



## SAMPLER

# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN READING

## Make Partnerships Part of the Story

**Read with me to open the door.  
By reading together, I learn more!**

Today, just about all schools set measurable goals in their school improvement plans for student success in reading and literacy. Harnessing extra resources and support with family and community involvement helps more students reach these goals. Well-designed and well-implemented involvement activities encourage youngsters to value, share, and enjoy reading, writing, and other language arts.

Research indicates that programs and practices of partnership make a difference in whether, how, and which families are involved in their children's education. Partnership activities support excellent teaching in school and out, and give students opportunities to practice and sharpen their reading, writing, and other language skills. With high-quality teaching *and* family and community support, more students will achieve required reading and literacy goals to progress to the next level.

When schools provide good information to parents about the reading and language arts curricula, more students learn that their families think reading, writing, spelling, grammar, speaking, and listening are important skills to master. By engaging community partners in reading activities, students learn that other adults enjoy reading and sharing stories.

The *Promising Partnership Practices* in this *Sampler* were submitted by members of NNPS who, over the years, shared activities for family and community involvement in reading and writing. The examples for family nights, workshops, volunteer activities, and other creative partnerships focus on all six types of involvement in the NNPS framework: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning at home*, *decision making*, and *collaborating with the community*.

**Improve Classroom Teaching and Students' Reading Skills.** The sample activities were conducted by school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to engage teachers, students, and parents across grade levels. Individual reading and language arts teachers and grade-level teams may adapt the activities to strengthen partnerships with their own students' families and communities in order to improve students' reading skills and attitudes. For example, a reading, language arts, or English teacher at any grade level may organize activities such as the *SHS Word of the Week* to engage families with students on increasing vocabulary skills. Or, they may conduct something like *Whitney's Coffee House* to enable students to read and share stories, poetry, essays, or other writings.

The ten examples in this *Sampler*, organized alphabetically, were effectively implemented in schools working to improve goal-linked partnership programs. They should help any school team or individual teacher feel confident about engaging parents and community partners with students on reading and writing activities. In this way, parents gain an understanding of the work that teachers and students do in English or reading classes every day. When students share ideas and opinions about words, books, and stories with parents and other partners, they are more likely to improve their attitudes about reading, fluency, and comprehension.

This *Sampler* includes just a few of many excellent activities in our annual collections. For more ideas visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org). Follow the paths to Success Stories and to a particular year's book. Then, click on Reading and Literacy.

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## Review of Research: Family and Community Involvement in Reading

Steven B. Sheldon, NNPS Director of Research

Many studies have been conducted on the impact of family involvement with students on reading and literacy skill development. Here, we summarize a few main findings organized by children's grade level. Research shows that, although practices differ in elementary, middle, and high schools, age-appropriate family and community involvement activities help students improve their reading and literacy skills at all grade levels.

### Preschool and Primary Grades

Children's entry to formal schooling marks an important transition in learning and development. Studies show that parents can be guided successfully to be good partners with children in reading from infancy on. Reading together helps young children build positive attitudes about reading, writing, school, and learning.

**Storybook Reading.** Storybook reading is an important shared activity in the early grades. Many studies conclude that the *quality* of parent-child interactions in reading determines whether and how these activities affect children. Studies show that shared reading with storybooks can help students build vocabulary, listening, and comprehension skills, whereas books on teaching letters and words can help students increase alphabet knowledge, decoding, and invented spelling. It is important for preschools and elementary schools to guide parents to use various books and activities to develop the full range of students' literacy skills.

**Reading Volunteers.** Although parent and community volunteers are common in the younger grades, research suggests that many volunteer programs are poorly coordinated with classroom curricula. Some studies found that children with volunteer tutors (e.g., reading buddies, formal tutors) had higher oral reading and word comprehension skills and improved their reading skills over time, compared to peers who were not tutored. It is important for teachers to train reading volunteers so that time with students is coordinated with classroom teaching in order to maximize desired results.

