

STARTING A GENERATION OF CHANGE

Edlun Marshall, a Freedom School intern, reads to two of his young students.



Roslyn Rose, an intern, tutors Kylon Jacobs and Nykell Johnson.



Laketia Farr reads police and firefighter books to Marvell/Elaine children.



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How well a community's youngsters read and cipher today is a good predictor of its future well-being, because it forecasts how well the next generation should be able to cope with economic and social challenges. For Marvell and Elaine, the future is beginning to look very bright.

We have noted the good development before, but it bears repeating that Marvell-Elaine elementary children scored a rare A on the scorecard for Arkansas's 1,050 public schools. About 15 percent of Arkansas schools made an A on reading and mathematics achievement tests for the past school year. Marvell-Elaine stands out because the high-achieving schools generally are those in well-to-do populations - school districts with very few children who qualify for free and reduced lunches.

Ninety-eight percent of students in the Marvell-Elaine schools qualify for subsidized lunches. Marvell-Elaine and most of the Delta have a much higher share of children from low-income families. The whole region has traditionally scored lower on achievement tests than most of the state and nation. That is why the community should celebrate the achievement and reaffirm its intention to continue whatever it is doing that contributes to its children's growing success.

The principal reason is Marvell-Elaine Reads, the communitywide partnership of the Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center, the Marvell-Elaine Elementary School, other organizations in the community and the volunteers who mobilized parents and other residents to increase the number of children who are reading proficiently at their grade levels.

Together they have moved the needle on third-grade reading levels by increasing access to quality summer-learning programs and mobilizing volunteers to tutor children. During a six-week day camp each summer, Marvell-Elaine Reads provides a full day of literacy instruction. It combines the



Marvell-Elaine Elementary School's summer school and the Freedom School run by BGACDC in collaboration with the Children's Defense Fund. Students improve their literacy skills, avoid the lapse in skills that usually occurs in the summer layoff, connect to their culture and participate in community service and social-action activities.

But one A is not enough. BGACDC, the schools and the community must continue the work and expand it. It takes a generation of work to make a lasting difference.

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