

The Before Bed Box

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(for sons)

“Before your son goes to sleep, there are things that he should know.
So when you tuck him in his bed, you’ll bump me with your toe.
Please pull me out and I’ll be there to help educate your child.
You’ll find by using me each day will make your time worthwhile.
There are ABC’s, 123’s, and sight words to review.
Of course it is always fun to read a special book or two.
Under your son’s bed, I’ll be waiting patiently.
To help your child become, the best that he can be!
PLEASE USE ME!”

(for daughters)

“Before your daughter goes to sleep, there are things that she should know.
So when you tuck her in her bed, you’ll bump me with your toe.
Please pull me out and I’ll be there to help educate your child.
You’ll find by using me each day will make your time worthwhile.
There are ABC’s, 123’s, and sight words to review.
Of course it is always fun to read a special book or two.
Under your daughter’s bed, I’ll be waiting patiently.
To help your child become, the best that she can be!
PLEASE USE ME!”

Background

The Indiana Mathematics Initiative (IMI), a six-year project funded by the National Science Foundation, focused on mathematics reform in nine, high-needs school districts in Central and Northern Indiana. As in many urban settings, students in the IMI districts often enter the classroom with limited knowledge of the “outside” world. Many live in poverty and, with a growing number of Hispanic immigrants in the region, it is not unusual for students to arrive with little to no skill in English.

In Indiana, student success is measured by ISTEP+ assessments of grade-level standards. On these tests, the performance of urban students often lags behind that of non-urban students. In the most recent ISTEP+ mathematics assessment, for instance, the percentage of black, Hispanic, and free-and-reduced lunch students with passing scores was considerably lower than statewide

percentages (see Table 1). As a teacher, it is easy to blame students’ performance on their academic preparation or social circumstances. Yet, simply placing the blame on “circumstances” does little to alter students’ success. The bottom line is that everyone — teachers, administrators, parents, politicians, and students — needs to work together to solve this educational crisis.

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8
All Students	70	77	74
White	75	81	80
Black	51	57	46
Hispanic	54	65	58
Free/Reduced Lunch	59	66	59

Table 1.

Percentage of students passing the 2007 ISTEP+ Mathematics Assessment
 (http://www.doe.in.gov/istep/2007/Data/state_disag_public.xls)

To support its reform efforts, the IMI emphasized outreach to parents and the community. In keeping with these goals, I encourage parental involvement in my classroom. Yet, I also realize that the parents of many of my students do not feel comfortable in a school setting. Some were raised in homes that failed to value education and recall only negative school experiences. A growing number of parents speak little or no English and simply feel out of place in U.S. schools. With all of these factors in mind, I adopted a new approach to parental outreach — in addition to teaching my students, I strive to teach the parents of my students. More often than not, parents want their children to succeed in school, but don’t know how to help. It was up to me, therefore, to provide them with tools that can promote success.

The *Before Bed Box*, which supplements or replaces the traditional bedtime story, is an affordable and simple approach. By providing parents with a kit filled with educational opportunities, I reasoned, they could reinforce the same skills that are taught in school. During the 2006–07 school year, I decided to put my idea to the test. In the remainder of this article, I provide some details about the contents of the *Before Bed Box* and ideas for implementing the box in your classroom.

The Before Bed Box

The students in my district (Hammond City Schools) all receive a list of required supplies. To make the box a reality in my classroom, my initial action was to add a few inexpensive items to students’ supply list. These items included a plastic shoebox and two packages of index cards. The students brought these supplies to school at the beginning of the year and I set them aside. In September, I invited the students and their parents to come to an after-school workshop.

At the workshop, I created work stations with written directions. After a brief introduction, the parents and students set to work. One station contained paint, permanent markers, and stickers, so that the *Before Bed Boxes* could become personal pieces of artwork. A

second station focused on the construction of flashcards with numbers and shapes, whereas another introduced mathematics poems to help with number recognition, writing, and facility with money. Several tables allowed students and parents to play mathematics games and create games for their boxes. In essence, the workshop represented mathematics Game Night. In this instance, the “game” that was being created was a learning tool that would provide practice for each student.

In my kindergarten classroom, approximately half of my students are non-native (ESL) students. To assist these students and their parents, I made arrangements for our ESL teacher to attend the workshop. She guided the Spanish-speaking parents and answered their questions. While many are hesitant to enter an English-speaking school, they were truly excited to create the *Before Bed Box* with their children.

Despite my encouragement, not every student attended a *Before Bed Box* workshop. As a result, I was faced with a dilemma. Should I create a box for these students? After much thought, I decided against it. In order to positively impact a student’s education, parents and that student must take ownership of the box and its activities. If each student wasn’t able to create his or her own box, I reasoned, there was little chance that he or she would use it.

