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Read 180 helps high school students succeed in class

By Keith Uhlig

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MOSINEE — For most of his life, 16-year-old T.J. Gorski struggled to read.

"You don't understand a lot of stuff," the Mosinee High School sophomore said. "After you're done reading, you forget what you first read."

His difficulty in reading meant he couldn't gain a foothold in any of his classes. "History was especially hard," Gorski said. "It was hard to understand the big words."

Things are looking up for Gorski now. Last school year, he was part of a group of about 15 Mosinee students chosen for a special pilot program, called Read 180, which uses sophisticated computer software and intensive teaching techniques to help older students hone their reading skills.

Although results are preliminary, the students "showed statistically significant improvement in their reading," said Principal Jim DeBroux, who spearheaded the effort to purchase the software package for Read 180.

It cost about \$30,000, he said, and was purchased with federal special education dollars. Now about 45 students are in the program.

After about a year and a half of Read 180 lessons, Gorski is

convinced that it works. He has started reading for fun, and he's doing better in other classes, too.

Reading better, Gorski said, "makes you feel smarter than what you used to be. You're actually learning something instead of sitting around."

For years, DeBroux watched older students like Gorski wrestle with reading deficiencies. All too often, high schoolers who struggled to read didn't get the intensive help they needed, he said.

"There was an assumption that (high school) kids already know how to read, or it's too late," DeBroux said.

Right now, Read 180 is used only for students in special education programs, but if the success is sustained, DeBroux envisions using it with more students. "I think it will work really well with our at-risk students," he said.

The secret to the program's success is its intensity and the fact that it attacks reading difficulties with a variety of tools, said reading specialist Jeanne Shupe.

"It's such a complicated issue. Why can't a kid read? There are 10 reasons why," Shupe said. "If you're not hitting all the dimensions, you're not going to solve the problem."

Read 180 uses educational



Colleen Shnowske leads the small-group portion of Read 180 at Mosinee High School. Working to improve their reading skills are Adam Phelps, from left, William Palfrath and Shawna Leonard, all freshmen.

tools such as a computer program that continually challenges individual students in spelling, word recognition and phonics, silent reading and exercises that have students read out loud in small groups.

Reading is so important, DeBroux said, that the strides some students are making are life-changing.

"If you have a kid who is at, say, a fourth-grade reading level, and if you can bump that up to a seventh- or eighth-grade level — talk about self-esteem," DeBroux said.



Carlos Cabrera, left, and Alex Rosso work on their individual reading skills as one of the three parts to the Read 180 project at Mosinee High School.