Read Aloud Program Impact Report 20-21
WHY READING MATTERS
The ability to read is a gateway skill to positive life outcomes, and development of that skill begins early and continues throughout a student’s scholastic career.

At Words Alive, we believe that empowering experiences turn students into agents of change and advocates for their own education. We also believe that reading is the foundation of community and economic development, and that when everyone can read, whole communities thrive!

READ ALOUD PROGRAM
Through our Read Aloud Program, we bring reading alive by inviting caring adults to share stories with children and inspiring those children to be curious, adventurous, and imaginative by exploring diverse and relevant books together. In this research-based program, trained Words Alive volunteers team up with elementary-age children for high-caliber read alouds that bring books alive. This program is tailored to meet children where they are – in classrooms, virtually, or at after-school sites. Regular program sessions, aligned with Common Core standards, provide English Language Arts enrichment over the course of the academic year and includes: engaging read alouds, small group learning, participation in a project connecting art and reading, relationship building, and new books for children to keep.

During the 2020-21 academic year, Words Alive partnered with like-minded leadership at the following Title I elementary schools to deliver our Read Aloud Program in 42 classrooms, serving 1,260 students in preschool through third grade:

- Bandini Elementary
- Burbank Elementary
- Edison Elementary
- Felicita Elementary
- Freese Elementary
- Herbert-Ibarra Elementary
- Monarch School
- Perkins Elementary
- Porter Elementary & State Preschool
- Walker Elementary
- Washington Elementary

The Read Aloud Program and this partnership supported shared strategic goals of partners to:

- Engage the whole community in working together to ensure that children and youth are poised for school success.
- Develop programs, competencies and linkages that support and promote student empowerment and self-sufficiency.
How Do We Help Children Fall in Love With Reading?

THE WORDS ALIVE WAY

Bring People Together
A total of 1,260 children from 42 classrooms participated in the Read Aloud Program during the 2020-21 school year.

Create Access
Children read stories that reflected their world and took home 5,722 books to grow their home libraries.

Build Habits
Children and dedicated reading role model volunteers clocked 630 hours sharing stories together.

Practice What Works
Volunteers focused on read aloud strategies that make connections to our world and honor children's innate sense of wonder.
OUTCOMES – WHAT CHANGED FOR STUDENTS

Reading aloud to young children has been recognized as an essential practice to developing emerging literacy skills. Reading research has also identified specific strategies that adults can use when reading aloud to enhance its impact.¹

Using this research base and tools developed by our third-party evaluative partners at the University of San Diego’s Caster Center for Non-Profit and Philanthropic Research, our Read Aloud Program focuses on three key impact goals.

That students:

Develop an enduring commitment to reading.
Objective: Students internalize the value of reading as they explore new ideas and topics through in-depth, shared reading experiences and discussion with their peers and caring adults.

Become life-long learners
Objective: Students experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and recognize their own ability to develop a sense of curiosity and active imagination, seek out information to solve problems, sharpen critical thinking skills and make circular connections between texts, self, and their world.

Become advocates for themselves and their future.
Objective: Students build their vocabulary and abilities of self-expression, becoming empowered to invest in their futures by increasing self-confidence and clarity as readers, writers, and speakers.

Our ultimate objective is that students believe in the power of reading and love what reading means in their lives. That is the tipping point between someone who can read and someone who calls themselves a reader. To get there, our program aims specifically to influence what students know, how they feel, and what they do about their own reading development and enjoyment.

WHAT TEACHERS SAID

Participating teachers were asked to complete a retroactive evaluation survey during the last week of the program. This survey intends to measure student skillsets, confidence, and interest in reading, with importance placed on literacy building activities and literacy behaviors after the program.

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

It is well documented in research on literacy development in children that skills, motivation or interest to read, and confidence as a reader work in concert to propel student ability forward.

Overall, responses from teachers reported that the Read Aloud Program had a positive effect in these key areas. At a glance, teachers felt that the program...

• Impacted the development of students’ foundational literacy skills.
  o 91% of teachers reported that Read Aloud impacted the vocabulary development of their students

• Impacted students’ reading comprehension skills.
  o 92% of teachers reported that Read Aloud impacted students’ ability to connect a story to things they know about the world

• Increased students’ motivation and engagement in reading.
  o 92% of teachers reported that Read Aloud increased students’ confidence in responding to read alouds
  o 100% of teachers reported that Read Aloud sparked their students’ imagination and curiosity

Improving Foundational Skills

According to teachers, Read Aloud played a role in supporting children’s foundational literacy skill development, a building block for reading comprehension. Figure 1 shows that nine out of ten teachers reported that Read Aloud had an impact on expanding student’s knowledge of literacy terms and vocabulary. Eight out of ten teachers said that Read Aloud had an impact on building knowledge of literary terms, while seven out of ten teachers said that Read Aloud had an impact on improving phonics and fluency.

Figure 1: Read Aloud’s impact on students’ foundational literacy skill development (n=18) Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Moderate impact</th>
<th>Large impact</th>
<th>Very large impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding vocabulary</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building knowledge of literary terms</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the basic elements of a book</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving phonics</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving fluency</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improving Reading Comprehension

Research suggests there are three levels of reading comprehension, each of which increases in complexity: 1) Literal = being able to understand what is stated in a text, 2) Inferential = being able to make inferences about passages in the text in order to understand its central message, and 3) Evaluative = being able to use prior knowledge to connect the text to other text, a reader’s own lived experience, and the larger world. Teachers recognized Read Aloud’s role in students’ development of both basic (literal) and advanced (evaluative) reading comprehension skills.

Figures 2 and 3 show that approximately nine out of ten teachers reported that Read Aloud had an impact on developing indicators of student comprehension skills.

