

Candyland of Literature

*Whittier Elementary School
Pasco, Washington*

Books and candy came together in a sugary sweet celebration last winter during Whittier Elementary School's Candyland of Literature program.

Members of the school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) came up with the sweet idea last fall as part of a goal to increase student scores on state reading achievement tests. Normally in the autumn months, the school hosts a fall festival with food and carnival games. This year, with their literacy goal in mind, they knew they had to do something with a greater academic focus. The group landed on the Candyland theme, figuring the classic game held some sentimental sway with both adults and children.

ATP members began planning the event several weeks early. They partnered with teachers to create their candy-coated curricula. Teachers and students, grades K-5, worked together to pick a favorite book they had read or heard. Each participating class then took the characters, settings, and ideas from their books and used them to illustrate the story around a doorway in the first grade hallway. Once the door decorations were complete, teachers asked students to walk down the hallway and peruse this virtual Candyland of Literature on their way to recess. Students voted on their favorite doorway and teachers posted results on a chart in the school cafeteria.

ATP members didn't want the reading fun to end when school let out. So, they planned an evening celebration at the end of October, which culminated the program's events with a cookie-and-candy-laced costume party. Volunteers advertised the event through the school activities calendar, as well as a series of flyers sent home with students. They also notified the district's public affairs office.

On the night of the event, children arrived dressed as their favorite storybook characters. Parents and children walked down the literary path and received candy at every

door. In the gym, the school's kitchen staff invited child-parent duos to decorate cookies that they had prepared especially for the event. At the end of the night, children choose one of several free books to add to their at-home library.

The evening proved so popular with families that staff ran out of cookie decorating supplies within 45 minutes. Still, parents and children seemed happy for the opportunity to indulge in both sugar and literature.

As most everything at the event was donated by area businesses, Candyland of Literature cost the school only about \$250 to conduct. Whittier used Title I money to cover the cost of some of the books that were not donated.

School administrators plan to replay Candyland next fall. They would like to diversify their selection of free books so that students can receive reading material more specific to their grade level. They will also order many more cookie decorating supplies so every participant can enjoy the activity.

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