

**THE Reading Team**  
LITERACY FOR LIFE



2015  
Annual  
Report



# Message from the President

Dear Friends,

The Reading Team is changing lives.

Our children gain on average more than two grade levels in reading ability in their first year in one of our programs. In a city and state in which less than 32 percent of the children pass the New York State English Language Arts Exam each year, fully 80 percent of Reading Team children do so.

In addition, test scores and report cards in the middle- and high-school years show that our graduates sustain these gains, build on them, and far surpass their classmates in academic achievement.

Last spring, we hosted our first-ever alumni event, which was attended by dozens of Reading Team graduates. When I first saw the assembly of vibrant young boys and girls, poised, accomplished, well-spoken, happy, and grateful, my heart filled with an indescribable joy. I knew that we had done our job and done it well.

The Reading Team serves Harlem's lowest-performing students, who invariably are expected to fail. We reject this forecast.



Our instructional model enables children who are academically vulnerable to flourish in school and to enhance their potential for success in a complex world.

In this report, you can read what some of our children, their parents, and their teachers think about the Reading Team and how it is improving lives. Their stories would have not been the same without you.

Thank you for making our work possible and for giving precious children an equal chance for success in life.

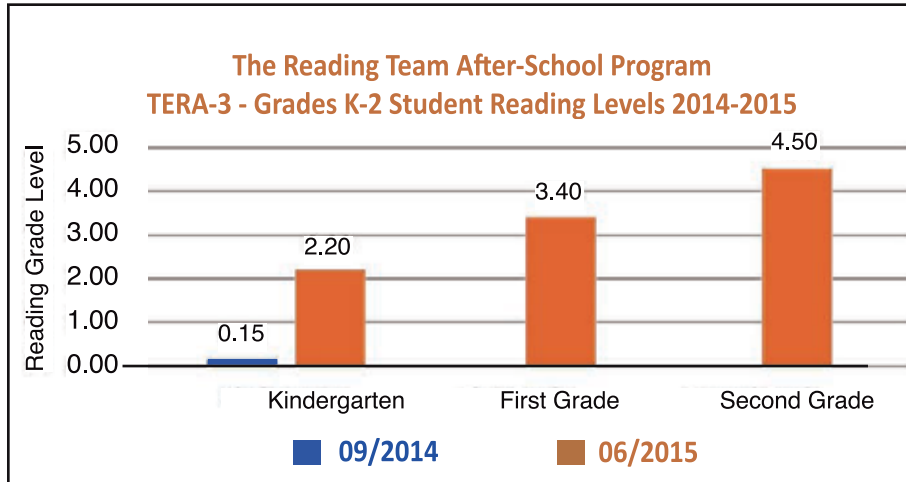
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Maureen Rover'.

**Maureen Rover**  
**President**

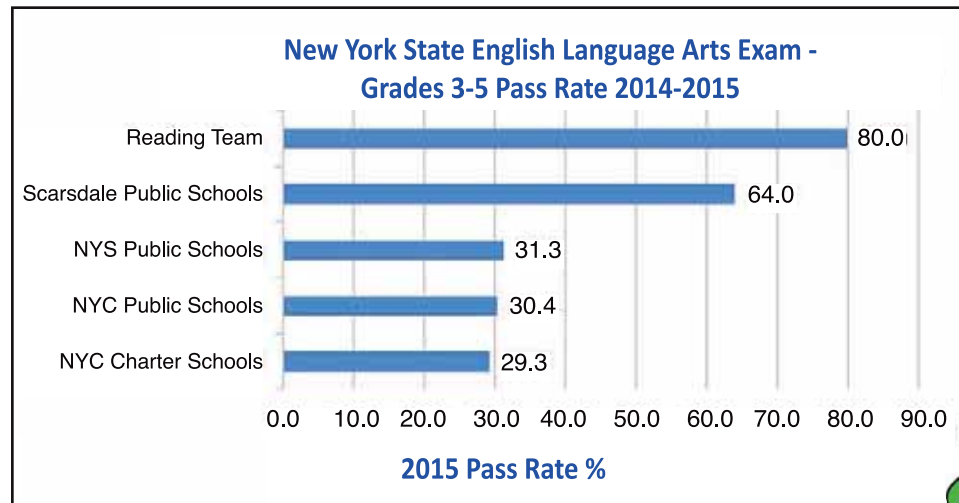


# After-School Program Impact 2014-15



Children are referred to our After-School Program in kindergarten and can return each year through fifth grade. We administer the Test of Early Reading Ability-3rd Edition (TERA-3) to the children on program entry in kindergarten and each June thereafter through second grade.

