



Reading Buddies

Program Resource Guide



OKLAHOMA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS MISSION:

Every day, Oklahoma City Public Schools will ignite a passion for learning in every child, invite families to engage, and inspire respectful and trusting relationships with our diverse community.

THE FOUNDATION FOR OKLAHOMA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS MISSION:

To advance excellence, create champions, and build strong community support for lasting change in Oklahoma City Public Schools.

READOKC MISSION:

Create a culture of reading and literacy in Oklahoma City, beginning with our students.

READING BUDDIES MISSION:

Expand and enhance the Reading Buddies Program in the Oklahoma City Public School District in order to improve students' attitudes toward reading.

District Overview

Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) is a multicultural district serving thousands of students all over the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. For the most current Statistical Profile, please visit www.okcps.org.

Goals & Objectives

As a Reading Buddy your goals are to:

- Spend consistent time with students to increase self-esteem, foster self-motivation, and promote responsibility.
- Assist in improving students' attitudes toward reading with the ultimate goal of helping students increase their reading proficiency.

The goal of the OKCPS Community Relations team is to provide resources to community partners to strengthen their volunteer programs in schools.

This Program Resource Guide is designed to assist you in coordinating a Reading Buddies Program in an OKCPS school. Questions regarding a particular school may be directed to OKCPS Community Relations staff or the school's Reading Buddies Liaison.



Equity is a Priority in OKCPS!

Vision for Educational Equity

Educational equity is defined as making decisions strategically based upon the principles of fairness, which includes providing a variety of educational resources, models, programs, and strategies according to student needs that may not be the same for every student or school with the intention of leading to equality of academic outcomes.

OKCPS recognizes our responsibility to eliminate past, present, and predictable barriers to student success by ensuring that all students have access to ambitious instruction from educators with high aspirations, to the needs-based allocation of resources (people, time, money), and to the support and advocacy needed to engage in high-quality and empowering learning opportunities regardless of their race, income, or other social factors.

Equity Protection for Students

In OKCPS we reserve the right to protect the hearts, minds, and feelings of our students. As part of our equity framework, we ask that volunteers adhere to the dimensions of empowering rigorous content, student supports and interventions, and positive and inviting school climates. All programming for the district must strive to uplift and promote the needs of all students regardless of their race, identified needs, zip code, or any other social factors that may be present. As we invite volunteers into our buildings, we do so with the confidence that all students are welcome to attend programs offered in their schools unless otherwise stated in the application and MOU.

Equity Protection for Schools

In OKCPS we reserve the right to protect the positive and inviting school climates that exist in our schools. We welcome individual volunteers, groups, and organizations into our building communities with the confidence that all partners have the best intentions towards our students. Any program that is perceived to be in conflict with providing empowering rigorous content, that does not provide equitable student supports and interventions or diminishes the quality of the school climate may be asked to cease operations. Building administrators reserve the right to request program outcome information to ensure that students are thriving as a result of their participation.

Reading Buddies Program Models

The following models are given as general guidelines but may be adapted with the approval of the school principal.

One-on-One	Group Reading	Book Club
Reading Buddies will read with one student weekly, approximately 30-45 minutes.	Reading Buddies will read with a group of three to four students weekly, approximately 30-45 minutes.	Reading Buddies will read with a group of five to seven students weekly, approximately 30-45 minutes.
Groups typically meet during the school day at a time determined by the principal, ensuring students do not miss core reading instruction.		

Volunteer Application Process

All prospective volunteers are required to submit a volunteer application. There is no fee or charge to the volunteers. The Oklahoma City Public Schools Board of Education believes in maintaining an adequate level of safety and security in all schools and sites of the Oklahoma City Public School district. Therefore, before entering a school or site to volunteer, each potential volunteer must first complete the Volunteer Application and receive district approval annually. In order to protect applicant identity, paper applications are no longer provided nor processed by the district.

1. Go to www.okcps.org/volunteerapp to find and complete the online Volunteer Application.
 - i. If you are volunteering with a group, please list your group's name under the **organization** category on the application.
2. As soon as the application has been submitted, a confirmation of receipt email will be sent to the applicant.
3. Application may take up to 5 business days to be processed.
4. Once the application has been processed, applicant will receive an email notification of approval or denial.
5. Once approved, volunteers are encouraged to begin volunteering. If you are unsure where to begin volunteering, the School Site Volunteer Coordinator or Community Relations team can provide information about available volunteer opportunities.
6. Denied applicants are mailed and emailed a denial letter. Principal is notified via email right after volunteer has been contacted. Denied volunteers are not permitted to enter any school or district facilities to volunteer.
7. Volunteers are required to review the Volunteer Handbook (found online). Training and orientation for schools or community partners are offered by request only.
8. In order for the district to maintain and ensure up-to-date background check records, all volunteers must submit a new Volunteer Application at the beginning of each academic year in order to maintain current status.

