The Impact of Reading Aloud to Children
An Evaluation of the
Words Alive Read Aloud Program

October 2017

words a!ive

Presented by:

Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research

University of San Diego
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

words a!ive

About Words Alive

The mission of Words Alive is to open opportunities for life success by inspiring a commitment to reading.

University of San Diego
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

About the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research

The mission of the Caster Center is to provide research, evaluation and consulting services that build the leadership and strategic and evaluative-thinking capacity of local nonprofits, as well as to be the leading source of information, data and research on the local nonprofit sector.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> *"The program has been amazing. My students are so engaged during the read aloud and eager to ask questions that I often wonder if it is the same class. They love to hear our volunteer read to them."*
>
> *– Teacher*

Words Alive is a nonprofit organization focused on creating opportunities for life success by inspiring a commitment to reading. With numerous programs serving youth, teens, and families, Words Alive teaches the value of reading and the importance of strong literacy skills in opening doors of opportunity for both children and their parents.

One of the Words Alive literacy programs is called the Read Aloud Program (Read Aloud). Through Read Aloud, trained volunteer readers (hereafter referred to as volunteers) engage with students weekly in preschool through third grade classrooms to share the joy of reading. Read Aloud offers two different models to schools. In the large group model, volunteers visit classrooms for 30 minutes each week to conduct a large group read aloud session with 20-25 students. In the small group model, volunteers visit classrooms for 90 minutes each week to read to the large group, then facilitate discussions and activities related to the story with small rotating groups of 3-5 students. In both models, volunteers are provided with standards-based resources to guide their sessions.

In January 2016, Words Alive commissioned the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center) at the University of San Diego to evaluate the impact of Read Aloud on students from participating schools and the implementation of Read Aloud's small group model at Golden Hill Elementary School. Between October 2016 and July 2017 the Caster Center research team designed and administered teacher surveys, analyzed a student reading motivation assessment, conducted a focus group with volunteers, and collected and analyzed volunteers' weekly field notes. Overall, the findings indicate that Read Aloud had a positive impact on students. Key findings are highlighted below.

Teachers felt Read Aloud…

Impacted the development of students' <u>foundational literacy skills</u>.

96% of teachers reported Read Aloud impacted students' vocabulary development and knowledge of literary terms

Impacted students' <u>reading comprehension skills</u>.

88% of teachers reported Read Aloud impacted students' ability to infer the central message of a story

Increased students' <u>motivation and engagement in reading</u>.

95% of teachers reported Read Aloud increased students' interest in reading

89% of teachers reported Read Aloud increased students' confidence in reading aloud

The small group model added significant value to Read Aloud. Teachers and volunteers from the small group model reported numerous benefits such as allowing less vocal students to participate, reinforcing vocabulary, discussing the central message of the books, and making curricular connections between texts, students' lives, and the larger world. Additionally, teachers who had the small group model rated the impact of the program slightly higher than teachers who had the large group model.

> *"The connections [children] made from book to book was so incredible to me… especially with the nonfiction. They started really believing some of the messages because they saw them over and over. Being able to have that small group instruction time to talk about [the message of the book] was invaluable. I saw a real huge growth in that small group… you wouldn't have that opportunity in the large group."*
> *– Volunteer*

The quality of the volunteer was integral to the success of Read Aloud. The majority of volunteers were highly engaged and many of them spent time outside of class planning activities, researching authors, and sharing additional props, photos, and videos to help bring the books to life. However, teachers who were paired with volunteers who had less teaching experience expressed a desire for their assigned volunteer to more easily engage with students. Similarly, volunteers from the small group model indicated they would have benefited from more support in managing and planning the small groups.

95% *of teachers rated the volunteers very favorably*

Reading aloud to young children has been recognized as an essential practice to developing emerging literacy skills. Reading research has also identified specific strategies that adults can use when reading aloud to enhance its impact.[1] The combination of dedicated, trained volunteers, a careful selection of diverse literature, and the use of standards-based curriculum guides seem to be essential components to Read Aloud's success. This evaluation suggests that Words Alive has developed a read aloud model that expands children's opportunities for essential literacy-skill building and also instills a love of reading.

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[1] Lane, H., & Wright, T. (2007). Maximizing the effectiveness of reading aloud. *International Reading*

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Developing strong literacy skills at an early age is critical for the long-term academic success of students.[2] A 2011 study showed that students who do not read proficiently by the time they leave third grade are four times more likely to not receive a high school diploma.[3] Yet, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2015, only 36% of fourth graders nationwide were reading proficiently.[4]

Words Alive is a nonprofit organization focused on creating opportunities for life success by inspiring a commitment to reading. With numerous programs serving youth, teens and families, Words Alive teaches the value of reading and the importance of strong literacy skills in opening doors of opportunity for both children and their parents.

Words Alive focuses on three areas of influence with regard to literacy development:

One of the Words Alive literacy programs is called the Read Aloud Program (Read Aloud). Through Read Aloud, trained volunteer readers (hereafter referred to as volunteers) engage with students weekly in preschool through third grade classrooms to share the joy of reading. Reading aloud to young children offers an opportunity to create a love of literature and has been shown to have a positive impact in many areas of literacy development, such as vocabulary, comprehension, and word-recognition skills.[5]

In January 2016, Words Alive commissioned the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center) at the University of San Diego to conduct an evaluation of the impact of Read Aloud on participating students. This report summarizes the findings from data collected between October 2016 and July 2017.

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[2] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters. KIDS COUNT Special Report.* Baltimore, MD: Leila Fiester. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.

[3] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation.* Baltimore, MD: Donald J. Hernandez. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.

[4] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), *2015 Reading Assessment*.

[5] Lane, H., & Wright, T. (2007). Maximizing the effectiveness of reading aloud. *International Reading Association*, 668-675.

Description of Read Aloud

Read Aloud operates in child development centers, Head Start classrooms, and elementary schools across the San Diego area. With a focus on supporting children in high-need areas, Read Aloud serves approximately 4,300 students in preschool through third grade each week. Read Aloud has two models:

1. **Large Group Model**: Utilizing the Read Aloud curriculum and pre-selected books, trained volunteers visit their assigned classrooms for 30 minutes each week to conduct a large group read aloud session with 20-25 students.

2. **Small Group Model**: Volunteers visit classrooms weekly for 90 minutes to read the book to the whole class and then facilitate discussions and activities with small rotating groups of 3-5 students at a time. Building upon the benefits of the Read Aloud large group model, the small group model is intended to allow students a chance to build a deeper understanding of the story and allow the volunteer to focus more on students' developing literacy skills. Over the course of the 2016/17 academic year, this model was active in two elementary schools: Golden Hill Elementary and Monarch School.

In both models, volunteers are provided with standards-based resources to guide their session and help students focus on the critical skills needed for literacy development. Additionally, all classrooms participate in book giveaway events twice per year, in which each student receives a new book.

Evaluation Objectives

Based on a logic model developed collaboratively with staff from Words Alive and the Caster Center, data were collected to determine the impact of Read Aloud on students (See Appendix A for logic model).

The specific objectives of this study were to evaluate:

➜ The process and implementation of the Read Aloud small group model at Golden Hill Elementary

➜ The impact of Read Aloud on children's foundational literacy skill development

➜ The impact of Read Aloud on children's reading comprehension

➜ The impact of Read Aloud on children's reading motivation

➜ If the small group model added significant value to Read Aloud

METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report are based on a comprehensive synthesis of multiple data sources. The Caster Center administered a teacher survey across all participating Read Aloud schools and collected in-depth data at Golden Hill Elementary, one of the schools implementing the small group model.

