

MEMORANDUM

August 13, 2013

TO: Board Members

FROM: Terry B. Grier, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: **HOUSTON REAL MEN READ RESEARCH BRIEF, 2012–2013**

CONTACT: Carla Stevens, (713) 556-6700

Houston Real Men Read, chaired by Texas District XIII Senator Rodney Ellis and spearheaded by Houston Independent School District (HISD) IV Board Trustee Paula M. Harris, is a mentoring program in which men from the Houston community committed one hour of their time, once a month, to read to second, fifth, and seventh-grade students. The reading dates were November 15 and December 20, 2012, as well as January 17, February 21, and May 16, 2013. This program reinforced three fundamental principles: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success.

An estimated 318 mentors were assigned to 47 participating elementary and middle schools. This brief was designed to summarize the results from the Houston Real Men Read mentor and student surveys. Responses indicated that overall mentors and students enjoyed participating in the program. The responses of mentors and students also indicated that the book selection could be improved. Program personnel may want to consider the types of books that students indicated they liked reading the most in the book selection process for the upcoming school year

Administrative Response: The HISD Library Services Department will continue to facilitate recruitment of MENTors, select participating schools, and manage materials for the Houston Real Men Read program. In an effort to better serve the MENTors involved in the program, Library Services will organize an informational session in October for all MENTors. This session will provide an opportunity for MENTors to meet volunteers from other campuses and network to share ideas for implementing the HRMR program. Additionally, book selections will be updated to reflect the reading preferences of the students surveyed to the extent possible since book selection is limited to titles offered by Scholastic. The HISD Library Services Department will also work with Strategic Partnerships to garner local support to ensure that as many HISD students as possible can participate in this important reading initiative.

Should you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me or Carla Stevens in the Department of Research and Accountability, at 713-556-6700.



TBG

TBG/CS:dm

cc: Superintendent's Direct Reports
Chief School Officers
School Support Officers

Nancy Gregory
Carol Bedard
Elizabeth Philippi



EVALUATION BRIEF

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Volume 7, Issue 2, August 2013

Houston Real Men Read: What was the experience of mentors and students during the fifth year of the Real Men Read program, 2013?

By Deborah L. Muñiz

Houston Real Men Read, chaired by Texas District XIII Senator Rodney Ellis and spearheaded by Houston Independent School District (HISD) IV Board Trustee Paula M. Harris, is a mentoring program in which men from the Houston community committed one hour of their time, once a month, to read to second, fifth, and seventh-grade students. The reading dates were November 15 and December 20, 2012, as well as January 17, February 21, and May 16, 2013. This program reinforced three fundamental principles: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success. An estimated 318 mentors were assigned to 47 participating schools. This brief was designed to summarize the results from the Houston Real Men Read mentor and student surveys. Responses indicated that overall mentors and students enjoyed participating in the program. The responses of mentors and students also indicated that the book selection could be improved. Program personnel may want to consider the types of books that students indicated they liked reading the most in the book selection process for the upcoming school year.

Data and Methods

This was the fifth year of the Houston Real Men Read program. During the 2012–2013 school year, an estimated 318 mentors participated in the program at 47 schools. This was an increase from the estimated 300 mentors who participated in the program by reading to students at 44 schools during the 2011–2012 school year. At the start of the program in 2008–2009, there were 168 mentors at 30 schools who participated.

Campus representatives were asked to submit the names of their mentors along with their email addresses to HISD's Library Services. About 180 emails for mentors were collected. Mentors were asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. A total of 90 mentors completed the survey during May of 2013. This accounted for a 50 percent response rate of those who received the survey and a 28 percent response rate for the mentor population. The majority of the mentor respondents (66 percent) were assigned second grade, followed by 47 percent who were assigned fifth grade, and three percent were assigned seventh grade (percentages do not

total 100 due to mentors who were assigned multiple grade levels).

Students were also asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey about their experience in the Real Men Read program. There was an estimated 9,309 students who participated in the program. A total of 3,418 students representing 41 schools completed the survey during March of 2013. This accounted for a 37 percent response rate. Almost half of the student respondents (49 percent) were in second grade, followed by 35 percent who were in fifth grade, and 16 percent in seventh grade. Percentages were based on the total number of responses. The survey also included open-ended questions. A coding scheme was developed for each of the open-ended questions. Responses were then coded according to emergent categories.

How did mentors hear about the Houston Real Men Read program?

