

## Honolulu Star-Advertiser, Hawaii's news leader. - Enriching young readers - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

StarAdvertiser.com

### Enriching young readers

Two Kalihi schools join Olympian Kristi Yamaguchi's national literacy initiative

By Nanea Kalani

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Mar 04, 2015

Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi has expanded her literacy program for children, Always Reading, to Hawaii in hopes of increasing access to books for kindergartners at two Kalihi public schools.

Yamaguchi's foundation will supply tablets loaded with e-books for classroom use at Kalihi-Kai and Lina-puni elementary schools. The program falls under her Always Dream Foundation, which aims to inspire underserved children to reach for their dreams through innovative reading programs and advancing early childhood literacy.

The reading program is a partnership with a national nonprofit, Raising a Reader, which will provide hard-copy books for students to take home throughout the school year to encourage families to read together.

"It's a reading program that integrates a book bag — where they rotate new books every week that they get to take home — and then in the classrooms they get digital tablets with corresponding e-books that are pre-loaded, so it's a nice way for the students to be able to see the two different platforms on how to read a book and also introduces them to technology," Yamaguchi said.

The 1992 Olympic gold figure skater, who lives in California's Bay Area, visited the two schools Tuesday morning to announce the program. She read a children's book she authored and took selfies with the kids.

"We know that reading is the cornerstone for a child's success in education as well as in life, so we really wanted to try to make an impact there," she said of the Always Reading program, which was started in 2012 and serves 15 schools and more than 1,500 students in California and Arizona.

Yamaguchi said she'd been wanting to bring the literacy program to Hawaii, and found a local partner in Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education to help sustain and possibly expand the initiative to more schools.

"We're slowly going national," she said, "and Hawaii — we just have strong ties here, lots of friends and extended family."

Karen Lee, executive director of Hawaii P-20, helped identify the two initial schools, which serve impoverished communities. Lina-puni Elementary, for example, is inside the Kuhio Park Terrace public housing complex, and 99.5 percent of its students receive free or reduced-price lunch, a key indicator of poverty.

"We wanted areas where students don't have ready access to books. It's very hard for many of the families to access books, and there aren't books that are in circulation constantly," Lee said. "The kids are super excited to read, but they just need to have constant interaction with books that are at their grade level."

The goal of the P-20 initiative — a statewide coalition led by the Executive Office on Early Learning, state Department of Education and University of Hawaii system — is to have 55 percent of Hawaii's working population holding two- or four-year college degrees by 2025, up from about 42 percent now. To help reach that goal, the initiative is working to ensure that all children can read at grade level by the third grade.

"Kids have to be exposed to books as early as possible," Lee said. "And it's not just about reading the books; it's also so they have exposure to the words, the vocabulary, so that when it becomes time for them to be able to express themselves, analyze what they're reading, understand what they're reading, they'll have the tools to be able to do that."

---

*Copyright (c) Honolulu Star-Advertiser*