



The New Haven Reads Community Book Bank, Inc.
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TESTIMONY OF KIRSTEN LEVINSOHN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW HAVEN READS
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
February 11, 2020

Good evening Madame Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee

My name is Kirsten Levinsohn, and I am the Executive Director of New Haven Reads, a literacy nonprofit in New Haven. First, thank you for your terrific support over the years. I am here today to make the case for the critical need for restoration of the other \$50,000 of funds for our free, highly impactful, one-on-one after school tutoring program for struggling readers. We are working with 570 students weekly and have 175 more students on our waiting list. Without the reinstatement of the \$50,000 in the budget, we will likely have to make severe cuts.

70% of New Haven third graders read below grade level, similar to other urban cities. Studies have shown that if a child is not reading at grade level by third grade, the chance that he will ever learn to read proficiently without intervention is small. New Haven Reads provides that intervention for struggling readers from pre-k to grade 12.

The mother of one of our former students recently told me of the tremendous impact New Haven Reads has had on her son, Brandon. He began our program in fifth grade reading at a second grade level. She told me, with tears in her eyes, that his frustration caused behavior issues at school and at home. As Brandon's reading skills improved, his mother told me, "everything changed", including his behavior. Now a high school senior, Brandon tutors at New Haven Reads and supports students who struggle in the same ways he did 7 years ago. Brandon will study psychology in college next fall.

Our program is based on the science of reading and is highly effective. Last year, 100% of our students improved their test scores and 72% improved their independent reading level a whole grade or more in a period of 6 months.

Our community and our state need our children to be able to read. A child who learns to read effectively is more likely to finish high school, go to college, and to get a good job. This obviously also means he will pay taxes as an adult.

Conversely, an average of 55% third graders who read below grade level will fail to graduate from high school. This translates to approximately \$260,000 in lost potential earnings across each individual's lifetime.

Our literacy program more than pays for itself down the road. I urge you, please put the \$50,000 back in the budget for New Haven Reads.

Thank you. I am happy to take your questions.

The Impact of New Haven Reads

Success in school and in life

● Research-based, individualized program

● Relationship and bond with a trained, caring adult tutor

● Parent engagement and support

In the academic year 2018-19...

100% of students tested improved their literacy scores

72% of students improved their independent reading levels by at least one grade level



4 New Haven locations serving students in **Pre-K to 12th grade**

570 students weekly from the Greater New Haven area working with **400** weekly community volunteers

89% of our families are from low income households

175 students on the waiting list

116,000 books distributed annually by the community book bank

Reading below grade level is the only criteria for the program. All our programs are **free of charge**

The Price of Illiteracy

- Without intervention, 55% of third and fourth graders who read below grade level will fail to graduate from high school.
- High school dropouts typically earn \$10,000 less per year** than their peers who graduate and \$36,000 less than those who earn a bachelor's degree or greater. **This amounts to about \$260,000 in lost wages over their lifetimes.**
- Without the services of New Haven Reads, of our 570 students each year, 314 would therefore be on a path to dropping out (55%), costing society a total of **\$81.6 million** in the long run. This is our local portion of a problem that **costs \$300.8 billion nationally in the US.**