



## **Will extending evening hours at Atwater library be helpful?**

*By Beverly Barela* On Jan 16, 2020

Crystal Vega, the Manager at the Atwater branch of the Merced County Public Library, and Esther Garcia, the Library Assistant, are excited about a pilot program for expansion of the branch's hours.

Vega told the Times, "From January 14 through June 30, 2020, the Atwater branch will be open until 8:00 p.m., instead of 6:00 p.m., on Tuesdays. They're trying to see if the extended hours are beneficial to Merced County residents. We'll be tracking the number of people using the library and checking out books during that time."

The pilot program is also in effect at the Merced, Livingston, Los Banos and Delhi branches.

During the program, the Merced branch will be open until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the Livingston branch will be open until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesdays, and the Los Banos and Delhi branches will be open until 8:00 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Data collected will determine the success or failure of the pilot program. The number of visitors to the library and the number of books checked out between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m., and the number of people who attend evening events or meetings at the library will be key in evaluating its success.

Susan Flinspach, President of the Friends of the Merced County Library told the Times, "The evening hours pilot project resulted from a public campaign led by Friends of the Library groups across the county to get the Board of Supervisors to increase the library budget and give the libraries evening hours. The library system has been chronically underfunded since its closure in the early 1990's. The library community grew tired of the underfunding and tired of having libraries close at the very hour when working people could get there, and so this past year we let the Board know that.

"The Board responded by funding nine capital improvement projects and a pilot program for evening hours."

Tiny Tales, a general story time for preschoolers, which includes ages 3 to about 6, takes place at the Atwater branch every Wednesday at 10 a.m., except the first Wednesday of the month. The theme for Tiny Tales currently is Wintertime. Vega and Garcia take turns reading the stories on alternate Wednesdays. A bilingual story time is beginning on the first Saturday of every month, according to Vega.



Natalie, a toddler, often attends Tiny Tales story time at the Atwater library branch.