How Principals Can Excite Students about Reading

As school leaders, administrators have a powerful influence on the reading culture of their schools. When principals show enthusiasm for reading, they send the message to both students and staff that reading matters. Here are some suggestions for principals who want to increase their role as lead readers at their schools:

- **Read books that you can share with students and teachers.** Ask your teachers, librarian, and students for book recommendations. Select at least one book each month for every grade level at your school. You can discuss these books with students and encourage students to read books that you think they would enjoy. You validate your students when you read the same books they do and take their book recommendations seriously. Participate fully in the reading community of your school by visiting the library, reading often, and talking with other readers. You also provide a role model for your staff, who may need to improve or update their knowledge of children’s literature as well.

- **Start meetings with book commercials.** At the beginning of every staff and professional learning community meeting, share one book recommendation. Select a variety of professional development, children’s literature, and adult titles. Encourage your staff to do the same. When you position reading at the start of every meeting, you reinforce that reading is of primary importance at your school.

- **Visit classrooms and read aloud to students.** Principals have little time to visit classrooms and talk with students on a regular basis. By reading aloud to students, you can promote reading, share beloved books, and chat with students in a casual, relaxed way. Pick a silly book, a book you love, or a book that you think will resonate with students. Students enjoy getting to know you as someone other than the head of the school. Our administrators take turns reading aloud chapter books to students who are waiting in the gym and cafeteria before school starts.

- **Create a Principal’s Shelf in the library.** In many bookstores, staff members showcase favorite books on personalized recommendation shelves. Readers enjoy a good book recommendation from a trusted reader. Work with your librarian to create a shelf of your personal book recommendations, and showcase books that you enjoy and recommend to your students and staff. Encourage other staff members to create recommendation shelves too. Don’t forget intervention specialists, extracurricular teachers, and support staff who interact with students on a regular basis. Children need reading role models everywhere!

- **Promote books during morning announcements.** Invite students to talk about the books they are reading by presenting brief book commercials during daily announcements. Students enjoy appearing on the announcements and hearing their friends or siblings. Post book titles shared during announcements on the school website and in the office, or display these titles in the library. Share your own recommendations with students too. My students begged our principal to read *Babymouse*, their favorite graphic novel series, because they knew he would enjoy the books and share them on the announcements.

- **Add an “I am currently reading...” line to your email signature.** I began doing this at the beginning of the school year, and it has caught on with other colleagues. While answering that
flood of emails, you share book recommendations with colleagues inside and outside your building and reinforce how much reading matters to you and your school.

- **Increase book access in common areas of the school.** Keep a basket of books in your office, the nurse’s office, and the main office waiting area. Invite parents and children to browse these books and borrow them. Encourage students who are waiting to speak with you or visit the nurse to read. Display books in the hallways and cafeteria. Ask your PTA or PTO to donate books for these areas or start a book drive.

- **Dedicate budget money for books.** Most teachers who create robust classroom libraries spend their own money to purchase books. Your students’ access to books should never depend on the generosity or personal resources of your staff. As school budgets tighten, allocate as much money as you can to increasing book access for your students. Critically evaluate requests for test-prep materials and extras and purchase library and classroom books instead, which research proves result in student achievement gains.

These easy-to-implement suggestions can boost your school’s reading culture. Enjoy getting to know your students as readers and engage in reading relationships with them. Validate your students and staff and join them in a vibrant reading community that includes you as the lead reader.