Figure 2: Read Aloud’s impact on students’ advanced comprehension skill development (n=18) Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Moderate impact</th>
<th>Large impact</th>
<th>Very large impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating understanding of a story</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling a story</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions related to a story</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making observations about characters in a story</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing their attention span during read alouds</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increasing Reading Motivation and Engagement

Teachers across all grade levels rated Read Aloud’s impact on student reading motivation favorably. Figures 4 and 5 show that roughly nine out of ten teachers felt that Read Aloud increased students’ interest and confidence in reading.

Figure 3: Read Aloud’s impact on students’ advanced comprehension skill development (n=18) Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact

- Making predictions about a story: 15% Moderate, 54% Large, 23% Very large
- Relating ideas from a story to themselves: 31% Moderate, 31% Large, 31% Very large
- Connecting a story to things they learn about in the classroom: 15% Moderate, 46% Large, 31% Very large
- Connecting a story to things they know about the world: 25% Moderate, 42% Large, 25% Very large
- Understanding the author’s message in a story: 46% Moderate, 23% Large, 23% Very large
- Developing their own opinions about a story: 23% Moderate, 31% Large, 31% Very large

Figure 4: Read Aloud’s impact on increasing students’ confidence in reading (n=18) Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a scale of 1=No increase to 5=Very large increase

- Responding to what is read aloud: 23% Moderate, 38% Large, 31% Very large
- Reading more frequently: 31% Moderate, 38% Large, 23% Very large
- Reading aloud to others: 38% Moderate, 23% Large, 15% Very large

Figure 5: Read Aloud’s impact on increasing students’ interest in reading (n=18) Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a scale of 1=No increase to 5=Very large increase

- Reading: 8% Moderate, 42% Large, 42% Very large
- Exploring books during free time: 8% Moderate, 31% Large, 38% Very large
- Asking to take books home: 23% Moderate, 15% Large, 31% Very large
The Impact of Reading Role Models

100% of teachers reported that having a dedicated Words Alive reading role model helped keep their students engaged during remote learning.

When asked how having a dedicated Words Alive reading role model helped keep their students engaged during remote learning, teachers’ responses illustrated the value of stability that volunteers provided during a chaotic time for learners and the overall impact of Read Aloud in building a positive culture of reading among students.

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS

About engagement during remote learning, teachers’ responses included:

“This is the one consistency they had during these last 15 months. They knew they could count on our reader being there for them with a great book.”

“All my Words Alive readers have taught my students to take turns talking to the group. They provide a space for everyone to participate and express themselves. We learn to be patient and practice good listening skills.”

“We’re all more motivated to read. As a teacher I get to listen to the stories as they’re being read, and I can begin to think of ways to make connections in my lessons. My students are motivated to read more stories especially the ones our reader shares.”

“Our reader made me feel like a kid, waiting to be read to...I know my students felt special. They asked for her on the other days of the week.”

“On Thursday’s during remote learning I would go over our daily schedule and share that our reader will be joining us after break. Each and every Thursday after that announcement, I would get a message typed to me in the chat (from my 1st grader) sharing that this is the best day ever because they get to listen to 2 stories! One from me and one from our reader.”

“Students now come up with more ideas on their own. Our reader provokes the students to think about the problem in the stories and motivates them to come up with more ideas to extend the story. She gets their thoughts flowing and asks them to think differently.”

POSITIVE CULTURE OF READING & DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

100% of teachers reported that the program exposed their students to a diverse range of stories, characters, and topics.

About the program’s influence on student interest and connections to classroom content, teachers’ responses included:

“I found that my students were interested in the books that they read with Words Alive. They would ask for books that are similar to the theme or title that we read with our reader.”

“They look for books that are similar to the books we read with our reader and will look for books with the same author. My students will look for the SAME titles read by our reader to checkout from the library! It’s exciting to hear them talk about the books that they love and most if not all of them are from your reading list.”

“Social Studies is difficult to teach and for students to retain the information because we don’t have a lot of background knowledge to build on. For example, we talk about the constitution, community engagement, different social systems and these are things that they’re not familiar with at home or have not talked about with their family or community. It has been helpful to read about these in the Words Alive books. This is less daunting because we read examples of real people like Wangari’s Trees of Peace being an activist in her community. It helps to build the background knowledge that isn’t there.”
“Our reader prompted me to get more social science books. Before Words Alive I didn’t want to use these books because I was worried that the students would find it boring or that it was too difficult, but after hearing these books shared by the reader, I realized that my students really enjoy them and want to read them.”

Teachers were also asked to share one word or phrase that they felt described their experience with the Read Aloud program. Feedback to this question suggests a positive experience. Note that the size of the word represents how frequently the word was used. (N=18)

Finally, we asked teachers to identify one word to describe their students’ experience participating in the program. Their responses below suggested a positive experience for students. Note that the size of the word represents how frequently the word was used. (N=18)
REFLECTIONS

In our twentieth year of programming at Words Alive, we continue to observe that supporting student engagement in reading development translates to stronger values of reading and learning in their lives. In the year ahead we intend to strengthen the impact of the Read Aloud Program in two exciting ways:

1. By developing curriculum resources and a targeted reading list to harness the power of stories to strengthen children’s social-emotional growth.
2. By developing curriculum resources and extended activities that support readers in digesting the story after a volunteer’s visit to ponder the author’s message and continue developing their own opinions about the story.

THANK YOU

*Words Alive and participating classrooms share deep gratitude for the philanthropic leaders who invest in our Read Aloud Program and the movement to make reading matter:*

**Transformational Leaders**
Anonymous  
Century Club of San Diego  
Dr. Seuss Foundation  
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