

## Florida Schools Increase Readiness Scores with The InvestiGator Club

**Problem:** During the 2010-11 school year, the Head Start Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) sites in the Manatee Community Action Agency (MCAA) had a readiness rate score below 70. MCAA was classified as low performing, and its sites were put on probation. This gave MCAA the opportunity to research and implement a new curriculum to raise its scores.

**Solution:** MCAA implemented The InvestiGator Club® curriculum, an inquiry-based learning system for Pre-K students, and experienced immediate results. After one year, six of the eight VPK sites increased their readiness rate scores, with three of those sites earning scores high enough to boost them out of low performing status. Palmetto, one of the VPK program sites, increased its readiness rate from 47 to 70 percent in 2012-13. Another VPK site, Pine Village, achieved 92 percent readiness in 2012-13 – the highest rate ever scored at MCAA, and one of the highest in the state.

### Why Pre-Kindergarten?

Studies show that as many as 40 percent of kindergarten students begin school below grade level in reading and math. Children who attend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education, and more likely to graduate high school. Students also are less involved in crime and delinquency later in life, earn more as adults, and are less likely to become dependent on welfare.



*Darlene Clubb, Pine Village Center Director*

### Implementing the Curriculum

Several MCAA sites piloted The InvestiGator Club during the summer of 2011 before adopting the full curriculum in the fall. The summer program began with three classrooms and then increased to 14 classrooms, involving 270 students and 14 teachers. At Pine Village, center director Darlene Clubb created 'Camp Investigate' to align with the implementation. Narrowed to the basics and comprised of 300 hours of instruction, the new curriculum enabled Clubb and her students to learn and grow together.

"The InvestiGator Club provides the ideal baseline for instruction," said Clubb. "But it's also flexible – I'm able to expand upon it and insert my own ideas."

## Building a Foundation

Deciding to implement an entirely new curriculum was a daunting task," said Kathy Patreka, Head Start director for MCAA. "Many of our educators were apprehensive about making the switch. However, once they saw the potential of The InvestiGator Club, teachers were excited to take the whole program to their classroom."

Teachers raved about the detailed lesson plans, the organization of the curriculum and the additional resources the kit provides.



*Kari Senechal, a VPK lead teacher for MCAA*

"It's great to have the objectives outlined right there in each lesson," said Clubb. "I can incorporate them with whatever additional material I thought was necessary."

As a professional educator, Clubb applauded the organization and key strategies of The InvestiGator Club. Clubb shared that she was able to run each day's activities more smoothly, and with less stress, thanks to the detailed lesson plans from The InvestiGator Club.

Kari Senechal, a VPK lead teacher for MCAA, spent hours creating activities to keep students engaged. Using The InvestiGator Club provided her with more time to be creative in planning lessons and reaching each day's objectives.

"The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, including vocabulary, literacy, language, math, science and social-emotional skills," said Senechal. "This helps teachers keep material fresh and students interested."

## Bridging Two Languages

Nearly 60 percent of the children MCAA serves are dual language learners. The InvestiGator Club Spanish-English Learning System provides a comprehensive curriculum built specifically for English Language Learners.

According to the teachers, students easily relate to the characters introduced in the curriculum and have fun interacting with them. The consistency of the characters throughout classroom activities also provides reinforcement of the words students are learning. Students see, hear and read new vocabulary through books, puppets and songs. The InvestiGator Club also features activities for students to explore their world, learn to problem-solve and work as a team.

"Children need to feel confident in order to learn," said Senechal. "The InvestiGator Club gives them that confidence, making them excited to learn and be successful."

## Students Prepared For Kindergarten

Through implementation of The InvestiGator Club curriculum, the MCAA sites reported a dramatic increase in readiness scores. Of the 19 students in Senechal's class, 12 are at the point where they can write words and sound out letters. She has never had a class this advanced so early in the school year. Clubb has been teaching VPK for more than 10 years and now uses The InvestiGator Club on a daily basis. Her students remember lessons they learned three months ago and can reiterate them perfectly. Clubb's VPK center Pine Village achieved a readiness score of 92 percent, the highest ever recorded at MCAA, and one of the highest in the state.