



WITS 2014-2015 School Year Evaluation Report

WITS is committed to a comprehensive program evaluation to ensure that we are making a positive impact in the lives of the students we serve. As WITS evolves to meet the needs of our students and teachers of Chicago Public Schools (CPS), we, too, must look forward and broaden the way we evaluate our programs. Shifts in data collection and process measures (ie: attendance and program dosage) have led us to a deeper understanding of what WITS is doing well, and where there is need for improvement. From capturing growth in literacy skills by gathering reading levels to synthesizing teacher feedback in effort revise the structure of our programs, WITS lets data do the talking in all areas of program development.

We also recognize the need to stay current on relevant research that supports WITS programming. As stated in the recent University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago Research study on young adult success, “strong, supported and sustained relationships with caring adults provide an important space for youth to experiment, try out roles and behaviors, and receive feedback that helps to build identity.” The value of WITS volunteer service, along with the knowledge of literacy enjoyment and success, is continuously being validated with prominent research.

Throughout all of WITS’ programs, the two paramount goals remain developing foundational reading skills and improved attitude toward reading. WITS has established a well-rounded evaluation process that uses pre-test and post-test surveys to learn how students’ literacy skills and attitudes develop over the course of the program year. Data for evaluation is collected throughout the year from teachers, volunteers, and directly from students. Students complete a short paper-based survey that assesses reading attitudes and behaviors. Students and volunteers also complete end-of-year surveys to provide insight on elements of overall program experience.

While staying aligned with the proven outcomes of WITS programs, we shifted our data collection to focus on reading levels as measured by each school. This shift required more cooperation with WITS partner schools, and we are excited to report that we received student reading levels from 86% of WITS partner schools.

Requesting reading levels from our school partners required more assistance from our program staff as well as from teachers and administration with whom we work. The extra effort has been beneficial to all participants. The collection of reading levels has been helpful in evaluating the impact of our programs, as well as informing our program team to supply students with appropriate level books, and has prompted more teacher involvement with the program. A reading level is able to tell us more than just a student’s proficiency in oral reading fluency. The assessments used in classrooms measure growth in fluency, comprehension and vocabulary development – literacy skills that are reinforced in our programs. This method of data collection has paid off as teachers are showing more buy-in to the program and volunteers are able to contextualize the progress of their students from beginning of the year to end of the year. Looking to the future, reading level data is informing us of how to transform our Mid-Day Mentoring journal activities to strategically address more literacy skills during WITS sessions.

This year, the RLTA program became a part of the WITS program portfolio. This presents new opportunities for evaluation as WITS combined classrooms will include a RLTA teacher and the support of WITS volunteer literacy mentors. Equipped with the largest volunteer force working with Chicago public school students and the highest quality teacher professional development, WITS will reach students throughout the city with literacy mentorship and deliberate, thoughtful instruction.

But first, let’s look at the progress WITS made in the 2014-2015 school year.

WITS BY THE NUMBERS

In the 2014-2015 school year WITS provided literacy mentorship, teacher professional development, and books in homes and classrooms to...

- 91 Chicago public schools
- 317 Chicago public school teachers
- 8,500 Chicago public school students

With the support of...

- 1,850 volunteers
- 40,810 hours of volunteer service
- 1,400 hours of volunteer training
- 46,551 new books in classrooms and student homes throughout Chicago.

WITS' volunteer powered service equals a dollar amount of \$950,664.

The cost to CPS schools, teachers and students: \$0

WITS KINDERGARTEN

The WITS Kindergarten (WITSK) program is a one-on-one reading program that takes place at CPS elementary schools. Kindergarten students spend fifteen to twenty minutes reading with a consistent volunteer each week, which allows volunteers and children to establish a consistent reading rapport and build book print awareness, as well as early literacy skills, over the course of the school year.

Foundational Literacy Skills

- 92% of WITS students improved their reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year.
- **WITS students improved, on average, by 5 Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year. Non-WITS students demonstrated an improvement of only 3.5 reading levels.**
- According to teacher reported observations, 64% of WITSK students improved in book and print awareness from beginning of program year to end of program year – up from 59% in 2013-2014.
- According to teacher reported observations, 74% of WITSK students demonstrated improved vocabulary development from beginning of program year to end of program year. This is an added skill to our teacher-student evaluation form.

