

The BOOKS (Books Offer Our Kids Success) Fund

During the 2007-2008 school year, a recently established program called BOOKS began making it possible for children's books to be purchased through the Scholastic Book Club and to be distributed each month to all kindergarten students at South Peru Early Childhood Learning Center, Pipe Creek Elementary School, and North Miami Elementary School. Since the beginning of the program, for ten months each year, approximately 450 families receive new books to read to their children.

"We get high quality books by well-known authors. We try to cover a variety of books," said Kim Martino, a teacher at Peru Elementary School and the creator of the BOOKS program.

When Kim began the program, she had to raise the necessary funds each month in order to purchase the books. With the generous gifts from individuals, businesses, grants, and with the support of the program's sponsor, the Psi Iota Xi sorority, Kim can now purchase books in advance for the entire school year. BOOKS also has an endowment fund with the Community Foundation, which Kim hopes will enable the program to be sustainable one day so that they may expand and offer books to other grade levels.

Providing books increases literacy rates, and it also increases the time that families spend with one another. During the first year of the program, books were distributed at school, but by the second year, annual family fun nights were organized, during which more books were distributed and the importance of reading to children was emphasized. In the third year of the program, a parent newsletter began to be distributed, which includes information about the books the children receive and questions that parents could ask their children as they read together in order to enhance comprehension.

Seventy percent of students at South Peru Early Childhood Learning Center come from low income families, and the BOOKS program makes it easier for children to have books to read with their families.

"We could not have done it without the Community Foundation," said Kim. The Northern Indiana Community Foundation is honored to be partnered with the BOOKS program and looks forward to continue watching it grow.

