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Hitting The Books

Frank Avila flexed his reading muscles on Chicago Reads Day by reading to children at ONWARD Neighborhood House during Head Start week.

A commissioner with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, Avila read the children's book *From Head to Toe*, by Eric Carle. Children were delighted as Avila used his bright tie to highlight passages as he read.

Mario Garcia, executive director of ONWARD Neighborhood, located on West Ohio Street, thanked Avila for taking time during his busy day to read to the children.

"It is extremely important because it exemplifies the importance of reading and education. It sets an example for the parents and children. It emphasizes that learning is important. To have someone from the outside, say an elected official or a sports figure, come in and read, gets the kids excited. It adds to the message. The kids say, 'Wow! If this is something they're doing, this is cool!' It makes them more excited about reading, which is good," Garcia said.

Avila reiterated the importance of setting an example for children. "It's important that children have good reading skills. I can't stress enough how important reading and education is for children today. In today's workforce, a good education is necessary. And reading is the backbone of that education."

Chicago Reads Day is one of five days that make up Children and Youth Services' "Get Started" week, which was created as part of CYS' year-round Head Start recruitment campaign. CYS staff and other city officials visit Head Start sites across Chicago to read to the children for a half-hour.

CYS partners with community- and faith-based organizations such as ONWARD Neighborhood to serve more than 17,000 low-income children in its Head Start program.

Commissioner Avila holds a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's in finance. He is the only civil engineer on the MWRD board. He is also the highest-ranking elected Hispanic in Cook County, and the first Hispanic elected to a full six-year term on the board.