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Renae Hickert, deputy superintendent for USD 480, reads to Jeannett Moore's second grade at Washington Elementary class as part of Read Across America in honor of author Dr. Seuss. Washington Elementary conducted other Read Across America activities throughout the week.

By ELLY GRIMM • Leader & Times It's already known that reading recreationally has several benefits — in fact, the National Education Association says that the U.S. Department of Education found that the more students read for fun on their own time, the higher their reading scores, and students who do more reading at home are better readers and have higher math scores.

Activities for Read Across America, conducted every year in honor of the birthday of famous author Dr. Seuss, were hosted this week and will also be ongoing next week at Liberal elementary schools. Renae Hickert, deputy superintendent of schools, said the students are excited.

"I do think it's because of the affiliation with Dr. Seuss," she said. "When I, myself, was learning to read a long time ago, it was with the Dr. Seuss books. They're a bunch of fun and a good way for the kids to think 'this is fun.'"

Jeannett Moore, a second grade teacher at Washington Elementary, says that she also appreciates how excited her students have become with Read Across America. "When the students notice that other people from around America are reading the same things as students in Liberal, it gets them more enthused about reading," she said. "When I started talking about Dr. Seuss and Read Across America, the students started checking out books from the library. They get really excited to learn about something that excites me."

Moore also says her students love that things like Read Across America can help them relate to other students around the country, helping unify them.

"When I relate books back to something that is important around America, the students get more excited about what I am reading," she said. "I also love to tie in what others are doing around America to let students at Washington know that other students do the same thing we are doing in Liberal."

Hickert said that she also likes how Read Across America honors Dr. Seuss on his birthday, saying he is a part of the American fabric.

"How many people grew up reading his books?," she said. "I think it's great that even though he's passed away a long time ago, it's a great tradition to keep going and to honor his name because he was all about getting kids to read fun books."

Tracy Mettlen, the principal of Washington Elementary, says that literacy has always been a priority.

"An important literacy goal at Washington Elementary is for students to develop a love of reading and writing," she said. "I believe this program fosters that expectation."

Moore also revealed that a recent meeting of the Liberal chapter of the National Education Association, there were discussions that could lead to Read Across America day being district-wide next year.

"Read Across America gives students something to relate to other students about," she said. "When students participate in activities outside their school, they like to talk about what they did at school and this is a great thing. There is also a lot of free information about reading and certificates that encourage students to read at home."

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