



Beebe Badger Bookmobile...



Blazing a Reading Trail

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The Beebe (AR) Public School District is committed to the mission of utilizing all resources to provide learning opportunities, tools, progressive technology, and guidance to enable all students to become productive citizens and lifelong learners. Each school year, upon returning from summer vacation, a noticeable decline in student reading levels from the end of the previous school year is evident. The research is clear that children who do not read during the summer can lose up to three months of reading progress and that loss has a cumulative, long-term effect.

Our Collaborative Solution

In an effort to combat summer reading loss in the district, in 2015 a retired 1994 sixty-six-passenger school bus from our fleet was retrofitted into the Beebe Badger Bookmobile. The intentional focus of the bookmobile project is to get books into the hands of students in our community.

In addition to applying for—and receiving—some small grants for the project, we asked community members to donate gently used books to supply the bookmobile. Many homes in our community contain books that children have outgrown, books that have already been read, multiple copies of books, unused cookbooks, and many other books that need a new home. This bookmobile project presented an opportunity for our entire community to be part of the solution to the summer reading loss problem. One of our new 2018 community partners was Apple Blossom Child Development Center. Rhonda Howell, center director, said the bookmobile was a “wonderful opportunity for our kids to interact more with books.” She added, “The kids would sit down and read the books they checked out from the bookmobile. We had not seen them so interested in books before!”

The maintenance, technology, and carpentry crews at Beebe Public Schools completed most of the

retrofitting on site, resulting in substantial savings to the district in comparison to the cost of conversion by a specialty company. Beebe is fortunate to have such a multi-talented workforce who embraced this project with open arms and with open hearts. This effort was truly a labor of love! To start, seats and windows were removed (see figure 1) as custom, adjustable shelves that slant to prevent books from falling while the bus is moving were built (see figure 2). The interior was painted before the installation of laminate flooring, seventeen LED lights, two air-conditioners, and a back-up camera. Interior speakers, a desk for checkout, and small benches built over the wheels completed the interior restoration. A generator was added to supply power when the bookmobile is parked. Exterior speakers, colored LED chaser lights, chrome wheel covers and exhaust tips, and a custom wrap (collaboratively designed by two district employees) ensure that the bookmobile maintains a stand-out presence in our community (see figure 3).



Figure 1. Gutted bus ready for conversion into bookmobile.



Figure 2. Custom-built slanted shelves.

Books, Meals, and Fun

The bookmobile logo *Blazing a Reading Trail* (see figure 3) communicates our mission to cultivate a culture of literacy in our community. All community members—babies through adults—are invited to come onboard to select books from our lending library and to attend programs and do activities at the bookmobile stops. The bookmobile is carefully maintained by bookmobile personnel, as the shelves are organized by both audience age and category. Stickers adhered to each book cover remind patrons to return loaned books to the bookmobile. The mobile lending library operates on the honor system, whereby no penalties or fines are assessed for lost or overdue books. As patrons complete the checkout process, books are placed in canvas bags with the bookmobile logo (paid for by a grant) and bookmarks are offered.

When the Arkansas Department of Education made a video about the

Feeding both the bodies and minds of students during the summer is an action step toward fulfilling our mission to use all resources to guide students to becoming lifelong learners.

bookmobile, one of our loyal patrons, Josie, said, "It is really just cool to have books, if you do not have them at your home. You do not have to pay for these books! It is awesome...you can just get books whenever!" The hope is for families to come on board to choose books together. Patrons Taiyah and Zoey are cousins and come to the bookmobile together, pulling Taiyah's younger sister in a little red wagon. For the video, Taiyah said, "When the bookmobile comes to YOU, it is really not that hard to be able to read books. We

came home the first day and decided we should do a book club! Every day, after the bookmobile, we sit down together and read."

Each summer, an average of six hundred book checkouts by young people are recorded on the bookmobile spreadsheet. (Adult borrowers are not recorded.) The ages of young patrons are recorded on the chart in table 1. Each student in grades Pre-K through sixth in the Beebe School District is provided with an account for the Scholastic



Figure 3. Eye-catching exterior of upcycled school bus.

