beanstack

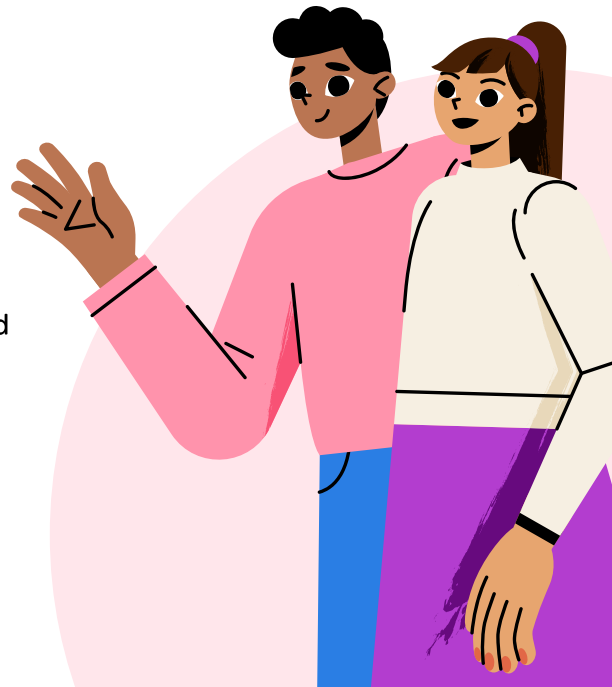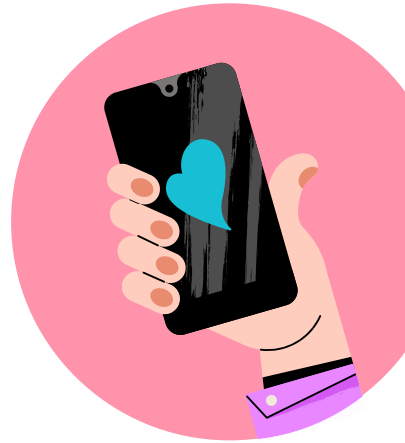# Creating an Inclusive Reading Culture at Seneca Middle School

For the past four years, school librarian Cassie Moore has worked hard to foster a strong reading culture at Seneca Middle School in South Carolina. The "Strive for 25" program was a key part of this effort, challenging students to read 25 books over the school year. Those who met the goal were invited to a special celebration. Last year, Cassie noticed that despite the 75% participation rate, some students were missing.

This discovery was pivotal,

> "I realized that members of our school community were omitted. Where were our multi-language learners, students who struggled to finish one book, those with dyslexia, etc.? I knew I needed to change the program to include and celebrate every reader."

With this sentiment in mind, Cassie, along with sixth grade ELA teacher, Amber Russell, set out to reimagine the school's reading culture to ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, felt recognized and empowered as readers.

The key to their success: using Beanstack to track reading time and create an environment of friendly competition between students. This year, Seneca Middle School has reached 96% participation, and they won't stop until every student is included.

Goals

Cassie and Amber saw an opportunity to take their literacy initiatives to the next level.
They sought to:

Create an Inclusive Reading Community

The top priority was for every student to see themselves as part of the school's reading culture, regardless of their learning challenges.

Encourage Self-Motivation

Provide students with clear goals and visible progress tracking to inspire them to develop consistent reading habits and take ownership of their progress.
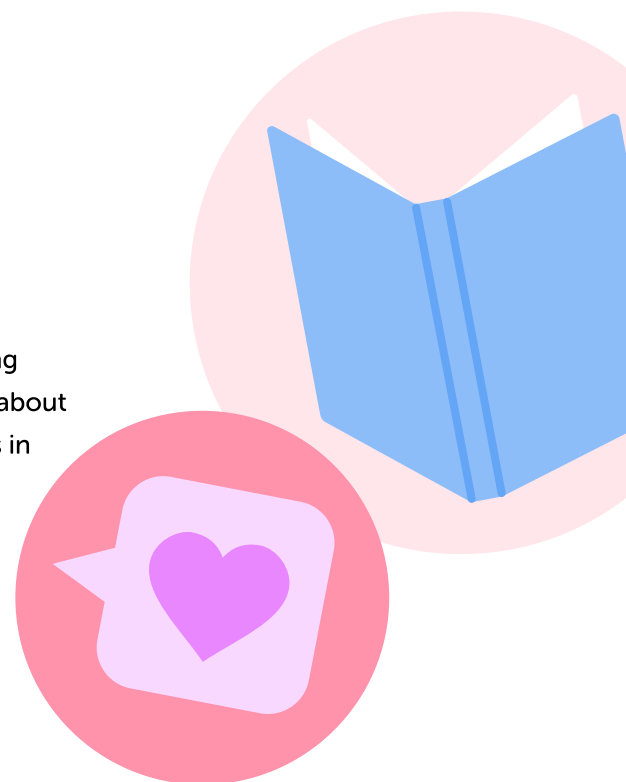
Create Excitement About Reading

Cassie noticed that middle school is often "the dropoff" when kids stop reading for fun. They sought to combat that by keeping kids engaged and excited about reading.

