



# La Nueva Voz

The New Voice, a Bilingual (English/Spanish) Publication  
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## Pomona Unified to roll out innovative literacy program using cell phone app

Pomona Unified School District is setting the stage for a roll-out of an innovative interactive bilingual program to promote literacy throughout the school district – and throughout the community – that is all based on a cell phone mobile learning “app” and a program goal of reading one billion words in the first year.

The school district will “flip the switch” for the program at a news conference scheduled for May 4 that

will introduce the school district’s partner in the project, Footsteps2Brilliance, Inc., an early learning (pre-kindergarten through third grade) technology company based in Washington, D.C.

And, while the program initially focuses on younger students to help them become proficient readers by the third grade, it creates a turnkey, citywide literacy solution free to everyone in the community – including English learner adults – who

can work on their own literacy skills while helping their children with the lessons.

The concept is based on downloading the mobile “app” to a cell phone for use either on line or off line, so no additional monies are required for hardware, infrastructure or maintenance.

Gregory Spencer, the California Director of Educational Partnerships for Footsteps2Brilliance, described the program this month to a dozen and a half members of a new collaborative – including representatives of La Nueva Voz – that was convened by Pomona Unified School District Supt. Richard Martinez.

**Some 91 percent of adults own cell phones, plus app can be used off line with no data charges**  
Spencer told members of the group that 91 percent of adults today own a cell phone, making the program widely available throughout the community.

And, since the “app” can be downloaded once at a free internet



Gregory Spencer  
Footsteps2Brilliance

“hot spot” location and then used off line, it requires no cell phone or data plan charges and no internet access at home.

Spencer told members of the collaborative, meeting at school district headquarters, that the program focuses on two key areas – a “virtual” universal preschool for 0 to 5 year olds and a pre-kindergarten to second grade program.

“It’s all about making sure that we are mitigating the 30 million

word gap,” Spencer said. “Too many of our children come to school having heard interacting with 30 million fewer words than a child from a more affluent home.”

In effect, the Footsteps2Brilliance program provides a “transformative mobile platform” that can cost effectively scale educational apps to the entire community and provide parents with the tools to become their children’s first teachers, track their progress and help every child succeed, according to a brief video at the initial meeting of the community collaborative.

And, because it is downloaded onto individual cell phones, it is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and in both English and Spanish.

The program can also be accessed live on line on the internet as well, Spencer said, making it readily available to everyone – whether on cell phones, tablets, computers or other devices.

Spencer said California residents are already paying to incarcerate children in the state each year.

“We’re already paying the price when we don’t have a literate community,” he said.

He said in the literacy program’s first year, the community will focus on the “first 100 read initiative,” based on 100 children using the program.  
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## Pomona Boys and Girls Club ‘Youth of the Year’ makes finals in L.A. County competition

Jannyda Sre, Youth of the Year for the Boys and Girls Club of Pomona Valley, last month was named one of six finalists in the first round of competition for Los Angeles County Youth of the Year.

Sre, 18, has been a member of the club for more than four years, and she is a senior at Pomona’s Garey High School where she maintains a 4.7 grade point average. She made the “final six” out of 26 nominees representing one from each club throughout the



Jannyda Sre  
Pomona Boys and Girls Club  
Youth of the Year

county, and was scheduled to appear in a second round of judging on March 16 at ABC7 studios in Los Angeles in which two “co-finalists” were to be selected to go to the state competition next month.

The Los Angeles County “Youth of the Year” co-finalists were expected to be announced at an award celebration scheduled to be held at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, sponsored by the Los Angeles County Alliance for Boys and Girls Youth of the Year... pg. 4



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## Literacy program... from pg. 1

gram at a total of 100 locations in the community – hot spots at McDonald's restaurants, the Boys and Girls Club of Pomona Valley and others.

Within that initial framework, children will focus on reading the first 100,000 words which, he said, should happen in the first eight to 10 days.

With more students becoming involved in the program, and by spending as little as 15 to 30 minutes a day on the program, the community would easily be able to reach the goal of reading a minimum of one billion words in the first year.