Summary of Data Sources

Data Source	Participants	Description
Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)[6]	n=28 • 2 classrooms • All 3rd grade students	In October 2016 and again in July 2017, Words Alive staff administered the MRP to two classes of third graders participating in the Read Aloud small group model. Questions were read aloud to small groups of students to ensure comprehension of the items. Questions measured each student's perceived value for reading and self-concept as a reader.
Volunteer Field Notes	n=9 • 158 field notes • 7 classrooms • Grades K-3	From October 2016 through June 2017, volunteers participating in the Read Aloud small group model completed weekly field notes, submitted online. Field notes documented weekly activities and volunteers' observations about students' literacy skill development and engagement in the sessions.
Volunteer Focus Group	n=4	In July 2017, the Caster Center conducted a focus group with volunteers who participated in the Read Aloud small group model during the 2016/17 academic year. Volunteers were asked about the strengths and challenges of Read Aloud, the support they received from Words Alive, and the perceived impact of the program on students.
Teacher Survey	n=75 • 22 schools • 22% Preschool • 47% Grades K-1 • 31% Grades 2-3 • 84% had 2+ years experience with Read Aloud • 13% small group • 87% large group	In Spring 2017, Words Alive sent a survey to 122 teachers (61% response rate) participating in Read Aloud. The Caster Center designed the survey which inquired about teachers' perceptions of Read Aloud and its impact on students.

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[6] Malloy, J. A., Marinak, B. A., Gambrell, L. B., & Mazzoni, S. A. (2013). Assessing motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher, 67*(4), 273-282.

Methods of Analysis

The qualitative data (open-ended teacher survey responses, volunteer field notes and volunteer focus group) were analyzed using content analysis, a method for identifying the themes in responses.[7]

The quantitative data (MRP and teacher survey) analysis included the following:[8]

- Descriptive statistics to summarize the data (i.e., frequencies, percentages)

- Paired-sample t-tests to test for statistically significant differences between pre- and post-mean (i.e., average) MRP responses

- Independent sample t-tests to test for statistically significant differences between mean (i.e., average) teacher survey responses across grade levels and program model (small group vs. large group)

READ ALOUD PROGRAM IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Based on data collected from students, teachers, and Words Alive volunteers, Read Aloud supported children's foundational literacy skill development, reading comprehension, and motivation and engagement in reading.

Presentation of Findings

The sections that follow present data from teachers, volunteers, and students. Note that the following icons for teachers, volunteers, and students are used throughout the report to signify the data source.

Teachers: Teacher survey results are displayed in bar charts. The data are presented in aggregate (i.e., total) and by grade level or program model when there were statistically significant differences. Verbatim teacher quotes from open-ended survey responses are also included.

Volunteers: Field note excerpts from volunteers at Golden Hill Elementary are displayed in text boxes formatted to look like a notebook. The field note excerpts describe the types of activities volunteers engaged in with students and identify instances in which students demonstrated their skills and knowledge. The field notes were edited for readability, and children's names were removed to protect their identity. Verbatim quotes from the volunteer focus group are also included.

Students: Student MRP results are displayed in bar charts.

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[7] Qualitative data were analyzed using Dedoose qualitative software.

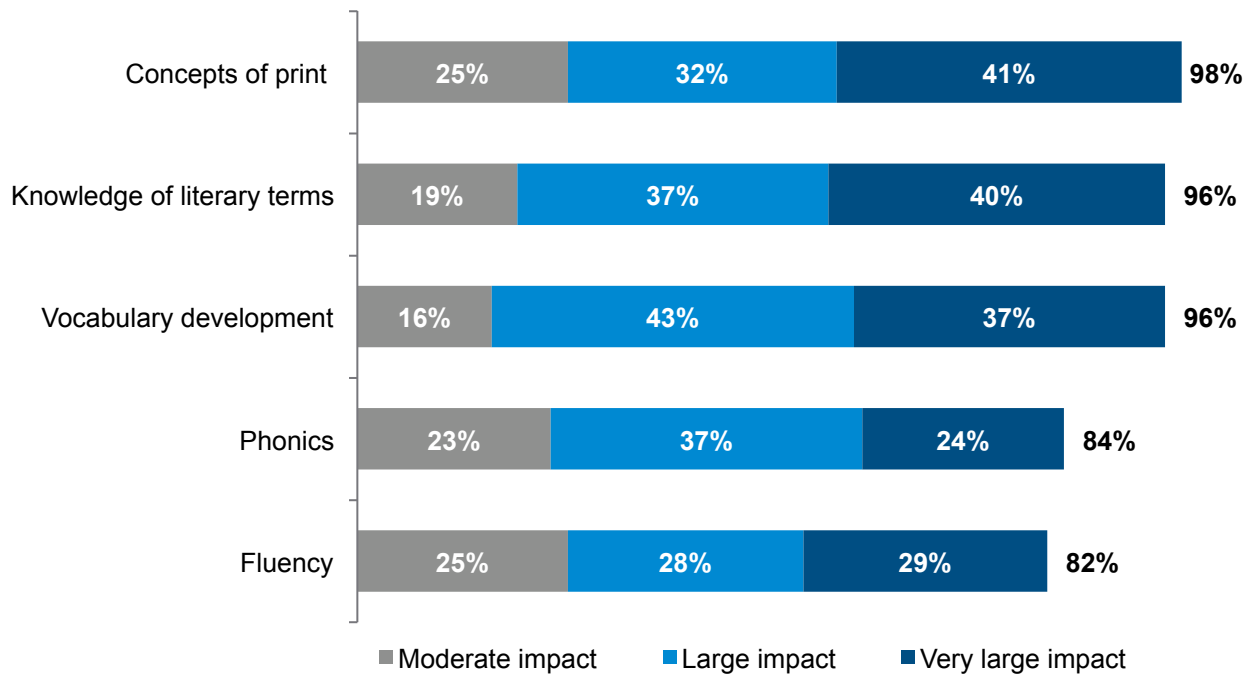[8] Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software.

Building Foundational Literacy Skills

For students to develop the ability to comprehend texts, they must have both the skills to decode letter and word sounds and sufficient background knowledge of common text structures, concepts of print, and vocabulary, to name a few.[9] According to teachers and volunteers, Read Aloud played a role in supporting children's foundational literacy skill development.

Figure 1 shows that nine out of ten teachers reported that Read Aloud had an impact on expanding students' knowledge of literary terms, vocabulary, and concepts of print. Eight out of ten teachers reported it had an impact on improving fluency and learning phonics.

Figure 1: Read Aloud's impact on students' foundational literacy skill development (n=75) *(Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact scale)*

Skill	Moderate impact	Large impact	Very large impact	Total
Concepts of print	25%	32%	41%	98%
Knowledge of literary terms	19%	37%	40%	96%
Vocabulary development	16%	43%	37%	96%
Phonics	23%	37%	24%	84%
Fluency	25%	28%	29%	82%

■ Moderate impact ■ Large impact ■ Very large impact

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[9] Dole, J. A., Duffy, G. G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, P. D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 61*, 239–264.

In order to examine possible differences across subgroups, a scale for foundational literacy skills was created by averaging the responses from the five items in Figure 1. As Figure 2 shows, average teacher ratings of Read Aloud's impact on foundational literacy skill development varied by the grade level they taught. Teachers who taught younger grade levels (Preschool-Grade 1) reported a greater impact on literacy skill development than teachers from older grade levels (Grades 2-3).