Strategies

Seneca Middle School found success by embracing simple but powerful strategies.

Lead by Example

Cassie, Amber, and other school community members found that sharing their own excitement and joy for reading was infectious. Talking to kids about books, reading aloud and independently, and sharing recommendations in the classroom inspired students to read and log more.
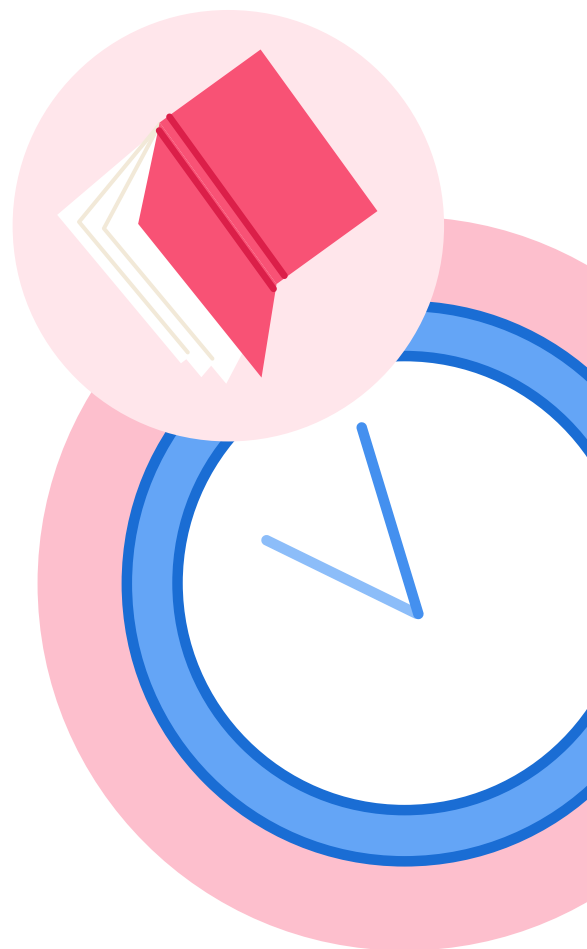
Foster Friendly Competition

Middle schoolers are naturally competitive, and Beanstack provided an opportunity to harness that energy for good. Setting up a competition between grade levels and sharing winners on the morning announcements was a huge motivator. With each new round of competition, students got more and more excited to beat the other grade levels, simply for the bragging rights.

Track Minutes, Not Books

"There are so many kids who can't wrap their brains around reading five books, but they can wrap their brains around reading, you know, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 60 minutes."

Log Everything

Allowing students to log every kind of reading, from classroom read-alouds and audiobooks to graphic novels and Marvel comics, created the inclusive environment that Cassie envisioned.

Let Recognition be an Incentive

While they offered small incentives like freeze pops for the winning grade level, recognition was the essential ingredient for creating excitement across the student body. Amber notes, "For our class, we just want the recognition. We want to see our names. It's literally just about getting recognized for the work that we're putting in."

Encourage Peer-to-Peer Learning

Letting students take the lead and show each other how to log minutes in Beanstack proved an effective way to spread the word and train students how to use the platform.

Outcomes

The impact of Beanstack at Seneca Middle School was both measurable and meaningful:

Increased Student Engagement

96% of students participated in the reading celebration after Beanstack was implemented, up from 75% the previous year.

Enhanced Accountability

Teachers could quickly assess student progress through Beanstack's tracking features, allowing for more personalized support.

A More Inclusive Reading Community

Students with learning differences and multi-language learners felt recognized and empowered as part of the school's literacy initiatives.

Lessons Learned

This year, Cassie is planning a major school-wide reading celebration, complete with a bounce house, a DJ, food trucks, and media coverage. In keeping with her commitment to inclusivity, a quiet celebration will also be offered in the morning, ensuring that every student has a way to participate.

With the hopes of reaching a collective goal of one million minutes read, they plan to celebrate regardless of the outcome. "The excitement is there, the momentum is there. However far we get, we're going to celebrate," Cassie said. The impact reaches beyond the school walls, with families and local businesses rallying to support the initiative.

Conclusion

Cassie and Amber's efforts increased student engagement and created an inclusive, supportive environment where every student could thrive as a reader. "I came across this idea: equity leads to liberation, and I feel like Beanstack is knocking down the need for an AR score or all of these other things that, in my opinion, put this fence around students and reading." Cassie reflected, "And so, to me, it was just about equity, especially for my multi-language learners, who are some of the most brilliant students in this building."