### Upper Elementary and Middle Grades

Most research on parent involvement in reading has been conducted in the early grades, but studies are accumulating that show that family and community involvement positively influences student achievement and other measures of success through high school. One study of third and fifth grade students from mainly African-American families with low incomes found that students in classrooms with teachers who more frequently involved families in learning activities at home had higher gains in reading achievement from one year to the next, compared to students in other teachers' classrooms.

Other interventions reinforce the importance of parental involvement in reading. For example, workshops for parents that share strategies for becoming involved in reading with students at home were associated with increased reading comprehension skills and reading achievement test scores for second through eighth graders. Also, a study of 71 Title I schools found that outreach to involve parents on several types of involvement was associated with improved reading achievement for students from grades three to five.

NNPS studies of the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) language arts intervention found that middle school students who completed more interactive homework assignments with a family partner had stronger writing skills, higher language arts report card grades and, over two years, higher reading achievement test scores than students in control (non-TIPS) classes. Other studies indicated that when high school teachers communicated frequently with parents, teens were more likely to increase reading achievement scores than when less communication occurred. Teachers may design homework that requires students to show and discuss what they are reading and writing with a family partner.

### Parent Involvement and Adolescents' School Achievement

Using data from a national sample of adolescents, several researchers found that students scored higher on reading achievement tests and/or earned higher grades in English if their parents discussed school and future plans, checked homework, and maintained high educational expectations. Parents' interest in and support for reading (and other school subjects) contributed to students' academic development through high school.

[For details on these and other studies, see:](#)

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 J. Flood & P. Anders (Eds.) *Literacy development of students in urban schools: Research and policy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association (IRA).

Sheldon, S. B. (2009). Improving student outcomes with school, family, and community partnerships: A research review. Pp. 40-56 in J. L. Epstein, J. L. et al. *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



# A NIGHT AT THE OSCARS

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## STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

In the evening twilight, as over 300 parents and students began to gather outside the doors of Stevens Middle School, a tingling sensation surged through the crowd. Anticipation mounted as rumors circulated of celebrities who'd been sighted on the school campus, all dressed in their finest gowns and suits. When 6:00 finally came around, the doors swung open, and down the red carpet they went, stepping into the blinding lights of the school hallway.

For the night, classrooms at Stevens were transformed into “venues,” each with a different theme and set of activities that related a connection between reading and the silver screen. A number of them were themed after books—including the immensely popular *Twilight*, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *Marley & Me*—that had been adapted into movies.

Visitors were treated to images from video stills, information or trivia questions about the movies and their stars, human and animal alike, and re-creations of objects or scenes from the films. Like every room at A Night at the Oscars, all of these venues had been designed by the students themselves. For example, the *Because of Winn-Dixie* room included a “bottle tree,” into which ESL students had written positive messages that could be revealed with a flashlight.

Other venues provided other exciting opportunities. One, a celebrity Wax Museum, featured students who were dressed as figures from biographies they had recently read. When attendees pressed a paper button on the student's costume, the statue came to life and told, in the first person, that historical celebrity's story. The *Jeopardy* room pitted students against parents in a book-to-movie trivia contest for fun and prizes.

Attendees also had the opportunity to learn a little more about life in the movie industry from the Behind the Scenes room. Here, visitors learned about the range of career opportunities that happen off-screen, including screen writing.

In another room, a local newspaper reporter held a session on interviewing skills, and gave students pointers on how to write their own interviews.

The evening also provided the school an opportunity to share with parents some of the reading services available from the wider community. The school's computer lab was ready and loaded with a variety of reading-related web sites that parents could use as resources for any grade level; they also were shown how to use the school's Parent Portal software to keep up-to-date on their children's grades. Elsewhere, the public librarian managed a booth where families could sign up for library cards.

Finally, once guests decided it was time for intermission, the cafeteria offered sandwiches, chips, and punch, with live Mexican folk dancing provided by the school's Baille Folklorico dance troupe.

