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## **PARTNERS IN LITERACY**

### **Westview Elementary School**

### **Zanesville, Ohio**

Westview Elementary school staff, parents, and community members developed a unique partnership to improve students' reading skills. Classroom teachers and the Title I reading specialist created Partners in Literacy (PIL) to organize and use the support of parents and other community members as reading volunteers. The benefits from PIL are widespread:

- All students actively engage in language arts activities for a 60-minute block.
- Teachers are able to give quality uninterrupted small-group reading instruction.
- Parent volunteers learn more about the reading process.
- Local businesses, senior citizens, and other community volunteers have made lasting relationships with teachers and students.

Each day during the one-hour block for language arts instruction, two volunteers assist a Title I reading specialist and the classroom teacher with reading stations. Students in each classroom are divided into small instructional groups while the volunteers are present. For thirty minutes, the classroom teacher teaches phonics and reading strategies to one group of students, while the Title I teacher instructs an at-risk group. A third group works with a volunteer who listens to each child read a familiar book, and a fourth group participates at a listening center for fifteen minutes. The volunteer at the listening center calls one student at a time to work on her/his designated sight word vocabulary list. At designated times, the students rotate between teachers and volunteers. With all students actively engaged with adults, teachers can individualize instruction, creating a high performance classroom where the needs of all students can be addressed.

Currently, four first grade teachers, four second grade teachers, and two Title I reading specialists participate in the PIL program. The teachers and the volunteer coordinator recruit and train volunteers. They create volunteer schedules and a substitute volunteer list.

Volunteers represent a variety of community resources. Parents, grandparents, senior citizens, school board members, and area businesses participate in PIL. Two local businesses, Wal-Mart and Longaberger Corporation, encourage participation and also offer modest financial support. Zanesville High School Career Mentor Students and local college students participate in the PIL

program as well. During the 2000-2001 school year, approximately eighty volunteers participated in PIL.

The results of the Partners in Literacy program have been compelling. Initially, the students participating in PIL achieved comparable results to their peers on dictation, vocabulary, and reading assessments. Approximately five months later, these same PIL students achieved an increase of 36.7% on the follow-up assessment and an overall composite of at least 8.4 points above their peers. The results indicated what participating teachers already knew: it is difficult for one teacher to accomplish the work of four adults.

Partners in Literacy has developed higher achieving readers, promoted personal professional growth, and enabled parents and community members to increase their role in the learning process. This team-based innovation involves the community and parents in a responsible and meaningful way that promotes ownership of literacy education. The program not only supports the academic development of students, but it also aids in the development of their social-emotional well-being.

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