Figure 2: Teacher ratings of foundational literacy skills* by grade level (n=74)
*(Average ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact scale)*
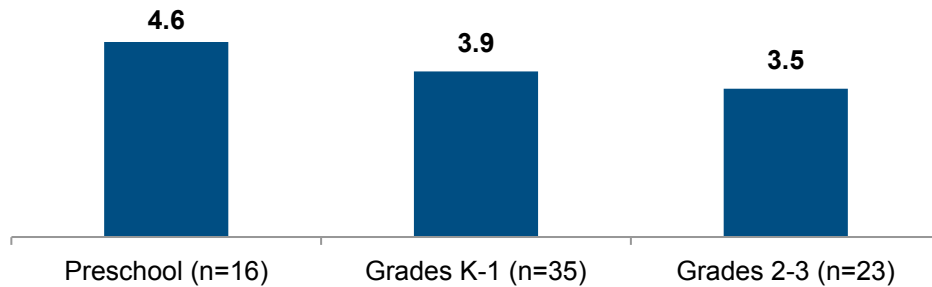
4.6	3.9	3.5
Preschool (n=16)	Grades K-1 (n=35)	Grades 2-3 (n=23)

*The differences between preschool and other grade combinations were statistically significant (p<.05)

Volunteers who led the small group model at Golden Hill Elementary also reported growth in students' foundational literacy skill development. The following excerpts come from volunteers' weekly field notes. They are grouped by theme, and subthemes are identified to the right of the excerpt. The primary themes that emerged were vocabulary reinforcement, knowledge of literary terms and devices, understanding concepts of print, and practicing phonics.
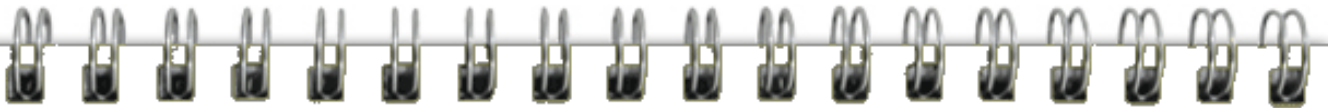
Evidence from the Classroom: Volunteer Field Notes

VOCABULARY

2nd Grade *Flight of the Honey Bee*	*"Prior to the session I emailed the teacher the vocabulary words (about 8) that we would be reviewing. She wrote them with definitions on an easel pad. As such, I was able to review the words and definitions with the students as I read the story. Thereafter, when we were in the group we referred to those vocabulary words again."*	Coordinated with classroom teachers to share vocabulary ahead of the session
2nd Grade *Grandfather's Journey*	*"We spent a lot of time on the vocabulary words. Each student had an opportunity to read a vocabulary word and a definition. I then would further explain with an example or additional information. We then worked on using these words in sentences. I had a list of 10 sentences and the children selected the correct word for each sentence."*	Led small group vocabulary-building activities such as crossword puzzles, matching games, etc.

LITERARY TERMS AND DEVICES

3rd Grade

Red Sings from Treetops

"The children mentioned things like alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyming, music, poem-like. Most of the kids had heard of personification but didn't know how to describe it. One boy defined it and another gave great examples of it."

Reviewed literary terms such as personification, alliteration, and rhyming

1st Grade

Drum Dream Girl

"[One student] said the 'words sounded like a poem' because they 'were smooth.'"

Kindergarten

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

"At the end of the book there was a song that the author had sung when he was little. [A student] was surprised about this and then said that maybe the book wasn't fiction if he really sang that song. I told them that fictional stories can often be based on things that really happen."

Introduced diverse text genres (e.g., poems, fiction, nonfiction, etc.) and their structures

DEMONSTRATED CONCEPTS OF PRINT

1st Grade

Rain School

"I held up the book open front to back and asked them what kind of cover it was. They were able to say it was a continuous cover and I introduced the title and the author/illustrator."

Showed students basic elements of a book such as front and back cover, title, author, illustrator

PHONICS

Kindergarten

No Sleep for the Sheep

"[Two students], who were in different groups, noticed that they could make the word "no" from "not" by covering the "t." [Another student] covered up the "ep" of "sheep" and said 'this says "she."' He did that after the girl in his group did it. And another girl looked at the word "Go" in those sentences and said, 'I've seen that word.' Then she ran up to the board at the front of the class and pointed to "go" on their sight word list. [A different student] went to the front and found "go" in a sentence on another part of the board."

Reviewed connections between letter sounds and words

Improving Reading Comprehension

Research suggests there are three levels of reading comprehension, each of which increases in complexity: 1) Literal=being able to understand what is stated in a text, 2) Inferential=being able to make inferences about the passages in the text in order to understand its central message, and 3) Evaluative=being able to use prior knowledge to connect the text to other texts, a reader's own lived experience, and the larger world.[10] Teachers and volunteers recognized Read Aloud's role in students' development of both basic (i.e., literal) and advanced (i.e., inferential and evaluative) reading comprehension skills.

As Figure 3 shows, approximately nine out of ten teachers reported that Read Aloud had an impact on developing students' basic reading comprehension skills.

Figure 3: Read Aloud's impact on basic reading comprehension (n=75)
(Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact scale)
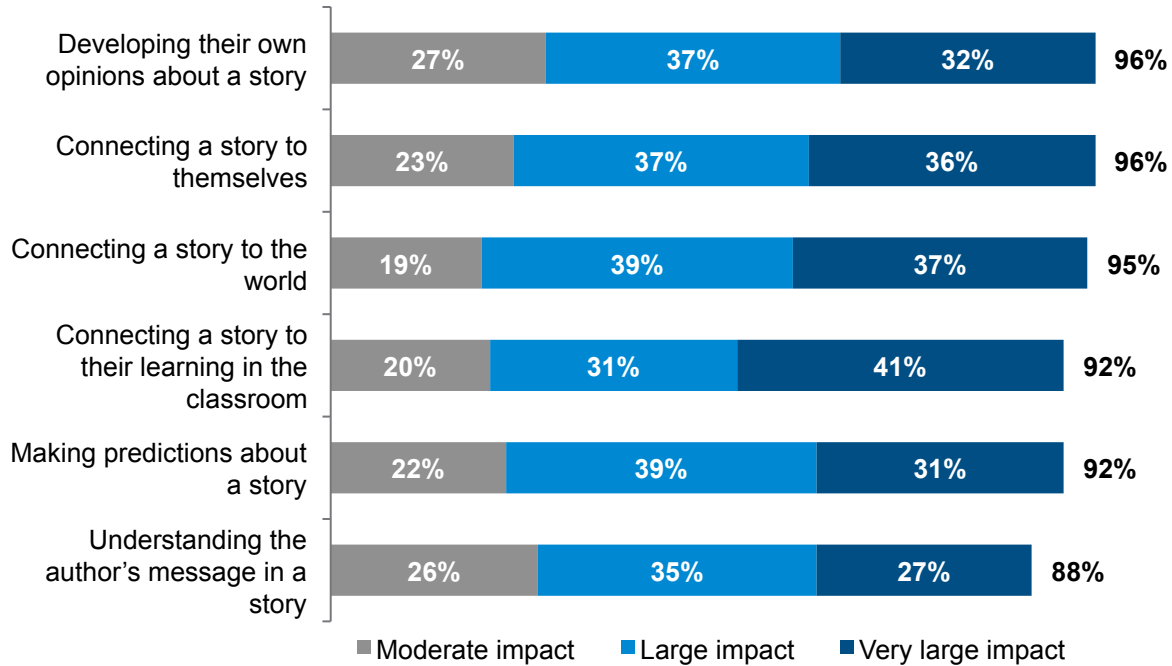

