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Rural Communities Snap Up Reading Program Kits

By Jeff Hunter
Staff Writer

For kids in rural areas who are struggling with reading, they can now make progress even when they're not in school.

Elementary school students are able to work on their reading skills year-round by following a program available at public libraries in Hyrum, Smithfield, Preston, Richmond and Newton.

"They don't have to lose ground in the summer," noted Alan Hofmeister, director of the *Reading For All Learners Program* at Utah State University. "Everything fits together with what the school district's doing. That way when school's out, parents and kids just switch."

Initially developed a decade ago, the *Reading For All Learners Program* is designed to assist parents and teachers with presenting reading in an easy-to-learn format. A series of "little books" which increase in difficulty are used to guide young readers from kindergarten-level skills to those of a third-grader.

The Cache County School District has had great success with the program, and many of the same materials are now available for checkout at some of Cache Valley's libraries.

Video and audio tapes are used to introduce the program, then parents only have to pick up the kits, each of which contain a couple of "little books" and are numbered and color-coded according to reading level.

"A family can just start at the beginning and work their way through—all in a sequence," Hofmeister said. "And they can link across to anything else. Most of them know that when they get to the fourth set that it's very easy for them to pull Dr. Seuss off the shelf."

"The important thing is to open up the rest of the library to them."

Jill Baxter, children's librarian at the Hyrum Public Library, said the kits are so popular that parents are only allowed to check two out at a time.

"We have people come here and sign up for a card just for (the reading kits)," Baxter said. "They have to pay \$30 a year, but they'll gladly pay that just to get these books."

By completing the lower levels, children can also earn rewards, including a certificate of

achievement and a free book.

“A lot of moms will say that their kids have been struggling and they were encouraged to try this, and their kids are just whizzing through it,” Baxter said.

Baxter added that the introductory and intermediate kits get checked out more frequently than the more advanced packs because children will start branching out on their own once they acquire their reading skills.

Hofmeister said when a rural library requests assistance, that USU usually donates about \$400 in books “to help them get started.”

“The new Preston library just put the program in last week,” he announced. “They had to because parents were driving down to the library in Smithfield to get the kits.”