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## Editorial: Helping our children one word at a time

Ventura Published 3:36 p.m. PT May 9, 2018



(Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

Across Ventura County this month, legislators, police officers and others are taking time out of their busy schedules to read out loud to young children in classrooms and libraries. Their efforts on behalf of literacy reflect their commitment to our community and deserve recognition and praise.

“There are many ways all of us can — and should — help our communities. But taking time to talk with a child, taking time to read with a child, is an activity that frankly may be the greatest contribution any of us can make,” former Star editor John Moore wrote after participating in the inaugural “Take 5 and Read to Kids” event in 2016.

The event, now in its third year, is a joint effort of The Star and the First 5 Ventura County early childhood development and preschool organization. On Friday, more than 60 “celebrity readers” visited various preschools to read to a combined 1,200 children, and others are doing the same at local libraries this month.

The idea is to raise awareness about the importance of reading and early childhood literacy. Studies universally have shown that daily reading to young children boosts language, comprehension, vocabulary and other skills. A few years ago, researchers at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital conducted brain scans on children ages 3 to 5 while they listened to a pre-recorded story and found left-brain areas involved in memory and understanding of words and concepts became more active. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents begin reading to their children from the time they are born.

Still, 42 percent of children 5 and younger in Ventura County are not read to every day, First 5 says. Not surprisingly, only 40 percent of third-graders in our county are reading at grade level, according to the latest Kids Count Data. And childhood literacy problems don’t magically solve themselves — about 18 percent of adults 16 to 65 years old in the United States struggle with basic reading and comprehension, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The thing is, young children really enjoy being read to, as Friday’s event again showed. At one Oxnard preschool, they looked in awe at the celebrity reader, paid attention to every word and ran up and hugged and thanked him when he was done, The Star reported.

We’d like to express similar gratitude to all those involved in this simple yet rewarding event — and to every parent taking the time at home to read out loud daily and develop a child’s mind.

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