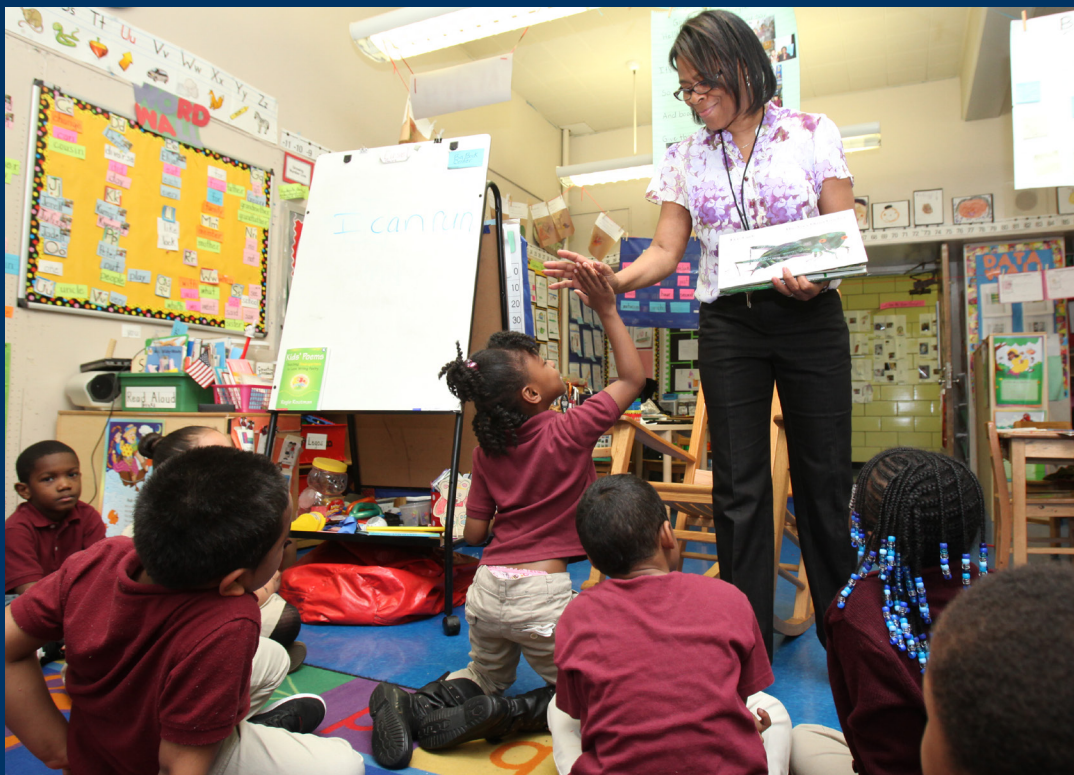




# A New Chapter in Early Literacy

Ready Readers Improves Reading Proficiency  
by Nurturing a Love of Books



MAR 2020



**“The change is never instant, but, if you look back at the beginning of the school year, those same shy and timid children who would probably never read for enjoyment bloom into outspoken, questioning, and book-loving individuals.”**

- READY READERS AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATOR



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## **Introduction**

Storytelling makes us human. Through stories we learn to understand ourselves, connect with one another, and explore new worlds. Stories even have the power to shape history.

No one loves a story more than a child. Observe a read aloud and watch a classroom of children become enraptured. Or sit with a child as the letters on the page begin to make sense, unlocking a gate to infinite possibilities.

As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said on International Literacy Day, **“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope.”**

Today, however, far too few children possess appropriate grade-level literacy skills. Less than 50% of New York City third through eighth graders are reading at grade level. This does not bode well since research demonstrates that early reading skills are a predictor of academic outcomes. According to the Reading Foundation, **reading proficiently by the end of third grade is one of the most important predictors of whether a student will graduate from high school.**

If we want to improve educational outcomes, it is incumbent upon education professionals to figure out a way to generate a love of reading in young children. Fortunately, Ready Readers does just that. Four years ago, with

encouragement from the Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education in The New York Community Trust, ExpandedED Schools joined forces with three community-based organizations (CBOs)—CAMBA, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, and the Chinese-American Planning Council—to deploy Ready Readers in their afterschool programs. Since then, the literacy program has reached nearly 3,000 students in grades K–3. The results, outlined on pp. 4–5, are impressive.

