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Need to Read

Club Provides Books for Children

BY JED BLACKWELL
EDITOR

The Mabry Middle School branch of a unique teen community service club recently completed a project to provide books for underprivileged children.

The Need to Read club is in its first year at Mabry, having been brought to the school from Holly Springs Motlow Elementary, where several members first became interested in the club and wanted to move it up with them when they advanced.

"I'm really proud of them," club founder Emily Conrad said of the students. "They've done a

great job. When they graduated to Mabry, quite a few members wanted to take the club with them. They did it, and they brought in several others."

Conrad is still a student herself. The 10th grader began the program when she was in 7th grade at Spartanburg Day School. She explained the twofold purpose of the reading club.

"First, I wanted to try to make reading as fun as possible," she said. "We have monthly meetings, and we try to include as many genres as possible.



Photo By Jed Blackwell

Students from the Need to Read Book Club at Mabry Middle School pick out books to donate to underprivileged children.

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For instance, this year we've covered animals, biographies, historical fiction, even Dickens. Second, I wanted to tie reading into community service. I wanted to find a way to inspire a love of reading in kids who might not normally read."

As a result, the club was born. The way it works is simple, according to Conrad.

"The organization seeks sponsors who donate one dollar per 100 pages read, and five dollars per service hour," she said. "The group from Mabry has raised \$1,500."

That money was used for a shopping spree at Barnes and Noble in Spartanburg. Mabry club members were assigned teams and picked out books for children of their assigned age groups. Then, they took the books to the Spartanburg Soup Kitchen, where they were distributed to children on May 11.

Conrad said she was excited about the efforts of the Mabry students.

"I'm really proud of them," she said. "They're really community-minded, and they're helping the program grow. It's incredi-

ble to see what it's become."

Mabry faculty member Julia Pressley is also pleased with the students' efforts.

"It's been great," she said. "There's already been interest in the club for next year. It's really had an impact on developing a love of reading mixed with service."

Student Taylor Brock was instrumental in bringing the club from Holly Springs to Mabry.

"Last year Emily came to our school and told us about the program, and I was really interested," Brock said. "I enjoyed it a lot, so when I got to Mabry I talked to Ms. Pressley and Mr. Batson about it, and I helped organize a chapter of the club at Mabry. I tried to get other

students interested, and it just took off."

Brock said the club provided a sense of satisfaction.

"It feels good to help provide books for kids who can't afford them," she said. "Every child deserves a chance to read."

Classmate Casey Brower agreed.

"I like that our reading has a purpose," she said. "I wasn't really interested in reading before, but knowing that I'm helping people makes me want to read more, so we'll raise more money."

For her part, Conrad is happy with the way the club is growing, but she is far from satisfied.

"I want to see it continue to grow," she said. "I'd like to make it a national project."