

# Read-Aloud Volunteer Program

## Annual Review 2016-17

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# Read-Aloud Volunteer Program

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# Read-Aloud Volunteer Program

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## *Mission Statement:*

The Read-Aloud Volunteer Program (Read-Aloud) is a relationship-based program that fosters in children the joy and love of learning through reading and story-telling.

## *Theory behind the Program:*

Read-Aloud is based on leading scholarly research from the International Reading Association, the National Association for the Education of the Young Child, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and Scholarly research:

<http://www.childrenofthecode.org>

Decades of research document that reading aloud to kindergartners through second-graders promotes development of early literacy skills and establishes a foundation for positive attitudes toward literacy (Van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer 2003; Trelease 2013).

Specifically, reading aloud builds oral language and vocabulary (e.g., Hargrave & Sénéchal 2000; Wasik & Bond 2001; Blewitt et al. 2009), listening comprehension—a precursor to reading comprehension (e.g., Brabham & Lynch-Brown 2002; Zucker et al. 2010)—content knowledge (Pappas & Varelas 2004; Hoffman, Collins, & Schickedanz 2015), concepts of print (Piasta et al. 2012), and alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (Aram 2006; Brabham, Murray, & Bowden 2006). Equally important, reading aloud is one way we enculturate young children into literacy—helping them acquire the language, values, practices, and dispositions of the literate world (Heath 1983)

([Young Children](#) / [September 2015](#) / The Book Matters! Choosing Complex Narrative Texts to Support Literary Discussion).



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Read-Aloud builds on this research, supporting the developing awareness of print, the transition to productive reading, and sustains children’s confidence and risk-taking when they read.

Volunteers in the program provide one-on-one read-aloud time with the same child each week. This is a vital part of the program that ensures a child has an adult who knows them and can support their individual needs.

Research also indicates that children learn best in the context of a relationship, and outside of the family children need other adults. Urie Bronfenbrenner, developmental psychologist, said of young children “Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.” The children know that their reader is there for them and that this caring adult supports their growing confidence in learning to read and becoming a life-long learner.

### *Evaluation History:*

Read-Aloud has conducted both an external evaluation review and internal evaluations yearly supported by Nancy Olsen, evaluator of the program. David Graeven and his team at Trial Behavior Consulting designed a comprehensive Read-Aloud Volunteer Program evaluation in 2013. Their study reported that students who participated in the Read-Aloud program in 2012 showed gains and improvement of at least one skill level for all three of the reading areas assessed (makes predictions, questioning, and characters). [Teachers](#) were also asked to assess the effectiveness of the program.

In house, Nancy Olsen of the board, has for several years been evaluating Teacher, Reader and Family responses which are captured in the brief reports below:

### *2016-17 Evaluations Report:*

#### *Methodology:*

Data from 2016-17 school year (the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of reporting) was obtained from five elementary schools that participate in Read-Aloud. These schools are **Coronado, Dover, Downer, Montalvin Manor, and Washington** which are located in Richmond, Montalvin Manor and San Pablo. Evaluation information was gathered from volunteers, teachers, and families to determine the impact of the Read-Aloud experience on children and



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families. This helps the program establish a baseline from which we can compare results in future years. This information will be used to improve programming and support for participants of the program. Social skills and reading skills were measured at the beginning and end of the Read-Aloud Program year. Comments were also solicited from all involved.



### *Books into the Community*

During the 2016-17 school year, Read-Aloud provided a total of 3,685 new and used books to children and their families throughout the Richmond, Montalvin Manor and San Pablo communities. Specifically, Read-Aloud provided 3,248 new books to children and families from our schools and summer program to help build their home libraries, 437 new and softly worn books were provided to children and families at Read-Aloud local Outreach Events or to Little Free Libraries, Richmond, a project to leave books at various venues for people to take to read.



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*Most Read-Aloud Participants Improved their Social and Reading Skills:*

**Social skills** include student participation, interest in reading, “Eye-on-the-page” skill level, being touched by a character, appreciation of books and or stories. To measure social skills, volunteer readers were asked to interview and rate each of their two or more **K-2 students** at the beginning and again at the end of the **24-week program**.