What the teachers are saying: "My students look forward to WITS every week! I have noticed that working with WITS has helped them with reading, comprehension and sight words. The program coordinator and I communicate throughout the week on what is going on in the classroom and I share their reading progress throughout the year." WITSK Teacher at Melody Elementary.

Attitude Toward Reading

- **According to teacher reported observations, 56% of WITSK students improved their overall attitude toward reading from beginning of program year to end of program year – up from 50% in 2013-2014.**

What volunteers are saying: "One of my students started out with little to no word or even letter recognition and told me, almost tearfully, that "Some kids can read, and some kids can't. I'm one who can't." She really came a long way and I was so very proud of her burgeoning ability to penetrate the text and find herself enjoying the whole reading process. At the back of one of the books she loved reading, the author dedicated it "To readers, and future readers." I always told her, "You WERE a future reader; now you are a READER!" She beamed every time!"

* Fountas and Pinnell is a book leveling system, categorizing books on certain levels of difficulty, A-Z. This system is used by WITS and by many Chicago public schools to match students to books that will be at their appropriate reading level.

MID-DAY MENTORING

Launched in 2001, WITS Mid-Day Mentoring (MDM) program is a one-on-one reading and literacy mentoring program. In this program, corporate, government, university, or community groups travel to a school for weekly reading and mentoring. Volunteers are paired with the same second or third grade student for an entire school year. Volunteer/student pairs spend 45 minutes building comprehension, vocabulary and fluency skills through reading aloud and conversation.

Foundational Literacy Skills

- 87% of WITS students improved their reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year.
- **WITS students improved, on average, by 5 Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year, whereas non-WITS students demonstrated an improvement of only 4 reading levels.**

What teachers are saying: "My students are always excited and looking forward to the WITS Program. The one-on-one support is extremely helpful. Some students are very shy and this helps them open up, it helps build self-confidence, and it helps to improve their decoding skills." WITS Mid-Day Mentoring Teacher at Otis Elementary.

Attitude Toward Reading

- **70% of WITS students improved their overall attitude toward reading from beginning of program year to end of program year – up from 64% in 2013-2014. (Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, McKenna and Kear, 1990)**
- By end of program year, 82% of WITS students said they enjoy reading for fun at home.
- By end of program year, 85% of WITS students said they enjoy finishing a book and starting a new book.

What volunteers are saying: "I highly enjoyed my time with WITS - getting to know my reading partner, teaching him words, context, seeing his excitement and interest grow over time. It was also a great break from work, and I always returned to work feeling refreshed and good about myself."

* Fountas and Pinnell is a book leveling system, categorizing books on certain levels of difficulty, A-Z. This system is used by WITS and by many Chicago public schools to match students to books that will be at their appropriate reading level.

WORKPLACE MENTORING

Since 1999, the Workplace Mentoring (WPM) program has been a one-on-one reading and mentoring program that takes place in the late afternoon at local corporations. Once a week after school, WITS busses a group of elementary school students to a corporate office, where each student is paired with the same volunteer for an entire school year. Volunteer/student pairs spend one hour once a week completing activities, reading, and working on homework, exposing students to the career world. The WITS on Campus program started in 2011 to give young students a taste of campus life and is modeled after WPM.

Foundational Literacy Skills

- 98% of WITS students improved their reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year.
- **WITS students improved, on average, by 5 Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year. Non-WITS students, on average, improved by only 3 reading levels.**
- By the end of program year, 40% of Workplace Mentoring students were reading at levels T through Z based on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This data point demonstrates that nearly half of WITS students reached their plateau in reading ability and made the leap into lifelong reading enjoyment by the end of program year.

What teachers are saying: *“My students love working with an adult mentor and experiencing a downtown professional work environment. They love the program and talked about it a great deal.” WITS Workplace Mentoring Teacher at Chavez Elementary.*

Attitude Toward Reading

- **62% of WITS students improved their overall attitude toward reading from beginning of program year to end of program year – up from 58% in 2013-2014. (Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, McKenna and Kear, 1990)**
- At the beginning of program year, WITS students were reading, on average, only 30 minutes outside of school. By the end of program year, WITS students reported reading an hour each day outside of school.
- By end of program year, 68% of WITS WPM students said they see themselves going to college.

What volunteers are saying: *“Over time it was fun to learn to know the kids as people rather than just students. They are fun and fascinating to speak with and have wonderful opinions on life, the universe and everything else in between.”*

* Fountas and Pinnell is a book leveling system, categorizing books on certain levels of difficulty, A-Z. This system is used by WITS and by many Chicago public schools to match students to books that will be at their appropriate reading level.

