

Literacy Inc. (LINC)
Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program
2009-2010 Program Year Final Report

This Year-End Report describes the activities of Literacy Inc.'s *Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program* for the school year beginning September 1, 2009 and ending June 30, 2010, as well as our plans for 2010-11.

Introduction

LINC's Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program is one of the largest cross-age tutoring programs in New York City. Teen Tutor brings middle and high school students together with elementary-aged children to read in one-to-one pairings on a weekly basis throughout the year, improving the academic skills and self-esteem of all participants. This dynamic program develops the skills and values of teens and children as they work together to improve their opportunities for a better future. The program provides at-risk teens who need a chance to prove themselves with the opportunity to take on meaningful responsibilities and experience mastery and success. In fact, in our strongest partner schools, students tell us that they look forward to the year they can become a teen tutor. It becomes something to strive for – a tangible symbol of their growth and success.

In 2009-10, we served 1,130 elementary children (tutees through grade 3) and 953 young people (tutors in grades 6 through 12) in 50 programs at 31 different sites, mostly in the New York City public schools. *This translates to 11,440 hours of one-on-one reading time for our elementary students!* One-third of the participating elementary students admit that they do not read with anybody at home, revealing that some children would not receive any individualized reading support without this program.

Evaluation results clearly demonstrate the effectiveness and potential of this program. Data collected at the close of the 2009-10 school year reveals that 81% of Teen Tutor programs increased tutees' guided reading levels by two or more. In addition, 34% of the tutors reported that they have increased their own independent reading time as a result of the program, with 40% now reading to their younger siblings or other children, and 66% feeling more confident in school.

LINC's overarching goal is to ensure that all children learn to read – *and can read well* – by the third grade. This is critical because after that point, they must read to learn. One in four children starts the fourth grade reading at only a first- or second-grade level. *74% of children who leave third grade reading below grade level will never catch up.*

The Teen Tutor program provides the necessary one-to-one reading practice that is so critical to achieving reading proficiency. In addition, it encourages the enjoyment of reading by fostering a secure and trusting relationship for young children to have repeated positive experiences with books. Teen tutors serve as role models that motivate elementary students to do well in school, and also counteract images and learned expectations of academic failure.

The program has behavioral implications as well. Students who cannot read well – and therefore cannot keep up in the classroom – become unmotivated, inattentive, and unruly,

making them 4-5 times more likely to be removed from the classroom for discipline infractions. At a site visit at PS 147, a teacher was asked if the program was improving student behavior. She replied that it did, because the younger kids want to impress the teens.

Therefore, the Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program has a dual focus:

- It improves the reading ability of elementary school children through one-on-one time with more experienced readers, and connects these children with strong teenage role models who demonstrate the value of literacy and learning.
- It serves as a youth leadership program for teenaged tutors, who gain not only reading skills but also increased self-esteem, a sense of pride in their ability to affect change, and improved school attitudes and attendance rates, all of which contribute to school success.

2009-10 Program Design

Middle/high schools were paired with elementary schools either sharing space within their own school building or within close walking distance. In most cases, entire classes were selected to participate, either by administrative assignment or teachers volunteering. Groups of about 18-25 teen tutors were matched with the same number of elementary school students for one-to-one reading sessions.

Teen tutors received two training sessions before meeting their buddies to set expectations and give them an understanding of their responsibilities. Depending on the needs of the individual program sites, paired teen tutors and reading buddies met once or twice a week, either during the school day or in an afterschool setting. Each session lasted the duration of a class period, or about 45 minutes.

LINC staff were present at the teen tutor sessions to provide on-going coaching for the teens and teachers. All participating students received assistance, praise, encouragement and nurturing during sessions.

Books were provided by LINC or by the participating classroom teachers. Each buddy pair (tutor + tutee) maintained a Teen Tutor folder that held weekly progress charts, worksheets, and a book log. Teachers were provided with suggested activities from which to choose the literacy activity for the day, including vocabulary games, how-to-read suggestions, and writing activities. Teachers were then able to connect the tutoring session to skills being taught in the classroom.

