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State Treasurer invites students to learn about money and smart financial choices

Participants in "Reading is an Investment" program also can win \$250 scholarships

SALEM – State Treasurer Ben Westlund today invited schoolchildren, parents and teachers to take part in the annual program that teaches important money skills – while also giving participants a chance to earn college scholarships.

The "Reading is an Investment" program, now in its fourth year, formally launched this week. The education effort, which focuses on elementary-aged youths, donates two books focused on financial concepts to every public elementary school library in Oregon.

"Better financial literacy will improve the quality of life for all Oregonians," Treasurer Westlund said. "The world today is increasingly complicated and filled with financial choices, and we all will be better served by equipping our next generation to make wise decisions."

This year's donated books are "A Chair for my Mother," by Vera B. Williams, which illustrates the value of saving through the story of a family that sets aside money following a fire; and "Kids Guide to Money Cents," by Keltie Thomas, which allows readers to determine their "money personality" and even offers business startup advice.

The books were selected by a panel of teachers and librarians, and each book has been aligned state standards in Math, Language Arts, Social Sciences, the Arts, Career-Related Learning, Science and Health and developed activities for each grade level. Participating students read the donated books, plus others from an age-based recommended list.

The books are provided through a partnership with the Oregon College Savings Plan, the state-sponsored 529 plan that helps families save for college and job training. Students who log sufficient hours reading will be entered into a random drawing for 100 scholarships, worth \$250 apiece, from the Oregon College Savings Plan.

Bonnie Heinz, head teacher at Juntura Elementary School in Eastern Oregon, said Reading is an Investment has been a positive addition to her lesson plans. "This past year so many things in the national news related to these topics, and without your resources it would have been more difficult to teach to my students' level," she wrote in a letter in August.

The Reading is an Investment program also made internal changes this year. Organizer Tasha Kiger led efforts to review and streamline costs, which resulted in a decision to exclusively post lesson plans online to save publishing and postage expenses. Those savings helped allow the program to continue. "It was about being environmentally friendly and also financially conscious," she said.

In the 2008-09 academic year, more than 2,500 children participated. The program also is open to families who want to complete the curriculum at home.

For lesson plans and program details, please visit www.ost.state.or.us and click on the "Reading is an Investment" link, or call the Office of the State Treasurer at 503-378-4329.

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