

A photograph of a female teacher with long dark hair, wearing a patterned cardigan, sitting at a table and reading a colorful book to two young students. A girl with a large yellow bow in her hair and a boy are looking at the book with interest. The background is a blurred classroom setting with other children and bookshelves.

A Year of Transformative Growth

**READING POWER'S
IMPACT IN 2023-2024**

Our Mission

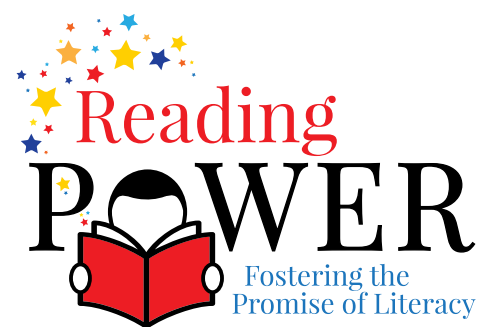


Our mission is to accelerate children's literacy learning and to develop their love for reading and writing

Our Vision



We envision a world where all children have a strong literacy foundation to support lifelong learning



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NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Dear Reading Power Friends and Family,



“

Low literacy is one of the most solvable problems of our time, and effective, early intervention is the key.”

LISA BULZONI, MEd,
Chief Executive Officer



Reading is a skill we often take for granted, yet it's the cornerstone of all learning and development. In the United States, the foundation of reading starts in kindergarten, with expectations for fluent reading by the end of first grade. By third grade, reading proficiency becomes critical; those who lag behind at this stage often miss out on crucial aspects of their education. Alarming research indicates that 88% of students who do not earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade (Renaissance).

When children are not proficient readers by third grade, they face significant challenges in all subjects, including science, math, social studies, and even music, art, and physical education. Struggling readers may also exhibit behavioral issues that affect their social interactions and overall development. Low literacy is one of the most solvable problems of our time, and effective, early intervention is the key.

Twenty-one years ago, Reading Power set out to change the trajectory for children in North Chicago, IL. Since then, we have expanded to additional districts where needs exceed resources across the northern and northwestern suburbs of Chicago. Today, we are accelerating children's literacy learning and developing their love of reading and writing through high-dosage, one-to-one tutoring. This school year alone, 748 students in North Chicago, Palatine, Waukegan, Wheeling, and Zion, IL were paired with over 375 trained volunteer tutors. Reading Power's students are making remarkable progress, with 72% meeting grade-level expectations in literacy and increasing an average of five book levels last year.

However, our work is not done. Reading achievement in our core service areas—Northeast Lake County and nearby sections of Cook County—

lags neighboring districts. Literacy is essential for a basic quality of life, and children who start behind face enormous challenges catching up. Areas with the lowest literacy rates often coincide with poor health, poverty, and low economic mobility. These areas, particularly in Lake and Cook Counties, frequently include predominantly Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx communities that have historically faced unjust disadvantages.

Each year, new school districts reach out to Reading Power requesting our program, and current districts seek to expand our services. We need additional funding to meet this growing demand. Our goal is exponential growth into new schools and districts over the next three years, extending the promise of literacy to even more students. As we scale our programs, we remain dedicated to maintaining the quality of our research-based, data-driven curricula.

Our vision is clear: a world where all children have a strong literacy foundation to support lifelong learning. Every year, a new generation of students enters school with the same challenges, and Reading Power is committed to meeting their needs and supporting new communities of young learners.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together, we can create a brighter future for all children through the power of literacy.

Warm regards,

Lisa Bulzoni, MEd
Chief Executive Officer

BY THE NUMBERS

Accelerating literacy learning
in the 2023-2024 academic year

748
Students

10
Partner
Schools

375+
Volunteer Tutors

19,600
One-to-One
Tutoring Sessions

2,145
Minutes
Per Student

72%

of students met grade level
expectations and increased
an average of 5 book levels.

The Reading Power Advantage

Reading Power's highly trained volunteer tutors provide one-to-one literacy instruction during the school day under the guidance of educational professionals. Lesson plans structure each tutoring session and are individualized daily for each student. Each kindergarten through second grade session encompasses reading, writing, and speaking to foster the promise of literacy. The target population for the kindergarten through second grade programs is students scoring below the 25th percentile on universal literacy assessments, thus reading below grade level. This past school year, many students started below the 10th percentile.

Preschool

The focus of our preschool program is to foster the love of reading through high-quality literature. This program promotes the growth of children's oral language, gives them opportunities for rich conversations, and helps to develop their listening comprehension through our one-to-one tutoring. Our volunteers work with students two times per week during free choice time in the classrooms. Preschool tutors commit to a one hour a week time commitment for the academic year.

Lesson plans structure each tutoring session and are individualized daily for each student.

