

# School Board advocates reading program for kids aged 0-5

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Pilot writer

Petersburg children up to five years old could soon receive a small library of children's books thanks to the Petersburg School Board, which is advocating the community join a national reading program.

The program, called the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, was started in 1996 by the country singer in her home state of Tennessee. Since then it has spread across the country.

The premise of the program is that every child in the community up to five years old can enroll to receive a free book every month. The child is sent a new book in the mail each month, adding to their personal library. Popular titles such as "The Little Engine That Could" are included in the program.

On Tuesday night, the school board discussed the program, which has an added incentive of a matching grant if funding is secured by March 1. The program has already been introduced in 20-30 Alaskan communities, School Board Member Jim Schwartz said.

Schwartz presented the program to the board, standing in for Peggy Floro, who was unable to attend the school board meeting. Floro, a community engagement advocate, has been working on starting the program in Petersburg for a few months.

He challenged the school board to help to generate funds for the program.

"It wouldn't take much to get that much," Schwartz said.

According to the Dolly Parton website, the cost is \$28 per year per child, meaning each book costs \$2.33.

For more information, contact Peggy Floro at (907) 772-3488

The program has been a proven success, and it is commonly known that reading to a child helps development, Superintendent Rob Thomason said Tuesday.

"In fact, at the earliest ages they are imprinting on language patterns," Thomason said. "They are observing the book, they are observing the patterns. They are not passive learners when they are at that young, young age."

"It pays dividends," Thomason said. "Even if they are not responding in words, it is going in."

Reading to children also prepares them for entering school.

"It makes a really big difference in where they are when they go to kindergarten," School Board President Jean Ellis said.

"It's probably one of the biggest things we can do to get kids ready for school," Schwartz said.