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# Lesson in tutoring

## Teens help kids boost reading skills

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DAILY NEWS WRITER

**KAHLIL RASHIM**, a bouncy, chatty second-grader at Public School 89 in the Bronx, bent over the open book and sounded out words with his tutor, who guided him whenever he got stuck.

"Some of the words are just a little bit hard," Kahlil said. "The tutors help us with the words we don't know. It's fun. When you're done with the reading, they let you color."

Kahlil is one of more than 700 elementary school kids struggling with reading who are getting one-on-one help from teen tutors through the nonprofit Reading Excellence and Discovery Foundation (READ).

The program targets the most at-risk kindergarten-through-second-grade students at 19 public and parochial schools citywide, 12 of them in the Bronx.

"Children really need to be reading successfully by the third grade in order to be successful in grade three and beyond," said Anne Adler, president of READ.

Poor reading skills compound learning problems as students move to higher grades, she said. "They get further and further behind," she said. "They just can't catch up."

READ was founded in 2000 by Al Sikes, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission from 1989 to 1993.

Focusing on grades K through two also prepares students for their first standardized tests in the third grade — a goal that took on new urgency last year when Mayor Bloomberg put in place test-score requirements for promotion to the fourth grade.

One in four students at the Mace Ave. school is not reading at grade level, said PS 89 assistant principal, Veronica Goka.

Though it is a Title I school that receives federal funding for supplemental education programs, Goka said it does not have the staffing or funding for the personalized tutoring READ provides.

"The one-on-one is the key here," she said. "It's the highlight of the program."

The 30 students in the program at PS 89 meet with their tutors for one-hour sessions three days a week for about 20 weeks. In that time, students improve one full grade level on average, according to READ.

Goka said she hopes the program will expand at the school. "I have parents coming to me and saying, 'Why didn't we get help?'" Goka said. "We could use another 30 tutors."

The teen tutors participating in the program receive five to seven hours of training, as well as supervision and guidance while they tutor. Most of the tutors come from parochial high schools, where community service is required for graduation.

"When I first came, some of the kids didn't know how to pronounce most of the letters. Now they can put whole words together," said John Meade, 15, a sophomore at Cardinal Spellman High School.

That makes his time and the extra subway ride after school well worth it.

"I love seeing them progress," he said.



MARIELA LOMBARD

Bronx first-grader Michelle Tran, 6, gets extra one-on-one reading help at PS 89 on Mace Ave. from tutor Marilyn Ramirez, who attends St. Pius HS in the Bronx.