Kindergarten

Students in the kindergarten program develop story listening skills, increase alphabet letter and sound skills, and phonemic awareness while fostering their early love of literacy. These early literacy skills are the main predictors of first grade reading success. Kindergarten students receive 25-minute one-to-one literacy tutoring sessions three times per week. During these sessions, a picture book is read to the child and discussed – fostering a sense of story, prediction making, vocabulary development, and a love of books. Students also write in a journal and play a game targeting foundational reading skills. Kindergarten tutors commit to a two hour a week time commitment for the academic year.

First and Second Grade

The first and second grade program is the heart of Reading Power. The goals are to accelerate student's literacy learning and love of reading. First and second grade students are tutored for 40 minutes, up to four days per week in a dedicated Reading Power space. In each tutoring session, the child reads four books, writes a sentence in their journal, engages in word work, and learns high frequency words. A familiar book is sent home each night for practice along with a student selected library book. A standardized lesson plan is used for each session and is individualized daily for each student. During each session, the student's performance is assessed, and a new lesson plan is prepared, allowing the next day's tutor to pick up where instruction left off. First and second grade tutors dedicate two and a half to three hours each week throughout the academic year.

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Literacy Challenges in Our Communities

Program Impact By The Numbers

 **2,150**
gift books distributed

 **55,000**
books read, discussed, and shared

 **684,260**
minutes tutored

In 2023, only 29% of Illinois third-grade students met or exceeded reading proficiency standards on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) (Illinois State Board of Education). In Zion, just 5 percent of third graders are reading at grade level, while in North Chicago, the number is 13% (IL State Board of Education). These statistics highlight the urgent need for initiatives like Reading Power, especially in under-resourced communities.

Supporting Underserved Students

Children from underserved populations face several obstacles to their education even before entering school:

- **High Poverty Rates:** The students Reading Power serves are 92% low-income and 85% minority (2023 IL School Report Card).
- **Limited Access to Books:** Up to 61% of low-income families do not have any books for their children at home.
- **Pandemic Impact:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, students in low-income and predominantly minority communities experienced double the decline in academic performance compared to their peers in more affluent districts, widening the racial learning gap (NWEA, 2023).



Reading Power has brought excitement and enthusiasm to our school daily. Learning to read is imperative and the purpose behind the program; however, what’s even more important to me is the love and excitement for reading that is being fostered in our students.”

