

Aspire Education Project

Community Reading Buddies 2018 Outcomes Report



Overview

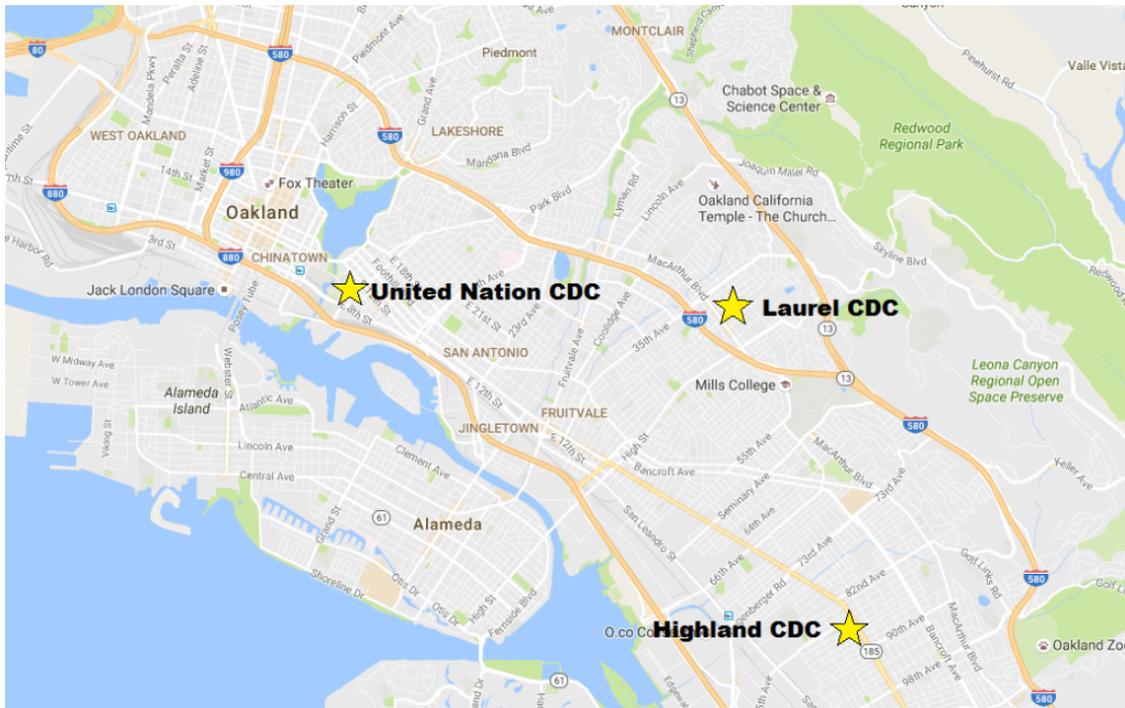
Community Reading Buddies is a youth-led early literacy program that partners with the Oakland Unified School District to provide one-on-one literacy intervention. We address the lack of school readiness among Oakland's PreK through 3rd grade students by training our teen volunteers to provide individualized reading support and encourage their buddies to develop a genuine love of learning. Our program empowers our Youth Mentor ages 13-17, by building their leadership skills and sense of community as they mentor younger students.

In Summer 2018, the program achieved the following:

- Served 161 students from eight classrooms in Oakland Unified School District's Child Development Centers.
- Engaged 157 teenage "Youth Mentors," representing 41 East Bay middle and high schools.
- Provided 90-minute mentoring sessions to each PreK–3rd grade student, totaling to 24 hours of one-on-one literacy and school readiness enrichment per Buddy over the eight-week program.
- Delivered over 2,320 hours of one-on-one and small group work on literacy and school readiness skill-building.
- Partnered with Tandem, Partners in Early Learning, a Bay Area non-profit dedicated to closing the early literacy gap, to hosting our four Family Literacy Celebrations (one in winter, one in spring, two in summer) in which 138 adult family members participated.

- Provided 785 developmentally and culturally appropriate books linked to specific early literacy skills to participating children and families (585 from Aspire and 200 from Tandem). See our curriculum page at the end of this report for more information.

Program Sites:



Program sites, with two classrooms at United Nations, two classrooms at Laurel CDC, and four classrooms at Highland CDC. Eight classrooms total, serving approximately 160 individual PreK–3rd grade Buddies, served by 157 Youth Mentors.

