NEW LITERACY PROGRAM KICKS OFF IN HOPES OF FAMILY PARTICIPATION

HONOLULU, HI, March 3, 2015 – Olympic Gold Medalist Kristi Yamaguchi today launched an early childhood literacy program at Kalihi Kai Elementary School and Linapuni Elementary School. More than 120 kindergarteners at these two schools will be participating in Always Reading, a program designed to increase literacy by encouraging more family involvement.

“Always Dream Foundation is thrilled to launch Always Reading in Hawaii,” Kristi Yamaguchi said. “This program will inspire a love of reading at an early age by providing children access to books and technology. Many of the children we hope to serve might not have access to 21st century technology. We hope to make a significant difference in the lives of children, and provide the necessary resources to engage their parents to be part of their learning process.

The Always Reading program is a partnership with Raising a Reader, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping families develop, practice and maintain literacy habits for children birth to age 8 that are critical for a child’s success in school and in life. The Hawaii State Department of Education welcomed the news, with this newly formed collaborative effort between Kristi Yamaguchi’s Always Dream Foundation, Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education and Raising A Reader.

“This program will provide resources and guidance for families to implement home-based literacy routines for children,” said Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi. “This support for the home is important in shaping a child’s literacy behaviors and reading development.”

Always Reading will provide e-books and tablets, as well as, hard copy books and book bags for the kindergartener students at Kalihi Kai and Linapuni Elementary Schools and their families to develop a reading habit at home to support literacy development in young children.

“We are confident this program will have an enormous impact on families by giving parents the tools to make reading more of a priority in their homes,” said Karen Lee, Executive Director of Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education. “We want to engage parents in a routine of book sharing with their children, as this has been proven to foster healthy brain development, positive relationships, a love of reading and the literacy skills critical for school and lifelong success.”
The program allows students to bring home a book bag filled with award-winning books each week. Books will be exchanged for new ones with more than 50 books rotated through the home during the year. The program also trains parents on engaging their children in reading, and connects families to local libraries to sustain the habit of borrowing and reading books after completion of the program.

Research shows a direct and proven relationship between family engagement and the academic growth and development of children, including social competence and relationships, cognitive development, communication skills, literacy development, vocabulary growth, expressive language and comprehension skills. Many of a child’s literacy habits and abilities are formed before the age of eight. Children who are not reading at grade level by the time they are in the third grade have a significantly lower chance of ever catching up.

In 2016, the Always Dream Foundation plans to host a children’s literacy festival at a local family destination. The event will provide a fun, enriched learning day highlighting the joy and importance of reading while engages families.

About Always Dream Foundation
In 1996, Kristi Yamaguchi founded the Always Dream Foundation whose mission is to inspire underserved children to reach for their dreams through innovative reading programs and by advancing the cause of early childhood literacy. Always Dream launched their “Always Reading” early childhood literacy program in 2012, which now serves 17 schools and over 1,500 students in California, Arizona and Hawaii. Always Dream works to engage and involve families and the community in the cause of early literacy through events and advocacy to inspire children to dream big.

About Hawaii P-20
Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education is a statewide partnership led by the Executive Office on Early Learning, the Hawaii State Department of Education and the University of Hawaii System that is working to strengthen the education pipeline from early childhood through higher education so that all students achieve career and college success. For more information, please visit www.p20hawaii.org.

About Raising a Reader
Raising a Reader is a 501c3 charitable organization dedicated to helping families develop, practice and maintain literacy habits for children birth to age 8 that are critical for a child’s success in school and in life. The Raising A Reader program is implemented through a network of community partners that comprise more than 2,700 locations across the country. Partners include public school systems, libraries, afterschool programs, community agencies and other organizations both public and private. More than 23 independent evaluations have proven Raising A Reader significantly improves language and literacy skills, school readiness, family reading behaviors and parent-child bonding. Headquartered in Redwood City, California, Raising A Reader was founded in 1999 and has served more than 1.25 million families nationwide. More information is available at www.RaisingARReader.org.

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