SAMANTHA ROTH, Whitman Elementary Principal

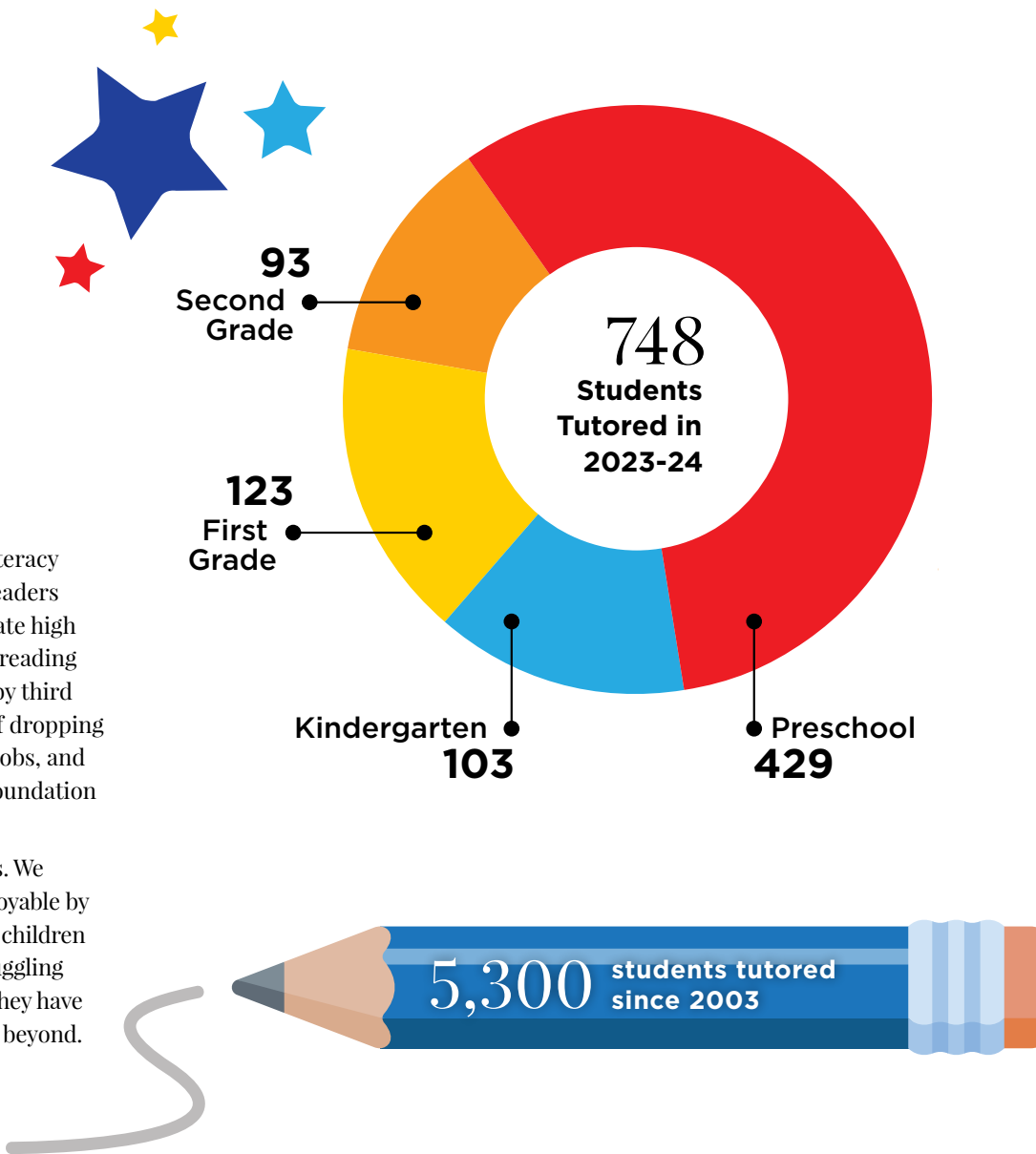
Effective Interventions

High-dose tutoring—defined as three or more individualized sessions per week—is one of the most effective ways to boost achievement for students from lower-income families, surpassing methods like cooperative learning, computer-based instruction, and mentoring (Poverty Action Lab, 2021). At Reading Power, we implement this approach to ensure our students receive the intensive support they need to succeed. Research shows that positive, caring relationships with consistent tutors support students social-emotional development, increase attachment to school, and connect students with mentors to help them navigate the education system. Sustained mentoring relationships with clear academic and social-emotional goals offer frequent feedback and improve student confidence and engagement (Hashim, et al., NWEA, 2024). Personalized high-impact tutoring also helps reduce absenteeism (Stanford University, 2024).

The Positive Impact of Reading Power

At Reading Power, we believe that early literacy can change lives. Proficient third grade readers are nearly five times more likely to graduate high school than their peers with below-basic reading skills (Renaissance). Without these skills by third grade, students face a higher likelihood of dropping out of high school, earning less in future jobs, and even being incarcerated. Literacy is the foundation for future academic and life success.

We are committed to our students’ success. We show them we care and make learning enjoyable by fostering a growth mindset that motivates children to want to read. Our goal is to support struggling readers before they fall behind, ensuring they have the skills they need to thrive in school and beyond.