Houston Real Men Read mentors were asked to indicate how they heard about the program. **Figure 1** displays the percent of mentors that heard

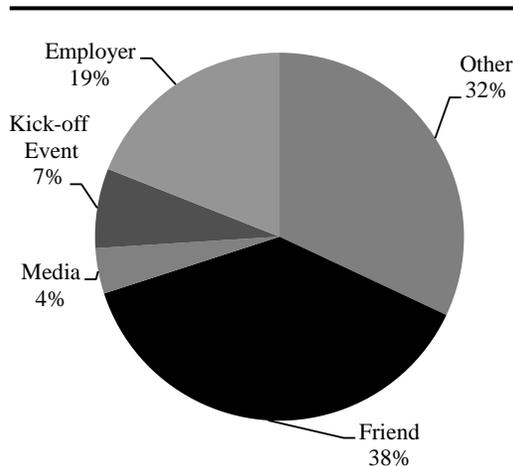


Figure 1. How mentors first heard about the Houston Real Men Read program.

about the program via a friend, employer, kick-off event, or media. The largest percent of mentors (38 percent) heard about the program through a friend, while 19 percent of mentors heard about the program through their employer. Also, seven percent of mentors heard about the program through the kick-off event, and four percent via the media. The category “other” included responses, such as school staff and relative (32 percent).

How did mentors rate the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program?

Mentors were asked a series of questions about the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program. **Table 1** displays a comparison of mentor response rates from 2009–2013. In 2013, the majority of mentors rated the following components as “excellent:” welcome by school (79 percent), classroom experience (73 percent),

communication from campus representative (69 percent), and lesson guides (52 percent). The program components with the highest percent of mentors rating it as “needs improvement” or “okay” were communication from central administration (36 percent) and book selection (26 percent). Overall, throughout the five years of the program, the overwhelming majority of mentors have rated all of the program components as “very good” or “excellent.”

What improvements can be made to the Houston Real Men Read program?

Mentors suggested improvements that can be made to the Houston Real Men Read program. There were a total of 22 comments that were grouped into three categories. The category with the most comments was “improve book selection” (11 comments). **Table 3** provides a list of the book selections for the 2012–2013 school year. Some specific responses regarding “improve book selection” were as follows:

- After the initial books on dinosaurs, there were two books on discrimination (repetitive). Also, the last book...was not engaging at all with the students. They need books they can be excited about owning and would want to read with their parents.
- I do not believe that the choice of books was appropriate. I had expected to be reading mostly fiction with great story-lines and well developed characters that would really engage the children. Instead, I was put in a rather awkward and unprepared position of dealing with issues such as white-colored segregation/Jim Crow issues and stories that I don't consider to inspirational in driving a child's interest and passion for reading...

Table 1. Mentor Survey Response Rates on Components of the Houston Real Men Read Program, 2009–2013

Components	Needs Improvement					Okay					Very Good					Excellent				
	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13
Application Process	7	7	0	0	2	30	17	20	16	16	32	49	39	52	42	31	27	42	32	40
Orientation	8	7	6	0	5	26	26	17	21	15	36	40	36	40	44	30	27	41	40	36
Book Selection	7	8	5	6	12	16	26	15	16	16	32	31	39	33	29	45	35	41	46	44
Timeliness of Book Distribution	14	3	3	4	5	21	21	15	14	14	29	37	27	31	35	36	40	55	50	47
Lesson Guides	3	7	2	3	2	17	25	15	13	16	33	36	33	46	30	46	33	50	38	52
Communication from Campus Representative	7	3	0	3	0	10	12	8	7	7	28	16	20	24	24	55	70	73	66	69
Communication from Central Administration	4	5	5	12	9	26	23	27	35	26	32	38	24	26	34	38	34	44	26	31
Welcome by School	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	3	1	5	19	21	18	26	16	77	74	79	73	79
Classroom Experience	1	3	0	0	1	3	5	2	0	2	18	18	20	20	24	78	74	79	80	73

Note: “Bold” indicates the highest rating for that component by year.

Table 3. HISD Real Men Read Book Selections for the 2012–2013 School Year by Grade

<u>Month</u>	<u>Second Grade</u>	<u>Fifth Grade</u>	<u>Seventh Grade</u>
November	<i>Scholastic True and False: Reptiles</i>	<i>Spiders</i>	<i>Face to Face with Sharks</i>
December	<i>The Three Little Javelinas</i>	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	<i>Seedfolks</i>
January	<i>My Brother Martin</i>	<i>March On! The Day My Brother Changed the World</i>	<i>Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown, and Me, A Memoir</i>
February	<i>My Name is Yoon</i>	<i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i>	<i>The Jumping Tree</i>
May	<i>Carlos and the Squash Plant</i>	<i>Becoming Naomi León</i>	<i>Esperanza Rising</i>

- Some of the content was not age appropriate.