Responsibilities

COMMUNITY PARTNER CONTACT

- Each Community Partner shall assign a Community Partner Contact who will communicate directly with the school Reading Buddies Coordinator and be responsible for the following duties.
- Maintain an up-to-date school information sheet (next page).
- Identify volunteer Reading Buddies and ensure they complete the OKCPS volunteer application process before meeting with students.
- Maintain an accurate record of current volunteers and their volunteer times.
- Work with Reading Buddies Coordinator to schedule volunteer orientation before program begins.
- Alert Reading Buddies Coordinator if you know a volunteer will be absent.
- Communicate with Reading Buddies Coordinator or OKCPS Community Relations staff regarding any challenges that arise.



SCHOOL READING BUDDIES COORDINATOR

- Each school shall determine which Reading Buddies Model is preferred and the days and times that Reading Buddies volunteers may come to the school. Each school also shall assign a staff Reading Buddies Coordinator who will communicate directly with the Community Partner Contact and be responsible for the following duties.
- Maintain up-to-date school information and share it with Community Partner Contact.
- Work with Community Partner Contact to schedule volunteer orientation before program begins. Discuss with the Community Partner Contact confidentiality guidelines for working with students. Match volunteers with students.
- Identify students to participate in the Reading Buddies Program. In general, identified students should be no more than a few reading levels behind. Students reading far below grade level likely need more targeted intervention than what a volunteer Reading Buddy is likely to be able to provide.
- Lead the volunteer orientation. After the school principal welcomes the volunteers and covers general rules and procedures, explain to volunteers where and when they will meet with students. Show them Leveled Book Room Resources and other resources you will have available for them.
- Communicate with Community Partner Contact or OKCPS Community Relations staff regarding any challenges that arise.

OKCPS COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM

- Recruit and connect Community Partners with schools interested in starting Reading Buddies Programs.
- Assist Community Partner Contact and school Reading Buddies Coordinator with volunteer orientation as needed.
- Assist with end-of-year Reading Buddies Program evaluation.
- Strengthen partnership relationships as needed.



SCHOOL INFORMATION SHEET - To be completed by the school's Reading Buddies Coordinator

School Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Principal Name and Email: _____

School Reading Buddies Coordinator: _____

Coordinator's Email: _____ Phone: _____

Check-in Procedures: _____

Parking Information: _____

Grade(s) of students you prefer to work with the Reading Buddies: _____

Day(s) of the week you can accept Reading Buddies: _____

Time(s) of day you can accept Reading Buddies: _____

Location(s) in school where Reading Buddies will meet with students: _____

Where Reading Buddies will meet students (pick up from classroom, meet in library/cafeteria/reading room, etc.): _____

SCHOOL RULES

- All OKCPS grounds are non-smoking, drug-free and weapon-free zones
- Please follow the directions of the principal or other school officials when at the school.
- Sign in and out of school using the volunteer kiosk.
- If one is provided, please wear the volunteer badge provided by the school while in the building
- Other school-specific rules or suggestions for volunteers: _____