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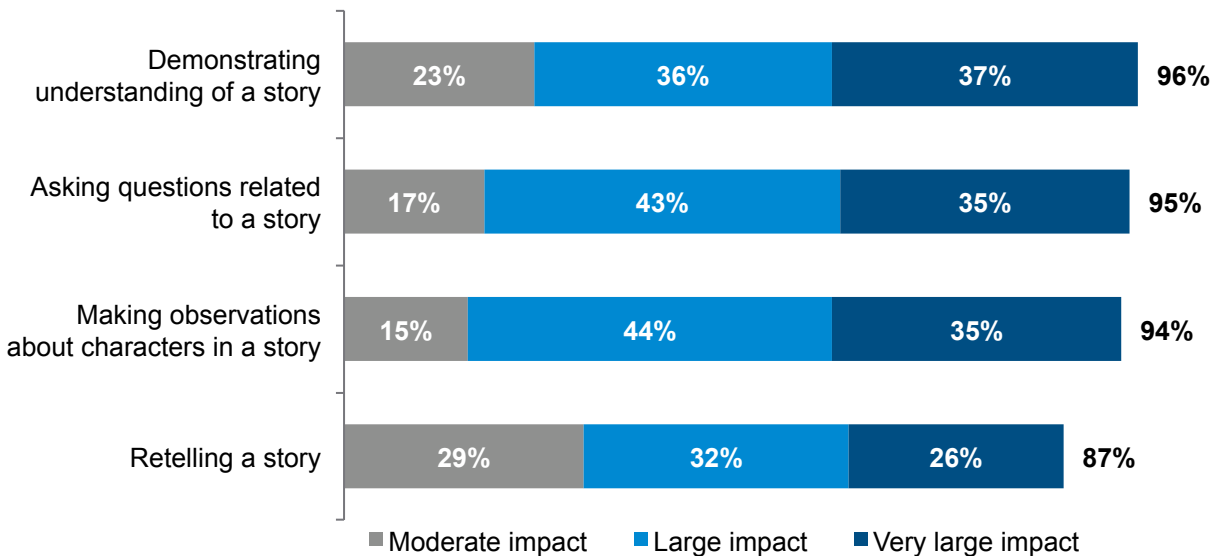
[10] *Basaraba, D.*, Yovanoff, P., Alonzo, J. & Tindal, G. (2013). Examining the structure of reading comprehension: Do literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension truly exist? *Reading and Writing, 26*(3), 349-379.

Teachers also perceived that Read Aloud had an impact on the development of students' advanced reading comprehension skills. As Figure 4 shows, roughly nine out of ten teachers reported Read Aloud had an impact on students developing their own opinions about a story, making curricular connections, making predictions about a story, and being able to decipher a story's central message.

Figure 4: Read Aloud's impact on advanced reading comprehension skills (n=75)
(Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact scale)

	Moderate impact	Large impact	Very large impact	Total
Developing their own opinions about a story	27%	37%	32%	96%
Connecting a story to themselves	23%	37%	36%	96%
Connecting a story to the world	19%	39%	37%	95%
Connecting a story to their learning in the classroom	20%	31%	41%	92%
Making predictions about a story	22%	39%	31%	92%
Understanding the author's message in a story	26%	35%	27%	88%

■ Moderate impact ■ Large impact ■ Very large impact

A scale for reading comprehension was created by averaging responses to the ten items in Figures 3 and 4. Teachers who taught younger grade levels rated the impact on reading comprehension higher than teachers who taught older grade levels (See Figure 5). The different ratings across grade levels for both foundational literacy skills and reading comprehension suggests Read Aloud may have had more of an impact on literacy development for younger children than it did for older children.

Figure 5: Teacher ratings of reading comprehension* by grade level (n=74)
(Average ratings on a 1=No impact to 5=Very large impact scale)
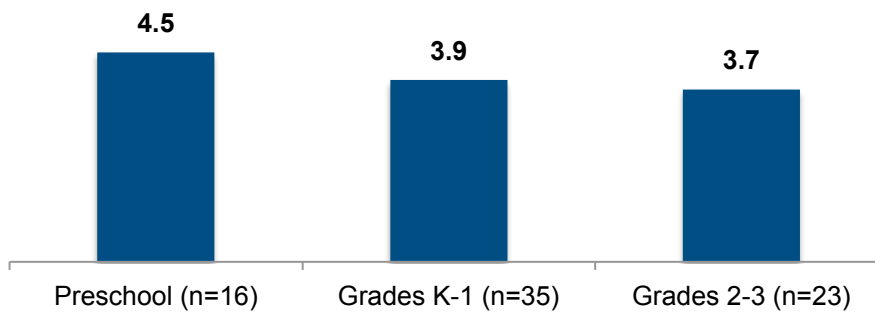
Preschool (n=16)	Grades K-1 (n=35)	Grades 2-3 (n=23)
4.5	3.9	3.7

* The differences between preschool and other grade combinations were statistically significant (p<.05)

Volunteers who participated in the small group model noted many instances of students' developing reading comprehension. In particular, they noted evidence of students demonstrating their understanding of a story and engaging in advanced practices such as critical thinking, making curricular connections, and inferring the central meaning of stories.

Evidence from the Classroom: Volunteer Field Notes

BASIC READING COMPREHENSION

2nd Grade *Rapunzel*	*"All of the children enjoyed interacting with the story and I asked them to verbally call out in unison when the evil character was present, as well as the happy ending. I noticed that every child participated and shared their ideas and didn't want to stop when I said it was time for small groups."*	Made observations about characters
Kindergarten *Vulture View*	*"Because I read the blurb on the book jacket, the kids knew from the beginning that vultures like to eat animals that are already dead. They remarked on it through the whole story. When the text asked the question "does the vulture want to eat that fox or that rabbit sitting over there?" the kids yelled out, "No!"*	Demonstrated understanding
Kindergarten *Time to Sleep*	*"We did a role-play activity where each student played an animal character and repeated the dialog from the story. We did it twice so that everyone had a chance to perform. [One student] embraced the role of the bear during the first performance. He sniffed the air and strode purposefully over to [his classmate who was playing] the snail to tell him winter was on its way. [One girl]…rushed to [her classmate] (who was the bear the second time around) and was delighted to wake her up and tell her to go back to sleep. Many of the kids needed prompting to remember their lines, but seemed to enjoy playing (or at least willingly played) their part."*	Retold a story

ADVANCED READING COMPREHENSION

2ⁿᵈ Grade

This is the Rope

"This fantastic book brought about many past experiences for the children and how objects can symbolize memories. During small group instruction, each child had the opportunity to find and share their favorite page in the book. Each child tried to discover which picture belonged to whom and retell the story from their point of view. We worked backwards during many of the questions so the children could truly understand how three generations were represented in the story at different times of their life. I was so impressed at how many children made the connection of this story to items they would pass down to their children one day!"

Demonstrated critical thinking

Kindergarten

Knuffle Bunny

"The illustrations really fascinated them. [One student] thought they were kind of like Eric Carle's because he had to cut the pictures of the people out and glue them on."

Connected texts to other texts

3ʳᵈ Grade

Of Thee I Sing

"I asked them to think about the examples in the book of the six defining adjectives: creative, smart, brave, strong, kind, inspiring. I asked the students to choose one and had them write to describe how it could reflect their life actions currently, and when they have grown. Secondly, we discussed who in the story had shown the same characteristic and the students had to remember which individual shared this same trait. This was a great way to do a second picture walk through the book for clarity."

Connected texts to themselves

1ˢᵗ Grade

The Gruffly

"[A student] said the message of the story was to believe in whatever you want. [Another student] said it was to think about a problem. [One of their classmates] said that if you are afraid you can think and help yourself. [Another student] said "Be brave, get over fears.""

Inferred the central message

Increasing Reading Motivation and Engagement

Decades of reading research suggests a strong association between reading motivation, reading achievement, and future academic success.[11] There are multiple dimensions involved in reading motivation: individuals must find value in reading and they must perceive themselves as having self-efficacy in reading.[12] Students, teachers, and volunteers provided evidence of Read Aloud's impact on students' reading motivation both in their value for reading and their self-concept as readers.

