



Jonas Gustavsson made 21 saves in the Red Wings' 3-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

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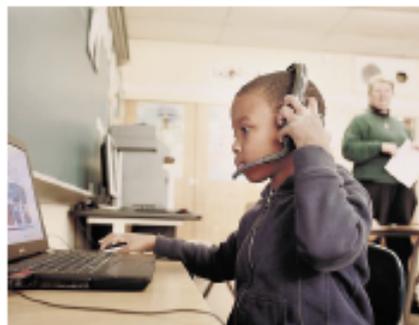
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Kids spell success with online tutors

Reading skills for DPS students improve with innovative help



Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit is the picture of concentration as she sits at a laptop in the classroom for her online reading tutor on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit. PHOTOS BY TIM GALLOWAY/SPECIAL TO THE DETROIT FREE PRESS



Dylan Scott, 6, of Detroit greets an online tutor. Teacher Alana McKibben, in back, said she hopes the program improves the students' oral fluency and confidence.

By Chastity Pratt Dawsey
Detroit Free Press Education Writer

The computer in a first-grade class at Chrysler Elementary in Detroit let out a chime that sounded like a ringing phone on a recent rainy Friday.

A little boy got up from the floor where the class was sitting and listening to a teacher read a story and went to the computer. He put on a headset, and after a mouse click said, "Hello. This is Ms. McKibben's class. I am Dylan. How may I help you?"

On the other end of the line was Anne Di Iorio, a banking coach at Quicken Loans in downtown Detroit. She was looking for student Paris Burg.

Six-year-old Paris, wearing a blue jumper and a wide grin that showed one missing front tooth, put on the computer's headset and opened an online story called, "The Circus."

It was time for her weekly virtual tutoring session with Di Iorio.

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U.S. gets \$41B in student loan profit

That could cover year of U-M tuition for about 3 million kids

By David Jesso
Detroit Free Press Education Writer

The federal government made enough money on student loans over the last year that, if it wanted, it could provide maximum-level Pell Grants of \$5,645 to 7.3 million college students.

The \$41.3-billion profit for the 2013 fiscal year is down \$3.6 billion from the previous year but still enough to pay for one year of tuition at the University of Michigan for 2,955,426 Michigan residents.

It's a higher profit level than all but two companies in the world: Exxon Mobil cleared \$44.9 billion in 2012, and Apple cleared \$41.7 billion.

"It's actually neither accurate nor fair to characterize the student loan program as making a profit," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said during a July conference call with reporters after the Free Press and other news media reported on profits from student loans. The department did not return calls or e-mails seeking comment this week.

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freep.com

Find more on student loans at freep.com/pellgrants and freep.com/studentdebt



Paul Jaramillo, 5, of Rochester Hills writes to Santa at the Somerset Collection's holiday store for kids. ROMAN BLANKQUARTIST/DFP

Somerset shop gives kids joy of playing Santa

Detroit Free Press

MONDAY 11.25.2013

WWW.FREEP.COM

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Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit is the picture of concentration as she sits at a laptop in the classroom for her online reading tutor on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit.

photos by Tim Galloway/Special to the Detroit Free

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It was time for her weekly virtual tutoring session with Di Iorio.

Paris is among about 180 Detroit Public Schools students from six schools taking part in an online literacy program called TutorMate, a system that makes it possible for professionals to volunteer at schools without leaving their workplace. The students are in first and second grades.

For the past four years, a growing number of tutors have signed up to be reading partners for children using an Internet connection.

The tutors log on and help children learn to read 30 minutes per week.

During each session, the tutor and student see the same short story on each of their computers. They don't see one another but talk to each other using a headset and microphone.



Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit, thinks about her answer during a word game during her online tutoring session on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit.



Dylan answers the computer as an online tutor contacts the classroom. He is one of about 180 first- and second-grade students taking part in an online literacy program called TutorMate.

The first-graders are learning about phonics, word families, sight words and aiming to become fluent readers who can read about 47 words per minute. Students selected to participate in this program need extra help with meeting grade-level expectations or they are learning to be strong oral readers, said Paris' teacher, Alana McKibben.

McKibben said she hopes the program improves the students' oral fluency and confidence.

"Kids really like that one-on-one attention time, it's very empowering for them," she said.

Program goals

Dan Weisberg, a native Detroit and national director of corporate alliances for the program's creator, Innovations for Learning, said he hopes to reach 250 Detroit students and grow from six participating companies — Quicken Loans, AT&T, Chase Bank, Comerica Bank, GM and Crain Communications — to 10 this year.

"It's all aimed at helping at-risk students in under-resourced school districts," Weisberg said. "By giving them personal attention at a time when they're 6, 7 years old ... with just a little bit of work, you really can have the most impact on a student's long-term academic career."

Innovations for Learning, a nonprofit company based in Evanston, Ill., started in 1993 and operates the program in 10 major cities with about 1,800 tutors, he said.

During Paris' tutoring session, Di Iorio helped her sound out words in the story, then played word games with her. When Paris struggled, Di Iorio bouyed her with encouragement. When Paris lost a game, Di Iorio kept it moving

— without commenting on the loss — until Paris sounded out all of the words correctly.

Humbling partnership

Between the words, they get to know each other. After Paris read the word, "dog," Di Iorio learned that Paris has a shih tzu named Misty.

It's a humbling partnership.

"I've never done anything so fundamental as teaching a kid to read," said Di Iorio, 24, of Ferndale.

The online setup helps her to volunteer easily and is comfortable for the kids, too, she said.

"Meeting with someone new in person could be intimidating" for a child, she said. "The headset helps a kid to come out of their shell more quickly. She can feel comfortable and confident learning in her everyday environment."

At year-end, the volunteers will meet the children.

But reading together online has its advantages over reading a handheld book, Paris said. The illustrations move and light up.

"The computer is funner," she said.

Contact Chastity Pratt Dawsey: 313-223-4537
or cpratt@freepress.com