



## Enthusiastic response to NCLUSD reading app

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**NEWMAN** - The Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District rolled out its new literacy app - Footsteps2Brilliance - before an enthusiastic audience Thursday evening.

Approximately 40 people filled a room at the McConnell Adult Education Center to learn more about the digital literacy program - which is available free of charge to all district residents, regardless of whether they have affiliation with local schools.

The interactive program has already been implemented in lower elementary grades district-wide, Superintendent Randy Fillpot noted.

Thursday's meeting was aimed at reaching out to the community as a whole to introduce residents to the literacy program - and to encourage them to serve as ambassadors of sorts by helping promote Footsteps2Brilliance among their circles of family, friends and co-workers.

### Footsteps2Brilliance

Bonita Elementary first-grader Jonah Souza demonstrated the Footsteps2Brilliance program Thursday for those in attendance at the McConnell Adult Education Center.

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"I think this is a good fit for the community," Fillpot said of the program. "I think it has the potential to be a game-changer for our district."

While Footsteps2Brilliance is available to children and adults alike, the district is focusing on putting the program in the hands of young children as part of a school readiness initiative and on honing the literacy skills of early-elementary students.

"We spend a lot of money and time in our district on kids who are behind," Fillpot told those who filled the meeting room Thursday.

Helping students read at grade level by the third grade is a key indicator of future academic success, he added.

Yet at the same time, the superintendent acknowledged, the district has no control over the amount of exposure to literacy children receive as pre-schoolers.

Director of Curriculum and Instruction Kim Bettencourt, a former elementary teacher and reading specialist, recalls knowing immediately which of her pupils came from a strong literary background and which had had little exposure to literacy.

"The very first day of school I could tell the kids who come from (literary) backgrounds," she commented.

Footsteps2Brilliance, Bettencourt added, offers an opportunity to reach students during a window of opportunity to strengthen their literary skills and school readiness.

Dr. Gregory Spencer, Footsteps2Brilliance vice president of bilingual literacy solutions and equity initiatives, was in attendance Thursday to help roll out the program.

The Newman-Crows Landing district, he said, is one of only a dozen nationwide which have negotiated unlimited lifetime access available to all community members. Under the district's agreement, Fillpot told Mattos Newspapers, Footsteps2Brilliance will provide support for the local program for the next five years.

The program, he noted, supports all styles of learning and can be operated on any device, with or without internet access (access is required for the initial download).

Fillpot said the program is bilingual, can read to or be read by the user, allows users to record themselves reading, and offers a variety of interactive games and features which strengthen literacy skills. The program levels the content and activities to the ability of the user.

Already, Fillpot said, Footsteps2Brilliance pupils registered under the Newman-Crows Landing account have been exposed to over five million words since the program was initiated in school - including 300,000 of which were seen by users who are not currently in local schools.

"That is the equivalent of 20,000 books read," he pointed out. "I don't know how we would have done that (through other avenues)."

Fillpot said he was greatly encouraged by the community response.

"People were excited about it, and had great ideas of what they want to do" to promote and utilize Footsteps2Brilliance," he commented.

He said the district will continue its outreach effort by contacting individual groups and organizations, and next year may set a goal for the number of total words read.

The district negotiated full community access because its leaders felt so strongly about the importance of broadening opportunities to enhance literacy skills, he indicated.

"If we are going to do something, we are going to put everything into it and give it our best shot," Fillpot commented.

The importance of literacy, Bettencourt said, cannot be overstated.

"A literary community is a thriving community," she told those who turned out for the community meeting Thursday.

For additional information about registering for the program, call 862-2933.

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