



WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
BY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

“Together, we are putting a laser focus on critical issues for San Joaquin County’s future. Working as a group, we can help overcome our region’s most pressing challenges and create a path to success for our children and community.”
— *President Pamela A. Eibeck*

President Eibeck reads to the community children during Family Day at the Park in September, part of the annual San Joaquin Reads Week.

Stories by
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GOING BEYOND OUR GATES

How do you build a better,
stronger community?

Through the launch of a major **early literacy effort** and a series of successful summer academies designed to fuel **music, math** and **science learning**, Pacific is aiming to raise youth academic achievement and, by extension, improve the lives of those throughout the region.

Such efforts are the cornerstone of Pacific's Beyond Our Gates initiative, an ambitious campaign started by President Eibeck to broaden the University's investment in the community and boost college readiness, particularly among low-income, academically struggling children.

Though the new programs are just a couple of years in the making, the region is already benefiting from Pacific reaching beyond its gates and into the community.

Reading by Third

The ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade has been called a critical indicator of a child's future educational success. And it's a goal that too few of San Joaquin County's children reach.

As part of a continuing conversation about how to elevate academic achievement in the Valley, University of the Pacific and community leaders have been exploring solutions to startlingly low literacy rates among children in the county. In September, the Beyond Our Gates Community Council launched its San Joaquin Reads initiative, which aims to increase the number of children who can read proficiently before they leave the third grade.

President Eibeck announced that Stockton had been accepted as a charter member of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a nationwide collaborative effort by funders, nonprofit partners and civic leaders to ensure that more children succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, career and active citizenship. Of the 124 communities that have joined the campaign so far, Stockton is the only one whose effort is being led by a college or university.

The Beyond Our Gates Community Council, which comprises local literacy experts, educators and representatives from businesses, the faith community, nonprofits and government, aims to work alongside parents, teachers and others in confronting the root causes of low literacy.

"We're helping children learn today so that they can be effective citizens tomorrow," said Eibeck. "This is a tremendously powerful group. Tackling such a deep-rooted issue will require a collaborative approach. If a young person is not able to read by the third grade, their future and the future of our communities are at risk."

The statistics in San Joaquin County are sobering, Eibeck said. Out of a classroom of 25 third graders, on average, only nine students are able to read proficiently. Less than 40 percent of local third graders demonstrate proficiency on standardized language arts tests.

Improving those figures is important, experts say, because after third grade students are expected to use computers for homework and classroom studies, read books and solve more complex problems. The child who is not a strong reader by fourth grade is at risk of falling further behind, dropping out and having fewer chances of finding gainful employment after high school.

At the Beyond Our Gates Dialogue that was part of the launch, Ralph Smith, senior vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and managing director of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, gave the keynote address.

"We recognize that schools can't do it alone," Smith said. "We can't stand on the sidelines. This is a group of kids who won't succeed without our help. That help is embodied in the Beyond Our Gates Community Council's call to action on literacy."



Ralph Smith, senior vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

A Harmonious Partnership

El Sistema, a Latin American music education program that is a model for youth music programs around the world.

Now, Stockton has its own version of *El Sistema*, thanks to a partnership of the Stockton Symphony, University of the Pacific, United Way of San Joaquin County, and Stockton Unified School District.

Harmony Stockton, a music academy that provides after-school instruction to local elementary students, has transformed the lives of 40 children and their families since it began in August 2011.

For many years, Peter Jaffe, director and conductor of the Stockton Symphony, had admired the *El Sistema* program. So when Pacific Conservatory of Music dean Giulio Ongaro visited an *El Sistema* program in Venezuela, the two men talked and Harmony Stockton was born. University of the Pacific hires the instructors, and

the symphony schedules the classes and arranges the concerts, working together with the University, the school district and United Way.

“Not only is it poignant,” Jaffe said, “it’s timely and even necessary. Nowhere could it be more apt than in a city where there has been much focus on our economic and social woes. The beauty of this program is that the wonderful musical skills the kids are learning are translating into invaluable life skills as well.”

Improving Social Skills and Academic Engagement

Founders of Harmony Stockton say the results of the program have been twofold. Through exposure to a wide variety of music and diligent practice with the violin and voice, the children are showing improved academic engagement and social skills at a time when literacy is suffering, dropout rates are alarmingly high and school districts have cut arts programs.

Study after academic study upholds the assertion that music education improves test taking, reading, memory, listening and concentration skills, said Lynn Beck, dean of the Gladys L. Benerd School of Education.



“If we make a difference in even one child’s life, then we are accomplishing something great,” Beck said. “We are reaching families. We’ve seen an enormous presence of fathers. It’s not just 40 children, but 40-plus families.”

Parents and instructors involved in Harmony Stockton say the children are displaying better manners and concentration. Many are setting sights on a college education, and not just in music, but also in sciences, art, technology and dance.

It’s a world where children can be anything they want and don’t have to repeat the cycle of poverty that has afflicted many of their families, said Erik Urbina ’11, a Pacific Conservatory of Music graduate and cellist with the Merced Symphony who is an instructor for Harmony Stockton.

“This is giving them many of the tools they’ll need as young adults, whether they choose a career in music or to become astronauts or politicians,” he said.



“Ever since her first Harmony Stockton recital, she’s been saying she wants to major in music in college. My heart lights up when I see her play. It’s opened up so many doors. She’s blossoming and is going places.”

— Harmony Stockton parent Vickie Gray about her daughter, Cheyanne, 9





The Reach for the Stars graduation ceremony that took place at Long Theatre in July

They're Reaching for the Stars

Promising young mathematicians, scientists and engineers celebrated a milestone this past July — the completion of their second year of the summer enrichment program, PREP-USA Reach for the Stars academy.

The four-year program is intended to expose sixth- through ninth-grade students to higher education and potential careers in engineering through math and science projects they can easily grasp. The academy serves 84 students from 11 schools, giving them the opportunity to explore STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.

Because the program is held at Pacific in the School of Engineering and Computer Science, Reach for the Stars students learn to see that they “belong” on a college campus, said Lynn Beck, dean of the Gladys L. Benerd School of Education.

“The knowledge they are gaining is preparing them for college and for careers in science, medicine, engineering, research and more. These students will lead our region’s workforce,” she said.

The graduation ceremony highlighted Verizon Foundation’s generous \$20,000 grant to support the program, the largest corporate gift to date.



Pacific, in partnership with University Regent José Hernandez’s Reaching for the Stars Foundation and Stockton Unified School District, launched the five-week Reach for the Stars Academy last year with 34 promising, low-income students from five area K-8 schools. The result: 33 of the 34 Reach for the Stars Academy participants improved their scores on a standardized logic and mathematics test administered at the beginning and end of the session.



Learn More
BeyondOurGates.org

The community’s feedback and ideas are welcomed as the initiative moves forward in building new and meaningful partnerships. Contact Community Relations Manager Jennifer Torres Siders at 209.946.3134 or jtorressiders@pacific.edu