

Building a Reading Community

“One Reader at a Time”

“Schools have tried just about everything to boost interest in reading: prizes, contests, even a statewide read-along for a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.”

Let's promote the opposite: genuine discussions and excitement about reading. Our goal is to provide intrinsic motivation. Not a competition, just “I'm a reader. I enjoy books!”

St. Petersburg Times, Friday, December 1, 2006.

How can your school create a reading community?

Through our presentation, we hope to show you how any school can experience reading community success!

West Hernando Middle School has been extremely successful creating active communities within our student population.

Students have constructed bridges, created stunning mosaics, built an aviary, and designed beautiful garden and waterfall areas. Upbeat music, from Andrea Botcelli to Janis Joplin, resounds throughout the courtyard. We have enthusiastic participation in team sports, kayaking, rock wall climbing, scrapbooking, and many other school activities. Yet, something was missing. Where was our reading community? Why was it important to establish such a community?

What issues could a reading community address and perhaps modify?

- Many times students who like to read want to be invisible.
- Students who don't like to read, pretend to read.
- Poor readers identify books with failure, frustration, or embarrassment.
- Reading is primarily assigned to students by teachers, not something valued and shared equally between students and adults.

Our Reading Leadership Team
began to brainstorm ideas.

A proactive Administration and an innovative Reading Leadership Team are two essential components needed to successfully implement any new idea in a school-wide setting.

Our Reading Leadership Team consists of the following members:

- School principal
- Reading coach
- Library Media Specialist
- Assessment Coordinator
- Title I Lead Teacher
- ESE teachers
- Teacher representatives from each grade level and content area

The Reading Leadership Team decided to implement a lanyard and pin program designed to encourage students to read. Students would earn a lanyard and a bronze pin after meeting the school-wide reading goal set for the first nine weeks. Thereafter, more pins could be earned as the year progressed.

Students loved the lanyards. There were bronze pins, silver pins, gold stars, sunshine pins, special recognition pins, candy cane pins, and honor roll pins. There was excitement in the air...students proudly wore their “badges of honor.”

More students were reading. More books were being checked out of the library.

We now had more readers than ever!

Did everyone feel a part of this community?

Had we really established our reading community or had we simply encouraged students who love to read to excel and those borderline readers to read more often?

We needed to rethink the parameters of our reading community. Who were our “invisible” readers? After much discussion, we concluded that the WHMS reading community was made up of:

- Faculty members
- Administrators
- Secretarial staff
- Cafeteria workers
- Custodians
- Students

Armed with this knowledge,
we were empowered !!

One problem still remained. We could easily recognize the members of our other school communities: hard hats and safety glasses, team uniforms, life preservers, and paddles, etc. What about our expanded reading community? We needed to identify ourselves.

Stuart Promotional Products once again came to our rescue. After initially donating enough lanyards for students, the company supplied enough additional lanyards for our entire community as well as plastic badge covers for each lanyard.

Members chose books from our library media center and wrote their book titles on brightly colored “I am reading...” cards to be inserted in the badge covers.

What happened next is now history...

- Genuine discussions and excitement about reading
- Book chats in the hallways
- Students talking with adults about books
 - and not just to a teacher
 - and not for a grade
 - and not for homework
 - just for fun
- Lengthy waiting lists for books in the library
- Televised book reviews

- Library Lunch Bunch
- Parents and children reading and sharing
- Shared interests with respected adults
- Custodians, secretaries, lunchroom personnel, administrators...all reading Sunshine State Readers (One custodian has read all 15 Sunshine State Readers aloud to his five foster children!)
- Book baskets
- Read-alouds
- Novels read in content area classrooms
- Kids recommending books to adults...WOW !!

Our school community is a diverse group of students and adults who spend 180 days a year together. In the past, the various groups existed in their own comfortable stereotypical roles. Building a reading community created a common bond among all facets of our school population.

“I am reading...” became not just a means of sharing book titles, but a conduit for these members to share a piece of themselves with each other.

Reading should truly be one of the common denominators of all who are a part of an educational setting.

Websites

This presentation will be available on the following website: www.hcsb.k12.fl.us