

In summer of 2024, AFT Local 212 was awarded a \$5000 book grant from AFT's "Reading Opens the World" initiative. The funds have kickstarted a multiyear literacy campaign designed to support students, educators and families with culturally and linguistically relevant books to foster an ongoing love of reading.

AFT Local 212, the employee union representing all faculty, professional staff, and the engineers and production specialists at Milwaukee PBS, is committed to ensuring that MATC students have access to the highest quality education. We know that literacy fosters agency, promotes civic engagement, and strengthens communities. This project, which was conceived and is coordinated by members of 212, serves the children of our students and the broader community by providing young children with high quality books to read, love, and keep, with the goal of promoting the love of reading.

Local 212 funded the construction and decoration of little free libraries, so there were no additional costs to the college beyond regular teaching activities. In the fall 2024 semester, MATC carpentry students and their instructor Pat Michels built five little libraries. These were installed in all four MATC campus Children's Centers and the downtown campus Little Stormers Village drop-in daycare center. MATC art students, led by their instructors Melissa Hartley Omholt and Shannon Novy developed and applied unique, whimsical designs. Additionally:

- Over 1000 culturally and linguistically relevant children's books were selected by Melissa Frankiewicz, Children's Center director, Celina Echeveste, Early Childhood Education instructor, and Anna Varley, Project Coordinator.
- Sara Cappeart and Tamara Allen coordinate the Little Stormers Village collaboration, which is hosting a little free library as well.
- Local 212 provides these AFT "Reading Opens the World" books to all five sites on an ongoing basis.
- MATC childcare parents and children are invited to take books home to keep, swap, or borrow!
- Furthermore, this academic year 64 MATC Early Childhood Education students received grant-funded text sets to seed their own classrooms and centers upon completion of the Early Language and Literacy course. This will continue in the coming semesters as well.

This project is driven by the enthusiasm and dedication of MATC faculty, staff, and student volunteers. Project coordinator Anna Varley and Melissa Frankiewicz, MATC Children's Center Director, have partnered to develop this sustainable initiative, ensuring free books reach the children of MATC students and employees.

For more information or to learn how you can volunteer, please contact Anna Varley (varleya@matc.edu), Melissa Frankiewicz (frankiml@matc.edu), or AFT Local 212 President Lisa Conley (lconley@local212.org).

This project, one that puts students and the community first, is another example of how Local 212 and MATC are "Better Together."