As a result of teens' feedback to the program and their desire to know more about the effectiveness of their work with their tutees, we instituted Reading Progress Charts this year. The Reading Progress Chart allows the buddy pair to track the younger student's Guided Reading Level and the number of times a tutee reads a book for mastery. Guided Reading is a reading instruction approach used in New York City public schools. It includes a system for book leveling that assigns each book a letter (A-Z) based on the degree of challenge it represents. Guided Reading Levels consider many factors that affect the challenge of a book, including its length, layout, illustrations, structure and organization, content, and theme. Students are well-versed in the Guided Reading Level system, know their own levels, and are able to select books for independent reading and tutoring sessions. Teachers are easily able

to provide LINC staff with this data, as it is an ongoing assessment conducted in their classrooms as a matter of course.

Teens were expected to journal about their experience and their tutees' progress, with LINC staff and the teens' teachers reading and responding constructively to the journals. Journaling was not consistent from program to program, however, and will be modified in the program design for 2010-11.

Program Goals and Evaluation

In 2008-09, LINC worked with The Rensselaerville Institute to create new strategies for program development and to measure the impact of our work. We now have the tools to create specific targets for key program areas, charting and tracking measurable gains in literacy rather than just counting the number of activities held. To that end, we utilize pre- and post-surveys of teachers and students; quality review site visits; one-on-one interviews; participant journals; reading progress charts to track tutees' guided reading levels; and attendance logs.

Primary targets for the Teen Tutor program in 2009-10 were established as follows:

- 25% of teen tutors will show an increase in independent reading time.
- One-third of teen tutors will see themselves as role models and will be more likely to engage in community service activities.
- 75% of children served will improve their guided reading levels by two levels.

In addition, we know that all students experience certain other secondary benefits as a result of participating in the Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program:

Teen students:

- Develop a human and compassionate sense of how young children need to be treated and how literacy is fostered
- Develop leadership and mentoring skills
- Develop a sense of personal power by having gratifying opportunities to help others and by being accountable to another student
- Improve basic skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking
- Become more aware of the importance of literacy
- Improve attendance and overall interest in school

Elementary school students:

- Receive the one-on-one attention that is directly linked to improvements in basic reading and writing skills
- Experience reading as an enjoyable activity with a positive teen role model
- Discover a positive role model through meaningful interactions with caring and committed teenagers

For both groups, the shared reading experience breaks down stereotypes and reduces prejudices in children and teenagers by creating a working and friendly relationship. This benefits the entire school community.

To gauge progress toward primary and secondary goals, and to ensure that each Teen Tutor program meets the standards established by LINC, quality review site visits are conducted by senior staff. The visit focuses on LINC/school relationships, use of materials, and teacher feedback about the program. The site visits have proven extremely useful, providing tremendous information about what programs work well, why they work well, and what programs need improvement. We were able to observe techniques and practices in strong programs that could be translated to newer and/or struggling programs. Similarly, we were able to identify and remedy problems right away, rather than waiting until the end of the year to think about corrective action plans for the following year.

In January and February of 2010, 10 school sites were evaluated. This accounted for approximately half the total programs, since so many schools are multiple-program sites with more than one participating classroom (in some cases, an entire grade). At these mid-year visits, we specifically sought to determine:

- Have 75% of tutees improved their guided reading levels by at least one level?
- Do the teens feel prepared by their training and supported by LINC staff and their teachers to work with their tutees?
- Do teachers understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to the program, and do they also feel supported by LINC staff?

Our participating middle and high school teachers share with us that students' attendance improves as they make sure to attend class on Teen Tutor session days. Teachers also observe behavior and attitude improvements around the time of Teen Tutor sessions, for the same reason. The teens know that their younger reading buddies are looking up to them, and they strive to live up to the expectations of that role. Ms. Rostant of Mott Hall says, "They love working with the younger students and being looked up to." For many, it is their first experience of having someone relying on them, and they feel accountable to their younger reading buddies. This is a significant life lesson, and not always an easy one. A teacher from Jamaica High School adds, "Some dislike the commitment - but most enjoy the experience. . .it is important for the teens to recognize the importance of persistence and staying the course and living up to their commitment to their buddy."

