

Packers lineman tackles literacy

His foundation hopes to give kids a boost to become better readers

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In first grade, Mark Tauscher was in the lowest of three reading groups in his class.

"I had a hard time reading, had very low confidence," he told a group of students at Milwaukee's 21st Street Elementary School on Tuesday. "They were diagnosing me with learning disabilities, all sorts of things."

His mother thought maybe he should transfer to another school nearby in Auburndale, his hometown near Marshfield, he added in an interview. "I just remember I didn't want to have to make that walk," he said.

His teachers worked with him, he got help at home and by second grade, he was in the middle reading group.

By third grade, he was in the top reading group.

At 28, he has a master's in education administration and continues to take university courses.

Oh, yes, he's also a starting offensive lineman for the Green Bay Packers and - as of Monday - a \$10,000 benefactor of reading programs in Milwaukee Public Schools so that children in the situation he was in, kids who need a boost to make it as readers, will have better opportunities.

Mark Tauscher



Photo/[Kristyna Wentz-Graff](#)

Mark Tauscher of the Green Bay Packers reads to students Tuesday at the 21st Street Elementary School in Milwaukee. He announced the formation of the Trifecta Foundation, which will assist child-literacy programs. Trifecta stands for Tauscher's Reading Initiative for Every Child to Achieve.



Photo/[Kristyna Wentz-Graff](#)

Mark Tauscher donated \$10,000 to MPS' reading programs and said he hopes to support programs in other districts around the state.

Quotable

As a child, "I had a hard time reading, had very low confidence. They were diagnosing me with learning disabilities, all sorts of things. "

*- Mark Tauscher,
who has a master's degree in
education administration*

On The Web

 [Trifecta Foundation](#)

Family, literacy, school - those are the three words worked into the logo of the Trifecta Foundation, which was launched with the announcement of the grant. Trifecta stands for Tauscher's Reading Initiative for Every Child to Achieve.

"We're going to help as many schools as we possibly can," Tauscher said. He started with Milwaukee because, as part of work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on his master's, he had seen statistics on how many MPS students are struggling to read. He said he hoped to support programs in other districts around the state, particularly in Green Bay and Madison.

Joining Tauscher at 21st Street School was Paul S. Beideman, president and chief executive officer of Associated Banc-Corp. He said the bank will contribute at least \$50,000 to the Trifecta Foundation and possibly more, based on giving \$10 for each new "Packer checking" account opened in coming months.

Tauscher said he hoped to raise more than \$100,000 for the foundation and to make it a long-term effort.

MPS Superintendent William Andrekopoulos said Tauscher called his office about six months ago, asking whether there was something he could do to help with reading education in Milwaukee. Tauscher told Andrekopoulos in a subsequent meeting that he wanted it to be something that showed up directly in classrooms.

The grant from the 315-pound, 6-foot-4 tackle will support the Teacher EXCEL Grant Program of the MPS Foundation. Teachers can apply for grants of up to \$750 to provide enrichment materials for literacy programs.

Andrekopoulos praised Tauscher, saying, "His heart is with the children."

Jayne Jaskolski, a speech-language pathologist at 21st Street who works with 3- and 4-year-olds with learning difficulties, told Tauscher and others at the presentation ceremony how she had used EXCEL grants to develop "literacy kits" that included books and props that could be used in storytelling. Each child was able to keep the kits. Last year, she used a grant to support programs in which reading, arithmetic, science, music and art all were used around themes dealing with bears and farms.

During the visit, Tauscher read a book, "Miss Nelson Is Missing," to 18 fourth- and fifth-graders from the school. Color commentary on his performance: He should do a better job of holding the book so the kids can see, but his post-reading discussion with them about what the story was saying was done very well.

He also offered to answer other questions from the kids. The main one was, can we have autographs? The answer: Yes, and quite a few.

Then there was one student who asked, "Is Brett Favre a nice thrower?"

Tauscher answered. "He seems like he throws pretty well, as long as he's hitting the right guy."

More online at: www.trifectafoundation.com

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