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NEWS | LOCAL

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Students prep for page-turning summer

40 East Palo Alto children receive books, shelves through literacy program

BY JESSICA BERNSTEIN-WAX

Daily News Staff Writer

A literacy program in its second year has given about 40 East Palo Alto second-graders the opportunity to savor reading during summer break.

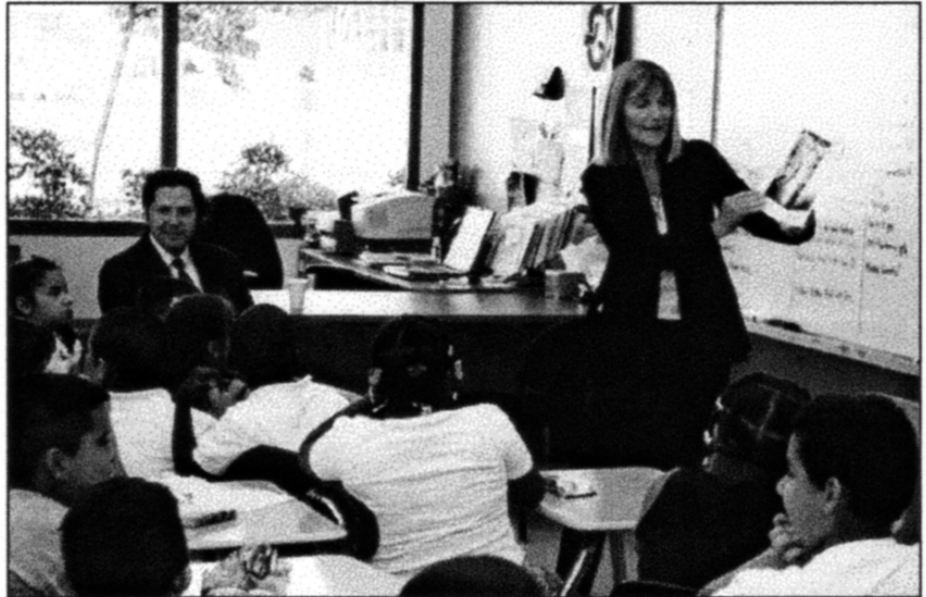
On Wednesday, representatives from the East Palo Alto Kids Foundation, Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, the Peninsula Jewish Coalition for Literacy and other organizations presented each Costaño Elementary School second-grader a bookcase and 12 books, nine of their own choosing, to read over the summer.

"I hope you all and your children really fall in love with books," Mark Goldsmith, one of the program's organizers, told the group of parents and children gathered at the school.

The program is part of a larger initiative run by the nonprofits and community members to boost literacy at the school. The initiative includes enhancements to the library and tutoring sessions for children of various ages.

As part of Wednesday's activities, parents participated in a program conducted in English and Spanish to boost their children's language development and encourage them to read more. Meanwhile, author Sally Mallam, director of the Hoopoe Books Share Literacy Program, read to the jubilant second-graders from her new book, "Dende Maro: The Golden Prince."

"The whole intent is to continue encouraging their love for reading," Costaño Principal Gina



Courtesy photo

Author Sally Mallam, right, reads from her new book to second-graders at Costaño Elementary School in East Palo Alto on Wednesday evening. The students received free books and bookcases as part of a literacy program.

Sudaria said. "The students need to also have that liberty to choose the books they enjoy. That alone will just propel them forward."

Eight-year-old Melody Alvarez said she picked "Snow White" as one of her books "because I like princesses."

Melody added that she loves reading because "you get to see the pictures, and it tells you about different countries."

Cindy Reyes, 7, was playing nearby and proudly said her father taught her to read in both English and Spanish.

"I read to my dad, my auntie, my cousins," Cindy said. "Last time my cousin fell asleep."

In January 2007, Rabbi Josh Zweiback of Beth Am wrote a piece in the synagogue's monthly

bulletin about how Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream was still far from being realized. Goldsmith saw the article, and the two ended up meeting for coffee.

"The project developed out of that coffee," Zweiback said. "We decided to launch it in the fall of 2007."

Sudaria said last year's recipients whipped through their summer reading and were excited to select a few new books this year.

Most students from Costaño come from low-income households, according to a joint release from the organizations involved in the program. Many have immigrant parents who speak little English and don't have books at home.

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