

Have You Heard: Red Clay Students Devour Digital Books

Since its introduction in 2016, Red Clay K–5 students have used their mobile devices to access nearly 140,000 books with “myON,” a portable library developed to counteract the summer learning slide.

Read More

Red Clay originally implemented myON to encourage reading over the summer break but it now plays a vital role throughout the school year, said Dr. Judith Conway, Red Clay’s supervisor of Unified Arts. “Our strategy across the district’s 17 elementary schools is to ensure that every student can read independently by the end of the third grade,” she said. “myON helps us achieve that by encouraging year-round reading and by enabling fast, cost-effective access to a digital library with sufficient critical mass and accessibility to serve our entire student population.”

The personalized literacy program – which is free to students – allows them to select from more than 13,000 titles and take them wherever they go. Students received a username and password at school, and many completed a short online assessment to determine their interest and reading level. Upon completion of the interest inventory, students select the books they want to read and download them on any computer or mobile device. Students can use the app to download books, even when no internet connection is present.

“myON gives students thousands of books at their fingertips,” said Conway. “Years back, we tried to build our own eBook library, but the catalog lacked sufficient variety and the process was slow—students were waitlisted for many of the books they wanted. In contrast, myON gives all of our students easy, anytime access to more than 13,000 digital books. myON is also a better investment, allowing us to provide a balanced offering of print and virtual books. The program is helping students develop the skills needed to become lifelong book lovers and learners.”

Jennifer Minchini, a librarian at North Star Elementary School, said the digital books have become part of the school’s library. “One of our goals is to provide students with a robust balance of physical and digital books,” said Minchini. “Each format has value in the development of learning skills, and we want to entice students from one to the other. myON, with its interactivity and read-aloud features, attracts students to the digital library and simultaneously fosters an overall enthusiasm for reading.”

Conway said that the intent of the district’s summer reading program was to give students an option that would make reading fun—and help them sustain reading skills through the summer. “Our teachers, focused on literacy and understanding students learn in different ways, use an array of tools to promote reading,” she said. “We had been working with Superintendent Dr. Mervin Daugherty to evaluate eBooks for the district and recognized that myON would be an ideal platform. myON combines easy access from almost any device (computers, smart phones, and tablets), an expressive reading voice (versus computer-generated audio), unlimited access to thousands of digital books with personalized browsing, and the ability to track reading data.”

The results have exceeded even Conway’s high expectations, and Red Clay is featured as one of the company’s success stories on their website [here](#).

“Our most recent myON data shows that 14 of our 17 elementary schools achieved a book-completion average of 10 books per student,” said Conway. “One of our city schools, Shortlidge Academy - which is the district’s second-smallest school with just 415 K–2 students - tallied 15,198 books for an amazing average of 36 books per child.”

Last year, Brandywine Springs School students read more than 13,000 books, with 22 percent of their reading time logged during out-of-school hours. “Many of our students don’t have access to books or someone to read to them at home, so it’s heartwarming to see them taking advantage of myON,” said Minchini. “Speaking as a parent myself, I also appreciate not having to purchase hard copies. On more than one occasion, I’ve bought multiple copies of a single title to keep at school, at home, or in the car.”

In the spring preceding the myON pilot, Minchini and her fellow librarians participated in a 1.5-day train-the-trainer session. Those librarians then introduced myON back at their home schools, helping students master logins and reading basics.

Encouraged by students' positive responses to myON over the summer, teachers continued using it throughout the school year. By the following July, students had finished more than 100,000 books. Minchini says that as the Curriculum and Instruction Department evaluated long-term funding, teachers weighed in. "Our teachers had a clear preference for myON, citing its user-friendly interface and high-quality selections of nonfiction. We now use myON in our classrooms, in regular and special education programs, for homework assignments, for story time in the library, and as a research resource—it's part of everyone's daily routine."