

## Literacy Nights engage parents, students

Like many elementary schools, Horizon Science Academy (HSA) Elementary in Columbus includes improving student literacy among its academic goals. Beyond the state's accountability system, including a special focus on K-3 literacy, improving students' reading skills is a high priority at the school given the unique population it serves, with more than 40 percent of students learning English as a second language (ESL).

"Last year, we created a plan to support our literacy goals," explained the school's principal, Jessica Shoaf. "One of the initiatives is hosting Literacy Night events to engage students and their parents."



The school's plan calls for monthly Literacy Nights – two school-wide events (one in the Fall and another in the Spring), and grade-level specific events throughout the year.

Response to the first two events held this school year has been impressive, with about 140 students and 100 parents participating in the most recent Literacy Night.

It's a simple, but effective, formula for engaging students and parents: a teacher reads a book to the entire group, then all participants are invited to take part in fun activities linked to the story.

The first event of the year featured *Rosie Revere, Engineer* – a best selling book that tells the story of Rosie, a shy but creative and bright young girl who dreams of becoming an engineer. But she must first learn to celebrate failure in pursuing her passion with persistence.

Students and their parents heard Rosie's story before designing hats made from tin foil, making boats out of cheese, and creating airplanes from tree seeds.

The second event for all the school's second- through fifth-grade students featured the bestseller, *Ada Twist, Scientist*. Parents and students enjoyed the story of the endlessly curious Ada, who learns the value of thinking her way through problems when her experiments don't go as planned.

In addition to fun activities planned by Shoaf and her team (including making slime, which was a big hit!), representatives of Columbus Metropolitan Library were on hand to sign students and parents up for library cards. The school provided information on Title I support services available to students, and a tutoring vendor promoted its services.

"We stress the importance of making sure students read at home," Shoaf said. "And we teach parents to ask their kids questions about the books they're reading. Because we want to make sure students have access to books at home, we provide each student with a free book – which they're really excited about – at our grade-specific Literacy Nights."

Although the primary purpose of the events is to support student literacy, parents of the school's many ESL students benefit, as well. Literacy Nights represent a unique opportunity for the parents of ESL students to engage in an important educational activity that may also serve to improve their mastery of the English language.

"We're pleased with the turnout for our first two events and expect participation to increase over time," Shoaf said. "The combination of inspiring stories, fun activities and creative snacks seems to be a winning formula!"