

Reading challenge: Hamburg school leaders dress up as cowboys

Friday, May 30, 2008



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HAMBURG — Superintendent Steven Engravalle was on his high horse Thursday.

Literally.

Engravalle sat on his lofty perch in the school's courtyard praising the third-graders of Hamburg School.

Why shouldn't he — after all, it was they who put him there.

Engravalle and Vice Principal Roger Jinks dressed as cowboys — complete with hats, boots and belt buckles that read "third-graders rule" — to reward the school's third-grade students for reading more than 1,000 books.

Each year, the third-graders are challenged to read at least 1,000 books. If they meet their goal, and Engravalle said they always do, the students are allowed to decide what kind of costume the superintendent and vice principal have to wear. Last year, Engravalle dressed in tights as the Hamburg Hero.

This year, in addition to the costume, Engravalle surprised the students by riding a horse up to greet them as they stood in the courtyard yelling and clapping for him.

In his best cowboy accent, Engravalle told the students, "We are so proud of you."

Jinks added, "See what reading gets you ... you get to go to Wild West City and we had to dress up like cowboys. "You did a great job.

Since October, 26 students in Marianne Allen and Veronica Danko's third-grade classes read 1,051 books.

Andrew Liberatore, 9, read 155 books. "It was worth it to see them all dressed up," he said.

To practice writing skills and to keep the students motivated, they were required to write book reports about each book they read. Each synopsis was written on a paper cowboy boot and then displayed in the hallways of the school to document their progress.

Engravalle said the reading project became a schoolwide event and "all of the kids had a blast with it."

"The more children come in contact with text, the better their vocabulary and writing skills are," Engravalle said. "Reading is a lifelong habit and I want to instill that in the students."

Eventually, all of the students of Hamburg School made their way outside to see their superintendent on horseback.

"Y'all be good today," Engravalle said as he rode off.

