



With a focus on equity and diversity, Albuquerque Public Schools inspires a love of reading with an innovative at-home program with the help of Follett.

ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ALBUQUERQUE | NEW MEXICO

INNOVATION FROM SCHOOL TO HOME

Albuquerque Public Schools' innovative program brings culturally relevant and bilingual books into the homes of local families. The Read at Home initiative puts free materials in the hands of students who otherwise may not have access to books they can read for pleasure (and not as homework). Follett is proud to work with the district to determine which books are right for its student body and to accomplish its goals.



“It’s important for students to have access to engaging and interesting books wherever they are – in their classrooms, their libraries, and their homes. Read at Home is designed to surround students with culturally and linguistically responsive books and other materials.”

RACHEL ALTABELLI

Director, Library Services
and Instructional Materials

ESTABLISHING THE READ AT HOME PROGRAM

Students who read for the joy of reading, outside of the classroom, gain reading proficiency and are ready to learn even more during school hours. To that end, the Albuquerque Public Schools district in New Mexico has piloted an innovative literacy initiative that aims to make reading a joy for *all* kids, especially those who may not have access to an at-home library or the means to buy and keep a book that interests them.

The Read at Home program provides books to all students in the district's bilingual, multicultural education program. The books are free for students, who can choose up to three titles. Students are given a backpack to take books home, where they can read and enjoy them. More than 60 schools with bilingual programs participate, distributing books to 11,000 students across the district from Kindergarten through Grade 12.

"The program was designed to promote biliteracy instruction that students are receiving in school and move it into their homes," said Sandra López-Alvarado, Director of Bilingual Programs. "For emergent bilingual students, it is important to give value to both languages of the program – English and Spanish – and give students access to authentic literature at school and at home."



The program is popular with students, many of whom may not own any books of their own. Being able to select books of interest to read for fun – and not as part of a school assignment – is "a really fun and exciting experience," said student Alexandra Jaquez.

"Many times our students can't afford to go to a bookstore to pick out their favorite book, so we hope to level the playing field with Read at Home," said Jessica Villalobos, Senior Director of the Language and Cultural Equity Department.

CURATING A COLLECTION THAT SPEAKS TO THE EXPERIENCE OF A DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION

The program is funded by the district's Language and Cultural Equity (LCE) Department, whose goal is not only to provide culturally responsive books that help students find mirrors of themselves in the literature they're reading, but also to build connections between students and their families.

"Part of helping students feel welcomed and engaged in school is showing that we see and value all aspects of them and their families, including language and culture," said Villalobos. "It's our hope that by putting books in front of students in which their cultures are represented, they will find mirrors for themselves in the literature they are reading, as well as build connections between themselves, their families, and their communities."

"We were choosing books that reflected students' language, culture, traditions, and experiences," echoed López-Alvarado.

To find those books, LCE staff partnered with the Classroom Curation team to find materials that support specific curriculum goals. Tens of thousands of books are published every year, so finding the right ones to align with project goals can be an overwhelming task. Follett Titlewave® gives educators access to millions of professionally curated titles for Grades PreK-12 students, and the Classroom Curation team can help curate a selection from Titlewave to fit the needs of any curriculum or project.

"We used Titlewave to build lists, both for this project and on an ongoing basis, and appreciate how easy it is to find reviews and awards in Titlewave," said Rachel Altobelli, the district's Director of Library Services and Instructional Materials. "The Read at Home program is a large undertaking and we need our vendor partners to be responsive and invested, as Follett is. We are a large district with many students, so projects like this one involve a large volume of books. When you have literally tons of books arriving in a short timeframe, there are logistical challenges. Follett is helpful and communicative when arranging shipping and is always willing to adjust things to fit our needs."



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JESSICA VILLALOBOS

Senior Director,
Language and Cultural Equity



PUTTING SMILES ON FACES AND BOOKS IN HOMES

The real fun begins when it comes time to get the books into the hands of students. The books are set out and displayed similar to the way they would be in a large bookstore. Students get to take their time browsing and can pick out up to three books. They then get a drawstring backpack to carry the books home in – and are even treated to a free pizza lunch before they head home. The books and the bag are theirs to keep.

Staff organizing the event say helping students make connections with books gives kids a new outlet to explore and helps them understand that their culture is celebrated all over the world.

“LCE and Library Services have been collaborating for several years on projects aiming to represent our diverse student cultures more fully in books and other materials,” said Altobelli, “so projects like this one take advantage of the work we have done and ongoing efforts to make sure we are seeking out and finding the best, most interesting, and most engaging culturally responsive books.”

Student response has been overwhelmingly positive.

“The most touching thing at the book distributions is when students ask us if they need to bring the books back, like they would with library books,” said López-Alvarado. “When we tell them they do not need to bring them back, that the books are theirs to keep, we get these huge smiles.”

One of those smiles lit up the face of student Alexandra Jaquez.

“It’s a good thing to see yourself in these books because it shows that you’re not the only one here,” she said. “You’re not the only one with these issues in your life.”

To date, the program has distributed nearly 20,000 backpacks, each one filled with books that students chose themselves.

“It’s been a wonderful experience,” said López-Alvarado.