

# 30 Million Words— Update on the Book Bash Pilot Project

## A few of the books that have been read with the kids:

- *One Word from Sophia* by Jim Averbeck
- *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña
- *If I Ran for President* by Catherine Stier

By age 4, Kindergarten children of affluence have heard over **45 million** words, while children born into poverty have heard only **13 million**.\* This is a **32 million word deficit**, a 32 million word socio-economic gap that limits children and learning behaviors before Kindergarten even starts due to circumstances out of their control. This gap, however, is not permanent, and these deficits can be made up.

We have all read to children at one time or another in our lives. Remember that moment when they started reading along with you, recognizing certain words? When they wanted to turn the page themselves? Or remember when they decided they wanted to read the book to you? These shared experiences are incredibly fundamental to a child's perception of reading as an enjoyable activity. Studies have shown



Engaging in conversation about  
"If I Ran for President."

that just one positive experience related to reading has the potential to create a life-long impact on a child's perception about and interest in reading.\*\*

Many parents have added stressors in their lives that limit the time they have available to spend reading with their children. These parents worry each day about keeping their children warm, fed, and healthy, and so often, reading has to take a back burner. Many times, parents themselves struggle with reading and are not able to read with their children.

This was the community issue the Junior League of Minneapolis (JLM) had in mind when the newest pilot project was created. Branded initially as the JLM Book Bash, the pilot has been in the developmental phase for 3 years, and numerous iterations and refinements have been put into place throughout that development. The Community Development committee has seen their own name change, has tested the format with various community partners, has refined the event style and has created strategic book selection guidelines.

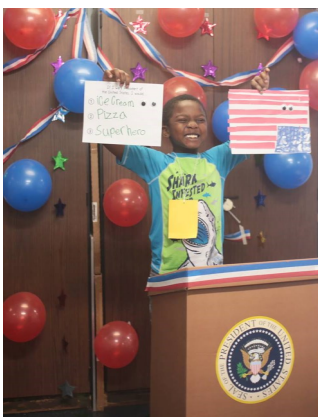


### A fun event focused on "Harvey Potter's Balloon Farm."

The model of the project is purposefully simple, so as to be able to duplicate month after month, and at multiple venues. This allows for consistency for the children and volunteers. Events occur monthly with current community partner, People Serving People. People Serving People is a shelter in downtown Minneapolis that accommodates entire displaced families, allowing families to stay together and support one another during a difficult time. Working with People Serving People allows the JLM to have direct interaction with children outside of school hours.

Events take place on Saturdays, and are comprised of a 2 hour and 45 minute shift for volunteers, and an hour and a half party for the children. All children living at People Serving People in grades K-6 are invited and are paired up on a one-to-one basis with a volunteer. Volunteers spend the first portion of the event reading the book with the children and then migrating from craft station to craft station, completing activities together that promote thoughtful comprehension of the story that was read.

The books themselves are the star of each event. The books are carefully selected by the Community Development committee; they are age appropriate and culturally relevant. The children can see themselves in the illustrations of the book, and most exciting of all, the children are able to take their very own copies of the book with them when they leave the party. A study in differences in access to books showed that kids in the lowest-income families have on average **0.4 books per home**, while kids in middle income families have on average **199 books per home**. The presence of



Campaign speeches inspired by Catherine Stier's story.

books in the home has a greater influence on a child's level of education than does the parents income, nationality, or level of education.\*\*

The Community Development committee is proud of the books they have selected, and their culturally relevant stories that reflect the demographics of children served. Diverse books are a rarity within the children's publishing industry. **Of all the children's picture books with human main characters, fewer than 7% of the stories feature a non-Caucasian protagonist.** There is something incredibly special about being able to "see" oneself in the illustrations of a story. It opens up imaginations and allows children to go on adventures through the pages of the book. Because diverse books are so hard to find, committee members feel honored to help curate books for the students that reflect themselves.

The success of the Book Bash pilot project would be impossible without the generous members who have donated books, and the amazing volunteers who spend their Saturday afternoons once a month with the children of People Serving People. All books used so far have been donated, and the committee has had enough books for each child at every party. Going forward, books will be included in the budget for the committee, so the committee will no longer be asking for donations. Thank you to everyone who donated books and volunteered their time.

The project has been extremely popular with JLM members. Sign-up rates and no-show rates for Book Bash shifts are more favorable than Community Pillar averages. Book Bash shifts ran at a **100% sign-up rate** and a **4% no-show rate** YTD through Jan. 2017. Post-shift surveys are

overwhelmingly positive – more than 90% of all attendees feel that the Book Bash events are a strong fit with JLM's achievement gap focus, enjoy the shift, and would recommend the shift to others! As one volunteer stated, "It was great connecting one-on-one with the children. You could see the impact you were making."

The Community Development committee has recommended that the Book Bash pilot be moved to its own standalone committee, under the new name "30 Million Words." A motion to make 30 Million Words its own committee passed at the February Board of Directors meeting, and will be voted upon by the general membership at the March 14th meeting.

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**Students and JLM volunteers reading stories**

\**Meaningful Differences*, Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley

\*\*Jim Trelease, Stephen Krashen

\*\*\* *Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations*