

Blazing a Titan

A Reading Adventure at Shaler Area Elementary School

Shaler Area Elementary School's teachers, staff, administrators and parents have worked together to develop a unique, multidisciplinary program to promote reading, the essential skill for all academic success.



Submitted by the Titan Trail Committee

Blazing a Titan Trail: A Reading Adventure is a school-wide, multidisciplinary reading incentive program designed to increase student achievement at the Shaler Area Elementary School. Shaler Area Elementary School is the upper elementary school of the Shaler Area School District.

In its third year, the school brings together, for the first time, students from throughout the district, including Shaler, Reserve, Millvale and Etna, with 1,100 students in grades 4-6 attending. Blazing a Titan Trail has been a unifying program element for our students and their families.

The Titan Trail program challenges all students to read widely and independently at their individual levels to reach the goal of reading 25 books during the school year. Each student receives a paper hiker to travel along a "trail" created on the walls of the school.

Students add hiking "accessories" including boots, a backpack, and a hiking stick as they read more books and progress along

the trail. Scholastic Reading Inventory™ is used to assess each student's independent reading level and Scholastic Reading Counts!™ software evaluates and records student progress.

Communication arts teachers and the school's librarian provide individual reading guidance for students, who have an extensive school library collection as well as a supportive public library available to them.

Blazing a Titan Trail: A Reading Adventure was created by the school's Titan Trail Committee, a voluntary group of faculty, administrators, teacher aides and parents, is co-chaired by the school's librarian and communication arts chairpersons and meets weekly before school hours throughout the school year.

The Committee has grown to include more than 30 active, committed educators reflecting all levels of experience, from AmeriCorps volunteers to master teachers nearing retirement. The Committee occasionally breaks into subcommittees to effectively implement the many new

programming ideas that regularly emerge from the synergy and leadership opportunities which characterize of our Titan Trail Committee.

The unique, teacher-developed program promotes the concept that consistent practice fosters growth in both mind and body. The idea of a hiking trail to display student progress in reading created a natural connection between our communication arts and health and physical education departments on the Titan Trail.

In its first year, the Titan Trail program focused on helping students to link the idea of practice for reading and academic fitness with practice for physical fitness. In the second year, the Trail experience has been enriched through connections with other disciplines, especially visual arts and music.

While reading is its essential component, the Titan Trail program strives to connect many disciplines to appeal to a wide range of student interests and abilities. The annual culminating activity on the Allegheny River's Three River's Heritage Trail and at Millvale

Trail

Riverfront Park, located within the Shaler Area School District, connects students' travels on the school's Titan Trail with the recreational and environmental resources of their larger community.

The Titan Trail Committee has developed community partnerships to provide educational programming to further connect our students with their larger community. Benchmark activities, including field trips, guest speakers and assemblies, and a community Run for the Titan Trail encourage students to continue reading throughout the year. Blazing a Titan Trail: A Reading Adventure and the first Run for the Titan Trail have received special support from Millvale Borough, PPG Public Education Leadership Community (PELC) Grant Program, Shaler North Hills Library, Darla Cravotta-Special Projects Coordinator, Office of Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato, Tom Baxter-Executive Director, Friends of the Riverfront, Hannah Hardy- Pa Environmental Council, Miranda Smith-Pa Fish & Boat Commission SW Region Education Specialist, Three Rivers Rowing Association, Shaler Township Police, Ross Township Police and Fire, Elfinwild Volunteer Fire Company, Undercliff



Volunteer Fire Company, Joe Zeppi's Frozen Treats-Shaler, Greater Pittsburgh Specialty Advertising, PTO of SAES, "Lend an Ear" volunteers, Shaler Area School District Buildings and Grounds Department, and Shaler Area School District Food Services.

In its first year, 97 percent of students met

the 25-book goal and participated in the culminating event along the Allegheny River. This year, 99 percent of students reached their goal.

The positive change in the school culture has been dramatic. It is now a school in which students are excited about reading and are very conscious that reading ability is valued and essential to academic success.

Blazing the Titan Trail: A Reading Adventure has inspired students to strive for excellence through practice, to know the joy of reaching a personal goal through one's own efforts, and to value the environmental and recreational resources of their own communities. Shaler Area Elementary School's teachers, staff, administrators and parents have worked together to develop a unique, multidisciplinary program to promote reading, the essential skill for all academic success.