Year-end ratings for each student indicated that 11 students (4%) started and ended with the highest possible rating and their high scores remained in effect until the close of the program. These students were recommended by their teachers for the one-on-one Read-Aloud experiences they lacked. Children were also included for other teacher concerns regarding the impact on academic success, such as extreme shyness, limited English language exposure, no books in the home and a lack of student confidence. These students’ characteristics, teachers judged, were considered to be frequent reasons for children’s failure to read.

There were 20 students with incomplete or missing data ratings. Of the remaining 197 Read-Aloud students, 180 (91.4%) showed improvement in their social skills ratings. Sixteen students (8.1%) showed no change, 1 student (0.5%) scored lower in the spring than in the fall. The full social skills evaluation data is shown in the first section of Figure 1, Social Skills Improvement. Each grade level is a different color, with green being program wide (all grades together). A max rating means that the student ended up at the highest ranking for all skills assessed; there was no room for improvement.

One influence associated with some lower spring social skills ratings was on-going development--a child may focus his or her energy on increasing skills in one area, which can lead to regression in another area.

### Teachers’ Evaluations Noted Improvement in Attendance and Overall Participation

Teachers reported in their end-of-year evaluations that many of their Read-Aloud students had started volunteering to read aloud in class. Although students grow, learn, and improve their skills daily due to the efforts of their classroom teachers, it is important to acknowledge that Read-Aloud students needed extra support that was not possible for the class teacher, with more than 20 students, to provide.



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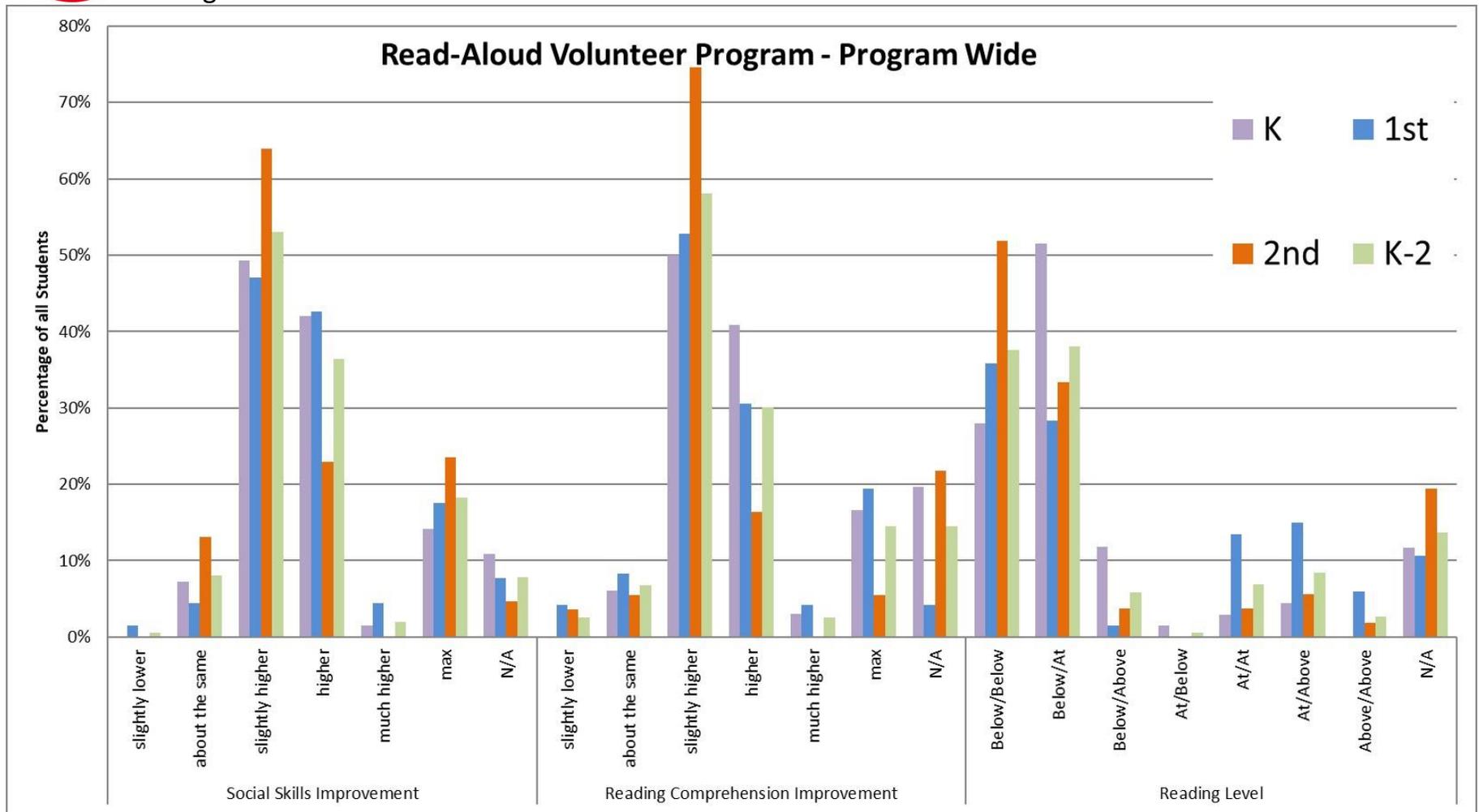


