



National **School Boards** Association

2019 Magna Award winners

Under 5,000 enrollment category

The Gift of Literacy

Pomona Unified School District, Pomona, California



LITERACY EQUITY FOR BIRTH THROUGH 3RD GRADE HISPANIC STUDENT AND THEIR FAMILIES

A child who cannot read by third grade faces a greater possibility of dropping out of school. The challenge of literacy is compounded when a student is also an English learner. The Pomona Unified School District is an urban district with a student population that is 85.6 percent Hispanic. Over 34 percent of students are English learners, 85 percent are in poverty, 11.6 percent have disabilities, and 11 percent are homeless. Children were coming to kindergarten and first grade with significant linguistic barriers. Of the more than 2,000 students enrolled in the district's pre-K program, 78 percent are Hispanic, with a large percentage of Spanish speakers. But while 52 percent of eligible children were in preschool, another 48 percent had no access to classes at all.

In January 2016, the district created the communitywide bilingual literacy initiative. The program's goal is to promote literacy for every pre-K through third grade child in the community. Every family of children from birth to third grade within the district's boundaries would have access to the award-winning, bilingual English and Spanish "Footsteps2Brilliance Early Literacy App," whether or not they attended district schools.

Removing barriers: With a majority Hispanic population, the district developed a citywide initiative that addresses the literacy needs of Hispanic students even before they enroll in school. By leveraging the smartphones that parents already own, the district provides families with game-based, bilingual resources that prepare children for academic success to create a system of equity for Latino students that starts in the community and continues in the school.

The initiative has reached out to hard-to-reach populations through churches, food banks, health fairs, backpack giveaways, meetings with private day care centers, and holding Coffee with a Cop events to partner with law enforcement to create positive interactions in the neighborhoods.

With the popularity of the initiative, the program has expanded to English/Chinese, and English/Arabic to accommodate the district's other populations, as well as the district's English/Spanish and English/Chinese Dual-Immersion programs. Our Adult Education students have also benefited, using the program to learn English. PUSD believes in equity for every person at every age in our community.

With a focus on improving kindergarten readiness and third-grade reading proficiency, this initiative has enabled the district to engage families before their children enroll in school, collaborate with feeder preschool and day care centers that send children into district schools, engage hard-to-reach populations, and enable businesses to contribute to student success in tangible ways through Wi-Fi hotspots, donations, literacy ambassador programs, and sponsorships.

Evidence of success: California English Language Development Test scores that test English learners show that overall, pre-K to second grade English learners engaged in the literacy initiative show significant improvement in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

As Superintendent Richard Martinez has said, "If we want our children to succeed, we must give them the gift of literacy, and how better to do this than through the support of their parents, families, and community."

CONTRACT

Ana Zambrano, program assistant

ana.zambrano@pusd.org

<https://proudtobe.pusd.org>