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Students make sport of learning

Computer game supplements English, math classes for middle schoolers

By [ANTONIO PLANAS](#)
REVIEW-JOURNAL



With his eyes fixated on a computer screen trying to win a point in a volleyball match, it didn't look like Canarelli Middle School eighth-grader Jalen Toliver was learning math.

Ty Jackson, a physical education and health teacher at Canarelli Middle school, incorporates into his classes a computer game meant to increase math and English scores.
Photo by [John Gurzinski](#).

But the computer game he was playing is an educational tool used at Canarelli to supplement what students are taught in math and English classes.

Monday was Toliver's first time on the game, and he said he was more attentive than he typically is during other classes.

Advertisement

"It's different from everything else we do," Toliver said.
"Instead of sitting in class doing work, we're on a computer having fun."

The game was introduced at Canarelli in January by Ty Jackson, a physical education and health teacher at the school. Jackson, a former wide receiver at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, oversees a program in which nearly 200 eighth-grade boys use computer games once a month to refine their English and math skills.

The computer game asks students questions similar to those that would appear on standardized tests they take during the year, scores that are taken into account when determining the school's federal No Child Left Behind Act status.

Canarelli, near Windmill Avenue and Jones Boulevard, has failed to meet federal guidelines for the past two years.

Students also are encouraged to play the game while at home. They earn points for answering questions and can earn prizes such as an autographed poster of the UNLV football team, or bags and binders with university logos. The biggest prize is an after-school field trip to UNLV.

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The program is called Kids College/Teen Distinction. Getting students to UNLV is important because once they are on campus they see for themselves that college is a tangible goal, Jackson said.

"If they experience the campus atmosphere, it will have a more lasting impact on them," Jackson said. "Going to school will give them a purpose purpose of higher education."

Jackson researched the program, which is distributed through Learning Through Sports Inc., based in Birmingham, Ala. The school paid for the online service using about \$3,500 in grants.

Jackson's students are given a password that allows them to log onto the game's Web site and start playing.

Students are asked to answer three questions correctly in order to get the opportunity to play a 30-second sports game in volleyball, basketball, football, soccer or baseball.

A class of about 35 students can answer about 10,000 questions during a 50-minute period, Jackson said.

He said the program has already paid dividends.

The program's results were assessed last school year. On the Iowa Test o Basic Skills, 40 of Jackson's students scored 14 percent better in math an 11 percent better in English than 40 students who didn't use the compute game.

The standardized test compares Clark County students with those from across the nation. Students whose test scores were analyzed were choser at random.

Jackson has a goal to eventually get an English and math teacher at Canarelli from every grade to use the program.

Principal Kristy Keller said students have responded well.

She said the trick is students are unknowingly studying.

"They are learning English and math standards without realizing it," Kelle said.

Brian Shulman, founder of Learning Through Sports, said about 600 scho in 25 states are using the program. It is designed for kindergarten through eighth-grade students.

The company also partners with the Mountain West Conference, which allows the company to use the images and logos of the eight conference athletic teams in the game including UNLV.

Kyle Martin, an eighth-grader at Canarelli, said he plays the computer gai every day at home for about 30 minutes. Most of the time spent by

Canarelli students on the game last school year was done after school.

Martin boasted Monday about leading the classroom in total points. He said he needs to improve his standardized test scores and has found a way to do that.

"It's pretty cool," Martin said. "It's fun 'cause you get to play a sport while answering questions."

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