

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)

*Roosevelt Elementary School
St. Paul, Minnesota*

FRED was popular at Roosevelt Elementary this year. FRED is Fathers Reading Every Day, a program of the Minnesota Humanities Commission that encourages men to read at home and to get more involved in their children's education.

At Roosevelt, FRED was a month-long initiative featuring two family reading sessions in December and January, which combined food, storytelling, guest readers, free books and camaraderie. Working with the commission, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) welcomed FRED and worked hard to make it a successful undertaking. The team even arranged and paid for taxis for families who did not have transportation.

The result was that large groups of men and some single mothers and their school-aged children attended both sessions. Dinner was followed by a storybook reading session. Among the guest readers were the school's custodian, librarian assistant, and a "live" Cat in the Hat.

After the reading period, children went to another area for activities and parents had the opportunity to discuss different types of literature and storytelling. They learned more about the Success for All reading program used at the school and received suggestions about reading with their children from a literacy teacher.

The parents also received *What Daddies Do Best*, a book that, when turned over, reads *What Mommies Do Best*. The families saw a great many parents reading with their children. They clearly understood how important they are to their children's education.

Parents and children also participated in a choral reading. Before leaving, children selected two free books to take home. Through FRED's influence, students saw their parents show more interest in listening to them read at home, and in reading themselves. Some of the children enjoyed the evening so much that they

wanted to know if there would be another "dad thing."

Improving student achievement through reading instruction is one of the school's and the ATP's priorities. Targeting activities to male caregivers was a need that was identified when the school completed the NNPS annual UPDATE evaluation. Although FRED specifies "fathers," the program also welcomed single mothers. Next year, the school will change the name to include both groups. More than 50 parents and 80 children attended the FRED sessions.

The school principal endorsed the program in collaboration with the ATP. The team's facilitator ordered food, arranged for taxis and childcare. School staff members and parents volunteered as readers. Teachers developed and supervised activities for the children.

FRED cost about \$885, including the food, taxi fares, door prizes and interpreters for Hispanic and Hmong families. Title I funding covered these costs, and the humanities council provided the books.

"Because of this program my children remind us to read, even if I'm busy," said one parent. Other participants agreed that the program helped them to become more involved in helping their children read, forging happy memories in the process.

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