



MORGAN COUNTY SCHOOLS

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To Whom It May Concern:

In the year 2000 the Morgan County Schools set a goal of having 90% of our students, including special needs children, reading on grade level by the end of grade three. We are proud that we achieved that goal in 2004. The significant improvement we are experiencing in reading vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in the early childhood grades has been the result of a community-wide effort by teachers, parents and others. One of the most significant "others" here in Morgan County is Robin Ferst and her **Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy**.

Robin knew from her own investigation that children who struggle with reading in the primary grades come to school with limited language experiences and low vocabularies. They start off behind their peers and some never catch up. Robin came to us with the wonderful plan of putting a book a month into the hands of all Morgan County's children under the age of five. She had borrowed this inspired idea from Dolly Parton's successful program in Tennessee. Robin's selfless commitment to this work continues to this day, with remarkable results.

Since the beginning of our collaboration with Ferst Foundation we have seen scores on our kindergarten readiness test increase from 46% ready to over 90% ready. We have also seen that our goal of 90% reading on grade level by end of grade three has been met by end of grade two. While we have implemented an array of interventions in local pre-school programs, there is no doubt that the most influential factor has been the books that come in the mail from the Ferst Foundation. The books are of excellent quality and children love to hear them read over and over. The habits that result develop a sound foundation for literacy that pays dividends for a lifetime. We have also seen an unanticipated benefit: an increased level of community engagement and support for our schools as a result of the work of the Ferst Foundation Community Action Team.

I strongly urge any community that is serious about increasing their children's chances for success in school to implement the Ferst Books program. I guarantee you will see the positive difference it makes in a child's life.

Sincerely,

Stanley W. DeJarnett
Superintendent