WINDHAM — Two-year-old Argenis Sotelo smiled as Arianna Acosta held up a copy of the children’s book “No Norman.” He leaned over and pulled the book on to his lap and happily gazed at the colorful illustrations on the pages. “He likes to look at books,” Argenis’ mother, Yilenia Reynoso, said. “He knows reading is fun.”

Argenis and more than 100 other children took part in Windham’s Read for the Record celebrations Thursday at the Windham Early Childhood Center. Thursday marked the 10th anniversary of Read for the Record and the sixth year Windham’s head start and preschool programs have participated. Early childhood education programs all over the nation read “No Norman” Thursday as part of the program. “I know today these children are going home and talking to their parents about what they did today because they are so excited to be here,” said Joyleen Albarracin, Head Start coordinator for the district. “It’s important when the community supports reading and shows these children how much fun it can be.”

Quanece Williams from Eastern reads "No Norman" Thursday at the Read For the Record at the Windham Early Childhood Center to Vida Pacheo, right, and Izabella Gonzalez. Francesca Kefalas/For the Bulletin.
Read for the Record is a program run by JumpStart, a national education association that trains college students and community members to volunteer in pre-school classrooms in low-income neighborhoods. Windham has access to JumpStart programs through the University of Connecticut and Eastern Connecticut State University. Kelly Zimmerman, site coordinator for the UConn Jumpstart program, said college students are in the Windham classrooms for two hours, two times a week. “For communities that can’t afford the support staff that’s an important part of the program,” Zimmerman said.

Zimmerman said the college students and the preschoolers develop a bond that also helps make learning fun for the youngsters. Children also went home Thursday with a free book and a package of goldfish crackers, said Charlene Shay, coordinator of the North Windham Family Resource Center and one of the coordinators of the events. She said the district cannot afford so many copies of “No Norman,” but all children got an age appropriate book. Yesenia Camacho brought her niece, 4-year-old Gianna Gomez, to the event. “I wanted her to have fun and enjoy being with some other kids because she’s so shy,” Camacho said. “And she likes to read so this seemed like a good way to get her out and have some fun.”

Argenis Sotelo, 2, and Arianna Acosta listen to "No Norman" Thursday at the Read For the Record at the Windham Early Childhood Center. Francensca Kefalas/ForTheBulletin