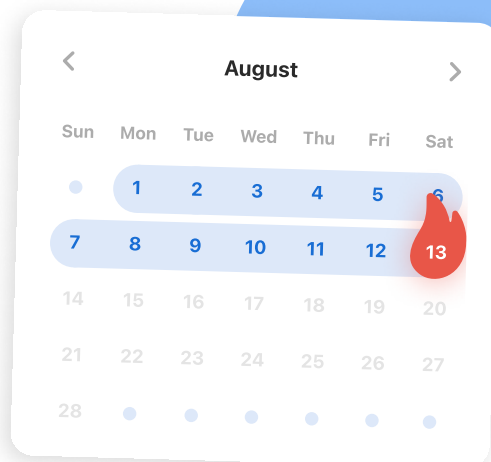


Reading Culture 101

Helping Students Become Lifelong Readers

Discover four foundational practices that strengthen reading habits, inspire more students to choose reading, and build a thriving reading culture.



Reading Is More Than a Skill

Every school is working to help students become stronger readers. Well-designed curriculum, effective instruction, and targeted intervention all play an important role, but becoming a lifelong reader requires something more.

Students need opportunities to discover books they enjoy, talk about what they're reading, celebrate progress, and make reading their own, not just another assignment. That's what a strong reading culture provides. It creates an environment where students don't just learn to read. They begin to choose to read on their own.



Reading Culture Goes Beyond

Points

Quizzes

Reading levels

One-time events

One educator

A Strong Reading Culture

- ✓ Helps students see themselves as readers
- ✓ Makes reading visible throughout the school
- ✓ Encourages meaningful choice
- ✓ Connects families to literacy
- ✓ Celebrates progress, not just performance

Reading culture isn't built by a single educator alone.

Librarians, teachers, administrators, specialists, and families all play an important role. School librarians are uniquely positioned to bring those efforts together and help create a culture where reading thrives.

Reflection

If someone walked through your school today, how would they know reading is valued?



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The Four Foundations of Reading Culture

While the approaches may vary, the strongest reading cultures share four common foundations that help students discover the joy of reading and build lasting habits.



Opportunity

Every reader deserves an easy place to start.



Choice

Ownership builds motivation.



Community

Reading grows through shared experiences.



Celebration

Progress deserves to be seen.



Missouri • 8 Schools • Districtwide

The Four Foundations in Action: Farmington R-7 School District

A shared district vision gave each school the flexibility to make reading culture its own. Across eight schools, educators engaged families, modeled reading alongside students, created schoolwide challenges, and celebrated progress in ways that reflected their individual communities.

[See how schools across the country bring each of the four foundations to life throughout this guide.](#)



[Read the full story](#)

Key Takeaways

Shared vision, local ownership: District leaders set the direction while empowering schools to lead.

Everyone has a role: Teachers, students, families, and community partners joined in.

Make it your own: Schools adapted challenges and celebrations to fit their readers.





Foundation 1: Opportunity

Every Reader Needs an Invitation

Students are more likely to build lasting reading habits when reading feels welcoming, achievable, and enjoyable.

Opportunity goes beyond providing books. It's about removing barriers, offering a variety of formats, making time for independent reading, and helping every student find stories they'll genuinely enjoy.

Schools Can...

- Offer print, ebooks, audiobooks, and graphic novels.
- Help students choose books based on their interests, not just reading level.
- Make independent reading part of every day.
- Create opportunities to read beyond the classroom.
- Celebrate every reader and every step of their reading journey.



Reading Culture in Action: Bob Folsom Elementary School

After moving away from a quiz-based reading program, Bob Folsom Elementary focused on making reading accessible, enjoyable, and inclusive for every student. Instead of limiting students by reading levels, the school encouraged choice, invited teachers to model reading, and found ways for every child—even emerging readers—to participate.

Key Strategies:

1. Encouraged students to choose books based on their interests
2. Included younger students through read-alouds and shared reading experiences
3. Invited teachers to participate and model positive reading habits
4. Removed barriers so every student could participate and succeed

"Students are excited about reading, which means students are checking out more books."

