



**The Carmel Hill Fund**  
Education Program

*New York City*

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





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# Message from the Director

The New York City (NYC) Project of the Carmel Hill Fund Education Program (CHFEP) is a story of educational innovation through cross-sector partnerships and a mission to cultivate literacy and a lifelong love of reading, particularly among at-risk youth.

CHFEP developed at the intersection of philanthropy, education technology (EdTech), consulting, and the K through 12 school community. From this junction, the NYC project collaborated with educators to identify the literacy needs of students, catalyzed purposeful instructional change, and fostered reading improvement by celebrating student growth, class accomplishments, and school-wide success for over two decades.

In 2004, I was an analyst overseeing literacy special projects with the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) in Upper Manhattan. I was introduced to a remarkable businessman and philanthropist named William Ruane. Mr. Ruane was partnering with a K-8 parochial school in Harlem to cultivate their students' love of reading, using Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader (AR), a computer-based program designed to encourage and monitor independent reading practice in students and revitalizing the school's library as a solution. Students' basic skill proficiencies increased by 70% over three years.

Due to the success of this undertaking, Mr. Ruane launched the Carmel Hill Fund Education Program and proposed the expansion of AR along with its corresponding Star literacy assessments into DOE schools in Harlem and surrounding community school districts. As part of the DOE, I was responsible for partnering with CHFEP to implement the pilot of this reading intervention in 10 schools, which then expanded to 25 over three years. Students' independent reading engagement and English Language Arts proficiency increased year-to-year. In 2007, I joined CHFEP full time, first to assist with strategic growth and expansion of our school partners from 25 to over 50, including districts in Brooklyn and Bronx, then becoming Director & NYC Project Manager in 2017.

For over two decades, the CHFEP NYC Project has been at the forefront of using EdTech to motivate students to read and standardize data to help educators efficiently teach and monitor student growth.

We were pioneers in the implementation of:

1. **Learning management systems** to keep track of data and information
2. **Adaptive software** that set students on learning pathways in direct response to their individual needs
3. **Station rotations** where students rotate through independent, collaborative, and teacher-supported activities in classrooms
4. **Mastery-based assessment** where students progress based on mastery of grade-level standards and skills.

In order to get reliable data and sustainable impact, we've focused on implementation fidelity and student goal setting with partner schools. Beyond the technology products, our Implementation Specialists also provided the necessary professional development and coaching for educators that created a culture of reading and literacy achievement in schools.

This culture-building aspect of the CHFEP NYC Project was supported by our commitment to providing library development services and student enrichment programming to partner schools, as well as celebrating student and classroom reading accomplishments.

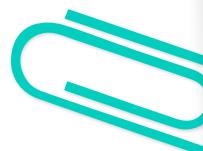
Our Library Project, Student Enrichment Project, and Read Up incentive program were grounded by the position that actions which enhance learning alter the student experience in some way. Most of our partner schools' students were from underserved communities and didn't have access to many academic experiences or abundant resources outside of school. So, part of our model became bringing experiences and resources to them.

From updated and well-stocked libraries with qualified librarians to author visits; from Summer Institute for the Gifted enrichment scholarships for gifted and talented students to partnerships with local nonprofits bringing reading and writing workshops to classrooms; creating a system of motivators to encourage students to reach their individualized goals to school-wide ice cream truck celebrations—we've taken an exponential growth model approach to student reading and literacy development.

It has been an honor to work with students, educators, families, partners, and my colleagues and team at CHFEP who committed to carrying out the mission of this organization. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve as a transformative leader and the trust I was given by Mr. Ruane to guide CHFEP NYC's vision, people, and systems. Most importantly, I'm humbled by the experience and role I was able to play as a change agent for the promise of youth literacy.

**Fanon J. Howell, Ph.D.**  
Director & NYC Project Manager

*Images: NYC Project Team pictured left,  
Fanon pictured right*



# Our Programs

Throughout our history as a program, including the current 2024 - 2025 school year, we've been honored to partner with **more than 50 schools** in New York City.

Our team successfully supports primary and secondary grade students' literacy proficiency and love of reading by providing educators with the means to motivate reading practice, monitor progress, and refine instruction. Just as our founder believed, we consider reading and literacy critical to youth not only advancing academically, but formulating a point of view and contributing to society.



## 3M+ books & myON

*We've ensured that partner schools possess a minimum of 10 books per student and have gifted over three million books to school libraries and classrooms along with Renaissance Learning's myON online library subscriptions.*



## 1M+ devices

*We've supplied partner schools with technology for blended learning practices and have gifted more than 1M devices to equip labs and classrooms.*



## 10,000+ educators

*We've offered core professional development modules for teachers and administrators totaling **20+ hours of training** for more than 10,000 educators annually, in addition to ongoing coaching on independent reading practice, assessment data analysis, and instructional planning solutions.*

# Access to Education Technology Solutions

As a philanthropic organization, our principal focus has been the provision of cutting-edge education software, including reading practice and literacy assessment solutions, while providing partnering schools with the necessary literature and technology to succeed in program implementation. We have used Renaissance Learning's adaptive assessments to support teachers and track and measure student reading progress. Technology solutions are paired with our professional development modules to maximize program implementation and success.

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Accelerated Reader and myON have really helped us create a strong reading community in our school. The diagnostic and quizzing platform helps us monitor student progress and we use the assessments as a way to further identify supports our students need in the classroom.

*Survey response from Community Action School - MS258*



## Professional Development Modules that Strengthen Instruction

Our Implementation Specialists have been key to the success of the program at our partner schools, providing premiere support and coaching on independent reading best practices, and instruction on how to use data to guide student grouping, progress monitoring, interventions, and differentiated instructional planning. We have provided **eight core professional development modules** totaling **over 20 hours of available training** that teachers were able to use as part of their continuing education.

These ongoing services are individualized based on the needs of each partner school, with the goal of helping teachers and administrators with student grouping, motivational tools and implementation tactics.

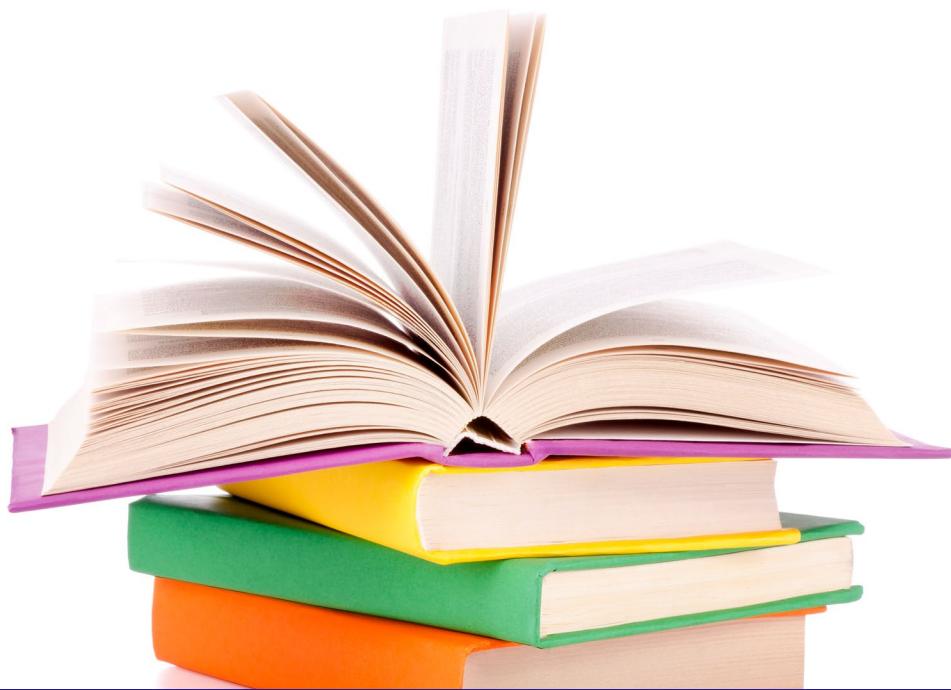
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The partnership has helped transform our reading culture. Our students identify as readers; they push themselves to achieve their reading goals. Our teachers use Star data regularly to inform their instruction and planning. Adding Independent Reading periods, trimester celebrations, and setting and monitoring reading goals makes a positive difference, helping to increase our positive outcomes. The partnership has been extremely beneficial and very much appreciated.

*Survey response from Cornelia Connelly Center*

## Developing Vibrant School Libraries

Research shows that students who attend schools that have library programs with a professional librarian can achieve higher levels of academic success, yet many of our partner schools lacked a library space to support student learning processes. The Carmel Hill Fund Library Project addressed this need in partner schools by developing library programs that supported the school community and provided a safe place to promote student literacy and a lifelong love of reading. Our Library Specialists worked closely with librarians to acquire materials that reflect the needs of the entire school community and align with curriculum requirements.



