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WAYS TO FOSTER A HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP IN READING

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Polls consistently show that the public gives literacy a high rating. Although many children are receiving high quality reading instruction at school, parents have a role as reinforcers. At one time, the belief was prevalent that parents should keep "hands off" any aspect of instruction. Teaching took place in the classroom and the place for parents was in the home. No more. It is now recognized that parents can do a great deal to support and buttress reading/language arts skills at home.



This partnership of home and school makes sense because it benefits children. Parental involvement makes sense because it helps reach children in order to sharpen reading skills and nurture a love of reading. The New Haven, Connecticut public school system has made parental involvement in reading one of its highest priorities and this article offers

surefire ways that have worked well in New Haven.

1. Home-School Book Project--Usually there is a supply of old basal readers no longer being used in classrooms. Many of these basal reader stories appeal to youngsters. Teachers have been encouraged to use them by cutting out the stories from these "thick" books and make "thin" books for the students to take to and from home. An attractive cover is made for each book. A card attached to the book for the parent to sign indicates that the child has read the book.

These books work especially well with reluctant readers who don't want to read a thick book--preferring to read something they can finish rather quickly. This project costs nothing and opens the channels of communication between the home and school in an effective manner.

2. Parent Activity Sheets-- In New Haven, performance objectives have been developed for reading, language arts and math. A local foundation provided funds for a grant that allowed the hiring of a committee of teachers, aides and parents to work for six weeks during the summer to develop Parent Activity Sheets to reinforce most of the performance objectives. A total of 414 activities were produced. Questions accompanying activities form the basis for evaluation and encourages parent-child interaction. A sample follows:

Subject: Reading

Parent Activity Sheet

Level: 11- #31

Performance Objective: Can distinguish between fact and opinion.

Materials: Storybooks, newspaper, magazines, etc.

Procedure: Tell your child that a statement of fact can be tested. A statement of opinion cannot be tested. Example--Say, "Mary is the prettiest girl in the room. Is this a fact or opinion?" When you think your child understands the difference, provide the following sentences and ask him/her to tell you if the sentence states a fact or an opinion.

1. Cakes are more difficult to bake than pies.
2. We have lunch at 12:15 at our school.
3. June has thirty days.

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4. The weather is better in France than in England.
 5. The football team should win the championship.

(Choose other sentences from newspapers, magazines, or books. Ask your child whether the sentences state facts or opinions.)

How Well Did You Perform on This Activity?

3. School to Home Communications--An effective way to reach parents is through the publication and distribution of bulletins and newsletters. The New Haven System has just begun publishing THE LINK, a four page tabloid designed to inform parents and members of the community about school programs and activities. Every teacher, administrator and parent receives a copy. Copies are also placed in local libraries, banks, supermarkets, and other locations.

THE LINK provides a good opportunity for reading personnel to reach parents in the school district. In one issue we included an article entitled "Ten Tips on How Parents Can Help Children Want to Read." Written to appeal to the practical side of parents, the article helps build the love of reading in all children through parent help.

Another approach being used is a reading-oriented calendar for the months of July and August. Summer is a good time to maintain reading skills through practice. There is an activity for each day of the week, and is published in the last issue before vacation. Examples:

-Suggest to your child that s/he either draw a picture or write in order all the activities planned for this day.

-Ask your child to make a list of all family members and relatives and then put them in alphabetical order.

-If you are planning a summer trip, bring your child to the travel agency with you. Secure maps, pamphlets, brochures, posters and other materials to read together as you decide the exact itinerary for your trip.

4. Saturday Morning Tutoring Program--Children who require remedial reading assistance are often involved in a "pull out" program. Reading teachers coordinate their schedules carefully so as to minimize or eliminate the

possibility that children will miss important classroom work. This is especially true when the classroom reading program is in operation since they supplement, not supplant, classroom reading instruction.

In some cases, however, taking children out of the classroom may create problems. These problems can be solved by working with parents to organize a Saturday morning tutorial program. With a small stipend for tutors and/or trained parents, an adequate program can be worked out to supplement the work of the schools.

5. Family Night--In order to communicate with parents about the reading program, the first step is to get them to come to school. A school-sponsored fun activity for the entire family or a program that involves children are effective ways to increase parent attendance. Some schools have traditional "Ice Cream Socials" or "Penny Bazaars"--activities which draw parents to the school, where they become acquainted with teachers and administrators.

Enterprising teachers have capitalized on the idea to bring parents to programs, after which there may be brief parent-teacher conferences in the classrooms. Parents may see exhibits of creative projects emanating from the children's reading, as well as displays of trade books, kits and media equipment and materials used in the reading program. As taxpayers, parents want to see that money is well-spent for materials to enrich reading skills. Exhibits of these types also counteract the notion some parents have that reading is taught by using only a textbook and workbook.

6. Newspaper Activities--Many children like to read the newspaper. In some classes, children (grades 3, 5, & 7) receive a local newspaper once a week. Since each child receives a newspaper to keep, s/he then takes it home. Children should be encouraged to discuss the newspaper with their parents. A sheet in the form of a letter to parents will help build cooperation in this effort. The sheet might contain standard questions of information children/parents could seek in the daily or weekly newspaper.

7. Be My Guest--An elementary teacher may be

aware that some parents cannot attend evening meetings, and might ask parents to visit the school during the day. The principal and guidance counselor could assist to answer questions and share observations over coffee.

Concluding Remarks

All parents have in common their desire to have their youngsters receive quality reading instruction. Communication and involvement are the key ingredients for an effective home-school partnership. The activities and programs described here are tested and successful ways to reach parents who subsequently become supportive and responsive to the reading needs of the schools.

The ultimate beneficiaries, of course, are the children and that fact alone makes the effort both rewarding and worthwhile.