

# Waldorf West celebrates reading, financial literacy with story time

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Monday may have been recognized nationwide as Columbus Day, but for the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland the holiday was another opportunity to raise awareness and encourage every individual in every community to celebrate reading and financial literacy as part of an annual program called Read Across Maryland.

Gov. Larry Hogan (R) proclaimed October as Reading and Financial Literacy Month, which encouraged the caucus to launch Read Across Maryland in partnership with the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives. The program aims to not only change Maryland for the better but also unify voices for equal access.

"It's comparable to Read Across America but we wanted to focus on reading and the need to have those skills developed," said Del. Edith Patterson (D-Charles), vice chairwoman of the caucus who read aloud two books to children on Monday morning during a special visit to Waldorf West Library. "Members of the caucus were encouraged to select a library and go out to read. Of course, I chose [Waldorf West which is in] my county. The staff here was so appreciative and cooperative."

The theme of Monday's story time at Waldorf West was "Dots, dots, dots," which included a read-along with Patterson, dancing to songs, crafts and other fun activities. Children of all ages were invited but a majority of young participants were under the age of 10.

Charles County Public Library La Plata branch program coordinator Abby Worden said the children's librarian selects a different theme every month and then picks books and various crafts to coordinate with that theme.

“Our story time program is basically to get kids ready for kindergarten and the early literacy components in,” Worden said. “We have kids that not only know how to read but love to read, learn and explore. This program is a really good gateway for that. The crafts also help with their fine motor skills and imagination so it’s not just reading. The librarians put a lot of time into making story time purposeful with a positive message, which is really crucial for when the kids go to school.”

As a former county commissioner who has advocated for the implementation of Waldorf West, Patterson said it’s important to reach out and help other communities where books are a scarce resource.

“It’s proven to be just what we thought. [Waldorf West is] not just a library, but it’s a resource for the community as well,” Patterson said. “I think that we have to level the playing field and provide books as well as reading opportunities for those communities that don’t have them.”

Patterson said it’s also important for parents to get involved in reading initiatives like Read Across Maryland to improve their child’s literacy skills. That’s why the Legislative Black Caucus encourages “mothers and fathers to read to their children while they’re young” and make it a daily, routine activity that “they can expect,” she said.

“It was very encouraging to see the children, the babies,” Patterson added. “I’m an educator, mom and grandmother so I like making some reality of the book — versus just reading the story — to bring in their knowledge base, hear them answer questions and give them positive feedback.”

Alana Kuhnert of Waldorf, a mother to two young boys, said she encourages other parents to take up an interest in the program after seeing firsthand how much her kids enjoy it.

“It’s a good program and it’s organized. We love the program and come every week that we can,” she said. “Just enjoying books and the socialization of it all while having fun.”