



Greg Kreller/NPT

Above: Head Start student Isabella Castillo flips through the book "The Mitten" by Jan Brett following story time as part of the 'Get Ready to Read' pilot program at the Happy Day Head Start school in Caldwell. Below: Head Start teacher Trinity Wolfkiel reads "The Mitten" to her class.

Education partnership readies new tools for Canyon County schools

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NAMPA — Children at the Head Start classroom listen intently as Trinity Wolfkiel, "Teacher Trinity," reads aloud. She asks them to point to and name animals on the pages of the book, and they eagerly respond, asking questions and giggling at the silly parts.

The Head Start program in Nampa is a pilot site for the "Get Ready to Read" screener, an early literacy tool to help preschool-aged children prepare for kindergarten — it comes with online resources and other ideas for teachers.

The screener is one of several tools brought forward by the Treasure Valley Education Partnership, a relatively new organization anchored



by the United Way of Treasure Valley. Education partners in Canyon County include Nampa, Caldwell, Middleton and Vallivue school districts, as well as The College of Idaho, College of Western Idaho and

Northwest Nazarene University. The United Way is the backbone of the project, which has a \$300,000 budget with additional seed money from businesses and foundations in the area.

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RICH RAIMONDI

Bishop Kelly High School principal

Rich Raimondi, chair of the organization and principal at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise, said the partnership was born out of the urge to have more say in education at the local level.

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"About three years ago, we were frustrated with education policy, and superintendents did not seem to have a voice," Raimondi said. To effect change, it needed to be bigger. "... We can't rely on the state, we can't rely on school districts alone, it really has to be a community effort."

Along with implementing tools like the reading screener, one of the major parts of TVEP is an annual "Report to the Community," which includes an overview of community indicators, such as kindergarten preparation, standardized test scores and success beyond high school. The indicators were chosen by a community group of 200 educators and business community mem-

bers during the first year of the partnership's formation. Much of the data comes from the National Student Clearinghouse, but Raimondi said it is the "most comprehensive report in the state."

The second annual report came out in October, but the results aren't quite reliable yet in terms of student achievement and success because of shifts in standardized testing and Idaho Core standards. Sarah Weppner, director of continuous improvement, said the data will become more useful as time goes on.

"The idea is that this would be a tool for us to track the progress we're making," Weppner said.

Raimondi said those three areas in the report are the top goals for the partnership; preparing more children to read at an early age, increasing the number of "college-ready" students for the workforce

COMMUNITY REPORT

To view the 2014 Treasure Valley Education Partnership community report, go to idahotvep.org.

and better preparing students to enter college by supporting them both financially and academically.

TVEP was also responsible for the "FAFSA Frenzy" event held last year in schools across the Valley, including Nampa High School, which won the top prize for completing the most federal applications for student financial aid. Nampa High increased its completion rate by 10 percent from the previous year, and the Frenzy competition will be held again this year.

Jessica Ruehrwein, executive director of TVEP, said a third project in the works will support students in and out of school, with a focus on junior high age students. The

organization is searching for pilot schools at the moment, but the goal would be to increase "grit" and "emotional competency" for those students. Raimondi said they are looking closely at Nampa and Caldwell schools for those pilot sites.

"I think the biggest gains can be made in Canyon County," he said.

For the moment, Raimondi said the organization has not brought political figures on board, but that doesn't mean there won't be interaction with legislators in the future.

"We chose to be a bit apolitical in what we're doing," he said. "Over time, during the session, we'll probably share what we're doing with legislators."



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