



Reading Partners Diligence Trip Report Saturn Street Elementary School Los Angeles December 11, 2018

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- Teresa Burton

Reading Partners Staff

- Laura Zachar, Executive Director LA
- Cecilia Rivas, AmeriCorps Site Coordinator
- Jenna Chaffe, Program Manager

Executive Summary

Teresa Burton of Focusing Philanthropy visited the Reading Partners (RP) program at Saturn Elementary School in Los Angeles on December 11, 2018. The visit included observing tutoring sessions and regular daily activities in the Reading Center and meeting with Reading Partners Executive Director Laura Zachar, Program Manager Jenna Chaffe, Cecilia Rivas the AmeriCorps site coordinator, and volunteer tutors and students. The purpose of this visit was to see a LAUSD school site, meet staff, and learn more about the RP program.

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 sessions for over 50,000 students by more than 55,000 volunteer tutors in 14 regions of the U.S. AmeriCorps members became service partners in 2010 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 Reading Center and recruits and trains 40-100 volunteers. In collaboration with principals and teachers, RP identifies 40-75 kindergarten through 4th grade students to receive two 45-minute intensive tutoring sessions each week throughout 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 literacy goals as determined by each student's particular needs.

Tutors follow an individualized reading plan tailored to each student using RP's curriculum. 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.

School Visit

- Saturn Street Elementary School, LAUSD
 - RP has been onsite for 3 years



- Students served: 43 students; Goal: 55 students
- School enrollment: 400 students
- Students are referred by teachers and the Principal
- Current Volunteers: 61 high school students and adults
- Saturn Street Elem. contributes \$15k to RP
- Saturn Street Elem. became an arts magnet this year.
- Students receive 2 tutoring sessions per week for 45 minutes each
- Volunteers spend at least 1 hour per week, the extra 15 minutes are for preparation and record-keeping
- Program runs 8:55am – 5pm, sessions run all day
- Students are referred and begin sessions in September except for kindergarteners who start in January
- Challenges at Saturn: There is a waiting list of 12 students who need tutoring
- Strengths at Saturn: RP has a very positive working relationship with the Principal, administration, and parents. RP staff is also pleased that they are invited to attend regular staff meetings and events and are considered partners with the faculty.

Pilot Project

- RP will pilot a new reading software program at Saturn Street Elementary School during the spring on 2019
- Four to six children in 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade, who are not currently in the tutoring program, will take part
- Sessions will include two children per computer with a new Literacy Site Coordinator supervising the children as they play reading games on the computers

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 17 AmeriCorps members this year in the LA area
- AmeriCorps members commit to 1 year. 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 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.

Key Observations

Reading Partners classrooms are vibrant learning environments that immediately demonstrate the strengths of the RP curriculum. With a colorful array of student work and print-rich displays, the Saturn Elementary Reading Center is a friendly and inviting place for students to meet with their tutors. Cecilia Rivas, the site coordinator at Saturn was very professional and actively engaged in helping each child-tutoring session stay on track. It was also nice to meet Jenna Chaffee who was there to train a new volunteer. I also spoke to a volunteer who completed her 4th tutoring session and was happy she found RP because she enjoys spending time with her student and being a part of his academic progress.

On my next visit, I would like to learn more about the status of the technology pilot project. Relevant questions include how many kids participated, the strengths and challenges of the software, an assessment of the impact on student learning, and the opinions of teachers and the school Principal on student engagement and the effectiveness of the software.

