

SUBMITTED

# LIBRARIES

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by other kids his age to make it to their schools. It can take a Guatemalan student 2.5 hours to reach his destination to get an education.

Patel's experience as a boy involved walking five to six kilometers, or approximately four miles, to school.

When Patel asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up, more of them raised their hands to indicate scientist over rock star.

Preparing themselves to follow their passion will help them not only achieve their career goals, but also become experts in their field.

"If you want to become an astronaut, can you just go and fly the shuttle?" he asked.

If a student wants to follow their passion, they can gain a lot of insight by going to the library and reading about it, he said. Reading can help with every topic, even video games.

Studies show reading a favorite subject for an hour a day will make a huge impact, he said. If a student keeps up on daily reading in paleontology, for example, after five years that reader will know as much as a college professor who teaches that subject.

"You have the opportunity to get an education without the intense struggle of 50 percent of kids in the world," he encouraged the students. "You have access to education."

Use the resources available, such as the materials in the library or ask a teacher for assistance, Patel said. Conversely, students who don't read aren't as likely to get as good an education or better career opportunities.

Patel's own love affair with reading didn't begin until he came to this country at the age of 21 in 2001, after his cousin took him to a library in Clermont, Fla. His cousin illustrated what a rich resource the library is by pulling down an atlas.

"There he had laid open a map — it was a map of India," Patel told the "Henry County Local" after the presentation. "The next detailed map that he showed had my village printed on it. I was just awestruck. I couldn't imagine that a library in Clermont would carry such a detailed map. I was homesick any way and just seeing my village name on a map brought me to tears. I believe that map left a very strong impression in my mind."

While working and attending college in Ohio his appreciation for libraries grew, and that's when Patel conceived the idea of establishing a library in his village.

"I never liked reading — I liked playing," Patel told the students, remembering his youth. "Reading wasn't fun for me until I stumbled on the right book."

His impulse after checking out a book that fascinated him was to buy copies for the non-readers he knew, saying they had been missing out.

Moving beyond buying books for his friends, Patel told the Local he first worked with Harshal Malewar to reopen a village library that had been closed but is now operating six days a week with two full-time librarians appointed by the municipality.

With friend Samarth Jain on the ground in Jharkhand, Patel helped organize a small library for fifth- and sixth-graders at a school there. The latest will soon open for fifth- and sixth-graders at RSGK High School in a town called Tumsar, Patel's alma mater.

Projecting pictures of this school, Patel noted his class went through



Bill Patel returned to the RSGK High School, shown at left, in a town called Tumsar on the observance of Republic Day in order to make the announcement that he would provide a library in a common space, filling a great hall. He passed out notecards to the students there to ensure he could supply all the topics that they want covered. Below, in an inspirational talk, Patel encouraged Eminence Independent Schools students to take advantage of the many resources they have available to them at their school and also the Henry County Public Library. He also encouraged them to read for an hour a day in order to become experts at their favorite topic. Below left, another interior shot of the public library Patel reopened.



lessons as they sat out on a veranda that was also used as a walkway — an atmosphere very different from Eminence's school.

When he last visited his school on Republic Day, Patel announced his intention to fill a big, airy hall with shelves and books to benefit fifth- and sixth-graders and eventually the entire school of 700. He asked the children to fill out notecards with their reading interests, so he could buy books on those subjects.

So, Patel has dedicated himself to work hard — 18 hours a day — to meet the goals he's set for himself, he said. If he doesn't he won't be able to help those students in India get a library.

When the students have the knowledge and a good job after persistently studying for years, then they can pay it forward, too. "Always have an attitude for giving back," Patel said.

Wrapping up his presentation, Patel spoke of his desire to be like moso bamboo, which grows in forests where he's from. That species has to be watered everyday for

years before it even starts to rise above ground. But when it does, it can reach heights of 90 feet in weeks and it dominates the landscape.

With the right education and attitude, the students can be like the bamboo — unstoppable, he said.

With each library effort, it's been a challenge to make connections with those who will go along with and support the idea, Patel said after the presentation.

"I have been working on accumulating finances for it," he said about the library at RSGK High School. "I have stopped asking people for help because I have done it in the past and the negative response made me feel sad."

However, Patel felt touched by those who wanted to pitch in, such as Mary Macquire, a Subway inspector, who heard about the library idea once and brought



in lots of books and a complete encyclopedia set; his friend Tejas Patel, who donated \$500 without hesitation; and wife Sima, who dedicated money from a baby shower toward the library idea, and brother Mike.

Alethea Coffee, family liaison for Eminence schools, invited Patel to share his inspirational story with students after the two struck up a conversation at the Country Boys store when he heard her talking about local educational efforts.

There's a parallel between what Eminence educators do and what Patel wants to do for the students in his old school, Coffee said. For example, Eminence provides books to fifth-graders — the same age group Patel is trying to reach.

Coffee gave Patel a tour of the EDhub and its maker spaces, which revealed ideas that he

could use in libraries in India. Coffee also intends to share other educational resources she accesses, such as firstbook.org, which provides free books for students.

Though the school year is nearly at an end, Coffee stressed students can continue to learn in the summer learning program at the Henry County Public Library.

Several students will be invited to participate in Eminence school's "Summer of Wonders" program to get extra help to get where they want to be, Coffee added.

"If you have a goal you want to reach, we want you to be unstoppable," she said. "We want kids to hunger after a goal and do everything they can to reach it."

Patel appreciates Coffee sharing her educational insights with him.

"I met Alethea Coffee here in Eminence [and she] has showed enormous interest in sharing and connecting my knowledge of overseas education systems with the kids here," Patel said. "She has guided me immensely in terms of growing to achieve my goal of creating more and better libraries and reading programs for more and more kids."

Patel also intends to be like the moso bamboo when it comes to his library idea — unstoppable.

"I never plan to stop in my goal now," he told the Local. "I work hard every day keeping one thing in mind that if I fail in achieving my goal then I fail those 700 kids in my hometown whom I have promised a library and who are all waiting eagerly. Someday when I am more capable, then I plan to bring books to the kids in war torn countries. No child must ever lose his right to freedom and education despite of his birthplace."

**YOU ARE INVITED!**

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