

Learning is his playbook: Packers lineman kicks in time, money to support reading at MPS.

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Byline: Erin Richards

Sep. 27--Mark Tauscher does not play 9-year-old Timeante Smith's favorite sport -- basketball -- nor did the Green Bay Packers player pick up the boy's favorite Dr. Seuss story, "The Foot Book," while at Pierce Elementary on Tuesday.

But the offensive lineman did promote Timeante's favorite subject -- reading -- when he read "Green Eggs and Ham" to more than 60 third-graders to kick off his annual reading challenge. Joined by fellow Packers player Josh Bourke, Tauscher handed off another \$10,000 grant to Milwaukee Public Schools from his TRIFECTA Foundation, now in its second season, and challenged all students to read for 500 minutes during October.

But after the big names left -- Tauscher, Bourke, MPS Superintendent William Andrekopoulos and Associated Bank Senior Vice President Jill Haupt -- the champions of initiatives to promote literacy remained.

Kids like Timeante, who was barely at a first-grade reading level when he entered second grade at Pierce.

Kate Cvengros, his former teacher, spent extra time with Timeante last year, trying to get him to recognize words and overcome his frustration.

"Then one day, it was like a light bulb went off," said Cvengros.

"Any extra resources we can get, like multiple reading levels of books or even little stuff like notecards for word recognition, make a difference," Cvengros said.

Timeante is now an avid reader. His goal is to read a book with chapters.

Ask him, and he'll say he improved because he reads every day, usually out loud to his grandma so she can help him if he gets stuck. His favorites include "The Foot Book," "The Lady with the Alligator Purse" and "The Shaggy Dog."

But "that football player" reading "Green Eggs and Ham" on Tuesday was fun, Timeante said, because he got to hold up a picture of green eggs every time Tauscher said the words. Other children, on cue, held up pictures of ham or of "Sam-I-am."

What Timeante and his classmates didn't know was that Tauscher's donation, along with support from Associated Bank, will help fund mini-grants of about \$750 for teachers who apply with ideas for programs to improve literacy.

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