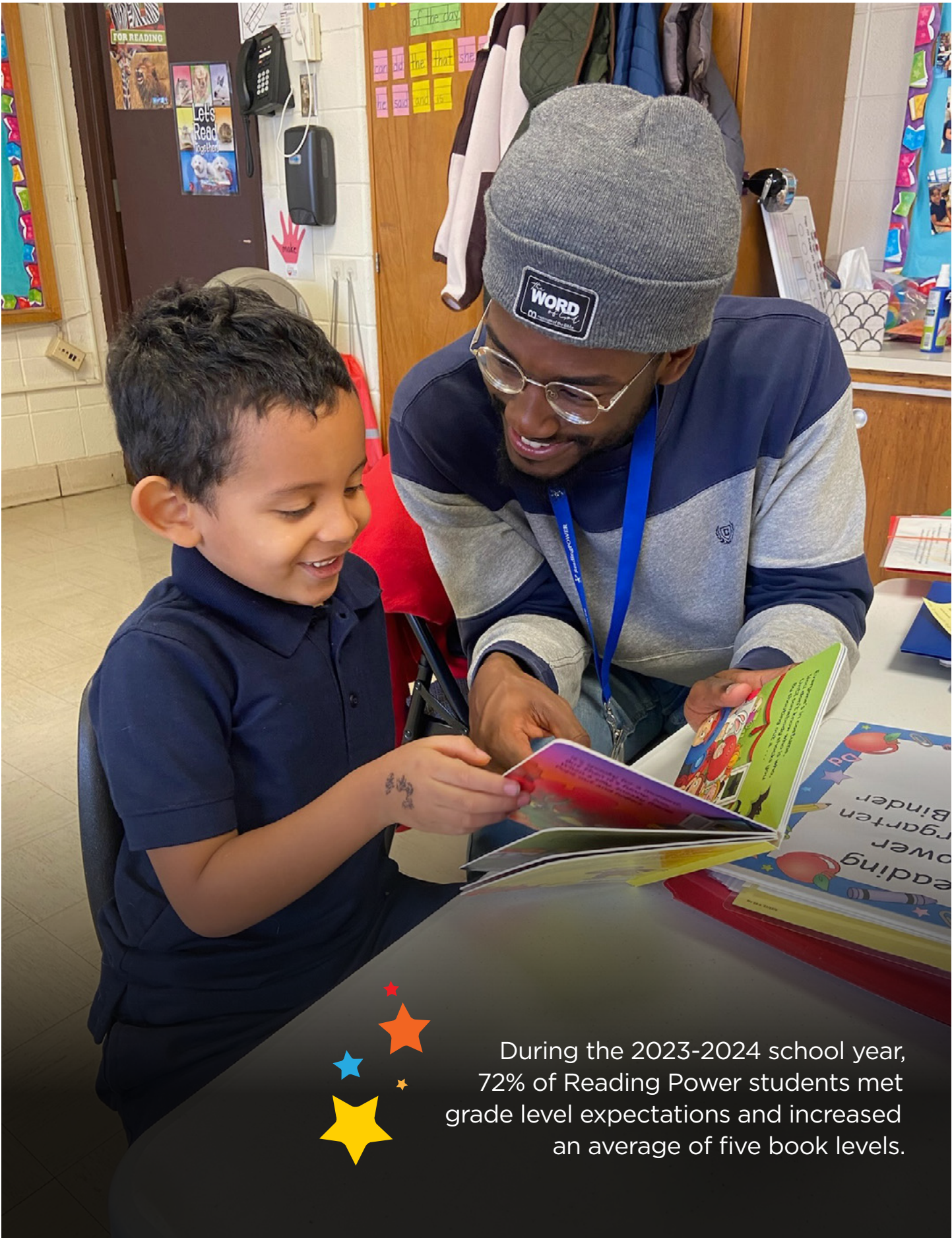
HIGH-IMPACT HIGH DOSAGE Tutoring

WHAT IT IS:

- ✓ During the school day
- ✓ One-to-one with a trained tutor
- ✓ Data driven instruction
- ✓ High-quality instructional materials
- ✓ 3-4 times a week for 30-35 minutes per session

WHAT IT ISN'T:

- ✗ After school, at home, during weekends or evenings
- ✗ Online or in a group setting
- ✗ Homework help
- ✗ Using whatever materials students bring
- ✗ Ad hoc, student-scheduled



During the 2023-2024 school year, 72% of Reading Power students met grade level expectations and increased an average of five book levels.

OUR RESULTS

Results indicate substantial growth in fluency, comprehension, phonics skills, and vocabulary, while increasing enjoyment of reading and building confidence.

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How We Measure

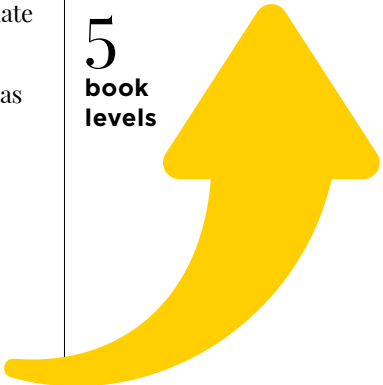
Reading Power measures overall growth to assess students’ literacy knowledge using universal assessments in the fall and spring. In addition, students are assessed daily to inform instruction. This individualized intervention is the key to

Reading Power’s success, as it supports the development of fundamental skills and independent reading practices. Student performance is formally evaluated three times a year. The Illinois Snapshots of Early Literacy (ISEL) is used for kindergarten and an Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measure is used for first and second grade literacy. Results inform program eligibility, advise instruction, and evaluate program effectiveness at year-end.

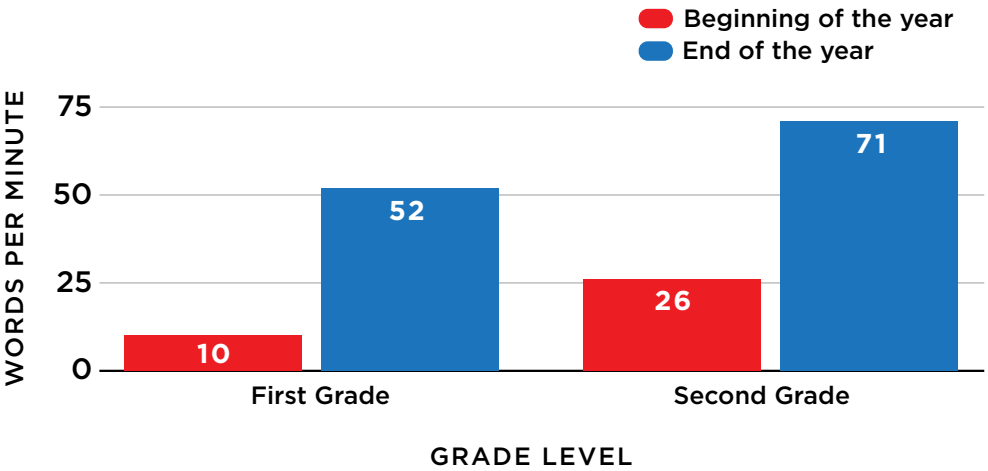
Data gathered since our program began in 2003 has shown that Reading Power students consistently advance to grade level expectations.

