

# Make Reading a Habit with Scholastic Book Fairs



Scholastic Book Fairs Provide Access to Books, Increase Student Reading Time, and Actively Involve Families in Literacy Achievement

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One of the delights of reading is that it is an intensely personal experience which is enhanced when it is shared with others. Not everyone reads the same things in the same way; yet those who can read and chose to do so lead fuller lives.

Do you know one of Scholastic's best-kept secrets? Hosting a Scholastic Book Fair at a school is one of the most effective, research-based strategies to excite and motivate students to read. Here is how:

- Book Fairs provide critical access to books with titles at affordable prices in all genres and reading levels. On average, 580 books are purchased at each Book Fair.
- With a good selection of books, all students read more. And those who read more books get more practice and become better readers. Their reading achievement scores rise (Chapman 2010).
- Each addition to a home library helps a student get a little farther in school (Evans et al 2009).
- A Book Fair attracts high attendance and is a powerful platform to launch reading programs that engage the entire family. Finding opportunities to invite parents to activities that are welcoming and have a social component can help them become active members of the learning community.
- Student excitement about books and reading during the Book Fair week is an untapped springboard for successful reading programs.
- Student choice is a strong motivating factor to increase voluntary reading. An average Book Fair generates 100,000 voluntary student reading minutes. In the months leading up to the Book Fair, schools can integrate reading-based incentives with strong results.

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Academically, reading is the skill that unlocks every subject matter and leads to success in school and beyond. Access to many level-appropriate books and the time to read them are essential for the development of better readers. “Research shows that reading scores for students in schools that focus on improving their library programs are, on average, eight to 21 percent higher than similar schools without such development. This holds true even when other factors like community demographics are taken into account” (Washington White House Conference on School Libraries 2002).

Family involvement combined with regularly renewed classroom and school libraries is an important means to the end of developing a nation of students who have the habit of daily reading – for success in school and throughout their lives. The Book Fair event addresses all three critical factors to create a successful reading culture at a school.

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## **THE BENEFITS OF STUDENT CHOICE AND VOLUNTARY READING**

Offering students reading choices and providing time to read throughout the year increases motivation, voluntary reading and academic success. Research has demonstrated that allowing

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students to choose the books they will read from a list or a library provides them with a sense of empowerment. They are more likely to feel as if they are reading for themselves rather than to please others. “Studies have confirmed the conventional wisdom that choice is motivating. Children need choice to develop independence” (Guthrie 2000).

Students who voluntarily read more develop positive attitudes toward reading. They read better, and they experience more academic success. “The common-sense notion that students who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate a positive attitude toward reading is upheld in both qualitative and quantitative research. Students’ reading achievement has been shown to correlate with success in school and the amount of independent reading they do (Cullinan 1998-2000).”

Strong school reading programs consistently support the practice of student choice in reading materials by providing time for them to read. The decision to provide instructional time



for voluntary reading sends students the message that the school values this kind of reading and sees it as important to their success. “Independent reading builds background knowledge. It contributes to knowledge of text content and familiarity with standard text structures. Independent reading contributes to vocabulary growth. Readers with a rich vocabulary understand content and appreciate the language used in well-written texts” (Cullinan 2000). It is logical and natural that students who are given the power of choice and the gift of time will read more and read better.

“For virtually all children, the amount of time spent reading in classrooms consistently accelerates their growth in reading skills. One study estimates that children learn an average of 4,000 to 12,000 vocabulary words each year as a result of book reading. Another study found that the highest achievers in fifth-grade classrooms were likely to read over 200 times as many minutes per day (21 minutes) as the lowest achievers (who read for less than one-tenth of a minute per day) . . . Together, these studies provide convincing evidence that the amount of reading is a major factor in growth in literacy” (Neuman 2001).

The power to excite students about reading is evident when they shop the Book Fair independently and select a book to enjoy. The power of this independence cannot be underestimated and helps to inspire a lifelong love of reading. It only takes that one “hook” book to motivate a reluctant reader to learn to love to read. Thus, choice leads to motivation, which leads to increased voluntary reading.

Because reading is fundamental to a thriving democracy and an endless array of economic opportunities, it is essential that we offer young people many and varied opportunities to learn to read and to practice reading. As Linda B. Gambell suggested in her President’s Message to the International Reading Association, “Will reading practice, or time spent reading, make a student a perfect reader? Probably not. But I’m convinced that practice helps students become better readers. As the ancient Assyrian Publilius Syrus said in 42 B.C., ‘Practice is the best of all instructors’” (Gambell 2007).

