



Reading Partners Donor Visit Report
Crescent Heights Elementary School, Los Angeles
October 22, 2019

Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Teresa Burton

Reading Partners Staff

- Laura Zachar, Sr. ED
- Chloe Oliveras, External Relations Director
- Kimberly Griffith, Sr. Site Coordinator
- Rachel Gottfried, Sr. Regional Site Coordinator, oversees 5 schools

Focusing Philanthropy Board

- Dewey Corley
- Keith Ennis
- Elliott Gilson
- Larry Gilson
- John Weissenbach

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Executive Summary

On October 22, 2019, the Focusing Philanthropy Board visited the Reading Partners program at Crescent Heights Elementary School. The purpose of the Board visit was to observe tutoring sessions, meet with Sr. Executive Director, Laura Zachar and her team and learn more about Reading Partners.

Background

Since 1999, Reading Partners has been dedicated to closing the literacy gap by tutoring elementary students from low-income communities to boost their reading confidence and competence. 2019 is the 20th anniversary of RP, celebrating more than 1.5 million tutoring session for over 50,00 students with more than 55,000 volunteer tutors in 14 regions of the U.S. in 2010 Reading Partners added AmeriCorps service members enabling RP to expand and serve more students. To date, 1,300 AmeriCorps and VISTA members have chosen RP for their year of service.

At each school site, RP transforms a dedicated classroom into a comprehensive Reading Center and recruits and trains 40-100 volunteers. In collaboration with principals and teachers, RP identifies 40-75 K-4th grade students per school to receive two 45-minute intensive tutoring sessions each week during the school year. Students are assessed at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to identify their individual reading levels and to monitor progress toward achievement goals as determined by each students' particular needs.

Tutors follow an individualized reading plan using RP's curriculum tailored to each student's needs. RP's target population is K-4th grade students reading up to two and a half years behind grade level. All enrolled



students attend Title I elementary schools where 40% or more students qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch programs, an indicator of poverty.

Updates

- RP changed the name of the “Comprehension Readers” modules to “Advancing Readers” and added a few new features. The new tutoring packets contain more decoding skills, discussion guides for tutors and prompts for tutors to ask the student questions about what they’re reading.
- RP is discussing expansion into 3 new cities: Detroit, Philadelphia, and Houston. More details soon.

Training for Tutors

Training for tutors consists of:

1. Overview of community and students
2. Explanation of Reading Partners curriculum and folder system
3. Mock session with student
4. Online volunteer hub orientation
5. Info on optional extra trainings

Training for AmeriCorps Members

Site Coordinators are AmeriCorps members and get 11 weeks of training.

- Summer: 5 weeks of full-time training
- Fall: members attend training every Friday from September to November

AmeriCorps Partnership

- Reading Partners employs 20 AmeriCorps members this year in the LA area. 13 members worked last year and are returning this year.
- AmeriCorps members commit to 1 year. Typically, half choose to stay for an additional year.

Book Donations & Supplies

- Students receive a book of their choice at the end of every lesson
- Books are donated by volunteers and local high school book drives
- Reading Partners holds supply drives with corporate sponsors and tutors also donate supplies
- During the holiday season, volunteers are allowed to give their students one book

Contact with Parents

- Reading Partners opens their centers to parents during school events such as Open Houses, Parent-Teacher Conferences, in order to meet parents and highlight their work.
- Parents who pick their children up after school have more contact than those whose children are tutored during the school day.

School Visit

- Crescent Heights Elementary School, LAUSD
 - Crescent Heights is one of two new LAUSD schools this year. Making a total of 5 RP LAUSD schools and further building on RP’s partnership with the District.
 - The Crescent Heights program is in its 4th week
 - Students served: 23 students; Goal: 40 students – This is a standard goal for a new school, RP should be able to serve slightly more than 40.



- RP needs to recruit more tutors in order to serve more students. RP is recruiting at local temples, high schools, and colleges. They are also introducing RP to city council members and other local leaders to gain visibility and help recruiting volunteers.
- School enrollment: 515 students
- Students are referred by teachers and Principal
- Current Volunteers: 28; Goal: 48
- Program runs 9am – 4:30pm; Sessions run all day
- Strengths at Crescent Heights: RP has a positive working relationship with the Principal, administration, and parents. Several volunteers came over from the Santa Monica school that closed because Kimberly Griffith was the coordinator there and recruited them.

LA Program

- The Reading Partners LA program was founded in 2008 and manages 14 schools (2 new LAUSD Schools this year) serving 850 students with 1,400 tutors, and 20 AmeriCorps members.
- 2018-2019 End of Year Stats
 - Last year, 85% of students met or exceeded their literacy goals
 - 92% of K-2nd graders developed mastery of key foundational skills
 - 73% of 3rd and 4th graders demonstrated growth in reading scores compared to their peers in the same grade.
- The LA Annual Budget is \$1.5 million.

Key Observations

Reading Partners reading centers are uniformly bright, warm, fun classrooms. We observed students in tutoring sessions, tutors in training sessions, and students doing online assessments to inform where to place them in the curriculum. Meeting the site coordinator was a pleasure as she was very welcoming and friendly. We understood why volunteers followed her from Santa Monica. Board members enjoyed seeing the center, meeting with staff, learning about the program from the packets and tutor's notes, and especially the student's book reports.

