

SUMMER READING PROGRAM AND POETRY WITH PARENTS

**BADGER MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RICHLAND, WA**

Badger 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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SCIENCE NIGHT

**WHITE BLUFFS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RICHLAND, WA**

Type 5

The 5th grade teachers at White Bluffs Elementary wanted all students to think of themselves as scientists—and they really meant every one. They coached all fifth graders to be accomplished presenters of their science projects to parents and to all students at the school’s Science Night. The presentations were the happy culmination of teachers’ efforts to help students plan and conduct a good experiment and to guide parents on how to support their children’s science learning. The goal was to ensure that these students experienced success as science “experts” in preparation for their transition to science classes at the middle school. This included the students who, typically, struggled in science. They, too, needed to shine at the Science Night.

Students were coached on how to share their work in an engaging way. At the Science Night, from 6:30-8 p.m., all fifth graders presented their science projects to their parents and to the younger students. “We had a great turnout,” said one teacher, “but the really surprising element was that all . . . students [who had struggled in science] arrived with a parent to hear their presentations. Some of these parents had not attended any other school event.” Student presenters felt prepared and knowledgeable—like real scientists.

Also at Science Night, the school’s Lego Robotics Club performed a demonstration, and two parents who work as soil scientists brought high powered microscopes and soil samples for students to observe. The PTO arranged for the Astronomy Club to help students observe the planets outside the school building.

Science Night grew from the fifth grade’s Scientific Method Unit for which every student conducted an at-home science project. This included students who were eligible for

free or reduced-price lunch, English Language Learners (ELL), and students in the Learning Adjustment Program (LAP). Teachers gave these students—many of whom struggled in science—special attention by phoning or e-mailing their parents to discuss how to support their children’s work on their science experiments at home.

Teachers provided detailed guidelines and rubrics to all students and parents on steps and criteria for the experiment, report, and presentation. They spoke with all students who needed extra support, monitored their projects, provided feedback, and coached them on how to present their work to young students. For example, one student was studying the effect of light on plants in a cupboard, dark room, and windowsill. The teacher talked with the student about how to document results, and asked his parent to take pictures of the student’s work on her smart phone, which the teacher would print for the student’s display. At school, teacher and student worked together on the display board. “By the time the science fair came around,” said the teacher, “the parent was as excited as the child . . .”

White Bluffs used its robocall to invite all students and parents to Science Night. Teachers personally called the families of struggling science students. Science Night was an inclusive, fun, educational way to build science knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes. “My child is so confident,” one parent stated, “she was even talking about pursuing a science degree in college.”

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SCIENCE

CAREER NIGHT

ENTERPRISE MIDDLE SCHOOL

WEST RICHLAND, WA

Students in the middle grades juggle a delicate balance between childhood and adulthood. Although perched to make that leap and wanting to grow up as quickly as possible, students need to build knowledge and good judgment to make important decisions. Early adolescents need guidance and opportunities to learn so that they avoid serious risks and missteps on the journey of growing up. At Enterprise Middle School, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and colleagues wanted to guide students to explore careers and set ambitious education goals so they stayed on a path to success in middle school, high school, and beyond.

The ATP adapted Career Night from one conducted at a middle school in neighboring Pasco, WA. The ATP divided the workload by creating subcommittees for advertising, personal invitations to students, resources/facilities, and presenter recruitment. Parents on the ATP took the lead in recruiting volunteers to talk about their work. Over 30 presenters agreed to participate, mainly parents of students at Enterprise Middle School and a few community members. Students requested to hear from high school coaches, as well. The careers represented included pipe-fitters, masons, fire fighters, and police officers, to name a few.

To encourage more and different students and their families to attend, the ATP asked teachers to identify students who typically do not engage in extra-curricular activities. ATP members personally invited these students to come. They also asked these students what careers they wanted to learn more about so that parents or community partners could be recruited to talk about those occupations.

On Career Night, booths were set up in two gymnasiums to give the speakers and students plenty of space. The middle school

students, parents, and others took a gallery walk, stopping at the careers they wanted to know more about. The presenters supplied information about their work, the education and training needed to do that job, and addressed questions.

The ATP separated groups of careers so that students could learn about related career choices in nearby booths, and different career opportunities as they explored the scene. The team also created a scavenger hunt activity, which encouraged students to visit various booths to find the answers to a set of exploratory questions. Students turned in the results of the hunt to be part of a drawing for prizes.

It was clear that students were excited about exploring careers and learning about the education needed for different professions. They received advice from experienced presenters who willingly answered students' and families' questions about their work. Participants were asked how to improve Career Night in the future. One student's response was typical of most others, "It was good just the way it is!" A parent agreed, "Keep doing this. Great idea!" A presenter confirmed the success of Career Night, "Thank you for the invitation to present. I had a great time with the students."

The ATP wanted students to think about completing middle school, selecting high school courses, and thinking about careers that may interest them. A Career Night is one way to help middle school students think about doing their best, staying the course, and growing up to a bright future.

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COMMUNITY & FAMILY RESOURCES CARNIVAL

**MARCUS WHITMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RICHLAND, WA**

The PTA at Marcus Whitman Elementary School has conducted annual fundraising carnivals with families every spring for many years. In the past, about 150 people attended the Carnival for games, food stations, raffles, and a silent auction.

Last year, a community partner, Communities in Schools of Benton-Franklin Counties (CIS of BFC) placed a Site Coordinator at the school. This representative became the Co-Chair of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). The team met with the PTA President and others to discuss new partnership opportunities. The group agreed on a new mission and new design for the next PTA Carnival.

The representatives from PTA, CIS of BFC, and the ATP agreed to retain many of the same elements of past Carnivals, but focused more heavily on recruiting community partners to host booths of interest to the parents of children at Marcus Whitman. A good plan emerged that divided tasks evenly so that all partners on the committee shared the load of planning, conducting, and evaluating the Carnival.

The PTA was responsible for all food stations, a bouncy house, and some raffle and auction items. CIS of BFC recruited community partners to host booths that provided information on community resources for families, or that donated items for the raffles and silent auction. The ATP identified the space needed for the Carnival, recruited volunteers, and made sure everything was stored away after the event.

The Carnival committee brainstormed to create a list of community agencies and services to host the booths that could conduct Carnival games and distribute helpful information to parents and students. CIS of BFC had connections to local non-profit organizations with programs for families with low incomes, for

children, and for schools. These included groups with programs and resources for physical & mental health, food, housing, health and hygiene, and clothing for children and families. Some games were educational and fun. For example, one game involved a spinning wheel to get a prize, but it required the student to read nutritional information. Another required children to read and follow directions to make a wooden tool box, which they could then keep.

The Carnival was advertised in and around the Tri-Cities area, as well as to the families of students at Marcus Whitman. This introduced the school to many families in and around the community.

At the Carnival, 16 new community partners hosted booths and/or donated prizes. An estimated 300 people participated. School staff were impressed with collaboration that grew to conduct the Carnival as well as the turnout. The principal raved, "...We had a great turn out and all of the new organizations that participated were wonderful!" A teacher agreed, "Awesome job on this year's Carnival! It was such an improvement from [the past]. Bringing in community partners and programs is such a great idea!" The PTA president evaluated, "I'm glad we changed [the Carnival] this year.

Everyone was very receptive to the new design." It was clear from reviews that although people say two heads are better than one, in this case three heads—PTA, ATP, and Communities in Schools of Benton-Franklin Counties—are even better than two!

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Type 5

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS