

LITERACY STORY

"Literacy is the foundation of progress and success in society, yet 32 million people in the United States struggle with literacy skills," Karen Wild, director of School Improvement said. "The ability to read and write provides limitless opportunities, but lacking those skills greatly hinders a person's potential and prospects. Low literacy has individual consequences such as lower quality of life and societal consequences such as slow economic growth. Knowing this, we are determined to do something about it here in our hometown."

Wild said community partnerships are essential in this effort. The FERST Readers Conversations Count Program is used to support parent and community understanding of both the need for literacy development and the strategies to be used by parents, caregivers and others who partner with children Birth to 5. Each of the programs are led by school literacy specialists and teachers in the Aspiring Leaders program, and receive support from appropriate community partners for particular programs:

Literacy initiatives currently under way at Carrollton City Schools are ramping up the school system's priority of putting literacy at the forefront of school improvement efforts.

PreK Parent University – Carrollton City Schools Teaching and Learning Team developed curriculum for incorporating literacy within and outside of the home. During the six-session program, Carrollton Elementary teachers and paraprofessional held workshops where parents and children were shown strategies to use at home to develop literacy skills and language. Staff members modeled the activities and then parents immediately practiced the new skills with their children. Conversations Count was a critical component of this offering. All materials, supplies and books were given to the families to use at home following each weekly session. The district provided transportation and meals for the program. The targeted families were from prekindergarten.

CES teachers Alea Shadrix and Nancy Smith led PreK Parent University and said they were pleased with the results. "PreK Parent University was focused on equipping parents with tools and resources to support their children in the early stages of literacy development," said Shadrix. "By giving the parents these tools, we are giving their children the literacy foundation skills needed to become a successful reader."

Smith agreed, noting many parents shared how they have already noticed improvement in their children's literacy readiness skills after using the activities at home. "We feel like PreK Parent University was a success!"

Wash, Dry and READ: In a partnership between St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Coin Laundry, and Carrollton City Schools, targeted families are offered free laundry services and supplies, snack lunches, and literacy support. Carrollton Elementary and CMS

teachers and paraprofessionals are providing three sessions of support for families using Conversations Count presentations as teaching points during the months of January, February and March. Teacher leaders provide information and modeling with parents of CCS students on how to develop effective conversation strategies. The focus of the support is to guide parents and caregivers in talking with and reading to children. Children are provided games and activities by paraprofessionals that support literacy growth. Books and materials are distributed to participants.

Teachers Tracey Cleek and Tiffany Pullen lead the program. "This literacy initiative has given us a wonderful opportunity to not only pass on a love of reading, but encourage parents and caregivers to continue working with the children in their lives, give practical ways to build language and literacy skills, and just love on our community," said Cleek.

Pullen said the unique environment has proven to be a fertile ground for literacy growth.

"It has been amazing to meet our students and parents in an environment that is less intimidating than the school classroom and show them very simple techniques they can use at home to help their child develop a greater vocabulary and foster a love of reading," she said. "Parents have been amazed at how easy it is to implement simple changes in their daily routine that can pay huge dividends in their child's language development and literacy skills."

Barbers, Beauticians and BOOKS!: CES and CMS teachers and paraprofessionals are providing three sessions of support for families over three months, meeting at a unique venue – barber and beauty shops. Teacher leaders provide information and modeling with parents of CCS students in making conversations count and enhancing the reading experience. The focus of the support is to guide parents and caregivers in talking with and reading to children. Children are provided free haircuts and styling as well as support from paraprofessionals with literacy games and activities that promote literacy growth. Books and materials are distributed to participants. The barbers and beauticians are provided support from CCS staff in Communication Counts and Talk with Me Baby for developing an understanding in clients that promote reading and literacy.

"Our mission with Barbers, Beauticians and Books was to create a literacy-based program that connects teachers, students, families and the community with reading materials and strategies that promote literacy growth," said Andrea Rackaway, who leads the program with fellow teacher Michael Hilbert. "Barbershops and beauty salons are vital components and cultural hubs for many communities. By taking books and literacy strategies outside of the school, we are showing our students that reading matters everywhere. We are pairing them with mentors who are investing themselves in the success of that child."

Partnering with the school system is Jacqueline Bridges of Elaine's Styles & More and Darrell Gamble of D'Styles Barbershop.

Fourth Trimester Literacy Partnership: Carrollton City Schools is partnering with Tanner Health System's Fourth Trimester program for parents of newborns. A CCS literacy specialist will provide parents of newborn babies with sessions that support parents in the medical, health and literacy needs in a two-hour session. The Conversations Count literacy support provides information and modeling with parents to teach them the best way to converse with their new baby.

"The focus of this support is to guide parents and caregivers in talking with and reading to children," said Wild, who is implementing this charge. "Books and onesies featuring Troy, the Carrollton City Schools dog, will be provided to participants."

Wild said along with Tanner, FERST Readers of Carroll County is a partner in this endeavor.

Other city school programs include Mobile Literacy Van, Tiny Trojan Book Project, and Connections Through Conferences. We will have more information about these programs in the future.