Ready Readers gives afterschool educators the tools and training needed to support early language and literacy skills. Through Ready Readers, afterschool programs become literacy-rich environments, where adults trained in reading comprehension and engagement read high-quality books and then lead corresponding activities that reflect a diverse mix of identities and cultures.

By delivering a curriculum, supplying books, and training afterschool educators, Ready Readers is nurturing a love of reading among young people who naturally embrace the fun-filled experience of engaging with imaginative stories and creative activities. As Ready Readers emerges as a critical literacy support, the model offers hope to principals, teachers, families, and communities concerned about the early language and literacy development of New York City’s 1.1 million public school students.

# Ready Readers Model

Behind every good reader is a joyful early experience with reading. Nonie Lesaux, Dean and Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and noted expert on early language and literacy development, described the kinds of early experiences that pave the way to becoming an effective reader:

“Throughout the day and throughout the early years especially (birth to nine), [becoming an effective reader] means asking questions, starting conversations, telling stories, and singing songs. It means listening to stories via audio, drawing letters, writing names as well as writing stories, letters, and essays. It means visits to local parks, libraries, and museums. It means teaching children to read independently and it also means everyone reading together. It is these interactions and everyday activities...that foster an orientation toward learning and inspire children’s sense of curiosity about the world and greater understanding of it, while simultaneously promoting their language abilities and their thinking.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the past four years, thousands of New York City six- to eight-year-olds have experienced the joy of reading through Ready Readers. Developed by ExpandedED, Ready Readers uses:

- **Culturally responsive texts** that support positive identity development, cultural competence, and social emotional learning.
- **Interactive read-alouds** that support vocabulary development, text comprehension, and grade-level discussion skills.



**“In day school we just read the read-aloud and then answer some simple questions. In afterschool, we read the book and then do a fun activity.”**

**- READY READERS AFTERSCHOOL STUDENT**

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<sup>1</sup> Lesaux N, Hastings M, Kelley J, Marietta S, Harris JR. Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success.; 2010. P.1.

- **Extension activities** that allow students to apply the major themes of the texts and connect them to the performing arts, visual arts, STEM, and health and wellness.
- **Attention to academic vocabulary** that is explored, highlighted, and revisited throughout the week and across different activities in the expanded day.
- **Opportunities to express and exchange ideas**, thoughts, interpretations, predictions and reflections with each other, both as a means to flex their critical thinking ability and practice their command of the English language via writing and speaking.

Through this formula, Reader Readers promotes:

- **Critical thinking** through lines of questioning that explore the themes and contents of culturally diverse books.

#### READY READERS CORE COMPONENTS:



**Culturally  
Responsive Texts**



**Interactive  
Read-alouds**



**Extension  
Activities**

#### READY READERS CORE EMPHASIS:



**Critical  
Thinking**



**Attention to  
Academic Vocabulary**



**Opportunities to  
Express Ideas**



ExpandedED also conducts training and provides the curriculum to ensure success. Through an initial 12 hours of training for afterschool educators, most of whom do not have extensive pedagogical backgrounds, educators learn how to conduct an effective read-aloud that includes vocabulary instruction and questioning to support comprehension. Throughout the year, ExpandedED provides coaching, monthly meetings, and conference calls for literacy managers.

In addition, the site managers and educators learn how to conduct activities that tie the theme of the book with visual and performing arts, STEM, and health and wellness.”

## Reach

In 2019, Ready Readers served close to 4,000 students across 60 sites through 20 CBOs. Ready Readers also promoted the professional development of 225 educators, increasing educator confidence, motivation, and knowledge of literacy instruction.

Children enrolled in these afterschool programs receive at least two hours of literacy-focused instruction per week during the school year. Through read-alouds, hands-on activities, and peer-to-peer discussions, young readers delve into a book’s theme, build oral expression, and make connections between the text and their lives, as well as the world around them.

Ready Readers programs also engage families in building the language and literacy skills of their children through Family Read Nights and other activities, field trips, and events. And last year, Ready Readers launched the Summer Institute for community-based summer providers interested in implementing the program.

## CAMBA FAMILY NIGHT AT PS 92

At Family Night at PS 92 in Brooklyn, families enjoyed dinner while admiring the beautiful student work created during Ready Readers lessons, including murals, poems, stories, puppets, and other creative projects. The staff also conducted icebreakers, prompting get-to-know-you conversations between families, and designed read-aloud lesson plans that encouraged meaningful discussion between kids and their parents.

