

Ashford School still loves to read books

By JILLIAN PEKOSKE
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ASHFORD — In an era of smart phones and video games, the town's local school recently hosted a program that showed its pupils still enjoy the written — and printed — word.

"Reading is my passion," Kate Lindsay, an 11-year-old, sixth-grader at Ashford School, gushed. "I was really excited about decorating my plate."

Kate was referring to an elaborate and extensive paper plate chain resembling a bookworm that had a prominent place in a school hallway this fall.

While the worm served as a remembrance of work students did in the summer, that work — summer reading — has a year-round positive academic impact.

Kate said she read a story about an orphan girl who befriends a dragon and receives slippers that can either be used to save her kingdom or demolish it.

She decorated her plate with dragons and slippers to symbolize the book "Dragon Slippers" by Jessica Day George.

As part of the summer project, each student was required to read two books of their choice and highly encouraged to decorate a plate that represented these books, Ashford School Principal Troy Hopkins said.

The plates were assembled as a bookworm and put on display in the school's main hallway as a way to visualize the large number of books the students read, said Jennifer Lindsay, the school's English language arts teacher and Kate's mother.

The worm begins at the main office and inches to the end of the hallway, where it travels from top to bottom and overlaps itself again as children look up at the worm walking to and from classes.

Summer reading and the bookworm creation that followed, attempt to prevent students' reading skills from fading over summer.

If students read all summer, teachers will not spend the first weeks, or even months, of the

school year working to get children's skills back to their June levels.

About two-thirds of ninth-grade academic achievement gap between advantaged students and less advantaged students can be explained by the reading gap over the summer during their elementary school years, said Susan Cormier, children's services consultant at the Connecticut State Library.

Reading in general is extremely important to children by expanding their vocabularies and learning to read more quickly but "reading during the summer can help children maintain reading ability during the long vacation months," Cormier said.

Summer reading becomes so significant because it is cumulative, she said.

Once a child falls behind during the summer, it is a reoccurring cycle where they will start every school year behind, Cormier said.

The bookworm is one of many projects at Ashford School aimed at getting children excited about reading.

Reading, which is important to the development of students, enriches their vocabulary, gives students ideas and exposes them to other places, Jennifer Lindsay said.

The school has family reading night, at which preschoolers to second-graders attend a book reading hosted by local celebrities, Samantha Makuch, the school's literacy specialist, said.

The school gets local firefighters and police officers to come and read to the children.

In addition to family reading night, some children participated in the governor's Summer Reading Challenge.

This challenge rewarded children for their reading with bracelets that said "I love to read" and coupons for free ice cream, Jennifer Lindsay said.

Editor's note: The writer is a University of Connecticut journalism student.