

EPAK Micro Grants Help to Close Achievement Gap in Ravenswood School District

Although most children in the Silicon Valley start elementary school with two years of preschool under their belt, many kindergartners in the Ravenswood City School District are attending school for the first time.

"Less than 50 percent of our incoming kindergartners attended preschool," said Lara Burenin, Literacy Coordinator at Ravenswood City School District.

The effects of this can have a significant impact on a child's inability to succeed in school. Research shows that a child who is not reading proficiently by third grade is significantly less likely to enter and finish college.

"In 2013, 23 percent of the third-graders were proficient or advanced in English Language Arts on the California Standards Test, while an average of 58 percent of third-graders were proficient or advanced across San Mateo County," said Burenin. "Literacy skills are critical to our students' success in school and in life."

Other district statistics demonstrate how the Ravenswood City School District is a high-poverty, high-needs community, and the achievement gap exists when students start kindergarten.

"More than 95 percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch, 75 percent are English Learners and more than 50 percent of the district's parents did not graduate from high school, many of whom did not finish elementary school," said Burenin.

With support from EPAK micro grants, teachers are able to help close the achievement gap and bring struggling students up to grade-level reading. Teachers can qualify for \$600 per semester grant to buy leveled reading books, instructional materials, reading kits and aids to support literacy.

"In my first year teaching, I came into the classroom and found how limited the supplies, resources, and tools were in East Palo Alto," said Erin Gonce, first-grade teacher at Brentwood Academy. "Our district was unable to provide the items we needed and one of the largest deficits was books. With my first EPAK grant that year, I purchased books. My students had a wide range of ability; some knew only a few letters while others read text up to a third-grade reading level. EPAK provided the grant for me to purchase textbooks to meet their needs. Without EPAK that year, I would never have had the money necessary to teach literacy effectively in my classroom. My students have grown to be passionate, dedicated readers and I thank EPAK for the opportunity to teach literacy in my classroom effectively."

What Teachers Say About EPAK and Literacy

"Every student who has learned about reading in my room has EPAK to thank," said Dyan Haxton, fifth-grade teacher at Willow Oaks. "EPAK grants have paid for all my best books and about 75 percent of my classroom library."

"EPAK is amazing! Through your generosity I was able to get leveled books, which is an important resource in creating successful readers," said Katie Ramirez, kindergarten teacher at Willow Oaks. "I am so very thankful for EPAK."

"Thank you EPAK for filling classrooms with quality literature for students to read, to love, and to inspire," said Viviana Espinosa, Academic Dean at Costano Elementary School.

"When one of my students started kindergarten she did not know any letters and she had never been to preschool," said Sarah Hackett, Kindergarten teacher at Brentwood Academy. "I started

by teaching her letters and basic sight words and quickly began reading with her in a small groups with Level A texts and she ultimately left kindergarten reading at grade level. When students like her come in with very little letter knowledge and they leave reading at grade level, they have made much more than a year of growth. My colleagues and I see this over and over every year in Kindergarten. The students are willing to do the work, and when we (their teachers) have the right tools on hand to teach them effectively, magic happens. I am so, so very grateful for EPAK!”