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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Youth, Education & Libraries Committee
Monday, December 21, 2020 - 6:30 PM
This meeting will be conducted via Zoom**

Minutes

Subject: Early Education & Universal Literacy

CB8 Members Present: Peter Patch, Chair, Alida Camp, Taina Borrero, Jane Parshall, Elizabeth Rose, Tricia Shimamura, Billy Freeland, Ed Hartzog, Rami Sigal (Community Member).

Note: The Committee thanks Tali Sigal, for her assistance in providing minutes of the meeting.

Special Guest Speaker: Andrew Fletcher, Director, DOE Universal Literacy

Additional Guest Participant: Esther Friedman, DOE (Retired) and a Founder of the DOE Universal Literacy Program, who hired Andrew Fletcher on behalf of DOE.

CB8 Focus: 'That Every Kid Learn to Read - By Third Grade.'

The focus of the session was on early education and universal literacy, with the objective: that every New York kid be able to read at grade level by 3rd grade. This is based on the fundamental educational principle that: 'Up to third grade, kids learn to read. After third grade, kids read to learn.'

In the City public schools, this objective is the focus and responsibility of the DOE Universal Literacy Program, now in its fifth year. The challenge is defined by recent data, which indicate that, city-wide, 53% of students are reading at grade level in 3rd grade.

To fulfill the DOE objective of 'Equity and Excellence for All,' reading will need to improve, even in the Upper East side, where the percentage of 3rd graders reading at grade level is reported to be in the high 80's.

In the DOE Universal Literacy program, the approach adopted is to have reading coaches provide supplemental instruction and support to teachers in targeted primary schools. The existing group of over 400 trained reading coaches have taken three weeks of summer training,

along with additional training during the school year, in the roughly 400 targeted schools. The schools are targeted based on reading performance, with preference to those schools where the need is most pronounced.

The program approach is based on the observation that a reading coach could build teacher capacity to help more students than a reading specialist, which would typically work directly with students one-on-one. The Universal Literacy pilot program was launched in 2016-17 in districts 4 and 10 in the Bronx and 17 and 32 in Brooklyn, targeting schools with lower levels of ELA test proficiency.

In year two, the program was expanded to Manhattan, and in year three, to the rest of the city. Coaches are now teaching due to the pandemic, mostly working in the schools they supported in K-second grade classrooms. The hope and expectation is that, as the pandemic gets under control, the coaches can move back into the coaching role focused on reading ability.

The distinction between using a reading coach (the current program), and a reading specialist (used more widely in prior years), can be summarized as follows: The reading specialist teaches students directly in small groups or one-on-one, reaching about 50 students per year.

In the Universal Literacy program, the reading coach can work with ten or more teachers in a school. With more than twenty students per class, the reading coach can thus reach over two hundred students through the teachers they coach. In addition, the reading coaches are funded through the DOE central office, while reading specialists are funded through the individual school budget.

The DOE does not impose a curriculum on individual schools. Therefore, the literacy program must train coaches in an ‘agnostic way’ so they can deal with any program they find in place at any school. The individual teachers can also choose whether to embrace or decline the coaching support.

The program target is to have 100% of students reading at grade level by 2026. The COVID pandemic has hindered progress towards that target. Further progress will depend on individual teachers embracing the program, and adapting their approach to teach reading, to increase literacy.

Families can also be helpful. Teachers can’t do this alone. With virtual learning, parents can see what reading instruction looks like in their school. Parents can ‘look behind the curtain’ to see how the program works.

It may also be possible to use a newsletter and workshops to engage parents in the process. In addition, Andrew’s program is working with Brooklyn College. Pre-certified teachers have observation hours to fill, so they can use the reading program to gain teaching experience with individual students. In the future, this collaboration may also expand to include education students at other CUNY schools.

‘Reading Rescue’ is a program that has been developed and expanded, following the earlier use of the ‘Reading Recovery’ [program. Under the terms of Reading Recovery, the school incurs a cost of \$200,000 to train and certify one teacher. Reading Recovery has been in use at several District 2 schools, where eight teachers have been trained in the program.

Reading Rescue is currently use in first grade, where teachers receive 2-3 weeks training, along with some on-site support. Students receive 30 minutes of 1:1 training, five days a week. 90 schools in the city are using the program.

Reading coaches make the same amount of money as school-based teachers, while they work five extra days/year and often more hours per day. The teachers they are coaching can choose whether to participate, so the teachers themselves must want to be coached. Therefore, the coaches focus on first identifying teachers who want to collaborate, and then demonstrate the program results, in order to engage other teachers.

Further information on reading literacy can be found through the following links, provided by Andrew Fletcher:

- [Early Literacy Resources](#) on schools.nyc.gov
- [Universal Literacy information on the InfoHub](#)
- [“Year 2 Evaluation Summary Report SY 2017-18”](#) (also found via link on the page noted above)
- [Test Results](#)
- [Robert Slavin Tutoring](#)
- [Robert Slavin Blog](#)
- [Chalkbeat](#)

Peter Patch, Chair