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Literacy program to take center stage

Oct 11, 2018 Updated 18 hrs ago

NEWMAN - Early literacy will take center stage in the Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District in early November.

The district will host a national literacy summit and press conference Wednesday, Nov. 7, at West Side Theatre to formally roll out its School Ready Initiative, which includes a digital literacy platform available free of charge to the community.

That program, Footsteps2Brilliance, is an early learning program which may be accessed through smartphones, tablets and computers and is available in English and Spanish.

The program, which is already being utilized in elementary classrooms and in the community as a whole - with emphasis on children who have not yet reached school age.

The program is available at no charge to district families with children ranging in age from infant to third grade, and offers libraries of eBooks, educational games and creative writing tools to increase kindergarten readiness and, ultimately, third-grade reading proficiency.

Literacy is a focal point of the initiative, but the campaign also focuses on health and social/emotional needs to better prepare youngsters to enter kindergarten.

"We want to promote the whole concept of this early literacy piece. We need to be helping kids ages 0-4 so that they are ready for school," Superintendent Randy Fillpot commented.

Statistics underscore both the need for early literacy and the potential the Footsteps2Brilliance holds in addressing those needs, according to a district press release.

Children from low-income families hear 30 million fewer words before age 4 than their more affluent peers, the district reported, a problem compounded by the fact that 61 percent of low-income children have no books in their home.

At the same time, 95 percent of all families regardless of income now own a smartphone or mobile device which can serve as a portal to access Footsteps2Brilliance. Once downloaded, the program can be utilized with or without an internet connection.

"This early literacy initiative in Newman-Crows Landing is a transformative model for supporting all children - birth through third grade - toward academic and lifelong success," commented Ilene Rosenthal, CEO of Footsteps2Brilliance, Inc. "By using smartphones and tablets that parents already own, Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District is able to provide all parents with the tools they need to prepare their children for success in school and in life."

In conjunction with the summit, Superintendent Fillpot and the NCLUSD board are challenging the community as a whole to read eight million words through Footsteps2Brilliance by March 1, 2019.

The summit and press conference will be held from 10 a.m. to noon on Nov. 7 at the theatre. The community is invited to attend.

Fillpot said the Footsteps2Brilliance founder will be among those on hand to speak at the event.

The initiative, he reflected, underscores the critical importance of acquiring literacy skills at an early age.

“The NCLUSD vision is that all learners graduate college and career ready, embracing the joy of lifelong learning, (and) are prepared to be responsible global citizens and leaders,” Fillpot commented. “As a community, we cannot wait to make progress on that vision. Action needs to occur prior to children enrolling in our district. Footsteps2Brilliance will even out the disparity in skills and experience that children arrive to us with.”