

Celebrity Reading Night

*Rains Centenary Elementary School
Mullins, South Carolina*

Rains Centenary Elementary found a new and exciting way to promote reading among students, teachers, parents and members of the community. They invited some famous faces from their area to a Celebrity Reading Night in September.

For many years, many students at Rains Elementary were reluctant readers, and reading scores declined. This prompted the school to set a goal to help students improve reading fluency, reading skills, and attitudes about reading. The school needed to find a way to put the fun back into reading and show students the connection between success in reading and a successful life.

Celebrity Reading Night kicked off a series of reading activities in the 2006-07 school year. The principal suggested the event after attending a similar evening at another school. The English Language Arts Team and the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) collaborated in planning the event. They invited local celebrities to show students that people they admire enjoy reading and have favorite books. Among the participating celebrities were local news anchors, college basketball and football players, judges, disc jockeys, teachers, pastors, team mascots and cheerleaders. Sparky, the NASCAR Speed Park mascot, helped host the event.

Students in Grades K-6 had a chance to spend time with several celebrities who read their favorite children's books. While students were doing this, their parents attended workshops on helping their children read at home. After the workshops, parents and students were treated to a pizza dinner.

More than 100 students and 50 parents and caregivers attended. About 30 teachers, administrators and school staff also participated, along with a dozen community members. The school's business partner, Vulcan Industries,

helped to underwrite the \$300 cost of the dinner.

Fliers were sent to parents, who were asked to RSVP so the committee would know how much food to prepare. There were also television and newspaper announcements and additional fliers distributed at churches, daycare centers, and through other community organizations.

Organizers said the event allowed students to see a clear link between the success of celebrities and adults in their community and reading. This generated excitement for the school's reading program. Parents said the event was wonderful and energizing, and community members said that more schools should sponsor Celebrity Reading Nights. The school hopes to have a reading night every year. For next year, they are aiming for a larger space and more celebrities.

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