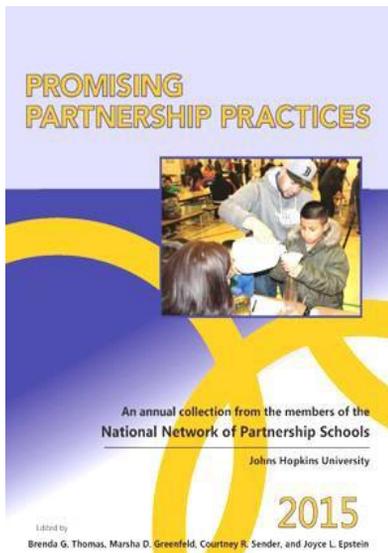


# Strategies that Engage Families with Children on Reading: Improve Skills and Attitudes



From annual books of  
*Promising Partnership  
Practices*

*National Network of  
Partnership Schools  
at Johns Hopkins University*

Use these strategies to extend information in the webinar  
with Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, January 13, 2016

# ACCELERATED READING PROGRAM

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## PORT BARRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### PORT BARRE, LA

**S**ometimes, students just want the company of a good book. For some Port Barre Elementary School students, however, the local library is ten miles from home—which is ten miles too far. The rural school serves over 600 students in grades PreK-4. Believing that it is vital to have reading resources available to all students, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers at Port Barre implemented the Accelerated Reading Program. The program makes it easy for students to choose a good book to read.

Accelerated Reader (AR) is an online program that guides and encourages individual students to continually improve their reading comprehension and other reading skills. With a teacher's and/or facilitator's assistance, each student checks out books on his/her reading level. Parents have opportunities to read to and with their children. They stress the benefits of reading for entertainment and for comprehension. After reading each book, students take an Accelerated Reader Test about the particular book. When they pass a series of tests, students are promoted to the next reading level.

Students, teachers, and parents are able to view their student's test results online to provide immediate, individualized, and constructive feedback on the student's performance. With these data, teachers and parents monitor students' growth and progress and guide student's ongoing reading activities.

Most teachers at Port Barre have incorporated Accelerated Reader (AR) books, skills, and tests into their curriculum and use the AR test scores as part of each student's report card grades. One teacher reported that "some parents have even become more avid

readers because of the example set. . .by their child."

According to a survey of parents, the school and family connections around reading have helped parents support their child's interest in improving their reading skills and in moving up the AR reading levels. Students' sense of accomplishment increases when they see their scores improve. At school, students encourage each other to go "up the ladder" of reading. One student noted happily that, though unable to get to the public library, "I can still check out books that are fun to read."

To implement Accelerated Reading, teachers worked together to identify books for each grade level, each reading level, and that cover topics of interest to all students. Once the books were obtained, teachers held sessions with students to clarify how AR worked, and how every student was expected to proceed from one reading level to the next by reading books and completing tests that indicate they understood the fictional stories or non-fiction reports. The school evaluated AR, to date, by the number of students who participated, reached their personal reading goals, and improved their scores, grades, and interest in reading.

The ATP and teachers publicized AR in newsletters and bulletins sent home with children, marquee announcements about events, progress reports, and announcements in the local newspaper and School Board bulletins. The program makes students, parents, and teachers partners in the reading process to motivate students to keep reading to improve their skills and attitudes.

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# CAMP OUT WITH BOOKS

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**FULBRIGHT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**LITTLE ROCK, AR**

Type 4

**O**n a survey last year, parents at Fulbright Elementary School requested more information and ideas for enhancing their children’s reading skills and joy of reading. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers designed Camp Out with Books to help parents encourage children to read “S’more.” At Camp, there were literacy stations, creative decorations, and refreshments. The planning group evaluated the activity, analyzed the data, and will use the data to plan future reading-related engagement activities.

One of the school’s community partners—Huntington Learning Center—contributed funding and resources for families. A college English professor was designated as the “campfire round-up reader.” Other information on summer reading camps and resources came from the University of Central Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and the Little Rock Writing Project.

At Camp Fulbright, families were welcomed by Park Rangers (faculty and staff). After signing in at the Visitor Center, families entered Camp Fulbright Pavilion (cafeteria) where they were addressed by Park Ranger Jackson (the principal). The winners of a school-wide book mark design contest were announced and awarded a gift certificate from Barnes and Noble.

Each family was given an Official Reading License that guided families along reading trails with camp-themed activities for students and their families by grade level. Among the literacy stations were Summer Reading Journals, Campfire Book Swap, Exploring the Future, myOn Technology (a digital books platform for students), and Campfire Read Aloud. The book swap was a huge success. Over 300 books were exchanged at this station. Leading up to the event

students had been encouraged to bring books to exchange for new reading material and they enthusiastically complied.

After two activity rotations, the “dinner bell” rang and participants went to the Fulbright Picnic Area for an old-fashioned camp cook-out of grilled hot dogs (cooked by parent volunteers), chips, s’mores and lemonade. Students played playground games, while parents visited teachers and each other.

Camp Out with Books was evaluated by about 150 parents and caregivers and 30 teachers who attended. Responses to the event were very positive. Suggestions will be considered for future activities to engage parents with students on reading and literacy skills.