### Goal is reading one billion words in first year

"That has never been done in the U.S.," Spencer said. "When that is done, it changes the dynamics of the community."

After the first year, he added, the program will be customized for Pomona.

And, he said, the kids love it – everything is based on fun lessons that can be used in the classroom, at home and on the go – all at the individual's own pace.

How will kids – and their parents – learn about the program?

Bilingual business cards will be handed out in the community, town hall meetings will be convened, La Nueva Voz will continue to publish updates on the program and more.

Notes to parents with program ac-

tivation information will be sent home to the 52 percent of kids already in the school district, although the district hopes to reach the remaining 48 percent of the kids not yet in the school system.

Footsteps2Brilliance created the literacy program concept in 2007 before smart phones. The program was launched in California nearly two years ago and Napa became the first in the U.S. to take the program countywide.

Pomona Unified conducted a successful pilot program at one school last spring, focusing on pre-school, transitional kindergarten and kindergarten, according to Deputy Supt. of Instructional Services Stephanie Baker.

She said by January of this year, with only 80 people trained, nearly 13,000 books had been read, 7,100 games had been played and 1,251 books had been created – by pre-school children – all with a comprehension level of 76 percent.

Baker said the national average is only 67 percent.

She added that the school district's theme this year is "launching into hyperdrive, preparing our schools for tomorrowland."

"This is what our students are going to have to be prepared for," she said, adding that the literacy program will help make that possible.

Pomona Unified Supt. Martinez said numbers are improving, and the



Deputy Supt. Stephanie Baker

school district today has a graduation rate of 83 percent, higher than the state average of 80.8 percent and the Los Angeles County average of 78 percent.

But the district still has about 60 percent of the student body not "college ready" when they leave school.

### Concept enables reading skills development in early grades

"It starts at the beginning, it doesn't start in ninth grade," he said. "The reality is if they are already far behind at the beginning because of their reading skills, they're not at grade level, they're far below basic when they hit third grade."

He said by working with the students and the district's community

partners, he believes students will not be reading simply at grade level by third grade – they will be advanced.

Martinez cited neighboring school districts in Claremont, Walnut Valley, Chino and Bonita where students are reading above grade level, "partly because they've been exposed to books early on" and partly because they have parents "that are not struggling at home to just try to put food on their table."

"They're exposed to more things," he said, from computers at home to museums and they "do things in summer time that our kids don't get to do."

Martinez said the collaborative will help ensure the district's students are successful.

"And reading is definitely a basis of where we want to make sure we do well," he said.

"We're bringing technology together with young students," Martinez added, with a literacy program that will "give them more tools in their toolbox."

"It's going to change the future," he said, by closing the reading "gap" that begins before kids even enroll in pre-school.

"With literacy, everyone can achieve," Baker said. "They can go to college, they can go to career, they can engage in politics, they can serve the community if they are literate. And,

when we have a literate community, we have a safe community."

Parents of children living within the Pomona Unified School District can register for the free program by going on line at [www.myf2b.com/register/pomona](http://www.myf2b.com/register/pomona).

Pomona Unified's enrollment is nearly 25,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12 and more than 2,000 students in pre-kindergarten.

Of those students, 37 percent are English learners and, combining students who formerly were English learners but have been reclassified, more than 60 percent of the students came into the system not being proficient in the English language.



Supt. Richard Martinez

## Million Mothers March date set in May

Vendors and others interested in participating in the 10th annual Million Mothers March celebration and balloon send off are urged to contact the Kennedy Austin Foundation in Pomona.

This year's event is scheduled for May 21 in the Pomona Civic Center.

The annual march provides an opportunity for mothers and loved ones who have lost children to

street violence or accidents to share feelings with others with similar losses. It also helps remember those who have died.

For more information, contact (909) 480-3357.

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- Pomona Unified School District administration building lobby
- Western University of Health Sciences Patient Care Center
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Pomona Valley, 1420 S. Garey Ave., Pomona
- Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center maternity lobby, outpatient services, emergency room
- Gold Strike Market Carniceria, 412 N. Park Ave., Pomona
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