In order to capture possible changes in students' reading motivation after they participated in Read Aloud, Words Alive staff administered the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) to third grade students at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. The MRP is a 20-item survey that measures students' value for reading and their self-concept as readers. Students' overall motivation to read did not change significantly from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, but there was a statistically significant positive change for two items. After participating in Read Aloud, students felt less worried about what other children think of their reading (see Figure 6) and felt happier about being given a book as a present (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: MRP Pre/Post averages "I worry about what other kids think about my reading..." (n=28)* *(1=A lot, 2=Sometimes, 3=Almost never, 4=Never)*
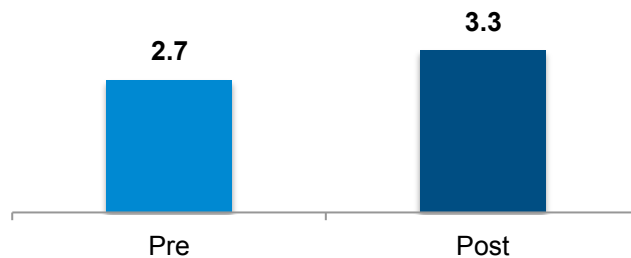
* Statistically significant difference (p<.05)

Figure 7: MRP Pre/Post averages "When someone gives me a book for a present..." (n=28)* *(1=I am very unhappy, 2=I am unhappy, 3=I am happy, 4=I am very happy)*
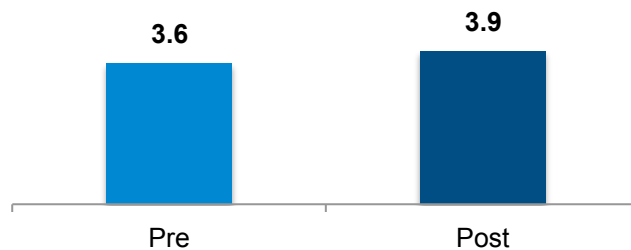
*Approaching statistically significant difference (p=.056)

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[11] Wigfield, A., Gladstone, J. R. and Turci, L. (2016). Beyond cognition: Reading motivation and reading comprehension. *Child Development Perspectives*,*10*, 190–195.
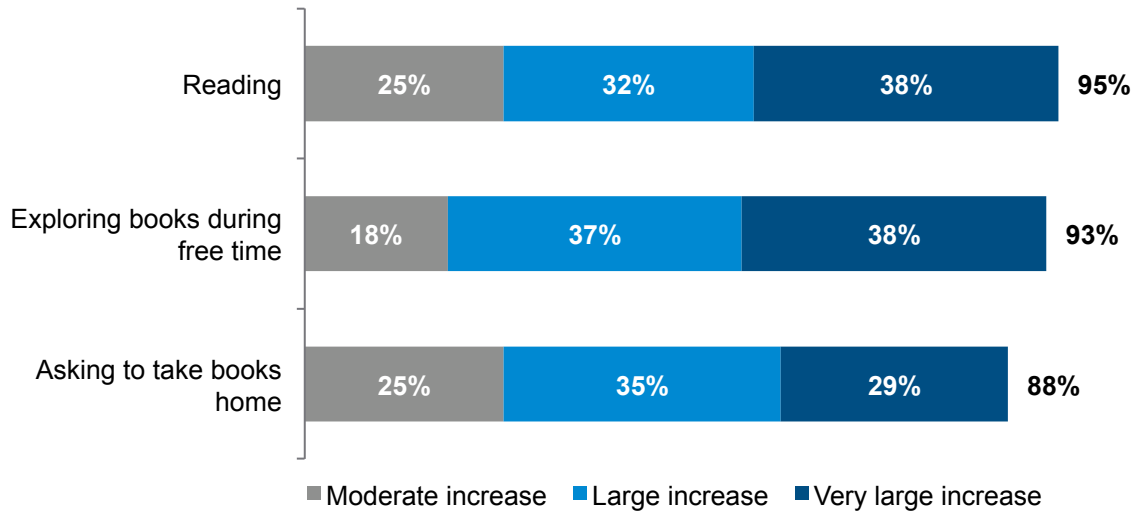
[12] Malloy, J. A., Marinak, B. A., Gambrell, L. B., & Mazzoni, S. A. (2013). Assessing motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher, 67*(4), 273-282.
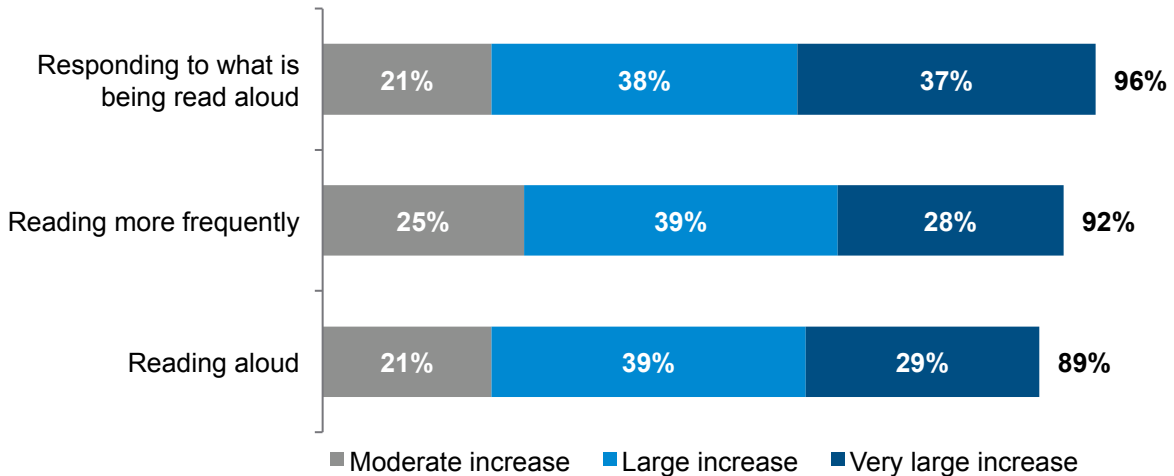
Teachers across all grade levels and program models rated Read Aloud's impact on students' reading motivation very favorably. Figures 8 and 9 show that roughly nine out of ten teachers felt that Read Aloud increased students' interest and confidence in reading activities.

93% *of teachers reported an increase in their students' attention span during read alouds*

Figure 8: Read Aloud's impact on increasing students' interest in reading (n=73)
(Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No increase to 5=Very large increase scale)

Category	Moderate increase	Large increase	Very large increase	Total
Reading	25%	32%	38%	95%
Exploring books during free time	18%	37%	38%	93%
Asking to take books home	25%	35%	29%	88%

■ Moderate increase ■ Large increase ■ Very large increase

Figure 9: Read Aloud's impact on increasing students' confidence in reading (n=73)
(Teachers who reported 3-5 ratings on a 1=No increase to 5=Very large increase scale)

Category	Moderate increase	Large increase	Very large increase	Total
Responding to what is being read aloud	21%	38%	37%	96%
Reading more frequently	25%	39%	28%	92%
Reading aloud	21%	39%	29%	89%

■ Moderate increase ■ Large increase ■ Very large increase

Volunteers also felt that student motivation and engagement in reading increased as a result of Read Aloud. Volunteers documented an increase in students' participation during the Read Aloud sessions as the year progressed and noted that students who were quiet or had special needs (i.e., English-language learner or Special Education designation) became more vocal and active participants over time.

Evidence from the Classroom: Volunteer Field Notes

CONFIDENCE AS A READER

Kindergarten

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

"[A boy in the class] wanted to show me that he could read and asked if he could read a page in the small group. I let him pick the page he wanted to read and he did a great job. [A girl in the class] said she would like to read too. She is a bit silly and read, "Blah, blah, blah!" She and I laughed and I told her that was not quite what was written! She then picked out the sight word "is" and said that. I told her that was great. [Three students] then looked through the book for more sight words they could find."

Demonstrated self-efficacy in reading

INTEREST IN READING

3rd Grade

Red Sings from Treetops

"I did ask a few questions during the story and kids raised their hands very politely to answer. I had told them to save all questions and comments until the end because the language in the book kind of flowed like a poem so it would be better to hear it uninterrupted. Lots of hands went up at the end of the story. Almost every child preceded their comment with, "when you were reading…" and went on to describe what they saw or heard."