Figure 1. Percentage of Students at each stage



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Student attendance was reported to be improved by Read-Aloud participation. Teachers reported anecdotally a notable improvement in attendance for many previously, frequently absent students. They commented that children in the Read-Aloud Program improved attendance from the fall to the spring.

Teachers also reported their English Language Learner (ELL) Read-Aloud students were calmer in class, pronounced sounds better, and very rarely missed school on a Read-Aloud day.

The ELL Read-Aloud students gained confidence in the classroom, increased reading time and curiosity in books, improved English skills with the one-on-one adult attention, improved fluency in reading English, and improved comprehension.



Teacher's assessment of comprehension scores demonstrate that overall, children improved in making predictions, understanding key concepts and identifying and empathizing with characters. Of the students who were evaluated, 93.8% or 126 students showed improvement in reading comprehension. See Figure 1, Reading Comprehension section for a break down in grade level and degree of improvement.



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Teachers reported that over one-third (72 students or 38.3%) of all students, including ELL, improved from reading below grade level to reading at grade level, 11 students (5.9%) went from below grade level reading to above, and 16 students (8.5%) increased from at grade level to above. See Figure 1, Reading Level. This chart didn't incorporate all indications that students improved their reading level; some teachers added descriptors to grade level demarcations (started very below or ended below + or ended between below and at, or by commenting on reading level improvement.

### *Teacher Quotes:*

- My students feel that the time spent is special and that they are special. They really are encouraged that they are getting that one-on-one experience.
- The students in my first grade classroom absolutely loved the Read-Aloud program. It increased many of their reading interests and provided quality one-on-one reading time I am sometimes unable to give.
- The Read-Aloud Program is the best thing to have happened to our school students who came in with low interest in books, low comprehension scores, or with attention seeking behavior are now avid, confident readers who always come back with a smile on their face. They love to go read and have huge smiles when it's book day! I could not imagine a school without this special program and amazing volunteers!
- V. has progressed into such a careful and thoughtful reader. He has good understanding of stories and has greatly enjoyed the one-on-one time with his reader.
- R. seemed to gain more confidence in the Read-Aloud program. She participates more in class. Her reading has also improved. Having extra books at home was very helpful for this.
- Read-Aloud allows students to blossom! The program helps foster strong reading skills and a desire to come to school. Great job Read-Aloud!
- She is reading books English to her parents. She loves read... Thanks!
- I recommend the Read-Aloud Program to all the teachers at Dover. It is a great program and the kids benefit from participating in the great program Helen Tadeo runs. The program is great for all the students but is someone needs a little help



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increasing confidence or reading skills this program is very helpful. Thank you all for the great job you do.