## Creating Safe Spaces that Enhance Reading Enjoyment

At ten schools we deepened our investment by designing and renovating physical library spaces. In order to qualify for a library renovation project, the partner school was required to have a certified librarian that has worked at the school for a minimum of two years, an administrator that supports the library program, including both circulation and instruction, and a space suitable for the library program and students. In addition to in-school efforts, we developed partnerships with local public libraries and school communities, providing a safe space for the promotion of student literacy and lifelong reading.

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Because of our new library, courtesy of Carmel Hill, students are super excited to come in and see what's new and interesting on the shelves.

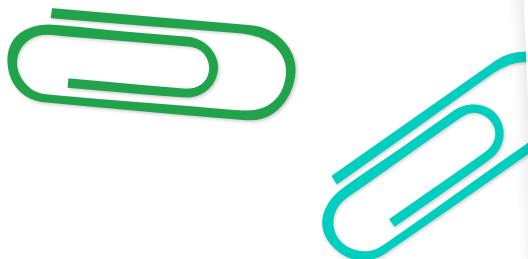
*Survey response from PS 171 Patrick Henry*



## Student Enrichment that Builds Reading Culture

The CHFEP Student Enrichment Project supported schools with social emotional programming, such as educational field trips and workshops, author visits, and sponsorship for high performing students' participation in summer enrichment camps.

Author visits have helped schools create a more robust reading culture, and in the past two years elementary and middle schools have been awarded this event based on their program participation and length of time with CHFEP. Once a school has been selected for an author visit event, we partnered with them to select an author that best represented their community, purchased books by the selected author for each student and supplied a set of the author's books for each teacher's classroom library. These highly anticipated visits celebrated schools' reading practice and inspired students to deepen their love of reading.



## The William Ruane Scholarship

A cornerstone of the enrichment program has been the William Ruane Scholarship, which provided funding for gifted and talented middle school students to attend the Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG), held at Yale University, Bryn Mawr College or Princeton University for three weeks in the summer. Students were selected by CHFEP staff based on their performance in the 92nd percentile or higher on the Star Reading literacy assessment, combined with recommendations from their school. Additional specialized programming for this cohort included workshops and outings for team building, leadership, and social skills. Last year, **25 students participated in this specialized program.**



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We consider it a great privilege for our daughter to have had the opportunity to attend the SIG program for two consecutive summers. The program provided a carefully curated experience of freedom and independence away from home which we consider invaluable, coming as it did on the cusp of adolescence, in contributing to the continuing formation of her character, both academically and socially. Having the opportunity to exercise agency in pursuing her interests, and in navigating expectations and social situations, helped her to imagine what might be possible for her in the future, and to sharpen her academic focus in the semesters that followed using skills she learned during the program. At SIG, she explored areas that were of great interest to her, forged a long-term friendship, and experienced a taste of higher-level learning that served to whet her appetite for pursuing such goals as she grows. For all of this, we are thankful that she was able to participate in the SIG program.

*Parent of a two-time SIG scholarship recipient in 6th and 7th grade*

# Our Partners

The 100+ schools with whom we have partnered span pre-kindergarten to high school, with a focus on engaging students in K - 5th grade as they progress from pre-readers to proficient independent readers; and 6th - 8th grade reading stamina. Last school year, 11 partner schools reached Star School status, which means they're our highest implementers as measured by meeting certain benchmarks around testing and reading engagement, including:

**20-30 minutes**

*of reading allotted per day*

**90%**

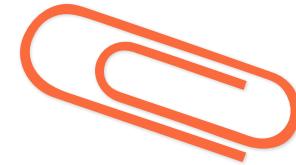
*of the school population is participating in pre- and post-testing with Renaissance Star assessments*

**80%**

*of classes achieving Star Class certification, with 80% or more of students meeting their reading challenge goal each round*



# 2024 - 2025 School Partners



## Elementary School Partners:

Mosaic Preparatory Academy  
PS 4 | Duke Ellington\*  
PS 5 | Ellen Lurie  
PS 8 | Luis Belliard\*  
PS 28 | Wright Brothers  
PS 36 | Margaret Douglas\*  
PS 83 | Luis Munoz Rivera\*  
PS 92 | Mary McLeod Bethune  
PS 98 | Shorac Kappock  
PS 102 | Jaques Cartier  
PS 129 | John H. Finley  
PS 146 | Anna M. Short  
PS 152 | Dykman Valley\*  
PS 152 | Evergreen\*  
PS 154 | Harriet Tubman Learning Center  
PS 175 | Henry H. Garnet  
PS 182 | The Bilingual Bicultural School  
PS 197 | John B. Russwurm  
PS 192 | Jacob A. Schiff\*  
PS 200 | The James McCune Smith School  
PS 304 | Early Childhood School\*  
PS 318 | TMALS  
PS 333 | The Longwood Academy

