

Creating a *Culture* of *L*





literacy

6 strategies you can use to ignite enthusiasm for reading

By Nayal Maktari

I spent my elementary years as a struggling reader, but I was eventually blessed with a teacher who did not give up on me and made it her mission to help every child in her class. She gave me books to take home, consistently told me I would become a better reader and made learning fun. I quickly changed my attitude toward reading and loved the many places that books allowed my imagination to go. My grades, reading, and confidence improved. She helped me develop a passion for literacy that has continued into my adult years and that I have attempted to instill in my own children. Those experiences have influenced how I address literacy as a principal.

Pleasant Lake Elementary School is a linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse school community that continuously aims to develop a culture of children and adults who cherish literacy. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are improving children's reading skills within the school day—and igniting a passion for reading that will carry well past the dismissal bell. Here are a few things that we do to foster a school culture of literacy:

1. Empowering Students

Most, if not all, schools have literacy as a buildingwide goal. We've created a culture in which it is every stakeholder's responsibility to reach our buildingwide goals, so our School Improvement Plan Goals are written into

student-friendly SMART goals we post and track on classroom data walls and our buildingwide data wall. We also include student goals in individual student data notebooks.

Our students track their individual and classroom progress. Students are also responsible for creating and updating our building data wall—which reflects classroom data and individual student progress—multiple times during the school year.

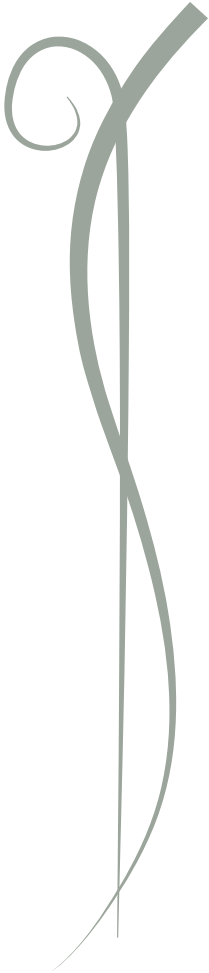
By involving students in meeting your literacy goal and the strategies needed to meet that goal, you are providing them with a sense of empowerment at an age when most children do not feel they have much control over many things in their lives. The empowerment and leadership opportunities you provide them will excite them about meeting the goals you have collaboratively created for your entire school community. It tells children, "You are in charge of your learning and can accomplish any goal you set."

2. Community Involvement

Engaging, collaborating, and supporting your entire school community are other important steps to creating a rich literacy culture. Create partnerships with various school community stakeholders in promoting reading.

A great start is to invite parents and guardians to be a part of your literacy plan. Share and promote your goals at PTA or PTO meetings,

Your goal is to create a culture in which children view reading as fashionable and fun.



evening events, parent-teacher conferences and in your communications home. Keep families informed about what is happening at school so they can mirror the same instructional language, expectations, interventions, and strategies at home. Educate parents on the importance of having their children see them reading at home for pleasure, and encourage parents to read to their children, and/or have their child read to them. We not only want children to hear the message that reading can be fun and a lifelong passion; we also want them to see it modeled by the adults in their lives.

Open your school doors to invite parents to observe a lesson, volunteer in classrooms, read to children, and celebrate their children's academic achievements. Parents will walk away feeling that they are your partner in ensuring their children value and enjoy reading. They will also have a deeper understanding of what you are attempting to accomplish with their child.

Invite a diverse group of adults into your school to read with children. Our children love the senior volunteers, community leaders, high school students, and family members who read to them. Let children see that adults of all ages, cultures, and professions love to read and are invested in them becoming better readers.

3. Books, Books, and More Books

A child can never have enough books. Sadly, we know that many children do not have sufficient literacy resources at home or the opportunity to visit their local library. You can address that need by providing children books throughout the school year. Ensure they have the necessary resources to read at home. The joy of seeing a student walking down the hall with a bag of books to take home and an extra hop in their step is priceless.

A simple way to provide members of your school community with books is to create a "Little Free Library" outside of your school where community members can take a book and then return it when they are done. Our little library is consistently full—not only with books we place in it, but with many other books donated by members of our community.

4. School Book Club

Evening book clubs throughout the calendar year are a fun way to get students and their parents excited about reading. They are a great

opportunity to share literacy interventions with parents to use at home and help create connections between home and school.

Extend your book club meetings over the summer months. At the end of the school year, we provide students performing below grade level with five books and invite them and their families to visit the school on multiple occasions over the summer to exchange their books for new books. Students are excited to see their classmates, teachers, and principal in addition to receiving their new books. Children also see that their parents, teachers, and principal care enough—and value reading enough—to spend time with them over the summer months.


5. Make Reading Fun

Your goal is to create a culture in which children view reading as fashionable and fun. So, let children see the adults in your school community enjoying books. Have children decorate their classroom doors to reflect their favorite book; children and staff can also dress as popular book characters.

6. Using Technology

Provide parents and children the appropriate links, usernames, and passwords so they can continue the joy of reading at home. Some programs will note a child's reading achievements by awarding medals and other means of recognition that really excite students and their parents.

Of course, teachers' dedication is tremendously important to creating and sustaining a culture of literacy. None of these interventions are possible without teachers' participation. They ensure that they have high-interest books and books reflective of our diverse school community in their classrooms and school library. Their actions and words show our children that reading is fun and valued in their classroom and our school community.

Promoting a rich culture of literacy in your school community, beyond your designated reading month, includes empowering children, involving parents and community members, and ensuring that all staff members have a clear understanding and focus on your goal of igniting the passion of reading in each one of our children. 

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