



The Carmel Hill Fund
Education Program

Colorado

**20 years of
cultivating literacy
and a lifelong love
of reading**





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Message from the Director

For the past 20 years, the Colorado project of the Carmel Hill Fund Education Program (CHFEP) has focused on providing the resources, training, tutoring and know-how to develop pathways and solutions for youth in the Denver Public Schools system to both learn how to read and to have the support and develop the skills needed to become comprehensive and voracious readers.

While our approach began with independent reading, through time, expertise and experience we have uncovered that a significant number of students lacked the skills and knowledge to be able to read on their own - a pattern that was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, educators and administrators face their own set of systemic



challenges, and a lack of funding and resources that directly impact their abilities to design and implement effective reading intervention programs.

In 2021, we launched our READS Tutor Program and Structured Literacy Initiative to provide more equitable opportunities, additional training, resources and support for those students who struggle the most to move from pre-reader, to beginning reader, to skilled reader, to voracious reader. At the beginning and end of the 2023 - 2024 school year we surveyed our partner schools about these initiatives to assess our impact and continued to adapt our programs. Throughout this report you'll see quotes from teachers, administrators and students, reflecting their experience with the CHFEP Colorado program and the impact on their students.

Above all, the students we serve and those who support them in their reading journey have been at the center of our efforts. You will read stories from Jennifer, the Academic Director at Beacon Network, who has partnered with us to build a strong structured literacy program in the middle schools she oversees, and James, a ninth grade English teacher, who speaks to the impact of targeted resources and support to guide student conferencing.

As I reflect on the work we've done in the last few decades, I'm filled with gratitude for the people who have trusted the CHFEP Colorado team to come into their buildings, share their pains and welcome our ideas and initiatives. It is this shared commitment to work together, support each other and build upon their deep dedication to their students that has fueled our vision that every community in Colorado reads.

Eileen McMahon
Colorado Area Director

Image: Colorado Area Project Team; Eileen pictured front center



Our Programs

We are honored to partner with 23 schools in the Denver Public Schools district during the 2024 - 2025 school year, along with our long-time community partner, the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver. We've serviced more than 158 educators and over 3,493 students each year, providing the support, tools and resources needed to foster a culture of successful readers.



23 school partnerships



158 educators serviced



3,493 students serviced



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Despite being one of the most highly impacted schools in the Denver Public Schools District, with more than 97% students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch and 67% English Language Learners, by 5th grade our students are demonstrating nearly the same proficiency rates as the state average as measured by our state assessments. In Spanish literacy, our students' proficiency is more than twice as high as the state average and for the past three years has been the highest in Colorado. A significant reason our kids are doing so well is directly attributable to the support we have received over the years from Carmel Hill helping our teachers develop the skills to support independent reading and providing resources our students need to read independently in "just right" books.

Shane Knight, Former Principal, Knapp Elementary School

School Partnerships

The framework of our partnerships were designed to support schools in creating and developing a sustainable system around Independent Reading Best Practices by working directly with teachers and administrators in all aspects - the student experience, book choice, teacher development, school processes, and technology.



The meetings with our [Carmel Hill] Implementation Specialist have been critical to our Independent Reading efforts. Under their direction, consistent and deep implementation of Independent Reading has flourished and our children have been re-energized about selecting books that they grow to love!

2024 Independent Reading Survey Respondent

READS Tutor Program

The READS Tutor Program was established in 2021 to aid students in progressing through the stages of reading development - decoding, vocabulary development, and background knowledge. Through close work with our school partners, administrators are able to place students in the READS program who are dramatically below grade-level proficiency. Often schools don't know the cause of a child's delay in reading development and our highly experienced and skilled tutors have helped identify the areas in which a child may need additional support and the appropriate intervention to address these gaps. With the skills learned through this intervention, we've been able to put students on a path to developing into a community of lifelong, voracious readers.



I feel good [about my progress], but sometimes books at my level are not ones I want to read. I want to read better so I can read anything I want.

Student response, Structured Literacy & Reads Tutoring Program Survey



Structured Literacy Initiative

As a progression of our READS Tutor Program, our Structured Literacy Initiative (SLI) has provided the highest level of evidence-based, effective reading and spelling instruction during the school day to the most impacted students within our partner schools. We have done this by offering a two-year therapy-level structured literacy reading intervention training and certification in the science of reading to Denver Public Schools educators at no cost to the child, family, educator or school. These interventionists work with a subset of students from the READS Tutor Program who need the greatest support to learn to read and become successful independent readers.

Kinder Read Alouds

Through reading aloud to our youngest readers, in both English and Spanish, these students are introduced to high quality literature, a diverse range of authors, and the joy of a great book which sets them up for success once they transition to independent reading.

Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver

We established our partnership with The Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver in 2005 to help stop the “summer slide” that children can experience in reading, and have since expanded into a full year reading partnership with 20 Boys & Girls Clubs.

