

Teacher helps student with dyslexia improve reading

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When Andrew Altemus of Clayton entered John Bassett Moore Intermediate School as a fifth grader, he struggled to comprehend second grade reading material. Now Andrew reads 200-page chapter books and is a staple on the school's honor roll.

Andrew has dyslexia, a neurological learning disability, but through his own hard work and the help of his teacher, Mrs. Lisa Neeld, Andrew's reading skills improved dramatically during his two years at JBM.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, people with dyslexia can be of average to above average intelligence, but often have trouble recognizing and decoding words.

"I never liked reading before Mrs. Neeld, but as I got better I started liking it," Andrew said. "I kept trying my hardest and trying to read books that were harder and harder."

Andrew earned an A in reading and language arts this year, and regularly earns high marks on reading comprehension tests.

His improved reading skills have also helped him in other subjects. Andrew said he can now understand his science textbook.

Neeld, in her 16th year as a teacher and second at JBM, has received special training on a multisensory approach to learning at the Reading ASSIST Institute in Wilmington. This approach signals to four processing systems of the brain to help students decode and recognize words.

In addition to her training, Neeld has spent many hours working with Andrew to help him improve. Neeld said she met with Andrew for 60 hours over the summer for tutoring.

"He gave up his free time because he knew how important it was," she said. "I'm just really proud of Andrew. He had to put for the effort."

Neeld thanked the Smyrna School District for funding her training in Wilmington. She said the teaching techniques she learned in training are helpful for all of her students, not just Andrew.

Andrew's mother, Ann Altemus, said she has been amazed by how far her son has come since meeting Mrs. Neeld in fifth grade.

"She had a monumental impact on Andrew," she said.

With Neeld as his teacher, Andrew has improved from between a first and second grade reading level to about a fifth grade reading level in just two years.

Altemus said Neeld has "gone above and beyond the call of duty" in teaching Andrew.

"I wanted to honor her for how much she's helped him, and I'm sure not just Andrew, but the whole school," Altemus said. "She's teacher of the year in our books."

To show their gratitude, Andrew and his father built a bookcase and donated it to Mrs. Neel's classroom. They painted the bookcase purple, her favorite color.

JBM Principal Derek Prillaman said, "I'm very proud of Andrew and his accomplishments. Mrs. Neeld has done an outstanding job."