

LOCAL NEWS

Three Fitchburg students have books published



Three McKay Arts Academy students recently had information books they wrote through the Foosteps2Brilliance app published. (L. to r.) Fitchburg Public Schools Early Literacy Coordinator Kathryn Brady, Mayor Stephen DiNatale, author Erika Matos, Principal Mark Pierce, authors Yarielis Pujols and Guillermo Escobar Pujols, ESL teacher Millette Rosa, and Swan Hope Press co-creators Sally Cragin and Kathryn Swantee, who published the books.

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FITCHBURG – Three young McKay Arts Academy students can now claim the title published author.



McKay Arts Academy Principal Mark Pierce congratulates the three young authors, (l. to r.) Erika Matos Batista, Yarielis Pujols, and Guillermo Escobar Pujols on their books being published.

Fourth graders and cousins Yarielis Pujols and Guillermo Escobar Pujols and fifth grader Erika Matos Batista each wrote an informational book, which were published by Swan Hope Press co-creators Sally Cragin and Kathryn Swantee and printed at Minuteman Press. Yarielis and Guillermo’s books focus on alligators, while Erika’s is titled “Billy the Beaver.”

The English as a Second Language students presented their books on June 10 in the school cafeteria to Mayor Stephen DiNatale, Principal Mark Pierce, and copies will be available in the McKay library. Dozens of students also gathered in the cafeteria and clapped and cheered in support of their classmates.

“So very impressive, congratulations to all the authors,” DiNatale said.





Young author Erika Matos Batista receives a copy of her published book, "Billy the Beaver," from Fitchburg Public Schools Early Literacy Coordinator Kathryn Brady, while her ESL teacher Millette Rosa looks on.

Pierce echoed those sentiments.

"I'm so proud of you three and what you accomplished," he said. "I hope this is just the beginning."



Fitchburg Public Schools Early Literacy Coordinator Kathryn Brady said the three authors started working on their informational books through the Footsteps2Brilliance app program virtually at home during remote learning.

“An informational text is something you can learn from, something that is real that gives knowledge about something you didn’t know already,” Brady said.

Once in-person school resumed, their ESL teacher Millette Rosa showed the students how to find information online for the books and helped them edit them.

“They worked so hard to ensure the capitalization and punctuation and everything was correct,” Brady said. “It is even more work if your primary language is not English.”



Three young McKay Arts Academy students can now claim the title published author. Fifth grader Erika Matos Batista wrote a book called “Billy the Beaver,” and fourth graders and cousins Yarielis Pujols and Guillermo Escobar Pujols wrote books on alligators.

Rosa has been an ESL teacher at McKay for six years.



“I just love teaching these kids,” she said.

Rosa said she and the three authors spent time researching information for the books as well as “learning proper grammar and punctuation.”

“Writing is one of the things we focus on,” she said, adding that the pandemic made it “hard to get them online and write.”

“This was one way to get them motivated and writing,” Rosa said. “They were very excited to write their stories.”

Yarielis said through Rosa interpreting that she “loves alligators,” and Erika said “it’s fun” to have her book published. Brady said Guillermo enjoyed the writing process so much that he plans to continue writing.

“This has led him to want to do graphic novels,” Brady said of Guillermo.



Dozens of McKay Arts Academy students gathered in the school cafeteria on June 10, clapping and cheering in support of their three author classmates.

Swantee and Cragin, who is a school committee member, were at the gathering and praised the students for their accomplishment. Swantee did the graphic arts for the books.

“I have always loved working with kids, so I was thrilled to be a part of this,” Swantee said.

Cragin thanked the students for “telling stories.”

“Your books are going out in the world,” she said.



Cragin said she and Swantee plan to continue publishing Footsteps2Brilliance books written by students.

“We are looking for more writers,” Brady said. “You can sign up on the app or write it on your own. We hope this summer while you are sitting under a nice shady tree or on your front porch you think about writing for us.”

According to its website the comprehensive Footsteps2Brilliance curriculum contains thousands of interactive eBooks, songs and games in English or Spanish. It has won numerous awards for using game-based methodology to engage students and inspire a love of learning.



Fitchburg Public Schools School Committee member and publisher Sally Cragin takes a photo of the three McKay Arts Academy students who recently had their books published, (l. to r.) Erika Matos Batista, Yarielis Pujols and Guillermo Escobar Pujols.

As the early literacy coordinator, Brady does outreach with many community agencies that “take part in caretaking in PreK,” including Head Start, YMCA, Seven Hills, Montachusett Opportunity Council, and others, and trains staff on how to use the Footsteps2Brilliance app. The program has been beneficial in engaging parents and accelerating literacy since it was launched over a decade ago.

“It has been taking off,” she said.

Brady said a donation of 50 tablets last fall from Fitchburg Art Museum for the students to use has helped foster involvement in the Footsteps2Brilliance program.

“We have been busy since then,” she said.

For more information visit <https://www.footsteps2brilliance.com/>.



Danielle Ray | Reporter



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