Jennifer Dowdle, Media Specialist

The Impact

100%

student participation in
reading initiatives



Increased library circulation
as students became excited
to read



Greater enthusiasm for
reading across the school
community

≠ Foundation 2: Choice

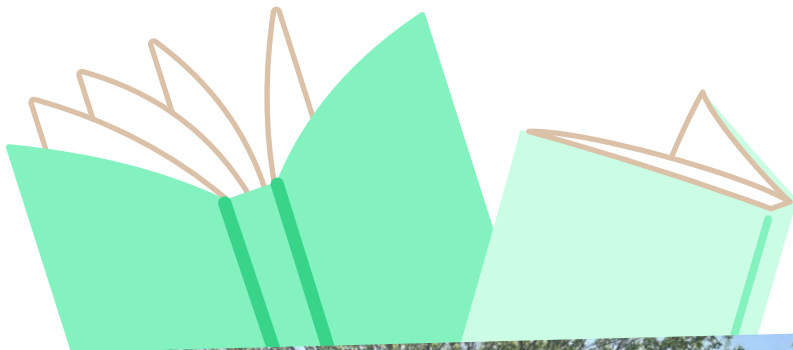
Choice Gives Students a Voice

Students become lifelong readers when reading feels personal. Choice is about more than selecting books. It's giving students opportunities to share recommendations, influence reading experiences, and see themselves as active participants in the culture around them.

When students have ownership, reading becomes something they do because they want to, not because they have to.

Schools Can...

- Survey students about their reading interests.
- Let students recommend books for the collection.
- Give students meaningful choice in what they read.
- Invite students to help shape reading challenges and celebrations.
- Create opportunities for students to share books with their peers.



Reading Culture in Action: Guadalupe Centers Middle School

Without a traditional school library, Guadalupe Centers Middle School found new ways to give students a voice in their reading culture. Through annual reading surveys, student feedback, and opportunities to help shape celebrations and future book purchases, students became active participants in building a reading community that reflected their interests.

Key Strategies:

1. Surveyed students to understand their reading interests and preferences
2. Used student feedback to guide book purchases and reading challenges
3. Invited students to help decide how reading achievements were celebrated
4. Connected reading to community partnerships and year-round reading experiences

"Kids need the opportunity to see one another read, and to see themselves as readers."

Christopher Leavens, ELA Teacher

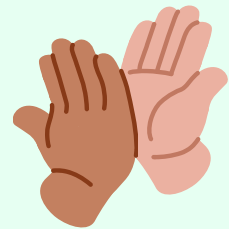
The Impact

55%

of students reported they like or love reading, surpassing the national average

54%

of students said they read more than the previous year



Families became more engaged through book fairs, PTO outreach, and community partnerships



Foundation 3: Community

Reading Is Better Together

Reading is often seen as an individual activity, but lasting reading cultures are built through shared experiences. When students, educators, families, and the broader community read toward common goals, reading becomes more visible, more social, and more meaningful.

Whether it's a schoolwide challenge, a family reading night, or students recommending books to one another, every shared experience helps strengthen a culture where everyone belongs.

Schools Can...

- Set shared reading goals for classrooms, grades, or the entire school.
- Invite teachers and staff to model reading alongside students.
- Create opportunities for students to recommend books to one another.
- Bring families into the reading experience through events and challenges.
- Partner with public libraries and community organizations.



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Reading Culture in Action: Brazosport Independent School District

When Brazosport ISD noticed that older students were losing interest in independent reading, district leaders knew they needed more than a new program—they needed a shared commitment to reading. By engaging teachers first, encouraging friendly competition between campuses, and keeping students, families, and staff connected through regular communication and celebrations, reading became a shared community effort rather than an individual assignment.

Key Strategies:

1. Engaged district leaders, teachers, students, and families around a shared vision
2. Turned teachers into reading champions through book club-style professional development
3. Created friendly cross-campus reading challenges and visible progress displays

"The biggest dial mover is teachers. If I get the teachers engaged, they will get the kids engaged."