- This is a fabulous program that provides individual reading time to students who may not get read to at home. The students come back excited about what they read and looking forward to class.
- Read-Aloud is an activity that exposes children to challenging texts that are slightly above their current reading level; students have a higher level of listening comprehension than reading comprehension - Texts being read plus guided conversations before, during, and after reading allows students to understand/comprehend texts they wouldn't comprehend reading them on their own - As a class activity it promotes the sharing of ideas, [and] collaboration among students, which equals better engagement - Another reason [I like Read-Aloud] is modeling fluent reading helps students to increase their reading levels and fluency.

### *Volunteers Add Value in Many Ways:*

Volunteers are at the heart of the program, and it benefits both the students and the adult volunteers. A recent Stanford report states: "When older adults contribute to the well-being of youth, it cultivates a sense of purpose and extends benefits both ways." Read-Aloud relies on its large base of readers from the community who range the spectrum of cultures, backgrounds and experiences.

<http://longevity.stanford.edu/blog/2016/06/01/hidden-in-plain-sight-how-intergenerational-relationships-can-transform-our-future/>

Read-Aloud has 106 volunteers (including substitutes), some of whom read more than the minimum of one hour a week in the program. Some 30 percent of readers have been with the program for over a decade. At the end-of-year celebrations, most report that they gain so much, watching children's minds blossom as they grow and learn.

Each volunteer works with the same two children over the program year. We have several readers who volunteer more than one hour a week and for each additional half-hour another child is supported. These volunteers add great value to the various



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schools that participate in the program. The volunteers provided pro bono services which is equivalent to \$118,200 (as 4,089 hours of volunteer work).

The summer programming in 2017 at WCCUSD Summer School at Montalvin provided an additional \$3,040 or 104.5 hours of volunteer work.



### *Family Responses Show Read-Aloud Increases Reading Excitement, Influences Family Dynamics and Helps Younger Siblings Learn*

Family responses based on 112 returned surveys were generally very positive and showed, not only an impact on the Read-Aloud student but also other children in their homes (see Figure 2). Ninety-six % reported that the children talked about books brought home and that there was an improvement in the child's interest in books. Ninety-eight % said their child was excited/joyful about having new books and 88% noticed their child enjoying reading with, or to, a sibling or another child.

Changes in reading rituals were also noted. Although 45.5% of responding families reported no change in times read and 4.5% reported a decrease in family reading frequency (possible reason: child more comfortable reading alone), fifty % of responding families reported an increase in family reading time together (see Figure 2, next page).