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Students are growing a love for reading. Fourth and fifth grade students love going to the library to independently pick out new books. Students talk about books more and have more confidence in their ability to read.

*2024 Independent Reading Survey
Respondent*



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[Carmel Hill's] support in professional development has been exceptional, offering guided support on next steps, ensuring that everyone knows exactly what to do to improve. This hands-on approach is incredibly effective and appreciated. **The ability to clearly analyze data and translate it into actionable insights is what sets [Carmel Hill] apart.**

Teachers trust the expertise and frequently ask for input, even requesting class observations outside our normal observation rounds. This level of trust speaks volumes about their capability and the strong relationships they've built. Their communication skills are amazing, allowing them to convey information effectively and ensure everyone is on the same page. **This clarity enhances our collaborative efforts and drives our success forward.** Thank you for your hard work and for being such an integral part of our team.

Amanda, 2024 Independent Reading Survey Respondent

Our Partners

Since the Colorado program of the Carmel Hill Fund Education Program was launched in 2005, we've worked with more than 50 schools. These partnerships have been impactful due to the dedication and commitment of teachers, librarians, administrators and community members who understand that a child's ability and interest in being a voracious reader can have far-reaching impacts on their life well into the future.



I want to read at home more and not just in school. I want this to be a hobby.

Student response, *Structured Literacy & Reads Tutoring Program Survey*

Over the past 20 years, we have invested a significant amount of books, resources and staff time to support students on their reading journey and the data reflects that:

(Data between 2005 - 2024)



5,328,276 books read



54,327 students served



1,554 teachers supported

2024 - 2025 School & Community Partners

Elementary School Partners:

- Amesse Elementary School
- APS Crawford Elementary School
- APS Montview Elementary School
- Beach Court Elementary School
- Cheltenham Elementary School
- Columbine Elementary School
- Edison Elementary School
- Force Elementary School
- Hallett Elementary School
- Holm Elementary School
- Johnson Elementary School
- Knapp Elementary School
- Montclair Elementary School
- Munroe Elementary School
- Samuels Elementary School
- Schmitt Elementary School
- Teller Elementary School

Middle School Partners:

- DSST: Cedar Middle School
- DSST: CGMS
- DSST: Cole Middle School
- Kepner Middle School
- Merrill Middle School

High School Partners:

- Abraham Lincoln High School

Community Partners:

- Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver



James' Experience

How conferencing with students builds trust, confidence, and leads to growth

I teach ninth grade English and our ninth grade Reading Lab at Abraham Lincoln High School, both of which are required coursework for every student. **Our school is a challenging environment with a high population of students learning English as a second language and a lot of reluctant readers**, a majority of whom are reading below grade level. Getting these students to get excited about reading and grow in their reading practice is no easy feat.

Before our current partnership with Carmel Hill, we tried a number of different approaches to structuring our Reading Lab, yet they were all lacking consistent rituals and routines. A few years ago, **our administrator decided to bring back the Carmel Hill program to provide consistency and evidence-based structure**, to the benefit of both teachers and students.



The program provides **a defined, structured way to manage reading progress and assist student learning and growth** across the school year. Carmel Hill supplied us with a wonderful progress monitoring document that has a plethora of different conference types and interventions, which has been **a valuable tool to keep myself accountable for student progress, and a great resource for different strategies to help get students back on track or refocus.** I use this tool weekly throughout the school year to conference with each student every Monday and again later in the week.

Ultimately, **it's students that benefit from the structure and consistency provided by the Carmel Hill program.** I'll often see students in the beginning of the year who aren't excited about Reading Lab and who struggle to commit to a text, especially if they're reading below grade level. As we progress through the weeks of conferencing and Accelerated Reader testing, **their effort pays off through increased confidence as a student overall and the spillover impact in their other classes.**

As a cohort of students progressed through high school, **we saw some growth with our Pre-SAT data last year.** While that can't be entirely attributed to this class, some can be credited to the routine we implemented to have all students, once a week, read a non-fiction article at grade level, even if they're otherwise reading below grade level. This exposure to grade level texts is supplemented with PSAT modeled questions for them to practice, along with an Accelerated Reader quiz. **This is yet another tool to help achieve our goal to see students demonstrate growth from the beginning, middle and end of the year** with their reading level.

James Crussell, English Teacher, Abraham Lincoln High School

Image: James Crussell



Our Methodology

The programs we've implemented over the past two decades have been based in science and developed to support our mission of promoting literacy and fostering a love of reading, particularly among at-risk youth in inner cities.

Independent Reading Practice

Our partnership framework was designed to help schools build and maintain effective independent reading programs. We have work directly with teachers and administrators to create and enhance all key components, including:

- Student engagement
- Book selection
- Teacher professional development
- School procedures
- Technology integration
- Teacher development

We accomplished this by creating a customized curriculum for Denver Public Schools teachers to address their students' unique needs and school-specific circumstances. Our Carmel Hill Implementation Specialists have provided monthly support sessions to teach, guide, and mentor teachers throughout the process.