## Elementary / Middle School Partners:

BedStuy - New Beginnings\*  
Harlem Academy  
Mott Haven Academy Charter School  
Washington Heights Academy\*  
PS 18 | Park Terrace\*  
PS 72 | The Lexington Academy  
PS 123 | The Mahalia Jackson School  
PS 171 | Patrick Henry

## Middle School Partners:

Bronx Prep Charter  
Cornelia Connelly Center  
Democracy Prep Harlem MS  
Democracy Prep Charter MS  
Excellence Boys Middle Academy  
Excellence Girls Charter School  
Harlem Prep Middle School  
Leadership Prep Brownsville  
Leadership Prep Canarsie  
MS 256 | Lafayette Academy  
MS 258 | Community Action School

MS 319 | Maria Teresa  
Ocean Hill Collegiate  
SEED Harlem  
St. Ignatius School  
Uncommon Williamsburg Charter School

## Middle / High School Partners:

Eagle Academy for Young Men of Harlem

## High School Partners:

South Bronx Community Charter High School



\*Denotes  
Star School  
designation for  
2023 - 2024  
school year

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At least a few times each week I see my students talking about books with each other during downtime between subjects. A couple of students will be talking about what they loved about the book they just read and recommend it to a friend, who will then ask if it's like another book or character they're familiar with. For example, they might say 'I know you like sports, this is the book for you.' That shows not only the love of reading, but that they're making it their own - they're sharing the love of books and expressing it in a way that promotes reading with one another. It's organic, and I love it.

*3rd grade teacher, PS 4 Duke Ellington Elementary School*

# Rewarding Reading

The Read Up Challenge was created as an exciting opportunity for students to read books, take Accelerated Reader quizzes to track progress and earn prizes based on their growth over the course of each of three rounds of the challenge.

What began as a one-time, 18-week program, evolved into a challenge spanning the entirety of the school year with three distinct rounds of participation intended to stretch students' reading abilities to enhance skill and build confidence.

**Designed to motivate students to read, each 8-10 week challenge promoted independent reading by increasing engaged reading time per day and the number of books read over the course of the challenge.** Students were assigned goals based on their grade for PreK - 2 and independent reading level for 3rd - 12 graders, with rigor increasing each round. For example, in grades 1 - 2, students were challenged

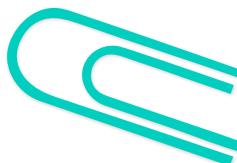
to read 8 books during the first round, 12 books during the second round, and 16 books during the third round and achieve an 80% quiz average on books read with incentives growing from a \$15 gift card to a \$25 gift card.

Participation has grown over time, and students consistently get excited both by the prizes they earn and their day-to-day engagement with the program. Additional incentives were provided for teachers, librarians and administrators for their implementation of the program and to recognize achievement in growing their school's reading culture. Our youngest students in pre-kindergarten through second grade were also eligible to earn a Families as Partners Award designed to recognize students and their family for their literacy efforts and growth throughout the school year. Teachers would nominate one winner per class based on Star Early Literacy testing, family and student engagement, and evidence of reading growth.

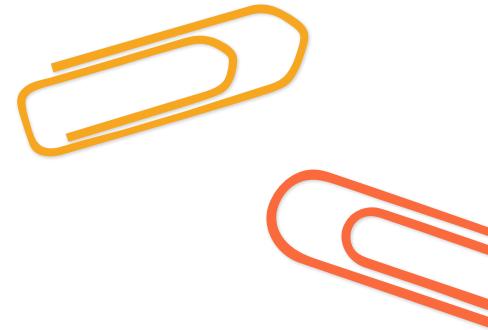
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Our elementary school students are extremely motivated to earn points. The Read Up Challenge has created a culture of positive competition and support among students. Students are so excited to share with families about their progress throughout the year.

*2023 teacher feedback*



# Our Approach & Process



## School partner selection

CHFEP partners with Title 1 New York City schools and together sign a Memorandum of Understanding to detail the conditions and expectations for partnership.

