

Community Assistance Award winner

Bookmobile Recipe: a fine fix for summer reading intervention

Ingredients:

You'll need administrative support, a vehicle to use, and a group of teachers to be the team that runs this summer intervention project. Start with a gathering of folks in your district that care a lot about reading scores and the district's "at-risk" population. Sprinkle with persuasion using -- articles that you can find about summer reading. There are so many examples of how even very simple interventions can change reading outcomes for children. In addition, explain that a bookmobile delivering books and reading strategies to children with teacher's help, will enable you to reach the most "at-risk" children who never make it to school or reading tutoring programs in town. Add that -- these children can also receive state food bank bags over the summer or other food that you may have supplied from a local food pantry. And finally, visiting these children in their neighborhoods allows teachers to make an informal check to make sure that children are being cared for adequately over the summer months. This experience also opened the eyes of our staff to the living situations of our students.

After persuasion add wheels! Our first vehicle was my own car and it took two years before the district let us use an extra van. In our fourth summer, a parent who owned a used car lot, donated an old Suburban to the district for use as the bookmobile. Once you have some district support for the idea, perhaps inform your school board members with a presentation to gain their interest. Here's a few other things to consider:



Our new "used" bookmobile

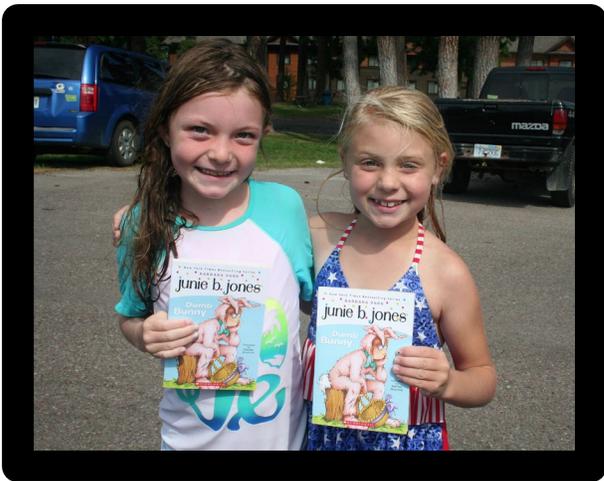


Finding money and shopping for the filling -- Books! Your bookmobile team or committee has to decide which age range to find books for. We began very simply in year "one" with 6 plastic tubs for K-5. We know that many kids are not reading at grade level so we labeled the tubs by reading levels and lexile numbers instead of grade levels. **This preserved children's dignity as we asked them to choose books that were at their reading level.** We used extra boxes in an empty classroom to sort books so we could refill the tubs each week. Sorting our warehouse and ordering books was lots of fun! Books can be purchased with grant money, business support, and private donor support. We developed a request letter and a brochure to seek support from local businesses and donors in town. We spoke to local civic clubs and in addition we wrote grants to larger foundations such as Town Pump and Burlington Northern. This year we were fortunate

enough to receive the Community Assistance Grant from the Montana Reading council as well. Shopping for books can be done through First Books, a company that supports trade book purchases for schools in need. Scholastic also has a subsidy program you can find on their website called Scholastic Partnerships Application. We also continue to order books from Eagle Crest Books as their books really suit rural kids and Native kids. This Canadian company has a focus on outside adventures and real photos. Books can be found if you are on a tight budget from used stores and family donations, but we have made a commitment to try and provide new books if we can.

Finding the right cooks for our recipe -- teachers! Sell the idea to teachers in a presentation at a staff meeting in the late winter and sell it in individual conversations with colleagues. Suggest a one-year trial to see how it goes. If you start with one route per week for six weeks, you will only need six teachers to help you get started. Show them some statistics on the summer reading slide such as this summary from Scholastic: http://mediaroom.scholastic.com/files/sc2012_facts.pdf.

In our district, we began with just a handful of teachers but by last summer we had 21 teachers involved and more that volunteered but never got a chance to come along! **These volunteer teachers are a critical part of the program in that they save on stipend costs, provide familiar faces for children and parents, and this day or two of volunteering helps teachers see where students are coming from.** A good thing all around!



How do I find *book hungry* kids in the summer?

Each district program will have to find their own best system for this problem. We use a combination of finding kids where they congregate in the summer with individual visits to students' homes and neighborhoods. We work to coordinate with the feeding locations in our area as well. Last summer's group spots included the pool, the Boys and Girls Club child care program, a school district summer program, a church camp held in another school, and lunch programs in some parking lots and parks. We ran 5 routes on three days last summer. Around the already mentioned main locations, we also had many individual families and children signed up in our detailed route book with maps, addresses, and phone numbers. We glean these names by providing teachers

with forms to use in the spring. These forms simply ask teachers to choose a few kids that would most benefit from the program for us to target over the summer. We ask parents to give us permission to stop by. Tracking down the forms can be nearly impossible so sometimes we just hang out in apartment building parking lots or in a neighborhood with children we want to serve and often we find the children we are most concerned about without being on their property.

Title I teachers in your school can be a great source for promoting the program to parents and helping sign up kids. Special Education teachers have hoops to go through about IEPs and are often less willing to help promote the program to their families. We hand out fliers in June, to inform kids and their parents when to watch for us in each area of our district as well. We also post these routes and times in the local paper, on Facebook, our website, and at the library. Last year we connected with about 1300 children over the summer. Due to increased interest, we have gradually added books for toddlers and babies/ and last summer added middle school, high school, and adult bins full of books and magazines.

How do we build on the "recipe" for future years? We knew from the beginning that it would be important to attempt to provide some data to our school board to show that this program influenced our student's reading scores. This data is important for grant writing also. Our district uses STAR to assess reading and also more

informal running records. We have collected STAR using May to September reading scores from children who received at least three books over the summer from the bookmobile. Last year, we implemented a Google form we could access on our cellphones to record data and we sent the form to volunteer teachers each week as their volunteer day came up. The results went directly to a spreadsheet that we could monitor as the day's route happened. We have the most complete results yet this year, but as we still are having a hard time seeing children consistently all summer, so our cohort numbers for each grade level continue to be quite small. At this point we sometimes get grade level cohorts with really great results that show that reading over the summer allows "at-risk" readers to maintain their reading level, while other cohorts can be thrown off by a control group that does well without us or a few children that continue to score poorly in September despite having some books during the summer. Whatever the scores, we continue to work on increasing the numbers as we collect data and we know anecdotally that many children and families have thrived due to our intervention of books, food, and friendly teachers over the summer.



We encourage teachers and school districts all over to try the "bookmobile recipe" approach to summer intervention. Our goals are to continue to build the program through more funds for books, possibly a summer coordinator position, reaching more high school students, and an idea we have of letting our Special Education department use the bookmobile one day a week to let an aide visit their students. If we can be of assistance in answering any questions about the program, please contact us at; twinjunipers@gmail.com I would be happy to assist by bringing our powerpoint to teacher or school board meetings in your district.

-- Betsy Kohnstamm, Columbia Falls School District