

## School Spotlight

# Freshman Year, First Chapter: Building a Reading Culture at Dobie9 Campus

At Dobie9, Pasadena Independent School District's dedicated 9th-grade campus, librarian Kimberly McCalla is uniquely positioned to guide students during a critical time for reading engagement. With only freshmen on campus, the environment is designed to support students as they transition from middle school to the broader high school experience.

Thanks to Pasadena ISD's district-wide use of Beanstack at all levels, students arrive familiar with the tool and ready to dive in. By weaving challenges into the rhythm of the school year and infusing each one with joy and community spirit, Dobie9 makes reading feel relevant and rewarding for students and staff alike. In doing so, this formative year becomes a launchpad for reading for fun—one goody bag, hot cocoa, and page goal at a time.



“ Freshmen are too cool for school... but then, as they start doing the challenges, they get excited about it. And when they see that the other kids are excited about it, too, that's when engagement starts increasing.

**Kimberly McCalla**

Librarian, Dobie9 Campus, TX

## Building Buy-In Through Celebrations

McCalla structures her school year around three reading challenges that are designed to hook new readers and keep engagement high. Each challenge culminates in a festive, inclusive, and highly anticipated event.

- **Read for Treats:** Beginning in early fall and ending with a Halloween celebration, including goodie bags, candy, and popcorn balls.
- **Cocoa and Candy Canes:** Launches in November, culminating in a cozy library party with hot chocolate, toppings, and free books.
- **Spring Into a New Book:** Runs from February and ends just before spring break, offering another round of prizes and book giveaways to keep students reading.

While food is a big motivator for the readers at Dobie9, nothing tops the excitement of a cart full of free books (usually ARCS), ready to be explored and taken home as prizes.

## Motivating with Pages, Not Minutes

Unlike many campuses, Dobie9 tracks pages instead of minutes—a district-wide policy for high schools that McCalla has embraced.

- Each challenge sets a specific page goal, starting at 500 pages per student for Read for Treats.
- Everything counts towards a reader's page count, from ELA reading to Manga and graphic novels.
- Pasadena ISD awards graduation reading cords to students who log 12,000 pages over four years—a powerful motivator that positions reading as a valued extracurricular activity

## Engaging Educators With Every Challenge

Teachers are key partners in Dobie9's reading culture, and McCalla makes sure they feel seen, supported, and rewarded.

- **Rewards:** Staff are included in every challenge and receive the same prizes as students. Because they often can't attend the larger celebrations, treats are delivered directly to their classrooms.
- **Communication:** Educator and admin involvement is encouraged through monthly newsletters, social media posts, morning announcements, and during planning meetings.
- **District Recognition:** Teachers are also rewarded at the district level. During a district-wide challenge in January, Dobie9 staff joined students in logging pages and were rewarded with Chick-fil-A lunches through a district partnership.

## LOOKING AHEAD

With each new school year, McCalla welcomes a brand-new group of students and begins the work of building a reading culture all over again. With the right systems in place and growing teacher involvement, Dobie9 is positioned to deepen its impact year after year.

"There is a clean slate every fall," she says. "But once they see what's possible, they're all in."