## Partnership onboarding & technology resources

CHFEP provides education technology, books and resources so that partner schools can successfully implement their program. Implementation Specialists work closely with administrators, teachers and librarians to tailor the program to the school's unique needs for the greatest chance at success.

## Professional development & implementation support

Implementation Specialists from CHFEP support teachers and administrators as they begin their Independent Reading program and any special initiatives. To further support successful implementation, all schools are provided with professional development opportunities around strengthening reading practice and data-driven instruction.

## Special initiatives & incentives

Partner schools have the opportunity to incorporate and participate in special initiatives, such as the Read Up Challenge, the Library Project, and Student Enrichment opportunities such as author visits and workshops for high performing students who may be selected to participate in the Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG) program, funded by the William Ruane Scholarship.

## School & student impact

School leadership and teachers value and demonstrate positive attitudes towards independent reading, integrate independent reading into daily school rituals and practices, have the knowledge and skills to use the Accelerated Reader platform and administer assessments, then interpret that data to inform reading practices in the classroom.

# Partnership & Achievement at PS 152

PS 152 Dykman Valley School is an excellent example of the strides in reading achievement and culture made possible through its partnership with CHFEP.

The school committed to using all Renaissance platforms made available by CHFEP, including myON, Accelerated Reader, and Star Reading Assessments in both English and Spanish. The school has consistently been a top performing partner school across categories, including myON use and the Read Up challenge participation and achievement, consistently landing in the top 12 performers and as of fall 2024 is ranked 4th out of our 20 Top Usage schools, both of which illustrate reading perseverance.

This was achieved by creating a strong rollout plan with the principal and ensuring that teachers were trained and supported, and, most importantly, that the school community understood the "why" behind the program. Professional development modules were designed around



the school and district's English Language Arts (ELA) data and our collective vision for promoting the love of reading and moving the needle on literacy.

**Critical to the success that we've had was establishing a presence early on, centering relationships, and creating mechanisms for feedback and celebration. CHFEP also funded part of their library renovation, including purchasing books, connecting librarians to resources, and providing staff to mentor and help organize their collection.**

*I've had the pleasure of partnering with Carmel Hill both in my capacity as Assistant Principal of a school, where I served as the Coordinator of the CHEFP initiative for four years, and as principal of PS 152, where we have been able to build a strong, collaborative relationship over the past three years. Back in 2022, I knew that in my new role as instructional leader, looking to move the needle on literacy in the building, it would make total sense to bring Carmel Hill on as a partner. And I was right! The resources and support the school has received, including the educational software, support with our library renovation and ongoing technical assistance have helped us focus and catapult our efforts in building a culture of reading from grades K through 5.*

*One of the greatest gifts has been that students now have access to tons of books and that they are excited to read them! The Read Up program specifically has been instrumental in getting teachers to prioritize independent reading, and holding both teachers and students accountable for reading practice. There's no question that the partnership has facilitated getting our students*

*reading (or being read to) for the love of reading every day. Our school now boasts an average engaged time per day spent on reading of over 20 minutes, which far exceeds our initial target of 15 minutes per day.*

*This is no small feat in a district where schools are under-resourced, and students struggle as readers and have fallen substantially behind in proficiency levels. With that as the backdrop, the level of commitment, urgency and hands-on approach our CHFEP implementation specialist has shown has made all the difference in what we've been able to accomplish together. She has served as a thought partner for our team, a coach to teachers and a motivator to students. I am proud to report that our school has made significant gains in literacy, seeing a 20% increase in proficiency levels from 2022 to 2024. I am certain that our focus on promoting and incentivizing the love of reading has contributed in great part to those results.*

**Estalex Rodriguez, Principal**  
PS 152 Magnet School of Innovation  
in a Global Community  
New York City Public Schools

*Image: Estalex Rodriguez*



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Having a fully functioning library means the world to me—and to my students. It's more than just a space with books; it's a place where kids can start their day in a quiet, comforting environment. For some of our youngest students—our “littles” from kindergarten to first grade—the library is the first place they feel truly at ease after a tearful goodbye to their parents. I'll often greet them with a simple question: ‘Would you like to come into our library and find a good book?’ More often than not, they let go of their parents' hands and take mine instead. It's a small moment, but to me, it's simply magical.

Having a fully functioning library has been an absolute joy. I am deeply grateful for the chance to witness the transformation in our students—watching them develop a love for reading and grow in confidence.

*Halli Moskowitz, Librarian at PS 171 Patrick Henry*





**The Carmel Hill Fund Education Program**

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