

News

A HOME RUN FOR READERS

PORTS KICK OFF BASEBALL BY THE BOOK

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Fatima Jiminez, 7, right, gives a high five to Stockton Ports mascot Splash after he made a presentation on reading Thursday to 550 kindergarten through fourth-grade students at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School in Stockton. The five-week Baseball by the Books program rewards students who finish with free Stockton Ports tickets. Calixtro Romias/The Record

By **Jason Anderson**

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STOCKTON - Hayden Withers, a first-grader at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, has never been to a baseball game.

"I've only seen it on TV," she said.

That could soon change if she keeps up with her weekly reading assignments.

To learn more

For more information about the Baseball by the Books reading program, call (209) 644-1900.

Hayden was one of about 550 students who reacted enthusiastically when Stockton Ports mascot Splash and a member of the team's front office staff surprised the students during an assembly in the school's auditorium Thursday and presented the Baseball by the Books reading program.

"Splash makes the whole experience fun for the kids," Ports account executive Sam Harold said. "It's something they can really gravitate towards and see this isn't just another assembly. It's something that's fun."

An estimated 25,000 students from kindergarten through the eighth grade at 48 San Joaquin County schools are participating in the five-week program, which the Ports established in 2007. Teachers will establish weekly reading assignments, and each student who completes the work will receive two tickets to one of the Ports' first four Sunday home games at Stockton Ballpark. The school with the highest percentage of students who complete their reading assignments will receive \$1,000.

"I've liked baseball since I was, like, 2 or 3," said 7-year-old Zitlalic Tamayo, a first-grader at King Elementary. "Seeing Splash was great. All the schools should have Splash come, because Splash is a great person."

King Principal Connie Fabian said she was pleased with her students' response to the reading program.

"It looks like they're all excited, and hopefully this makes it fun and encourages kids to do their nightly reading," Fabian said.

"Promoting literacy is important, because it builds their vocabulary and their comprehension. Literacy is intertwined through all content areas - reading and writing - and it's important to build those skills so they can be successful."

Lilian Guerra, the literacy specialist at King, said the reading program has been well-received each of the past three years.

"Kids like receiving incentives," she said. "The more they see that there is a reward to reading, the more they'll read."

Parents who attended the assembly said they liked the idea of an incentivized reading program.

"It encourages them to read and gives them something fun to look forward to," said Veronica Luna, whose son, Jonathan Diaz, is a first-grader at King. "I've noticed with my son, the more he reads, the more he loves to read."

Stockton has the third-lowest literacy rate among metropolitan areas in the United States, according to an annual study released recently by Central Connecticut State University. A number of organizations are working to promote literacy in Stockton.

University of the Pacific asked a Spanos Center crowd of 5,154 to "Take a Timeout for Reading" during Saturday's nationally televised men's basketball game against University of California, Davis. Anyone who donated a children's book was admitted for \$5. More than 1,000 books were donated.

On March 2, the Rotary Club of Stockton will hold its annual Rotary Read-In for children from kindergarten through third grades.

Harold, the Ports account executive, said the team is happy to do its part.


"The Stockton Ports want to promote literacy, because it's going to make a difference in the children's lives," he said. "Reading is so fundamental, and this is a program we think is really beneficial to the community."

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