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A NYC Reads Family Partnership Toolkit



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The Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University develops the next generation of leaders while supporting the education sector in transforming public school systems into learner-centered organizations that provide each and every student exceptional learning experiences. Since its founding in 2011, CPRL has developed close to 750 leaders from dozens of law, business, education, policy, and data science graduate programs, and provided research, policy, and legal expertise to hundreds of school systems and education organizations across the U.S. and internationally.

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Acknowledgements

This toolkit would not have been possible without the contributions, insights, and generosity of school communities, district communities, curriculum developers, professional learning providers, and other stakeholders who opened their doors, shared their effective practices, and offered recommendations and feedback to inform this work. Thank you so much.

Advocates for Children of New York, Center for Student Achievement Solutions, Great Minds, HMH Into Reading, Leading Educators, NYCPS District 12, NYCPS District 14, NYCPS District 20, NYCPS District 25, NYCPS Literacy Advisory Council, NYCPS Office of Library Services, PS 24Q Andrew Jackson Elementary School, PS 79 The Francis Lewis School, PS 165Q Edith K. Bergtraum, PS 184Q Flushing Manor, PS 380 John Wayne Elementary School, PS 458 Samara Community School, The Robin Hood Learning + Technology Fund, Springboard Collaborative, Teaching Lab, Teaching Matters



Introduction

Students' academic and personal outcomes are stronger when educators and families work together as partners. With the NYC Reads initiative, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) is doubling down on what Chancellor Banks called schools' key promise to families: to teach their children how to read. Fulfilling that promise starts with intentional efforts to strengthen partnerships with families.

To support schools in fostering meaningful family-school partnerships around literacy and NYC Reads, the Columbia University Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) has partnered with NYCPS and the Robin Hood Learning + Technology Fund to develop this NYC Reads Family Partnership Toolkit. Co-created with district- and school-level stakeholders in Phase 1 of NYC Reads (who began implementing NYC Reads during the 2023-24 school year), professional learning providers, curriculum developers, and family-facing community-based organizations, this toolkit provides schools with guidance on how to design and implement an NYC Reads family partnership strategy. And, instead of asking schools to start from scratch, it provides samples and templates, based on effective practices from Phase 1, that schools can customize to meet their unique community needs.

In other words, this toolkit provides resources to help schools build, carry out, and continuously improve a family-school partnership strategy around literacy and NYC Reads.



In addition to generously sharing their practices, Phase 1 stakeholders conveyed a few key messages:

1 Educators are responsible for reading instruction

Partnering with families on NYC Reads **does not mean that we expect families to teach their children to read.** Understanding the Science of Reading, studying data to plan targeted instruction, and leading engaging literacy lessons is **our responsibility as educators.**

2 All families want to support their children's learning

All families, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or level of education, **can and want to participate in their children's literacy learning.** Moreover, all families have **essential knowledge** about their children that educators need to provide students with strong instruction.

3 One size won't fit all families

One size won't fit all. Some families may be eager to explore the nuts and bolts of the Science of Reading. Others may want to foster a love of reading through a nightly reading, audiobook, or conversation ritual in their home language. Still others will want to share key insights and observations about their children's progress with educators to help educators tailor instruction. All of these approaches (and many, many others!) are valuable and valid contributions to students' literacy learning.

4 Families know best what they want and need

It is our job, as educators, to **establish two-way communication** with families that allows us to **learn about children's needs and strengths** to improve our instruction and **provide the guidance, opportunities, and resources families want** to support their children's reading development.

5 Continuous learning will help us do better over time

It's also our job to **learn alongside families about how it's going, adjust course where needed, and strive to keep doing better.**

This toolkit can help.

Sample Strategy and Roadmap with Embedded Resources

In many cases, family-school partnership happens naturally. Individual teachers, principals, or family coordinators make connections with families that blossom into meaningful partnerships. However, to maximize impact and ensure that the benefits associated with family-school partnership equitably reach all students, your approach to NYC Reads family partnership—like any other strategic effort—requires intentional planning and doing.

