

This past year Florida had 19 YMCA READS sites throughout the state. The Program Coordinators of each of the sites, along with the State Coordinator, Madeleine Hennings, met at the South County Family YMCA in Venice for the READS state conference. The conference this year focused on Reading Comprehension Instruction and the new school assessment tool, FAIR (Florida Assessment for Reading Instruction). YMCA READS! is a unique partnership between participating YMCAs, schools, parents, students and the community to meet the educational and developmental needs of low-income primary age children. The primary focus of YMCA READS! Programming is improving students' reading grade level equivalency through mentoring and the use of a research-based, data-driven literacy curriculum. In addition, children's socio-emotional and physical needs are also addressed. Mentors work to instill character development, core values and relationship building. After participation in a READS! Session, scholarships for after-school program services are made available to YMCA READS! Students. Structured and supervised after-school services help meet the need for a safe environment . Physical needs are addressed by providing nutritious snacks, sports and recreation in order to help fight childhood obesity.

Recent research on Out-of-School Time has shown that intervention programs need to address several key elements: on-going communication and collaboration with the schools; family and community involvement; use of research-based curriculum materials and on-going progress monitoring in a supportive setting. Programs work in close collaboration with the child's parents and teachers to create a seamless plan of action for improvement. Community involvement is another key element of the program: since its inception five years ago, YMCA READS! has benefited from the support of many agencies, businesses and service organizations which have provided mentors, donations and small grants. Besides the participating YMCAs, local high schools, universities and colleges; churches; retired citizens associations; professional boards and local Chambers of Commerce have referred volunteers. Community foundations and businesses have contributed donations.

This early intervention program targets first and second grade students, and accepts some third grade and kindergartners based on school staff recommendation. All the students we work with are identified by the classroom teacher, reading specialist, guidance counselor or school principal as struggling readers for a variety of reasons including Limited English Proficiency and specific learning needs.