



Dear Family,

As the Media Specialist at Willis Junior High School, I find myself repeatedly having conversations with students who share that they do not like to read. To them, reading is an arduous task that merely serves an academic purpose. When I encourage these children to check out graphic novels or pick out materials that fit their interests to read “for fun,” they blink at me skeptically. Sometimes they humor me by checking out material that may not ever leave their backpacks.

My staff and I know the importance of reading. Children who enjoy reading usually perform better academically and have more positive attitudes about school than students who do not like to read. Additionally, frequent readers have advantages over reluctant readers. The act of reading improves one’s reading proficiency and builds stronger vocabularies. As a result, the enthusiastic readers are able to enjoy increasingly complex texts, thereby widening the selection of appealing reading materials. A cycle of improvement continues as they consume more and more books. Poor readers, on the other hand, tend to read less and lose ground. Over time, these differences create a widening gulf in learning.<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, family members’ attitudes about reading have a significant influence on children’s perceptions of reading. “Parents who believe that reading is a source of entertainment have children with more positive views about reading than do parents who emphasize the skills aspect of reading development.”<sup>2</sup> By putting greater value on reading for fun, reading may reduce misbehavior due to boredom, provide a means of escape during stressful times, and be a source of great conversation between family members.

The Willis Junior High School media center promotes reading together as a family among Chandler residents, especially families sending children to Willis Junior High and its feeder schools. The program is called *The Family 15 Challenge*, and it is supported with federal grant money (see below).

It’s pretty simple.

1) Agree as a family to read together 3-5 times a week for at least 15 minutes at a time.

This might look like:

- \* listening to an audio book on headphones
- \* enjoying an audio book in the car or at home
- \* reading to each other or reading silently at a specific time
- \* a mixture of the above, or other ideas you may devise

2) On a calendar, check each day that your family reads together for at least 15 minutes.

3) Turn in the family’s calendar to the Willis Junior High School Media Center by the last school day of the month to participate in a monthly prize drawing. If your family chooses to continue *The Challenge*, start again!

For more information about the program or to get copies of the reading calendar, go to the WJHS Library website at <http://www.mychandlerschools.org/Page/83994> or call Bethany Celmins at Willis Junior High School, 480-883-5701.

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1 Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(4), 360–406.

2 Baker, Linda, Deborah Scher, and Kirsten Mackler. "Home and Family Influences on Motivations for Reading." *Educational Psychologist* 32.2 (1997): 69-82. Taylor & Francis Group, 8 June 2010. Web. 2 Feb. 2017.