Summer Reading Challenge, so that their reading minutes can be logged. To invite friendly competition, minutes are shared weekly through district social media accounts.

The Beebe Badger Bookmobile joins the school lunch summer meal program (supported by a federal grant) on planned stops Monday through Thursday of each week during the summer. Students, ages eighteen and under, are invited to enjoy a healthy sack lunch and beverage prepared by food service employees in an effort to meet young learners' physiological needs. The food service employees (who have their own van) encourage all students to visit the bookmobile after they finish their lunch. Likewise, bookmobile employees encourage all patrons to enjoy a healthy school lunch after they choose their books. Feeding both the bodies and minds of students during the summer is

an action step toward fulfilling our mission to use all resources to guide students to becoming lifelong learners.

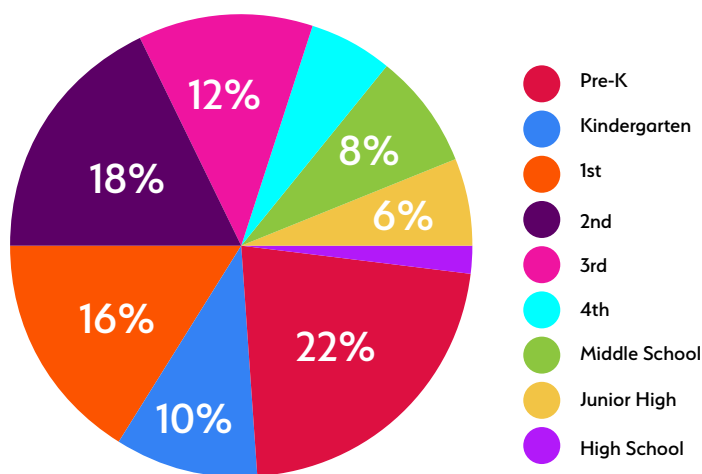
Beebe Public Schools appreciates and acknowledges community collaborators who have graciously granted permission for all bookmobile stops. I contact potential collaborators in the spring and have had a warm reception from daycare centers, apartment-complex managers, mobile-home park owners, and churches.

Additionally, volunteers have enthusiastically shared knowledge and experiences with bookmobile patrons. I solicit volunteers by writing articles for the local newspaper and by sending a recruitment e-mail to members of our school community. In addition, local master gardeners and staff members at our county extension office have been

generous with their time. We have been fortunate to have community members who have travelled extensively, collected unusual artifacts, and refined unique talents, skills, and interests willing to serve our students by volunteering their time to stimulate learners' minds through the summer months.

Partnerships with local childcare facilities have afforded their students weekly read-alouds by district school librarians and visits to the bookmobile to maintain learners' reading achievement during the summer months. Classroom teachers have also volunteered their time to read to students or to provide learning activities. Classroom teacher Katrina Mills said, "The thing I enjoyed most about presenting the bubble-making science lesson in conjunction with the bookmobile was just the excitement and joy that I saw within

Table 1. Grade levels of young borrowers.



the students. Kids genuinely enjoy learning, but many are not provided learning opportunities during the summer. Even though Beebe is a small town, our district is really spread out and there are many students who do not have the opportunity to enjoy our local library. The bookmobile is vital to giving those students enjoyable summer learning opportunities.” See the sidebar on page 14 for more reflections by volunteers.

A few of the opportunities presented on bookmobile routes include conversations with master gardeners, instruction in origami, science investigation through experiments, cooking demonstrations, and watermelon seed-spitting contests. We have also had a community member share artifacts from her African safari. Another time, we had a champion collie join us on one of the bookmobile routes (prompting the addition of Lassie books to the bookmobile collection). As community collaborators share their wisdom, an effort is made to add books to the bookmobile to encourage students to learn more about the shared topics and to continue to ask questions and to think deeper. We invite all readers to check out our blog at <http://beebebadgerbookmobile.weebly.com/blog> for more information regarding our community collaborators.

