

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Young authors have plenty to celebrate at CES

Because of a Comal Education Foundation grant awarded nearly a decade ago, the next Harper Lee or John Steinbeck may very well have their passion for writing instilled at a very early age.

Shirley Gerdes was at Bill Brown Elementary in the late 1990s when she created an ongoing project in which her students could write and publish books.



When the Comal Education Foundation (CEF) was established in 2001, Gerdes decided to write a grant request named “Project Publish.” Ultimately, she was awarded \$4,500 during the CEF’s second-ever prize patrol, which helped her turn her vision into the Young Author’s Celebration.

The grant allowed Gerdes to expand her publishing project to the entire fourth grade at BBES as well as several other individual classrooms at different grade levels.

When Gerdes left BBES in 2004 to start teaching at Comal Elementary, she brought the “Young Author’s Celebration” with her.

It started out small at CES, but the project quickly gained steam, and by 2008, every class from kindergarten to fifth grade was taking part.

“The foundation grant launched this,” Gerdes said. “It got the teachers and the students rallied around the connection between reading, writing,

illustrating and publishing. It's wonderful to see this project alive and well so many years after we started it."

Students spend several months writing and illustrating, and usually around Spring Break, teachers send the books to be bound in hardback-style to Student Nationwide Publishing in Topeka, KS.

"The students are absolutely thrilled when they see all their hard work come back in published form," Gerdes said. "It really makes them proud. It makes them feel like real authors."

Students at CES invite many public figures, key community leaders, as well as their families and friends to the Young Author's Celebration, which took place this year on May 11. Students read to those who attend and have their captive audience members sign their books afterward.

Those invited included Governor Rick Perry, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, and Congressman Lamar Smith.

Those who attended included Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott, New Braunfels Mayor Bruce Boyer, Comal ISD superintendent Dr. Marc Walker, Garden Ridge Mayor Jay Feibelman, Comal ISD school board members Bill Swint and Frank Baker, Mia Garza, a representative from Congressman Smith's office, and CEF board members Margaret Tenorio, Carlene Comer and Mark Lehmann.

"It's makes me very proud to see our kids showing off their great work," Baker said. "It makes me feel like we're doing good things."

Swint said he always loves attending the Young Author's Celebration.

"This is really invaluable," Swint said. "What a wonderful way to encourage our youth. It's great to see our young people getting to meet so many community members and leaders who may inspire them."

Brandy Worley, who has two students attending CES, said her kids were beaming with pride when they saw their published book.

"It's so important for them to be able to show off their creativity at that age," Worley said. "They really feel they accomplished something."

Boyer said the Young Author's Celebration is an event he wouldn't miss.

"To feel you're an author at age seven, eight or nine can do nothing but give you confidence heading into the future," Boyer said. "It takes a lot of imagination to do what these students have accomplished."

Gerdes, who will help open Garden Ridge Elementary next fall after CES closes, said she hopes the Young Author's Celebration is around for a long time to come.

"It's just one of those projects where the hard work is worth the reward," Gerdes said. "The smiles you see from not only the children but everyone at our school today gives the kids, teachers, parents and community members a great sense of pride."

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IN PHOTOS: Comal ISD Superintendent Dr. Marc Walker and student Ben Yates share a laugh during the Young Author's Celebration at Comal Elementary School on May 11.

New Braunfels mayor Bruce Boyer concentrates as student Grazie Wenzel reads her published book during the Young Author's Celebration at Comal Elementary.

Preston Koenig is all smiles as he has his book signed by Comal ISD's school board vice president Frank Baker.

Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott visits with student Asilyn Schultz and teacher Karen Whitman during the Young Author's Celebration at Comal Elementary on May 11.



