

## Embracing Reading Day is March 10



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Herald-Tribune columnist Carrie Seidman and some new friends from Christine Thompson's first-grade class at Fruitville Elementary get ready to read "Green Eggs and Ham" in 2019. [Photo provided by Bill Wagyl]

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More than 7,500 elementary school students from 60 schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties will celebrate reading and diversity on March 10, through books by authors/illustrators Todd Parr and Patricia Polacco. Embracing Reading Day is the brainchild of [Embracing Our Differences](#), a local non-profit organization that initially launched Embracing Dr. Seuss Reading Day six years ago as part of its year-round educational initiatives.

According to Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's education director, readings are scheduled for 440 pre-kindergarten to third-grade classrooms in 60 schools across Sarasota and Manatee counties. To date, 280 volunteers from the

community have signed up to be readers. Over the course of the day, more than 8,200 books, focused on the theme of diversity and inclusion, will be gifted to every participating student and classroom.

“Children begin to internalize messages about power, privilege, cultural and societal norms from a very young age,” says Jewell-Plocher. “Research on prejudice shows that encountering people who are different helps reduce stereotypes. For some children, a book can serve as a first introduction to a world of ‘others.’ Todd Parr and Patricia Polacco are both award-winning authors/illustrators who create heartwarming stories that offer consideration of all people and creatures and encourage conversations about diversity and respect for others.”

In 2019, this reading initiative reached 6,300 students from local elementary schools and provided more 6,500 books for students and classrooms. This massive outreach reflects a collaboration between EOD and the [Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#), a joint effort supported by The Patterson Foundation, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, United Way Suncoast and an anonymous family foundation. For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).