Of course, none of the night's successes would have been possible without joint efforts by the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO). Spearheaded by the school's Literacy Coach, with a theme selected and designed by students, the annual Literacy Night took on a whole new life with the Night at the Oscars theme. The success of the event was apparent, based on how well it met the goal of Stevens' Balanced Literacy Action Plan: “to promote enthusiasm and student performance in relation to reading and writing.”

Based on students' thrill at seeing their hard work pay off, receiving rewards for attending and participating, and their parents' positive reactions to the event, it seems that, at this Oscar party, everyone was a winner.



# FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT

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## **ROOSEVELT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER NO. 65 BUFFALO, NEW YORK**

**C**urious George, Mother Goose, The Cat in the Hat, and Old Mother Hubbard wandered through the halls of Roosevelt Early Childhood Center one November evening, telling their tales and inviting the youngsters and their parents to talk with them about the stories in which they star. Meanwhile, some of the Roosevelt students performed *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in the Fairytale Theater.

It was a whimsical, wonderful night for the 100 parents and 125 youngsters who attended the first Family Literacy Night at Roosevelt, which enrolls students in Pre-K through fourth grade. Also on the program were a book exchange, music and literacy program, and make-n-take activities. The Riverside Branch librarian was on hand to read aloud from award-winning children's books and helped children and adults apply for library cards.

A committee of parents, teachers, and administrators developed the activities and entertainment after school officials studied data from state and local reading assessments. They targeted the needs of children in the various grades. Parents learned about their child's reading needs and found new ways to support learning at home.

The variety of activities and the fun-loving nature of the event won much praise.

"Putting an exciting and fun twist on reading and understanding literature helps the kids embrace it," said one parent. "This was a good way to keep the children reading, not only in school but at home as well."

One student called the event "cool, fun and exciting." A grandparent particularly liked the Mother Goose readings and "signing my granddaughter's favorite book."

Literacy night addressed two needs at Roosevelt: improving specific literacy skills and increasing parent involvement. The reading coach noticed that the amount of parent involve-

ment grew on the same trajectory as the school's reading scores. So, teaming up the activities seemed like an efficient way to promote both school goals.

Students participated in an innovative publicity strategy. They played roles in different situations promoting literacy night, similar to readers' theater, during daily announcements for two weeks before the program. The school offered homework passes to students attending, but they had to be picked up at the door.

The children's theater was particularly popular, based on adult feedback, and will definitely be expanded for the next literacy night. Also on the future agenda are parent workshops, opening the computer lab so parents can explore web-based resources, and including more community members.



# FAMILY TRADITIONS READING NIGHT

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**THOMAS JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
BELLFLOWER, CALIFORNIA**

**W**ho doesn't, after all, love a holiday? The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Thomas Jefferson Elementary tapped into a universal topic for their Family Traditions Reading Night, making the evening a special occasion by asking students in grades K–6 to write about . . . special occasions.

Inspired by models in the NNPS book *Family Reading Night* (Hutchins, Greenfield, and Epstein 2008), the team designed a program that included reading activities, a book exchange, a presentation by the county's children's librarian, and refreshments. Central to the evening was an essay-writing contest that the students entered before the event.

The winners of the essay contest—selected by teachers based on children's response to the question, "What is your family's favorite holiday?"—were invited to read their essays aloud to the proud parents, students, and school staff. The opportunity for parents to hear what students had written affirmed their connection to what their children were learning in school. The assignment also prompted students to involve their parents in the writing process by asking for specifics about family traditions. By hearing these traditions honored before such a large audience, families were encouraged to feel they had a greater part in the Thomas Jefferson community.

ATP planners added the writing assignment to the program based on the academic needs demonstrated by the CA STAR assessment and district benchmarks. Reading comprehension was a specific target. With the other activities of the night, not only did the essay contest boost reading skills, it also resulted in the school's largest Reading Night turnout yet. "The cafeteria was filled to capacity," wrote the ATP facilitator. "There were many families who came who usually didn't attend family nights."

