

Preschoolers learn love of reading By Kathy Routliffe
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EVANSTON -- When U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, read "Mrs. Spider's Tea Party" to a room full of preschoolers Wednesday, she wasn't only entertaining them.

Schakowsky was helping to teach them the virtues of being good to one another, and the fun of learning through reading.

The Evanston congresswoman was one of 20 or so celebrity readers who trooped through the classrooms at Haven Middle School's early child-care center last week, when the center observed the "Week of the Young Child."

The roll call included firefighters and police officers, Evanston-Skokie School District 65 Superintendent Hardy Ray Murphy Jr., community librarians, city, and YMCA officials and others.

The idea, Marla Israel said last week, is to show youngsters between ages 3 and 5 "that a variety of different people read all the time and enjoy reading, whether they are a mayor, a superintendent, a fireman or a policeman.

"It also helps these children see these people as people who care about them and care about their development and growth."

Israel is early childhood principal at the center as well as school-aged child-care and family center coordinator there.

Week of the Young Child efforts are sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and District 65 has taken part in previous years, Israel said.

But she praised Rocio Olasimbo, the program's new assistant coordinator for education and staff development, for helping infuse this year's events with energy and excitement.

"We've always done something, but never this well-coordinated and executed," she said.

Each year's celebration has a theme and in 2002 it was "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You," Israel said.

"We are modeling and celebrating that theme of being decent to each other. And we're celebrating the underpinnings of learning which happen in early childhood. The quality of early childhood experiences like those in District 65 make it a wonderful place to learn that lesson."

The district has operated an early child-care program since 1965, with a stated goal of making all children ready to enter school and be successful when they do so.

Right now there are 250 children in the program, some attending in half-day stints and others for full days. When the district's new Joseph E. Hill Education Center opens, that number will jump to between 350 and 400, Israel said.