

## FAMILY HOMEWORK NIGHT BEST PRACTICES

These best practices come from lessons we've learned from our 8 week pilot.

### GENERAL BEST PRACTICES:

- One church hosts every week. Having a consistent location is helpful.
- Target children in grades K-3 because of the Mayor's Read By Fourth Program that the city has launched. [readby4th.org](http://readby4th.org)
- Buy in from the principal and or teachers makes a difference in getting families to come. One way we got to know the school and principal is through volunteering as a tutor or helper in the school prior to launching Family Homework Night.
- Advertise for FHN at Back to School Night. We attended back to school night. We had a table with flyers and a sampling of books. The principal even gave us 5 minutes to share with the audience of parents and teachers about our program.
- Set out a specific number of weeks the program will run.
- No FHN between Thanksgiving and Christmas break.

### DINNER BEST PRACTICES:

- Before the program begins each church signs up for designated weeks to bring all of the meal for their specific night.
- Have the meal ready to serve at the start time; kids don't do well waiting around for dinner.
- Serve dinner within 15 minutes of opening the doors. We found that the longer the kids sit around, the more trouble they can get into.
- Do not offer juice or soda, just milk or water.
- Allow 20-25 minutes for dinner.
- Have designated servers to serve the meal.
- Have the team who served the meal also clean up. While the team is cleaning up, begin your program of reading with the kids.
- NO DESSERT! If you provide dessert after dinner the kids will not be able to sit still for the next 30 minutes to read books. If you really want to offer dessert, you can send it along with them as they leave. However do keep it in mind it may be close to bed time.

### BOOKS BEST PRACTICES:

- Have a library in place before the first night of Family Homework Night. (see photo)
- Have a system for your library of books.
- The storage bins pictured are from Ikea and they were \$1.50 each.
- Have a large range of books from board books (for babies) up to chapter books like the Magic Tree House series. (see book list at [familyhomeworknight.org/serve-with-us](http://familyhomeworknight.org/serve-with-us))
- Focus on having many easy reader/Level 1 books; at least 30-40.
- Choose books to fit the demographic of



children you are serving. (In our pilot we served a school that is 99% African American and our book choosing reflects that.)

- Choose books that depict children of the race you are serving accomplishing great things.
- If you are serving a school with a 70% poverty rate then you can buy books discounted from [fbmarketplace.org](http://fbmarketplace.org). You can find your school's rate from the School District website -> School Profile -> Enrollment

### **VOLUNTEER BEST PRACTICES:**

- Everyone volunteering is required to have the following clearances:
  - Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP)
  - Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services (Child Abuse).
  - Additionally, a fingerprint based federal criminal history (FBI) submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent is required IF the volunteer has lived outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the last 10 years.
    - The PSP clearance is free.
    - The Child Abuse clearance is free.
    - The FBI clearance costs \$21.35 through the Department of Human Services.
- Here is a link to get started <https://www.familyhomeworknight.org/serve-with-us.html>
- Collect clearances before the first night of FHN. Also be sure to give volunteers enough time to get these done.
- Collect cell numbers of each volunteer to communicate last minute changes
- Consistent volunteers is important for the kids for the following reasons:
  - It builds trust between the child and the volunteer.
  - The volunteer gets to know the child's reading level and can help them advance better as a reader.
- Take about 10 minutes before the first FHN starts for the volunteers to get acquainted with your library system and the type/level of books you have. This way volunteers can better assist the children in picking out books.
- Volunteers should pair up with the same kids each week.
- Allow the child to read to the volunteer as much as possible.
- Whenever possible, have enough volunteers to pair one-on-one with a child
- Another source of volunteers could be older kids from their school

### **HELPFUL TIPS READING W/ KIDS:**

- Ask questions about what they see/read
- Before the chapter books is finished, ask "What do you think will happen?"
- Help them sound out words, don't always just read it for them if they don't initially know the word.
- Allowing a child to master an easy book builds confidence as a reader.
- Choose books that interest them. (Most times let the child select the book, but guide them)

- More robust guides are at: <https://www.familyhomeworknight.org/additional-resources.html>

### **THE PROGRAM:**

- Take attendance (including their grade) each week.
- Provide name tags and a sharpie each week.
- After the 1st week, allow kids to choose a book to take home. Helps them spread the word of the program and makes them excited to come back.
- Take a picture of each child with their book so you can re-order those popular titles.
- End when you said you would end. Sometimes kids will want to keep reading, but end on time.
- Half way though the allotted weeks, allow kids to take another book home. We replaced these books, but it is your choice.
- Last week: Celebration w/ cake and award certificates and gifts. Kids take home 2 books. Consider having goody bags with fun and practical stuff.
- Pinterest has free templates of award certificates.
- Keep in mind when the sun will be setting during your sessions.
- Encourage parents that come to read with their children. This will help you end on time.
- If older siblings come, encourage them to pair up with a younger student to read

### **IDEAS WE MAY TRY NEXT TIME:**

- A group game between dinner and reading, adding an element of fun and community
- Take attendance and have an award for coming a certain number of weeks (like a 76ers sweatshirt)
- Incorporating a time to work on homework or practice math flashcards