

Pulse column:

Reading is one of the foundations of learning and study after study proves that students who enjoy reading do much better academically. In fact, research has consistently shown an irrefutable connection between reading and academic success.

Yet, maybe because it seems like such a basic skill, reading is often overlooked. Unfortunately, many parents are uncertain how to encourage their school-aged child to read. To be successful, students need to read outside of the classroom, to find books that capture their attention and imagination and that they enjoy, while learning.

One of the easiest ways to build this skill is through time spent reading as the National Reading Panel concludes, "There is ample evidence that one of the major differences between poor and good readers is the difference in the quantity of total time they spend reading."

For some, it is a matter of time, while for other children it may be that books simply aren't readily available in the home. Lakota's informal literacy initiatives help address that gap, making books available to students outside of the classroom and incorporating parental involvement.

These new – and quickly expanding – initiatives are designed to inspire families to support and encourage their children, helping instill in them a love of reading. We launched a pilot program earlier this year with our "Barber Shop, Books and Boys" in which young male students and adult male role models read books at a local barbershop. This program has proven popular with both the young students and the community volunteers who serve as role models.

A second option, "Literacy at the Laundromat," is now live, ensuring kids have books to read while waiting at the laundromat. Thanks to Scholastic Books, which donated child-friendly books covering a wide range of topics, there is now a small library at Splash & Dash Coin Laundry, located at 7770 Cincinnati-Dayton Road, West Chester.

Students can read a book while they wait, even opting to take the book home with them to finish. Then, the student writes a brief summary, has a parent or guardian sign the pager and takes it to school where they receive a small prize.

While these informal literacy programs can't take the place of academic learning, they can bolster that classroom work, helping students strengthen their reading skills and, in turn, overall academic success. By next fall, we hope to have 20 or so free book sites throughout the area, all with the purpose of encouraging kids – and their parents – to read.

For more information about these programs and how you can support them, either with your time or with your donations, contact Angie Brown at [angie.brown@lakotaonline.com](mailto:angie.brown@lakotaonline.com) or (513) 557-8868.