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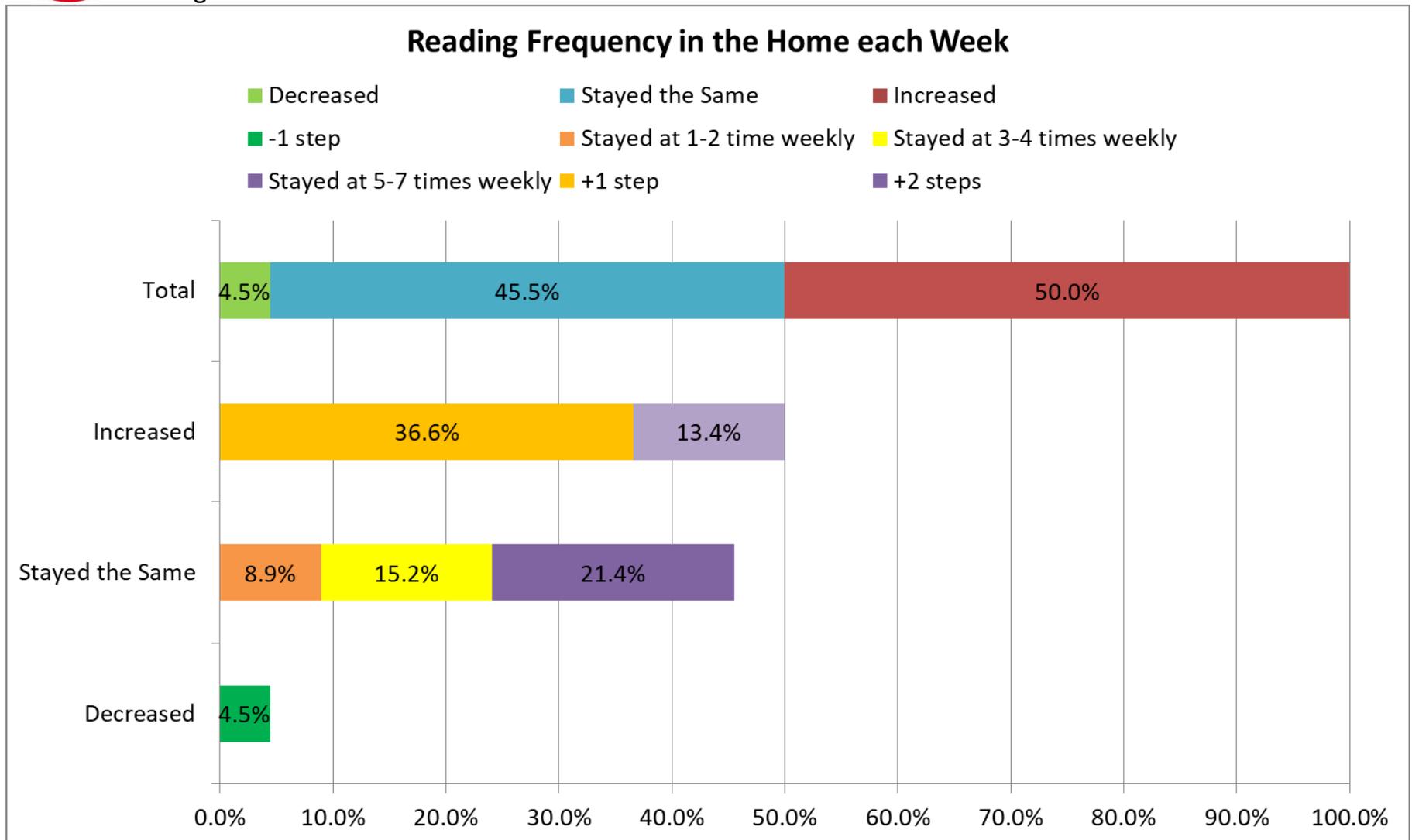


Figure 2. Family Reported Change in Reading Frequency



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*Children's Learning Made Visible:*

Having books in the home provided parents a window into how their children learn or improve their reading. For example, ELL students were described by parents as being much more interested in books and reading, taking books in the car and sharing them with siblings. Some students had never owned a book before Read-Aloud and no books were previously in the home. The Read-Aloud experience was reported to have positively influenced changes in family dynamics at home, with significantly more time spent together reading and discussing the Read-Aloud-provided books, and with more parental attention paid to the child's learning.



### *Parent/Guardian Quotes:*

- "He pretends he is the teacher to his 4 year-old brother"
- "Thank you for the program, it has really improved M's reading and interest in books."
- "R-A is a great program. I have seen BIG improvement in my child's love of reading. Reading before bedtime became a habit and bonding between me and my child..."