Students donned their pajamas and brought

their pillows. Many also brought a used book for the book exchange, at which hundreds of children swapped for something new to read. The librarian gave a presentation and handed out applications for library cards. The large turnout, which produced the greatest challenge (albeit a pleasant one), required a few last-minute changes. Instead of having the attendees go to classrooms for the teachers to read to them, one teacher read to all the students and families in the cafeteria. Parents and other volunteers set up, organized the exchange, and provided refreshments.

With all of the time and effort put in by the different groups, costs were minimal: \$50 in Title I funds. Due to the event's overwhelming success, the ATP hopes to recruit even more volunteers—and set aside more time for students to read their essays—for their Family Hero Reading Night in June.



## Letters from the Heart

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*Horace Mann Elementary School  
West Allis, Wisconsin*

The idea came from the “Absolutely Incredible Kid Day,” a day set aside for parents, teachers and community members to write a letter telling a child how wonderful he or she is. Horace Mann Elementary, a school in suburban Milwaukee, gave the national day a new twist, creating the Letters from the Heart event – a letter exchange that turned into a very special evening.

Letters from the Heart involved not only teachers and parents writing letters to children, but also students writing letters to their teachers and parents. In this way, the project helped students work on their writing skills. This related closely to one of the goals of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP): Help all students write proficiently on grade level.

The event also addressed the challenge of increasing parental leadership and involvement at the school. The school has a diverse population and more than three-quarters of its students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The ATP hoped that a good experience would make parents more willing to be involved. Writing letters allowed parents to interact positively with the school.

The activity proved good for everyone. The adults and students expressed feelings in their letters that they might not say in person. People were not shy about participating – more than 400 students and 400 adults wrote letters.

Letters from the Heart was also a learning experience. Beginning in February, teachers worked with their students on letter-writing skills, and gave them the opportunity to finish their letters in class. Parents, too, got help with their writing. For two weeks before the event, several ATP and staff members, including the librarian, held letter-writing workshops for parents, both before and after school. These workshops offered writing tips, computer access and a quiet space to work.

On the evening of the March PTA meeting, Letters from the Heart began with a pizza dinner sponsored by the PTA. After dinner, each family had its picture taken. Parents and students worked together to make a frame or card to hold the photo. The school also set up a reading room and encouraged families to enjoy reading a book together. These activities paled, however, to the evening’s big event – the letter exchange in the cafeteria.

“It felt as if time stopped and the world slowed down during this exchange,” said one organizer. “Seeing the smiles on each person’s face as they read their letter was a humbling and joyful experience. Hearts opened wide that night and the letters will stay with each child and parent forever.”

The event’s success was due in part to good publicity. Several letters were sent home to parents introducing the project, welcoming them to attend letter-writing workshops and the exchange. The PTA paid for the food and the Family Resource Center provided materials for the art project and the camera for family pictures. The cost was less than \$400.

Overall, the practice was a resounding success, according to everyone involved. Parents were positive about the practice and expressed their hopes that the school would repeat the event. The principal was thrilled. The teachers were proud to be a part of helping adults and children connect so meaningfully.



## MYSTERY READING CLUB

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**JOHN B. CARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
HAMPTON, VIRGINIA**

**A**t every grade level, students love a good mystery. John B. Cary Elementary School wanted to increase students' interest in reading. They unleashed the thrill and puzzles of mysteries in the Mystery Reading Club.

Because many students lacked a variety of reading materials at home, the second-grade teachers provided good stories and activities that would encourage student reading and family involvement. With the cooperation of the Parent Involvement Facilitator, they sent home a mystery a week with a sheet of relevant questions that students would talk over at home and complete for homework. In preparation, teachers informally surveyed some students about this idea and they all responded positively and enthusiastically. Teachers, then, introduced all students to the Mystery Reading Club.

Each student received a "mystery folder" containing a description of the club, the first mystery to read, and the first set of mystery questions to discuss at home. Students had to return their work to the "mystery box" on Mondays to receive a mystery prize. Teachers showed samples of the prizes to build enthusiasm and to motivate students to read and discuss the mysteries at home.