Students and parents were happy to come to Camp to enjoy reading, gather information, and meet others in an informal setting. As one parent shared, “Our family had a great time at Camp Out with Books with our Fulbright Family! My twins especially enjoyed the story time around the campfire and the book exchange. The myOn Technology session was particularly helpful to me. It was such a fun evening and a great way to get kids excited about literacy.” A teacher reported, “This was a very well planned and orchestrated event. A lot of teamwork went into making it a successful opportunity for parents and students to grow. The decorations were adorable, the activity stations were engaging, and the food was delicious. What a fun night for all!” Throughout the planning and implementation of Camp Out with Books, teamwork, leadership, and friendships were strengthened, and a sense of community was cultivated at Fulbright.

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READING

# HEAR YE! HEAR YE! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

## SIXTH WARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### PEARL RIVER, LA

**H**ear Ye! Hear Ye! Read All About It! at the Sixth Ward Elementary School had a unique focus—using the newspaper to reinforce thinking and literacy skills. Students and parents linked their own experiences to news and feature stories, and used skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, math, social studies, and science to solve some puzzles and problems. Each family received a copy of the big Sunday newspaper, which they took to six newspaper-related stations set up with interesting activities.

Station 1: What’s so funny? With the paper’s comics section, children chose their favorite comic strip. They whited-out the dialogue and, with their families, used their imaginations to write new dialogue for the characters in each frame.

Station 2: Let’s have fun. Families planned a weekend of activities to enjoy with visitors who were coming for a family reunion. They used the entertainment, travel, and weather sections of the paper to explore restaurants, find places to visit, and plan indoor and outdoor activities. Parents and children were encouraged to discuss and negotiate things they liked to do. They incorporated math skills by setting a budget for the family reunion and events.

Station 3: For the sport of it. Children and parents read the sports section’s news and articles about players and coaches of the New Orleans Saints. Each family wrote a message to the team or to a player on a stamped postcard, which were mailed to the Saints Camp. Students drew pictures next to the sentences written by mom or dad.

Station 4: Skim and scan. Students and parents used highlighters to identify a story in any section of the paper that interested them. This included a feature about another country;

movie review; advertisement; article about an animal; letter from a reader; crossword puzzle; house for sale; or something else. Parents and children discussed why they chose the story they did.

Station 5: What’s the weather? Students were asked to answer higher-order thinking questions to make meteorological predictions based on weather maps, graphs, tide forecasts, and charts.

Station 6: Adopt a pet. The ATP knew that the paper would include a few “free to a good home” advertisements. They asked students to use creative, persuasive writing skills to convince a pet owner to let them adopt their pet. One parent expressed surprise, “I never realized there were so many things for children in the newspaper!”

Administrators gave greetings, offered refreshments, and encouraged families to meet each other. Each student received a certificate of participation. The public librarian talked about library programs and helped parents and children sign up for library cards. Families also shopped a book fair for new or gently used books.

The ATP used the newspaper theme for flyers to advertise the evening. Cartoons and sports figures appeared on posters in the halls. Robo-calls invited families to come to “read all about it!” Newspapers and cookie trays cost about \$125, with other donated items.

Read All About It! extended current-events to encourage children and parents to read and talk about sports, weather, entertainment, ads, and all kinds of news stories. This was, itself, a newsworthy event that everyone could read about.

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# HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY CELEBRATION

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## UPPER MERION HIGH SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, administrators, and students at Upper Merion High School expanded the school's recognition program from athletes and students who earn high test scores to recognize and encourage students' accomplishments in literacy. Faculty, parents, students, and community members (including public library staff) worked together to increase students' motivation to read and to build skills and appreciation for literary arts.

At the Literacy Celebration, the talents and accomplishments of students and community members took center stage. There were four components: keynote speaker; awards ceremony; workshops on increasing students' professional, entertaining, and personal reading and literacy skills; and a school open house. Over 100 students, parents, and community members attended.

The opening address was presented by a local author, well known in the media, who had published several nonfiction books. Then, an awards ceremony recognized the achievements of students involved in literacy activities such as Reading Olympics, the township library's Reading Buddies program, literacy-related senior graduation projects, and student theater critics. Awards also were given to students who made significant advances in reading and writing during the school year.

One of Upper Merion High School's overarching goals is improving reading across content areas. Workshops focused on a variety of genres. Community members in a local Master of Fine Arts program ran workshops on poetry and connections between food and literature. Other community members taught blogging, storytelling, writing through grief, and history writing. "The storyteller was awesome!" one student remarked. "I want to be like her when I grow up."

The evening culminated in a grand Open House. A local book store continued its school-day Book Fair into the evening. Students organized a free book swap with books they'd collected. Students also curated a Gallery of Literacy that showcased students' reading and writing projects. In keeping with the theme, the ATP and administrators awarded literacy-related door prizes.

Many groups in the school and community had an active role in planning the Literacy Celebration. Teachers on the planning committee met to select the four basic components of the evening. High school students and parents were invited to an open planning session to provide ideas about the date, activities, organizers, hosts, and the keynote speaker for the event.

Each member of the parent, student, and faculty committee volunteered to lead some aspect of the Literacy Celebration, including soliciting food and drink donations; coordinating with community organizations; serving as the contact person for speakers and workshop hosts; creating the gallery of student work; soliciting and arranging door prizes; organizing a book swap; and creating print and video event advertisements. The high school budget covered the \$700 cost of refreshments, door prizes, and speaker compensation.

