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School Connect and Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation Team Up to Make Reading a Slam Dunk for Valley Students

Valley Readers program engages students in Title 1 schools across Alhambra, Tempe, Laveen, and Washington districts.

(PHOENIX) – It is officially “game on” for thousands of Pre-K/K-8 students in Arizona as this year’s Valley Readers program is in full swing. Local nonprofit School Connect and the Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation are teaming up for a second year to reward students’ reading efforts with fun incentives, and a chance to host a Phoenix Suns, Phoenix Mercury, and Valley Suns assembly on campus.

The Valley Readers Program, made possible through a grant by the Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation, encourages students to track reading minutes and service minutes read to others through March 6. The top four schools who have read the most minutes and logged the most service hours in each district will get to host special assemblies at their school that feature Phoenix Suns, Phoenix Mercury, and Valley Suns mascots and entertainment teams.

“We want it to be fun so they associate reading not with have-tos, but with a world opening up,” said School Connect Founder and CEO Tracey Beal. “There’s something powerful about the connections that happen in relationships—between parents and kids, between an educator and their class, and between kids as they read with or alongside each other. The friendly competition to get the most minutes read in order to earn an assembly with the Suns, Mercury, and Valley Suns builds community, builds relationships, and builds good memories.”

At a time when just 39% of Arizona’s third graders are reading at grade level, the Valley Readers program is designed to not only inspire a love for reading, storytelling, and volunteerism, but to also strengthen family, school, and community involvement in education. Last year, more than 20,000 students across 31 schools participated in the Valley Readers program, culminating in a total of 9.6 million minutes read.