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# Preface

For over a decade I have had the pleasure of working with elementary schools adding excitement to reading programs by providing the Reading Is Magic® assembly program. Whether I have been participating in Parents As Reading Partners (PARP), Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), book fairs, or other such programs, the best part of the experience has been seeing the creative ways teachers and parents have been adding fun and excitement to their reading programs.

There are two main objectives of any reading program:

- To develop a positive attitude toward reading, and
- To develop positive life long reading habits.

The development of a positive attitude is not something that can be developed solely in school. The home plays a major role. Studies show that the best predictor of children's reading behavior is their parents' reading behavior at home. Therefore, it is as important to promote reading to the parents, as it is to the children. This is particularly true for the parents who have yet to make reading with their children a daily habit.

This report is packed with many ideas I've personally observed in elementary schools from New York to Florida. These proven ideas will help you generate enthusiasm in both the children and adults. I hope it helps your school community add excitement and increase participation in its reading program!

## **CHAPTER 1: Ten Steps To A Successful Reading Program**

If this is your first time planning a program to promote reading you may feel lost. Don't worry; this chapter will help you plan a great program. After being involved in promoting reading at literally hundreds of schools for the past ten years, I have observed that the most effective reading promotion programs include most, if not all, the following ten action steps in their planning. Keep them in mind as you plan your program, and you can be assured of success.

## **STEP 1: SET CLEARLY DEFINED GOALS**

The first step is to clearly define the goals for your program. That means deciding the amount of daily reading time you will expect from the children.

### ***How Much Time?***

Schools planning Parents as Reading Partners (PARP) campaigns typically set a goal of 15 minutes per day reading with another person. You don't need to be limited to this goal, however. You can choose daily, weekly, monthly or even yearly reading goals for your students. Perhaps you would prefer measuring the number of minutes read each day, number of pages read, or the number of books read. One school principal challenged her students to read 1000 books in one week. They exceeded the goal and reached 1200!

If your school has always used 15 minutes per day as its goal, a simple change such as this could breathe some new life into the program.

Be creative with your goal. Snapper Creek Elementary School in Florida, for example, sets a yearly goal that really catches the students' attention - one million minutes. The combined reading times outside of school for all students must top one million minutes by a certain date in April.

### ***Have Students Choose A Reading Partner***

The Parents as Reading Partners program is successful because it encourages students to read with another person. Sensitive to the wide variety of families, however, many schools change the program's focus from Parents as Reading Partners to People as Reading Partners. The

reading partner can be a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, sibling, babysitter or other adult.

Despite these efforts, there may still be some children who have no one available to act as a reading partner. To handle this contingency, some schools provide a teddy bear to act as a reading partner when necessary. Children are allowed to take the bear home overnight to act as their temporary partner. This is a good idea because it allows school officials to identify potentially at-risk children.

### ***How Long To Run Your Program***

If this is your first year running a reading program, you will probably want to start out with a two- or three-week long program. As you develop skill and confidence running the program, you may decide to expand it to a full month. Some schools prefer a much longer program, and run their program from October until April.

Regardless how long your program runs, make it easy for parents to keep track of how often they read with their children by sending home a calendar with each student. Calendars are returned to the school at the end of each week, or the end of the entire program. This also makes it easy for teachers to keep track of the time each student has read.

### ***When To Run Your Program***

While many schools begin a program to promote reading in October or November, most choose to run their program during the winter months of January, February or March. This works well in the Northeast, because people typically spend more time indoors during these months. Reading is

a great indoor activity, and a special program to promote reading can add excitement to the long winter stretch.

Don't forget that extracurricular sports usually begin in the spring, so be careful if you are planning a program in April. Participation in the reading program will suffer if it overlaps soccer or baseball.

## **STEP 2: CHART STUDENT PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS**

Let your students know how well they're doing by having a large chart prominently displayed showing their progress. It doesn't have to be a dry, bar chart either. Be creative. For example, Snapper Creek Elementary School displays a large thermometer in front of the school, showing total number of minutes read toward their million minutes' goal.

### ***Use Your School Mascot***

One school used the school mascot - an Indian - as part of its chart. A large Indian head painted on paper was on display in the gym. Each student who handed in a reading time slip received a feather to add to the Indian's headdress. Students printed their names on the feathers, which were cut from construction paper. Each classroom had a different color for their feathers, and classrooms competed to see which class could add the most feathers. This was so successful, that the committee had to start a second Indian headdress because the first had filled so quickly!

### ***Use Classroom Bulletin Boards***

St. Regis Mohawk Primary School uses classroom created bulletin boards to chart student progress. In the hallway outside each classroom is a bulletin board display based upon that year's theme. Students who read the required numbers of books are allowed to put their name on a marker cut from construction paper and post it on their bulletin board.

### ***Relate the Display to Your Theme***

The bulletin boards and markers should relate to your theme. For example, one school used space travel as the theme. Students made spaceships for their markers. Each time a student read five more books, his or her spaceship traveled to the next "planet" (the next bulletin board). The goal was to "explore" the entire "universe." As they walked through the hallways, students had constant reminders of their progress.

When the theme was "Treasure Island," bulletin boards were "islands," and markers were "gold coins."

Another school with a Sesame Street theme used the Cookie Monster character to keep track of how much students read. Each student made a big round cookie out of brown paper (construction paper or a grocery bag), and then colored in the chocolate chips. For every book read, they nibbled away at the cookie with a paper hole punch.

For a bookworm theme, make a colorful bookworm out of construction paper. For every book read, students added a segment to the bookworm's body. In addition, they wrote the book's title and author on the body segment.

Another school using a Jack and The Beanstalk theme created a tall beanstalk with a strip of green crepe paper. Students cut green leaves from construction paper. For every book read, they wrote the title and author on the leaf and added it to the stalk.