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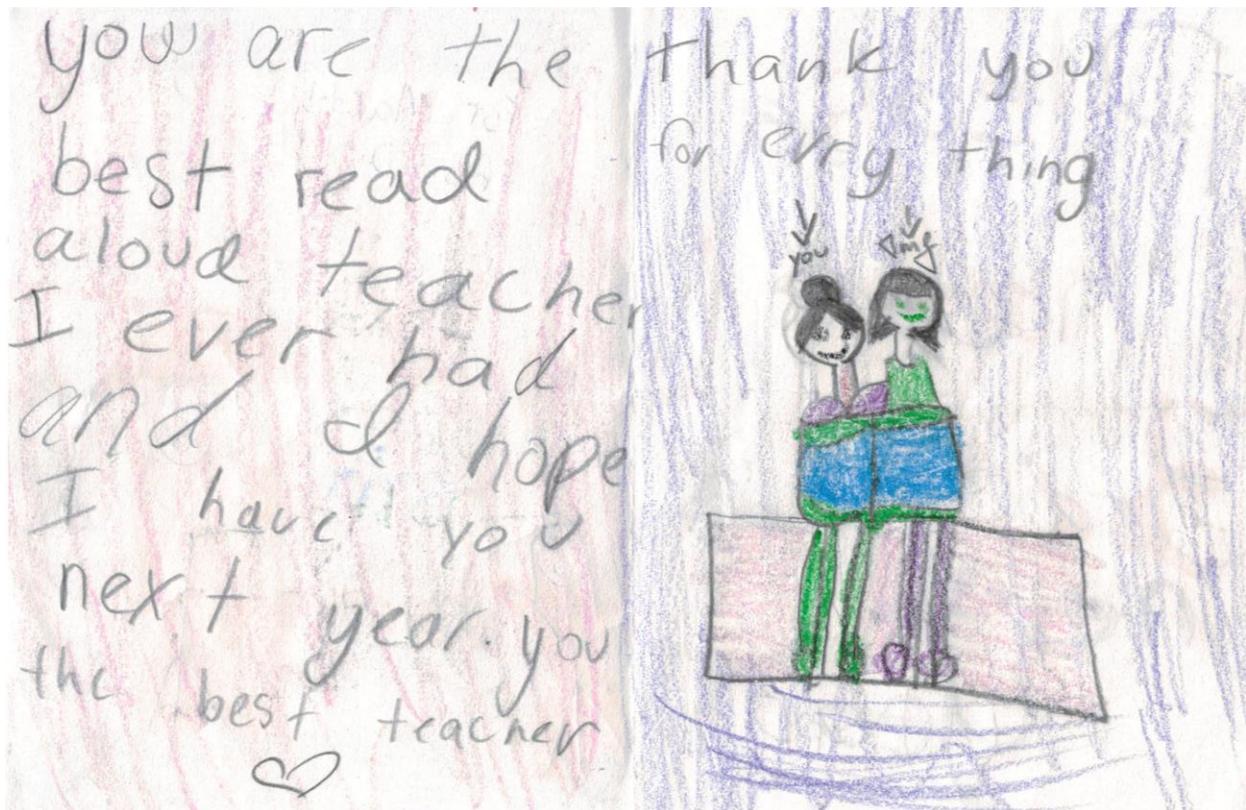
- “Every time we read out loud at home I see that her reading is gotten way better, before she wasn’t able to read a sentence—thank you so much for helping her.”
- “My child reads 2-3 times a week on his own now”
- “My daughter loves books and I believe the bigger the library, the greater the mind. So thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!!!!”
- “My son really enjoyed the R-A program and his R-A teacher...I appreciate the opportunity for my child to experience something that he loves with others...thank you to all volunteers and to the program
- “G... loves the Read-Aloud Program, and looked forward to it. She really enjoyed her reader and thought he was funny and made the books interesting.”
- “What an incredible opportunity for my child to form a positive bond w/another adult.”
- “A... is more motivated to want to red and try her best. She enjoyed her reader so much and wants to be a teacher when she is older!”





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# *How Read-Aloud works and the need for Read-Aloud*





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### *Description of the Program:*

Read-Aloud is a 24-week program for children ranging from kindergarten to second grade. The teachers choose the children who will benefit most from one-on-one reading time with a compassionate adult reader.

Children are chosen for multiple reasons, such as the need to hear English spoken, exposure to books, and for social and emotional needs that can be supported through one-on-one adult interactions:

Obviously, there are very important cognitive kinds of underpinnings to reading. And there's a significant amount of intellectual development and language development that's necessary to master reading. But your ability to learn to read is also very much influenced by your feelings and your social development... And what we learned is that the active ingredient in the environment that's having an influence on development is the quality of the relationships that children have with the important people in their lives. That's what it's all about. That's where the action is.

Jack P. Shonkoff, Professor of Child Health and Development and Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, Chair the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child Source: COTC Interview :

<http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/shonkoff.htm>

Read-Aloud relies on a large base of readers from the community who range the spectrum of cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences. Their commitment and support to the schools and families provides a bridge to the community.