Demonstrated engagement

2nd Grade

Fifty Cents and a Dream: Young Booker T. Washington

"During this week I chose a student who in the past had been a challenge to stay focused. She did great! Her reading was excellent and she was more attentive. I recognized her for this good performance in front of her peers and later told the teacher that she was a good reader. She heard me tell the teacher all this good stuff and smiled."

1st Grade

Mama Built a Little Nest

"I also once again have the student who is essentially nonverbal participate in the small group discussion in very productive ways. She was pantomiming her answers for example when I asked how the birds [build] the nest she pointed to her feet and pantomimed with her hand a beak."

Movement from passive to active participation

1st Grade

What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?

"One difference this week is that the little boy who is autistic actually participated during the group reading for most of the time. He sat on a chair in the back [and] answered questions, and listened for the direction of the book. During small group, he then came and participated by talking about the alligator which was his favorite animal…Another girl who usually wasn't very vocal, was the one to offer her opinion at the beginning of the story about the book being fiction or nonfiction. I'm remembering that this might be the first time she has voluntarily participated during the large group reading."

1st Grade

Stuck

"I noticed that [one student in particular] was attentive to the book and laughed at appropriate times. In the past when his speech teacher came to fetch him, he went willingly. Today, he tried to negotiate with her so he could hear the end of the book. I made sure I had time to finish the book with him when he returned to class."

2nd Grade

The Cloud Spinner

"During the small group instruction, I noticed that the shy children…took more risks at answering questions and paying better attention [than] the last month."
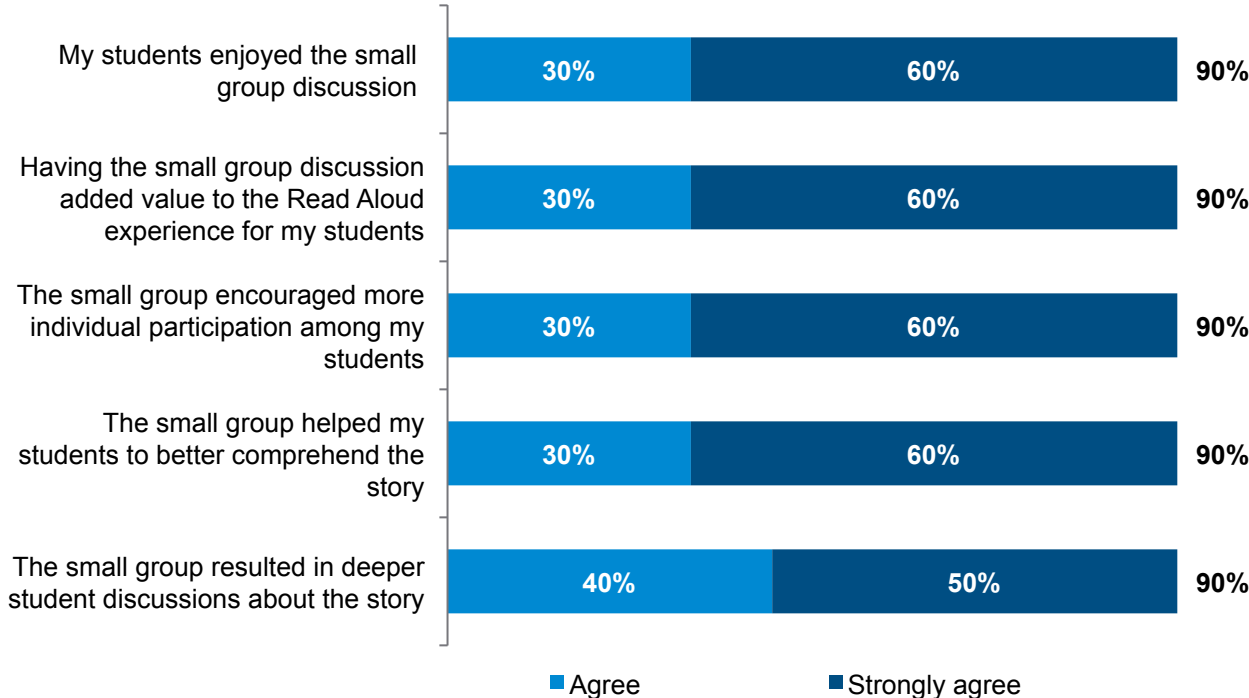
Movement from passive to active participation

Comparison of the Small Group and Large Group Model

One of the goals of this evaluation was to assess if the small group added value to Read Aloud. The small group model requires additional resources to implement, and Words Alive wanted to know if there was a notable difference in value for students. Teachers and volunteers provided evidence of the benefits of the small group model.

As Figure 10 shows, nine out of ten teachers whose classroom had the small group model agreed it encouraged more individual participation, helped students understand the story, and resulted in deeper discussions.

Figure 10: Perceptions of the small group model (n=10)*
(Teachers who reported 4-5 ratings on a 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree scale)

|	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
My students enjoyed the small group discussion	30%	60%	90%
Having the small group discussion added value to the Read Aloud experience for my students	30%	60%	90%
The small group encouraged more individual participation among my students	30%	60%	90%
The small group helped my students to better comprehend the story	30%	60%	90%
The small group resulted in deeper student discussions about the story	40%	50%	90%

■Agree ■Strongly agree

* Caution: Very small sample size

Teachers whose classroom included the small group model also rated the impact of the program slightly more favorably than teachers who had the large group model. As Figure 11 shows, small group model teachers had a higher average rating than teachers with the large group model on the following scales: foundational literacy skills, reading comprehension, and motivation to read (note: preschool is excluded).

Figure 11: Small group (n=10) vs. large group model (n=49)*
(Average teacher ratings on a 1=No impact/increase to 5=Very large impact/increase scale)
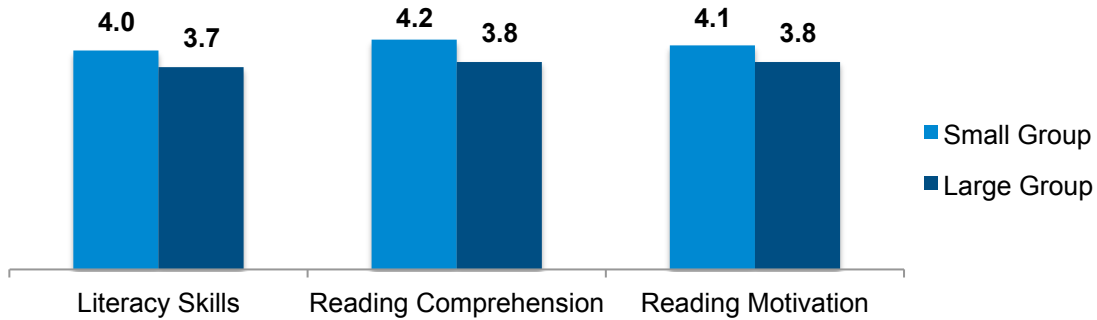
*Differences were not statistically significant

During the focus group, volunteers expressed their belief that the small group portion of the Read Aloud sessions added substantial value.

According to volunteers, the small group:

- Gave <u>all</u> children opportunities to participate

- Allowed for additional practice using new vocabulary and reading aloud

- Deepened students' listening and reading comprehension

- Allowed for more text-to-text and text-to-world connections through the additional resources that volunteers brought to the sessions

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VOLUNTEER RESPONSES TO QUESTION :
"WHAT, IF ANY, VALUE DO YOU FEEL THE SMALL GROUP ADDS?"

"The connections they made from book to book was so incredible to me… especially with the nonfiction. They started really believing some of the messages because they saw them over and over. Being able to have that small group instruction time to talk about [the message of the book] was invaluable. I saw a real huge growth in that small group… you wouldn't have that opportunity in the large group."