Need for the Program

In Oakland, only one in three low-income children enter Kindergarten ready for school, and by third grade only 19 percent of students are reading at grade level.¹ Worse still, the data clearly indicate that those students who start off behind rarely catch up without significant academic support and resources. The opportunity gap begins well before kindergarten, and is firmly rooted in early reading skill disparities.² The phenomenon known as the “summer slide” only exacerbates the problem. During summer break the academic skills of many low-income students erode while those of their more well-off peers continue to grow, as they have more opportunities for academic engagement and can access special enrichment summer camps and activities.³

¹ Oakland Achieves Report 2016.

https://oaklandachieves.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/oaklandachievesreport2016_finalsmaller.pdf

² “Early Warning Confirmed: A Research Update on Third Grade Reading.” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011.

<http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-EarlyWarningConfirmedExecSummary-2013.pdf>.

“The origins of well-developed conventional literacy skills are found very early in children’s educational experience.” National Early Literacy Panel, 2008 p. 68. <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>

“Children who enter school behind their peers often stay behind.” Pew Charitable Trust, 2005.

<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2005/06/15/why-all-children-benefit-from-prek>

³ “Why Summer Learning Deserves a Front-Row Seat in the Education Reform Arena.” The Johns Hopkins University New Horizons for Learning, 2010. <http://archive.education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/Journals/spring2010/why-summer-learning/index.html>

It is undisputed that one-on-one interactive reading is a valuable tool for supporting the development of early literacy and language skills.⁴ According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Early Childhood, "Reading with children in their infancy and preschool years is associated with higher language skills at school entry and later literacy acquisition."⁵ Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences highlights "one-on-one tutoring by qualified tutors for at-risk readers" as the gold standard for literacy support, along with "instruction for early readers in phonemic awareness and phonics."⁶ From its beginning over two decades ago, CRB has prioritized providing exactly that one-to-one skill-building experience to Oakland's students.



Program Design and Best Practices

Oakland's most vulnerable youth are in need of rich and sustained early learning experiences that prepare them to succeed in school. For this reason, both the CRB curriculum and the Youth Mentor training curriculum reflect the latest research on effective practices for supporting early literacy in young children. This ongoing attention to pedagogical best practices ensures that CRB can maximize its positive impact on the approximately 160 PreK to 3rd grade students who participate each summer, as well as ensure an empowering experience for the program's 150 plus teenage Youth Mentors.

Community Reading Buddies is designed as a one-on-one reading and skill-building experience for our three to eight-year-old students and their Mentors. Mentors read with students, complete literacy skill-building activities together, and engage in interactive play during each session. Each Buddy receives two dedicated 90-minute sessions per week from their mentor with this proven highly impactful approach. Research strongly indicates that activities that help increase awareness of sounds and language (including rhyme, alliteration, and sound matching), as well as those which promote letter recognition and knowledge of letter-sound associations, have a strong impact on students' later acquisition of literacy skills.⁷ The CRB curriculum incorporates games and activities oriented toward achieving precisely these goals.

Our program-specific library, selected in collaboration with the Oakland Unified School District's Department of Early Education, facilitates cultivation of the specific early literacy skills we are targeting. Our permanent rotating library goes to each session at every school, and we supplement with module-specific books added each week to target a specific early literacy skill.

⁴ Kenneth Rainin Foundation & NORC at the University of Chicago (2016). "Every Oakland Child Ready for Kindergarten." http://krfoundation.org/krf/site-content/uploads/2016/08/SchoolReadinessForChildren_RaininFoundation_NORC.pdf National Institute for Literacy (2009). *Early Beginnings: Early Literacy Knowledge and Instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPEarlyBeginnings09.pdf>

⁵ Council on Early Childhood (2104, June 23). "Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice." *Pediatrics*, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2014/06/19/peds.2014-1384>

⁶ Institute of Education Sciences (2003). *Identifying and implementing educational practices supported by rigorous evidence: A user-friendly guide*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 3.

⁷ Christie, et al. (2003), National Institute for Literacy (2009)

Current research also points to the crucial importance of oral language skills in students' later literacy development.⁸ For this reason, in 2018 CRB continued to deepen and refine its training of the Youth Mentors to better prepare them to support their Buddies' in developing and improving their oral language skills. Mentors engage children in conversation, use unknown vocabulary words, take turns listening and responding to what children are saying, and use open-ended questions to make the program time more interactive.⁹ This language development work occurs during both reading and play time, which is taken as a critical opportunity for oral language development.



