



“How gratifying it is to target reading and target the positive relationship between role models and students at that crucial age in a safe and non-threatening environment.”

—Janice Newsum,
Manager, Library Media Services and
Houston Real Men Read, Houston ISD

Houston ISD and Real Men Read Mentor a New Era of Readers

Houston Independent School District (ISD) is on a mission to end the literacy crisis in Houston by changing attitudes toward books.

A few years ago Houston ISD initiated the “Literacy by 3” campaign, a movement to get every child reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. The Houston Real Men Read program continues to support this initiative by providing mentoring and building home libraries.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For more than seven years, mentors in the Houston Real Men Read volunteered their time to read to students in the second, fifth, and seventh grade throughout the Houston ISD school district. Family and community engagement elevates positive reinforcement into a standard of life—in this case, an encouragement to learn. By 2016, more than 70% of Houston Head Start centers and 49 schools have implemented the program.

The program reinforces fundamental principles: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education leads to a successful life. It exposes children to a wide range of literature and ideas that challenge them to think critically and learn something they never dreamed of learning. Just widening their horizons is priceless.



Scope of REAL Mentoring Program Since Implementation

 **49**
Schools

 **512,182**
Books Distributed

“Being a part of Real Men Read for the past 7 years has provided me with a connection to tomorrow as well as an opportunity to help shape that tomorrow by creating a love of reading, of knowledge, of creativity and of awe that we explore by reading.

Simply put, I love it!”

—Bill Turney, Mentor, Askew Elementary

MAKING A DIFFERENCE. INITIATING THE CHANGE.

Houston Real Men Read encourages students to interact with positive male role models—which can be pivotal to the trajectory of a child’s life. In just five hours a year, volunteers are changing lives, boosting reading skills, and establishing a new mindset in the community. To promote this exciting work, program leaders send email alerts to school district board members, place public service announcements on the television and radio, and were interviewed by local reporters and bloggers. Those efforts have made obtaining volunteers a joy instead of a trial.

The Community

Both program leaders and individual schools make full use of their community. Mentors are members of fraternity groups, retired teachers, and parents. One-fourth of the volunteers come from community churches. Houston police chiefs, deputies, and officers are part of the mentoring experience, which not only changes perspectives on reading but improves relationships in the community. Helping children to see male police officers in a positive light has been one of many unforeseen benefits of the program.

Another benefit of opening up the volunteer pool to the entire community is that it allows men from all walks of life to mentor and inspire a child. For example, students have

learned from marine biologists who blog about jellyfish. The various types of careers, hobbies, and interests that students are introduced to through Houston Real Men Read provides an opportunity for true bonding.

The Partners

In addition to working with the community, Houston Real Men Read partners with Scholastic REAL, a mentoring program that helps young people succeed by establishing supportive relationships with caring adults who inspire students and build their literacy skills. REAL mentors spend an hour each month reading engaging grade-appropriate fiction and nonfiction books to select classrooms and community centers.

The partnership with REAL has allowed Houston Real Men Read reach various levels of readers, at the same

“Sharing a book with young readers is where the magic begins. It allows us to connect reader to reader, thinker to thinker. Reading aloud invites the opportunity for all involved to become excited, to feel disturbed, to be moved.”

—Cindy Puryear,
Director of Literacy, HISD

time, with enduring results. Middle school students want their thoughts and opinions to be heard. By providing a safe haven without the pressure of parental guidance, students are able to comfortably express their evolving ideas. It might seem like a small thing, but simply listening to a child can inspire a love of a learning that only comes from the confidence that he has something to contribute. In return, mentors learn how rewarding it is to interact with middle schoolers and become more comfortable engaging with them. REAL has inspired real results within the Houston community.



THE SUCCESS

The initial pilot program won two awards from the Texas Association for Partnership in Education. The next year the School Board voted to make HRMR a district initiative and provide funding. The passion and commitment of Houston Real Men Read volunteers has changed not just the lives of the students they mentor, but the community as a whole. It is not about what the child is reading, but the bond that is being established in those one hour sessions, and the optimism it inspires in everyone.

Visit houstonisd.org or scholastic.com/face/real to learn more about the program and how you can be involved.