

# Sugar Creek Elementary launches school-wide push for reading

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*Kelly McKinney FMSD - Kimberly Nees, media specialist at Sugar Creek Elementary School, holds Humphrey the hamster while Stephen Griffin holds a copy of the book. Nees, pretending to be afraid of Humphrey, showed the hamster off to students as part of the One School, One Book kickoff.*

The students, faculty and staff at Sugar Creek Elementary School are reading the same book as part of the One School, One Book program.

First graders Elena Nugent and Jessiqa Jasper and fourth grader Wisdom Baker can't wait to talk about the book they're reading. They shout out their favorite lines, talking over one another as they excitedly share the story of Humphrey the Hamster, the main character of the book "The World According to Humphrey," by Betty G. Birney.

The girls, along with the other students, faculty and staff at Sugar Creek Elementary School, are reading the book as part of the One School, One Book program.

Kelly McKinney FMSD - Kimberly Nees, media specialist at Sugar Creek Elementary School, holds Humphrey the hamster while Stephen Griffin holds a copy of the book. Nees, pretending to be a friend of Humphrey, showed the hamster off to students as part of the One School, One Book kickoff.

The students have a nightly assignment to read several chapters with their family. The following day, trivia questions about the book are asked during the morning announcements and winners are announced in the afternoon.

So far, students need little encouragement to keep reading. "It gets more interesting every single day," said Nugent.

Sister's Jasper and Baker like reading aloud every night with their parents, they said. The family passes the book around so each family member has a chance to read. When it's Mom and Dad's turn, they make up funny voices for each character.

"I like it because it's our family project and we get to laugh out loud together," Baker said.

"LOL," Jasper added. "We laugh out loud."

"The World According to Humphrey" was one of several books recommended for the project by the Read to Them Foundation, media specialist Kimberly Nees said. Nees was awarded a \$500 grant from the Foundation for Fort Mill Schools to buy a membership into the Read to Them Foundation, which supplied her with ideas and discounted materials.

The aim, she said, is not only to encourage students to read but also to encourage families to read aloud together.

"Reading aloud benefits children up to high school. It improves their fluency and vocabulary. Parents should be reading to their kids for as long as they will sit there," Nees said.

Having everyone in the school read the book provides some common ground between students and staff, Nees said.

“It’s helping us build relationships with the students. The idea is that the buzz from the books goes from the classroom to the halls all the way through the office and into their homes” Nees said.

Only a week into the program, Nees has already deemed it a success. Students are excited, she said, and parents are enjoying it as well.

“They say they’re enjoying it as much as the kids,” Nees said.

The next books in the Humphrey the Hamster book series are already checked out of the library, she added.

Each night, there could be up to 600 families reading the same parts of the same book out loud to each other, Nees said.

“It’s really moving to think about,” Nees said.

Nees is a first-year teacher, coming to the classroom after 10 years as a stay-at-home mom. Though the One School, One Book project was a big one to tackle in her first year, Nees is already eyeing a bigger goal.

“I would love to see the whole district take it on,” Nees said. “It would be tricky to do, to find a book for students from K through 12th grade, but it’s already being done in other places. It’d be a fun challenge.”