72% of Reading Power students met grade level expectations and increased an average of

5 book levels



AVERAGE INCREASE IN WORDS READ PER MINUTE



OUR TUTORS

The Impact of Dedicated Tutors on Student Success



Reading Power is led by reading professionals and powered by over 375 trained volunteers. The strong relationships that students form with our dedicated tutors are central to the success of Reading Power. These connections play a vital role in fostering literacy growth and instilling a love for learning in young children.

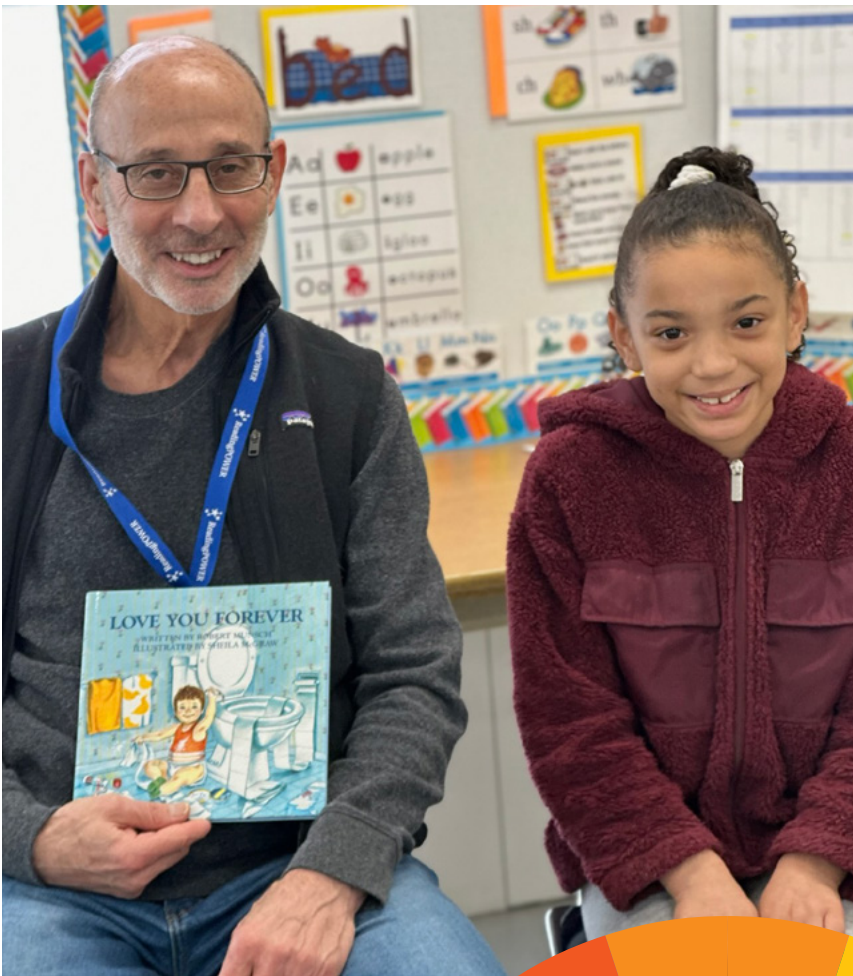


“Our students benefit from working with the volunteers who are encouraging them to enjoy and love reading. The one-to-one setting allows the tutors to design lessons specifically for the needs of the students based on what they know and need to learn to achieve academic success.”

DR. RACHEL BLAND, Director of MTSS for Palatine CCSD15

2024 Presidential Volunteer Service Awards

Reading Power is a certified organization with the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation. Led by the AmeriCorps and managed in partnership with Points of Light, this program allows Certifying Organizations to recognize their most exceptional volunteers and the impact they make. This year, 24 Reading Power tutors were honored with a service award for volunteering over 100 hours during the 2023–2024 academic year.



Hear from Our Tutors

Literacy has the power to transform lives. Don’t just take our word for it—listen to what our Reading Power tutors have to say about their experiences:

“Tutoring is the most rewarding thing I do all week.”

This is bigger than literacy. This is one-to-one mentoring. It’s really amazing.”

I truly LOVE Reading Power. It has helped put purpose back in my life.”

I love to see the ‘lightbulb’ go on—when a child sounds out a word or when they finish their first 100 fast words.”

Seeing the big smiles and enthusiasm on the students’ faces is pure magic!”

