

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, December, 2019

In an effort to increase and reinforce the importance of reading and math practice, Plainville Community Schools will kick off the *Superintendent's 2020 Reading and Math Challenge* at the start of the 2020 calendar year. The district-wide challenge will continue from January 2nd through the end of May.

While our school district has various programs to support and promote reading, the goal is to build a unified and widespread appreciation of the importance and power of reading to change our students' present and their future. In the primary grades, we will also incorporate various math practice activities to support growth and development in mathematics. This is a common practice in many districts, and we hope to do things even better in Plainville. The goal of the challenge is to collectively increase student enjoyment of reading and build healthy habits that continue to grow over the years, while also reinforcing mathematics at the elementary school level.

Parents and guardians of elementary school students will be asked to support their children in completing a weekly reading and math log, noting minutes read (20 per day), names of books/stories read and documenting five minutes of math practice. Students will also be encouraged to document their own progress on their reading and math log, giving them even more ownership and pride in their achievements. Students will receive bookmarks when they reach reading milestones. Students who show consistent effort in their reading and math practice will also be eligible for special reading awards, including vouchers for books at the elementary school book fairs and other exciting reading-based recognitions.

At the secondary level, an emphasis will be placed on pleasure reading and the connection between reading ability and overall academic and lifelong success. Several

strategies have been developed to support the focus on pleasure reading at the secondary level. Middle and high school students have a voice in selecting books for their respective library circulations, new book clubs are being formed, book talks will be scheduled, author visits are planned, and the high school is hoping to create a student based Library Advisory Group. In addition, faculty members at the high school will recommend their favorite books via morning announcements and visual displays in the school building.

District partner and local media outlet, The New Britain Herald, will sponsor the middle and high schools' "Read and Feed" component of the Superintendent's Reading and Math Challenge. As such, for every book read by secondary level students up to 1,600 books, the Herald will donate one dollar to be used to purchase non-perishable food items for the Plainville Community Food Pantry. Mike Schroeder, President, Editor and Publisher of the New Britain Herald reiterated the importance of promoting and encouraging reading, noting the options and enhanced citizenship that are enabled for adults through being a better reader.

To help build student and home libraries, in addition to resources currently available to students through school library media centers, Plainville Community Schools will be holding a "Book Swap" event on Saturday, January 11th from 10:00AM -12:00PM in the Plainville High School Cafeteria. In preparation for that event, students and families are being encouraged to bring in books that are in good condition to their respective schools to be exchanged for a ticket. Tickets can then be turned in for books at the Swap event. All students will be able to attend and choose books they would like to read, whether or not they have tickets, however, with more tickets, they can choose additional books. District staff members are also invited to donate books from home, for readers in Pre-K through adult literature that would be suitable for high school students. Collection bins are located in each Plainville school for book donations.

There is a saying that *practice makes perfect*, and while perfect readers and mathematicians are not our objective, our goal is to help students to continually improve. Through this challenge the hope is that students will independently read more, or be read to by a parent, guardian or loved one. Reading books of interest feeds a passion for reading that is an essential ingredient in success. I am excited for this challenge and the potential that it has to reinforce a culture of readers who develop a real love of reading.