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Spread the Word

A NYC Reads Family Partnership Toolkit

NYC Reads

CPRL | Center for Public Research and Leadership

Columbia University in the City of New York

About CPRL

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.

Learn more at cprl.law.columbia.edu

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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 schools' key promise to families: to teach their children how to read. Fulfilling that promise starts with intentional efforts to strengthen partnerships with families focused on literacy.

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 communities, professional learning providers, curriculum developers, and family-facing community-based organizations, this toolkit provides districts and schools with guidance on how to design and implement a NYC Reads family partnership strategy. And, instead of asking schools to start from scratch, it provides samples and templates, based on effective practices from across the system. School leaders, parent coordinators, teachers, librarians, parent leaders, or other community stakeholders (e.g., community-based organizations that support schools) can customize these to meet their unique needs.

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

In addition to generously sharing their practices, 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 support their children's learning

All families, regardless of race, home language, socioeconomic status, or level of education, **can, want to, and do 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 audiobook or conversation ritual in their home language. Still others will want to share key insights and observations about their children's progress with teachers to help them tailor instruction. All of these approaches (and many others!) are valuable and valid contributions to students' literacy learning.

4 Family-school learning is a two-way street

It is our job, as educators, to **establish two-way communication** with families (regardless of families' home language) 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, school leaders, parent coordinators, or parent leaders make connections with families that blossom into partnerships. However, to maximize impact and ensure that the benefits associated with family-school partnership 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 40+ customizable resources (e.g., family communications, event guides, slide decks, and strategic planning tools to help you plan and measure impact). And, ideally, you will not work alone. Whether you are a principal, parent coordinator, teacher, parent leader, or other community member, it will take a team to drive these efforts. See Build, Test, Measure, and Improve Your Strategy on the July/August portion of the roadmap (page 9) for guidance on activating your team.

Sample Strategy

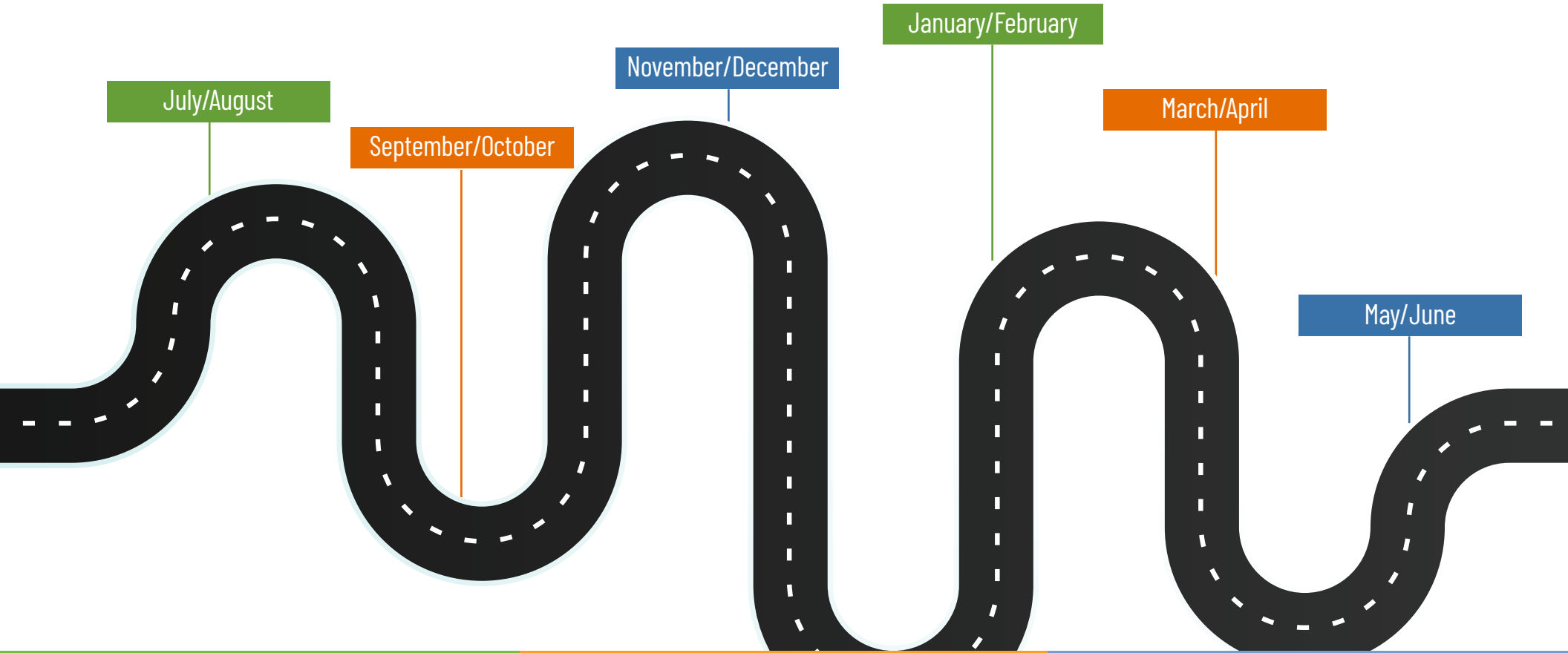
The strategy below takes the form of a logic model (i.e., a series of action steps that we expect to logically lead to a set of interim and longer term outcomes). This strategy can be used "as is," but you can customize it to meet the needs of your community.