At Upper Merion, the future looks bright for improving the Literacy Celebration. Next time, they plan to extend invitations to middle-school students and parents as a means of introducing them to the high school and to students' reading and literacy levels. The Literacy Celebration is poised to continue spotlighting excellence and enthusiasm for reading, writing, and literature.

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# READERS ARE LEADERS FAMILY READING NIGHT

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**CANYON VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**H**eroes inspire students. If admirable leaders read stories aloud to students, perhaps more students would read more. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Canyon View Elementary School designed a Family Reading Night where local leaders read aloud their favorite children’s books. Students and families—many English Learners and families who are migrant farmers—met the readers and listened to good stories to spark students’ interest in reading for pleasure.

A planning subcommittee included educators and parents. It was chaired by the school librarian who developed the Readers are Leaders Family Reading Night. Local leaders were recruited from the community as the reading heroes. They included police officers, local semi-professional football players, the school principal, district superintendent, two Spanish speaking professionals, and local high school students. Also, each grade level team of teachers was asked to develop a “make and take” activity for parents and children to do during the evening and that they could take home to help their children practice a useful reading skill.

The school publicized the event actively, including sending home a ticket that could be traded at the Reading Night for new books for each child attending. To cast the community leaders as “reading heroes,” teachers and students were invited to dress as superheroes that evening. Dinner was provided and served for a half-hour before stories were read aloud.

The school mascot and greeters welcomed about 300 families to the Reading Night and gave each a map of the school with the schedule of the Leader-Readers and their stories, and make-and-take activities in different rooms. Families chose which story they wanted to hear for each 20-minute session, with 5 minutes to change rooms for

the next story. Throughout the evening, the make-and-take activity room was open for families to visit and chose the activities to make with children at different grade levels.

After all readings, the teachers and volunteers were in the cafeteria to trade the entry tickets for a new book for each child to take home. Each child also was given a bag of classroom supplies, donated by teachers. Also, a booth was set up for families to take photos of their children in their super-hero costumes.

The ATP reviewed the activity and discussed possible improvements. Parents received a survey for their views if they attended the Reading Night or were asked why they could not attend. Students benefitted from the make-and-takes that helped their parents see how to interact with them at home on key reading skills.

Mainly, everyone enjoyed hearing leaders from the community read some good stories. Many of the Leader Readers were new visitors to Canyon View. As community partners they were making a new contact and they were impressed with the enthusiasm of the parents, students, teachers, and others they met at the school. One Leader Reader raved, “I enjoyed reading to the families. It was fun to share one of my favorite stories and show the families how using expression makes a story come alive.”

Canyon View’s ATP always includes a Reading Night in its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. This one was a page-turner that everyone enjoyed.

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Type 6

READING

# SEUSSATIONAL READING EXTRAVAGANZA

**MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

Type 6

“**T**here was no time for play. There was no time for fun. There was no time for games. There was work to be done.” So begins *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, the sequel to one of the most enduring children’s books by Dr. Seuss. This year, Mark Twain Elementary School proved, to the contrary, that play, fun, games, and learning could be combined at the Seussational Reading Extravaganza.

The Suessational Reading Extravaganza had four fabulous features. From 9:30-10:30 a.m., the Guest Readers Session welcomed community members to read in participating classrooms. They were given guidelines and a bottle of water, and then read to children in their assigned classrooms in two 20-minute periods. They shared one of their favorite childhood books and talked about how reading is useful in their adult roles and professions. Students created “Thank You” cards for the guest readers.

Community members also served as guest judges for the Door Decorating Contest. Two weeks prior to the event, classroom teachers and specialists decorated their classroom doors based on a Dr. Seuss book. The Guest Readers dropped two votes in a ballot box for the Best Primary and Intermediate Decorated Doors. Treats were awarded to the students in the two winning classrooms.

Read with Thing 1 or Thing 2—aka, Read with Our Principal and Vice Principal—was a third component. Teachers could sign up for a 15-minute time slot for the administrators to read a Seuss story to students in their classrooms. The administrators dressed the part in Thing 1 and Thing 2 shirts.

From 3-3:30 p.m., Parent Readers came to read with their children for the last

half-hour of the school day. In all of the Suessational sessions, students benefited by listening to good readers read good stories, discussing what they heard, and practicing their own reading strategies during class.

“As a parent of a first grader,” said one guest reader, “I know my daughter...is excited to... have a fun day enjoying Dr. Seuss’s many amazing books. What a great way to help our children find a love of reading early on.”

Costs for Suessational Reading were covered by a \$150 Pasco Association of Educators grant, which purchased pencils and bookmarks for every student and treats for the winners of the door decorating contest.

The ATP and other event organizers sent reminders to the community and parent reading volunteers two weeks and, again, a day in advance of Suessational Reading. Although the read-alouds were conducted during one day at Mark Twain Elementary, the ATP reasoned that the schedule could be modified to different days of the week. They also considered having cross-grade-level reading buddies—e.g., fifth graders reading to kindergarten children—to build school spirit about reading.