If the students were unable to complete the work one week, they could turn it in the next week and still qualify for a prize. This way, students did not lose interest in reading if they couldn't meet every deadline.

Every Monday afternoon, the Parent Involvement Facilitator visited each class. She read the name of each student who solved the mystery and the others applauded. These students received a mystery prize—small bags of goodies, such as candy, school supplies, or cookies.

The program's real strength was that it engaged students with a parent or family partner at home. The children talked with their partner about the mystery and discussed the questions at hand. The family member—parent or other partner—could, then, get "into" the mystery with their youngster, discuss the questions, and help figure out some of the puzzles in the books. "The Mystery Reading Club has been fun and has become something my son and I look forward to doing together!" said one parent.

Of course, the other benefits of the program are important, too. Because the activity was designed to be completed at home, students learned to take responsibility for bringing the reading materials home, completing the work, and returning their ideas and answers to the mystery box on time. And, by making reading and writing more fun, the teachers guaranteed that students would take these responsibilities seriously and improve their reading skills. "This is great! Can we do it all year?" asked one student.

The Mystery Reading Club was an excellent home learning activity. The entire program cost only \$95 and was easy to implement. The school plans to initiate similar clubs in other subjects. There's no mystery to this method—the solution is clear: Keep it simple. Keep it fun.



# READING AT HOME AWARENESS

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## ELLEN OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

**I**mproving students' reading abilities is a main goal at Ellen Ochoa Middle School. Reading in school is not enough, teachers knew, to increase skills and scores. Students need to read at home, every day. This prompted the project for Reading At Home Awareness.

Additional reading time is particularly important at Ochoa because English is a second language for many of its students. Also, according to state test scores, 80 per cent of the students were reading below grade level.

After hearing these data, the Parent Involvement/Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed a plan to give all parents information on ways to encourage their children to read for pleasure at home. The goal was to have every student read for 40 minutes a day outside of school.

The team initiated Reading at Home Awareness at fall parent-teacher conferences by talking with each parent about their student's reading scores. Parents received monthly information on the importance of reading and at other events at school. Each month, a letter and a magnet with reading tips went to more than 800 students and their families. The tips suggested that parents talk with their children about what they are reading, that middle-schoolers read to their younger siblings, and that parents help students find appropriate reading material in school and community libraries.

Ochoa hopes to increase scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) from 32 percent proficient to at least 49 percent in the next year. The school also wants to increase students' Measure of Academic Progress scores (a computerized test adapted to each student's ability level) by at least 2 percentage points from fall to spring.

Persistence paid off. In a survey on the program's progress, more than 50 percent of parents responded that their child increased reading time at home and decreased time watch-

ing television and playing video games. Some parents reported that their elementary students were reading more, too. "We are creating a community of readers," commented one of the program's organizers.

"Why do you have to send a magnet every month?" one student asked her teacher. "My mom is making me read for 40 minutes every night now." Persistence pays off when complaints become accomplishments!

The ATP implemented the program with the help of the school's National Junior Honor Society whose members made business card-sized magnets and helped label and stuff envelopes that were mailed home. The library staff also helped with materials that were published in English and Spanish.

As the school year ended, the ATP team sent parents a letter and ideas to encourage students to maintain good reading habits over the summer in order to avoid the "summer slide" in skills. The Reading at Home Awareness program is serious business at Ochoa and is likely to continue at the request of parents. The principal, teachers, and ATP will watch for progress on the standardized reading tests.



## Reading with Residents

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*Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary School  
Forsyth, Georgia*

**R**osy-cheeked children from Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary brightened the lives of 80 nursing home residents last year during their long-standing Reading with the Residents series. Over the course of the last school year, the program sent 102 students to a local assisted-living home to entertain senior citizens by reading aloud their favorite books.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) developed the field trips in 2002 to help boost students reading levels and strengthen community ties. Through reading to the elderly, they hoped students would develop a sense of pride in their education and respect for their elders. They knew seniors would appreciate the visit.

