

An Examination of Early Literacy and Community Engagement with Raising a Reader

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Every child deserves an equal access to educational opportunities.

Growing up in a rural community as a first-generation, low-income (FGLI) student sparked my interest in educational equity and in expanding opportunities for students who live in underserved communities. From an early age, my mother reminded me that education and books could take me places and open doors that might otherwise remain closed.

My experiences at Duke have made me increasingly aware of the privilege and responsibility that come with having access to educational opportunities that are not equally available to everyone. I decided to do DukeEngage Boston, which is focused on education equity. I worked with a nonprofit called Raising a Reader that addresses the literacy gap in Boston.

What My Internship with RAR-MA Looked Like

Sponsorship Kits

- Created thank notes that target each donor with gratitude
- Printed flyers about what RAR-MA does to promote the mission of the organization

Donor Outreach

- Encouraged sales of raffle tickets at book club events
- Conducted phone calls to increase donor engagement and participation



How Does RAR-MA Approach The Literacy Gap in Boston

- Uses a train-the-trainer model
- Works with schools, childcare center, and other organizations to help families build consistent reading routines

Blue Library Bags with Tag

Each child receives their own Blue Library Bag, encouraging ongoing trips to a local library after exiting or aging out of the program. Each Bag includes a blue tag with loop to attach to the bag.

Classic Red Book Bag Program

Helps families create and maintain shared reading routines essential for early learning success. Children take home bright red bags filled with high-quality, award-winning, books to read with caring adults in their life.

Home Library Programs

Support families to build a lasting connection to books and reading. We provide children with curated books they can keep to build home libraries, and resources to help families establish joyful reading routines and promote early literacy in the home.

Indicator	Performance Metric	Benchmark
1. # of times child asks per week	Child Interest	5 times
2. # of times sharing books per week	Reading Dosage	3 times
3. # of minutes sharing per week	Reading Dosage	60 minutes
4. # shared reading behaviors ^a last session	Reading Quality	4 behaviors
5. Has a reading routine	Reading Quality	Yes
6. # of library visits last month	Access	1 visit
7. # of books at home	Access	More than 10
Composite Benchmark		
# of benchmarks met	Family Reading Behaviors	5 or more benchmarks ^b

^a Shared reading behaviors include: parent lets child choose what to read, child pays attention, parent asks child questions about story, child turns pages of book, child asks questions about book, child reads or tells story about pictures, child asks to read book again, parents used different voices for different characters, parent and child talked about new words.

^b Meeting at least 5 benchmarks is considered “high” on the Composite Family Reading Benchmark; meeting 3-4 benchmarks is considered “medium”; meeting fewer than 3 benchmarks is considered “low.”



My Learnings and Growth

- The environment of working in a nonprofit is very team-based and collaborative
- Without meeting the funding goal, it’s hard for a nonprofit to sustain itself
- Causes in education inequity has been shaped by history and it takes more than a day to address the gaps
- RAR-MA emphasizes a lot on dialogic learning to help build reading routines between families and children

