

Englewood school introduces literacy program

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(Photo: Michael W. Curley, Jr./NorthJersey.com)

ENGLEWOOD — The Donald A. Quarles Early Childhood Center introduced a new literacy program to parents on Monday, which helps children learn to read with a computer application and games.

The Footsteps2Brilliance program, free to district parents, uses an application available to download on any device — including desktop computers, laptops and smart phones — that can read its books aloud to help children learn words early and track their reading progress, and features games meant to reward and encourage students to read.

"We all want big things for our kids," said Catherine DeRosa, director of curriculum and implementation for Footsteps2Brilliance, as Principal Arlene Ng of Quarles translated to Spanish. "We want them to graduate. We want them to have a rewarding career, both personally and financially. We also want them to have positive life choices and happiness...It starts now."

Although the program, and the books and games on it, are online, children do not need to be online to use it once they download the books and games, DeRosa said.

"Once you have downloaded everything onto the device, I can take this device anywhere," she said. "You can go to the soccer field, your child is getting antsy, they're sick of sitting there — have them read a book on Footsteps2Brilliance or play a game."

Each student enrolled in the program gets a "super secret code" using icons to log in, so that when their progress is uploaded, the school can track each individual's progress. Parents also can register in the application to allow their other children to use it or to help their child work through the program, which offers both English and Spanish language options.

"Your child's brain is like a muscle," DeRosa said. "The more it's used, the more it retains."

She suggested parents focus at least 15 minutes a day on the program, which she said would make children more prepared to be readers as they grow up.

The application has programming for pre-kindergarten through third grade, and Quarles' participation in the program will begin with pre-kindergarten and kindergarten before moving on to the other grades.

Parents at the presentation were enthusiastic about the program.

"From what I've seen right now, I think it can be a really good adjunct to their education," said Evelyn Hall, who has a daughter in kindergarten. "It looks like the curriculum is good, and it looks like it will be a lot of fun for the children."

Hall added the Spanish language feature is "amazing," as her daughter is in the district's dual-language program.

Luis Jimenez, who has a son in pre-kindergarten, said he has used a similar program with his son so he knows they work, but plans to switch to Footsteps2Brilliance after seeing the presentation.

"I think it's cool how they're also using it at the school," he said. "It's very important to help the kids learn in a fun way. I remember, I didn't learn in a fun way."

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