The school principal recognized the shared joy of reading that was generated throughout the day, and added, “When kids are excited about literature, you know you’re doing something right!” As Dr. Seuss stated, “*The more that you read, the more you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.*” Mark Twain’s students were clearly going places by reading and learning.

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READING

# SUMMER READING PROGRAM AND POETRY WITH PARENTS

**BADGER MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
RICHLAND, WA**

**B**adger Mountain Elementary School is on a mission to improve students' reading skills at all grade levels and to guide parents to encourage students' literacy learning. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and teachers are particularly focused on students who are in reading intervention programs and families who have not been actively involved. This year, the ATP implemented two reading-related activities to address these goals.

Poetry with Parents was held in April, which is National Poetry Month. To encourage attendance by previously less engaged parents, the ATP featured students who were in reading-intervention and extra-help programs for literacy skills. Teachers chose two poems for each grade level, K-5, and made copies for students. They taught the students choral reading skills in the Learning Labs. Then, they scheduled Poetry with Parents on a Friday evening. In the school library, students and parents had dinner of roll-up sandwiches, cookies, and water, and prepared to enjoy poetry together.

The Reading Specialist spoke with families about the importance of reading at home, and introduced the Summer Reading Program (see below). Then, each grade-level group of students presented their poems, showing their skills of fluency, pronunciation, and expression in reading.

Proud parents took photos and videos, laughed, and applauded. The ATP chairman noted, "This was a night just for the students who needed reading-intervention assistance to shine!" At the end of the evening, families chose a free book to take home, donated by a local reading organization.

The Summer Reading Program aimed to reduce the "summer slide" in reading often experienced by students who struggle with

reading at school. After obtaining approval from the principal and legal approval from the district, the ATP identified two neighborhoods in which many of these students lived. They designed a weekly reading program to be conducted in the students' communities. At a "buy one, get one free" book fair at the school year's end, students and parents donated new and used children's books for the summer program.

Two teachers volunteered each week to bring a cart of high-interest books into the neighborhoods. Apartment-complex managers were very cooperative, providing access to Community Rooms for the program. Each Wednesday, the teachers shared stories in a read-aloud period and prompted students' participation with interesting questions. Parents and grandparents also came to listen and read with their children. Some were Spanish speakers who were learning English. They enjoyed time when their children read to them.

After 45 minutes of story time, discussions, and reading for pleasure, teachers helped students choose books to read during the week. Students who attended at least five weeks received a free ice cream coupon. At summer's end, teachers were able to give away six books to each student. The Summer Reading Program strengthened students' positive attitudes about reading and maintained students' connections with teachers. Attendance grew as students and their families shared their appreciation for these sessions with others in their neighborhoods. Through these programs, Badger Mountain is supporting its high-needs readers and is showing that reading is fun in school and under the sun.

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# THE BIG READ

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**J.M. WRIGHT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
STAMFORD, CT**

Type 4

**J**.M. Wright is a newly reopened and diverse Technical High School. At opening it served students in grade 9, but will include grades 9-12 as it grows. The school—in Connecticut’s Technical High School System (CTHSS)—offers students academic subjects and the choice of 10 trades. One school goal is to ensure that students experience academic success and prepare for postsecondary education and training. This starts, as all educators know, with reading.

To increase 9th grade students’ reading skills and to bring students, staff and families together, the Parent Engagement Team organized a friendly competition called The Big Read. All faculty, staff, 9th graders, and many parents read the novel *Wonder*, by R. J. Palacio. This young people’s best seller is about a young boy with a serious facial deformity and how he and his schoolmates cope with his differences. The book raises difficult questions about things all students seek: friendship, understanding, and the freedom to be oneself.

With support from district Leaders for Partnerships at CTHSS, books were purchased for the 138 students. One book was for use in class and one reading at home in the language of the student’s choice. The school’s partnership team took the activity a step further by “gamifying” the reading experience with assessments, activities, projects, and special incentives.

As they read the book, students completed activities including daily quizzes, doing random acts of kindness for others, designing a new cover for the book, comparing characters, and having a family member read the book and discussing themes and messages at home. Students took a summative test about the book as part of their Accelerated Reading (AR) quarterly reading goals and English grades.

Successfully completing an activity earned students Warrior Points (WP) named for the school’s mascot, the Wright Tech Warrior. Collecting WP earned students prizes—such as dress down days, bonus points on quizzes, and chances for gift baskets and gift certificates donated by local Stamford business partners. The point system and prizes were managed by teachers in the Schoology Learning Management System, an online program usually used to manage coursework and classroom content. This allowed everyone to see students’ progress, comments, and points.

From mid-April to mid-May, the Big Read was the story of the school. Morning announcements, posters, “teaser” pictures on school TV screens, and a presentation to parents at an information night kept the Big Read front and center at the school. It also was a friendly competition among shop classes, as the 9th grades selected their permanent shops for their years at the school. The shop or trade with the most WP at the end of the event won a pizza party at the park outside of the school.

One extra benefit of the Big Read was that parents who read the book could talk with their teens about many challenging issues about growing up. Teachers elevated the discussions by conducting activities that connected the book’s themes to their shop, science, social studies, and English classes. The Big Read of *Wonder* was a big, unifying event that spotlighted the importance of reading in the right way at Wright Tech.