The families and children then read *Islandborn*, about a young girl’s quest to learn about where she was born. The students, many with close connections themselves to other countries, discussed the story with their families and then they worked together to create an image about their community.

As one parent said: “Ready Readers is important to me because it helps my child learn and develop. My child is more cheerful and lively than before.”



Ready Readers sites are located in all five boroughs.

## Evaluation

Ready Readers uses several evaluation tools to measure impact and guide continuous improvement. For student outcomes, the program collects data on attendance, running records, and a literacy attitudinal survey. Running records are collected three times throughout the academic year. Student literacy attitudinal surveys are collected in the fall and in the spring as a pre- and post-measure. Staff receive two scored observations throughout the year (pre and post) and are also given a pre- and post-survey on their growth and learning. Finally, a site representative completes and submits a normed fidelity rubric on implementation.

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### READY READERS' IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATORS

Thanks to Ready Readers young readers have demonstrated improved reading skills, attendance, and engagement. But that's not all. Afterschool educators have also reported that they, too, are benefitting from the training, gaining both skills and confidence. The data tells a great story.

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### READY READERS INCREASES CHILDREN'S READING COMPREHENSION

Among the 1,768 students participating in Ready Readers for whom the program collected baseline and end-of-year data:

- 56% demonstrated growth at a pace that exceeded expectations for their grade level.
- 79% demonstrated growth at a pace that either met or exceeded expectations for their grade level.

Among the 912 students who started the school year below proficiency for their grade level:

- 63% demonstrated growth at a pace that exceeded expectations for their grade level.
- 80% of students below proficiency demonstrated growth at a pace that either met or exceeded expectations for their grade level.

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### ATTENDANCE

- 73% of Ready Readers students met the benchmark for program “completion” by attending at least 52 hours of Ready Readers activities.

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**“A concerned parent was grateful that we had bilingual books and was able to read to her daughter at home. Her child, aged eight, went up reading levels from ‘L’ to ‘O,’ which is now meeting the standard for her grade. The ability to give families bilingual books in their home languages so they may share one-on-one reading time together is a wonderful benefit of this program and has helped engage bilingual Chinese speaking parents.”**

- PROGRAM DIRECTOR AT PS 20Q

**“At the trainings, I learned how to get into characters and be creative with the kids. When you do a different voice, they get so excited.”**

- READY READERS AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATOR

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**73% of Ready Readers students met the benchmark for program “completion” by attending at least 52 hours of Ready Readers activities.**



**80% of students below proficiency demonstrated growth at a pace that either met or exceeded expectations for their grade level.**



**73% of educators indicate that participating in Ready Readers increased the likelihood that they will continue working for their afterschool provider long-term.**



**68% of group leaders indicate that their experience increased their interest in a career in youth development or education more broadly.**



- Ready Readers had an average attendance rate of 84%, higher than the typical 80% target for afterschool attendance set by the the New York City Department of Youth and Community for the elementary grades.

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#### **ENGAGEMENT**

- Ready Readers educators saw substantial improvements in youth enthusiasm for afterschool literacy activities as well as moderate improvements in enthusiasm for reading outside of afterschool.
- Impact areas rated highest by educators were “ability to make predictions” and “ability to understand the message or lesson of a story,” two key skills highlighted in the New York State Next Generation ELA Learning Standards.

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#### **READY READERS BUILDS SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE OF AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATORS**

According to surveys, Ready Readers builds educators’ confidence and capacity in classroom management, structuring questions, reading with expression, designing engaging activities, choosing an appropriate book for their students, teaching vocabulary, and supporting students for whom English is a second language.

- 95% of Ready Readers group leaders reported high confidence levels (4 or above on a 5-point scale) in their teaching abilities at the end of the school year.
- In addition, 84% of group leaders reported increases in their confidence supporting reading comprehension. Group leaders indicated

statistically significant increases across all seven questions related to confidence, moving from an average of a 3.8 to 4.5 out of 5.

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#### **READY READERS INFLUENCES AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATORS TO REMAIN & ADVANCE IN THE FIELD**

Most educators communicated on surveys that the program made them more likely to remain with their organization and consider a career in education.

- 73% of educators indicate that participating in Ready Readers increased the likelihood that they will continue working for their afterschool provider long-term.
- 68% of group leaders indicate that their experience increased their interest in a career in youth development or education more broadly.