Buddy Progress

CRB positions children for later success in school, and works to increase school-readiness of Oakland's Kindergarten population; currently only one-third of low-income Kindergarteners arrive ready for school with solid early literacy skills. Using pre- and post-assessments and surveys, we can see marked improvement in our Buddies' skills. Over our eight-week program, the Buddies gain new capacity and reinforce what they learn during the school year, preventing summer learning loss.

Data Gathering

Aspire uses survey data to measure the Buddies' progress from the start to the end of the program. Progress is measured using individual pre- and post-surveys for each child, observations from youth mentors and CRB staff, along with feedback from their teachers.

The surveys were created in program year 2015 with pro bono assistance from The Calsoyas Group, an educational consultancy, and updated by Aspire for program year 2018.¹⁰ Our survey tools are modeled closely on the Desired Developmental Results Profile, created by the California Department of Education. Survey instruments are available upon request.



⁸ Kenneth Rainin Foundation (2016) Christie et al. (2003)

⁹ Bond, M., Wasik, B.A. (2001, Jun). "Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(2), 243-250. Christie, et al. (2003)

¹⁰ As full disclosure, Aleka Calsoyas, the Managing Partner of The Calsoyas Group, was a co-founder of Aspire Education Project. She no longer participates in the operations or governance of Aspire Education Project, but holds an Emeritus role on the Board.

Skills Improved

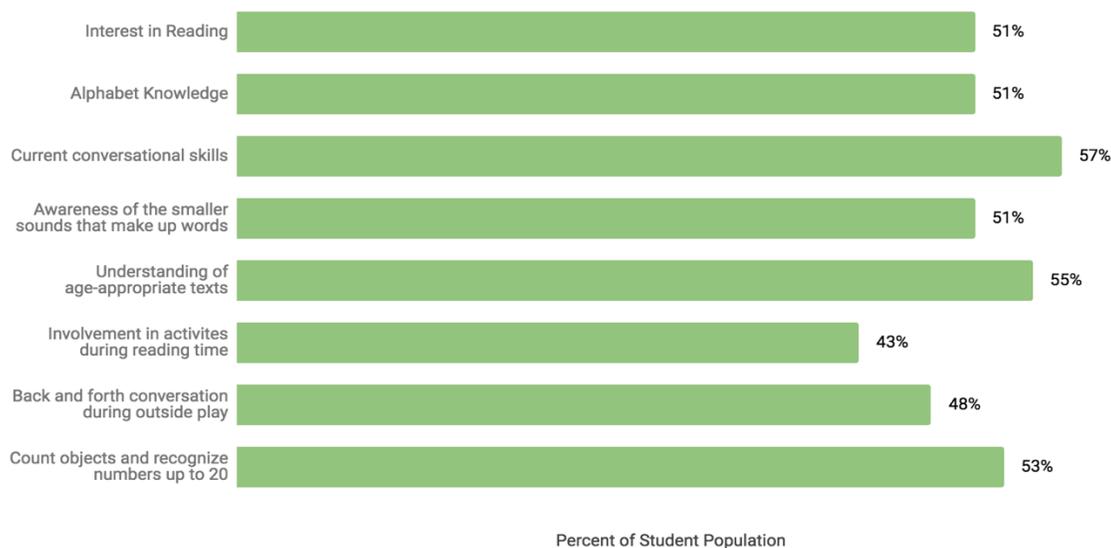
Youth Mentors record their Buddies' growth in eight critical areas correlating with school readiness and desired program outcomes:

- Interest in Reading
- Alphabet Knowledge
- Conversational Skills
- Phonemic Awareness
- Understanding Text
- Active Involvement
- Social Skills
- Number Sense



Mentors observed Buddies' improvement in all eight areas over the eight-week program:

