Darrius Mason, a fifth grader at Mary H. Matula Elementary School, enjoys reading for fun and joining a book club lets him to discuss stories with friends who have read the same books.

La Plata, MD—Wednesday mornings at Mary H. Matula Elementary School are booked. From 8:30 to 9 a.m., more than 60 students take part in before-school book clubs. Open to students in kindergarten through fifth grade, the program was born out of an idea of Tina Caron, learning resource teacher, and Nina Ogasawara, school counselor.

They noticed how kids don’t seem to enjoy reading, not even for pleasure. “They need to see teachers who love reading,” Ogasawara said. They brought up the idea of starting book clubs during a staff meeting and teachers took on nine different groups. The six-week session focuses on a theme for younger students, and a book for older ones.

The clubs are a no-stress situation for young readers. “There are no tests,” Caron said. “We read for enjoyment.”

The Billionaire Boys are reading “Trouble Maker,” by Andrew Clements. The group of fourth and fifth grade boys meet over doughnuts and talk about the book with Marvin Jones, executive director of schools.

“I like reading” Darrius Mason, a fifth grader said. “And I like to share our experiences with the book.”

“It’s good to catch up and talk about a book we have all read,” Patrick Takeuchi, a fifth grade student said.

Ryan Hughes, a fourth grader, is in the Mad Science group led by science teacher Chuck Larkin, Judi Gordon, instructional resource teacher and Blonda Tillman, reading resource teacher. The club doesn’t read books, but it does go over and perform experiments like making cotton candy. Hughes’s favorite author is Dav Pilkey, writer of the “Captain Underpants” series. “It helps your brain to grow,” Hughes said of reading. “You’re reading new words and context clues.”

The next round of book club meetings will start in February with one having an ocean theme, another focusing on the Harry Potter sequels and one tackling Percy Jackson books.

Teachers choose the books their clubs will read and students can pick what club they want to belong to. Now that the word is out about the clubs, Ogasawara thinks they’ll see an uptick in participation next month.