The program begins every year with a call to the nursing home's activities director. An ATP member works with the director to set dates for the monthly visits. Teachers receive a schedule for the year and information about the home to distribute to students. Each month a sign-up sheet circulates the classrooms. Teachers select two students from each class to visit the nursing home.

The ATP publicizes the event in the school's newsletter. Photos from the field trips are usually featured in the school year book. The local newspaper also features the program.

On field trip day, 10-14 students from grades K-5 hop on a bus and travel to the nursing home. Parent volunteers and ATP staff chaperone the students. On the bus, the ATP leader gives students a short talk on what to expect at the home. The group arrives at 10 a.m. and is immediately escorted to the home's cafeteria. Nursing home staff introduces the group and students take turns reading their favorite book or a story they wrote recently. After the readings, students and chaperones divide into smaller groups to read to room-bound residents. At the end of the visit, around 11:30, students gather back in the lobby where residents share the home's various resident pet

dogs, cats, and birds for the children's enjoyment. Students receive hugs and candy upon their noontime departure.

Community response to the project over the years has been overwhelmingly positive. "It has meant so much to our residents to have children visit each month and read to them... the hugs and smiles they receive from children mean much more than words ever could," the nursing home activities director wrote in a recent thank-you note.

"Our Reading with the Residents program is a world-class opportunity for children to be exposed to generational culture. It helps children build relationships with senior citizens. It also helps build character values, such as assisting others, respect, and a sense of community," the school's assistant principal shared.

The event costs \$250 to implement annually. The school uses Title I funds to cover the expenses—primarily associated with transportation.

The school plans to continue the program next year. They are looking for ways to increase the amount of time students spend at the nursing home, as well as increasing the number of participating students.



## SHS Word of the Week

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*Skyline High School  
Idaho Falls, Idaho*

Wordplay took on a whole new meaning this spring for students at Skyline High School when school administrators introduced the new community-sponsored Word of the Week program.

The idea emerged at an Academic School Improvement meeting. Teachers were in search of a way to improve students' verbal SAT scores, but they wanted to move beyond the 'typical teen speak.' Skyline faculty and administration decided to involve the Idaho Falls community in a major vocabulary lesson by asking local businesses to sponsor a Word of the Week.

Every week a new word was presented at the high school. Its spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, and usage were posted on a sign hung in every classroom. Teachers encouraged students to use the featured word as much as possible during normal lessons.

Word of the Week community sponsors agreed to give students discounts on their services if students mentioned the word at the register. For example, Starbucks upsized students' drinks for free if they mentioned the word "alacrity." Hollywood Video, Arby's, Coca-Cola, and Office Depot/United Way also joined in on the fun. Some of these franchises asked students to use the vocabulary word in a sentence while others asked for a definition.

To test their cumulative knowledge, at the end of the year students took a Word of the Week quiz. Students who received top marks were awarded prizes, such as a digital camera, free movie tickets, Sonic gift card, or iTunes gift card. The contest was sponsored by Coca Cola and the school's Renaissance Club. More than 70% of the students who took the quiz won a free soda.

Some teachers thought some words (e.g., "licentious") were too racy for the contest. Over all though, most teachers supported the program whole-heartedly. Administrators listened to teachers' concerns and developed a

more rigorous vetting process for words.

Students found the program to be an enjoyable way of learning those daunting, archaic SAT words. "It expands our minds using words we would not normally be exposed to," one student said.

Teachers and school administrators reveled in the cooperative atmosphere the program created. "The best part about our Word of the Week program is that students, teachers, staff members, and community members all are learning and using the words together! It's a lot of fun watching adults and students incorporate words into their daily lives both in and outside of school," principal Trina Caudle said.

The program cost \$300 to implement. Administrators used district funds to cover the cost. They plan to continue the program next year and expand the number of community sponsors involved. Skyline High would also like to solicit students to help create the word list.



