It has been an exciting start to the 2010-2011 school year with ReadersPlus! In our 14th year as an America Reads/America Counts program, over 80 tutors are heading out to the Family of Five schools each week to ensure that young students receive extra support in reading and math.

One of the proudest accomplishments of ReadersPlus is that it is run almost entirely by USC students. Each of our five campuses has two undergraduate staffers – a Coordinator and an Assistant Coordinator – who oversee all day-to-day operations of the program, from scheduling one-on-one sessions with tutors and tutees to running after-school academic enrichment programs. These ten staff members are the faces of ReadersPlus and serve as ambassadors from USC to 32nd St School, Foshay Learning Center, Norwood Elementary School, Vermont Elementary School, and Weemes Elementary School.

In addition to the leadership that our undergraduates bring to the program, we have also caught the attention of a very important leader – newly inaugurated President C.L. Max Nikias. President Nikias visited several of the USC Family of Five Schools this fall to observe the active partnerships taking place between USC and the neighborhood schools. Students in the University Park neighborhood are excited to know that President Nikias supports ReadersPlus, in addition to many other university programs, in their schools.
For more than ten years, USC ReadersPlus has attempted to conduct student assessments and program evaluation annually. A great deal of time and energy has been spent in investigating methods that would provide the “right fit” for both neighborhood students and our USC tutors. The current literacy assessment tools we use are the same ones used by full-time, fully trained classroom teachers; in-depth evaluations of students’ reading readiness for emergent readers, and measures independent readers in the areas of accuracy, fluency, expression and comprehension. Our math assessment aims to measure growth in discrete skills at every grade level K - 6, and is carefully aligned to California grade level standards.

While these tools are effective in gathering data, we have consistently faced a number of challenges in attempting these sorts of assessments on our own. We’ve struggled to acquire both pre- and post-test data for students due to chronic absenteeism and the high transciency rate in our schools, as well as staffing issues within the program. Even when complete data is collected, oftentimes it is not complete. While our undergraduate tutors are given a pre-service training which includes the implementation of the assessment tools we use, it alone is not enough to give all of our USC students the confidence necessary to implement these assessments effectively.

Ultimately, we have decided that it is time for us to reevaluate our evaluation process as a whole. The most important item to consider is whether our tools and the data gathered match our program’s primary mission and objectives:

1. Improving skills and strategies for learning,
2. Exposing children to various forms of literature and real life math problems,
3. Making reading and math fun and interactive, and
4. Creating a positive learning relationship between the students and their reader or math mentor.

In our reflection, and after conversations with colleagues in the Rossier School of Education, we have come to the conclusion that essentially, if our major program goals are to improve students’ attitudes and confidence in reading and math, and nurture them in becoming life-long learners, it is not necessary for us to gather detailed data about reading and math skills. Rather, we need to introduce assessment tools that measure student self-efficacy in reading and math so that we can demonstrate growth in those areas. Psychological theory and research suggests that children with high self-efficacy in academic areas have a high correlation to achieve greater success in those areas (Jinks & Morgan, 1999). Therefore, a student with high self-efficacy for a particular academic task or skill will result in greater effort, persistence, and instances of engaging in that particular task by choice (Bandura, 1977; 1982).

This fall semester, we are evaluating program success by way of reading and math interviews. Each child served by a USC Reader or Math Mentor has engaged in an interview appropriate to their level and content area at the start of the semester and will be given the interview again the last week of this month. We will share the results of that data in an upcoming newsletter and in the meantime, will continue meeting with the School of Education to consider ways for Rossier students to both engage in service-learning experiences that will give them relevant education assessment/research practice and provide our program with skill-specific reading and math assessment data that will complement the self-efficacy growth we hope to show in our mentees.

Stay tuned!
Meet Our New Literacy Project Coordinator!

At ReadersPlus, we are very excited to have Gwendolyn Randolph volunteering as the new Literacy Project Coordinator. Gwen is no stranger to the Family of Five Schools, having taught at Weemes Elementary for 34 years before retiring in 2007. She has an extensive background in education, having taught pre-K thru 5 except 3rd grade, was a mentor teacher, an outreach consultant (Dropout prevention specialist) and having taught college level courses for the California Department of Education. Read our interview with Gwen to learn more about our new Literacy Project Coordinator!

As the Literacy Project Coordinator, what does your job entail?
My role as Literacy Project coordinator entails recruitment, support, training and collaboration with volunteers and the Readers Plus staff.