This is the best job I’ve ever had and I don’t even get a paycheck!”

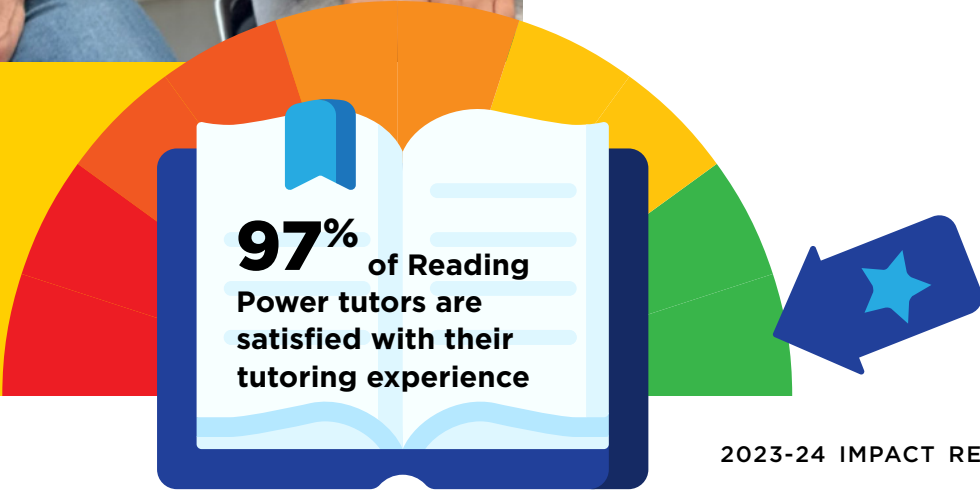
Tutoring may make me rethink where I spend my winters.”

TUTOR ONE CHILD. CHANGE TWO LIVES.

The need for literacy intervention is greater than ever. Reading Power needs more tutors to continue expanding and reaching more students in need. **Ready to join us?**



Scan to become a volunteer tutor today!



“Reading Power opened my eyes to the possibilities of my future, a future I am just beginning to realize.”

MARCO ESCOBAR, former Reading Power student and now an honor student at Zion-Benton High School

A Swinging Success: Third Annual Play for Literacy Golf and Games

Reading Power hosted its third annual Golf and Games event at Knollwood Club in September 2023. The event saw over 250 guests come together to support our mission. Their generous contributions enabled Reading Power to expand into two new districts and four new schools during the 2023-2024 academic year.



Reach for the Stars: Celebrating 20 Years of Literacy Success

In April 2024, Reading Power celebrated its 20th Anniversary benefit, an event marked by community, celebration, and inspiration. Co-founder Mary Jane Hender received the Literacy Legacy Award, recognizing her pivotal role in our organization’s success. Volunteer tutor Amanda Wright was honored with the Shining Star Award for her outstanding dedication.

The highlight of the evening was an inspiring speech by Marco Escobar, a former Reading Power student and now an honor student at Zion-Benton High School. Marco shared his journey, emphasizing the transformative impact of literacy support: “Reading Power opened my eyes to the possibilities of my future, a future I am just beginning to realize.”



This year, Reading Power formed valuable partnerships with two higher education programs, resulting in mutually beneficial outcomes for both our students and organization.

College of Lake County

This year, Reading Power reached a significant milestone by welcoming four new schools, including Robbie Lightfoot Early Childhood Center in Waukegan, IL. This expansion doubled the number of preschoolers Reading Power serves, creating a pressing need for more volunteer tutors. To address this, Reading Power partnered with the College of Lake County Early Childhood Department. Early Education students, like Irma Roman, can volunteer to tutor in the classroom and earn school credit hours for their invaluable contributions. Drawing on her experience as a former teaching assistant now pursuing her degree, Irma remarked, “This is such a natural fit for me.”

Reading Power’s preschool expansion aligns with broader efforts in Illinois school districts to better prepare preschool students for kindergarten and enhance pre-literacy skills. Robbie Lightfoot Early Childhood Principal Nicole Session shared, “Our students are eager to join Reading Power tutors to hear a story and engage. Building relationships enhances Social Emotional Learning, which is integral to successful early learning outcomes. The one-to-one interaction also supports our school-wide improvement goals in early literacy development. We appreciate the opportunity to have Reading Power in our school.”



National Louis University

Lucy Weber, a Master’s in Teaching in Elementary Education student at National Louis University (NLU), dedicates her free time to tutoring young students through Reading Power. This partnership with NLU mobilizes aspiring teachers as high-impact tutors in northern Illinois. Teaching “has always been what I’ve wanted to do,” Weber says with a big smile, after wrapping up a session with an energetic second-grade student at Lincoln Elementary School, a Reading Power partner school in Palatine, Illinois. Weber applies evidence-based instructional practices from her NLU coursework to her interactions with students, maintaining a calm, attentive, yet firm demeanor. Currently, tutoring opportunities are optional for aspiring teachers at NLU. Given the quality of the program and the learning she receives at Reading Power, Weber believes it should be incorporated into the teacher preparation experience. She relishes the immense value and feeling of being better prepared to engage students in deep and meaningful learning. In addition to applying her coursework in practice, she credits the quality of Reading Power’s training and support structure for building her confidence and decision-making skills as a future teacher.



NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

“Building relationships enhances Social Emotional Learning, which is integral to successful early learning outcomes.”

NICOLE SESSION, Robbie Lightfoot Early Childhood Center Principal

2023-24 FINANCIALS

Reading Power provides a transparent view of our financials, ensuring accountability and trust in managing the generous resources entrusted to us.



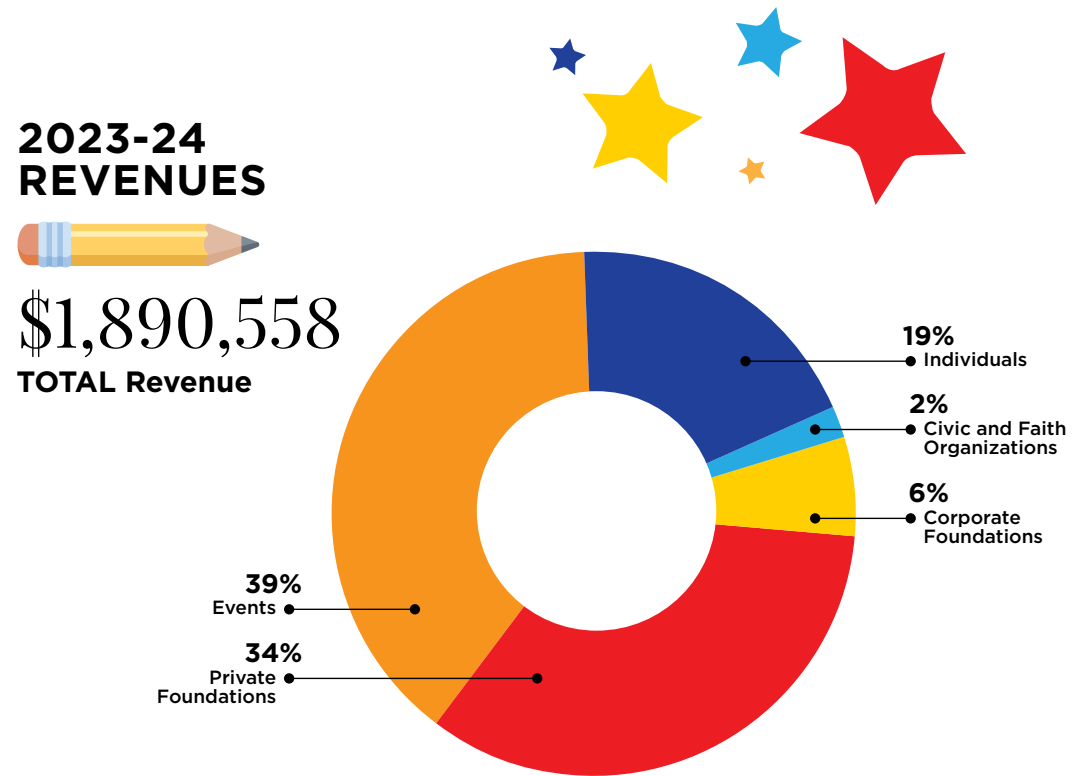
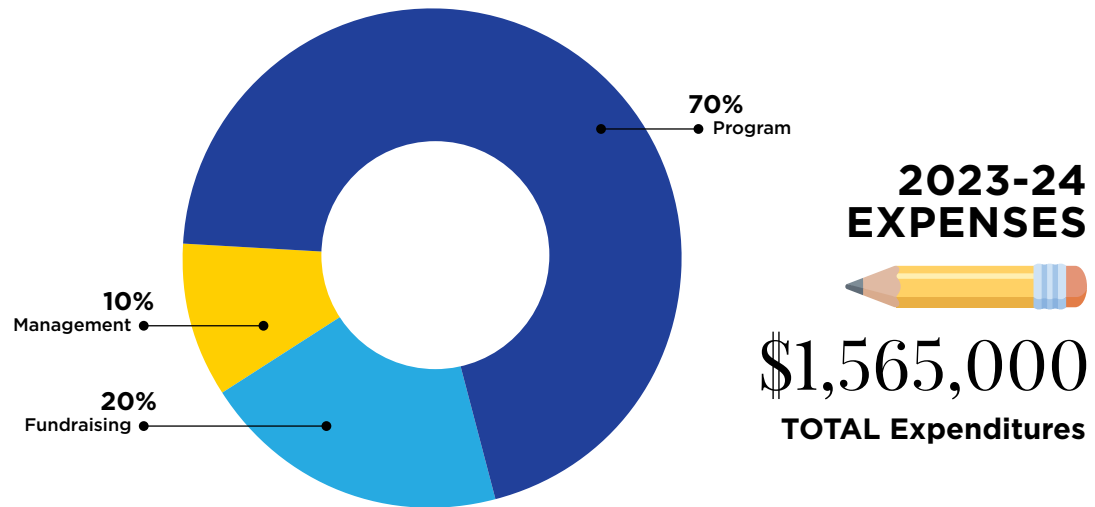
\$250
trains a tutor



