

Barnum Buddy Program

*Barnum School
Taunton, Massachusetts*

To provide individual attention to pre-kindergarteners who have difficulty learning important readiness skills, the Barnum School developed the Barnum Buddy Program. The school recruited high school, parent, and community volunteers as “big buddies” to be paired with a “little buddy.” These Barnum Buddies work together twice a week for 20 minutes, reading books, playing learning games, and practicing skills that the teacher highlights for each student.

The program supports Barnum’s School Improvement Plan, which calls for greater achievement in literacy, language arts, and math. Teachers refer potential participants after carefully analyzing the child’s initial academic performance and mastery of basic skills. Each child has a binder that includes a learning prescription, written by the classroom teacher, which indicates the specific skills the big buddy should focus on, along with notes on effective ways to work with the child.

The school set aside a special space for the Barnum Buddies. This area includes plenty of activities, books, and games for the buddies to share. Each time the big buddy works with his or her little buddy, the child receives a paper to take home, indicating what skills have been worked on. The child’s progress is noted in the binder.

The school recruited volunteers by contacting a local public high school, giving talks at other area schools, and putting notices in community newsletters. Though some of the volunteers are paired with more than one little

buddy, most are not. The Barnum Buddies program is being funded by School Improvement Plan funds. By recruiting volunteers, Barnum has contained the cost.

The first year of the Barnum Buddies program had eight students. During the second year, the program expanded to 30 children. The school is closely monitoring its academic data to see what impact the Barnum Buddies are having on student achievement.

*Mary-Jane Webster, Principal
(508) 821-1282
mjwebster@tauntonschoools.org*