Liz Fambrough, Library Media Coordinator

The Impact

+5.4M

Students logged more than 5.4 million reading minutes

↑32%

High school library circulation increased 32% in year two



Teachers and administrators became active participants in the district's reading culture



Foundation 4: Celebration

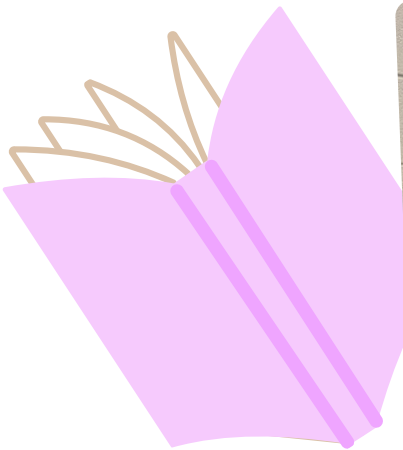
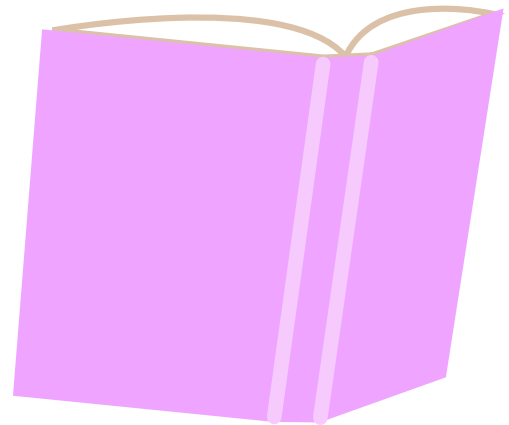
Celebrate Every Reading Milestone

Celebration isn't just for the students who read the most. It's about making reading visible and helping every student see that progress matters.

When schools celebrate milestones, recognize effort, and share reading achievements, they create momentum that inspires more students to participate and keeps reading at the center of school life.

Schools Can...

- Celebrate progress at every milestone.
- Recognize participation, not just top readers.
- Make reading visible through displays and announcements.
- Create traditions that students look forward to each year.
- Involve the whole school in celebrating reading.



Reading Culture in Action: Christa McAuliffe Elementary School

Christa McAuliffe Elementary transformed a schoolwide reading challenge into a tradition students couldn't wait to be part of. Through weekly recognition, playful school traditions, and visible celebrations, reading became something the entire school rallied around. The focus wasn't simply on rewards—it was on creating excitement, recognizing progress, and making reading a joyful part of everyday school life.

Key Strategies:

1. Celebrated readers during weekly morning announcements.
2. Awarded the traveling "Top Bean" trophy to the class with the most reading minutes.
3. Created memorable traditions, including the opportunity to dump beans on the principal's head.
4. Partnered with local businesses and the public library to celebrate reading across the community.

"Kids need the opportunity to see one another read, and to see themselves as readers."

Christopher Leavens, ELA Teacher

The Impact

+75%

Over 75% participation during the first month of school

+300,000

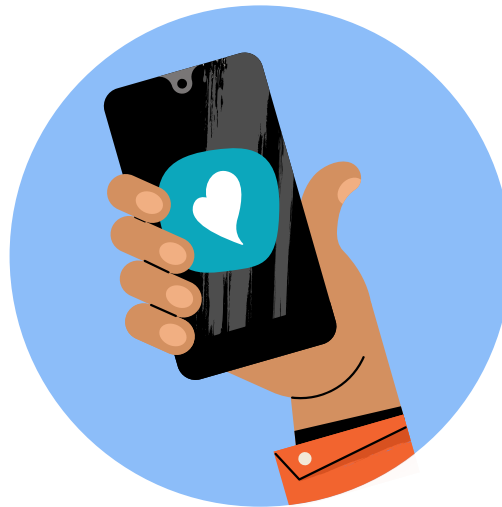
300,000+ reading minutes logged within the first few months



Teachers, families, and students united around a shared reading celebration

Build a Reading Culture That Lasts

Looking for an alternative to quiz-based reading programs or a way to strengthen independent reading? Beanstack helps schools create a reading culture where students choose to read. By expanding opportunities, encouraging choice, building community, and celebrating progress, schools can inspire more students to become lifelong readers.



Let's Connect →