\$500
builds a classroom library



\$3,000
tutors a Reading Power student for one year



Subject to annual audit by Lauterbach & Amen, LLP



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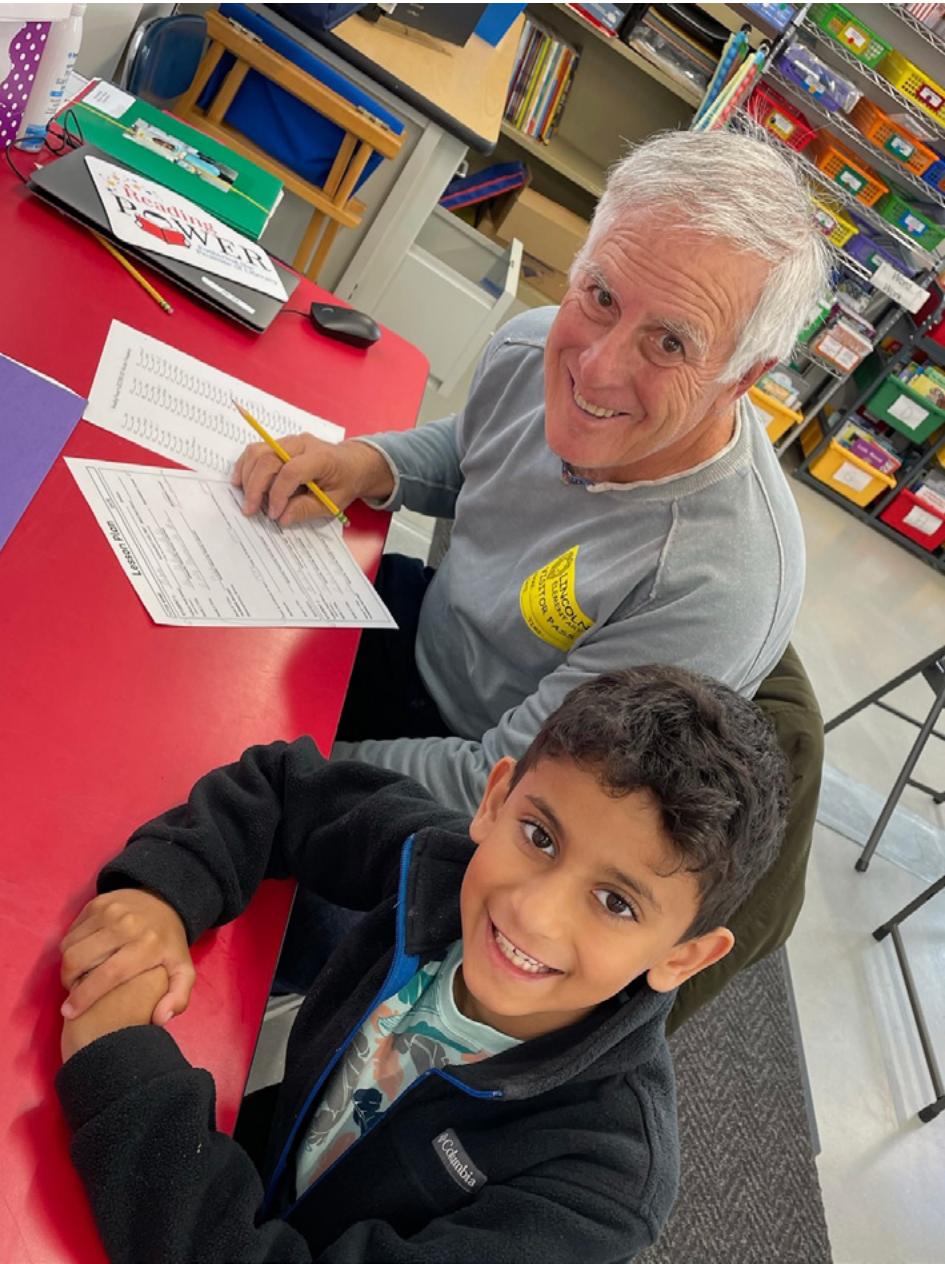
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