

Reading—Using the Newspaper

*Strategic Learning Initiatives
Chicago, Illinois*

Helping a child learn at home can be entertaining and inexpensive. Just ask those adults who participated in “Reading—Using the Newspaper,” a workshop that reached more than 110 parents and other caregivers in Chicago schools. The workshop, one of more than a dozen offered annually by Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI), emphasized the newspaper as an economical, ever-changing teaching tool offering many possibilities for learning—from improving alphabetizing skills to fostering storytelling.

Dedicated to accelerating student and adult learning through best practices from education and the private sector, SLI sponsors parent workshops on a variety of topics, such as nurturing positive self-image, playing writing games, and creating effective science fair projects. Through these workshops, parents gain tools for supporting their children’s learning at home. SLI also aims to train leaders who will carry on these projects when the four-year initiative is complete.

To give parents both confidence and knowledge, the newspaper workshop taught participants three hands-on activities they could try at home:

1. Working in groups, the parents cut out 8 to 15 large headlines and arranged them in alphabetical order.
2. Each group received a comic strip with the last panel missing. The adults created their own endings or punch lines and shared them with the whole workshop.

3. Pairs of adults created a checkerboard, with one letter, cut out from the paper, per square, and then played “Word Checkers,” in which players must say a word that begins with the letter they are about to land on. Words can be in English or in the player’s native language.

Parents received instructions and materials for doing these activities with their children at home. The organizers found that they needed newspapers in languages other than English, especially in Spanish, and that the other materials needed to be available in multiple languages, both for the workshop projects and for take-home kits.

Planned by the organization’s leaders, families, and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) members, the activity gave parents strategies for helping their youngsters become better readers. SLI staff hope to offer the workshop again next year, with a different set of activities and perhaps more time, so the parents can finish their games of Word Checkers.

“Now I can play games with my children to teach them new words,” remarked one parent. Said another, “I learned how to be more creative with my children and how to make reading more fun.”

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