Volunteer readers report that this is a life-changing experience for them, and that they are more engaged in the schools and their communities. They say they stay because they gain so much from watching children blossom, grow and learn. But it is the children we read to, starting their life-long journey of learning, who are the focus of the program. And we want to get them off to a great start. The volunteer readers provide this opportunity for children to receive story-telling each week and special one-on-one time for the child with their own reader.



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### *How We Individualize a Child's Reading Material:*

Each Volunteer works with at least two children each week. The reader-volunteers' log details notes of the children's interests and growth. This helps the coordinator at each school choose and tailor book selections for each child. It is important to understand where the child is developmentally and not just chronologically. Arbitrarily deciding what reading level a child should be at because of their age rather than experience only starts the process of failing to succeed in school. Children in the program are given the opportunity to explore and discover at their own pace. Discovery and understanding meaning making are important steps in a child's developmental and academic growth.

Many children have not heard rich, descriptive language or the kind of stories that they begin to listen to with their special reader. One of the interesting outcomes of the children building their own collection of books is that it changes dynamics in the home. As the child begins to read aloud, families become more interested and share reading with the child. Reading rituals or story telling becomes or increases as part of the experience of the child and family, and the child begins to see him or herself as a reader.



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### *Building Up Home Libraries:*

Read-Aloud's commitment to providing two-books each month for the children is a powerful way to increase access to books and literacy activities in the home. Drs. Todd Risley and Betty Hart's work on Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young American Children demonstrated the need to increase vocabulary in everyday conversations in the home. Books are one way to increase the "story-telling, remembering and what if's" of every day experiences between adults and children. These early experiences again impact the academic capacities of the children; the richer the contextual language is that a child receives the better their success in reading and school activities.

Read-Aloud's participating children select and take home two new books each month to add to their personal library. Depending on the level of development and growing interest, a child may hear as many as 90-100 books read aloud to them over a program year.

Each of our schools provides either library space or a special room for our program; giving the message that this is an important activity and a special time in which to hear stories read out loud.

A study from the University of Nevada, Reno by Evans et. al. show that having even as few as 20 books in the home has a significant impact on a child's ascent to a higher level of education:

<https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/news/2010/books-in-the-home-as-important-as-parents-education-level>

Read-Aloud seeks to help local families build and enhance their home libraries to ensure as many children in our community gain a step ahead during their formative years of development and this study reinforces the Read-Aloud philosophy of getting beautiful, books into the homes of families to change family dynamics around reading.

What Read-Aloud has seen from evaluations and anecdotal stories from families is that having books go into the home on a regular basis promotes and or



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increases reading activities in the home. It has also increased conversations in the home with more effort being paid to telling stories. Families tell us that they can see their child learning to read and that the books coming home inspire families to look for books at other venues, such as a library or garage sale.



### *The Team Coordinators:*

Read-Aloud provides a coordinator for each school site. This coordinator works closely with the teachers and school administration, oversees the day-to-day running of the program and supports the volunteer readers. It is the coordinator who selects books for each child using log notes and conversations from the reader as a guide. The coordinator also observes the child and reader interactions and can make judgement calls regarding materials for the child.

### *The Need for Programs such as Read-Aloud:*

The students in West Contra Costa County are below average in their reading skills; only 30% of third graders meet or exceed English Language Arts standards, and in some schools in Richmond as few as 5% of children meet this (Richmond Community Foundation Literacy Coalition). Many of the schools are under-resourced and under-served with multiple turn-overs of teachers in the district. The challenges are huge.