Student Growth in Each Category

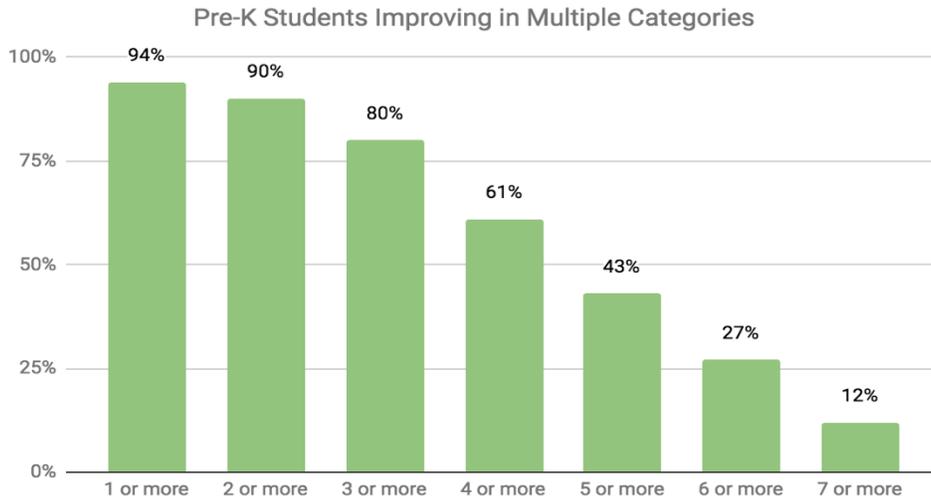


● ● ●
During the time spent with the reading buddies program our children were more engaged with literacy and now seem to spend more time in our library.
-United Nations CDC Teacher

This year, we continued to measure the components of the program that stimulate oral language development and conversation skills. 57% of students improved their conversational skills with their mentors, and 48% increased back-and-forth conversation during outside play. The Conversational Skills area shows the highest level of improvement, indicating the program's strong performance in this area.

Most Buddies showed measurable improvement over the course of the sessions; 94% improved in at least one area, and 80% of Buddies showed improvement in at least three areas.¹¹

¹¹ With four years of data from a substantially similar suite of measures, we can now report general reliability in our year-on-year findings. That is, the percent of buddies improving in each category, and improving overall, is generally at the same high levels each year. For example, we see that 80% of buddies improved in two categories in 2015, 78% in 2016, 85% in 2017 and 90% in 2018. Similar ranges apply in the other survey categories.



Teacher Feedback

Teachers and aides at all participating school sites provide feedback via an anonymous end-of-program survey. The responses are filled with praise and appreciation of the program. Teachers note that the Youth Mentors demonstrate a high level of skill and confidence when interacting with younger students. Some of the benefits of CRB expressed in teacher responses include:

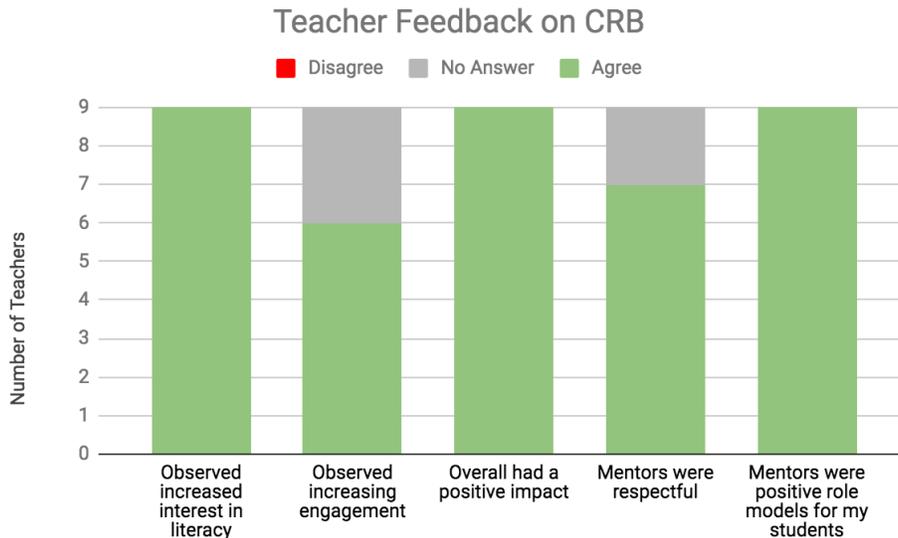
- Fostering a classroom culture of interest and enthusiasm around books and reading
- Social-emotional skill development through socializing and relationship building
- Exposure to great role models: teen mentors demonstrated collaboration, patience, and empathy, as well as enthusiasm for reading and learning
- Substantial one-on-one interaction time where young students receive undivided attention, personalized instruction, and plentiful opportunities to practice new skills

● ● ●

The children love it when the mentors come; they look forward to hanging out with their Reading Buddies.

