

News

STOCKTON RANKS DEAD LAST IN LITERACY

By **David Siders**

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STOCKTON - You might be the only person reading this story. Or anything else, for that matter.

For the second year in a row, Stockton ranks last in a study of literacy in the nation's largest 70 cities.

The report, America's Most Literate Cities, considers not whether residents can read, but whether they do. It examined newspaper circulation, library and Internet use, educational attainment and the number of periodicals published in cities that have populations of at least 250,000.

Seattle ranks first overall. El Paso, Texas, finished second to last in the study, published this week by Central Connecticut State University.

Stockton ranks lower than 60th in all but one measure, Internet resources. Based on its number of library connections, public and commercial access points and percent of adults who have read a newspaper or ordered a book online, Stockton ranks No. 45.

"It breaks my heart," said Michelle Lonero, a teacher at Rio Calaveras Elementary School who recently created the costumed characters "Super Reader" and "Bookmark" to encourage students, including those in her first-grade class, to read.

Gabriel Bernal, 8, is one child who needs encouragement.

At Cesar Chavez Central Library on Wednesday, his mother, Esther Bernal, held a dozen books to check out for him, "ones that keep his attention going."

Unlike his bookish brother Xavier, 10, who emerged from the shelves with a book on the Dallas Cowboys, Gabriel said he prefers to play video games. Still, he said his mom is right to make him read.

"Gosh," she said. "He needs to be smart."

Central Connecticut State University President John Miller, the study's author, said Wednesday that California and Texas cities likely score low in the study in part due to their large populations of recent immigrants who do not speak English.

"It is disconcerting," Mayor Ed Chavez said. "There's no way to sugar-coat it."

Miller said Stockton could not expect to move up the list dramatically any time soon, but he said small efforts could help.

For example, he said there should be a rule in every home that when the television is on, closed captioning accompanies it so viewers could practice reading along.

Lonero said parents should have books, magazines and newspapers in the home. And she said parents must not give up.

"I have hope and faith," she said. "You have to. You can't give up on the kids. Maybe adults need to be better role models for reading, and they need to be reading more in front of their children."

According to federal data from 2004, the most recent available, the Stockton-San Joaquin County Public Library system has about 1 million books and checks out about 2.1 million books and materials every year, or 3.75 books and materials per capita.

At the Seattle Public Library, the per capita circulation is 11.48.

The complete results of the survey are online at www.ccsu.edu/AMLC06.

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