

Reading Partners Donor Visit Report Longfellow Elementary School, Pasadena, CA October 9, 2019

Program Visited

- Reading Partners, Longfellow Elementary School, Pasadena, CA

Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Teresa Burton

Reading Partners Staff

- Laura Zachar, Sr. ED
- Chloe Oliveras, External Relations Director
- Jenna Chaffee, Deputy Program Director
- Sara Couch, Sr. Site Coordinator
- Rachel Gottfried, Sr. Regional Site Coordinator, oversees 5 schools

Executive Summary

Teresa Burton of Focusing Philanthropy and a donor visited the Reading Partners program at Longfellow Elementary School in Pasadena on October 9, 2019. The visit included observation of tutoring sessions and regular daily activities in the Reading Center and meeting with Reading Partners Executive Director Laura Zachar and her team. The purpose of the visit was to see a Pasadena school site, meet staff, and learn more about the developments in Pasadena.

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 the RP, celebrating more than 1.5 million tutoring sessions for over 50,000 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 student's particular needs.

Tutors follow an individualized reading plan using RP's curriculum as 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 to ask students questions about what they’re reading.

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

- Longfellow Elementary School, Pasadena, CA
 - RP has been onsite for 4 years
 - Program is in week 4 of the school year
 - Students served: 39 students; Goal: 65 students
 - RP needs to recruit more tutors to serve more students. RP is recruiting at Pasadena Community College and Pacific Oaks College because RP can fulfill students’ federal work study requirement and those students can often make more than one session per week.
 - School enrollment: 515 students
 - Kinder students typically stay one year; 2nd graders often stay for 2 years. 10 to 20% of students are enrolled for 2 years or more.
 - Students are referred by teachers and Principal



- Current Volunteers: 54; Goal: 98
- Program runs 9am – 5pm; Sessions run all day
- Strengths at Longfellow: RP has a very positive working relationship with the Principal, administration, and parents. Several volunteers came over from Cleveland ES, the school that closed at the end of last year.

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 classrooms are uniformly cheerful, encouraging places to learn. We saw several students in tutoring sessions working through their lesson and enjoying themselves. I was happy to learn that volunteer recruitment was going well, specifically, that a few committed volunteers came over from Cleveland ES and several others lived within walking distance.