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## **THE BENEFITS OF SUMMER READING – MOTIVATE THE SUMMER READING CLIMB**

Providing time for students to read throughout the year helps keep their skills strong and encourages them to develop the habit of reading. Summer programs offer the opportunity to

eliminate learning loss and strengthen literacy skills. They can help level the playing field for learners from varied backgrounds. "Summer deserves attention because, when it starts, learning stops for many children, especially low-income children and children of color. Recent evidence suggests that summer learning loss plays an even larger role than the test-score achievement gaps built up over the preschool years in determining class differences in educational performance and attainment over the long run. Furthermore, learning is not just about retaining information: Learning to think, solve problems, analyze information and situations, innovate, communicate, and work well with diverse individuals are all key skills needed in a global economy. The informal learning environments of many summer programs can be prime contexts for the development of these 21st-century skills" (Miller 2007).

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Summer programs can help all students retain the skills they have gained during the school year through the summer, and they can build on those skills to be more prepared for the next year.

Scholastic Book Fairs provides a free summer reading program complete with suggested reading lists and curriculum connections by grade level as well as an end-of-school-year "Buy One, Get One Free" promotion that gives the entire school community the best books at the most affordable prices. Students and their families can also take advantage of the Scholastic Read for the World Record program, which includes a wide array of online activities and resources designed to keep students reading over the summer.

## **THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND HOME LIBRARIES**

Family engagement in literacy activities in school and at home has a strong, positive impact on children's educational progress. A family that consistently demonstrates a respect for and interest in books and reading helps students develop the comfort and curiosity they need to achieve academic success and lifelong reading habits.

William H. Jeynes, writing for the Harvard Family Research Project, has reported that his analysis of research indicates "... that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes. These findings emerge consistently whether the outcome measures were grades, standardized test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings

(Jeynes 2005). Similarly a Southwest Educational Laboratory report based on a review of a decade of research on parent involvement found that regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adjust well to school;
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education” (Education Week 2004).

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While all subjects benefit from family engagement, it has been shown to be especially helpful in encouraging children to read and in supporting the development of a wide range of literacy skills. “Of all academic subjects, research shows reading is the most sensitive to family influence. In 1994, the College Board established a correlation between reading and a family’s support for their children’s efforts. Reading achievement is felt to be more dependent upon learning activities in the home than either math or science. Moreover, success in reading appears to be the gateway to success in other academic areas as well” (Colker 2010).

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Thus, it is imperative for schools to find many positive ways to invite parents to be partners in their children’s education, especially in reading. While seeking to include parents, it is also important to remember how difficult this might be for parents who are not fluent in English, who have not experienced personal academic success or who may have had previous negative experiences with schools.

Because home libraries exert such a positive effect on students as they grow as readers, it is also essential to identify ways to encourage families to establish home libraries. Research has demonstrated that the existence and size of home libraries are strong predictors of the number of years students stay in school and the success they achieve there. “Home library size has a very substantial effect on educational attainment, even adjusting for parents’ education, father’s occupational status and other family background characteristics” (Evans et al 2009).

Perhaps even more significant is the evidence that suggests that adding books to any home library, large or small, at any time increases a child's chance for success. "Regardless of how many books the family already has, each addition to a home library helps the children get a little farther in school" (Evans et al 2009). It is clear that helping families develop collections of books to which students have access at any time will support them in their development as readers and learners.

A Scholastic Book Fair provides families the opportunity to attend a warm and welcoming school event that celebrates reading. Great care is given to ensure that books are affordable so that the experience is accessible for all students. Additionally, schools can obtain Title 1 funding toward reading certificates where applicable so that books are made available to all students and their families. Students can use reading certificates to buy books for their home libraries.

Many schools host Grand Events designed to encourage the involvement of extended family members (aunts, uncles, or grandparents) who can continue reading aloud daily to students and extend the home-school connection.

Additional literacy programs can be hosted throughout the year including the build-a-book make-and-take activity as well as the Read and Rise family engagement program. Schools can use Title 1 funding to support these programs where applicable.

Home libraries and family engagement in school programs offer all students access to books, encourage voluntary reading, and result in greater academic achievement. It is in the interest of our learning communities and our overall communities to identify programs that can help families and schools to work together.

