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More than 2,000 register for Footsteps2brilliance

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By Ken Jackson

Staff Writer

According to the Osceola County School District, 87 percent of students are not prepared for kindergarten on the first day of school.

Instead of just staring at the statistic, the district's done something about it this year, launching Osceola Reads and the digital Footsteps2Brilliance product.

Since formally introducing Footsteps2Brilliance, a literacy app for pre-kindergarten through third grade students, in February, more than 2,000 county families have registered.

The School District, Education Foundation Osceola, the cities of Kissimmee and St. Cloud and Osceola County joined forces to bring the application, which can be accessed through a traditional computer or any mobile device to parents and students-to-be to enforce reading and phonics to young children.

In six months, 2,333 community users have registered, which all Osceola County families can do for free. This brings Osceola Reads over halfway to its February 2017 goal of reaching 3,750 of the 15,000 eligible community families.

The Osceola Reads program promotes reading readiness skills for Osceola County children. Sponsors brought the reading app into VPK through second grade public classrooms, and offered the program for free to all community children, and the registration fee for private providers (schools, day cares, etc.) has been lifted.

With use of the free reading app, Footsteps2Brilliance, the Sponsors of Osceola Reads, such as the Education Foundation of Osceola County, are confident that Osceola County's youngest learners will be prepared for school. Since it was designed as an app, it can be easily used on a phone or tablet, so children can use it away from the computer, like in a car or during other playtime. It links at home and at school, giving teachers and parents a view at the child's progress.

Lee Franco, who coordinates the Footsteps2Brilliance program for the Osceola County School District, said that portability will help children be ready when they start school.

"We want them to be successful when they go to kindergarten," she said. "If a child comes with a 30 million word gap in kindergarten, research says he or she will always be behind because they will always be trying to catch up."

"The Education Foundation of Osceola County believes that supporting literacy among our youngest students is critical to our mission of supporting public education in Osceola County," said Kathy Carr, Executive Director of the Education Foundation of Osceola County. "We are pleased to support Osceola Reads because we know that this grassroots project will prepare our children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed."

Any private school can request registration forms for private schools/facilities at info@OsceolaReads.com. Any parent can register their children at www.OsceolaReads.com. More information on the initiative is available through social media at facebook.com/OsceolaReads, Twitter and Instagram (@OsceolaReads).