

MASONS OF CALIFORNIA, RAISING A READER AND WUSD EXPAND PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE AFGHAN REFUGEE STUDENT LITERACY

Oct 2, 2024



From left, G. Sean Metroka, Grand Master of Masons in California; Dr. Cheryl P. Hildreth, Washington Unified School District Superintendent; Michelle Torgerson, Raising a Reader president and CEO; and Doug Ismail, California Masonic Foundation president, pose for a photo.

WEST SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - As part of its partnership with Raising a Reader and Washington Unified School District, the [Masons of California](#) announced Sept. 24 its funding of bilingual books with Farsi translation for 150 young Afghan refugees currently enrolled in the Washington Unified School District. The Greater Sacramento region, where Washington Unified School District resides, is home to one of the largest populations of Afghan refugees in the United States.

“Imagine starting a life in a new country and not being able to communicate with your teachers and peers,” said Doug Ismail, the California Masonic Foundation president. “As three organizations connected by their commitment to literacy, public education and improving educational outcomes, the partnership between the Masons of California, Raising a Reader and

Washington Unified School District leverages key resources from each entity to maximize impact on Afghan refugee students throughout the district.”

With 61% of Raising a Reader program participants reading at or above grade level in first-grade, compared to the 43% average, the bilingual books will improve educational outcomes for Afghan refugee students who did not grow up speaking English as a first language and increase access to growth opportunities in-school and beyond.

"As we launch Raising a Reader's new Farsi collection, we are reaffirming our commitment to ensuring that every child feels seen, supported and valued," said Michelle Torgerson, Raising a Reader president and CEO. "By offering books in native languages, we help foster a love of reading and learning among children and families across the United States. This bilingual collection is particularly meaningful as it supports newly-arrived Afghan families and helps build strong family connections through reading together.”

Through the partnership with Washington Unified School District, Masons of California will bring the Farsi-translated materials to 50 classrooms across the district. In total, the Masons of California have supplied Raising a Reader materials to more than 900 classrooms across California, primarily focusing on underserved schools with below-grade level reading scores. The organization hopes to continue expanding its Raising a Reader partnerships, with a goal of reaching at least 1,000 classrooms throughout the state.

“With approximately 10% of our student population from countries outside the United States attending school in our district, it is clear that West Sacramento is seeing a rise of ‘newcomers,’” said Dr. Cheryl P. Hildreth, Washington Unified School District superintendent. “We are grateful to Raising a Reader and the Masons of California for partnering with us to improve the educational outcomes for these students.”

In addition to its partnership with Raising a Reader, the Masons of California also support public education initiatives through its Investment in Success scholarship program, sponsorship of the California Teacher of the Year Awards, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and more.

About the Masons of California

Freemasonry is the world’s first and largest fraternal organization, guided by the enduring belief that everyone has the responsibility to make the world a better place. For 300 years, Freemasonry has enhanced and strengthened the character of its members by providing

opportunities for fellowship, charity and the search for truth within themselves and the larger world.

The Masons of California have more than 40,000 members and more than 330 lodges located throughout the state. The California Masonic Foundation is committed to making a profound difference in the local community and touches the lives of thousands of Californians each year. Learn more at freemason.org and follow the Masons on Facebook and Instagram.

About Raising a Reader

Raising a Reader (RAR) is a national nonprofit organization that partners with parents and educators to create brighter futures for children by strengthening family bonds. For more than 25 years, Raising a Reader has helped parents increase the amount of time reading with their children, which can lead to stronger reading skills. Forty independent evaluations consistently show that Raising a Reader increases parents' reading time with their children. Independent studies show that 74% percent of parents or guardians reported that they or someone in their households read to their children four or more times in a week (compared to 44% prior to participation).