

## Southern Middle School students staying connected to school through Learning Blade program

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SPECIAL TO THE CJ

Students at Southern Middle School in Pulaski County are staying home during the coronavirus pandemic.

They are, however, continuing to learn, thanks to the Learning Blade program provided to the school by the GEAR UP Opportunity Grant.

Southern science teacher Chelsea Bentley has collaborated with her colleagues to integrate Learning Blade into students' distance learning plan to help keep them accountable for their daily learning goals.

Students are being tasked to complete two Learning Blade lessons a day from the Dolphin Rescue Mission.

"The kids enjoy Learning Blade, the real-life connections it gives them and the interactive tools offered," Bentley said.

Southern reportedly leads the nation in using the Learning Blade program since schools were closed with 329 eighth-graders enrolled, completing over 3,500 STEM lessons since March 16.

"We have been able to offer students interactive assignments that provide immediate feedback. It also has been beneficial for our teachers because they are not having to come up with lessons, and the Learning Blade lessons relate to content they have taught in class," said Southern Middle School Principal Brett McQueary. "They are also giving students the grade they earn in the lessons, so it isn't just a 'completion' grade. GEAR UP staff went into all eighthgrade classrooms back in January to introduce the program

to them and assist them with completing lessons.

Since students already had experience using the program at school, it was an easy transition for them to complete lessons at home."

The ease of using the program has helped make it popular among the student population. "Students like that they were familiar with using the program.

They like that it is 'paperless' and interactive. They also like that they have multiple attempts at getting the correct answer without penalty and receiving instant feedback," McQueary said. "Students get to choose which assignment to do, so it will fit their interests. The program saves students' progress, so they are able to pick up where they left off should they not complete the lesson or have internet issues."

"It's really fun and a lot of interesting things to learn about. The lessons are not boring," said eighth-grader Damian Nester. "The lessons are easy to follow and interesting.

Logging on and navigating the website was easy. I enjoyed doing the Learning Blade lessons better than any of the ILearn lessons. "

"As a parent, I really liked the layout of the web site," said Kristie Wesley, Nester's mother. "I liked the content in the lessons. He was really interested and focused on what the lesson was about. It was easy to follow and had plenty of information to enrich his knowledge and learning.

"Students really seem to enjoy completing the Learning Blade lessons," added eighthgrade science teacher James Cox. "The activities do a great job of connecting cross curricular content with real world scenarios."



**Logan Bower, an eighth-grader at Southern Middle School, worked with the Learning Blade program recently as part of his daily lessons from home during the coronavirus pandemic. Southern reportedly leads the nation in using the Learning Blade program since schools were closed. Students have completed over 3,500 STEM lessons since March 16. The program is provided to the school by the GEAR UP Opportunity Grant.**

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