

**Project bolsters Costa School library in East Palo Alto
Congregation Beth Am worshippers aid renovation effort
By Neil Gonzales
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EAST PALO ALTO — One group of volunteers clamped together boards to make bookshelves while another group sorted through thousands of books this past weekend at Costaño Elementary.

"The school library and classroom library are super important for poor communities where home libraries don't exist," said Dianne Otterby, a board member of the East Palo Alto Kids Foundation and a former local teacher. "The more we can beef that up the more access the children have to reading."

So the foundation and Congregation Beth Am of Los Altos have teamed up to launch a multipronged project to bolster student literacy at the school serving many disadvantaged families.

The nonprofit organization and Jewish synagogue not only are assembling shelves and collecting books to refurbish Costaño's library, they also plan to bring in a tutoring program starting next school year.

"We can put a lot of books in a library, but that might not be enough," said Richard Stark, project coordinator for the congregation. "You can make bookshelves, but that might not be enough. And having reading tutors alone might not be enough. But the combination of the three will instill a love of reading."

The project is setting up drives to gather donated books that are in good condition and also raising \$100,000 — most of it to go toward new materials, organizers said.

The Costaño library "is probably 8,000 books short compared to other school libraries," Stark said.

It holds "fewer than half the volumes that would be considered adequate for a public school library serving grades K-8," added foundation board President Tasha Castañeda, "and virtually none of the high-interest books that excite kids and incite them to read — books like the 'Harry Potter' titles for middle-grade students."

Some of the collected books will go to classrooms and students' homes, Otterby said.

The effort is also looking for volunteers to train for the tutoring program, which could run during and after school, Stark said. This part of the project will partner up with the Jewish Center for Literacy, he said.

"Many of our students face obstacles that are out of our control as educators," said Gina Sudaria, assistant principal at Costaño. "If we equip them with the skills and desire to read, we empower them with the tools to access information and knowledge in order to achieve success."

If the project proves successful at Costaño, Stark said, it could expand to other schools.

Last Sunday, project volunteers started putting together some 40 shelves and went through about 2,500 books, Otterby said.

Another shelf-building and book-sorting session is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday at Costaño.

For more information or to donate, call Stark at 650-504-5600 or e-mail rstark@thestarks.org.