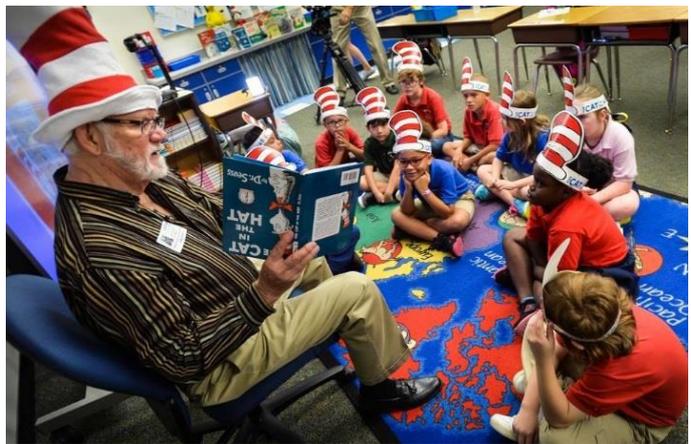


## First-graders get their very own Dr. Seuss book

More than 4,000 free books were distributed for Embracing Our Differences and the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading's "Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day."

By Elizabeth Djinis  
Staff Writer



SARASOTA — For Kimberly Morris' first-grade class at Alta Vista Elementary School, Thursday morning could have been like any other day.

Nearly 45 minutes into the school day, more than 15 first-graders piled onto the classroom's map-decorated carpet and sat down to listen to Dr. Seuss' "The Cat in the Hat." But first, there would be a special guest: John Berteau, the Patterson Foundation's governing board chairman. Next, there would be hats: red-and-white striped bands that matched the title cat's own preferred cap. And then, a final surprise: the book Berteau was holding would soon become theirs. At that news, one student, 7-year-old Dylan Sanchez, stood up to get a better look, and a few of the first-graders gasped.

They were just a small part of the 11,000 students from more than 65 Sarasota and Manatee county schools who participated in local

nonprofits' Embracing Our Differences and the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading's "Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day." More than 4,000 books were distributed, and every classroom received at least one copy of the book specified for their grade. In its fourth year, the event coincides with Dr. Seuss' birthday and is co-funded by the Patterson Foundation, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, the United Way of Manatee County and the Manatee Community Foundation.

"A lot of these kids have one or two books, and I try to keep books around," said Morris, who has taught at Alta Vista for 15 years. "But it's not the same as having their own; it's special."

After receiving their books, the children rushed to inscribe their names on the first page. Dylan said he already has 40 or 50 books, but he's excited to add this one to his collection. His current favorite? Another Dr. Seuss hit, "Horton Hatches an Egg." It's the story of the "half elephant, half bird" that really gets to him.

Dylan's seatmate, 6-year-old Sophia Emmons, said she cherishes her time spent reading, especially on rainy days. To her, that coincided well with the lesson from "The Cat in the Hat."

"The lesson of this book is, if it's a rainy day, you can still play," Emmons said. "I play with my toys, but sometimes when it's a rainy day, I read."

This is the second year that Berteau has volunteered to read, and he was one of more than 450 volunteers signed up to read to students ranging from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. His secret to keeping students engaged?

"Look at them," Berteau said.

For these students, Morris said it's not just the books that are important, but the day itself. Seeing children in her previous classes have this same experience, she knows it well.

"They talk about -- 'Remember when all those people came here?'" Morris said. "The book will be well-loved and hugged, as well as the memory of the day."