

Starting a Birthday Books Project: A Step-by-Step Guide for Schools Working with a Community Partner

Starting and operating a Birthday Books Project is surprisingly easy and affordable! If your school partners with a community organization, you can even share the effort and save school funds. While schools and community partners can divide responsibilities however they choose, the most common method is this:

- The community partner buys the books and gives them to the school, and
- The school gives out the books to the students on their birthdays.

This document provides a step-by-step guide for the work of THE SCHOOL under that common role division.

NOTE: This guide is for schools *with* a community partner. **If your school plans to start a BBP *without* a community partner, please see our guide for Schools Starting a BBP Independently, separately linked on our website.**

The School's Role. With a community partner supplying the books, the school can focus on the important (and fun!) task of giving books to students. A simple system can allow each child to choose a gift book on their birthday, in an organized manner that supports school learning goals. These simple guidelines can help:

Designating a project coordinator. It's helpful to have one person who can 1) serve as the contact point with your community partner, 2) set up the BBP display area, 3) receive and put out new books as they are received, and, 4) most important, help students choose a book on their birthdays. Your project coordinator may be your media or literacy specialist, a family outreach staff member, or a front office staff member: whoever is most available and enthusiastic. Total time needed will be up to 3 hours to set up in the display area in advance, up to 5 hours over the year to maintain and restock the display area, and up to 1 hour per week to help students choose the birthday books.

Setting up the display area. A key element is a Birthday Books display area, which can be as small as a single bookcase dedicated to the project. Most schools place that display in the school's Front Office or in their Media Center, depending upon where it is most convenient to pass out the books and keep them safe. Books should be displayed so that they can be easily seen by students as they make their gift choice, with books for older readers on the top shelf and books for the youngest readers on the bottom shelf. Ideally, the display should be completed and stocked with books *before* school starts in the fall.



On page 2 is signage which you can print and post on each shelf of the display case. Many project coordinators add decoration to the area; although entirely optional, the creative flair of your school staff members can add excitement to the display and help celebrate literacy.



Giving out the Birthday Books. When school starts in the fall, begin the daily habit of giving out books on birthdays. Most schools announce the birthdays of children on the morning announcements (including weekend birthdays on Fridays), and invite the birthday children to proceed immediately to the Birthday Books area to receive a book. Your school's BBP project leader will be responsible for this process, but may delegate specific tasks. For example, the person who reads the morning announcements may announce children's birthdays, the teachers of the named students can direct them to the Birthday Books area, and a Front Office or Media Center staff member can assist them in choosing a book. Giving out the books is a special time for both the birthday students and the staff member who helps them select a book. Enjoy!

Summer birthdays (and other school breaks). Students with a birthday during the summer, winter and spring breaks are absolutely included! Plan to give out those Birthday Books to the students during the week before the break begins. Since that end-of-year giveaway for summer birthdays involves a large number of students, it's wise to plan ahead. The Project Leader of your community partner organization should provide you with any additional books you'll need to stock up in early May. You can help by doing a rough count of how many additional books you'll need and communicating that information by late April.

Staying in touch. Regular contact is crucial between you as the BBP Coordinator for your school and the volunteer who serves as the BBP Project Leader for your community partner organization. That communication helps you and your community partner to better serve your students. Feel free to ask any questions, and be sure to share any information that might be helpful. For example, you can see which books the kids love most, and telling your community partner can mean more great choices. And, of course, if you see students happily enjoying their gifts, it is so thoughtful to pass that joy along. **IMPORTANT:** If you switch positions or if your contact info changes, be sure to let that Coordinator know so that the project you've built together can stay strong.

Happy Birthday

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