

## Reading program marks one year with readiness gains

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After one year of being able to log into a free reading and phonics application, more Osceola County kindergartners are starting their school careers at the starting line, rather than far behind it.

That was the report from Osceola Reads, which has partnered with the School District of Osceola to bring Footsteps2Brilliance, a mobile literacy app geared for pre-kindergarten through third-grade students.

The target audience is pre-kindergarten and VPK groups, and the audience is growing, they reported at an anniversary celebration Friday.

With a goal of signing up 3,750 families in a year — 25 percent of those eligible to do so for free — Osceola Reads announced 3,863 are registered.

Among other standout stats: 33 percent of kindergartners were deemed “prepared for their first day of school” in September, up from 13 percent in 2015 and above the 30 percent goal. Of the children who used the app for the recommended 45 minutes per week, 99 percent were ready.

Among kindergartners through third graders reading comprehension rose from 71.5 to 79.2 percent, and the students logged 77,724 hours on the app and read 923,000 books through it.

Lee Franco, a district curriculum specialist and the Footsteps2Brilliance coordinator, said the program has “exceeded our goals.”

“The students have been reading so many books,” she said. “The community helped spread the word. But this is just Year 1 of a five-year initiative, we still have so much more to do.”

Much of that push will be about marketing. Where F2B was marketed at community events, through social media, on flyers and billboards and in the media in the first year, next year will find app ads on Lynx buses, signage at the developing Poinciana SunRail station and more social media campaigns.

Dr. Debra Pace, School Superintendent thanked community partners for their efforts.

“We couldn’t do this without their support,” she said. “They put money and resources behind it, not just words. Reading is the key to a young person’s success. It’s the key to everything else.”