

Raising readers: Preschoolers visit Watsonville library

By Donna Jones , Santa Cruz Sentinel

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WATSONVILLE >> Beaming preschoolers clutched their new purple bags, soon to be filled with library books.

The children and their parents were visiting the Watsonville Main Library on Tuesday as part of Raising a Reader, an early literacy program involving more than 4,000 young children at 232 preschools and day care centers countywide.

Watsonville State Preschool teacher Manuel Serrano read the children a story to open the event. Then parents and children were given a tour before the bags were picked up along with forms to apply for library cards.

“It’s pretty interesting because when I have the chance I want to bring her to the library so we can get books to read at home,” said parent Oscar Segura, who accompanied daughter Samantha, 4, and brought son Abraham, 18 months, along as well. Reading is important, he added, because “they learn more about how life works.”

Serrano’s students have been preparing for the visit in the classroom, taking home a red bag containing four colorful picture books to share with their families weekly. The bags rotate among the students so each week brings something new.

“Book cuddling, it’s called,” said Jennifer Robinson, who coordinates Raising a Reader in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. As they snuggle with moms and dads or older sisters and brothers, the children are developing an academic foundation and a love of books, she said.

The red bags also come with a short DVD that provides tips to parents for reading with their children.

Since its inception in 2006, nearly 16,000 children have been served by the program, funded by First 5 Santa Cruz County.

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In surveys, parents said they spend more time reading to their children since joining the program, and they are more likely to use literacy promoting strategies such as talking about the pictures or new words while reading. They also said they increased their library use.

Serrano said he is amazed at the way his students are learning. In his native Mexico, even at a young age, grammar was stressed and children were punished for not reading well.

“Here, you have the joy, and you don’t have to be afraid,” he said.

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