

# Antelope Valley Press

## Burning a path to literacy

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PALMDALE - Palmdale School District's Palmdale Promise: Early Learning Literacy Initiative seeks to have all children in the city reading at grade level by third grade with the aid of the citywide Footsteps2Brilliance reading program.

Student literacy and achievement is at the center of The Palmdale Promise, which seeks to prepare each student for success in high school and beyond.

On Wednesday district and city officials conducted a national press conference at Summerwind Elementary School to unveil the early learning literacy initiative with a crowd full of students, parents, city officials, Antelope Valley education leaders and lawmakers, and others including guests from the Snowline Joint Unified School District and Pomona Unified School District.

"In our community we have a clear message from all of us and that is to say that we're all together in this whole thing about making sure that students read by third grade," Palmdale School District Superintendent Raul Maldonado said.

The district, in collaboration with the city, worked to make Footsteps2Brilliance available throughout the city.

Footsteps2Brilliance is a bilingual literacy application for pre-kindergarten through third-grade students, which features more than 1,000 interactive books, songs and learning activities that can be downloaded via a single app on mobile digital devices.

While the adults talked about the importance of literacy in the school's gymnasium, a group of kindergarten, first- and second-grade students worked with the program in a classroom.

"It's fun; it teaches you a lot of stuff and it helps you," second-grader Isaac Mora said.

Isaac, 8, said the program helped him read.

"It helps you read and it helps make you smart," he added.

Lori Park, a learning support teacher, said she likes that students can use the program at home.

"One of the things that I really like about it is, for especially our beginning readers, the one set of books goes with each letter of the alphabet so they can really practice those sounds. So our kinder and preschool kids can really get those letter sounds," Park said.

The district purchased a license for Footsteps2Brilliance last year for \$647,292 including future updates, which will provide city residents free lifetime access to the program. Since the program launched last summer the district's elementary students read an estimated 124 million words.

Through the Palmdale Promise families who live in ZIP codes 93550, 93551 and 93552 can download the program for free, whether they are enrolled in district schools or not, via the district's website at [www.palmdalesd.org](http://www.palmdalesd.org).

"We want to see (kids) be successful and grow up and come back to our community and help out," Maldonado said.

The first three years of a child's life are the most important in terms of brain development. Maldonado encouraged parents to read and sing to their children before they are born.

The district is the first school district in the state and the nation to offer the program citywide, said Eugene Narciso, co-founder and chief operating officer of Footsteps2Brilliance.

"You are the first, the trailblazer, to represent a vision that's bigger than Palmdale," Narciso said.

Narciso encouraged Palmdale parents to use the free program.

"This is going to help your children become the future," he said.

Gregory A. Spencer, director of Educational Equity for Footsteps2Brilliance, said you have to invest in children at the earliest stages for the best opportunity for children to have a successful outcome in life.

The city is on board with the school district's plan, Mayor Jim Ledford said at the event.

"I can't think of a more important issue for our community than what we're doing this morning right now; for our kids, for our future. This is how we build the great Palmdale we all want," Ledford said.

Rep. Steve Knight, R-Palmdale, praised the district's program and also encouraged parents to read to their children.

"I don't think there is anything better than knowing how to read and having good reading comprehension. I still work on it today," Knight said.

District Trustee Sharon Vega encouraged audience members to spread the word about the program to help all children in the city read at grade level by third grade.

Antelope Valley Union High School District Superintendent David Vierra commended Maldonado and the district board for its vision in implementing the program.

Antelope Valley College President Ed Knudson also encouraged parents to read to their children.

"Spend time with them, help them know that there's an opportunity out there that they can achieve if they invest in themselves," Knudson said.

Elena Esquer, assistant superintendent of Educational Services, said after the event that the district has a technology plan in the works to either provide some help with Internet access at home for low-income students or the ability to send mobile devices home with students.

"We're not at a one-to-one yet, but we're working on it," Esquer said.