But, there's no need to start from scratch. Leveraging CPRL's Evolutionary Learning Toolkit and Leading Through Learning Playbook, we provide a sample strategy and strategic month-by-month roadmap that you can customize, try out, and improve over time in order to forge impactful family partnerships around NYC Reads. Within the roadmap, you'll find ~50 customizable resources (e.g., family communications, event guides, workshop slide decks, and strategic planning tools to help you plan and measure impact).



Sample Strategy

The strategy below takes the form of a logic model (i.e., a series of action steps that we expect to logically lead to a set of interim and longer term outcomes). This strategy can be used “as is,” but ideally, you will customize it to meet the needs of your community.

If schools...



R

Reach, Relate, & Respond

Facilitate two-way, consistent communication and learning between educators and families



E

Equip & Empower

Provide families with varied, asset-based opportunities to build toolboxes of supports for their children as readers



A

Appreciate & Applaud

Celebrate literacy as a source of joy and cultural continuity



D

Do Better, Over Time

Continuously learn about how family partnership efforts are working and how they can be improved

Then...

Educators and families will strengthen their relationships, as well as expand and deepen one another's knowledge of how to support children as readers

As a community, educators, families, and students will promote reading, joy, culture, and ongoing learning—in and out of the classroom

As a result...

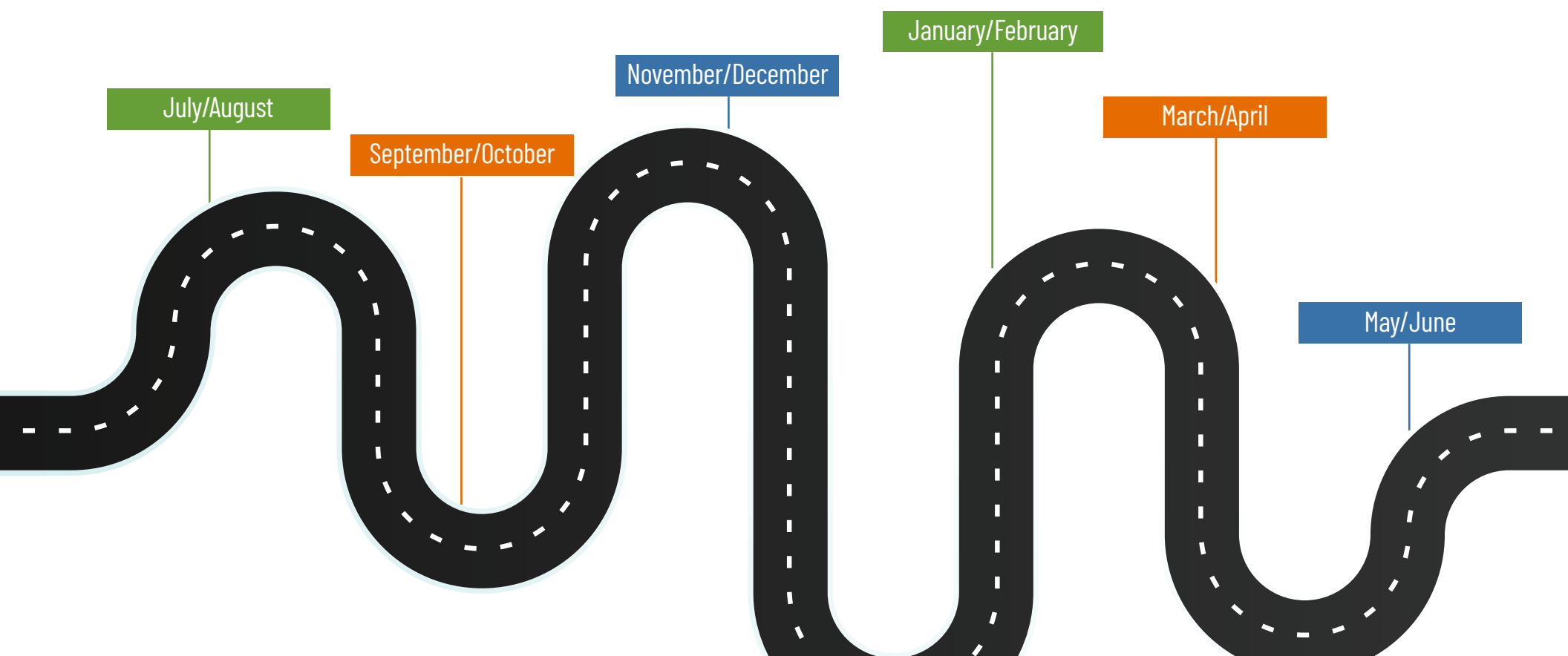
All NYCPS children will learn to read in ever-expanding, joyful, responsive literacy environments that include home, school, and community.



