



## Improving Literacy and Language Skills

Literacy Connects is improving the literacy and language skills of infants, children, adults and families in neighborhoods around schools in the Sunnyside Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona. The organization is the largest, nonprofit literacy provider in Arizona, and it promotes literacy through educational opportunities from birth through adulthood.

Helios invested \$487,000 into the initiative to increase families' literacy levels and educational expectations.

The program is designed to improve reading skills and scores among students at targeted elementary schools, encouraging greater involvement of parents in their children's and their own education, and developing closer links between the schools and community organizations that provide birth-through-adult educational programming.

The Literacy Connects Infusion Project model, which was piloted in August 2013 at Mission Manor Elementary School, provides research-based literacy programming for children birth through age eight in the surrounding community. The project addresses kindergarten readiness, reading at grade level by third grade, English language reading and writing, one-on-one literacy support and opportunities for learning through creative expression and arts integration, such as painting, drawing, dance and drama.

Literacy Connects and project partners, including United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, Pima Community College Adult Education, Sunnyside Parents as Teachers, and Pima County Public Libraries, are working collectively to do the following:

- Support area early childhood centers with professional development, including student advocacy, and help families successfully transition between early childhood programs and kindergarten
- Offer tutoring and educational workshops to help adults build skills in basic literacy, English-language reading and writing and college-and career-readiness
- Offer elementary school children reading coaches, opportunities for creative expression and whole-family learning events and
- Support teachers with programs and professional development

Literacy Connects is creating a literacy movement in the communities it serves, allowing more children in Southern Arizona to develop the language and literacy skills they need to read at grade level by the end of third grade.