To encourage high school students to read, Northwest High School principal Jason Childress created a pilot program #N2RDG that began during the 2013–2014 school year here in Justin, Texas. The premise was to make the program as simple as possible, centered around reading text in various formats, such as e-books, books, database articles, and required reading. Information about what everyone read is posted via Twitter using the hashtag #n2rdg. Students can read as many books as they want, and extrinsic rewards are given for every five books read (or equivalent other reading), up to a maximum of thirty books; students are encouraged to read beyond the limit.

The idea originally sparked with NHS principal Jason Childress as a way to extend the twenty-five book challenge implemented at the junior high schools. Childress and his administration team worked out a program that was in line with an already established program but distinctly different and created to reflect Northwest High School. The principal then handed the concept over to an associate principal, several teachers, and the school librarian (myself); we served as the nucleus of a think tank to design the specific program targeting the high school audience. Including faculty members in the planning created teacher buy-in to a new program that looked chaotic at first but began to flesh out with more meetings, recommendations, and ideas—including ideas gleaned from other stakeholders and from reading programs at other schools in the area.

The admin and reading program team encourages every educator/admin on campus to display reading lists posted beside doors, wear t-shirts with the #N2RDG logo, use advisory as a place to discuss books, and allow free reading time. Faculty members are also encouraged to give dedicated wall space in classrooms for the library to use to display books, and use the state-of-the-art television studio on campus to broadcast teacher segments about the best books they’ve read. (The TV broadcasts also include book trailers created by the school librarian to further encourage students to check out books.)

Students know they will be rewarded for their reading, which is inherently embedded in public education. Those students who logged all thirty books are visited by the Prize Patrol and recognized in class for their participation. (The thirty-book prize is an invitation to a cookout hosted by the principal, whom students LOVE!) Surprisingly, those that complete the thirty-book challenge asked if they could continue turning in their reading lists without rewards attached. The Prize Patrol will continue to recognize any student who reads over and beyond thirty books. Students recognize that the value of reading continues even without extrinsic rewards!

Students who have not yet read thirty books are also rewarded. After reading five books students get their choice of a school lanyard, team sticker for a vehicle, or two cookies from “Java City,” the coffee

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1 “Advisory” refers to a cohort of twenty to thirty students who meet as a group with their advisory teacher once or twice a month. These sessions keep students up to date on campus activities and also serve as a place to encourage reading. Students sometimes use the time to update their reading logs, which contain short synopses and to talk about books they’ve read.
shop inside the school library. The prizes get bigger as students read more books. A beverage from Java City is one of the ten-book prizes. A popular choice at the fifteen-book level is two weeks of reserved parking. Readers of twenty books earn a school t-shirt or a travel mouse for a tablet. At twenty-five books students can opt for a free parking pass for the coming school year or a free movie pass.

The program has two tiers; one is the teacher reading challenge, which is handled by a campus curriculum coordinator, who recognizes teacher readers and distributes extrinsic rewards as well. (Teachers participate in the same program as the students, but the rewards are different.) I am in charge of student reads and distribution of rewards. Any student who wants to participate is given a reading log sheet. These sheets are collected by the advisory teacher and used to tally rewards. I get the information so I can keep a running total of how many books are read by students during a month.

After the first round of rewards and recognition, the program gained ground. (Checkouts increased, too.) As I write this in December (which had 975 books read during a two-week period), I’m looking back to see that in October 1,395 books were read by students, while in November the number read jumped to 1,535, with more participants turning in reading logs.

Since this is a pilot program, data will be gathered to see if #N2RDG has any correlational effect on state and campus assessment tests. More significant than test results, though, is seeing students talking to each other about books, checking out books on a regular basis, and working/studying in a pervasive culture of reading for pleasure instead of doing only forced reading in textbooks.

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In addition, #N2RDG received the 2014 Young Adult Reading Incentive Award from the Texas Library Association. The award honors a librarian who has shown exceptional ability in motivating young adults to read by developing and implementing a reading incentive program for young adults in grades 6–12.

Naomi Bates is a high school librarian at Northwest High School in Justin, Texas. She is actively involved in the Texas Library Association and serves on various association committees. She is also an active member of the Texas Computer Education Association. She was named by Gale Cengage and School Library Journal as one of five emerging library leaders for 2010–2011; she has also been honored by TCEA as Library Media Specialist of the Year.