

Energy Express is returning to Tucker County! The program will begin on Monday, June 18, with 56 students participating at Tucker County High School. We are accepting applications for participants – children who completed grades K-5 during the current school year. How can you apply? Applications were sent home with students and can be returned to their school or the Extension Office.

Originally created to combat the “summer slide” (the tendency for students to lose some of the achievement gains they made during the previous school year) Energy Express does far more. According to Matthew Beatty, Interim Director of the Energy Express Program, students show an average of two to four months of academic growth after participating in the program.

Why do children enjoy Energy Express and make gains in reading? According to Carole Scheerbaum, WVU Extension Agent, children enjoy Energy Express because they are involved in “bringing books to life through reading, writing, art, and drama activities. Working in a small group, of up to eight children, participants work as a team alongside an AmeriCorps Member serving as their Mentor. They are actively engaged in reading-related activities throughout the day. Along with these activities, children also participate in recreational activities and are served breakfast and lunch. To make the week more special, each child receives a book to take home for their own personal library.”

It is no wonder that, based on the success of Energy Express participants and the unique aspects of the program, the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University named Energy Express program one of the nation’s best summer learning programs in 2009. Energy Express is made possible through collaboration of WVU Extension Service, AmeriCorps, West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, and the West Virginia Department of Education – Office of Child Nutrition. Because of the support of many state-level partnerships, WVU Extension is able to provide 70 percent of the funding required for the Energy Express.

Locally, then, our Tucker County Energy Express Collaborative works to provide the remaining 30 percent of funding for the program. We have received generous funding and support through the Tucker County Board of Education, Mountain Top Library, Five Rivers Library, and the Tucker County CEOS. We are grateful that the Tucker County Board of Education assists with the program by providing the space for Energy Express and custodial services as in-kind resources to the program. Other partners include the Tucker County Senior Center, our summer foods program sponsor..

Who runs the program? A Site Supervisor works with a team of AmeriCorps Members each summer to implement Energy Express. AmeriCorps members serve in two ways – as mentors and as community coordinators. Mentors are AmeriCorps members who are either college or college-bound students who work with small groups of children and create a safe, environmentally rich atmosphere focusing on reading, writing, art and drama. AmeriCorps members also serve as community coordinators – working with volunteers and promoting our efforts in the community.

The importance of community involvement and volunteers to the success of Energy Express cannot be overstated. Our adult and youth volunteers provide invaluable service by providing 1-on-1 reading with children in the classroom, assisting children with writing or art projects, helping teachers with supervising outdoor activities, and assisting with meal service, and sorting supplies and books. They provide many services, and with their help, our program is successful. We can never have too many volunteers! Volunteers are those from the young (entering seventh grade in the fall) to the young at heart.

If you would like to volunteer a few hours of your time and participate in this wonderful summer adventure, please call the WVU Tucker County Extension office at 304-478-2949.