

## County launches 'Ready for Kinder' campaign with learning kits

Merced County children face many obstacles that prevent them from achieving grade-level proficiency in reading and math.

According to First 5 Merced's Needs Assessment in 2018, only 4 in 10 children living in Merced County achieved grade-level proficiency in English and a dismal 3 of 10 in math.

It all starts early! Research shows that kindergarten readiness lays the foundation for long-term school success. When children enter kindergarten ready to learn, they achieve more academically. According to Williams & Learner, "Academic success has been linked to improved social, economic, and health outcomes."

Reading with a child, engaging in literacy activities, quality childcare and education, and healing from early trauma all play a role in children being kinder ready. Out of the 24,918 children ages 0-5 living in Merced in 2018, only 26.4 percent had an adult reading books with them every day, the Needs Assessment found.

First 5 Merced and the Merced County Library are addressing this readiness gap by launching an early literacy campaign over a two-year period.

"The goal of Ready for Kinder Merced County! is to dis-

seminate information regarding powerful daily literacy practices that help children gain a solid foundation and give parents and caregivers concrete tools to facilitate engagement in literacy activities," said Amy Taylor, county librarian. "Learning kits coupled with messaging in four languages spoken by most of Merced County's families (English, Spanish, Hmong and Punjabi) via a new bookmobile in the future will help address the readiness gap."

Ready for Kinder Learning Kits are themed and contain 4 to 10 books, a theme-based toy, literacy sheets in the aforementioned languages, and a detailed content sheet. Currently, there are 21 kits available for check out through your local library thanks to a generous donation from the Friends of the Merced Library.

"Thanks to First 5 Merced, the number of kits will soar to over 200 by the end of the year," Taylor said. "Learning kits will be available via the bookmobile by next winter and families who live far from libraries will have access to these valuable tools to support their children's development, and thereby be ready to succeed once they start kindergarten."

To request a Learning Kit, please call your local library or visit the library's website at [www.mercedcountylibrary.org](http://www.mercedcountylibrary.org). Let's help all children be ready for kinder!