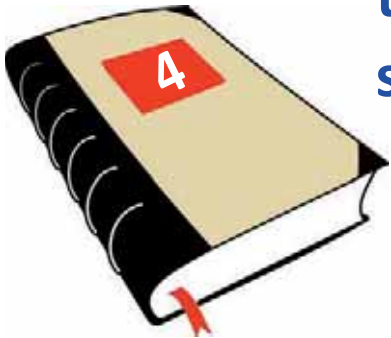
In grades 3-5, Reading Team children take the New York State English Language Arts Exam, a test given annually to all third through eighth graders in New York State Public Schools. The chart to the right depicts our children's performance on the exam compared to the performance of students in New York City and throughout the state.





## Our Mission

The Reading Team is a Harlem-based nonprofit organization that is dedicated to enabling young children who are at high risk of reading failure to become strong and enthusiastic readers, writers, listeners, and speakers and to develop the skills, habits, and behaviors that will support their success in school and in life.



# Why We Keep Sending Them

For a decade, we have been sending hundreds of youngsters to the Reading Team's Preschool Program, which has given them the literacy grounding needed to succeed in school.

A significant number of our preschoolers don't get the basic language skills at home like their more advantaged peers. Most of them come from households where parents are often forced to hold two jobs and can't find time to read to their children. Also, numerous immigrant families in the community speak only their native language at home. As a result, many of our four-year olds, don't know how to accurately say the alphabet, recognize letters in or out of sequence, or treat a book or hold a pencil.

Virtually all the children who participate in the Reading Team's Preschool Program surmount these obstacles and are ready to learn when they start kindergarten.

The Reading Team intervenes before a lack of academic success impairs youngsters' curiosity and desire to learn. Instructional groups are small, so that children receive the attention and nurturing they need to associate reading with pleasure. Reading Team Literacy Mentors are educators and trained to implement its unique educational model. Assessment is rigorous, which helps staff to tailor instruction for each child.



We appreciate the Preschool Teaching Training. It supports our children's emergent literacy with instructional techniques, and books and materials for our center. Our parents welcome meetings with Reading Team staff to learn how they can help their children succeed.

All of this explains why 9.9 out of 10 children who we enroll in the Reading Team Preschool Program for a year succeed in elementary school—and why we'll keep sending them.

**Diane Spann, Director, Addie Mae Collins  
Community Service Early Learn Program**



# Engineering Success



My son Fallou aspires to be an engineer, and I think he'll make a splendid one. I wasn't always so sure—at least not before I learned about the Reading Team.

I enrolled Fallou in the Reading Team's After-School Program when he was in first grade because he was neglecting his homework. He couldn't seem to concentrate and was straining to assimilate the most basic lessons. He really got down on himself, but his attendance at the Reading Team has changed all this.



A fifth grader at PS 76, Fallou's participation in the After-School Program is the best thing that happened

to him. First, they do homework at the Reading Team. Second, Fallou's ideas are taken seriously and his challenges addressed right away. The small student-to-mentor ratio makes this type of attention possible. His instructors won't let him give up. Every time he succeeds his confidence rises.

I like that instruction focuses on a broad range of skills and concepts—reading fluency, writing, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, analysis, research, argument—all of which he'll need in middle school. As befits my aspiring engineer, math is one of his favorite subjects, and he credits the Reading Team with helping him with his times tables.

Fallou has improved so much that he is in an accelerated reading class. Mr. Sam, his Literacy Mentor, says a key change for Fallou is his determination. He has told me that Fallou doesn't let setbacks get him down anymore.

With his homework under control and his grades climbing, there is little doubt that his goal of being an engineer can be reached.

**Kaiso Diop, father of 5th-grader Fallou in the Reading Team After-School Program**

# The Whole Child



You can't teach a child the A-B-C's, or much else, if his emotional needs go unmet. The Reading Team knows this. Its holistic approach tackles the range of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental barriers to literacy and academic development.

A lot of our children come from poor families, have young parents, or are being raised by their grandparents. Many of them lack the time or ability to nurture pre-literacy skills by reading aloud,

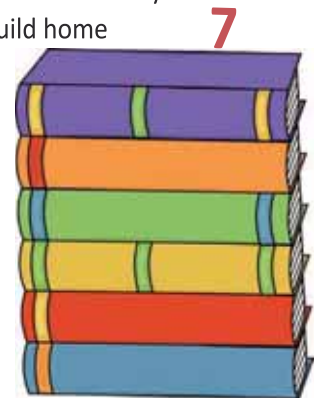
engaging in focused conversations, or actively listening. Neglect of this kind not only renders children unequipped for learning, it makes them anxious, withdrawn, even angry in a school setting.