Public Library Partner

Goff Public Library in Beebe has been a collaborative partner from the inception of the bookmobile effort. Schedules of the summer reading opportunities available at

the public library are kept onboard the bookmobile, and the local library provides copies of the bookmobile routes to its patrons. If requested books are not available on the bookmobile, it is suggested that patrons visit the local public library, or access the public library’s e-book collection, to locate the desired title. Library card applications are also available on the bookmobile. Instead of operating as competitors, the public library staff and the school district bookmobile workers operate in cooperative spirit in an effort to best serve all of the patrons in our community.

Ramona Howell, Goff Public Library Branch Manager, recently shared, “We have so enjoyed our collaboration with the Badger Bookmobile and hope to continue it for many years to come. Although we provide many summer programs to promote literacy, not all children are able to make a physical trip to our library. We are so grateful that those children still have access to books from the bookmobile. We do our best to promote their excellent resources, and we appreciate the many ways they promote our library and what we have to offer our community. We look forward to continuing our work with the bookmobile’s staff to promote literacy and community in our small city.”

Beyond Summer

If students are still reading a book when the summer bookmobile routes have ended, they are asked to return the books to the local public library or to their school library. During the school year, the bookmobile can be seen in parades and at special events such as literacy nights and school

block parties. The bookmobile coordinator also maintains the blog throughout the year, so that students and community members can follow the ongoing adventures aboard the Beebe Badger Bookmobile as we Blaze a Reading Trail through our community.

Other Community Organizations That Have Helped

The following community organizations also contributed to the success of the Beebe Badger Bookmobile:

- Kiwanis Club
- Major Jacob Gray Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution
- Delta Kappa Gamma – Beta Beta Chapter
- Antioch/Beebe 4-H Club



Volunteers' Reflections

"Presenting science classes during the summer in a city park, rural church fellowship hall and mobile home community where children also received nutritious lunches as they anticipated the arrival of our bookmobile was a thrilling experience for this retired teacher!"

—Linda Jenkins, Master Gardener, Community Partner

"Our bookmobile puts books in our students' hands when they may not have any access to books otherwise! I enjoyed the opportunity to introduce my culture through a read-aloud, and students seemed to really enjoy the art activity that was related to the story. The bookmobile is an exciting and unique way to promote literacy!"

—Fumiko Stinnett, Classroom Teacher

"My time on the bookmobile was a great joy for me. At every stop we made, several students took advantage of the books and the jewelry-making station we were able to set up for the kids who otherwise, without transportation, would not make it to the public library. At one stop, we had seven or eight young people making jewelry to complement their outfits that day. On our last stop, a young man was our only taker on the jewelry station, and he spent his time making something for his mother, which I thought would make the benefits of the bookmobile have an even more lasting and positive effect on the whole family. It was my pleasure to serve in this capacity, to see the efforts being made to continue the Beebe children's literacy standards and opportunities during the summer months, and believe the bookmobile adds a great deal to their summer. I think showing the kids that we will put wheels on a LIBRARY!! in an effort to get books delivered to them, makes it plain how much we value, and therefore *they* should value their continued reading."

—Meredith Howard, Jewelry Making, Community Partner

"The bookmobile has a major impact on students' ability to either maintain or increase a reading level(s) during the summer months. Students that take advantage of visiting the bookmobile are enthusiastic about reading, and they are appreciative of chosen books based on not only reading level, but interests as well. Dr. Calvert does a superb job of selecting a wide variety of books. In providing a special program during a bookmobile stop, I noted the importance of parents attending the program alongside the students. During the special program, parents are able to observe how to read a book to a student, discuss the reading, ask and answer questions about the reading, and expand vocabulary knowledge."

—Allison Shuttleworth, Literacy Coach



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Public School District. She

was the 2016 Arkansas Literacy Association's Celebrate Literacy Award winner in the teacher category. A 2016 graduate of the Arkansas Leadership Academy, she served as president of the Arkansas Reading Association (now the Arkansas Literacy Association) for the 2013–2014 school year. She earned her Ed.D. in Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. Kay blogs about the Beebe Badger Bookmobile at <http://beebebadgerbookmobile.weebly.com/blog>.

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