"I think [the small group] gives every child a chance to interact that in a large group they don't, they miss out, the little one, the quiet ones. I saw one [quiet child] who made such a leap. In the beginning he would just [repeat] but by the end he was telling me things."

"The dynamics of the group gave other children a chance to bounce back with their experiences…the most important activity was finding their favorite page and telling us why…they usually made a text-to-self experience and the other children really listened to that."
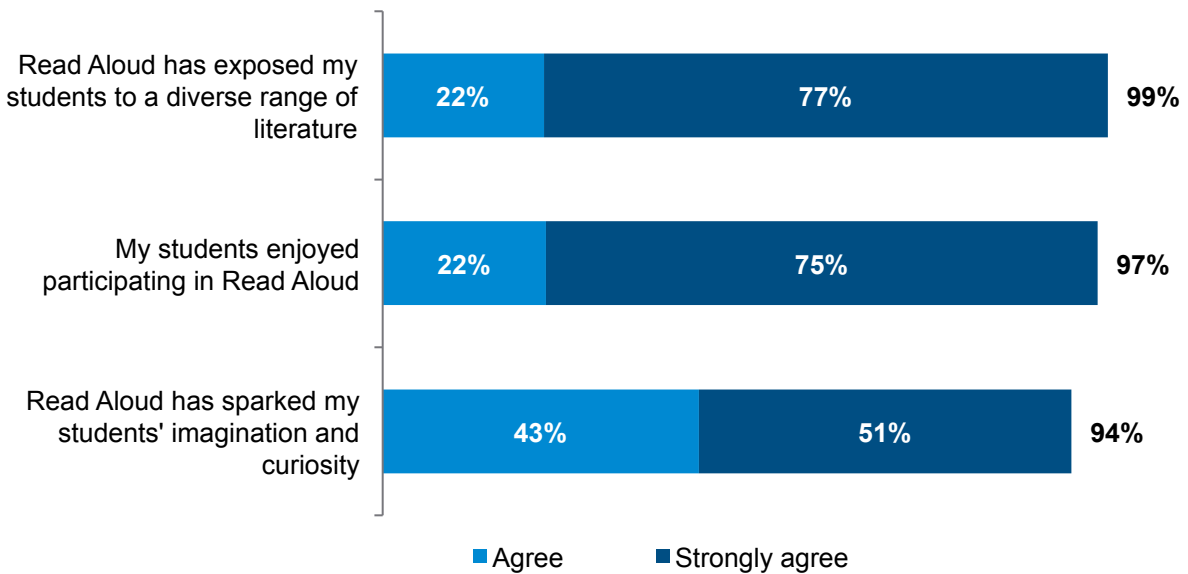
TEACHER AND VOLUNTEER SATISFACTION

The teacher survey and volunteer focus group asked respondents to report their satisfaction with Read Aloud. Overall, teachers and volunteers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the impact on students and the implementation of Read Aloud.

96% *of teachers reported they would like to have Read Aloud in their classroom next year AND would recommend the program to other schools*

Figure 12 shows that nearly all teachers believed the students enjoyed the program and that it exposed their students to diverse literature that sparked their imagination and curiosity.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with Read Aloud's positive impact on students (n=73)
(Teachers who reported 4-5 ratings on a 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree scale)

	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Read Aloud has exposed my students to a diverse range of literature	22%	77%	99%
My students enjoyed participating in Read Aloud	22%	75%	97%
Read Aloud has sparked my students' imagination and curiosity	43%	51%	94%

■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

Additionally, teachers participating in Read Aloud were positive about the implementation of the program. Figure 13 shows that nine out of ten teachers were very favorable about the training and preparation of volunteers, as well as the support they received from the Read Aloud staff.

Figure 13: Satisfaction with the volunteers and support from Read Aloud staff (n=74)
(Teachers reported 4-5 ratings on a 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree scale)

	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Our classroom volunteer was well-prepared each week	15%	81%	96%
Our classroom volunteer met my expectations	17%	78%	95%
Our classroom volunteer was well-trained	24%	70%	94%
I received adequate support from the Read Aloud Program staff	24%	68%	92%

■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
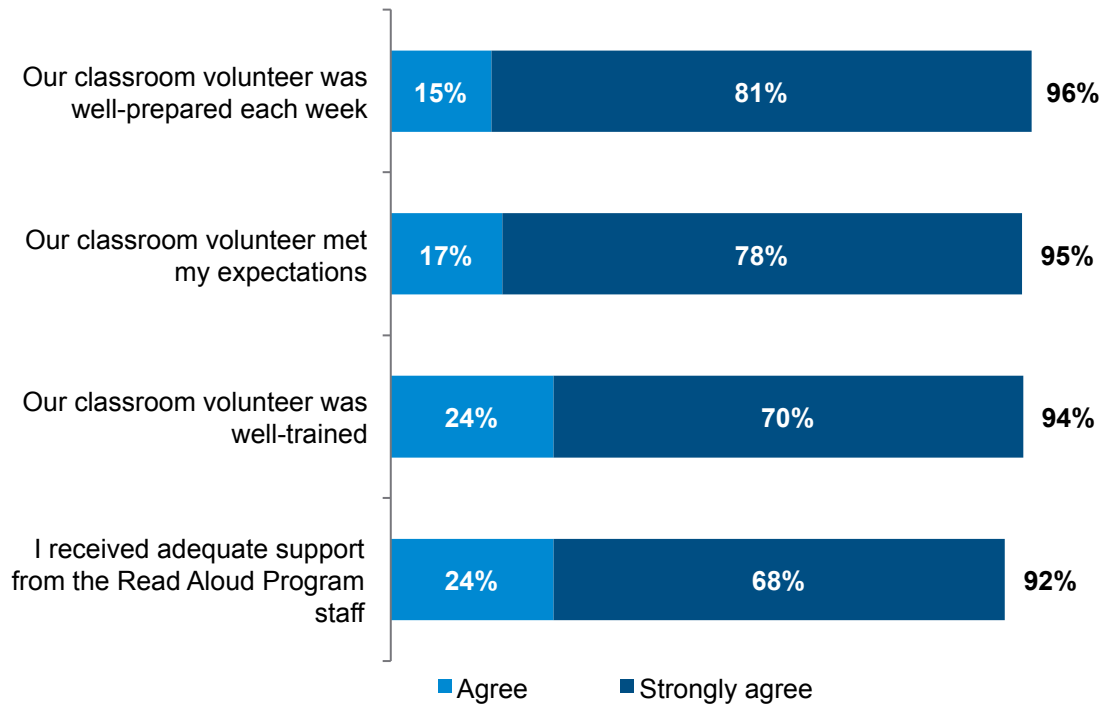
When asked what they would miss the most if their students no longer participated in Read Aloud, teachers' responses further illustrated their satisfaction in areas such as the value the volunteers brought to their classroom and students, the vast exposure to diverse literature the program provides, and the overall impact of Read Aloud in building a positive culture of reading among the students.

TEACHER RESPONSES TO QUESTION :
"WHAT WOULD YOU MISS THE MOST IF STUDENTS NO LONGER PARTIPCATED?"

Value of Volunteers

"We always look forward to seeing [our volunteer] and the special time we have with her."

"Having another adult involved in an educational setting that they get to know and depend on is fabulous for these students."

"The read alouds and the relationship the students developed with our [volunteer]."

"Our volunteer. She has been an amazing asset to our class. She has put in so many extra hours helping students."

Exposure to Diverse Literature

"The wide range of texts that are presented to the kids."

"The variety of books read each visit allows different genres and topics that extend beyond our units; the variety builds a love of reading of all types of literature and adds a richness to the literacy experience in our class."

"The children being exposed to a variety of books."

Positive Culture of Reading

"The opportunity to read a book just for enjoyment and not strictly academics."

"The enjoyment the kids get out of it!"