The Reading Team breaks through these blocks. Its Literacy Mentors encourage children to express themselves and share their thoughts about the stories they hear and read. In addition to teaching word sounds, print conventions, and pre-reading concepts, they help children with motor skills, such as drawing and writing. All of it makes learning fun.

The Reading Team also empowers parents to share fully in their children's development. For example, it suggests ways they can help with homework, create a dedicated home study space, set up family reading times, and more.

Its book giveaways neutralize the TV and toy addictions too many of our kids develop. They enable our children to build home libraries, learn to read for enjoyment, travel the world through stories, and most importantly, believe in themselves.

**Ms. Kouassi, Pre-K teacher at PS 36**



# Thanks for the Winning Strategies & Attitude

One morning, Makayla ran into my room and exclaimed, “Ideas are pouring into my head. I’m writing them down as fast as I can. When I make them into a story, I’ll have a great book.”

Before attending the Reading Team, Makayla could read individual words, but was unable to recognize them in a sentence or understand how they combined to tell a story. Her teachers said her comprehension problem was not trivial and referred us to the Reading Team. I was concerned she had a learning disability.

Instructors at the Reading Team saw it differently. They worked with Makayla on comprehension strategies that emphasize “intentional thinking”—prediction, questioning, structure, and summarizing. They detailed the strategies for me, so that I could reinforce them at home. Makayla has jumped three reading levels. Now, she draws meaning from everything she reads and writes, and she reads and writes a lot—with purpose.

Attitude. That was Alycia’s problem. A free spirit, she didn’t pay attention or work well with others. I didn’t think that a literacy program could help, but the Reading Team showed me otherwise. Its Literacy Mentors know that academic and character development are linked. While teaching reading skills and concepts, they model empathy,

self-respect, and acceptable social behavior. They tailor solutions for unique problems.

Alycia’s favorite mentor, Ms. Debra, gives her tasks that involve organizing materials for her age-mates and explaining assignments to them. Ms. Debra helps Alycia to see the link between good habits and success. She is responsible, hard-working, and better behaved. Her vocabulary has exploded, and her grades in school are rising.

**Lorraine Lima, mother of 3rd-grader Makayla and 2nd-grader Alycia, in the Reading Team After-School Program at PS 36**





# They Really Care

When I was in first grade, my Auntie noticed I had lots of trouble reading when she helped me with my homework. My teacher told her I was reading way below my grade level and might have to repeat first grade. I remember her sadness. She was worried about me.

A day later, my teacher gave her a phone number for the Reading Team, so my Auntie brought me there and signed me up.



This year, I'm in third grade in the Reading Team After-School Program. I was not held back in first grade. I've caught up with my classmates and am reading at grade level. I thank my Literacy Mentors. They really care about me, and make reading and writing cool.

Sometimes I work with Ms. Gloria, who is the Reading Specialist. She has taught me how to improve my spelling, vocabulary, and penmanship. She shows Auntie how to help me with homework and practice reading at home. In the computer lab at the Reading Team I've worked on the Waterford Early Reading Program. It teaches me to improve pronunciation—which is useful for a talkative kid like me.

To be honest, Auntie wasn't the only person worried about me. I was too. But the Reading Team took away my fear. My Literacy Mentors are showing me that I'm actually smart, and we have nothing to worry about.

**3rd-grader Amir in the Reading Team After-School Program**



# Write On & Trouble Be Gone

In second grade, I liked to read, but the books in my classroom were simple and dull. I was fluent at reading, yet had trouble expressing my ideas in writing. My teacher wanted my writing skills to improve too, so she searched the web for a tutor. She found the Reading Team.

The next day, my father took me to the Reading Team where we spoke with Program Director Ms. Margaret. She told us instruction took place every day during the school year. My parents loved the idea of placing me in an after-school program that focused on academic skills, but I was shy and afraid the work would be too hard.

Ms. Margaret made me feel at home and introduced me to my Literacy Mentor and the children. Something else put me at ease: the thousands of books that lined the walls. They were not simple and dull. Seeing them was like hitting the jackpot. Several times a year, we were all allowed to select books to keep. Because of that, I went from liking books to loving them.