If schools...	Then...	As a result...
R Reach, Relate, & Respond Facilitate two-way, consistent communication and learning between educators and families	Educators and families will strengthen their relationships, as well as expand and deepen one another's knowledge of how to support children's literacy As a community, educators, families, and students will promote reading, multilingualism, culture, and ongoing learning—in and out of the classroom	All NYCPS children will learn to read in ever-expanding, responsive literacy environments that include home, school, and community
E Equip & Empower Provide families with varied, asset-based toolboxes of literacy supports for their children		
A Appreciate & Applaud Celebrate literacy as a source of joy, multilingualism, and cultural continuity		
D Do Better, Over Time Continuously learn about how family partnership efforts are working and how they can be improved		

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 (**). Some resources are specific to K-5 schools or 6-8 schools. We note where this is the case.



July/August (or earlier)

Resources included for the months of July/August can be repurposed for September/October (or other months) depending on individual school teams' summer schedules.

R

School leaders co-construct the community's "why" behind their NYC Reads efforts in a community town hall, "NYC Reads: The What and the Why."
(K-5 slide deck here) (6-12 slide deck here)

E

School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance focused on talking as a form of literacy.
(K-5 family guidance here) (6-12 family guidance here)

School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance focused on engaging with children as they read or listen to books.
(K-5 family guidance here) (6-12 family guidance here)

Keep it Accessible. Where feasible, connect with families using varied media. Where possible, incorporate oral communication (e.g., videos). Some families prefer it. The Office of Language Access can help with interpretation and translation needs.

A

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

D

With teams of stakeholders (e.g., the School Leadership Team/SLT), school leaders customize their school's NYC Reads family partnership strategy and roadmap, using "Build, Test, Measure, and Improve Your Strategy."
(Strategic planning guidance here)

With teams of stakeholders, school leaders customize a plan for measuring their NYC Reads family partnership efforts, using "Measurement Plan and Tools for Gathering Data."
(Strategic planning guidance here)

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

September/October

R

**Teachers/parent coordinators conduct calls (or other communications) to learn about families' needs and goals for their children and to gather advice on how to support their children using the "Welcome Back Phone Call Protocol."
(Educator Guidance here)

School leaders update their school websites with information on NYC Reads' purpose and components, using "NYC Reads School Website Copy."
(Website copy here)

Parent coordinators/parent leaders conduct a brainstorm with families (e.g., with the Parent Teacher Association) to gather feedback on planned NYC Reads family partnership efforts and to explore how the PTA might support.
(Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here)

E

**School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance to help families find free books students will enjoy. (K-5 family guidance here) (6-12 family guidance here)

Parent coordinators/librarians implement a digital library sign up, "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 at-home literacy routines. (K-5 slide deck here) (6-12 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.)

