

2021 NSPRA National School Communication Awards
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The article titled “Librarian Dr. Pam Westbrook sends 2,243 extra books home with students” was shared on DoDEA Connects — the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)’s internal news source and Intranet.

Librarian Dr. Pam Westbrook sends 2,243 extra books home with students

By Wendy Liu
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Librarian Dr. Pam Westbrook ensured the students of Stearley Heights Elementary School in Okinawa, Japan were loaded up with books before the school closed March 23. The spread of the coronavirus has caused school closures globally including all 163 DoDEA schools.

In the last two days of school — March 19 and 20 — Dr. Westbrook successfully sent home 2,243 extra books. On March 19, 337 books were checked out. And on March 20, the last day of school for students, 1,906 books were checked out. Prior to that, there were already 835 books on loan resulting in a total of 3,078 books in homes with students.

“Due to the uncertainty concerning the length of the closure, I wanted to encourage students to take lots of books,” said Dr. Westbrook. “I felt it was crucial to keep the joy of reading in our students as well as to let them know that the ‘Book Lady’ had a special treat for them while they are working from home.”

Under normal circumstances, students can check out between two to three books depending on their grade level. During longer breaks — such as Thanksgiving, winter break, and spring break — the students are usually permitted to check out double their normal amount.

With a situation like the current pandemic, there was no precedence to follow but Dr. Westbrook engaged with Stearley Heights Elementary School Principal Dr. Jennifer Sears and the school's Instructional System Specialist Dr. Judy Walter. With resounding support to put research tools in the hands of students, Dr. Westbrook executed the mass checkout of library books.

"The kids were so excited to be able to select so many books and the somewhat controlled chaos that ensued that day was totally worth it!" shared Dr. Westbrook.

On the last day of school before the extended closure, 46 students were absent — many due to restriction of movement mandates. Stearley Heights Elementary teachers went above and beyond and selected books to send home for those students so they would also have new books to enjoy.

Now there are approximately eight books checked out per student.

"I'm very pleased that we were able to do this! I am also pleased to hear from parents about how happy they were to see the extra books," said Dr. Sears. "Those extra books will increase our student's opportunity to read for knowledge or pleasure."

In addition to providing physical books, Dr. Westbrook also provided a step-by-step guide for students and parents on how to access the school's virtual library and information center for eBooks and educational databases.

"The online tools offer amazing options for reading practice as well as continuing to encourage lifelong reading enjoyment," said Dr. Westbrook. "It'll also come in handy for students as they work on class assignments which require research and further study."

As with other Stearley Heights teachers, Dr. Westbrook will be recording read-aloud stories for students to view online as a way to connect with them during the closure.

"What's important is that the kids know I care for them, I'm proud of them, and that I want them to continue to love reading even if we are not together each week," said Dr. Westbrook. "I have worked for DoDEA for 24 years and the amazing thing about our agency, our employees, our students, our parents, and our communities is that we are up to any challenge and excel at problem-solving. At DoDEA, we got this."