My four years at the Reading Team flew by—that happens when you enjoy what you're doing. Instructors taught me researching, outlining, paragraph writing, and editing. They explained the difference between fiction and nonfiction writing. In fifth grade, we read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and I performed a scene. I think he was the greatest writer ever and knew all there is to know about life.

Thanks to the Reading Team and its wonderful Literacy Mentors, I have not had trouble with writing or reading since.



**Salmatou, 7th grader at Future Leaders Institute and Reading Team After-School Program alumna**



# The Reading Team at a Glance

## What We Believe

At the Reading Team, we believe that literacy is a basic right and that interventions to mitigate the risk of reading failure must come early. Remedial tactics for middle- and high-school children in academically vulnerable neighborhoods like Harlem arrive too late.

Every year, the vast majority of children in grades 3-8 in this community fail the New York State English Language Arts Exam. Children citywide perform only slightly better. And each year across the United States, 1.3 million children drop out of school.

Academic failure of this magnitude springs largely from inadequate early literacy development. As soon as fourth grade, the inability of children to summon basic literacy skills and concepts—to locate information, identify themes, recognize textual evidence, make inferences, interpret meaning—is devastating

## Early and Intense Intervention

The hallmark of the Reading Team is early intervention, before a lack of success in school dulls children's inherent enthusiasm for learning. Our instructional model delves deeply into concepts and skills that build and sustain learning. It features small reading groups, technology-based reading lessons, one-on-one work with a reading specialist for struggling learners, a Book Distribution

Program, Creative Dramatic activities, Parent Conversations, preschool teacher training, and staff professional development.

Last year, we added enrichment activities to help our after-school children cultivate strengths in critical thinking, problems solving, decision making, and creativity. The activities include: art, chess, computer coding, HYPOTHEkids STEM, and Suzuki recorder.

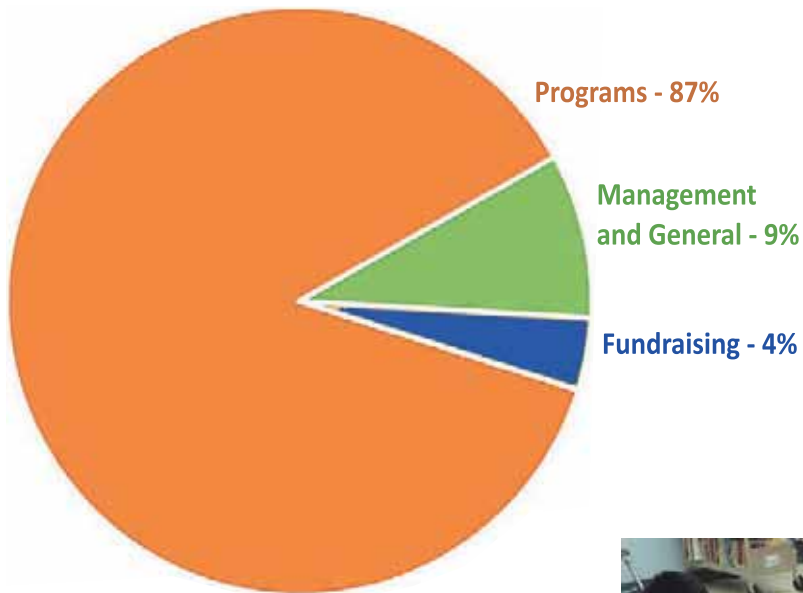
## Our Core Programs

Since opening our doors in 2001, we have helped more than 6,000 disadvantaged children achieve substantial and lasting academic success. In 2014-15, we served 900 four- to eleven-year-old children, their parents, and their teachers at our two Harlem sites:

- Our **Preschool Program** served 500 four-and five-year-old children from 11 day care centers and Head Start programs at our main program site, equipping them with important early literacy skills and concepts needed for success in elementary school.
- Our **School-Day Program** at PS 36 served 250 four- to seven-year-old children, enabling them to develop key foundational skills and concepts for thriving in their regular classrooms.
- Our **After-School Program** served 100 children in grades K-5 from 18 elementary schools at our main program site and 50 children in grades K-3 at PS 36.



# Reading Team Expenses for 2014-15



U.S. Representative Charles Rangel visited our After-School Program.

Intentionally small reading groups give children the personal attention they need for learning.



Alumnae enjoyed reminiscing at our first Alumni Reunion.



Chess is a new enrichment activity in the After-School Program at PS 36.

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# THE Reading Team

LITERACY FOR LIFE



We serve children from 11 day care and Head Start programs, as well as 18 public, charter, private, and parochial elementary schools in New York City.

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