There are multiple classes participating in the program at PS 189 in Washington Heights. One teacher observed, "The children are so happy to read with the teenagers. They feel so grown-up and eager to show off their reading skills. I think it gives them motivation to read." A colleague expanded, "They [are] very excited every time the Teen Tutors come to the classroom. Being with the high schoolers [makes] my students feel more interested in reading. Every Friday morning, the first thing my students ask me [is] 'Are the reading buddies coming?' When I say that they [are], the whole class cheers a collective 'Yes!'"

A teacher at Grant Avenue Elementary in the Bronx shared that her students look forward to reading with their tutors and seeing them around school. "They have a great joy for reading

and writing during buddy time. They love the idea of reading to someone. They [go] home and [tell] their parents they read to a teenager.”

From the Tutees’ Post-Program surveys, we learned:

- **95% of buddies believed that their tutor helped them become a better reader**
- 90% of buddies thought their teen tutor helped them better understand classroom lessons
- 95% of buddies enjoyed reading with their tutor
- 76% of buddies read more books at home since participating in the program

From the Teen Tutors’ Post-Program surveys, we found:

- 34% of tutors reported that they do more independent reading as a result of participating in the program
- 83% of tutors realized the importance of being a role model
- **74% of tutors say that tutoring is very important and that they make it a point to come to school on tutoring days**
- 66% of tutors felt more confident in school as a result of the program
- 65% of tutors would like to participate again
- 40% of tutors read more to siblings or other children in their community
- 59% learned to be patient and not give up

In their post-program surveys, the teens’ teachers revealed:

- 83% felt their students received adequate training to become tutors
- 88% believed that their students were supported and encouraged by LINC staff throughout the program
- 88% found the tutoring materials to be useful
- **95% would participate in the program again**

In addition, middle and high school teachers reported the following improvements in their students as a result of the program:

- 67% improved attitude toward others
- 75% improved sense of responsibility
- 50% improved reading ability

Ms. Howe of Hudson High School described her twelfth graders’ “huge sense of accomplishment,” after working with the same first graders all year, while Ms. O’Casey of Bronx Early College Academy related her middle school students’ journey with their tutees: “They loved working with the younger ones. They went from saying, ‘Ms. O, they cannot read their ABCs,’ to ‘Ms. O, the younger ones are reading now!’”

Of the buddy (tutee) teachers:

- 97% believed the program enhanced the reading instruction they do in the classroom
- **100% would participate in the program again**

Moreover, the elementary teachers reported the following improvements in their students as a result of the program:

- **70% improved reading ability**
- 82% greater confidence in reading aloud
- 79% increased willingness to share ideas

Ms. Warshaw of PS 251 claims, “It reinforces the teaching points taught in the classroom. The materials were age, grade and guided reading level appropriate. Students were always excited about their time with their reading partners. They felt they made a new friend (brotherly and sisterly type) and it made them more confident when reading to someone older than them.”

In addition to noticing that her first graders approach their books with a positive attitude, Ms. White of PS 55 is even looking toward the time when her students, in turn, become tutors, saying, “They liked the teenagers and look forward to becoming teenagers themselves. They want to become better readers to ensure the children *they* work with are good readers.”

Looking Ahead

After taking a critical look at program design and evaluation data in the summer of 2010, program staff planned several improvements for the coming school year.

First, we have delineated clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all involved: LINC staff and management, schools’ teachers and administrative staff, tutors, and tutees. We will now require all participating schools to sign Letters of Agreement to ensure that programs run smoothly and maintain high quality standards. We have developed a clear tutoring session format and revised and updated all session materials, including games, worksheets, and recommended reading lists. All programs will be expected to follow the following session structure:

Standard: The standard format for most Teen Tutor sessions will require at least 45 minutes.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 10 minutes | Tutors read a book (or two) to their buddy |
| 15 minutes | Buddy reads to tutor |
| 10 minutes | Literacy activity chosen by elementary teacher completed in pairs |
| 5 minutes | Tutors write in their journals |

Special: Every 5-6 sessions, the group has a special themed session that includes guest readers, games, and interactive literacy activities to be determined by LINC staff in collaboration with participating teachers. Special sessions will be fun celebration events designed to encourage and maintain reading enthusiasm.