# USED BOOK SALE

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## LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WAUSAU, WISCONSIN

Summer is, for many kids, a time to forget about school and—all too often—reading. At Lincoln Elementary, however, the annual Used Book Sale combats the summer doldrums by providing low-cost books to students in the spring, while at the same time benefiting non-profit organizations in the community.

It started with a single volunteer, who gathered books from rummage sales and second-hand shops throughout the year and, with the help of her family, brought them all to the school for a sale in the spring. Although this individual moved on to new volunteer activities after a couple of years, her idea took off and became a Lincoln tradition.

Each fall and winter for the past six years, Lincoln faculty and staff have partnered with parents, other area schools, and local businesses to collect as many children's books as possible. The event has become well known in the community, and by starting early in the school year, organizers are able to make sure that enough books have been gathered by the time the sale takes place.

In the spring, students may purchase two books for 25 cents. They are limited to a total of four books when they visit the sale with their teachers and classmates during the school day. However, students may buy as many books as they like if they come in with their parents during the Family Fun Night at the end of the sale.

Even students with financially struggling families are able to afford books at that price. The four-book limit during the school day ensures that everyone has equal access to the books. The rules also provide an incentive for students to bring their families to school for the special end-of-sale event.

"This is such a great program," one teacher remarked. "So great for our students!"

As the resources are provided by community organizations and volunteers, there are no costs

to Lincoln Elementary for conducting the yearly Used Book Sale. All of the money raised goes back to the community—donated to a different local non-profit group each year. This helps to determine a given sale's theme.

One sale that benefited an area food pantry, for example, accepted canned goods as well as quarters in payment for the books. Another sale allowed students to "adopt" a stuffed animal, with proceeds going to the local pet shelter. In this way, students and their families are alerted to the value of community collaboration and gain knowledge about the different organizations through which they are able to give back.

Unanimous positive feedback indicates that the Used Book Sale is here to stay at Lincoln Elementary. "Love the event, love to shop, love the deals! They ask for it to return each year," a parent commented.

One student had similar sentiments: "I love to shop for these books; I wish I could do this every day!"



## Whitney's Coffee House/Poetry Night

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*Whitney M. Young School  
Cleveland, Ohio*

**A**spiriring poets rhymed their way deeper into their parents' hearts last February, during the Whitney M. Young School's Coffee House/Poetry Night.

The school's family liaison came up with the idea to involve parents and children in an enjoyable, non-stressful activity outside of the classroom. It was also intended to further the school's goal of improving students' reading and writing.

The liaison helped the school's English teachers plan a poetry reading for students in grades 8 to 12, following a unit they taught on poetry. In these classes, teachers encouraged students to write their own poems on topics of their choice. At the end of the unit, teachers asked students to participate in the poetry reading, sending home permission slips with interested students.

The school used fliers, newsletters, and e-mails to publicize the poetry reading—a first for the Young school.

On the evening of the event, teachers and staff transformed the school's media center into a coffee house, reminiscent of Beat generation hangouts. They decorated the tables with cloths and centerpieces and hung student artwork on the walls. The coffee house menu offered sandwiches, pastries, coffee and punch for the 5:30 to 7 p.m. event. About 60 parents and community members attended, and 34 students participated by reading their original poems on relationships, family life, religion, and other topics.

"Students were able to express themselves and actually be themselves," said Ms. Wright, commenting on one of the many benefits of the reading.

At the end of the night, the audience gave the young poets a standing ovation. The adults were thrilled to see how creative the students could be. "They loved it," the liaison commented. Many parents were sad that they did not have copies of the students' poems

to keep, and they encouraged the teachers to publish them in a book.

The refreshments cost about \$200—the only expense for this project. The school covered these costs with money from the school budget.

The school plans to make the poetry reading an annual event. Next year it wants to expand the reading to involve all students, grades 6 to 12, and plans to schedule the poetry unit earlier in the school year.

To encourage other schools, the liaison said simply, "Just do it. It was a wonderful practice and everyone loved it."