

Inspiring Confidence



Ms. Skrbec brings the joy of learning to her classroom.

Ms. Skrbec, a first grade teacher and Reading In Motion Peer Coach at McKinley Park Charter School on Chicago's west side, has created a learning space that feels like home to her students. It's with genuine excitement that her students engage in the centers, activities, and lessons Ms. Skrbec creates for them. Her effort has paid off too—this year, the majority of Ms. Skrbec's students are already reading at or above grade level! When asked what inspires her as a teacher, she says, "I am motivated when I see a child go from 'I don't get it' to 'this is easy!' with a ginormous smile." Ms. Skrbec's love for teaching is palpable. As we discuss her experience before and after implementing the Reading In Motion program in her classroom, she shares how the program has changed her entire approach to teaching: "After bringing RIM into the classroom, I realized how many crucial components were not only being poorly

taught on my end, but how easy they were to teach with the help of RIM! The program provides a teacher-friendly approach that helps students develop the most fundamental foundations to reading."

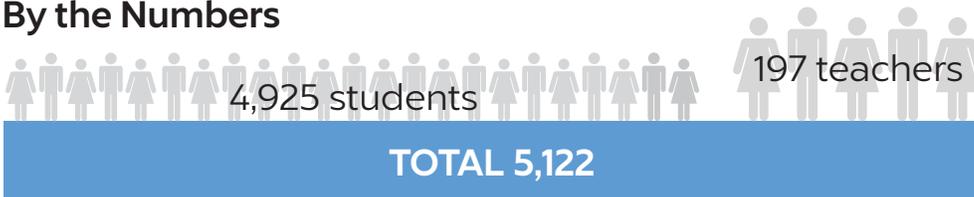
Ms. Skrbec uses a unique tool to help her students track and understand their own progress. Each student is given a simple bar graph that shows where they started and where they are now. "After tracking themselves over several weeks, my students began to feel a great sense of accomplishment as they'd see their bar graph growing higher and higher," she reports. "I was able to first-handedly witness illiterate students grow into tremendously confident and fluent readers." Ms. Skrbec says that Reading In Motion has transformed her most anxious and resistant readers into enthusiastic ones: "I now have a classroom of students who enjoy reading because they can—and that is all thanks to Reading In Motion. Your program has transformed my life and my students' lives forever and I am eternally grateful." She goes on to encourage other educators to try out the program, too. "I could tell you all day how it's helped me in my personal journey, but I strongly believe that your story will be just as powerful. Do it now. Thank me later!"

How Arts-Based Learning Changes Everything for Teachers and Students

Little Jackson is a veteran in the field of arts-based education and this year we are celebrating his 30th year as a Reading In Motion Coach. Not only does he bring decades of experience to the schools we serve, but he brings a passion that arises from a lifetime of helping others find their truth and discover their talents. Prior to joining Reading In Motion, Little helped struggling youth rap about their lives as a way to process their emotions and experiences. Together, Little and the students turned these rap sessions into plays. Little brought this experience to Reading In Motion's (then called Whirlwind) All-Stars Program in 1989 to teach Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students to express themselves through music, dance, and drama. Nowadays, his work focuses on helping teachers and students develop and recognize their own abilities through arts-based learning in the classroom. We asked Little a few questions about his work and his perspective on learning.

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By the Numbers





Coach Little Jackson helps students become familiar with letter shapes and sounds.

What's your favorite part of your job?

Getting the chance to have quiet coaching time with teachers. During that time, I'm able to pour out my heart and mind to teachers, sharing with them how to educate and engage a student in understanding that learning is absolutely fun. Children learn by having fun and exploring. You could turn that around too -- children have fun by exploring through learning. I model what I've talked about to teachers and they see that I'm able to get the kids to do things they've been trying to get done.

Can you share a memorable moment you've had with a teacher?

During a Reading In Motion Summer Institute [where teachers are trained to implement the program], a teacher once asked why we were putting all this time into summer training. It was just one more new thing on her list of administrative tasks. She was really against having this new thing in the classroom. Later, a few weeks after the school year started, I went to visit her and she said to me: "This works! I'm telling everyone about this!" Now, years later, she is a real spokesperson for the program. Reading In Motion was at her school for years because every year she said, "If we lose Reading In Motion, I may have to leave this school."

What can parents with struggling readers do to help?

Purchase a box of letter cards and sight word cards [high frequency words, like *the*, that can't be sounded out] and spend 10-15 minutes every day, five days a week, just going through letter names and sounds. More than 15 minutes is too much, so just 15 minutes a day. That would help the child and their teacher a great deal if a parent did this.

Do you have a book you'd recommend for K-first grade readers?

I just read and absolutely loved *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch.

Turning Struggling Readers into Enthusiastic Spellers

Ms. Fletcher is a first grade teacher at Dunne Technology Academy on Chicago's south side. As a former student at some of Chicago's best public schools, Ms. Fletcher says she wants her students to have as much fun learning as she did. If first grader Layla's* experience is any indication, we'd say Ms. Fletcher is achieving her goal. "Layla began the year with very low reading scores. Because she was a struggling reader, she didn't read at home and was completely uninterested in books." Ms. Fletcher goes on to say that "because of Reading In Motion's support in our classroom, Layla's enthusiasm and desire to learn have improved drastically and she's making huge strides in closing the reading skill gap between her and her higher scoring peers." It takes a dedicated and caring teacher to help cultivate a love of learning in struggling students. With the Reading In Motion program, Ms. Fletcher was able to provide Layla the unique support she needed as a challenged reader, showing her the progress she was making and giving her the attention she needed to develop confidence.



Big smiles from Ms. Fletcher's classroom!

Ms. Fletcher reports that Layla now "loves coming to small group reading instruction and is extremely proud of her own progress." After the class read *Oh, the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss, Ms. Fletcher asked the students to write down a place they would like to go. Layla wrote that she wanted to be in a dance "copitishun" — her attempt at spelling competition. Ms. Fletcher says, "I was so proud of her use of all the sounds she heard in the word and the effort she put forth in spelling that word. She has shown tremendous growth, not just in her ability, but in her desire and effort." This experience and her new attitude toward reading and writing will take Layla a long way in her academic career and beyond. Thank you, Ms. Fletcher!

**Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the student.*

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