



## Board of Directors

# Board of Directors Commitments & Guidelines

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# About WITS

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## Our Vision

WITS creates opportunities for every student in Chicago to be literate.

## Our Mission

Working in the Schools (WITS) sets students on a trajectory for success by building critical literacy skills and developing positive self-identity through teacher led literacy professional development and volunteer powered mentorship programs. Our unique approach to student literacy advancement focuses on activating volunteers as mentors, supporting educators through professional development, and building libraries in the classrooms and homes of students.

## Our Value Statements

### Community

- WITS is a movement of educators, volunteers and investors coming together to support a better public education for every student.
- WITS believes that pipelines of mentors, across all of its communities, set the right tone and culture in our schools for all students to become literate.
- WITS communities of teachers and volunteers model for students the life-enhancing benefits of literacy and a passion for learning.

### Empowerment

- WITS advocates for every CPS student to have access to the literacy resources necessary for academic and professional achievement.
- WITS teachers and volunteer mentors empower students to trust in education opportunities and the value it brings to their future.
- WITS builds teachers into literacy leaders and broadens the civic mindedness of volunteers.
- WITS believes in the power of mentors to build and strengthen communities. Volunteers mentor students. Teachers mentor teachers. Volunteers mentor volunteers. Students mentor students.

### Consistency

- WITS is 100% privately funded, and program delivery is not reliant on school or city budgets.
- WITS students out perform their peers in reading level growth year over year, driving students to grade-level proficiency.
- WITS fosters relationships between students and mentors to develop mindsets critical for positive youth development.

## The Need

Research shows that students who do not read proficiently by third grade fall further behind across all academic subjects and become less likely to graduate. To ensure students hit this crucial benchmark, support must focus on disinvested communities, starting early and remaining consistent throughout a student's academic career.

In December 2021, The Illinois State Board of Education estimated that only 20% of Chicago Public Schools third graders met literacy benchmarks last year, compared to 40% in 2019. Additionally, a study released in December 2020 by McKinsey & Company indicates that pandemic-induced unfinished learning is not experienced equally. Trends thus far show that, "while white students are expected to be four to eight months behind, students of color may be six to twelve months behind by June 2021," widening existing gaps in learning and achievement.

Now, CPS educators are recalibrating services to meet students where they are and encourage their academic progress. Free, accessible enrichment programs like WITS offer teachers and students the resources and support they need to navigate this critical time in education.

## Our Programs

### [Student Mentorship Programs](#)

Most WITS student mentorship programs focus on pre-k to fourth grade, instilling a love of reading in early learners as they enter elementary school. WITS later supports students as they transition from learning how to read, to reading to learn. This milestone requires students to use strong foundational literacy skills to comprehend increasingly challenging curriculum. WITS mentors commit to weekly or bi-weekly participation, meeting with the same student from October to May. WITS mentors help students develop foundational literacy skills, while becoming allies for their students, helping them identify as curious, capable learners. WITS student mentorship programs include:

- [WITS Early Childhood Summer Program \(pre-k and kindergarten\)](#)
- [WITS Kindergarten](#)
- [Mid-Day Mentoring \(2nd – 3rd grade\)](#)
- [Workplace Mentoring \(4th-8th grade\)](#)

### [Teacher Professional Development](#)

To advance student literacy, support must be extended to the educators who instruct them. The Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (RLTA) provides Chicago Public Schools teachers with the tools, resources, and network to create professional learning communities within their schools. The cornerstone of the program are [RLTA Study Groups](#). Four to six teachers from the same school identify a specific project that supports their school's literacy goals. The group meets monthly for the duration of the school year, guided by WITS coaches who are often current or former CPS educators and RLTA alumni. RLTA Study Groups offer a close-knit space for educators to problem-solve, share learning, and influence whole-school literacy instruction.

For educators who wish to develop their instructional skills independently, the [RLTA Summer Institute](#) offers an annual catalog of 35+ course offerings for educators to choose from, allowing them to gain the techniques that are most applicable to their classrooms. All workshops are taught by current educators, and workshop topics are based on requests from Awardees, and guidelines by the CPS Department of Literacy.

### [The Gift of Reading](#)

Fostering a love of reading is at the heart of what WITS does. At the end of each school year, WITSummer Books sends WITS students home with a brand-new set of culturally-relevant books – putting learning, adventure, and fun directly in their hands. In addition to providing books for students in our mentorship programs, WITS gives Study Group teachers book grants to enhance their classroom library, typically funding 85 brand-new books to teachers' collection.

[Click here to learn more about how WITS has adapted our programs during COVID.](#)

## Our Impact

WITS welcomes all students to participate in programs, regardless of their reading level. Whether the student is reading above grade-level and needing an extra challenge, or an emerging reader who needs practice with fundamentals, WITS helps them grow. Because success looks different for each student, WITS' main tool for measuring growth is individual student reading levels. At the beginning and end of each school year, teachers assess students in oral fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary - skills reinforced at our programs. Each student is assigned a reading level, with the goal of advancing levels over the course of the year. Typically, WITS receives beginning and end-of-year reading level data and uses reading level improvement as an indicator of eventual reading proficiency.

