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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rio Rancho Rotary offers student literacy program

OVER 70% of New Mexico's fourth-graders cannot read at grade level. The premise that they "learn to read until the third grade" and then "read to learn after the third grade" dooms these children to years of poor academic performance, lowered self-confidence and many will become high school dropouts. This is unacceptable. These children are our future — our future employees, our future neighbors and our future customers. We must do better.

We have been blessed with an outstanding public school system and do not experience these drastic results. Our professional educators are dedicated to providing every student with the tools necessary for success. However, even with all these efforts we still have many students who cannot read at level when they leave elementary school.

The Rio Rancho Rotary Club addresses this issue with a unique — and what

has proven to be a very successful program — The Dick Hillier Tutoring Program. The program is unique in that the participating teachers are paid a small stipend to tutor their own underperforming students outside normal school hours. Participating teachers select five or six students that need individual attention and work with them for two hours per week for 15 weeks, outside normal classroom hours. Standardized tests given before and after the program show marked improvement in each student's reading ability. Aside from the academic improvement, the student's self-confidence grows and they more fully participate in classroom activities. This 10-year-old program is in high demand in the Rio Rancho School District.

**EARL WAID**  
Albuquerque