



Reading 1,000 books before kindergarten is the goal in Cochise County

By Summer Hom
January 3, 2024



Book reading record sheets for those who participate in the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program at the Copper Queen Library in Bisbee. December 5, 2023.

Summer Hom, AZPM News

Cochise County's libraries are participating in the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten Program to help encourage early childhood reading.

The statewide early childhood group [First Things First](#) says from birth to age 5, a child's brain develops more than at any other time in life. That is why Cochise County Library District Director Amadee Ricketts says the 1,000 book challenge focuses on the age before children start kindergarten.

"It's based on the idea that so much of brain development ... happens before age 5," Ricketts said. "Reading with young children builds important skills they'll need later, so it builds vocabulary and excitement about books and reading ... If families are reading one book a night, which so many families do anyway, they'd hit one thousand books in less than three years."

Each participant in the challenge gets a reading record sheet, which has one hundred boxes on each page, to cross off the number of books they've read. Librarians around the county said even if you read the same book multiple times, it still contributes towards your book count.

Copper Queen Library Manager Jason Macoviak said 10 children have signed up for the program so far.

"We want anyone — any walk of life — to walk into our library and to be able to see themselves in a book," said Macoviak. "I think if we can do that, we've done our job. And not only have we done our job is we also have created a connection with a reader and we want that connection to become a lifelong relationship."

In Willcox, Library Manager of the Elsie S. Hogan Community Library Michelle Leyvas said they've had 3 to 4 participants in the program.

"I just hope that it will bring in more children than we have so far," Leyvas said.

Youth Services Librarian at the Sierra Vista Public Library Erica Merritt said audiobooks also count in the challenge. She adds the Sierra Vista Library started the program about a year ago with 53 kids participating.

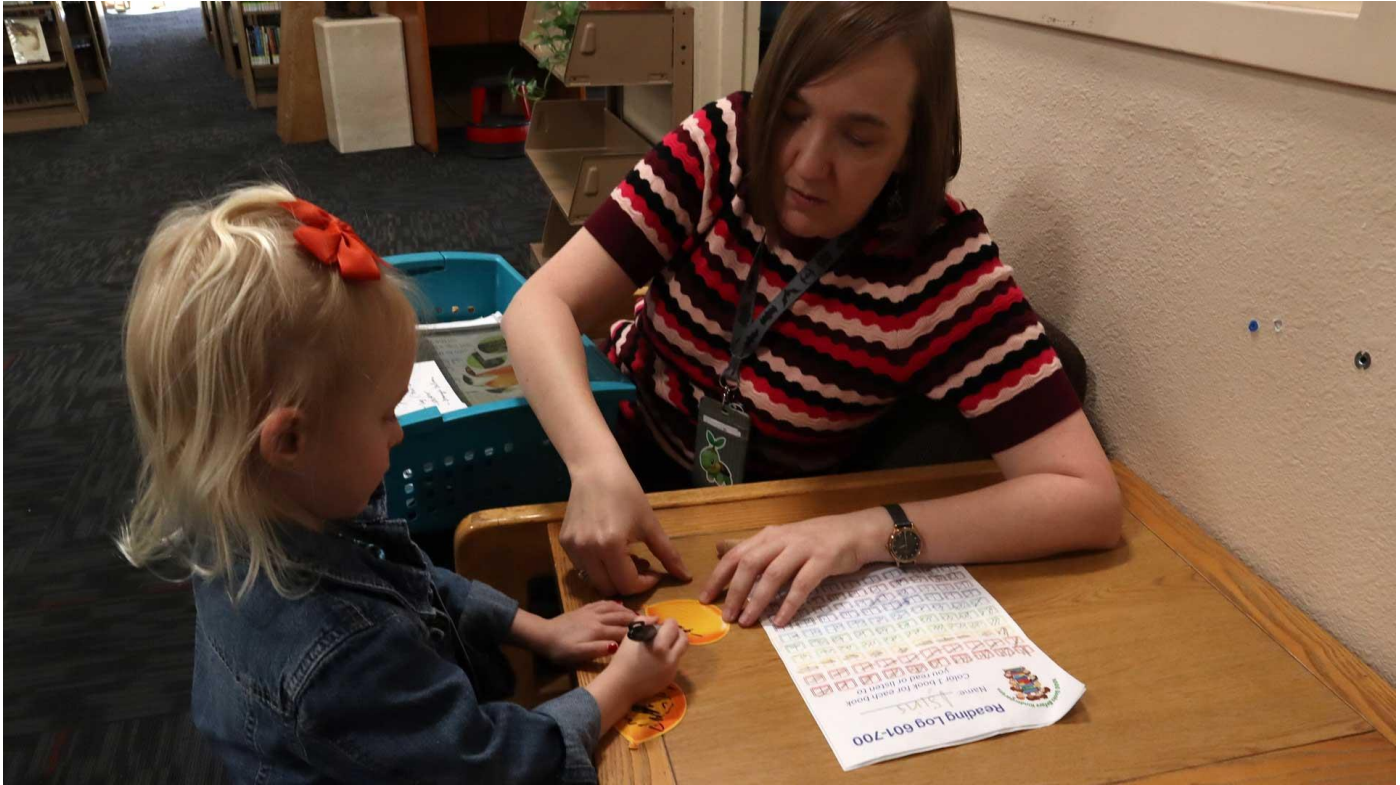
"And it's self-paced, which is great because if they start when they're two years old if it takes them three years till they reach kindergarten to read one thousand books, that's fine," said Merritt.

The [U.S. Census](#) estimates about 35.9% of Cochise County's population is either Hispanic or Latino and about 27% of the county's population [speaks a language other than English at home](#).

Dr. Leah Durán, who's an Associate Professor of Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of Arizona said that fostering reading in the pre-K age group, especially for multilingual children, helps to open the door to learning other subjects.

"The language that we see in writing, written language in books, in newspapers, and just in all kinds of written material is very different than oral, spoken language," said Dr. Durán. "So, it's really valuable to kids to have a lot of exposure not only to oral language the way we all have with our families, but specifically to written language in the way that it is different; especially because the further you get in school, the more you are expected to learn through reading, not just about reading. And so, the better you understand how written language works, the better you're positioned to learn about science, social studies, and even math because a lot of the learning happens through writing and through reading textbooks and through reading picture books."

Cochise County Library Director Ricketts says once participating children have read one thousand books, they can receive a free tee shirt or a tote bag courtesy of the Friends of the Cochise County Library District.



Sierra Vista Public Library Youth Services Librarian Erica Merritt (right) helps three-year-old Aeryn Johnson (left) put up her celebratory paper balloon on the wall signifying reading 700 books as part of the 1000 Books Before Kindergarten program. December 6, 2023.

Summer Hom, AZPM News