

# BJC Book Brigade Comes to Area Schools

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ALTON, IL – When second-graders in public school districts served by BJC HealthCare pack up their desks at the end of the school year, they will have a brand new book to take home to encourage their summer reading.

In its fourth year, the BJC Book Brigade is providing more than 26,000 books to rising third-graders in more than 300 public and charter schools in 63 districts throughout the communities served by BJC hospitals, including Alton and surrounding communities.

The program is a BJC community outreach effort in recognition of the correlation between education and higher income, better health and longer life expectancy.

As part of the program, Alton Memorial Hospital President Dave Braasch visited North Elementary School in Godfrey on May 9 to read to second graders and help give out books. The opportunity to spend time with the young students was a bright spot in his day.

“While it may seem like a modest effort to us, many of the children who received a book last year wrote touching notes to express thanks for a brand new book of their own,” Braasch said. “In the journey toward higher education and better health, the BJC Book Brigade is one small step that will take a very long time. But, we believe it’s well worth the long-term effort toward improved reading, high school graduation rates and, ultimately, better health for the future.”

Jahbron Caldwell, 8, of North Elementary School was glad to get a book called “I Just Want to Say Good Night.”

“I want to read it as much as I can and then read it to my little sister,” Jahbron said. “Reading teaches you words you don’t know.”

Morgan Crain, also 8, received a book called “Dog is My Co-Pilot.”

“I like dogs, so I like reading about them,” Morgan said. “I love reading, so thank you very much for giving us these books.”

Book titles are selected by curriculum specialists based on age-appropriate content and storyline messages. Employees have the opportunity to donate books online through Scholastic Books, and BJC supplies the remainder. Books are packaged and delivered in partnership with Valley Industries sheltered workshop in St. Louis.

Now in its fourth year, the BJC Book Brigade has provided more than 73,000 second-graders with a new book to read during their summer vacation.

Schools in the Alton area are receiving 1,100 books. Books go to the Alton School District, Bethalto, East Alton, Roxana, Wood River-Hartford, Jersey and Zion Lutheran School in Bethalto.

“Reading books can open up so many opportunities, and we want to encourage childhood literacy, because we specifically know it is related to health outcomes,” says June McAllister Fowler, BJC senior vice president of communications, marketing and public affairs, and executive sponsor of the BJC Book Brigade program.

Michelle Bick, a second grade teacher at North, said that reading during the summer is critical for children.

“A summer slide can happen if they don’t keep reading,” she said. “Reading is so important because it’s a skill needed in all the other subjects. And the Book Brigade is wonderful because we have lots of students from low-income families, so some of them might not otherwise have a lot of books in the summer.”

**Second grade students at North Elementary School in Godfrey show off the books they received as part of the BJC Book Brigade. Alton Memorial Hospital President Dave Braasch (center back) read some of the books to the children on May 9.**