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MIAMI-DADE

Early Learning Coalition launches book giveaway

BY NADEGE CHARLES

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Sitting cross-legged on a colorful reading mat, wide-eyed students at Kidworks USA in Hialeah listened intently as children's author María Celeste Arrarás read a story filled with magic and mystery.

The reading -- sponsored by the nonprofit Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe -- kicked off a countywide book giveaway.

As part of a \$125,000 grant from Reading is Fundamental, the nation's largest literacy organization, 385 centers like the one in Hialeah will receive a total of 28,000 books.

"A lot of people think early child care is baby-sitting," said ELC President Evelio Torres. "We want to stress the importance of building a love for education at an early age and reading is a fundamental part of that."

As part of the giveaways, a list of well-known readers including Ron Magill, Miami Metrozoo's media director, and Miami-Dade County firefighters will volunteer to read at local centers.

Arrarás, an Emmy award winning journalist, *Telemundo* host and single mother of three, read

her book, *The Magical Cane*, on Wednesday morning.

Arrarás said she was inspired by story time with her kids and was forced to write the book out of necessity.

"They never wanted to hear the same story," she said. "My girl wanted mermaids. The boys wanted action and Pokémon, so I combined all these elements to create one story."

Miranda Cabarga, 4, was impressed.

"She did a very good job and I really like the girl in the story because she's like a mermaid."

The books will be used to bolster the education centers' libraries and each child will also be given one to take home.

"We want to encourage parents to read to their kids at home," Torres said. "It reinforces what they're learning at school and it also helps to form a deeper bond with your child."





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