

Reading Buddies having a significant impact on students at Grapeland Elementary School

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Operating quality school costs money. There are teacher salary, books, supplies and countless other expenses that can add up.

But the Reading Buddies program at Grapeland Elementary in Rancho Cucamonga costs less than \$100 a year. That's because all the adults who visit the classrooms monthly to read to kindergarten to second grade students are volunteers.

"It's less than \$100," said Principal Jeff Sipos. "Coffee and doughnuts, that's it."

With the academic year ending in May, last week was the finale of the Reading Buddies program. The readers, who represent businesses from the Rancho Cucamonga Chamber of Commerce, got the star treatment from Grapeland students.

During a celebration in the Multi-Purpose Room, Sipos called out the readers' names like he was the announcer of a basketball game. Students cheered and offered high-fives.

"Sometimes, in books, you learn interesting things and stuff," said Keiya Gaerlan, 7.

Plus, these reading buddies, like Santa Claus or grandparents, always come with gifts.

Reading buddy Barry Barthe, who read Dr. Seuss' "Oh the Places You'll Go" as the culminating book, is known for passing out popcorn during special holidays.

"I like Mr. Barry because he brings popcorn and reads nice books," said Bryar Berry, 7. "Mostly because of the popcorn."

Actually, Bryar is an avid reader. His favorite is the "Charlie Bone" series.

"I'm always asking, 'Can I go to bed now so I can read?'" Bryar said. "Those books always leave me in a cliffhanger."

Many students are like Bryar - bookworms. There are 605 students in the Etiwanda School District campus and every day, 450 books are checked out from the school library.

Vivian Shiffman has been reading to students for the past three years. Shiffman has three grown children and when she leaves for Grapeland Elementary, she tells them, "I'm on my way to see my other kids."

Sipos gives some of the credit to Reading Buddies volunteers for fostering the love of the printed word.

"How do you quantify how much Reading Buddies helped? I don't know," Sipos said. "Does it make an impact? You bet it does."

Students get antsy when they know their reading buddy will soon visit.

"When a reading buddy misses a day, it's like you've pulled the carpet underneath them," Sipos said.

The students are so into reading, in fact, that they are scheduled to win a bet with the principal. Sipos challenged the students to earn a certain number of accelerated reader points by the end of the year. If they do, Sipos promised to spend the entire school day on top of the roof.

On May 2, it appears Sipos will have quite the view.

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