

Making a Difference in Education

by Maureen McGarry

What's more important than a child's success? When we look to the future, we know our children face an increasingly complex world- full of opportunity- but only for those who are prepared. For some children, there is a wide achievement gap in the mastering of reading and numeric skills. This can be a predictor of later academic achievement if not addressed by the end of 2nd grade. Research demonstrates strong correlations between early literacy proficiency and future success in school. With most parents working and unable to spend time in their child's classroom, others can help fill in the gap.



*Cindy Kaup reading and sharing a moment with students at
Winzler Childrens Center*

One-on-one attention from an adult in reading and/or math can be a turning point in the life of a child. Emotionally, it guarantees that there is someone who cares enough to work directly with them. Academically, that “light bulb” moment can happen in the middle of a story being read to them, or as they solve a pattern sequence from a deck of cards.

The Decade of Difference Early Literacy Partners Program is working together with our broader community, RSVP and

Volunteer Center of the Redwoods looking for volunteer tutors. “It’s something that anyone can do and we have needs all throughout Humboldt County” says Jenny Bowen, Community Outreach Coordinator for the Decade of Difference. “Supporting a child who is reluctant or struggling in reading or math is one of the best ways our community can step up and truly make a difference...not only for a child but also for the future health of our community.”

“This is my fifth year volunteering in reading and math at Pacific Union,” says 55 year-old John Davis of Arcata. “It’s a great way make a difference and only give a minimal amount of time. Anyone can find two hours a week to help a child.” Davis spends additional time helping in the kindergarten classroom and with the yearly science fair. “It’s a great way to get yourself out of the house.” His motivation for volunteering comes from the concern he has about how much time is spent on the perception that our schools are “broken”. Davis, who still works part-time, says he is tired of people talking about what is

wrong with our education system. “If we’re going to talk about it that way, then we need to do something to help. It’s time we give back.” Davis reports that volunteers get a great deal back as well. “The energy the kids give to you is incredible! The kids are happy to see you.”

Nancy Ihara who is a volunteer in a K-2 class at Peninsula School agrees. “The teachers need support,” says Ihara. “All teachers work really hard to reach their common core goals. It’s nice to be there to support them. And it’s fun. It’s nice to work one-on-one to give the children what they need.”

Free trainings are being offered by the Decade of Difference Early Literacy Partners Program on Monday, November 10, 2014 at the Humboldt County Office of Education. No prior experience is necessary and all materials and information will be provided. Standard background checks and TB testing is required and will be covered through the program. Those 55 and older can also sign up with RSVP and be counted as a national service volunteer. For more information or to register for this upcoming training, contact Jenny Bowen, Community Outreach Coordinator, at 441-4552 or jbowen@humboldt.k12.ca.us or call RSVP at 442-3763.