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## Tutoring program sees success

At-risk teens can earn money for college expenses

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Vickie D. King/The Clarion-Ledger

Lanier High student Author Bryant, 15, puzzles out a math problem involving fractions. Bryant and other students participate in Quantum Opportunities at the Jackson Medical Mall. The program allows students to improve grades and earn money for college.

Six months into a national program for at-risk high schoolers, a group of ninth-graders from Lanier High School already is showing significant progress academically and socially, said researchers and local program coordinators.

Every weekday after school, 15 to 17 students trickle into the Quantum Opportunities program at the Jackson Medical Mall about 3:30 p.m. and get extra help with their homework and learn other social and academic skills until 6 p.m.

On Friday afternoon, nine students worked busily at computers, tackling quadratic equations, fractions and language arts passages.

Fifteen-year-olds Author Bryant and Alen Redmond said they log onto the computers and work on areas where they have the most trouble. Then they take tests to find out where they need improvement.

"It helps us to get a jump start so we can know what we're doing in class before the teacher says," Redmond said.

"It gives us an edge," Bryant said.

Above their heads are motivational quotes from famous African Americans like Frederick Douglass and Jesse Jackson, and other signs such as, "Think Straight A's: Attitude, Attendance, Achievement."

The students hand in test results with mostly grades between 80 percent and 100 percent to Myron Evans, a co-coordinator for the program.

"The grades have gone up tremendously," he said.

Evans said the students also participate in conflict resolution and community service activities including health fairs and visiting the elderly at local nursing homes.

In addition to getting help for schoolwork and being exposed to new things, the kids are paid \$1.25 for every hour they come to the program.

The money is matched by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation based in Washington, D.C., and put into an account that will go toward college or a vocational school upon graduation, netting the kids thousands of dollars.

"We know this is not enough to pay for new Jordan tennis shoes, but it's enough to keep them interested," said Johnnie Gage, chief operating officer for the Eisenhower Foundation, that supplies a \$150,000 annual grant to the program.

There are even opportunities for kids to earn bonuses for such things as perfect attendance or devoting 100 hours to academics, which nets an automatic \$100 match for their college account.

According to the foundation, if a student completes the program, the student can earn up to \$10,000 for any post-secondary education.

"It's a good part that can help us with our college funds and books for college," said Micael Taylor, 15.

Taylor said he wants to attend a junior college first and then transfer to a university in Texas to earn a business degree.

Ollie Shirley, program coordinator, said when the program first began the main problem was kids fighting among themselves.

"We're very proud of the progress we're making. We've had at least one child who made the honor roll for the first time in his life," Shirley said.



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Myron Evans, Quantum Opportunities assistant coordinator, assists Lanier High student Micael Taylor (second right) with Algebra 1.

### AT A GLANCE

The Quantum Opportunities programs are in Mississippi, Alabama, New Hampshire, South Carolina (two programs), Oregon, Washington, D.C., and are planned for this fall in Maryland.

Sixty students are randomly selected for the program. Thirty are invited to participate, while the other 30 are part of a control group that does not go through the tutoring. Researchers test the control group at the beginning of the program and periodically to compare progress between the groups.

The students who participate in the program are described as "at risk" and are in the bottom two-thirds of their class.

The Quantum Opportunities program is doing so well in Jackson, that foundation officials are looking at bringing in another national youth program. Talks are ongoing, said Jimmie Gage, chief operating officer of the Eisenhower Foundation.

Source: Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation

She said she's seen English test scores rebound from 24 percent to 80 percent and, instead of talking back to staff, students now apologize when they talk out of turn and even greet them with hugs.

The greatest academic improvements have been in English and algebra, Shirley said.

"You can see the turnaround," said Lanier High School Principal Stanley Blackmon. "They're doing better in the classroom. ... They don't come across our desk with as many disciplinary problems," he said.

Gage said Jackson was a natural fit for the program.

"We look for a recognizable, youth development organization that has the credibility with kids, and we look for the potential for partnerships whether its through the police or the schools," Gage said.

He said the medical mall was well-established in the community and Lanier High also was very supportive along with other city officials.

Jackson's program is standing out among the eight Quantum Opportunity sites operating nationwide.

"This is the first time where associates have done more than 100 hours of academic enrichment in four months," said D.J. Ervin, deputy director for evaluation for the Eisenhower Foundation. "That's beyond homework. We've never seen that before."

Ervin said the preliminary data also show attendance is better in the Jackson program in comparison to the others.

Shakera Moore, 16, said she was surprised "in a way" that her group, the "Quantum Bulldogs" is setting the standard in the nation.

Moore said she's working to become class valedictorian when the group graduates from Lanier in three years.

"I feel like we can accomplish anything if we try," Moore said. "We just come here everyday and do what we are supposed to do."