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Annie E. Casey Foundation heads a Third Grade Reads National Project to support cities and districts working to improve reading for all children. Ralph Smith at the foundation reports that: an alarming number of children—about 67 percent nationwide and more than 80 percent of those from low-income families—are not proficient readers by the end of third grade. This has significant and long-term consequences not only for each of those children but for their communities, and for our nation as a whole. If left unchecked, this problem will undermine efforts to end intergenerational poverty, close the achievement gap, and reduce high school dropout rates:

<http://gradelevelreading.net/about-us/from-the-managing-director>

An important report highlighting what this means for young children in later academic life can also be found at this site:

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/reading-on-grade-level-in-third-grade-how-is-it-related-to-high-school-perf/>

*Read-Aloud is Modeled after SMART:*

Read-Aloud is modeled after a statewide program from Oregon, Start Making a Reader Today (SMART), which has been highly successful in its efforts to have the state's children reach benchmarks and succeed. SMART has also received a Library of Congress award for its literacy work in Oregon. SMART has had an independent study by the Eugene Research Institute that demonstrates that fifth graders who participated in SMART are 60 percent more likely to reach state reading benchmarks than are similar students who did not participate. The full study can be found here:

<https://www.getsmartoregon.org/what-we-do/program-outcomes/>

*Outreach Successes:*

Read-Aloud continues to spread the joy of reading to children and families. Because we are a grass-roots organization, tied closely to the surrounding communities, we have not had the financial support of organizations such as



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SMART on which we are modeled. Read-Aloud has sought to support other groups as they begin their own Read-Aloud Programs in the county.

Read-Aloud also provides ongoing outreach experiences for families in San Pablo, and surrounding areas. These outreach celebrations are either book giveaways with tips on how best to support children's reading or workshops where the aim is to provide books to the families, and guidelines on how best to support children's reading. At these workshops we also offer family activities, expansion of language games and other information to increase reading in the home.

### *Community Driven:*

Read-Aloud is local, and engages both adults who provide read-aloud opportunities to children in the schools and the children and families who are part of the program. This organization is fueled by the passion of the staff, the board, district participants and local communities we serve.

### *Quick Inspirational Piece*

"This program is elegantly simple but a potent tool for literacy", said Marilyn Nye, Education Professor and Read-Aloud Founder. Dr. Nye had visited the SMART program in Oregon, now statewide there, and had been so impressed she modeled her own program after it. Read-Aloud is now in five WCC under-resourced elementary schools providing reading experiences to teacher-selected children; engaging in local outreach family celebration reading events; supporting a start-up reading program modeled after Read-Aloud, and part of an extensive network of literacy providers working together to increase reading opportunities in Contra Costa. Read-Aloud continues to thrive as a small non-profit working to help the community read.

At the heart of the program are volunteer readers who provide one-on-one time with their assigned children each week, ensuring that individualized reading takes place. The children's ideas, interests and developmental level are all considerations, as are the children's experiences with owning, seeing and reading books. Both children and adults benefit from these one-on-one interactions and both look forward to their weekly encounters. This is an intergenerational model that brings together older adults and elementary school children. It is



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intentionally planned to benefit both parties, and adults feel they have something to contribute and something to gain from these interactions.

The Read-Aloud team is diverse and has coordinators in each of the five schools we serve. The coordinators oversee the program, and support the teachers, readers and children. The board is active and engaged and brings many assets to the organization. An addendum to the mission statement should say the Read-Aloud team is “driven by passion”.

Teacher comments include: “Frequent absences before Reader came. Now he never misses a reading day. He never had a book at home before.” “One-on-one experience rarely available to her outside Read-Aloud”, and “Needs more support at home. Read-Aloud gave him that at school.”

Every other week the children get to choose a gift book to take home. Families tell us they wait for the new books and can see their child learning to read. Read-Aloud helps families build and enhance their home libraries and this helps change family dynamics and increases reading activities. As one mother said “Since my daughter ... has been in the program, she has learned to read. She is interested in reading her books. She always has some books in the car, so when we go out she reads them...” Another parent commented: “We like the bilingual books, so they don’t forget our language in Spanish.”

Read-Aloud employs the best of what we know about how children learn, and an awareness that relationships matter in the context of children’s learning. A message from one of the children at the end of last year said: “Please have 3rd grade next year”, the card had a drawing of the child greeting her reader at the classroom door. There was a large red heart with “You are the best” written on it and both reader and child had enormous smiles on their faces.