



For Immediate Release

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Students Read 8.5 Million Words in Spring Reading Challenge, Summer Challenge Awaits

In support of Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative, students respond with investment in their own literacy, as top readers in Desert Center Unified School District earn prizes of iPad tablets ahead of the next challenge.

RIVERSIDE – What started as a challenge to read 3 million words in March and April, led to 38,000 students in Riverside County reading more than 8.5 million words to exceed the goal set by Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Edwin Gomez.

“It is amazing to see our youngest students taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative and Footsteps2Brilliance, to enhance their literacy inside and outside of the classroom,” said Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Edwin Gomez. “The summer is a great time to focus on individual reading skills. As a result, we are announcing a new 3 Million Word Summer Reading Challenge for the summer, and I look forward to seeing how far our students can surpass this goal in only six weeks.”

“We commend the students and families of Riverside County for surpassing Dr. Gomez’s 3 Million Word Spring Reading Challenge. We are experiencing unprecedented circumstances due to the pandemic, and placing literacy resources in the hands of families ensures the success of their children in school and beyond. This will create a lasting impact for years to come. We are honored to be a partner with Riverside County Office of Education in this important work,” said Ilene Rosenthal, CEO of Footsteps2Brilliance.

The 3 Million Word Summer Reading Challenge begins on June 15, 2022, and ends on July 31, 2022, and the top five winners who spend the most time learning on the Footsteps2Brilliance app will each be awarded an Apple iPad to continue their learning.

For the Spring Reading Challenge, the top five readers earned the prize of an Apple iPad for their time spent reading and learning using the Footsteps2Brilliance platform. Three of the top five overall readers included kindergarten and 1st grade students from Eagle Mountain School in the Desert Center Unified School District whose enrollment totals only 28 K-8th grade students.

“My favorite part is writing and learning the words,” said Jimena Carazas, a first-grade student who totaled more than 30 hours of learning time during the Spring Reading Challenge. “Sometimes, I stay up until midnight, and I’m not sleepy at all.”

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Jimena's mother, Mrs. Edith Carazas, shared that she allowed her daughter to stay up 30 minutes after bedtime, but she realized that even though she was staying up later, it was time well spent.

"I can see that she is doing great things, and she is being productive with her time while focusing on her education at the same time," Mrs. Carazas said. "Jimena reads the stories, enjoys the music, and reads to her two little sisters, so there really is no need for television."

Mrs. Carazas also shared that she enjoys the availability of the content in Spanish since English is not her first language. Jimena's teacher is Shauna Peterson, a 17-year teaching veteran who learned how to incorporate the Footsteps2Brilliance platform at the same time as her students.

"Once they got into it, the students were very competitive about the reading challenge. They really like the interactive nature of the program, and it really meets all their needs," Mrs. Peterson said. "There isn't one student who didn't participate, and they don't even realize they are learning. I can definitely tell that this has helped them become more confident readers."

Desert Center Unified School District Superintendent, Dr. Greg Sackos, is extending the reach of the program to help a wide variety of students—including those who haven't yet enrolled.

"We have even targeted some third-grade students who have been able to use the program for supporting the development of reading skills while inspiring them to read with great results," Dr. Sackos said. "And we showed parents how to use the program, so I know there will be incoming pre-kindergarten students who are using it right now that are going to be ready for kindergarten this fall."

During the Spring Reading Challenge, the class would fill in the chart together with their latest reading statistics as a math lesson, and the school celebrated with a chocolate fondue party after meeting their goal of 500,000 words—totaling a full 16.6% of the 3 million word challenge from one of the smallest schools in all of California.

Examples of Student Work

The Footsteps2Brilliance bilingual program emphasizes reading, writing, vocabulary, and oral language development. Every student creates an online writing portfolio. Here are some examples of work created by the winning students who are all in kindergarten or first grade.

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As part of the Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative at the Riverside County Office of Education, the partnership with the Footsteps2Brilliance platform offers pre-reading activities, read-to-you stories, alphabet recognition songs, grammar rule games, and more, to the youngest learners in Riverside County. Offered in English and Spanish, and with or without internet access, the interactive tools are available for free to all families in Riverside County from the age of birth to 5th grade. The free apps are available on smartphones, tablets, and computers, at <http://www.myf2b.com/riverside>.

About the Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative

The Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative, launched in late 2020 by Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Edwin Gomez, strives to promote and expand literacy throughout Riverside County. Strong literacy skills are the foundation of all learning and contribute to a student's ability to graduate from high school academically and socially prepared for college, the workforce, and civic responsibility. Essential literacy skills include the ability to read, write, listen, speak, research, and represent, to think critically, create, collaborate, and communicate with empathy in all content areas. Resources available on the [Literacy by 5th Grade Initiative website](#) include access to online books, video tutorials for teachers of reading, recordings of RCOE educators reading to preschool-aged students, and more.

About Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE)

The Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) is a service agency supporting the county's 23 school districts that serve 430,000 students—more than the student population of 17 states. RCOE services include administrative support to districts, programs for preschool, special education, pregnant minor, correctional, migrant, and vocational students. In addition, the organization provides professional training, support, and resources for more than 18,000 teachers, administrators and staff throughout the 7,000 square miles of Riverside County. Learn more at www.rcoe.us.

About Footsteps2Brilliance

Footsteps2Brilliance, Inc. is the breakthrough early learning platform that accelerates early literacy achievement by uniting the power of mobile gaming technology with the latest in cognitive research. Footsteps2Brilliance provides enticing, interactive, 24/7 learning experiences that digitally link school and home to give students the edge they need for success in school today and the world tomorrow. For further information contact: info@footsteps2brilliance.com.

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