-Highland CDC Teacher

● ● ●



We interviewed Site Directors from each Childhood Development Center that hosted Community Reading Buddies on the program's impact. All Site Directors indicated that Youth Mentors were respectful, positive role models for the students. They observed student gains in the following areas:

- Interest in literacy
- Skills in back-and-forth communication in conversation,
- Ability to observe, anticipate and reason about cause and effect
- Capacity to pay attention
- Understanding of numbers and quantity
- Persistence in the face of challenges to understanding

All Site Directors agreed that CRB positively impacted their students, and that they would recommend the program to a colleague.



Youth Mentor Experience

Our Youth Mentors represent the diversity of the Oakland community. Of our Summer 2018 cohort, 39% of mentors were from Oakland Schools, and 43% were youth of color. In addition to our volunteer mentors, this year we hosted 10 young people from the Oakland School District's Exploring College and Career Options (ECCO) program and 1 from Girls Inc.'s High School internship program. These 11 participants each contributed an average of 47 hours to the program, double the number of most other volunteers.

We were also honored to host 30 volunteers from the Center for Talented Youth Civic Leadership Institute. The group of thirty 9th graders came from all over the nation to participate in a three-week summer service-learning program at UC Berkeley and contributed a total of 60 hours to the CRB program.

Youth Mentor Training

CRB Youth Mentors not only share books with their Buddies, but also use evidence-based interactive techniques to enrich the reading experience and maximize the efficacy of one-on-one reading as a means for developing strong early literacy skills.¹² Mentors are trained and continually coached by CRB Staff and expert partners to:

¹² Christie, J. F., Richgels, D. J. & Roskos, K. A. (2003, March). "The Essentials of Early Literacy Instruction." 58(2), *Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*, 52-60.

- Use books to help students understand how print works
- Have conversations while reading to encourage critical thinking and narrative skills
- Train students to isolate and recognize phonemes
- Develop fluency with alphabet letters and sounds



Experts from Tandem, Partners in Early Learning presented a workshop on Early Language and the Growing Brain at our start of summer Mentor Training. The Youth Mentors learned about early brain development, the 6 skills of early literacy (Interest and Motivation, Phonological Awareness, Narrative Skills, Letter Knowledge, Vocabulary, and Print Awareness), and reviewed and practiced interactive read-aloud skills.

In addition to the start of summer training, CRB staff and Lead Mentors led daily discussions with the Mentors before the start of each session to reinforce the early learning skill they were covering for the week.

Mentor Growth

Upon completion of the program, Youth Mentors respond to a detailed survey regarding their participation in CRB. The survey, adapted from the Youth Leadership Life Skills Development questionnaire, offers insight into how CRB supports the growth of our Mentors' skills and citizenship. The data show that they found the program to be both a fun and formative experience.

Along with high levels of satisfaction with their CRB experience, Youth Mentors reported growth in their personal and leadership skills:

How do mentors describe CRB?

"Reading Buddies taught me patience and diplomacy. My buddies were super enthusiastic; however, they liked to try and be the leader and create a lesson plan for the day. I learned to find a middle ground between what they wanted to do and what the lead mentors and I wanted to do."

- Giovanni, 11th Grade

"Reading Buddies forced me out of my comfort zone, in a good way. I learned to be more responsible and gained valuable people skills. Reading books to kids requires patience and understanding the pace of the buddy you are reading to, their learning style, and that everyone is different. Trying to keep your buddy engaged with a book or activity is a lot more difficult than it seems and CRB helped me balance multiple things at once. Overall, I am a more confident and understanding after being a mentor."

- Adrianna, 12th Grade

"Reading Buddies helped me to grow as a mentor and leader. I learned that it takes an entirely different approach to encourage reading/literacy techniques. I learned to adapt my methods for the levels of my buddies and how to make reading more of a game to keep them involved"

- Lauren, 11th Grade

"Reading Buddies helped grow my leadership skills and helped me communicate with people that I hadn't met before."

- Ellie, 9th Grade



Family Engagement

Our work starts in the classroom, but its greatest effects play out at home, as families to continue to build on their students' enthusiasm for reading and growing literacy skills. CRB Staff and Youth Mentors took the lead in fostering this connection by organizing, promoting and hosting special events, communicating with parents, and distributing books.