**On average, WITS students improve their literacy skills by four levels, with 70% of students exceeding the national average for reading level growth from the beginning to the end of the school year.**

Due to COVID-19, WITS was unable to complete program evaluation for the 2019-2020 school year. While teaching remotely, many educators were unable to conduct individual student assessments to assign reading levels during the 2020-2021 school year. In lieu of that outcome, WITS took the opportunity to test new methods of evaluation that measure alternative measures of success, including how WITS programs affect students' social-emotional development – an outcome WITS has been interested in exploring for a long time.

View our latest WITS [Annual Report](#) and [Talking Points](#) for more information.

# WITS DEI Commitments

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WITS is a community of readers who promotes literacy, builds communities, and finds strength in sharing stories, perspectives, and empathy as pathways to dismantling racist behaviors and mindsets. WITS is committed to connecting people across various boundaries as we believe cultivating relationships between diverse groups of people builds empathy and understanding. These key steps serve to dismantle ideologies that oppress People of Color and are foundational to the future we aspire to create.

We are and remain committed to being an anti-racist organization. We acknowledge that racism has pervaded our public education system, from punishing enslaved people who sought to [learn to read and write](#), to [Separate but Equal education laws](#), to [housing discrimination](#) that often maintained school segregation and [perpetuated unequal distribution of funds](#).

Our community building will continue to include and elevate the voices of People of Color. We acknowledge the dynamic that can exist if our staff, Board, and volunteers are predominantly white and the students we serve are predominantly People of Color.

With these acknowledgements, WITS commits to:

- Continue to develop a staff, Board of Directors, Associates Board, and volunteer corps that is more [reflective of the communities we serve](#);
- Offer annual antiracism education to our community members and volunteers through WITS Talks and other resources;
- Partner with companies whose cultures align with our antiracist values and practices;
- Promote books by Authors and Illustrators of Color to foster conversation and build a culture of antiracism in our work with students, teachers, and the public; and
- Assess internal processes that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a member of our community, we ask you to be an active part of this awareness and commitment with us, and to [meaningfully uphold our values – Community, Empowerment, and Consistency](#).

# Board of Directors Commitments

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WITS Board of Directors are responsible for defining and upholding the organization's mission, vision, and values, and for providing overall leadership and strategic direction to the organization. Below are key responsibilities for individual directors:

## Board of Directors Expectations

### Organization

- Establishing policy for the organization.
- Hiring and evaluating the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
- Securing adequate funding for the organization.
- Creating and updating long-range plan for the organization.
- Selecting and supporting the organization's officers and periodically reviewing their performance.
- Adopting key operating policies and procedures.
- Approving contracts as appropriate.

### Participation

- Attend at least 80% of board meetings and organization activities. (includes fundraising events, WITS talks, site-visit on program etc. summer books)
- Serve on board committees, taskforces, and consider leadership roles when asked.
- Participate in fundraising campaigns and events.

### Financial Investment

- Support the organization through a three-year pledge that meets the minimum personal give of \$2,500 per year.
- Secure an annual contribution in the amount of \$2,500, which can be fulfilled by personal contributions, contributions raised from others, or in-kind donations of goods and/or services.

### Fiscal Oversight

- Set and approve the annual budget.
- Review and understand financial statements as they are submitted to the board.
- Stay familiar with the organization's bylaws and operation procedures.
- Sign a conflict of interest statement and disclose all potential conflicts in advance to the board of directors.
- Serve as a member of the board in manner that promotes the best interests of the organization.

## Board of Directors Committees

### **Executive**

Comprised of board officers, the committee oversees operations of the board and acts on behalf of the board during on-demand activities that occur between meetings. Members of the Executive Committee may include past Presidents.

### **Governance**

The Governance Committee serves as the nominating committee for officers and new directors and will perform an annual evaluation of all Board members.

### **Finance**

Oversees development of the budget and ensures accurate tracking, monitoring and accountability for organizations funds. The committee also recommends financial guidelines to the board and oversees short and long-term investments.

### **Ad-hoc Committees and Taskforces**

By determination, the Board of Directors may designate other ad-hoc committees and project taskforces that support the overall strategy of the organization. Members of any such committee or taskforce may include a variety of constituencies outside of the board of directors.

## Board of Directors Time Commitment

- Each director is asked to commit to one three-year term. Directors may serve consecutive terms if approved by Governance Committee.
- There are four quarterly board meetings throughout the year. Typically, on the second Wednesday in September, December, March, and June. Meetings are from 12:00 – 2:00 p.m. Location may vary.
- Directors are encouraged to attend and participate at WITS events throughout the year. These events may include: The Blackboard Affair, Community Celebration, RLTA Showcase, Annual Meeting.