

HOW TO BOOST ATTENDANCE TO FAMILY READING NIGHTS AT SCHOOLS

By Matthew Gollub © 2020-2023



What's the most important indicator for a child's success in school?
If you answered "family involvement," we're on the same page!

Parents don't need graduate degrees to encourage reading at home. But it's vital for them to see reading as key to their child's success. Family Reading Nights help communicate to parents some of the ways they can support reading at home: by sharing stories, creating quiet time, keeping a variety of children's books in the home, etc. But the first step is getting lots of families to attend!

Here are my favorite pointers for successful family night events, gleaned from the many schools that have featured me as the guest speaker:

***Call it a Family "Reading" Night, not "Literacy" Night.** "Literacy" sounds dry. "Reading" sounds comfortable. Also, the word "literacy" may put off some parents who assume that since they already know how to read, this event is not for them.

***If possible, arrange for a few minutes of student entertainment.** Weeks beforehand, ask 1st-3rd teachers to teach their students a song or dance to perform on Family Reading Night. Or ask a student choir or orchestra to perform. If their children are involved as performers, parents not only show up in droves. They vie for seats close to the front, cell phones and video cameras in hand!

***Ask teachers to attend and give their students an incentive to come, too.** The "incentive" may be as simple as excusing those who attend from homework.

***Allow sufficient time to “market” the event.** Send home written announcements in appropriate languages. Announce the event over the intercom and school marquis. Use automated phone messages or get office staff to personally invite parents as necessary. Perhaps even enlist the help of a few key parents who can communicate to other parents the benefits of the event.

***Avoid scheduling conflicts.** Try not to compete with other events such as a band concert, municipal celebration, Friday night high school football game, etc.

***Choose a time that works for your families.** At 5:30, many parents are just coming home from work. A 7:00 start time can be difficult with young children. A 6:30 start time often works best.

***If funds are available, consider serving dinner.** Food from a local restaurant is both a convenience and incentive! Often restaurants will agree to big discounts to help support literacy and gain recognition. If serving dinner, consider starting at 5:30.

***Refreshments or dessert** can also entice people in lieu of dinner.

***Set up a childcare center in a nearby classroom** so that mothers don't have to hush younger siblings during the talk. Mention available childcare in your announcement; overworked parents will welcome the short break!

***Keep the feeling festive and fun.** Raffle off books or the wares of local merchants. Set up activity tables to demonstrate reading customs. Give kids prizes for reading or spelling different words. If your community has the expendable income, consider a silent auction to raise library funds.

***Consider bringing in a guest speaker**—maybe an author or storyteller with whom students are familiar. But remember, the speaker must feel comfortable with crowds of wide-ranging ages. Guests might also be local business people, sports heroes, superintendents, the principal—any engaging, kid-friendly presenter who can describe how reading helped him or her in life.

The purpose of a family literacy event is to gradually help improve your community. More reading families mean better test scores and parent involvement. Such profound change does not take place overnight. But the rewards for planting seeds and harvesting readers are immense.

Matthew Gollub has created numerous award-winning books for children. He speaks English, Spanish, Japanese and jazz. As a speaker, he has performed at over 1,000 elementary schools. His popular picture book for parents is titled Give the Gift! 10 Fulfilling Ways to Raise a Lifetime Reader. For more FREE articles and resources, please visit www.matthewgollub.com.