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NEWS RELEASE

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Covina-Valley Unified Teacher Advocates for Awareness of Dietary Needs in New Children's Books

COVINA, CA – Grovecenter Elementary School kindergarten teacher Jennifer Ritter is building a more inclusive learning environment for students by writing and publishing two children's books about food allergies, using her own personal experience with gluten intolerance to educate students and families about dietary restrictions.

Ritter's diagnosis of gluten intolerance came two and a half years ago. Her daughter and grandson were also both recently diagnosed with celiac disease, an illness caused by an immune reaction to consuming gluten. This experience, she said, fueled her passion to educate others on the importance of understanding and accommodating food allergies in schools.

"Before my diagnosis, I was aware of food allergies, but now I'm much more conscious of the impact they can have on students," Ritter said. "When I read my books to my class, students lit up when they saw themselves represented. It was eye-opening to see how much it meant to them."

Ritter released her two books, "The Magical Cookie" and "Jacq Has Celiac," in June 2024. She presented both books in June at the Allergy & Free From Show in London, where she connected with influencers and shared her story with more than 20,000 attendees. Ritter said she was touched at the overwhelmingly positive response she saw, and the gratitude parents expressed for the representation her books provided for their children.

"I was inspired to write these books because of the exclusion I have felt in my own life and the exclusion I all too often see students face due to their food restrictions," Ritter said. "My dream is to create a space where no child feels left out, and where educators have the tools to help all students feel included."

Ritter's advocacy has also extended to the digital realm, where she has built a community of more than 5,000 followers on Instagram under the handle "[glutenfreetravelstheworld](#)." Through this platform, she shares tips, safe restaurants, and resources for others navigating celiac disease.

Ritter said she hopes to get her books in school systems, allowing for discussions in classrooms that will limit the explanation children have to give to their teacher and peers about their dietary needs.

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“Food allergies can be isolating, especially for young students,” Ritter said. “I hope my books and advocacy work inspire other educators to be more aware of these challenges and to create classrooms where all students feel safe and included.”

Ritter’s work aligns with Covina-Valley Unified’s ongoing commitment to inclusion and equitable practices, ensuring that all students feel supported.

“Mrs. Ritter’s dedication to her students and her work in raising awareness about food allergies exemplify the inclusive culture we strive to foster in Covina-Valley Unified,” Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Eminhizer said. “We are proud to have educators like Mrs. Ritter who go above and beyond to ensure that every student feels seen, valued, and safe.”

Ritter’s books are available for purchase online through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Target, and she plans to continue her advocacy through future projects and events.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

CVUSD_CELIAC1: Grovecenter Elementary School kindergarten teacher Jennifer Ritter is building a more inclusive learning environment for students by writing and publishing two children’s books about food allergies, using her own personal experience with gluten intolerance to educate students and families about dietary restrictions.

CVUSD_ENERGY2: Grovecenter Elementary School kindergarten teacher Jennifer Ritter released her two books, “The Magical Cookie” and “Jacq Has Celiac,” in June 2024. She presented both books at the Allergy & Free From Show in London in June.

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