Volunteer Guidelines

1. **Expertise:** Volunteers do NOT need to have an education background or degree. If you can read at a 6th-grade level, you can help a child read! Volunteers are there as facilitators—to support students as they practice their reading.
2. **Gifts:** Your gift of time is valuable. We ask that no monetary gifts or in-kind gifts be given.
3. **Confidentiality:** No volunteer should be permitted to access, review, disclose, or use confidential student information, or participate in conversations in which confidential student information is discussed. Volunteers are held to the same standards of Code of Conduct as district staff and must observe all Board of Education policies.
4. **Code of Conduct:** Volunteers should always be supervised by at least one district employee. Keep in mind, volunteers act as role models in appropriate dress, language, and behavior.
5. **Volunteer/Student Relationship:** For the protection of all, relationships between volunteers and students must be kept appropriate at all times. Continuing a relationship with students outside of school activities is not permitted. Volunteers should not give money, gifts, or medication of any kind to students.
6. **Appropriate touching** such as handshakes, high fives, an arm or hug around a shoulder are the only safe and friendly ways to touch a child. For some children, or for some cultures, even these gestures may be unwelcome. No child should be subject to unwelcome touching, no matter how well intended. If a child ever inappropriately touches you, please inform a staff member right away. Volunteers are role models for students. Conversations with students and staff should demonstrate respect for others and avoid language that may be perceived as discriminatory, profane, sexist, or offensive.
7. **Non-Discrimination:** No student or staff person should ever be treated differently, spoken to disrespectfully, or denied services on the basis of sex, race, religion, disability, age, creed, color, national origin, sexual orientation, or marital status. In addition, school personnel or volunteers cannot encourage or promote religious beliefs by class activities, comments, or invitations to their place of worship.
8. **Suspected Abuse or Neglect:** Reasonable suspicion of abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or illegal and/or dangerous activities should be immediately disclosed to staff.
9. **Photography:** Photographing students is prohibited at all times, unless it has been approved by Communications and/or Community Relations.
10. **Discipline:** Any discipline of a student should be left to a staff member. Never touch a child in anger or grab or chase students. Physical punishment is never permitted. If a child becomes unmanageable, find the nearest staff member.
11. **School Safety Plan:** In the event of an emergency (fire, tornado, etc.), volunteers should be familiar with the Safety Plan of the building and should follow the directions of the school Reading Buddies Coordinator and other staff.
12. **Prohibitions:** OKCPS administrators reserve the right to suspend the visitation privileges of any person(s) who may threaten the peaceful and orderly operation of the school system's environment.
13. **Liability:** The District cannot provide any type of health insurance to cover illness or accident incurred while serving as a volunteer, nor is the person eligible for workers' compensation. Community Partner Groups are required to provide certificate of insurance naming Oklahoma City Public Schools as an additional insured at the request of OKCPS Risk Management.
14. **Cultural Awareness:** We want to ensure we provide the highest level of compassion, care, and quality for our diverse student population while making them feel comfortable and welcomed. OKCPS recognizes that diversity embraces race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability.

READING BUDDIES SHOULD:

- Be a consistent volunteer. Students look forward to reading with their Reading Buddies and enjoy seeing them at the scheduled times. Anticipating this time has even increased some students' attendance rates.
- Keep communication lines open with the school Reading Buddies Coordinator. Express any concerns with the Reading Buddies Coordinator or the Community Relations team.
- Follow school protocol and rules.
- Keep information about the student confidential.
- Keep comments made in the presence of students positive (see tips).
- Always have volunteer identification visible.



READING BUDDIES SHOULD NOT:

- Be alone with a child or student in a closed room.
- Give medication, medical treatment, or medical advice to a student.
- Take a student off school grounds for any reason.
- Promote personal or religious beliefs to a student.
- Promote any political candidate or parties to a student.
- Solicit students or parents to a particular brand, product, or business.
- Lend students money.
- Provide any type of gift to student.
- Give personal contact information to a student or connect to a student on social media.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO WORK WITH STUDENTS

1. Be warm and friendly. Show an interest in what the student does and tells you. Listen well.
2. Keep your commitment to arrive consistently and on time. Students look forward to your visits. Keep promises and apologize if you make a mistake.
3. Encourage students to think. Give students plenty of time to answer questions or self-correct when reading. Silence often means the student is organizing his or her thoughts.
4. Admit when you don't know an answer. We can't know everything all the time! Feel free to ask the student or teacher for help when needed.
5. Encourage students. Use tact and positive comments. Look for something worthy of a compliment, especially when a student is having difficulty.
6. Let students "talk out" problems. If a student is upset, you don't need to solve the problem. By listening, you let the student know you care.
7. Look for teachable moments.
8. Maintain a sense of humor.

Social-Emotional Skills

"Social-emotional skills help students develop empathy, manage emotions, and solve problems. Social-emotional competence increases the likelihood of school success as students learn to self-regulate, improve upon relationships with peers and teachers, and decrease off task or self-defeating behaviors. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is one of the major themes addressed in OKCPS's EmbraceOKC mental health plan. EmbraceOKC is our tapestry and SEL is woven into all of our goals as a caring and committed district."

