Books and Barbers Program Flourishes in Fort Worth

When students in Texas’ Fort Worth Independent School District go to their local barbershop, they are not only going to get their hair cut, but are also getting the opportunity to improve their reading skills.

The Books and Barbers Reading Program is an initiative launched in the summer of 2017 by the Fort Worth school system and pairs the school district with local barbershops in an effort to boost literacy.

Each participating barbershop is equipped with bookshelves, a variety of books, many with multicultural themes, and helpful and willing barbers ready to support their young patrons’ reading skills.

The initiative is specifically aimed at boosting the literacy rate of the district’s African American students, who make up 23 percent of the student population. In 2016-2017, only one in four black students in the district were reading on the appropriate grade level.

The partnership has expanded to include nine barbershops, who not only provide students with extra reading practice, but a comfortable environment. “We know the barbershops are places that our young men are going to fairly regularly,” said Sherry Breed, chief of equity and excellence for the district, in an article in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. “...And they have an established relationship with their barber.”

Roger Foggle, a barber participating in the program, encourages his customers to read aloud and answer questions about the book they are reading.

He says that many of the older boys

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A student in Texas’ Fort Worth Independent School District reads while getting his hair cut by a barber as part of the district’s Books with Barbers program. Photo credit: Joyce Marshall, Fort Worth Star-Telegram