



Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles

ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 24, 2007

Contact: Parita Shah
(213) 978-0741

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA AND CITY LIBRARIAN ANNOUNCE FREE CITYWIDE LITERACY PROGRAMS

Mayor, City Librarian announce Read to Me LA and launch the 18th Adult Literacy Center to help raise student achievement in LAUSD and address the alarming rate of adult illiteracy

LOS ANGELES – Continuing his effort to bring city services to Los Angeles' public schools and raise student achievement, Mayor Villaraigosa today announced "Read to Me LA," a new literacy program designed to develop reading skills for both children and their parents.

Villaraigosa and City Librarian Fontayne Holmes also officially opened the city's 18th Adult Literacy Center at the Echo Park branch library.

An overwhelming percentage of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) are scoring below proficiency in English language tests. In reading scores released just this summer, 72 percent of third graders, 67 percent of fifth graders and 70 percent of ninth graders in LAUSD are scoring below proficiency in English language (Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) - California Standards Test, August, 2007).

With fewer than half of children ages five and younger in LA County being read to at home and 3.8 million adults in LA County being classified as having "low literacy skills," Read to Me LA and the expansion of Adult Literacy Centers will work to improve reading skills in children and address the alarming rates of illiteracy among adults. ("Shaping the Future," LA County Health Survey)

"Read to Me LA is the first leg of our race toward improved literacy rates and reading scores and we cannot stop until our students reach the finish line of academic excellence," Mayor Villaraigosa said. "This represents a renewed effort to infuse our education system with City resources and raise student achievement rates over the long term."

- MORE -

Read to Me LA is being funded by two generous, \$100,000 donations from the Target Corporation and the RGK Foundation.

The donations – which will fund more than half of the program's services – were raised from the Target Corporation, the presenting sponsor, and the RGK Foundation. Additional funding and support is being provided by Union Bank of California, Northrop Grumman, the Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Foundation, the Erteszek Family Foundation, Wells Fargo and the Hilton Hotels Corporation.

Read to Me LA and the expansion of the Adult Literacy Centers are part of a series of city initiatives designed to support teachers, students and parents in raising student achievement and lowering the drop-out rate.

Two weeks ago the Mayor announced Live Homework Help, a program to offer free, on-line English, history, math and science tutoring for students in fourth through twelfth grades and kicked off another year of Student Smart, which prepares students for the SAT, PSAT and ACT tests. Both programs are free and are offered at every one of the City's 72 libraries.

In September, Mayor Villaraigosa launched three programs in partnership with the school district. The Mayor opened the LA Jobs Academy to tutor, train and prepare LAUSD students for meaningful, well-paying careers in the public utilities industry. Mayor Villaraigosa also kicked off the Campaign for LA Schools with a \$50 million cornerstone investment – the largest individual gift ever given to LA's schools – and launched the School Safety Initiative which will implement new programs to enhance safety on and around LAUSD campuses.

#

OVERVIEW OF CITY INITIATIVES SUPPORTING LA SCHOOLS

Read to Me LA

“Read to Me LA” – a free reading program for LA’s families – teaches parents and caregivers how to read to their pre-school age children on a daily basis and offer kids the skills to thrive in the classroom. Held at the Central Library and all 71 branches, this program invites parents and kids to fun and interactive sessions with local children’s librarians.

Library staff read books, engage families with creative literacy-building activities and offer parents tips for reading with their children at home. As part of the effort to help the City’s youth develop essential literacy skills, “Read to Me LA” offers parents free books and booklists, and provides ongoing support for family reading activities.

Adult Literacy Centers

The LA Public Library’s 18 Adult Literacy Centers offer resources and programs free-of-charge to address the alarming rate of adult illiteracy in Los Angeles. Through a series of programs and training courses, these centers provide free computers, books and tutoring sessions to English-speaking adults who read and write below a sixth grade level.

Through the City’s Literacy Centers, adults work with a trained volunteer on reading and writing skills twice a week for at least six months. The libraries also offer programs that teach adults to read children’s books they can take home to their kids and feature extensive collections of books, audiotapes and videotapes designed for individuals with limited English proficiency. In addition, the LA Public Library’s website provides self-paced online teaching tutorials for independent study which are accessible from any library in the system and from any computer with Internet access.

Live Homework Help

Live Homework Help is a new tutoring program for students in grades four through 12. This free library service connects youth with librarians and other tutors to get assistance with homework in history, math, science, English and nearly any other subject. The program is accessible at more than 2,000 library computers and from home computers (with a valid library card) seven days a week between 1:00 PM and 10:00 PM.

The service also offers assistance to Spanish-speaking students in the subjects of math and science.

Live Homework Help’s one-on-one service helps students with homework, builds strong study skills and prepares kids for exams. The student and tutor communicate in a virtual classroom with live chat and two-way, online white boards.

Student Smart

The Los Angeles Public Library partners with The Princeton Review to offer citywide seminars, SAT, PSAT and ACT tutoring, and assistance with test-taking strategies and college admissions to middle and high school students. The overall aim of these courses and sessions is to enable youth to develop effective study and test-taking habits for college. Student Smart also helps students prepare for the college admissions process and navigate financial aid applications.

The LA Jobs Academy

The Los Angeles Jobs and Infrastructure Academy is an education and job-training program that tutors, trains and prepares LAUSD students for meaningful, well-paying careers in the public utilities. Over 1,700 students from South Los Angeles schools - Jefferson, Manual Arts and Santee High Schools and the Accelerated School - will participate in this two-year program and receive math and English tutoring as well as hands-on job training.

www.renewcalifornia.org

Campaign for LA Schools

Campaign for LA Schools is a fundraising effort to increase resources for the LAUSD. Villaraigosa launched the campaign with a \$50 million cornerstone investment – the largest individual gift ever given to LA's public schools. Richard and Melanie Lundquist donated \$50 million over 10 years and asked all of Los Angeles to join this fundraising and reform effort and challenged business and civic leaders to recognize their responsibility to contribute.

www.partnershipla.org

School Safety Initiative

Villaraigosa was joined by Superintendent Brewer, LAPD Chief Bratton, School Board President Garcia and School Police Chief Manion to unveil the School Safety Initiative which will implement new programs to enhance safety on LAUSD campuses, create more secure environments around schools, and improve security on students' paths to and from class.

The School Safety Initiative has begun with the first-ever evaluation of crime data around 20 middle and high schools located in or near the City's Gang Reduction Zones (GRZs). This will allow LAPD and the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) to identify trends, examine patterns and coordinate necessary resources to prevent and combat criminal activity in and around school campuses.

#