

Raising a Reader program helps El Centro parents promote literacy early, at home

By KARINA LOPEZ Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, January 9, 2015 1:10 am

For educators throughout the Imperial County and perhaps throughout the country, there is arguably nothing more vital to a child's success than the ability to read proficiently.

Unfortunately in Imperial County, literacy rates continue to be a problem for most citizens.

In 2003, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy conducted an assessment of English literacy among American adults age 16 or older, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

During the assessment, 41 percent of Imperial County's population at the time was lacking basic prose literacy skills, almost triple the national rate of 14 percent.

To help combat these statistics and give students and their parents more opportunities to read at home, the Imperial Valley Masonic Lodge sponsored the Raising a Reader program at five schools in the El Centro Elementary School District.

The program aims to open the world of reading to the district's youngest students by sending them home with three books every week, which will be read to them by their parents.

Susana Gilkison, a kindergarten teacher at McKinley Elementary School, said it was something she did years ago, but because of costs, she was only able to distribute books to five kindergarten students each week.

The program is something not only Gilkison, but her students and parents were excited about.

"With this, we are able to send all 25 students home with three books each week," Gilkison exclaimed.

Gilkison said she loved the idea behind the program as it would allow children and their guardians to bond as well as set a strong foundation for the rest of their education.



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Susana Gilkison, a kindergarten teacher at McKinley Elementary School, speaks to a group of parents about the importance of reading to their children from an early age during a Raising a Reader program kickoff at the El Centro school on Thursday morning. KARINA LOPEZ PHOTO

“Reading out loud helps stimulate a child’s imagination and teaches them a love for books,” she said.

On Thursday morning, Gilkison saw the launch of the program inside her classroom and happily helped distribute books and information to the parents in attendance.

Humberto Rascon said he was looking forward to reading to his son, Joseph, as work takes him out of the Imperial Valley for extended periods of time.

“This way he’s learning, but we’re also bonding,” Rascon said.

The El Centro resident said what he found most interesting about the presentation was the advice to allow the child to dictate the tempo and order of the story.

“I know that’ll probably happen with me and my son, because he’ll see a picture and just come up with his own story for it,” he said. “He’s very creative.”

School Principal Patti Weeks said she believed the program would accomplish what it set out to do and get students excited about reading.

“They’ll get new books every Thursday and they’ll read them with a parent before they have to return them for a new set on Monday,” Weeks explained.

The rotation of books between the kindergarten students and classrooms at the school will continue of the rest of the year culminating in a trip to the El Centro Public Library, Weeks explained.

“They’ll get set up with a library card and hopefully use it during the summer and continue to read,” Weeks said.

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