- Kenneth Elliott, Ph.D., LMFT, CCDVC, Director of Mental Health, Oklahoma City Public School District

Considering the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Our Students

Although the focus of our program involves reading and literacy, we cannot ignore the fact that students and families may have been impacted by COVID-19. As we work with students and develop relationships, we may be in a position to hear about some of the difficulties our students have faced during and after the pandemic. Here are some suggestions:

1. The best thing we can do is to maintain routines as closely as possible. Having a sense of "routine" communicates to the child that she/he is safe and life will go on.
2. Give children choices whenever possible. Oftentimes traumatic events equate loss of control, so you can help the child feel safe by providing them some choices (or control) when appropriate.
3. Give simple and age appropriate answers to COVID-19 questions. Do not initiate, but answer the question. Be a good listener and clarify misconceptions.
4. Prepare children ahead of time if you anticipate a change of routine, loud noises, or lights going off.
5. Contact the school counselor or other staff should you feel additional support in terms of a referral needs to be made.

Reading Buddies may learn additional ways to support children during the pandemic. Please go to the OKCPS main web page and click on COVID-19 Important Information and for social emotional support go to COVID-19 FAQs. This provides helpful links to the CDC and SAMHSA regarding emotional health.

READING TIPS AND POINTERS

Tips for building comprehension skills

The goal is to build background knowledge, vocabulary, and positive associations with reading. You also can work on building comprehension skills by asking questions as you read that check comprehension and encourage engagement with the material.

- **BEFORE** reading the book—Ask the student to predict what he/she thinks the story will be about based on the title and pictures and why.
- **DURING** reading the book—Interact with the book while reading. Encourage the student to predict, visualize, and connect to things he/she knows.
- **AFTER** reading the book—Have the student retell the story in his or her own words. Ask questions about what happened and what the student thought about what happened.

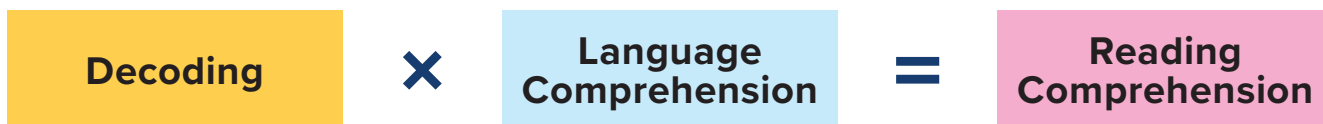
Do not underestimate the power of just being there to listen to and encourage. That alone can go a long way toward building skill, confidence, and a positive association with reading. Let me know if you would like more suggestions for how to help your student. Thank you for making this investment of your time!

A student with a positive self-image is	A student with a negative self-image is
Self-motivated	Lacking initiative
Eager to learn	Fearing failure
Cooperative	Demanding own way or not responsive
Unafraid of new experiences	Afraid of new experiences
Secure	Insecure
Successful	Expecting to fail in school
Decisive	Indecisive
Sure of self	Unsure of self
Confident	Reliant on others or safety of elaborate rituals/routines
Able to praise self and others	Putting down self and others or bragging excessively
Phrases to Encourage your Student	
You're so much fun to be around	That's fabulous
You get better at that every time I see you	There you go; that's it
I know you worked very hard on that	You're so helpful; thank you
I'm going to brag about this	The time I spend with you is really special
That's the best I've seen	You're going to make it
You're so thoughtful	I wish I could have done it that well
That is a tremendous improvement	You'll always be in my hall of fame
You're such a joy to work with	Thanks for working so hard

Reading Buddies

The following information is intended to support Reading Buddies by providing an overview of how students learn to read and what the Reading Buddy can do to help support students' positive attitudes toward reading.

Gough and Tunmer (1986) described our ultimate goals of reading comprehension as the product of decoding and language skills as seen in the formula below. It is essential to have both the ability to read words and the ability to understand language in order to comprehend text. As students become proficient in these areas, they develop fluent readers who use less brainpower for decoding and more for comprehension.



DECODING





Decoding is the *ability to use letter-sound knowledge to sound out an unknown word.*

Decoding includes:

- An understanding of **individual sounds** (phonemics awareness)
- The ability to link **sounds to letters and spelling patterns** (phonics)

When these skills work together, students can form a bank of words they recognize automatically. The **human brain looks for patterns**, so it is important for students to look for common spelling patterns and to identify sounds when reading unknown words. Research shows that approximately 70% of struggling readers have difficulty decoding words, which is even more prevalent with students who are English learners. This makes it vital to support students in the decoding process.

STEPS FOR READING NEW WORDS

-  Look at the word.
-  Find sounds, chunks or syllables that you know.
-  Blend sounds together.
-  Think about if the word makes sense.