A

**School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.
(K-5 school-wide event guide here) (6-12 school-wide event guide here)

Teachers implement classroom-level celebration for Hispanic Heritage Month.
(K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 classroom-level event guide here)

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

Parent coordinators/librarians celebrate families' cultural backgrounds through oral storytelling at the "Sharing Family and Staff Stories" event.
(Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here)

D

**School leaders disseminate a family needs assessment survey digitally and/or via phone to learn about families' strengths and the supports they want as partners in their children's literacy learning.
(Survey questions here)

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

November/December

R

**Teachers share updates on students' needs and progress during conferences and explore strategies for strengthening their skills with families.
(K-5 educator guidance here) (6-12 educator guidance here)

Families share updates on students' needs and progress during conferences and explore strategies for strengthening their skills with teachers.
(Family guidance here)

E

**School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance to explain how teachers understand students' reading progress. (K-5 family guidance here) (6-12 family guidance here)

**School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance, "I'm Concerned About My Child's Reading Progress: How Can I Get More Support?"
(Family guidance here)

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop on how to support the literacy shifts at home.
(K-5 slide deck here) (6-12 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.)

A

**School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families.
(K-5 school-wide event guide here) (6-12 school-wide event guide here)

Teachers implement a classroom-level celebration for Native American Heritage Month. (K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 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)

D

With teams of stakeholders (e.g., the SLT), school leaders 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

R

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, using "Pre- or Post-December Break Phone Call Protocol." (Educator guidance here)

E

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop "NYC Reads: Supporting All Learners." (Slide deck here)

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop "Adolescent Literacy Challenges and How to Address Them." (6-12 slide deck here)

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop, "Digital Tools to Support Literacy." (Slide deck here)

School leaders/parent coordinators/librarians facilitate a family micro-workshop, "Literacy Learning in the Age of AI." (6-12 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.)

A

**School leaders implement ~monthly classroom visitation for families. (K-5 school-wide event guide here) (6-12 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." (School-wide event guide here)

Teachers implement a classroom-level celebration for Black History Month. (K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 classroom-level event guide here)

D

School leaders share NYC Reads family partnership data in a community town hall, "NYC Reads: Sharing and Acting on Your Feedback," and ask families for input on how to improve. (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 updates on students' needs and progress during conferences and explore strategies for strengthening their skills with families.
(K-5 educator guidance here) (6-12 educator guidance here)

Families share updates on students' needs and progress during conferences and explore strategies for strengthening students' skills with teachers.
(Family guidance here)

E

**School leaders disseminate family-facing guidance to support families in making their children's summer plans, "Free Ways to Keep Reading and Learning this Summer."
(Family guidance here)

Before spring break, school leaders disseminate family-facing guidance, "Keep Growing as a Reader Over School Breaks." (K-5 family guidance here) (6-8 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.
(K-5 school-wide event guide here) (6-12 school-wide event guide here)

Teachers implement a classroom-level celebration for Arab American History Month. (K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 classroom-level event guide here)

Parent coordinators/librarians celebrate families' cultural backgrounds by facilitating the "Family and Staff Recipe Exchange."
(Arrival/Dismissal/Event add-on guide here)

D

School leaders disseminate a family feedback survey digitally and/or via phone 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

R

**Teachers and families complete a reading progress reflection and goal-setting document, "Pre-Summer Reflection: Glows, Grows, and Goals," via email, ClassDojo, or phone (or other communication channel).
(Family guidance here)

E

**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.
(K-5 school-wide event guide here) (6-12 school-wide event guide here)

Teachers implement a classroom-level celebration for AAPI Heritage Month. (K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 classroom-level event guide here)

Teachers implement a classroom-level celebration for Jewish American Heritage Month. (K-5 classroom-level event guide here) (6-12 classroom-level event guide here)

D

With teams of stakeholders (e.g., the SLT), school leaders study NYC Reads family partnership data and adapt strategy for the coming year.
(Data analysis protocol here)

School leaders share NYC Reads family partnership data in a community town hall, "NYC Reads: Sharing and Acting on Your Feedback," and ask families for input on how to improve.
(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 NYC Reads districts, schools, and other stakeholders that have proactively partnered with families around literacy—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 family-school partnerships. As you embark on your own path toward NYC Reads family partnerships, strive to learn alongside others pursuing the same work. And, when you get something right, spread the word.

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