

## PowerUP Jax Fall 2016 Grant Winner

### 16. Emmie McMahon

Lone Star

Subject/Grade: 3

Project Title: A Jedi Academy will make Jedi Masters!

#### **Summary of Project:**

A Jedi Master gets his strength from his mind; he grows his mind and his powers increase. I want to teach my students that there is no limit to what they can do—if they just put their minds to it and work extra hard. At the beginning of this year, 1/4 of my 3rd grade math students were at least 2 grades below grade level, and I saw them already starting to give up. Through my Jedi Academy, my children are learning that they want to learn. I offer a before school computer Jedi Training and an after school Jedi Academy (Tutoring with a Jedi theme) each day, and most days my classes fill up. My students earn rank changes from Youngling all the way to Jedi Master by improvement in weak areas, mastery of new material, and extra work—and boy are they motivated! But we have some serious roadblocks we need to overcome. One that is tripping my soldiers up is focusing. I have 15 students who are either diagnosed with ADD (with or without the Hyperactivity) or are just extra “wiggly.” They struggle with attending to the task and just need to move. Studies show that all students learn better when they get to move throughout the day. The exercise pumps more oxygen to the brain and improves learning outcomes. This is something we can fix! I need wobble chairs, fidgets, pedal exercisers and other ways to get the wiggles out so my students can learn.

#### **How many students will be directly involved? Explain any further impact on other students, teachers, the school as a whole, and/or the community.**

I teach 38 third grade students and they will most directly be impacted by this grant, however, I work very closely with the rest of my grade level and we share items on a daily basis. My partner teacher, who shares my students will of course, be using the tools as well. Further, my principal is very interested in the impact of movement and encourages innovative ideas. She purchased a few standing desks for one classroom, but funds are very limited so I could not get any. I want to try this out with my students and see just how far I can move them through their learning. I have a unique opportunity this year because I came up with the Jedi theme and they are really buying in to it. They want to please their Jedi Master (that's me) and so they are really willing to try things this year that students sometimes are not as apt to do. What kids WANT to come to school an hour early and stay an hour late? My students are doing just that. The problem is that the extra time is leading to extra need for movement. If this plan is successful in my classroom, a 5th grade teacher at my school is already interested in trying it as well.

#### **How will the project specifically increase student learning? Be sure to explain the project's connections to existing learning standards. Be clear about what new skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions the students will acquire.**

With this grant, I want to purchase Pedal Exercisers which are pedals that will fit under desks to allow students to pedal while they stay in their seats. I will get Wobble Chairs which are the child equivalent to stability balls. I have tried the stability balls in my classroom and I find them more distracting as the students bounce higher and higher. I will get Stability Discs which give the feeling of a stability ball, but it is just an inflated pad the fits right on the chair, under the child. It exercises core stability. Rather than ordering standing desks which were prohibitively expensive, I will get lap desks. They will be placed on top of the desks I already have, allowing students to stand—or they can be used on the floor during rotations. Lastly, I am ordering a variety of fidget stress balls and squeeze toys for hands that need to move. These tools will work to improve all areas of learning, by increasing focus and time on task. John Ratey, of Harvard Medical School says that “Exercise, good fitness-based exercise, makes our brain more ready to learn.” At the Univ of Illinois, Dr. Charles Hillman says: “It's good for attention, it's good for how fast individuals process information, and how they perform on cognitive tasks.” These tools will not improve only certain learning standards, it has the chance to impact all of them.

#### **What is your plan for evaluating the success of your project? What artifacts (photographs, samples of student work, testimonials, etc...) would you use to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project?**

I track data all the time. I have Reflex Math data which tracks facts memorized. I have iReady lessons which assesses the students at the beginning of the year to determine their baseline and then periodically throughout the year to track growth. I have Paper and Pencil baselines in math to compare with the FSA to track how ready students are for 4th grade. Further, I survey my students frequently to see how they feel about things in the classroom. I want to make sure that I am not missing anything that is getting in the way of learning. I also poll parents through Class Dojo and Survey Monkey to “take the pulse” of the parents of my students. Finally, I have T-shirts. My class is purchasing “Jedi in Training” T-shirts and we are all going to wear them every Thursday. As students improve and work hard, they will earn stars which will be displayed on the back. How's that for data? I can provide achievement data, testimonials from students, parents, and other

teachers. Of course I would also share photos of my amazing class utilizing each of the tools we purchase. I fully expect to see great things from my class this year.