About 50% of English words are spelled using a regular pattern; an additional 36% of words follow a pattern except for one sound. For example, in the word “said,” the “s” and “d” make the expected sounds but the “ai” says /ě/ which is unexpected. When reading with students, be sure to point out the sounds that are expected and then discuss the sounds that are unexpected.

FLUENCY

Students become fluent readers through extensive practice with reading and recognizing word patterns.

Fluency refers to accurate, expressive reading without conscious effort. Good fluency allows readers to focus on comprehension.

Here are ways to increase fluency:

- **Repeated reading.** Have students reread the book. When reading longer books, have students reread a particular passage or chapter .
- **Simultaneous oral reading.** Read the book or passage aloud together so you are reading with one voice.
- **Partner reading.** Take turns reading parts of the book. The reading tutor could make some intentional mistakes to allow the student to play the role of coach/mentor. This would increase confidence in reading and provide the student with an opportunity to see reading fluency from a different perspective.

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

Language Comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from spoken words when they are in sentences or text. Language comprehension requires having **background knowledge** and **vocabulary** as well as an understanding of how words are put together to make meaning. Struggling readers frequently opt for simple books, so they may not have experience with higher-level texts that provide vocabulary, background knowledge, and longer, more complex sentences.

For example, most students know the word “*plant*” but consider this sentence: “His father works at the *plant* down the way.” To support your reader, you may need to define “*plant*” in this context and provide background information on the function of a plant as a factory. Readers may also need support to understand the phrase “down the way” or who “*his*” refers to in the phrase “*his father*.”

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT READING COMPREHENSION

	TIPS	QUESTIONS TO ASK
Before reading	Help students establish a purpose for reading the book and activate background knowledge and experiences related to the book. Identify the genre (fiction, nonfiction, fairy tale, etc.) and preview pictures, chapter titles, headings, or other features in the book.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think this book is about?• What do you think will happen?• Why do you think the author wrote this story?• Does the book look like another book or movie that you know?• What kind of book is it? (fiction, nonfiction, biography, etc.)
During reading	Help students connect events or information in the book by asking questions and having the student summarize periodically. Define unknown vocabulary and support students in decoding unknown words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What has happened so far?• What do you think will happen next?• Where and when does the story take place?• Who is the main character? Who are the other characters?• What words can I help you understand?
After reading	Help students review the important events or ideas in the book. Have them retell or summarize main ideas and themes. Have students answer questions by giving evidence from the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What happened in the beginning, middle and end?• What did you learn from the book? Does it remind you of any other books you have read?• Could the events take place in today’s world?• What lesson(s) did you learn?• What part would you change if you were writing it?

REFERENCES

- LETRS, 3rd Edition (Moats and Tolman)
- Family Guides, OSDE
- Words Their Way Sixth Edition (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, Johnston)
- Reading Rockets
- Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guides
 - Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade
 - Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade

FAQ's

What if I would like to bring a gift or card to my student?

Your gift of time is valuable. We ask that no monetary gifts be given.

What if my student tells me something that concerns me?

Please notify the Reading Buddies Coordinator immediately.

What if my student doesn't want to try?

Encourage your student to do his/her best. There may be a reason for the lack of effort. If the situation persists, notify the Reading Buddies Coordinator.

How do I deal with an uncomfortable family matter or event in my student's life?

Your job as a Reading Buddy is not to solve every issue or situation for your student, but to be a support during difficult times. If you have a concern about a student, discuss it with the Reading Buddies Coordinator.

What if I want to know how my student is progressing?

You may ask the Reading Buddies Coordinator, keeping in mind that most information is confidential. Always remember your objective is to assist in improving the student's attitude toward reading more than anything else.

What if the directions for the lesson are unclear?

Ask for assistance. It is good modeling for students to see that their mentor needs to ask for help sometimes.

What if my student asks for my cell phone number or email address?

You are mentoring within a school-based program. This means that the time and communication you have with your student needs to stay within the school boundaries. Volunteers should not share personal contact information with students.

If I have concerns regarding my student, the program, or other issues what should I do?

You should first talk to your Community Partner Contact, who may then refer you to the school Reading Buddies Coordinator if needed.

Communication

It is vital to keep the lines of communication open. If you have a concern that is not addressed by the Community Partner Contact or the Reading Buddies Coordinator, feel free to contact the OKCPS Community Relations office.



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The Foundation for Oklahoma City Public Schools

Thank you for your participation.

The role you are playing is changing a child's life forever!