Ready Readers staff in the last few years have taken next steps towards a long-term career in education and youth development, securing positions as teaching aides and paraprofessionals, re-enrolling in school to work toward a teaching degree, and/or taking full-time positions as teaching assistants or early childhood instructors.

Given the chronically high turnover rates among direct service staff in the afterschool field, the ability of Ready Readers to increase retention rates has profound implications for implementation of the program at scale in terms of strengthening and stabilizing afterschool programs across New York City.

## **Next Steps for Ready Readers**

Thanks to more than \$4 million in grants from the Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education in The New York Community Trust, ExpandedED and its CBO partners have spent the past four years successfully implementing stage one of the Ready Readers program. Today, ExpandedED seeks to scale the model to reach more afterschool programs throughout New York City.

In 2019, ExpandedED led a Summer Institute based on the Ready Readers model open to all afterschool service providers funded by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. Staff from 21 CBOs participated in the training and implemented Ready Readers-inspired literacy programming for 800 students.

ExpandedED is exploring and testing additional strategies to enable more children to experience Ready Readers:

- Building the capacity of CBOs to embed Ready Readers within their own site or organization-based required professional development.
- Integrating the functions of the Literacy Manager within the publicly-funded staffing structures of CBOs.
- Developing a campaign to build public and policymaker support for focusing on early literacy in elementary afterschool, including building dissemination plans for Ready Readers information, City Council

engagement, and a policy brief.

The campaign will encourage CBOs to infuse literacy instruction into elementary afterschool literacy programs and call for increased funding from City Council for DYCD and DOE to provide professional development to afterschool educators and increase per-participant reimbursements for elementary afterschool programs.

ExpandedED is also engaging in research to better understand and advance the impact of Ready Readers on increasing staff retention rates of afterschool providers and inspiring long-term career paths in youth development and education.

In a field that faces regular staffing challenges, such as high turnover rates, Ready Readers can have a positive impact. Staff have commented on feeling supported in ways not achieved by other curricula or models, which has generated a more positive attitude towards employers. As ExpandedED explores next steps, it seeks to build on these findings and work with CUNY, DYCD, and others to offer tangible benefits for those serving New York City's children.

ExpandedED looks forward to working with a growing coalition of partners and supporters to continue to build the capacity of the afterschool sector to nurture and grow young children's love of reading. To join us, contact Joel Nunez at [jnunez@expandedschools.org](mailto:jnunez@expandedschools.org).

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**“I’m most proud of the fact that most of my second grade students love reading now and look forward to reading new books. I’m also proud of the fact that all my students learn to write poems for RR activity. They love it and continue writing poems on their own.”**

**- READY READERS AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATOR**








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**“[My students] have grown in ways I could not have imagined. They have become very disciplined. At the beginning they were not excited; today my kindergarteners look forward to Ready Readers. I am proud to see how much the children have grown and appreciate reading.”**

**- READY READERS AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATOR**

## Thank You

In addition to our founding partners, we also wish to thank the many CBOs that have embraced Ready Readers as a part of their K-3 afterschool programs:



**ExpandedED Schools is a nonprofit organization that closes the opportunity gap for youth from under-served communities by increasing access to enriched education experiences. Annually, we build the capacity of hundreds of public schools and community organizations across New York City to offer expanded learning opportunities that support the academic, social, and emotional success of youth of all ages. An innovation hub within the after-school field, ExpandedED employs three central strategies to achieve impact on youth, educators, communities, and the educational system as a whole: 1) Research and development: We design, implement, and evaluate programs aimed at redesigning education to ensure that youth are future-ready; 2) Capacity building: We strengthen teaching and learning through professional development and technical assistance; and 3) Advocacy: We partner with policymakers and influencers to continually shape and strengthen policies that promote educational equity and successful outcomes in school, career, and life.**

**This report was written by Kathleen Traphagen with support from Saskia Traill, Joel Nunez, Tarilyn Little, Naa-Shorme Aidoo, and Jennifer Friedlin. We would also like to thank our Ready Readers Collaborative Partners, CAMBA, Cypress Hills local Development Corporation, and Chinese-American Planning Council.**

**ExpandedED thanks all of the school and community leaders who provided input for this report and commit daily to the important work of supporting New York City's youth.**

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