As part of our effort to provide clearer expectations of program responsibilities, LINC will have planning meetings with participating teachers at the beginning of the program, and a more formalized refresher training for tutors at the mid-point of the year. We have found that the best outcomes emerge from programs that meet reliably and consistently beginning early in the school year. This means we will hold planning meetings in the summer so that

trainings and buddy matching takes place as soon as school starts in the Fall – early enough in the year to work around holidays and testing schedules.

Our Teen Tutor program assessment strategy will continue to utilize guided reading levels, attendance logs, and quality review site visits in their present formats. We believe that we have an opportunity to obtain better and more focused information from teachers, administrators, tutors, and tutees, however, and will therefore make the following changes to our surveys, interviews, and journals:

- Surveys: Questions will be more focused, making them easier for participants to answer. We will add a survey for the principal to determine the program’s impact on the school community at large. The teachers’ post-surveys will ask about overall program impressions and general observations about class attitudes and behavior, as well as the social and academic benefits of program participation. At the beginning of the program, we will randomly select three of each teachers’ students to inquire about specific reading and classroom achievement as a result of participation in the program.
- Interviews: We will randomly select 3 to 5 program pairings (elementary school/middle school or high school) and conduct one-to-one interviews at all levels – administration, literacy coach or librarian, teachers, and student participants. This mirrors the larger LINC strategic plan for the 2010-11 program year to deep-dive into our identified communities of focus.
- Journals: We have found that open ended journaling is not effective. We will create journal prompts for the tutors, and journaling will be built in as a session activity. (Tutors will journal while tutees complete their own writing exercise.) Similarly, LINC staff will also receive prompts for reading the journals, so that they know exactly what to look for and how to respond.

Another primary change for the 2010-11 program year is that all LINC programming will be concentrated in 9 communities of focus. They are:

Bronx – University Heights, Highbridge, Kingsbridge, and South Fordham
Manhattan – Inwood and Washington Heights
Staten Island – Stapleton
Brooklyn – Sunset Park
Queens – Jamaica

We have identified at least three partner schools in each high-need community. We believe we can achieve maximum impact for young readers by layering services at each of these schools. This means that in addition to developing programs with new schools, we will “step up” existing school partners. For example, if a school has one Teen Tutor program, we will expand to multiple classrooms. We do not want the Teen Tutor program to stand alone at our partner schools without other LINC program areas. Therefore, we will add parent workshops and literacy celebrations to Teen Tutor Schools. We will have more contact with parents as we offer reading list suggestions and activities for school holidays. We will connect

members of the school community to the local library, so that families can acquire library cards and attend library-based events, such as our PJ Nights.

Therefore, goals for 2010-11 are:

General:

- Literacy Inc. will facilitate the Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program in at least 3 schools in each of our neighborhoods of focus in New York City.
- 10,000 hours of one-on-one literacy attention will be provided to elementary students in grade 3 or below.

School/Community Benefits:

- 33% of students will show improved school attendance as a result of participating in the Teen Tutor Program.
- 50% of principals will report that participation in the Teen Tutor Program contributed to a more positive school community climate, because of positive inter-grade relations fostered by the program.
- In order to support the literacy achievement goals of the school and the Teen Tutor program, LINC will provide additional programming that focuses on parent and community-wide engagement in at least 50% of schools participating in the Program.

Tutors:

- 33% of teen tutors will report increased time spent reading for pleasure.
- 50% of teen tutors will demonstrate improvement in vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills.
- 66% of teen tutors will exhibit increased confidence as a result of the program.
- 25% of teen tutors will report that they will engage in additional community service activities and be able to identify the intended organization or program.

Buddies:

- 60% of elementary teachers will report that the program supported Guided Reading Level improvement.
- 50% of buddies will report increased out-of-school reading time and will be able to complete a reading inventory.

We believe that these improvements to the Teen Tutor Reading Partner Program, along with our plan to layer additional literacy support services in each school, will ultimately result in better educational outcomes for students in our communities of focus, thus activating entire neighborhoods around reading success. We know that when a community sees the positive results from its efforts, and children see the importance attached to their educational success, the entire community is strengthened. We are excited to begin the new year, and confident that we have developed the tools, training materials, and processes necessary to reach these ambitious 2010-2011 program goals.