

My Family Reads

*Cary Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

Cary Elementary School's family literacy program allowed kindergarteners to borrow bags of books from school to expand their reading choices at home. My Family Reads began with a family kick-off dinner and ended one month later with classroom celebrations. Each Monday during the four weeks, teachers at Cary Elementary School gave kindergarteners a bag of four books to take home and a slip to complete about their favorite book. The completed slip and the bag of books were brought back to school on Friday, so that students could receive new books again on Monday.

At the kick-off program, the kindergartners performed for their families, and the teachers gave an overview of My Family Reads. As a part of the overview, teachers demonstrated reading strategies and gave time for families to try these strategies while reading together. Parents and children ate dinner and cake afterwards.

A team of the principal, Title I representative, reading specialist, and the parent involvement facilitator worked with the kindergarten teachers to design this program. The reading specialist and parent involvement facilitator implemented the program and managed it on a weekly basis. Teachers regularly promoted the program and encouraged family reading.

The total cost to implement this practice was \$400. The team collected books currently in the school but no longer being used, thus defraying the cost of purchasing additional books. The parent involvement facilitator's Title I annual budget funded the dinner, supplies, and the books given to the children at the

classroom celebrations. The biggest challenge faced by the school was tardiness in returning the books—a problem fixed by frequent teacher reminders.

Cary Elementary had several goals identified when starting this program. They intended to encourage family reading, improve the reading ability of their kindergarten students, and help parents feel more comfortable and confident in reading with their children. Everyone kept track of the program's progress through letters home and school meetings. At the end of the program, evaluations were handed out along with a new book for each child to keep. Feedback on the program was positive: students benefited academically; kindergarteners enjoyed taking books home; and parents read with their children. "It was something we looked forward to doing together. We both loved it!" wrote one excited parent. Another said, "I hope you will continue this program in first grade."

Cary Elementary School plans to continue this program in the future, hoping to involve more families, provide more books, and extend the length of the program next year.

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