

# Reading Counts Book Review Celebration

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*Creek Bridge High School  
Marion, South Carolina*

The administration of Creek Bridge High School took a cue from a favorite children's television program, *Reading Rainbow*, turning a student reading challenge into a television phenomenon.

The project began last September when the school's principal challenged the 440 students at the school to read more. During the semester, students participated in Scholastic's Reading Counts program, which involved reading books and taking computerized tests to check their comprehension. They were awarded points based on how many tests they passed. To sweeten the deal for Creek Bridge students, the school announced that students who received 100 points or more by the end of the contest in January would be invited to a special celebration. The top three point-earners would also receive cash prizes.

Teachers got busy encouraging students to read. They helped students select books at the appropriate level of difficulty and set aside time for silent reading in class. Parents followed up with encouragement to read at home.

The contest took a 21st century turn when, at the end, the school's top readers were asked to produce video reports on their favorite books. With the help of the school's media specialist, students filled out questionnaires about their chosen books and based the talking points for their video reviews on that information.

The videos debuted during the end of semester Book Celebration. About 100 parents and students enjoyed the videos and celebrated their reading success. Not only did students enjoy watching themselves and their peers, but they also enjoyed learning about one another's favorite books. Students received copies of their video book reports on DVDs with certificates for completing the Reading Counts program. After the celebration, the videos were featured on the school's web site.

Creek Bridge initiated the reading challenge and resulting celebration to improve the low scores that high school and middle school students posted on the South Carolina School Report Card. For the past five years, teachers and staff faced challenges in reading comprehension and language arts. They were having trouble getting students to read any books – let alone pass tests about them. The reading challenge, encouragement, and planned celebration brought real results. During the contest, teachers and students saw state test scores rise and library circulation increase. In fact, the books reviewed in the video were the most widely circulated books for months.

The cost of the program was \$1,000, covered by state technical assistance funds. Parents, school staff, and students agreed that it was money worth spending. Many, including the school librarian, have high hopes for an encore performance. "This is a great program. We must do it again!" the librarian said.

Creek Bridge High School plans to do just that, repeating the contest and productions of videos in the fall and in the spring next year.

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