

Home Reading Program for Grade One Children

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The principals and grade one teachers of Lakeview and Jubilee Elementary Schools in Meadow Lake were looking for an effective means of developing the literacy of at-risk children and their families. Discussions between parents and teachers had underlined the benefits of children reading at home, and in 2000-2001, a Home Reading Program was put in place for grade one students. The program was supported by a partnership between the Meadow Lake School Division and a community literacy group, which received a federal grant to hire a Home Liaison



Two young students absorbed in their reading.

who would support literacy development within students' homes. A grant from the McDowell Foundation allowed the teachers to frame the program as an action research project that explored the question: What is the impact of a Home Reading Program with a Home Liaison on student achievement and family literacy?

Research Methodology and Research Findings

Teachers and parents developed a process to monitor student reading and evaluate reading gains. Over the course of the year, students chose a series of levelled books to take home daily in a "green bag" supplied by the schools. Along with their parents, students recorded their at-home reading in a "reading log". Data gathered over a period of 139 days showed that the average percentage of the days that the students read was 54 percent (Lakeview) and 68 percent (Jubilee). When students were divided into four groups according to the percentage of days they read, their average grade level gain tended to correlate with the frequency of home reading:

Percentage of Days Read	Number of Students	Average Grade Level Gain
0-25	18	.69
26-50	29	.82
51-75	39	.82
76-100	51	1.1

While many students completed their home reading consistently, those who were not reading consistently were visited at home and assisted by

the Home Liaison. Records were kept of the number of home visits. The following chart shows the relationship between the number of Home Liaison visits and the students' average grade level gain:

Number of Visits	Number of Students	Average Grade Level Gain
0	86	.93
1-5	20	.82
6-10	10	.80
11-15	9	.99
16-20	3	.70
21-25	1	.4

At the beginning and end of the school year, all grade one students were tested using Gates-MacGintie Reading Tests to determine their reading gains. As shown below, these results were compared to those of grade one students in the previous year:

	May 2000 (Without Home Liaison)		May 2001 (With Home Liaison)	
	Average Grade Equivalent Score	% of Students at or above 1.7 Grade Level	Average Grade Equivalent Score	% of Students at or above 1.7 Grade Level
Lakeview	1.8	73%	2.0	77%
Jubilee	1.9	76%	2.4	88%

A survey was also developed and administered to parents in order to gather information about

Five Essential Ingredients for a Home Reading Program:

1. Levelled reading books, bags and incentives for each classroom.
2. A Home Liaison to encourage and support family literacy.
3. Teacher support and inservice in the values of home reading.
4. Parent support to engage in the program.
5. Standardized testing to add to the credibility and accountability of the program.

the family's at-home reading habits and seek feedback regarding the Home Reading Program in general. In addition, comments were collected from teachers, students and the Home Liaison.

The major findings from the data were summarized as follows:

1. Compared with grade one students in the previous year, the students participating in the project showed significant gains in their overall reading achievement. Eight percent more students were reading at a 1.7 level or higher.
2. At-risk students who received home visits showed significant gains in reading.
3. Students who read at home more frequently showed greater gains than other students.
4. Parents, teachers and students felt that the Home Reading Program was beneficial.

Recommendations

The teachers and school division personnel regarded the project as the starting point for a much longer process of addressing the need in Meadow Lake for family literacy and parental involvement in children's reading. They recommended that the Home Reading Program be expanded to include all grade one and two students and the Home Liaison be employed full-time by the school division. These recommendations were subsequently implemented by the Meadow Lake School Division along with the provision of additional funding to every school for literacy resources that would support the Home Reading Program.

Other recommendations pointed out that further development work was needed in two areas to make the Home Reading Program more effective:

1. strategies to support increased parental involvement in student achievement, and
2. processes for monitoring student participation and the involvement of the Home Liaison.