"I believe it is important to have different people share their love of reading with the kids. They have learned how important reading is this year."

During the teacher survey, teachers were asked to share one word or phrase that they felt best described their experience with the Read Aloud program. As seen below in Figure 14, the feedback to this question was also very positive. Note the size of the word represents how frequently the word was used.[13]

Figure 14: Teachers' descriptions of their experience with Read Aloud

Similarly, teachers were also asked to select one word or phrase they felt best described their students' experience with Read Aloud. Figure 15 shows teachers' positive perceptions of the student experience.[13]

Figure 15: Teachers' perceptions of the student experience with Read Aloud

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[13] Some phrases were grouped into themes and represented as such in the word cloud.

During the focus group, volunteers also expressed satisfaction with Read Aloud in areas such as the program's impact on students and the experience of volunteering. It is noteworthy that volunteers spent a considerable amount of time preparing for their sessions by researching topics and authors, planning activities, and bringing in relevant props. This speaks to their strong commitment to the program.

VOLUNTEER QUOTES

Impact on Students

"I think [the benefits of Read Aloud are] an appreciation for reading, for language… At the book giveaway you saw the little kids just craving and eating those books up… What we're doing, hopefully, is touching those kids and showing an appreciation for reading and showing the value of literature."

"The connections they made from book to book was so incredible to me... especially with the nonfiction. They started really believing some of the messages, because they saw them over and over.

Volunteer Experience

"[Volunteering for Read Aloud] totally changed my point of view of teaching…this program made me feel like I made much more of a difference in that ninety minutes than I could have all day as a teacher."

IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

Both teachers and volunteers were asked to give feedback on Read Aloud and offer recommendations for improving the program. The two themes that emerged across both groups were more opportunities for teachers and volunteers to collaborate, and more support for volunteers on how to best engage with children.

Teacher Feedback

Teachers were asked to give suggestions for improvement. Out of 75 respondents, 43 (57%) either did not respond or wrote they did not have recommendations for improving the program. The remaining 32 (43%) respondents suggested improvements to the following:

- **Revise book selection**: More age-appropriate, less non-fiction, curriculum-aligned, standards-aligned.

- **Ensure curriculum accounts for short attention span of young children**: Recognize shorter attention spans of young children, particularly at beginning of the year by using shorter simpler books and reading only one book per session.

- **Increase consistency in volunteer quality**: Some volunteers could have benefitted from being more interactive and engaging with children.

- **Highlight volunteers' life experiences**: Encourage volunteers to share more about themselves and their life experiences with students.

- **Set clear goals and expectations for children's behavior**: Volunteers need to express clear expectations for how children should behave during Read Aloud.

- **Encourage more collaboration between teachers and volunteers**: Volunteers and Words Alive staff could team up with teachers to plan activities.

Volunteer Feedback

During the focus group, volunteers were also asked for suggestions on how to improve the program. Note that the focus group only included volunteers participating in the small group model at Golden Hill Elementary, and as such many of the recommendations are specific to this site. The following list summarizes the volunteers' recommendations:

- **Offer more training and support in classroom management**: Classroom management was difficult even for those with prior teaching experience, particularly during the small group model. Volunteers suggested the following:

  o Volunteers meet with teachers before their sessions begin to learn the classroom management practices already in place in the classroom.

  o Pair new volunteers with veteran volunteers so they can work together to plan activities and share tips. Two volunteers reported they worked together during the year and found their collaboration very valuable.

  o Allow new volunteers to observe veteran volunteers.

  o Ensure that all volunteers attend Words Alive training sessions.

- **Consider if volunteers should attend when there is a substitute teacher**: Volunteers found it very difficult to hold their sessions when there was a substitute teacher.

- **Ensure teachers formally introduce volunteers to the class**: A few volunteers reported they were not introduced to the students when they first came to the class.

- **Prepare school administrative staff for volunteers' weekly visits:** Volunteers had to negotiate entry to the class each week and shared that there was no system in place for them to get access to the room key.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study was the reliance on teachers' and volunteers' self-reported perceptions to assess Read Aloud's impact on students. Adding observations of the small group and large group model in multiple schools could enrich the findings. Gathering feedback from students could also add a valuable perspective.

The MRP also presented a number of limitations. First, on the Pre-MRP students rated their value for reading (Mean=3.5) and their self-efficacy (Mean=3.2) in reading fairly high, which meant there was little room for growth on a 1-4 scale. Second, many of the third grade children had participated in Read Aloud the previous year; therefore, the Pre-MRP was not truly an assessment of their motivation to read prior to beginning the program. Third, students were very young and it is possible they did not understand the items or have the stamina to complete the survey.

In the upcoming year, Words Alive plans to administer the MRP to fourth and fifth grade students who will participate for the first time in an after-school version of Read Aloud (one group will have the large group model and one group will have the small group model). Read Aloud participants will also be compared to a group of students who will not participate in Read Aloud. This research design will potentially strengthen the findings on Read Aloud's impact on student reading motivation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this evaluation highlight the ways in which Read Aloud impacted students' emerging literacy skills and value for reading. Reading aloud to young children has been shown to be one of the single most important activities for fostering early literacy development. The rich descriptions of volunteers' activities with students coupled with teachers' enthusiasm for the program demonstrate Read Aloud's success in developing a model that expands children's opportunities for essential literacy skill-building and instills a love of reading. The key takeaways along with recommendations from this evaluation are listed below:

- **The small group model added significant value to the experience for students, teachers, and volunteers.** The small group increased participation from students who did not feel as comfortable being vocal in a large group setting, and provided opportunities for critical thinking, vocabulary support, and deeper connections to the text.

   o **Recommendation:** Consider the possibility of expanding the small group model into more schools.

- **There were grade level differences in teachers' perceptions of the impact**. Although teachers rated all components of Read Aloud very favorably, teachers who taught younger grade levels felt the program had a greater impact on literacy skill development and reading comprehension than teachers in the older grade levels. However, these grade level differences did not exist in teachers' perceptions of the impact on students' motivation to read.

   o **Recommendation:** Apply the findings on grade level differences to customize the curriculum for the younger and older grades. Consider consulting with second and third grade teachers about what strategies and practices they recommend incorporating into the curriculum to further develop students' more advanced reading comprehension skills.

- **The quality of the volunteers was a key component**. The majority of volunteers were highly engaged and many of them spent time outside of class planning activities, researching authors, and sharing additional props, photos, and videos to bring the books to life. However, teachers who had volunteers with less teaching experience expressed frustration with the volunteers' limited classroom management skills and ability to engage students in the books.

   o **Recommendation:** Capitalize on the expertise of veteran volunteers and develop a mentorship model where veteran volunteers work with new volunteers (ideally in the same grade level and school) to develop classroom management strategies and plan engaging supplemental activities.

Mission: Open opportunities for life success by inspiring a commitment to reading

Inputs	Participants	Activities	Evaluation Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
Staff • Executive Director • Senior Program Manager • Read Aloud Program Manager • Associate Program Manager Board Partners Students Parents School staff • Teachers • Administrators Volunteers • Readers • Co-chairs Materials • Books • Resource guides	Students Volunteers Teachers	Large group reading Small group discussion and activities Trainings for volunteers and teachers Check-in meetings for volunteers and teachers	Teacher Survey (PreK-3rd) MRP (Motivation to Read Profile) Pre/Post Grade 3 Volunteer field notes Interviews/ Focus Groups • Teachers • Volunteers Words Alive Document Analysis	Number of student participants Number of teachers Number of classrooms Number of schools Number of volunteers Hours of student exposure to reading	Support the development of following: • **Foundational literacy skills** (e.g., vocabulary development, concepts of print, knowledge of literary terms, fluency, phonics) • **Reading comprehension** (e.g., prediction, curricular connections, understanding the central message, critical thinking) • **Reading motivation** (e.g., interest and self-concept)