READS Tutor Program: Trained and Certified Literacy Tutors

Our READS Tutor Program works with the Accelerated Reader Framework and has provided structure and scaffolding in small groups or 1:1 instruction for 3rd to 9th grade students who are significantly behind current grade levels for reading. The program targets tutoring in decoding, vocabulary development, and background knowledge.

Administrators at participating schools identified students based on results from the STAR Reading Growth Assessments and input from teachers and specialists within the school. We then selected tutors based on their training and accreditation through the Academic Language Therapy Association (ALTA), and provided additional training to implement STAR, Early Literacy and Star Phonics with students in a focused, deliberate manner to achieve targeted goals.

Structured Literacy Initiative: Take Flight Curriculum

Our unique Structured Literacy Initiative (SLI) was created to be the intensive next step for students who need the most help learning to read, intended for students grades 3rd - 11th at participating partner schools who struggle to read or who have a specific learning or reading disability.

We accomplished this by identifying, recruiting and training interventionists or special education teachers from partner schools and then supporting them through a two-year training and practical instruction program using the Take Flight Curriculum developed by Scottish Rite for Children and implemented by the Colorado Literacy and Learning Center. Once trained educators completed the program, they worked with a small number of target students for a minimum of two hours per week.



Take Flight contains the five components of effective reading instruction supported by the National Reading Panel research meta-analysis and mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. With Take Flight, students will learn all 44 sounds of the English language, 96 letter – sound correspondence rules and 87 affixes. The student will also learn spelling rules for base words and derivatives. Practice opportunities are also provided that are designed to improve oral reading fluency. Finally, Take Flight introduces comprehension and vocabulary building strategies for both narrative and expository text in the context of oral reading exercises to prepare students for successful, independent reading.

scottishriteforchildren.org

Jennifer's Experience

How targeted tutoring support helps the whole student

I've been a teacher and administrator in Denver Public Schools for 26 years, and **I've never worked with an organization that's had more impact on student outcomes** as much as my work with Carmel Hill. And of all the various gifts they've provided our school, the READS Tutor Program is one of the most valuable and sustaining.

Kepner Beacon is one of the most impacted middle schools in Denver Public Schools, with about 20% of our students reading at a pre-reader level. Some of the most impacted of these students are identified to take part in **the READS Tutor Program, which provides small group or 1:1 instruction to students** in reading, with a focus on decoding, vocabulary development, and background knowledge. Carmel Hill invested in training a reading specialist at our school, who now teaches other reading teachers about these targeted strategies and various screeners and assessments, and additionally provides tutors to meet with students twice per week for this therapy-level support.

Image: Jennifer Kent



The unfortunate reality is that once students get to middle school, we tend to want outcomes fast and our measures are usually big measures, like state assessments. State assessments don't have the nuance to show incremental growth because they simplify students into buckets of meeting or not meeting grade level expectations. In contrast, **STAR Reading Growth Assessments can help us identify, celebrate and take action on student progress.** When you have a seventh grade student who started the year reading at a kindergarten level and ended the year reading at a third grade level, it's a huge achievement and it's one that's almost invisible on a state assessment and uncovered through the methodology provided by Carmel Hill through the STAR assessments.

As a result of this targeted support intervention, **we've seen student confidence increase and their growth in reading impact their other core content classes.** It's incredible to witness these learners as they develop their own academic identity and start to see themselves not only as a reader, but as a student who's excited to learn.

Jennifer Kent, Academic Director, Beacon Network

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I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for your invaluable assistance in helping our teachers understand how to develop independent readers and foster a love for reading among our students. Your expertise and dedication have made a significant impact on our educational community. Your insightful guidance and practical strategies have empowered our teachers to create more engaging and supportive reading environments. By sharing your knowledge on differentiated instruction, reading strategies, and fostering a love for literature, you have provided our educators with the tools they need to inspire and nurture independent readers.

2024 Independent Reading Survey Respondent

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I wanted to extend my heartfelt thanks for Carmel Hill’s invaluable support in guiding our teachers on how to annotate and read data effectively. Your expertise has been instrumental in helping our educators understand how to better support their students during the independent reading block. Your clear and insightful explanations on data annotation have empowered our teachers to identify key areas where students need additional support. This has enabled them to tailor their instruction more precisely, ensuring that each student receives the guidance necessary to thrive as independent readers. Your dedication to enhancing our teachers’ skills has not only improved their ability to interpret and utilize data but also significantly contributed to the overall learning experience of our students. The progress we are witnessing in our classrooms is a direct result of your hard work and commitment.

2024 Independent Reading Survey Respondent





The Carmel Hill Fund Education Program

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