



Springfield Housing Authority families receive \$390,000 literacy grant

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Jack Flynn, The Republican

SPRINGFIELD - The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has awarded \$390,000 to help 200 families at the Springfield Housing Authority boost reading skills in young children.

The grant, announced by authority executive director William H. Abrashkin and other community leaders, is designed to get all children in the families reading at a proficient level by third grade.

The funding will reinforce efforts by several other community groups, including the Irene and E. George A. Davis Foundation, to boost early literacy skills for children in low-income families.

Abrashkin said numerous studies show that children who fail to develop adequate reading skills suffer consequences throughout their adult life. The grant will help target children at home, in school and in community programs, and give them extra help in literacy skills, Abrashkin said.

"This is exactly what we need - intensive, concentrated, collaborative community resources brought to bear on this problem," said Abrashkin, who appeared at the event with Sally Fuller, program director of the Davis Foundation; Maura Geary, program manager for the Regional Employment Board; Dora D. Robinson, chief executive of the United Way of Pioneer Valley, and representatives from other community groups.



The Republican photo by Mark M. Murray

On hand for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation early literacy Springfield grant announcement at the John L. Sullivan housing complex in Springfield are, left to right, front, Timothy Collins, President of the Springfield Education Association, Sally Fuller, Project Director at the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, Rhonda Stowell-Lewis, Principal of the Dorman Elementary School, William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director of the Springfield Housing Authority; back row, left to right, Rosemary Hernandez, Literacy Program, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Dora D. Robinson, President and CEO of United Way of Pioneer Valley, Thomas O'Brien, Principal of the Edward P. Boland Elementary School, and Maura Geary, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County.

Fuller said the grant will allow the housing authority to join forces with the Davis Foundation and other groups trying to develop literacy skills in young children across Springfield.

In 2009, 64 percent of third graders citywide scored below proficient on the 2009 MCAS reading test, a figure that helped launch the Davis Foundation's Reading Success by Fourth Grade initiative.

The grant will provide help for children in the John L. and John I. Robinson Gardens housing developments and to the elementary schools linked to the two developments - the Edward P. Boland and Dorman elementary schools.

To one parent attending the event, the campaign echoes the message she preaches to her three children each day. "Read, read, read," said Bonnie J. McCarter, a program coordinator for the housing authority.

To reinforce the point, McCarter has recruited her 11-year-old daughter Madison as a literacy coach and cheerleader for her two younger siblings.

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