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## Briceville Elementary School participates in national reading initiative

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BRICEVILLE (WATE) - Elementary students in a rural Anderson County community get a big boost in morale and a stronger foundation in reading. It's all thanks to a pilot program that partners low performing schools with local engineering firms.

The national program is called [Engineering Better Readers](#), and Briceville Elementary School is the only one in the state selected to try it out.

6 News visited fourth grade teacher Michelle LaDue's class, where students said reading is fun.

"Yes, I've always loved to read," said 10-year-old Madison Byrge.

But even for those who don't love reading, a spark has been ignited in this small, rural school.

Briceville students are in a race to earn points for rewards. LaDue explained that the engineering firm Geo-Environmental Associates, based in Knoxville, donated to the incentive based program.

"I was awarded \$3,000 from Geo-Environmental to buy the prizes," said LaDue. The kid-friendly prizes were purchased for kids to "buy" with points they earned from reading. "It just makes it more fun," said 10-year-old Conner Long. "It's more fun to read."

LaDue was allowed to tailor the program so all students could succeed based on their individual abilities.

"When a child has to struggle through a book, and they read just three pages in 30 minutes, and they look



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over at their buddy who just finished that whole book, that can be really discouraging," LaDue explained. "But we might set their goal a little differently. For example, we might say, okay you just read that page, can you tell me about that page?"

A roadmap was developed for the program. Students are scored by teachers, who are looking for specific achievements in five categories.

"Things like if they came to reading with their homework prepared, if they had their folder signed," explained LaDue. "If they did whatever assignment their teacher gave them. Reading behavior, and that's a big one, developing those basic reading skills, did they sit? Did they listen? Is their hand creeping over to their neighbor? Are they following along? And also are they actively participating?"

There are also two blank slots for a teacher to grade progress for students with special needs. It's encouraging healthy competition, students even keep a book recommendation chart to suggest books to friends, and they're writing about what they've read.

"Right now I've been trying to read more books," Madison Byrge said. "I've got to write about six summaries still. So I'm going to get some more points off of those."

6 News got a sneak peek at just some of the more than 200 prizes kids can win. There were things like Wii and Xbox video systems, educational toys, iPods and computer reading devices.

They are items the students are excited about because they filled out a wish list that was used to shop for the prizes.

"You can get like the Kindle Fires, the iPods, the Nerf guns, skateboards and stuff like that," Conner Long said. When asked what he had his eye on, he replied with a smile, "The Xbox."

Teachers say the Engineering Better Readers program is working and free time is less idle. Students are more focused on reading, and encouraging others to read.

Briceville Elementary has less than 150 students in kindergarten through 5th grade. Ninety percent of them qualify for free or reduced lunch. That's one of the reasons the school was selected to participate in the program.

"We have several kindergarten students who've read 300 or 400 books, and at the beginning of the year they walked in not knowing any of their letter recognition," added LaDue. "For them to excel like that is really inspiring to all of us."

Barry Thacker, P.E., with Geo/Environmental Associates said the company partnered with the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation on Engineering Better Readers to encourage more Briceville students to become engineers.



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