

William Penn School District receives funding to expand successful 100 Book Challenge Reading Program

LANSDOWNE - Attention William Penn School District families: The 100 Book Challenge is coming! Thanks to a state grant, the William Penn School District will be able to expand the popular reading program to all of its elementary schools next year.

"We see the 100 Book Challenge as a really important component of our reading program. In order for our children to become successful readers, they need regular, consistent opportunities to read independently and apply the skills and strategies they are learning. The 100 Book Challenge can provide those opportunities and so much more," said Carol Shiffiin, the district's Director of Federal Programs and Elementary language Arts.

The program, which is designed to promote independent reading, has been in use at three of William Penn's eight elementary schools for about six years. Through the 100 Book Challenge, students are encouraged to read at least two 30-minute sessions per day—both at school and at home. Students are assessed to determine their reading abilities and are allowed to choose books they want to read from baskets that have been color-coded to denote various reading levels. During class time, they are monitored by teachers who track their progress on skill cards that are sent home to families. At home, students must also read for 30 minutes, with parents or guardians signing off on reading assignments, for every reading milestone a child reaches, he or she is rewarded with small prizes.

"The whole idea of incentives for reading achievement really gets kids interested in the program—they want to be recognized for reading. They will stop you in the hall to talk about their accomplishments. They are very enthusiastic about it," said Ms. Shiffiin. "The reward system helps establish the habit of reading, and after a while, the incentives don't matter as much to students—they read because they enjoy it."

The three William Penn School District schools that are currently using the program in grades K-6 are Walnut Street, Park Lane and Bell Avenue Elementary Schools, Park Lane Principal Bob Wetzel said that the 100 Book Challenge has generated a real enthusiasm for reading at his school.

"I believe children are better able to enjoy books, in addition to using them for research or learning," said Mr. Wetzel. "They have a better understanding of vocabulary and more of a command of the English lan-

guage. They are finding out that the more you read, the more you know."

Students are encouraged to read at least one book per day at school, and one at home, for the entire year. Every year, the number of students meeting or beating that goal continues to rise, with a number of students reading double the required amount. Children are honored three times a year for their accomplishments at assemblies with certificates and a prize, such as ice cream. Students who read double the required amount are honored annually and receive a prize. Daily progress is also charted on a bulletin board in the school, resulting in a healthy competition between classmates.

Mr. Wetzel believes that because the program allows students to read at their own level, children can complete books without struggling and are encouraged to read more as a result. In addition, the one-on-one time that children spend with teachers in independent leading sessions has been beneficial for Park Lane students, said Mr. Wetzel.

"The teachers have a better idea of their students' strengths and weaknesses and can better target instruction," said Mr. Wetzel.

"Students who participate in the program are very committed to it. Some of our students move between school districts or school. When they come back to William Penn schools, the first thing they ask is, 'Do you have the 100 Book Challenge?'" said Ms. Shiffiin.

The 100 Book Challenge is the flagship program of the American Reading Company and was developed by CEO Jane Hileman. The idea grew out of Ms. Hileman's real-world experience as both a teacher and a private tutor observing students' reading success—and failure—in urban and suburban classrooms. Today, more than 600 schools, 95 districts, and 24 states, plus the District of Columbia use the 100 Book Challenge. The program has been cited as key in boosting the standardized reading test scores of students in Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Florida.

For more information about the 100 Book Challenge and the American Reading Company, visit online at www.americanreading.com.