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READING

# WHITTIER WINTER READING EVENING

**WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**W**hen it's cold outside, there's nothing better than curling up with a good book. That is what happened at the Whittier Winter Reading Evening. Children and parents were invited to come to school in pajamas, bring blankets and pillows, and settle in for an evening of reading and learning together.

When they arrived, families found activities at five station-locations, each staffed with at least five staff members, high school students, or parent volunteers. At the Family Reading station, families read in a cozy classroom while enjoying cookies and a cup of hot cocoa. Parents read to their children from books borrowed from the school library. They were excited, later, to find that teachers, community members, and the local library donated enough books for all 300 participating students and their siblings to take one home.

The fifth graders conducted a Reader's Theater in the cafeteria. The Food Station offered meals donated by Second Harvest, a community organization. In the library, Photos with Santa Claus could be taken in front of a wintry background decorated by one of the school staff. The custodian volunteered to be Whittier's jolly Santa. At the Second Harvest Food Donation station, families received a bag of food to take home, courtesy of a nonprofit organization that uses community funds to benefit families with low incomes.

Whittier wanted the event to meet the needs of their students and families, who include many English Language Learners. Because research suggests that all students would benefit from reading for pleasure at home at least 20 minutes a day, Whittier's teachers wanted to forge a strong connection between home and school to encourage students' love of reading and to increase students' vocabulary in English and their home language. Many families work long hours

during the May-November harvest season. The ATP scheduled Winter Reading Evening in December so more families could attend.

The evening was evaluated at a monthly ATP meeting and at a Vertical Team meeting. The ATP agreed it was good to obtain the donations of children's books in advance, and to recruit volunteers from the high school and community as helpers. The flyers and school's automatic phone message system increased attendance. Over 100 parents and 300 students attended. "Take homes" were very important. After reading, eating, and celebrating the season, all families took home at least one children's book, a bag of food, and some new strategies for encouraging children's reading at home. Over 20 raffle winners won holiday wreaths donated by teachers, community members, and Action Team for Partnership (ATP).

The evaluations also produced some suggestions for the future, including creating a map giving the locations of the activity stations; distributing hand-outs to all parents on strategies for reading at home; and inviting the public librarian to register families for library cards.

One parent commented on the friendly atmosphere, "The classroom was very warm and welcoming for reading." A student added, "And we get a free book. Yay!" A teacher remarked, "This is awesome. I love working at this school." It was clear that the Winter Reading Evening was evidence of a welcoming school climate for all partners in education.

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# FALL INTO READING

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**JOHN J. JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Type 4

**E**ngaging young readers in fun activities may be one way to set them on the path of life-long reading. At Johnson Elementary School nearly all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Their teachers have set goals and are working hard to encourage their students to love learning and to love to read. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers planned Fall Into Reading—a fall festival and family reading night. Teachers, parents, community members, and AmeriCorps volunteers took active roles preparing and conducting this event.

The ATP organized a many-faceted publicity campaign to attract families and community partners. Teachers put information about the event in students' report cards; reminders were posted on the school's marquee; colorful posters were hung inside and outside of the school; flyers were distributed throughout the community; and invitations were extended in the American Press newspaper. Families and community members were impressed when some teachers and school staff knocked on doors to deliver flyers about the reading night.

At Fall Into Reading, students and their families had many opportunities to participate in hands-on reading activities and informational booths organized by the teachers, students, and staff from the Calcasieu Parish Public Library. Each grade level set up a reading-themed, standard-based activity station for attendees to enjoy. The activities and games were designed to show parents what reading and language arts instruction looks like at their child's grade level and ways to practice and reinforce specific skills at home. Students were eager to demonstrate reading and language arts skills for their parents. One parent appreciated this focus, saying, "I enjoyed the

time I got to spend with my son getting to see what he does in school each day."

College students and staff from the McNeese State University's athletic department were featured guests. They came to talk with students about the importance of reading, even in college athletic activities.

AmeriCorps volunteers along with some Special Education Teachers built a hair-raising, horrifying, haunted house, and dressed for the occasion. After being scared "out of their wits," families could recover by going on a country hay ride, which was offered during the entire evening.

Hot dogs, chips, and drinks were served when participants arrived. The Fall Scholastic Book Fair was open for browsing and buying. Students and parents could explore and purchase books and educational games and toys that encouraged reading. Chick-Fil-A donated one free book for each child attending. At the reading stations, families collected ideas and materials on how to help with reading at home.

The ATP received lots of positive feedback from 100 students, 65 parents, 30 teachers and 20 community members. One parent represented many others by commenting, "I wish you all would do more activities like this one. We really enjoyed ourselves!" That certainly expresses the joy of reading.

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READING

# PARENT FEEDBACK BUILDS STRONGER READING NIGHTS

**EASTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**T**hanks to parent feedback, annual family reading nights at Eastgate Elementary School keep getting better. Reading Nights were first implemented when the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at the school heard that families wanted to support their children’s literacy education, but were not sure how to do so. Now, the ATP plans activities each year for teachers, students, and parents to enjoy reading and to show families how to help their children strengthen reading skills at home. Parents enjoy these events, offer suggestions for improvement, and look forward to the next reading night. One suggestion was: “Why not include local community members in the fun?”

