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Educators, volunteers use Dr. Seuss to teach students about kindness



Laura Kingsley, assistant superintendent and chief academic officer of Sarasota County Schools, read "The Cat in the Hat" to Laura Paulillo's first-grade class.

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Dr. Seuss Day got a special twist in district classrooms when Embracing Our Differences partnered with Sarasota County Schools.

by: [Samantha Chaney](#) Staff Writer

Gasps, giggles and all manner of ga-fluppted noises erupted in Laura Paulillo's first-grade classroom on the eve of Dr. Seuss's 115th birthday. Paulillo herself paraded around the premises dressed as the Cat in the Hat — painted whiskers and all — as children clambered toward the reading space in the middle of the room.

After all, with the arrival of the first day of March, a litany of volunteer readers also arrived at Alta Vista Elementary with one mission: to inspire students through the work of Dr. Seuss books.

And Laura Kingsley, assistant superintendent and chief academic officer of Sarasota County Schools, visited Paulillo's class to read "The Cat in the Hat," where the children wanted nothing more than to participate in the book with her.

"We had to shake hands with..." she read aloud.

"Thing 1 and Thing 2!" the first-graders chorused together, finishing the sentence.

In celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday, and as a means of teaching children more about kindness and inclusivity, Sarasota County Schools teamed up with the arts and education program, Embracing Our Differences. The program, based in Sarasota, placed volunteer readers at elementary schools all throughout the county. According to Embracing Our Differences Executive Director Sarah Wertheimer, teaching students about how to treat each other is crucial.

"We really focus on teaching the importance of kindness, respect and inclusion," she said. "And that's why Dr. Seuss is so perfect for our message; because we're able to really bring in those bullying prevention parts of his books."

And Kingsley herself demonstrated that respect and kindness to the children, not only by embracing the children's differences during her visit, but by also embracing them in a heartwarming hug before she left.

"I want you to feel loved," she told Paulillo's class upon finishing the book. "Because I loved reading to you today."

But hugs and stickers were not all children were left with before the day ended. In fact, Embracing Our Differences arrived with a collection of Dr. Seuss books to give away to teachers and students alike.

"My favorite part about this program is seeing the students interact with the volunteers and get so excited about the books that they're reading and the books that they're able to bring home," Wertheimer said.

"I hope they take away that you can read and re-read many times great books," Kingsley echoed. "We love to celebrate Dr. Seuss Day and his birthday. And for Embracing Our Differences to take this and make this a community effort is a gift to our schools and teachers and our children. We're very appreciative."