



School Spotlight

Christa McAuliffe Elementary: Reaching for a Million Minutes

When the Christa McAuliffe Elementary school improvement team set their priorities for the school year, they had a clear goal: to rally everyone around reading. Why? They saw an opportunity to build on students' strengths and create a culture of resilience, where reading is celebrated every day.

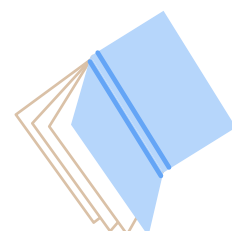
To achieve this vision, principal Jim Hanley, along with teachers and the school's media specialist, designed a plan that paired strategic goals with excitement and fun. Their mission was simple: rekindle students' love of reading to help support overall learning. The result was the Beanstack Million-Minute Challenge, a schoolwide initiative to read one million minutes.



“ On the back side of things, in our classrooms, we're giving them the skills to be able to read. And on the front side, we developed this exciting, engaging plan to get them to fall in love with reading, and engage with reading.

Jim Hanley

Principal, Christa McAuliffe Elementary School, Tinley Park, Illinois



Leading by Example

At Christa McAuliffe, reading culture starts at the top. Hanley and his team make the Million-Minute Challenge a visible, daily part of school life,

- **Schoolwide focus:** “It’s our goal, it’s talked about, we have it on bulletin boards around the school—it is the thing that we’re doing this year.”
- **Simple expectations:** Each student reads and logs at least ten minutes a day. Everyone from the gym teacher to the principal is encouraged to model the same behavior.
- **Sharing information everywhere:** Hanley and his team created a how-to video and one-pagers for staff and families that explained the challenge and built enthusiasm.



Motivation That Matters

The approach at Christa McAuliffe emphasizes recognizing readers and encouraging progress over prizes. The culture of the school and the broader community is reflected in every celebration.

- **Top bean trophy:** A can of beans topped with an astronaut is awarded weekly to the class with the most minutes read.
- **Weekly recognition:** The whole school celebrates readers in morning announcements and checks in with students about what they’re reading.
- **The ultimate prize:** Ten lucky students will have the opportunity to dump beans on Hanley’s head at the end of the year. Students are gleefully anticipating the show.

A Community Reading Together

The Million-Minute Challenge connects classrooms, families, and local partners in a shared reading mission.

- **Local partnerships:** Monthly Benny’s Best prizes—a \$10 gift card for one top reader per grade level—are sponsored by neighborhood businesses.
- **Public library collaboration:** Through Beanstack’s Tandem Connection, students can log reading for both their school and library challenges at once.
- **Community outreach:** Hanley created a hype video to share with the school board and community, reinforcing the goals and central focus of the challenge this year.



Trailblazer Status

The school surpassed 75% participation in the first month of school.



300,000+ Minutes

Students surpassed the 10-minute daily reading goal in the first few months of school!



Student Engagement

Teachers and parents report that students are more interested in reading.

Conclusion

At Christa McAuliffe Elementary, the Million-Minute Challenge has quickly become a defining part of the school year. By leading from the top, balancing motivation with meaning, and rallying the entire community around a shared goal, the educators at Christa McAuliffe have sparked a culture shift. Teachers are jumping on board, parents are noticing it, and students are reading with fresh enthusiasm.