About four of the mentor's comments were categorized as "timeliness of book distribution." As one of the mentors explained, "I was only given about 5 minutes to prepare for the first reading session as I had not seen the book before I walked in the door at the school." Lastly, there were six comments regarding a "lack of communication from central office." One of the comments was, "I was not made aware of any orientation and did not get a chance to meet other RMR mentors throughout the year. I did not receive any type of communication from Central Administration..." Another mentor commented that "Communication from Central Administration not really necessary."

How did the mentors describe their experience with the Houston Real Men Read program?

Mentors had an opportunity to describe their experience in the Houston Real Men Read program. There were a total of 84 comments that were all categorized as a "positive experience" with the exception of one comment. Some of the responses included:

- The Real Men Read program is an amazing opportunity to become involved in today's young generation and being a positive role model. I very much looked forward to my monthly sessions with my class and got to know them individually and saw a great amount of progress from the beginning to end of year. It was great to see students interested in following along with the reading and being motivated to read other books.
- Very positive...I enjoyed reading to the kids and leading insightful, probing discussions that provoked deep thought, connections with the characters and storylines, and applications to the student' daily lives.
- Excellent, it really makes a difference when the students know you are visiting regularly and it was great that they would look forward to it.

Mentors were also asked "Do you plan on volunteering as a mentor for the Real Men Read program next school year?" Approximately, 75 percent indicated "yes," 24 percent "maybe," and one percent "no." **Figure 2** shows the number of years that surveyed mentors have volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program. Most of the mentors indicated that this was their first time to volunteer in the program (48 percent). About 22 percent have volunteered for two years; 13 percent for three years, and 17 percent have volunteered four to five years. Most of the mentors (98 percent) stated that they would recommend others to participate in the Houston Real Men Read program, while two percent indicated "maybe." Lastly, mentors were asked, "Has your participation in the Real Men Read program encouraged you to increase your involvement in other volunteer opportunities at your current campus or another campus?" Sixty-four percent stated "yes," 23 percent "maybe," and 14 percent "no."

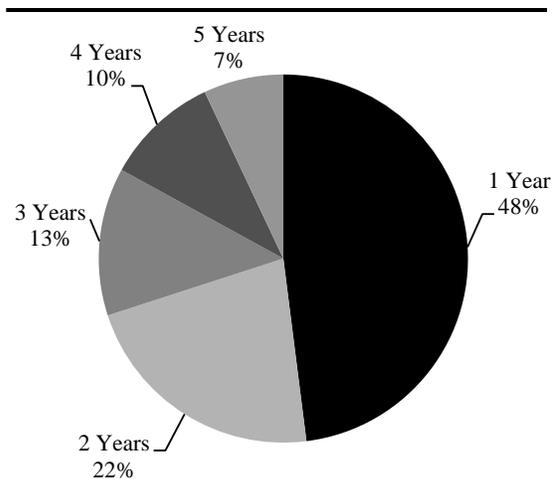


Figure 2. Number of years mentors have volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program.

What did students think about the books?

Students were asked, “What do you think about the books?” **Table 4** presents the response rates to this question by grade level. About 74 percent of second grade students indicated “I like all the books.” In contrast, the percent of fifth grade students who indicated “I like all the books” was 48 percent and for seventh grade students it was 27 percent. The percent of students who indicated “I like some of the books” ranged from 24 percent in second grade to 66 percent in seventh grade.

Figure 3 shows the response rates of students by grade level to the question, “Have you shared the books with your family and friends?” The majority of students indicated that they shared their book with their family and friends. Specifically, 81 percent of second grade students, followed by 72 percent of fifth grade students, and 48 percent of seventh grade students have shared their books.

Students had an opportunity to indicate the three types of books they enjoy reading the most. Second grade students enjoy reading picture books (49 percent), books about animals (47 percent), and fairy tales (36 percent) the most. Fifth grade students reported that their favorite type of books were mysteries (54 percent), comics (50 percent), and books about animals (42 percent). Seventh grade students enjoy reading mysteries (62 percent), fantasy (50 percent), and comic books (49 percent).

What did students think about the Houston Real Men Read Program?

Students were asked, “What do you enjoy about the mentor’s visit?” Students could check more than one of the following selections: “being read to,” “asking questions,” “doing activities,” and

Table 4. Response Rates to the Question “What do you think about the books?”

