

Bryan Reads Together

*Jane H. Bryan Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

Bus drivers, custodians, crossing guards, and parents teamed up with teachers and administrators at Jane H. Bryan Elementary School to get students reading last year. During the Bryan Reads Together program, nearly 500 students, parents, and community members all read and discussed the same two books.

Bryan's administrators wanted to boost reading scores on the state's standardized tests and encourage students to become life-long readers. Below-average test scores over the past few years had kept the school from attaining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The school's goal was to have 70 percent of its students in grades 3 to 5 pass the language arts section.

The school's reading coach heard about another Virginia school where students and community members read books together. She decided it would be a good way to help Bryan students become better readers.

Last spring, the school chose two books, *The World According to Humphrey* by Betty G. Birney, and *Meet Addy* by Connie Porter. The first session began in January and the second in March. The school supplied the books and kicked off each reading session with a celebration that included a skit about the book performed by students and staff, an explanation of the practice, and pizza and punch. All students were included, even those not yet able to read. Custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers—everyone who had regular contact with students—also joined the reading exercise.

Teachers encouraged students to read and discuss the book at home with their parents, following a schedule they distributed. Parents and guardians were asked to read aloud to the youngsters who were not yet able to read. To encourage participation from all parents, the staff provided audio CDs of books to those who requested them. These adults were, however, encouraged to follow along in the books as they listened to the narrative.

To keep students and families motivated, the principal and reading coach asked trivia questions about the book every day over the intercom. Students who answered correctly were acknowledged at the end of the day and entered in a drawing.

The school waged an extensive publicity campaign. The staff announced the reading program through fliers and in the school's newsletter. The principal recorded a school-wide telephone message informing families about the activity. Students wore stickers home on the days of the kick-off events, reminding their parents to participate.

Teachers gauged the success of the program through students' careful attention to the morning trivia questions. They saw significant improvement in students' reading skills over the months of the program. Parents said they were happy to spend extra time with their children.

The school used Title I funds to cover its costs, about \$2,500. The parent involvement facilitator supplied bags used to distribute the books and the refreshments for the kick-off celebrations.

"This activity was so successful that we plan to start it earlier next school year and increase the number of times we introduce new books to our students and families," concluded the facilitator.

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