



PHOTO & CAPTION

Schoolkids Get Excited about Reading



Photo: USAID/Kimberly Flowers

Second-grade students Tyrone Josephs, 7, and Jeamel Byfield, 9, form words out of block letters at the Salt Marsh Primary School near Montego Bay, Jamaica.

An effort to train school teachers in techniques to make students love to read aims to reach more than 500,000 students across Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Students in the Caribbean are getting excited about reading. This enthusiasm is the result of a USAID-sponsored education program that emphasizes the importance of reading as a gateway to all future learning and well-paying jobs.

Through the program, teachers have become more effective reading instructors and children in grades one through three have become more skilled, motivated and enthusiastic readers. Since the program began, there has been a marked increase in reading scores for many students. For example, at Salt Marsh Primary School near Montego Bay,

Jamaica, more than 80 percent of students scored above the mastery level during the 2004-2005 school year — a significant jump compared to the 56 percent who scored that high during the previous academic year.

In St. Lucia, the former education secretary Didacus Jules was so impressed by how students were performing in the island's eight participating schools that he commissioned a video to record the program's progress and achievements. He hopes that the video will provide other teachers in St. Lucia with both inspiration and lessons learned.

The program aims to reach more than 500,000 students in communities across Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, it has been running in St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Belize, Guyana and Jamaica since 2002 and 2003. In 2004 and 2005, the governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada committed their own funding so their schools could participate in the program. This year, Jamaica's government will pay to expand the program to another 50 schools across the island.