

Reading program far surpasses 3 million-page goal

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Footsteps2Brilliance through the County Office of Education is working to promote literacy during the summer and beyond



The San Benito County Office of Education embarked on a 3-million-word challenge at its Literacy Summit in May when it kicked off the Footsteps2Brilliance program. This summer, it has far surpassed that goal, with 15,622 books read through Aug. 5 — [nearly 5.6 million words](#).

"The purpose of the 3-million-word challenge was to work with our families to ensure our kids across the county continued to read during the summer. Literacy is arguably the most crucial factor in determining whether a student will succeed in school and beyond," County Superintendent of Schools Krystal Lomanto told BenitoLink.

Research shows that the greatest disparity of knowledge among children is the vocabulary gap — the number of words a child knows from birth through third grade. Children from low-income families hear 30 million fewer words before the age of 4 than their more affluent peers. This problem is compounded by the fact that 61 percent of low-income children have no books in their homes. No single strategy, Lomanto said, offers a greater return on investment than providing early learners with the tools needed to read proficiently by third grade.

The Office of Education is hosting a Literacy Collaborative for any community member who is interested partnering to close the literacy gap among students.

"We have over 30 members at this point who are excited to team with the SBCOE to ensure all students read proficiently by third grade," Lomanto said.

"The Literacy Collaborative is focusing on how to engage parents to utilize the Footsteps2Brilliance program (getting more parents/kids registered from ages 2-4), developing our marketing strategies and engaging our community to receive more sponsors. Our next Collaborative meeting will be Sept. 18 at the [county office of education](#), 460 Fifth St. from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Lomanto thanked the following partners for their monetary support of Footsteps2Brilliance, which is also funded by a grant:

- San Benito Community Foundation
- United Way San Benito
- San Benito County Probation
- The City of Hollister
- CMAP

Other partners included local school districts: North County, Aromas San Juan, Southside, Tres Pinos, Willow Grove, Cienega, Bitterwater Tully, Panoche and Jefferson. Lomanto said her office is working with the Hollister School District, which is interested in participating. The YMCA, Youth Alliance and San Benito County Free Library have also been part of the effort.

Below is a video highlighting the Footsteps2Brilliance program:

About:

[Adam Breen \(Adam Breen\)](#)

Adam Breen has been a San Benito County resident since 1980 and graduated from Sacred Heart School and San Benito High School before earning a bachelor's degree from California State University, Fresno. A father of two sons, Adam has taught newspaper and yearbook at SBHS for the past decade, after six years as a magazine editor for Santa Clara University. He previously was editor of the Hollister Free Lance.