ROCHELLE LEE TEACHER AWARD

The Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (RLTA) is named in honor of Rochelle Lee, the Chicago educator and librarian who inspired generations of students to be impassioned readers. Each year, over 400 CPS teachers in grades Pre K - 8 apply to participate in the program and are selected through a competitive application process. Teachers apply either as a potential individual awardee or part of study group. Teachers may participate in RLTA for a maximum of four years. The first two years can be as an individual participant; the last two must be as a member of a study group.

WITS selects between 200 and 300 CPS elementary teachers through a competitive application process - approximately 75 individual and 150 study group participants each year. The RLTA Selection Board is composed of educators, non-profit professionals and individuals representing corporations in Chicago who carefully review each application.

RLTA teachers agree to:

- Read aloud to their class for 20 minutes each day
- Provide students access to culturally diverse books in their classroom library (provided by WITS)
- Allow students another 20 minutes for independent reading
- Enable and encourage all students to take home books daily
- Engage in a meaningful discussion about what they are reading

RLTA Participation

- 198 teachers
- 63 schools
- 5,544 students impacted by professional development and balanced literacy
- 21 study groups
- Over 35 workshops as part of RLTA Summer Institute
- 5,000 hours of teacher literacy professional development
- 832 hours spent by teachers in WITS review library

What teachers are saying: *“Participating in the RLTA program has made me more connected to my teaching practice. It has helped me to realize that I do have strengths and has given me confidence in areas that I had questioned myself on in the past. It has also strengthened my passion for teaching by being surrounded by other teachers who are equally motivated.”* RLTA teacher at STEM Magnet Academy

CLASSROOM READING TUTOR

The Classroom Reading Tutor program (CRT) is the inaugural WITS program. Volunteers work with a teacher to support the classroom in literacy goals, with each volunteer's service tailored to the needs of the class. Classroom Reading Tutors (CRTs) often work with small groups or one-on-one with students to build literacy skills.

CRT Participation

- 25 CRTS literacy mentors
- 24 teachers and classrooms
- 9 partner schools
- 630 students impacted by CRT support
- 2,190 hours spent in Chicago Public Schools

At the beginning of the school year, without a CRT, only 8% of teachers said they were often able to work one-on-one with their students. By the end of the year, the number of WITS teachers spending substantial time working with students one-on-one increased by 22%.

What teachers are saying: *"The support of the volunteer allows me to follow through with assessments and working with individual students while she [CRT] manages other students."* WITS partner teacher at Manierre Elementary.

"[My CRT] has touched the lives of many students at Manierre. Many old students still come up to visit him or ask about him often. He has become a part of the Manierre family and we love having him." WITS partner teacher at Manierre Elementary.

"Having Laurie has allowed me to work with more groups and individuals on the day she is here. It has also helped organize my small group instruction in a way to allow me to have small group work ready to use when she's there." WITS partner teacher at Talcott Elementary.

"My WITS volunteer helped students that I wouldn't have had the time to reach in a class of 32. They also helped manage behaviors so that I could teach without as many distractions." WITS partner teacher at Corkery Elementary.

WITS ON THE WEEKEND

WITS on the Weekend (WOW) is a Saturday literacy mentoring program for volunteers located at a CPS school. Volunteers and students work together as a team to read and complete cooperative learning challenges based on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) principals. Volunteers engage student interests by encouraging children to explore learning and literacy beyond the classroom.

WOW Participation

- 34 volunteers
- 3 school sites
- 56 students
- 14 Saturday sessions
- 28 hours of STEAM and literacy based activities
- 4 STEAM field trips: Garfield Park Conservatory, Lincoln Park Zoo, Adler Planetarium, Museum of Science and Industry

Across all three WOW programs, overall student attendance improved. Students attended at least 70% of the Saturday sessions, an improvement from last year's 63%.

What volunteers are saying: *"The organization of the WOW program this year was excellent, and I hope that this program structure continues in the future. I loved having two or three students in my group and getting the chance to get to know other volunteers."*

Research Reference

1. Nagaoka, Jenny, Camille A. Farrington, Stacy B. Ehrlich, and Ryan D. Heath. *Foundations for Young Adult Success*. Rep. Chicago: U of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2015. Print