Family Reading Celebrations

Family Reading Celebrations are our special events dedicated to family engagement and community outreach. We hold two family reading nights over the summer and two during the school year. Youth Mentors invite their Buddies' parents and families to join in an evening of literacy-themed activities. CRB collaborated with Tandem Partners in Early Learning to lead family workshops on reading at home. Attendance was robust; the events engaged not only Buddies' parents, but also siblings, relatives, and the larger community.

Each celebration begins with games and activities designed to strengthen young students' alphabet and story comprehension skills. While the Youth Mentors lead these literacy activities, family members participate in short trainings on Early Literacy Development from Tandem Staff. The Tandem trainings helped parents identify ways to engage their students while sharing books and spark their narrative skills and critical thinking.

One parent expressed, "I let my child use her imagination to tell me the story from the pictures in the book." Tandem Staff encouraged parents to share pages from the give away books they would each take home. One parent suggested on the page that features a grandfather talking to his grandchild, "I would ask my child; "What are they talking about?" It is this kind of training and group discussion that leads to more families sharing books at home and reinforcing their students' early literacy skills.

After the Tandem Workshops, families join their students for an interactive read aloud and performance by local authors or performers. At the end of each Family Reading Celebration, every child takes home a copy of the read aloud book to enjoy with their families.

In addition to the books distributed during these special events, Youth Mentors presented Buddies with age and culturally diverse gift books matched to the program's curricular goals throughout the program. All participating families took home books to keep throughout the program—on average five books per Buddy.



Des, Community Literacy Specialist from Tandem, demonstrates reading techniques at a family workshop

Financials

The 2018 CRB program was generously supported by the following donors:

- Quest Foundation
- Clorox Company Foundation
- Bernard and Alba Witkin Foundation
- Children’s Support League
- Barrios Trust
- Mechanics Bank Community Giving
- The Oakland Literacy Coalition
- Aspire Fundraising: \$22,508 from 75 individual donors

Total Program Funding: \$61,475
Total Program Cost: \$61,428



Lastly, the largest contributors to the program by far are the Youth Mentors who donate their volunteer hours to the next generation in Oakland. Their contribution, calculated simply as *time-on-site and in training at minimum wage*, comes to **\$81,250**.

Thank You

The Aspire Education Project team deeply appreciates the support of the donors listed above, and others that generously provided funding for the Community Reading Buddies programs. The support of our donors allows our program to continue enrich our Buddies, Youth Mentors, and the community as a whole.

Thank you for all of your support!

In the Summer of 2019 we are planning to expand our offering to increase the number of classrooms, buddies, and mentors. Stay tuned for more detail in the upcoming months.





Community Reading Buddies

CRB's curriculum supports school readiness.



every week

- Oral language and conversation
- Narrative skills: characters, setting, events, details
- Vocabulary
- Print motivation



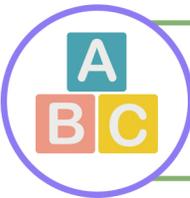
Weeks 1 & 8:
Meeting
& Reflecting

- Print awareness
- Back-and-forth conversation
- Book selection
- Retelling familiar stories



Week 2:
Alphabet
Sounds

- Phonological awareness
- Recognizing and producing rhyming words
- Identifying word ending sounds



Week 3:
Alphabet
Knowledge

- Recognizing and naming letters of the alphabet
- Letter-sound correspondences



Week 4:
Counting

- Counting objects
- Writing numbers
- Counting syllables in spoken words
- Using math vocabulary



Week 5:
Beginnings &
Endings

- Blending onsets and rimes of single-syllable spoken words
- Segmenting words into onsets and rimes



Weeks 6 & 7:
Sound
Awareness

- Isolating sounds in 3-phoneme (CVC) words
- Adding or substituting sounds to create new words
- Blending 2 or 3 phonemes to create words

CRB

Community Reading Buddies

2018



157
Mentors



161
Buddies

3

Childhood development centers in Oakland

55
Buddies in 1st-3rd Grade

106
Buddies in Pre-K

ABOUT US

110
Mentors in 10-12th Grade

47
Mentors in 7-9th Grade

79%
of Mentors volunteered 10 or more hours

2,320+
Volunteer Hours

77%
Mentors have a better understanding of Oakland as a community

84%
Mentors learned to create an atmosphere of acceptance

81%
Mentors see a link between teaching & leading

81%
Mentors said CRB made them grow as a person

785

Books donated to Reading Buddies & Families

51%
Buddies increased interest in reading

55%
Buddies increased grasp of age-appropriate texts

57%
Buddies increased conversation skills