Sample Strategic Roadmap with Embedded Resources and Tools

The roadmap below shows how the strategy's action steps might play out over the course of an academic year. We embed the tools you'll need to take each action step throughout. The roadmap, resources, and tools can be used as they are, but ideally, you will customize them to meet the needs of your community.

This toolkit provides an abundance of resources; not all schools will have capacity to implement everything below. All of the resources below are designed to be implemented with minimal budget and staff capacity, but we've labeled a set of activities and communications that we recommend schools prioritize with two asterisks ().**



July/August (or earlier)



R

School leaders co-construct the community's "why" behind their NYC Reads efforts in a community town hall. ([Community town hall slide deck here](#))



E

School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance: "Talk, Talk, Talk with Your Child." ([Family guidance here](#))

Keep it Accessible. Where feasible, connect with families using a variety of media. Of course, translate materials into the languages families speak and read. Where possible, incorporate oral communication (e.g., videos) for families who are less comfortable with written language.



A

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Welcome Back Book Giveaway." ([Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here](#))



D

School leaders draft their school's NYC Reads family partnership strategy, roadmap, and plans for measuring their progress and impact, in partnership with educators and families (e.g., with their broader School Leadership Team or SLT). ([Strategic planning guidance here](#); [sample measurement plan here](#))

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback. ([Exit ticket here](#))

September/October



****Teachers/parent coordinators conduct welcome calls to learn about families' needs, hopes, and goals for their children as readers and to gather their advice on how to best support their children as readers.**
([Teacher Guidance here](#))

School leaders update school website with information on NYC Reads' purpose and components.
([Website copy here](#))



****School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance: "Finding Free, Fun Books (or Audiobooks!) for Your Child."** ([Family guidance here](#))

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Sora Sign Up."
([Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here](#))

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Library Card Sign Up."
([Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here](#))

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop on simple ways to strengthen literacy in daily life.
([Family Micro-Workshop Slide deck here](#))

****School leaders/teachers distribute curriculum-specific family letters for each curriculum module.**
([See your curriculum website or ask your professional learning provider for these resources.](#))



****School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.**
([School-wide event guide here](#))

Teachers implement "Hispanic Authors Celebration."
([Classroom-level event guide here](#))

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "October Literary Parade."
([School-wide event guide here](#))



****School leaders disseminate a family needs assessment survey via email and/or phone to learn about families' strengths and the supports they want as partners in their children's literacy learning.**
([Strategic planning guidance with survey questions here](#))

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback.
([Exit ticket here](#))

November/December



****Teachers share knowledge of students' needs and progress during family conferences and explore strategies for strengthening their skills with families.**

[\(Teacher guidance here\)](#)

Families share knowledge of students' needs and progress during family conferences and explore strategies for strengthening their skills with teachers.

[\(Family guidance here\)](#)



****School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance "How We Understand Your Child's Reading Progress."**

[\(Family guidance here\)](#)

****School leaders share "I'm Concerned About My Child's Reading Progress: How Can I Get More Support?"**

[\(Family guidance here\)](#)

School leaders implement "The Science of Reading: Easy Moves to Try at Home" family micro-workshop.