## **CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES NEED BOOKS**

Classroom and school libraries should be large, varied and constantly renewed. Research supports that increasing access to a vibrant collection of level-appropriate books leads to better reading. The positive connection between strong school and classroom libraries and reading achievement measured both through observation and testing has been recognized by educational researchers.

Access is so significant that just providing access to interesting, level-appropriate books can improve overall literacy skills. "In one experiment, students simply 'received a supply of

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books at the end of the school year for three years in a row' and without any other intervention 'scored significantly higher on a state reading assessment . . ." (Miller 2007).

If students are to develop the habit of reading, their classrooms and libraries need to offer an environment that is rich in literacy. "According to the American Library Association, classroom libraries should include about 300 titles, single and multiple copies, as part of a permanent collection, with supplements from a well-stocked school library. The International Reading Association recommends that classroom libraries start with seven books per child and purchase two additional new books per child each year" (Neuman 2001). These resources benefit every child in every classroom and can make a serious difference in the lives of students who do not have many books at home.

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"Recent research emphasizes the importance of the classroom library, particularly in children's literacy development. In one large-scale study, classroom libraries with high-quality books were placed in over 350 schools to enhance the language and literacy environment of 18,000 economically disadvantaged children. Findings revealed that with books in close proximity to classroom activity:

- Time spent reading increased by 60 percent compared to a control group;
- Literacy-related activities more than doubled, from an average of four interactions per hour to 8.5 interactions per hour;
- Letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, concepts of print and writing, and narrative competence rose 20 percent more than the control group after a year, followed by continued gains six months and 12 months later" (Neuman 2001).

Studies like this make it clear that "school libraries and classrooms must have an adequate amount of reading material for each child in order to create a fair balance between children who receive access to books outside of school and those who do not" (International Reading Association 1999).



While the links between strong school and classroom libraries and academic success are widely acknowledged, budgetary pressures too often result in small, outdated libraries that offer students limited access. “To reach the goal of 100 percent reading proficiency, we need to turn toward a formulation that could be called NCWB - No Child without a Book” (Chapman 2010).

On average, each Book Fair provides a critical influx of almost 600 new books. These new books reach home, classroom, and school libraries. In addition, schools leverage the profits they earn at the Book Fair by buying new books and educational resources from the Scholastic School Resources catalog. This is a significant benefit that can help to offset shrinking school budgets. On average, with two Book Fairs per year, a school can earn \$3,500 in new books and educational resources. The Book Fair is a powerful solution for continuing to provide students with critical access to new books each year.

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## CONCLUSION

When families and schools work together to offer students increased access to a wide range of level-appropriate books and the time to read them, student reading improves. It is a natural alliance for a common goal, but it is one that too often gets lost in the rush of daily lives and the demands of test preparation.

Access comes first. Simply having interesting books easily available at home and in school is an enormous step toward voluntary reading and academic success. A strong research base

supports the importance of access to books. Children read more and read more widely – both for pleasure and for information – when they are allowed to select for themselves what to read, and when they have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries, and at home.

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Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading and tend

to be the best readers. Students with increased access demonstrate progress as measured in a variety of ways, including standardized tests. Although it’s clear that access alone will not always result in reading excellence, it’s the key to getting started.

Too often, impoverished children lack access to books. “Research consistently shows that children who live in low-income neighborhoods have little access to reading materials in public libraries, in their schools, and at home . . . If more access leads to more reading and if more reading leads to better reading, writing, spelling, grammar and a larger vocabulary, this means that the first step any literacy campaign needs to take is to make sure children have access to plenty of books” (Krashen 2007).

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Time is the other essential ingredient for improved reading. Research has demonstrated that any increase in reading time results in stronger reading performance. Like all skills, reading skills improve with practice, and practice takes time. Students who engage in frequent, voluntary reading enjoy reading more. Those who read for fun are likely to read better. “Reading is the keystone for later learning. The time children spend learning to read is the single most powerful strategy for improving literacy skills in fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” (Miller 2007).

Having more books and more time to read helps students become more proficient readers, and reading is the basis for success in all subjects and throughout life. Engaging families in this process provides important support for everything students do to improve their reading and success in school. All students deserve our help in their efforts to become strong readers. “All of the data suggest how powerfully reading transforms the lives of individuals – whatever their social circumstances. Regular reading not only boosts the likelihood of an individual’s academic and economic success . . . The statistics confirm: Books change lives.” (Gioia 2007).

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Books change lives.”***

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