Elementary School • September 2026

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Orange County Public Schools
Title I

Kick off the school year by establishing evidence-based reading habits

A new school year is the perfect time to build a daily reading routine. By using habits that align with how the brain naturally learns, you can help your child grow into a more confident and capable reader. To support your child's reading progress:

- **Establish a consistent time** for reading when your child is most alert. Consistency helps your child's brain store new words so they become easy to recognize over time.
- **Build knowledge and meaning.** Talk about the story. Ask, "Why did the character do that?" This bridges the gap between decoding (saying the words) and comprehension (understanding the message).
- **Reread favorites.** Hearing a story multiple times builds fluency, helping your child recognize word patterns faster and read with more confidence.
- **Model fluency.** Read aloud. Listen to audiobooks. Hearing expressive readers helps your child learn the rhythm of language.

Explore variety at the public library

Frequent library trips make it easy to keep your home stocked with a wide range of reading materials. This variety is key to building the background knowledge and vocabulary your child needs to become a skilled reader.

Explore the library together and check out:

- **Nonfiction and biographies.** These build real-world knowledge and specialized vocabulary.
- **Poetry.** Rhyme and rhythm help the brain process the sounds within words.
- **Challenge books.** Reading a difficult book together introduces sophisticated new words and ideas.
- **Graphic novels.** These use both words and art to help readers see the "big picture" and build comprehension.

Turn your fridge into a word gallery

Is your refrigerator already covered in photos and artwork? Why not add some words to the mix? Try adding these items to help your child learn:

- **Letter magnets** so your child can practice spelling.
- **A calendar** to help your child learn the days of the week.
- **Lists,** like grocery lists or weekly menus, to show everyday uses of writing.
- **A "word of the day"** to talk about and use together in conversation.

Design a cozy reading corner

Make reading irresistible by setting up a special spot just for reading. You don't need much room—just include:

- **A basket or shelf** with a selection of exciting books.
- **Comfortable seating.** Try a soft chair or a stack of pillows.
- **Bright lighting** to make reading easy on the eyes!

Ask questions to help your child choose the right book

Learning how to choose a book is an important step for readers. When deciding on a book to read, ask your child these questions:

- **Does the title sound interesting?**
- **Is the text easy to read?** Do you know most of the words on the first page?
- **Do you like the pictures?**
- **Are you "hooked"** after reading just the first few lines?

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Lead by example to raise a lifelong reader

Children who see family members reading are often more motivated to pick up a book themselves. To show your child that reading is both informative and fun:

- **Be visible.** Let your child see you reading every single day.
- **Share your "why."** Tell your child if you are reading to learn something new, double-check a fact or simply for enjoyment.
- **Spark interest.** Share an exciting or funny part of your book to encourage your child to read more.
- **Model habits.** Use your library card to check out books for yourself during every visit with your child.
- **Give books as gifts.** Show your child that books are special by giving them as gifts.

Get creative with post-reading activities

The joy of a great story doesn't have to end at the final page! You can keep the magic alive and deepen your child's connection to the story with these creative activities:

- **Get into character.** Ask your child to perform a favorite dialogue or scenes out loud to practice expression and tone.
- **Map the world.** Encourage your child to draw a detailed map of where the story takes place to help visualize the setting.
- **Design costumes.** Have your child sketch outfits that reflect each character's unique personality and style.
- **Host a character dinner.** Plan a special menu featuring foods the characters would actually enjoy based on clues from the book.

Q: School just started, and I'm already worried about my child's reading skills. Is it too soon to contact the teacher?

A: No! The sooner reading struggles are identified, the better. The teacher is still getting to know your child, so your perspective is especially helpful. Working together gives your child the best chance for success. Let the teacher know about your concerns and be sure to ask what you can do to support your young readier at home.

Hunt for big words

Don't toss that junk mail! Grab a highlighter and turn a flyer into a word hunt.

Ask your child to highlight the longest words on the page. To make these big words less intimidating, have your child draw a vertical line between each syllable. This practice strengthens decoding skills by helping your child tackle complex words piece by piece.

For lower elementary readers:

- ***Turtle's Race with Beaver*** by Joseph and James Bruchac. Turtle burrows deep into the pond when winter comes. When she resurfaces, she finds that Beaver has moved in, and the pond looks different.
- ***The Noisy Paint Box*** by Barb Rosenstock. When Vasya Kandinsky got his first set of paints, he painted along to the music and sounds of the city.

For upper elementary readers:

- ***The Universe of Fair*** by Leslie Bulion. Miller wants to explore the town fair by himself. However, he finds that responsibility is much more than he bargained for.
- ***For the Love of Autumn*** by Patricia Polacco. Danielle has a kitten named Autumn. When Autumn runs away, Danielle's students work together to help her find her beloved cat.

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