The ATP agreed that this was a great idea. Last year, Family Reading Night was conducted on the school’s Pajama Day to celebrate Dr. Seuss’s birthday. The program for Reading Night featured community leaders including the Superintendent of Elementary Schools, the Chief of Police, a fireman, an artist, players on local sports teams, a DARE officer, and bilingual high school and college students who were alumni of Eastgate Elementary. The community leaders conducted two sessions, each 30 minutes, in eight classrooms to meet and talk with groups of families. Speakers were given guidelines by the ATP to introduce themselves and explain why reading was important to them. Next, they read a favorite story aloud to the families and children.

The participation of bilingual high school and college students, who were Eastgate alumni, was a real highlight. Many families in attendance speak Spanish at home. They were encouraged to attend when they learned that some of the stories would be told in Spanish. The alumni enjoyed giving back to their former school. “It was really fun to come back to Eastgate

and read to the kids and families,” said one.

Teachers were in every classroom. After the community leaders read a favorite story aloud, the teachers demonstrated for families how to ask children questions to increase reading comprehension. They distributed bookmarks printed in English and Spanish with simple questions, such as “Who are the characters?” and “What is the setting?” Teachers also announced an upcoming raffle featuring a bicycle as the prize. Students could earn tickets by reading at home with their families. “This will help me ask more questions about the book my child is reading and ask the right questions,” one parent stated.

More than 80 students and about 60 parents attended the community-based Family Reading Night. There was plenty of advance publicity. The ATP sent home flyers and put notices in the school newsletter and on the school website. On the day of the event, teachers distributed reminder stickers that students wore on their pajamas, worn for the daytime celebration of Dr. Seuss’s birthday. Family Reading Night concluded with cookies and milk for all.

The ATP credits much of reading night’s success to parent feedback. “At every event, we survey families to see if we met their objectives and if they have any suggestions for how to improve future events,” the ATP Co-Chairs explained. “We truly appreciate our parents’ perspectives and always look at the previous year’s survey when we begin to plan our events.”

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Type 6

READING

# READING: THE BEST 20 MINUTES OF YOUR DAY

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**SUNSET VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 4

**W**hen families start reading together, the time often becomes the best 20 minutes of the day. The practice deepens family bonds, encourages children to enjoy reading for pleasure, and demonstrates that parents support their children’s literacy education. To help families make reading a good habit, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers at Sunset View Elementary School helped plan Reading: The Best 20 Minutes of Your Day. Parents on the ATP gave useful input for designing and implementing this event.

The family reading night was conducted on Pajama Day during the school’s Spirit Week. The ATP advertised The Best 20 Minutes by mailing flyers home, putting a notice in the school’s e-newsletter, and hanging posters around the school. On the day before the event, the ATP sent home one last reminder. Over 50 students and 75 parents gathered to read together.

The principal kicked off the event by juggling apples, reading a Dr. Seuss book, and explaining three ways to organize short family reading sessions. First, he said, the sessions should be fun. Second, books and stories should be of interest to the child involved—and students have different interests. Third, the student should receive a hug, pat on the back, promise of reading the next day, or other token of progress at the end of the session.

After this introduction, families participated in breakout sessions on literacy skills by grade level led by 20 teachers. The activities put a spotlight on students and showed parents what their children were learning in reading class. Teachers prepared handouts for parents so they could reinforce the same skills at home when they read stories with their children.

For example, kindergarteners played games to improve letter knowledge fluency

and rhyming skills. First graders demonstrated five strategies for decoding difficult words and took home star-shaped magnets featuring the tips. Second graders demonstrated a five-point story-retell strategy and received hand-shaped magnets printed with the five points. Students received a free book donated by the National Reading Foundation and practiced reading the book aloud with their families.

The school librarian met with students in grades three through five and their families. Originally, the ATP had not planned to include older grades in the event, but agreed to do so when teachers from these grades showed interest. They were glad they did. The older students were interested in the librarian’s presentation about new books for their reading levels and interests. “Students were excited about reading the new books with their friends and family,” the ATP Chair reported.

A visit from the Community Bookmobile was a highlight of the evening. Some parents and students signed up for library cards and all enjoyed browsing the books. Some checked out books to take home. The Bookmobile visits the school every other week.

The Best 20 Minutes reading night concluded with hot chocolate for all. On the exit survey for reactions and suggestions, teachers noted that they enjoyed spending time with families, including many they had not previously met. Families appreciated learning how to organize family reading time that will help their children practice reading skills. This activity demonstrated how to create a cozy time—even 20 minutes—for shared reading at home.

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READING

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WITH STUDENTS ON READING

### SELECTED ACTIVITIES

Joyce L. Epstein, Facilitator

SEE THESE SECTIONS FOR IDEAS ON:

- I. WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS FOR PARENTS
- II. ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS TOGETHER
- III. SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK
- IV. GALA EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS
- V. READING VOLUNTEERS
- VI. COMMUNITY PARTNERS

## I. WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS FOR PARENTS

**P.A.I.R.S. – Parents Actively Involved in Reading Strategies.** Storyteller sessions and demonstrations are conducted to show parents how students learn to read, how to help students with reading skills, and how to select books for students. The activity includes a trip to the school library to select books to bring home to read with children. Other schools call similar workshops **Breakfast and a Book** or **Parents as Reading Partners**. They add strategies to encourage parents to read with their children and ways parents may improve their own reading skills. Breakfast is provided, along with reading-related gifts for parents to bring home.