Throughout the school year, I sent additional materials to be added to the boxes. In addition, I also sent home *Before Bed Box* notes. If I observed a student struggling in an area, for instance, I would ask parents to work on a particular skill — utilizing the materials in the box. In this way, students received the individualized attention that they so desperately needed. The notes also provided me with an informal way to inform parents of their child’s progress.

As the end of the school year approached, I decided to turn the *Before Bed Boxes* into summer enrichment programs. Research has proven that many students lose skills during the long summer break. To prepare my students for first grade, therefore, I consulted with the first-grade teachers in my building and received a list of activities that they felt would be beneficial. My students and their parents were then invited to an end-of-year Mathematics Night, where they prepared materials that would allow them to retain their knowledge of kindergarten mathematics and jump start their learning in the next grade. In doing so, parents remained actively engaged in their children’s education.

Conclusions

It’s always gratifying to see one’s simple idea gain momentum. In my district, the *Before Bed Box* has evolved on a grander scale. My colleagues on the City of Hammond IMI Select Cadre, a team of experienced teacher leaders, embraced the *Before Bed Box* and have created one for each grade level. (The contents of sample boxes for a variety of grade levels are contained in the Appendix.) In fact, this project has become embedded in the school improvement plans of several Hammond elementary schools. It is my hope that the idea will spread beyond Hammond, and that the tool allows parents to become active partners in their children’s education.

Reference

Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). “The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review.” *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 227–68.

Appendix

Sample Kindergarten List

- *Everyday Mathematics (EM)* Home Books (set of 4 to be distributed through out the school year)
- Number Cards 0–30 (to practice number recognition)
- Number Writing Poems 0–10 (to help students print numbers correctly)
- Shape Cards (circle, square, triangle, rectangle, oval, and diamond)
- Wooden Cube (to remember the name of this 3 dimensional shape)
- Film Canister Money Holder (to keep a penny, nickel, dime, and quarter for coin recognition)
- Money Poems (to help teach the students the value of each coin)
- Deck of Playing Cards (to play the games Top It, Addition Top It, and Domino Addition)
- Dominoes (to play the Domino Addition Game)
- Number Line 0–20 (to play the game Monster Squeeze)
- Pair of Dice (to play the game High Roller)
- Number Grid (a grid with the numbers 0–110 to play the Number Grid Game)
- Paper Clock (to practice time on the hour and half hour)
- List of Math Vocabulary (one list for each of the eight sections)
- Monthly Calendars and teacher-generated questions (to practice calendar skills)
- Ruler (to practice measuring with a standard unit)

Sample First Grade List

- Summer Survival Kit
- Routines (Reference Folder)
- Directions for games
- Fact Triangles (addition and subtraction)
- Clock
- Dry Erase Marker
- Laminated Card Stock (slate)
- Hundred Grid
- Game Markers
- Numberline
- Name Tag (Commercial Kind with math components on it.)
- Fact Platter CD
- Film Cannisters
- Place Value Board
- Pencils
- Ruler
- Cardboard Shapes
- Ruler copied on overhead
- Deck of cards
- Calculator
- Vocabulary Cards "Ref. Ring"
- Scissors
- Pipe Cleaners/Straws
- Crayons

Sample Third Grade List

- Vocabulary Words and Measurement Tables (standard and personal)
- Fact Triangles (Addition and Subtraction and then Multiplication and Division)
- Place Value Booklets (whole numbers and decimals)
- Fact Platter for studying facts
- Dry erase board, marker, and eraser
- Ruler
- Tape Measure
- Money
- Clock
- Number Grid
- Calculator
- Deck or cards and directions for converting regular cards into EM cards
- Dice
- Fraction Cards (second semester)
- Array Bingo Cards
- Unit appropriate vocabulary and games

Sample Fifth Grade List

- *EM* Math Deck (on loan to be returned at the end of the year)
- Dice (regular, double, fraction, and dodecahedral)
- Game Markers
- Unifix Cubes (counters or fraction markers)
- White Board (sheet of paper in a plastic sleeve)
- Dry Erase Marker
- Eraser (1/4 piece of felt)
- Geometry template (on loan)
- Calculator (on loan)
- 4-Square Problem Solving Model (this is used to solve story problems/longer problems)
- Slide Ruler
- Grid Paper (Many uses, but for Chapter 9 used for model construction for Area/Volume or Coordinate Grids)
- Template on Acetate
- Protractor
- Ruler
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Deck of Playing Cards with conversion instructions
- Debits/Credit Cards
- Fraction Cards
- Fact Triangles
- Geometric Shapes (cut from fun foam)
- “Cheater” Chart
- Vocabulary
- Games
- Coordinate Grids with pos. & neg. numbers

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