Over the tumultuous past few years, the AFT has used Reading Opens the World to disrupt learning loss, connect with families and build relationships. As others have banned books and tried to erase history, AFT members have organized 390 community events across the country to encourage families to send their children back for in-person learning after pandemic closures—with books, bounce houses and face painting as sweeteners. Our teachers host family learning circles and Zooms to help parents boost their children’s reading skills. Through aft.org/read and the AFT’s Share My Lesson, we have tips for parents to encourage reading and support reading success, as well as resources for educators on the science of reading, improving literacy for English learners and hosting family literacy nights. And our partnership with Reading Universe offers educators evidence-based reading instruction support online.

In this age saturated with social media and digital devices, books are still—and perhaps even more—important. Research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development shows that teens who read physical books gain nearly 2.5 years of learning compared with teens who rarely or never read books.

Perhaps an even higher authority than the research are the kids themselves. Take it from Mason, a seventh-grade student in St. Clair, Mich., whose teacher filled her classroom library with books from the AFT and First Book. “I don’t know what happened to me, but I hated reading before,” Mason said. “And this year, my teacher had all these books and I just started reading.”

While the road to giving out 10 million books has come with considerable effort and expense, it’s worth it. I’ve seen kids jump with excitement as they choose books that will become treasured possessions. I marveled at the line to enter a book giveaway and family literacy festival in New York City that snaked down several blocks in the rain. And my eyes have teared up as I’ve watched teachers select books they know will excite and engage students. It’s a milestone worth celebrating: 10 million books down—bringing joy to millions of kids and their families—and countless more to go.