Responses	2nd		5th		7th	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I like all the books.	1,173	73.8	548	47.7	136	26.5
I like some of the books.	386	24.3	563	49.0	340	66.3
I do not like any of the books.	30	1.9	38	3.3	37	7.2

“keeping the books.” More than half of the students selected “being read to” (53 percent), followed by “doing activities,” (46 percent), and “keeping the books” (45 percent). About 33 percent of students also selected “asking questions.” In addition, students could provide a comment about what they enjoy about the mentor’s visit. A seventh grader responded:

I really liked the way he read because it was the perfect tone of voice. He kept us interacting with the book because he asked us questions about what is happening in the book. He was also knowledgeable about the subject. Overall he was a great mentor.

A fifth grader commented, “every time the mentor comes there is a new book and a new adventure starts in the book.” Another fifth grade student stated, “Having people come to the classroom and doing something they don’t have to.”

Lastly, students were asked, “How do you feel about participating in the Houston Real Men Read program?” **Figure 4** shows the response rates of students by grade level. Second grade students had the highest percent of students who indicated they “love it” or “like it” (88 percent) compared to 78 percent of fifth grade students and 60 percent of

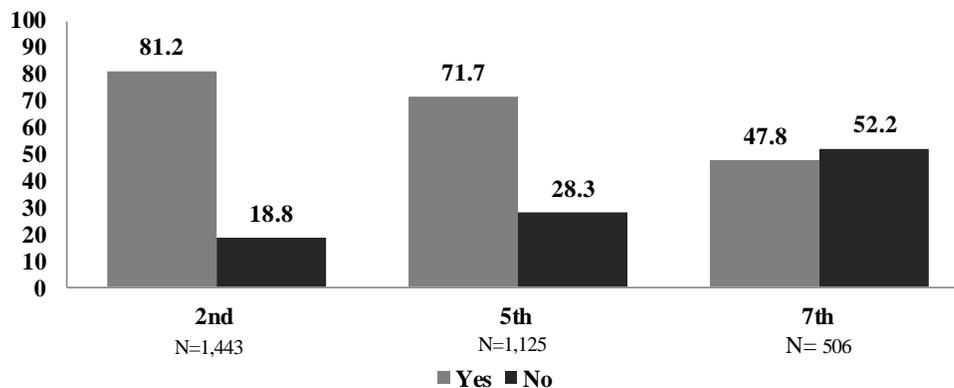


Figure 3. Response Rates of Students to the Question: “Have you shared the books with your family and friends?”

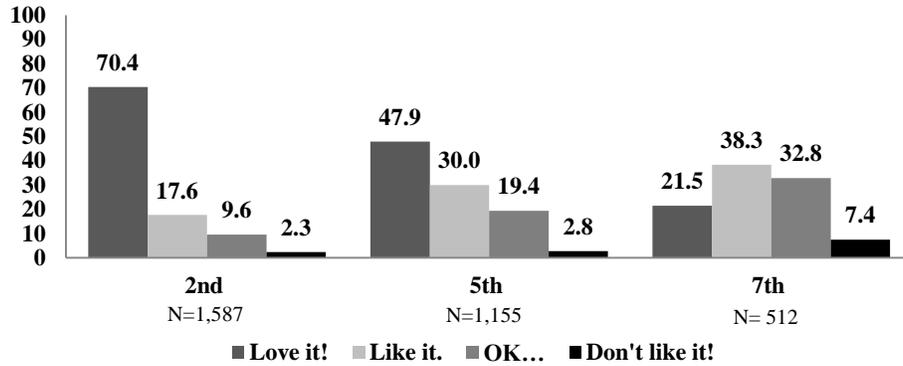


Figure 4. Response Rates of Students to the Question: “How do you feel about participating in the Houston Real Men Read Program?”

seventh grade students. Overall, the majority of students “love it” (55 percent), while a quarter of students “like it.” The remaining 17 percent of students thought the program was “OK,” followed by three percent who “Don’t like it.”

Conclusions

Survey results indicated that mentors and students enjoyed participating in the Houston Real Men Read program. This was evident in that the majority of mentors plan on participating in the program during the next school year. Also, the majority of the program components were highly rated by mentors. Students indicated that their favorite part of the program was being read to by the mentors, which speaks to the fundamental principles of the program.

Although, most of the mentors were pleased with the book selection, there were more than a quarter who believed that the book selection could be improved. Similarly, students’ survey results indicated that some of the books selected could be improved, especially at the fifth and seventh grade level. Program personnel may want to consider the types of books that students indicated they enjoyed reading the most in the book selection process for the upcoming school year.

For additional information contact the HISD
Department of Research and Accountability at
713-556-6700 or e-mail Research@Houstonisd.org.