**Latino Literacy Program.** Spanish-speaking parents gain information and share ideas on how to become more involved with their children's literacy learning at home. Parents conduct various art and language activities, learn about bilingual books to read at home, and create a family album and story to share with other parents at the workshop and with their children at home. Attendees are introduced to and visit the school's lending library for parents.

**Open Court Parent Workshops.** Educators and experienced parents introduce parents of students from kindergarten through grade 5 to the school's reading program and the *Open Court* textbook series that the children will use. Sessions are conducted in Spanish and English to familiarize parents with students' spelling cards, sight words, sample stories, and how to help children at home in positive ways. The activity may be adapted to any reading curriculum.

**Equity Book Club.** Parents are invited to attend a dinner to discuss high-quality children’s literature on issues of equity. The discussions increase understanding in a school that serves a diverse population of students and families. The evening, conducted three times a year, includes a reading, potluck dinner, guided discussions, and copies of a selected book.

**Family Reading Resource Center.** Parents may pick up materials to take home to help students practice reading, vocabulary, and other skills. Workshops for parents are conducted periodically explain how to use various materials with their children.

## II. ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS TOGETHER

**Jumpstart to Reading.** Kindergarten and first grade students and their parents come together to hear a story. Parents also receive information on how students learn to read and ways to encourage reading at home. Parent-child pairs receive a new book to take home. Other schools call similar parent-child activities **Parent/Family Book Club**, **Storytelling Night**, **Family Reading Night**, and **D.R.E.A.M. Night (Do Read Every Available Minute)**. These include parents and children at all grade levels, or different grade levels each month. The activities may involve a professional storyteller, help families meet other families, provide parents with ideas from their children’s teachers of activities to conduct at home about specific stories, and strengthen parent-teacher interactions about reading.

**Open Library Night.** Parents and students have access to the school library one evening a week to check out books together.

**Family Center Learning Nights.** Parents and children are invited to reading and literacy gatherings on selected Thursday evenings throughout the year. They are guided by teachers and curriculum leaders to make a family book with family photos. Parents may attend sessions on how children learn to read and how to help at home. Some sessions are organized to meet-an author of books for children or on parenting.

**Bridges to Literacy.** Parents and children are invited to various reading-related events that strengthen multicultural understanding. They may read selected books together, visit the school library, complete a crafts activity related to reading about different cultures, complete a cooking activity by reading recipes, and participate in storytelling and drama activities to improve speaking skills. Parents and educators also share ideas on how to support literacy development at home with several kinds of activities. Other schools conduct similar activities on different themes. The **Makowski Marketplace** links the multicultural books and related activities and games to the backgrounds of the students at the school. At **Family Right to Read Night** parents and students are invited to read books on a particular topic. For example, one evening featured books about bears along with related reading, art, writing, and other activities.

**Camp Read-A-Lot.** Parents and students listen to stories read aloud in English and Spanish at a “camp night” at school and conduct various activities with books. The event is conducted by parent and community volunteers, in collaboration with community groups and organizations. Students and parents take home books in English and Spanish and reading-related activities to conduct and enjoy at home to increase students’ reading for pleasure.

**Families Who Write and Read Succeed Night.** Parents and students with diverse cultural backgrounds are invited to write and illustrate a book together on a theme that is important to all families (e.g., friendship, celebrations, learning etc.). Translations are made for families who write in different languages. Families read their books, share them at the event, and take them home. New and used books also are donated to the school for distribution at this event.

**Family Literacy Nights.** As a result of collaborative planning between the school and community organizations, parents are offered courses to learn English; parents, students, and teachers are offered courses to learn Spanish and computer skills; and students are given opportunities obtain help with homework.

**Book Swap.** Students and parents exchange gently-used books periodically throughout the school year. The events include reading stations to read books, art activities, and storytelling, as well as locations for books for parents and students at different grade levels. Parents and students may pick up reading lists of books recommended for students at different grade levels.

### **III. SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK**

**Keep Books.** First graders bring home books called “Keep Books,” which the students may read, write in, and share with their family partners. The students may collect and keep up to 48 books during the school year. The school works with the Early Literacy Learning Initiative at Ohio State University to conduct this activity.

**Story Bags.** Students take home a different “story bag” each week to share with a family partner. The bag contains a book, guidelines for parents with suggested questions to discuss with their children, and an activity to conduct related to the story. Students and parents write a short comment or reaction to the book and return it with the bag to the teacher.

**Reading BINGO.** BINGO lists different reading and writing activities in the boxes on the game card. Students who complete 5 activities in a row during a month (such as reading a recipe, writing a thank you note, drawing a map, writing directions, listing products at a grocery store from A to Z, or other reading and word activities that are listed) win the game and are awarded a book to take home.

**Get Caught Reading.** Students are asked to pledge to read at least 20 minutes per night for five nights per week, with parent’s approval of the child’s promise. During one randomly selected week, teachers and other staff call students at home between 7 and 7:30 p.m. If the students are “caught reading,” they are recognized in school the next day. Parents verify that their child is reading as part of their homework.

**Authors in Training.** Students in grades 4 and 5 read their poetry to parents and other community members at “Poetry Picnic.” Students also read their poetry on a local radio show and some of their work also is printed in the community newspaper.

**Dad’s Day Breakfast and Writing Showcase.** Students read essays and other written work for their dads or other family members. Students also share writing portfolios. Everyone has breakfast.

**A Reading Partnership.** Students who are incarcerated in a school within a detention center and their parents read *And Still We Rise* or other selected books. Students and parents are given a copy of the book and discuss its messages in their phone conversations or regular visits. They also discuss the book with the school staff. The “book club” is helping to connect parents, students, and staff in new ways.

**Reading Goals and Challenges.** Many schools set goals for students, collectively, to read a large number of books during a school year (e.g., one school may set a goal for students to read 51,000 books in all; another school’s goal may be 100,000, depending on the size of the student population). Some schools supplement the reading goal with activities such as parent, grandparent, community, and child reading nights; pancake suppers with stories and books to read; breakfasts and books; and other reading-related events.

## IV. GALA EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS

**Read Across America Week.** Many schools celebrate this week with reading-related activities scheduled at various times during the day and evening and on different days, so that all parents can find time to attend at least one reading event. Activities include listening to guests read aloud children’s books and listening to students read their writings. Local celebrities may be invited to participate, and local bookstores and businesses are asked to sponsor events and provide books for children.

**A Birthday Party for Dr. Seuss (sometimes called Cat-in-the-Hat Day).** Many schools organize programs in honor of Dr. Seuss each February. They may conduct activities all week or on one day to celebrate and feature books by Dr. Seuss. Activities include an evening of celebrity readers (e.g., teachers, community business people, elected officials, and others) of Dr. Seuss books. Some wear costumes. Children and families listen to stories, conduct art activities, have snacks (sometimes called Seuss-snacks), swap Dr. Seuss or other books, and receive books that are donated.

**Salute to National Book Week.** Students, teachers, and parents demonstrate a love of literature on each day of the week. Activities include trivia games on favorite books; parent, staff, student, community, and celebrity readers for each class; and related school library activities.

## V. READING VOLUNTEERS

**Books to Go.** This activity aims to increase parent awareness of reading skills that children learn at each grade level, improve students' skills and test scores, increase students' interest in reading, and increase the number of books that students have at home. Volunteers collect donations of new and gently-used books and sell them to students for 50 cents each. Different carts of age-appropriate books serve different grade levels. In one school, over 5000 books were exchanged in this way for students in pre K to grade 2 over two years.

**B.E.A.R. (Be Excited About Reading).** Community members, including parents, elected officials, organizations, and businesses come to the school to read books aloud in different languages. Translators also were present. The reading volunteers visited with all students in the school's 50 classrooms. Reading bears were prominent symbols.

**Lunch Bunch.** Students in grades 1-5 who have not completed the school's requirement to read for 20 minutes at home as part of each night's homework complete the assignment by reading during the lunch period with a parent, community partner, or student volunteer.

**Partners in Literacy.** Teachers train volunteers to listen to children read a book at a listening center and to work with each student on a designated sight vocabulary reading list during language arts classes. Volunteers include parents, grandparents, senior citizens, other community partners, school board members, and businesses.

**Book Talks.** Parents and other volunteers in a junior high school select a book for early adolescents from a list provided by the school library director, read it, and present a 5-10 minute talk to share their reactions with students. Teachers work with the library director to select books linked to particular units of work in different school subjects, and schedule the volunteers to come to those classes at a convenient time. The presenters discuss the books with up to four classes on a given day. The program aims to show students that adults enjoy books and to help students identify good books in the media center that are linked to their class lessons.

**Family Reading Resource Center.** Parents may pick up materials to take home to help students practice reading, vocabulary, and other skills. Workshops for parents are conducted periodically explain how to use various materials with their children.

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## VI. COMMUNITY PARTNERS

**Reading Book Bags 'N' Buddies.** The school trains community volunteers to read books, tutor, conduct activities, and talk with students about reading in grades Pre-K to 3.

**Buddy Reading Program.** This program pairs future teachers in an education college with fourth and fifth grade students in a local school to talk about a specific novel or biography via the Internet.

**Ozzie’s Reading Club.** A city’s minor league ball team works with students in a local school in several ways. The ball players read stories at a Reading Club Night. The teachers and team designed a baseball reading game. Over eight weeks, students read a set number of books or pages to reach first base, second base, and so on. Those who make a “home run” by completing the reading program receive a free ticket to one the team’s Reading Club Night games. The readers marched in a parade at the ballpark and received other prizes from the team.

**Paws for Reading.** The mascot of the Detroit Tigers baseball team partners with an elementary school to read and discuss the poem, *Casey at the Bat*. The teachers also set up a reading raffle for children to enter a drawing for a monthly reading prize. Prizes for the raffle and other school accomplishments include ballgame tickets.

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Reference: Sheldon, S.B. & Epstein, J. L. (2005). School programs of family and community involvement to support children’s reading and literacy development across the grades. Pp. 107-138 in *Literacy Development of Students in Urban Schools: Research and Policy*, James Flood & Patty Anders (Eds.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association (IRA). 2005.

These activities were conducted by schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). For more information and many other examples of family and community involvement activities in reading, see the annual NNPS books of *Promising Partnership Practices* at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) in the section Success Stories.