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Positive progress report for Laurel K-4th graders

By Magen McCraey, Staff Writer

LAUREL COUNTY, Ky. Elgin Foundation representatives astounded the Laurel County Board of Education Monday night with a positive progress report for the districts kindergarten to fourth-grade students reading levels.

Linda J. Vinson, education consultant for the Elgin Foundation reported, We more than hit our targets. The Laurel County Schools are part of a six-district initiative that's in its second year assisting 11,000 children to improve 90 percent of third-grade students reading levels by 50 percent or above by spring of 2016.

Laurel County kindergarteners improved their reading by 40 percent, first grade by 25 percent and second grade by 20 percent, and third by 15 percent. Although growth had occurred, some schools exhibited slight negative growth, such as Cold Hill Elementary's first-grade students, Colony's kindergarten, Johnson's first grade as well as London's first grade. The only school exhibiting negative growth in fourth grade was Johnson Elementary.

Vinson said winter 2012 MAP testing scores from the Northwest Evaluation Association reportedly stayed strong, but a negative component affecting growth is summer loss. Only one county out of the entire initiative showed summer gain, which was Clay County.

Since funding is not provided to carry on reading programs throughout the summer months, their community took it upon themselves to assist their youth with their outside resources such as vacation Bible school. Vinson suggested that Laurel County do the same to connect with their local churches, camps and sports programs to continue in the initiative outside of the classroom as well as implement pre-school in all elementary schools.

We have to stay the course, if it was easy everybody would be doing it, she said, adding, the biggest winners here are your kids.

As much as the district would like to implement more pre-school programs, the board determined that it was not feasible after a reading of the districts draft budget for the Fiscal Year 2012-13. Revenue has remained static and the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) for next year will be reduced by a quarter of a million, said Jim Kennedy, business manager for the district. The tentative budget with revenues versus expenditures this year will be \$1.7 million short, in taking money from the rainy day contingency fund to fill the gap, the contingency will stand strong at \$3.9 million.