



The New Haven Reads Community Book Bank, Inc.  
45 Bristol Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511  
203.752.1923 • [information@newhavenreads.org](mailto:information@newhavenreads.org)  
[www.newhavenreads.org](http://www.newhavenreads.org)

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TESTIMONY OF KIRSTEN LEVINSOHN,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW HAVEN READS  
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
February 26, 2021

Good evening Committee Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Kirsten Levinsohn, and I am the Executive Director of New Haven Reads, a nonprofit that supports children's literacy. We are extremely grateful for the support of \$50,000 a year that we received from the Judicial Branch for each of the past two years. These funds are essential to the important work that we do. I am here today to request that these dollars remain in this year's budget. And given that some of our usual sources of funds have been diverted to support COVID-relief, we would be thrilled to receive more.

New Haven Reads provides free, one-on-one, science-based literacy programs for struggling readers. Our program is highly effective demonstrated by assessment data, parent accolades and our students' proud smiles. Prior to the pandemic, we worked with over 550 children every week and we expect to be reaching that many again in the next school year.

Literacy education is anti-poverty work. It is racial equity work. Whether a child can read or not, in a very real way, determines his or her destiny. On average, 55% of third graders who are struggling with reading will fail to graduate from high school – without an intervention like New Haven Reads. A child who learns to read is more likely to finish high school, to go to college, get a good job, and be a taxpayer. He will have better health outcomes and he is much less likely to be incarcerated. New Haven Reads changes the trajectory of students' lives. **Our literacy programs more than pay for themselves down the road.**

Last spring, we pivoted to a fully online learning program. We are now working with almost 300 students every week. We gave laptops to students and have provided internet connectivity to families. We distributed bags of supplies including headphones, and whiteboards to support our students' learning. We started a new, intensive pilot program in the fall to work with those students who are two or three years below their expected reading level but are not showing any progress. Our pre-k and kindergarten program supports critical pre-literacy skills. And, our Book Bank has distributed thousands of books to build up home libraries. **We have been supporting our students in every way we can.**

Even before Covid-19, there were persistent achievement gaps and profound inequities in our education system. The pandemic has made it all much worse. Early research studies demonstrate that although all students are experiencing learning loss at this time, it is the students of color and the low income students who are most affected - with up to a year of learning loss. This will have a very real impact on their future academic success and future earnings.

Our students are all amazing young men and women aged 4 to 18 who are working hard to become confident, successful readers. 98% of our students are minorities and 89% are from low or very low-income households. **These are the students who are most affected by Covid-19 and the educational inequities that will remain. These students need, and deserve, this support.**

To be a strong, vibrant, flourishing state, our children must be able to read. New Haven Reads is an important part of that work, **I urge you to please make sure that New Haven Reads is in the budget for next year and beyond.**

Thank you. I am happy to take your questions.

# The Impact of New Haven Reads

## Academic and Economic Success: Literacy is a powerful anti-poverty tool

- Research-based, individualized literacy 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



Since April 2020, all of our programs are online serving grades K to 12

- Our tutoring and K programs moved online
- We distributed laptops and internet connectivity
- Summer programs were hugely successful
- We supplied learning resources to students

**Almost 300** students weekly (570 students pre-pandemic) from the Greater New Haven area working with **229** community volunteers

**89%** of our families are from low income households

**Over 8,400 books distributed at food pantries** from our book bank in summer 2020

**200+ students** on the waiting list and the educational gaps caused by the pandemic are widening.

**Reading below grade level** is the only registration criterion. All programs are **free of charge**

### The Price of Illiteracy

- **Without an intervention program like New Haven Reads**, 55% of 3rd and 4th 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 is about \$260,000 in lost wages over their lifetime.**
- Without the services of New Haven Reads, of our 300 students each year (2021 student numbers), statistically speaking, 165 would therefore be on a path to dropping out (55%), costing society a total of **\$42.9 million** in the long run. This is our local portion of a problem that **costs \$300.8 billion nationally in the US.**