[\(Slide deck here\)](#)

****School leaders/teachers distribute curriculum-specific family letters for each curriculum module.**

[\(See your curriculum website or ask your professional learning provider for these resources.\)](#)



****School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.**

[\(School-wide event guide here\)](#)

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Native American Authors Celebration."

[\(Classroom-level event guide here\)](#)

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Winter Wonderland and Reading Contest Kick off" holiday event.

[\(School-wide event guide here\)](#)

School leaders share a reminder/flier for Reading Spirit Week (for post-December break).

[\(Flier here\)](#)



School leaders, along with families, study needs assessment data and adapt strategy, as appropriate.

[\(Data analysis protocol here\)](#)

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback.

[\(Exit ticket here\)](#)

January/February



Teachers/Parent Coordinators conduct pre- or post-December break calls, reminding families of the start date for the spring semester and the “Reading Spirit Week” that will take place.
([Call script here](#))



School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop on digital tools to support reading.
([Slide deck here](#))

Parent Coordinators/Librarians conduct a brainstorm session with families (e.g., with Parent Teacher Association) to explore how PTA might support NYC Reads.
([Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here](#))

**School leaders/teachers distribute curriculum-specific family letters for each curriculum module.
([See your curriculum website or ask your professional learning provider for these resources.](#))



**School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.
([School-wide event guide here](#))

Parent Coordinators/Librarians implement “Reading Spirit Week” to encourage children to return to school immediately after break.
([School-wide event guide here](#))

**Parent Coordinators/Librarians implement “World Read Aloud Day” event.
([School-wide event guide here](#))

Parent Coordinators/Librarians implement “Black Authors Reading Celebration” for Black History Month
([Classroom-level event guide here](#))



School leaders share NYC Reads family partnership data in a community town hall and ask families for support on how to respond.
([Slide deck here](#))

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback.
([Exit ticket here](#))

March/April


R

****Teachers share knowledge of students' needs and progress during family conferences and explore strategies for strengthening students' skills with families.**

(Teacher guidance here)

Families share knowledge of students' needs and progress during family conferences and explore strategies for strengthening students' skills with teachers.

(Family guidance here)


E

****School leaders disseminate guidance on free local summer literacy events/community resources (e.g., Summer Rising).**

(Family guidance here)

School leaders/teachers distribute guidance on how to keep reading over school breaks.

(Family guidance here)

****School leaders/teachers distribute curriculum-specific family letters for each curriculum module.**

(See your curriculum website or ask your professional learning provider to access these resources.)


A

****School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.**

(School-wide event guide here)

Teachers/Parent Coordinators/Librarians implement "Arab American Authors Celebration."

(Classroom-level event guide here)


D

School leaders disseminate a family feedback survey to learn about families' experiences with NYC Reads.

(Survey questions here)

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback.

(Exit ticket here)

May/June



****Teachers and families complete a reading progress reflection and goal-setting document via email, ClassDojo, or phone.**
(Family guidance here)



****School leaders/teachers distribute curriculum-specific family letters for each curriculum module.**
(See your curriculum website or ask your professional learning provider to access these resources.)



****School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.**
(School-wide event guide here)

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "AAPI Authors Celebration."
(Classroom-level event guide here)

Parent coordinators/librarians implement "Jewish American Authors Celebration."
(Classroom-level event guide here)



School leaders study feedback survey data and adapt strategy for the coming year.
(Data analysis protocol here)

School leaders share feedback survey data in a community town hall, identifying how they plan to respond.
(Slide deck here)

School leaders disseminate a family exit ticket at each event or activity to gather quick feedback.
(Exit ticket here)

Conclusion

As noted above, this toolkit was created in partnership with Phase 1 NYC Reads districts, schools, and other stakeholders that have proactively partnered with families around reading—testing out a variety of approaches. With NYC Reads as a unifying force, NYCPS districts and schools are uniquely positioned to exchange insights, troubleshoot challenges, and elevate effective practices, fostering ever-stronger educator-family partnerships. As you embark on your own path toward NYC Reads family partnership, strive to learn alongside others pursuing the same work. And, when you get something right, spread the word.