How did you first become interested and involved with Literacy Project?
I became interested and involved with the Literacy Project when I was an Outreach Consultant at Weemes Elementary. I received JEP student volunteers that served as mentors, tutors and some taught mini courses in the classroom. My program at Weemes was a success because of USC/JEP volunteers. After being retired for 2 years I decided it was time to give back to JEP as they had given to me. I have always felt that it only takes one person to change the life of a child by connecting.

How has your previous experience in education helped you as the Literacy Project Coordinator?
My training as a teacher, college instructor and Outreach Consultant have helped me to share my professional expertise with the Readers Plus staff and volunteers. I feel that these positions help me as the Literacy Project Coordinator because I have knowledge and training in Literacy development and I understand working in a school environment.

What is it like working with USC students for Literacy Project?
Working with USC students and volunteers is very rewarding. Everyone is so positive and have such high expectations for themselves and students. This is what you call ENTHUSIASTIC!!!!

What is your advice for new Literacy Project mentors or reading tutors?
My advice for L.P. mentors or reading tutors is to speak to the student's teacher and ask for their recommendations regarding helping the student. This way the teacher and mentor or tutor are working together for the student's benefit.

And lastly, what are a few of your favorite children's books?
A few of my favorite children's books are "The Very Hungry Caterpillar", "Sylvester and the Magic Pebble", "There's A Nightmare in My Closet", “There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly" and "Silly Sally".

My advice for a struggling learner is to ask for help. Talk to your teacher, parent or someone at the school. Let them know that you want and need help.
Ever wonder who our USC Readers and Math mentors are? This semester, we have compiled a series of data showing the kinds of students that make up USC ReadersPlus and the areas of tutoring that we provide.

**Some more numbers:**

- Total number of students with USC ReadersPlus Readers: 252
- Average number of students per tutor: 3
- Average number of work hours per week per tutor: 11
- Average number of hours per week per tutor spent on on-site one-on-one tutoring: 5
- Average number of teachers ReadersPlus works with per site: 14
- Percentage of tutees who are girls: 46%
- Percentage of tutees who are boys: 54%

**Our tutors come from all grades:**

- freshmen: 6%
- sophomores: 12%
- juniors: 21%
- seniors: 24%
- graduates: 37%

**Our tutors are trained to teach:**

- Reading: 54%
- Math: 18%
- Both math and reading: 28%

**We tutor students in many grades:**

- Kinder: 54
- 1st: 50
- 2nd: 45
- 3rd: 60
- 4th: 50
- 5th: 35
- *6th: 20
- *7th: 18
- *8th: 12
- *9th: 10
- *10th: 10
- *11th: 5
- *12th: 5

* math tutoring only
This semester, USC Readers Plus at 32nd St. Magnet School extended our one-on-one tutoring program to include high school students. Previously, our tutoring has focused on helping elementary students on reading and math skills. Two years ago, we started working with middle school math students. This year, we are continuing our work with elementary school students that need additional help in reading and math to get to grade level. Readers are also working as Teacher Assistants in the eighth grade classrooms. For the first time, Readers are helping high school students on an individual level in math. This semester at 32nd St., we have Readers, Project Read volunteers, and Literacy Project volunteers dedicating their time to get our students back on track.

Origami Week at the After School Program

Every week in our afterschool program, Readers plan and execute enrichment lessons to our twenty students. This October, Reader Mojo Tuheen planned an amazing Origami week! Students created multiple pieces of origami while learning about the history, methods, terminology, symbolism, and related literature. At the end of the week, the students impressed the Readers and showed off what they had learned in a game of Origami Jeopardy. Origami week was such a success because Mojo tied the academic components in with active participation as they created their origami. The students and Readers alike loved these lessons!

Student of the Semester: Yesenia Gamero

This fall semester, the Readers would like to honor Yesenia Gamero as the student of the semester! Yesenia is a fifth grader new to the ReadersPlus program. However, she has impressed us all by being a hard worker, respectful of everyone around her, helpful to her teammates, and a role model for all the other students. Yesenia consistently follows rules, completes her work, and helps the younger students in her group with their homework. Congratulations to Yesenia!
Elder Arreortua has been with the Readers at Foshay since Fall 2009 and will be graduating this winter. He is not only a phenomenal tutor, tutoring in both math and reading, but a great mentor as well. He has built strong relationships with his students and they often look to him for guidance and help. He is eager to take the initiative with his students and plan interactive lesson plans tailored to each one of his students. We wish Elder the best of luck and he will be missed.

**Achievement Chart**

This year we implemented the Achievement Chart in our afterschool program. This chart has the names of all the students and next to their names they place stickers for either finishing their homework, staying on task while doing homework, or completing a book report for the fall Book Review Contest. The book report yields 5 stickers. The student with the most stickers at the end of the semester is awarded a prize. This is a great incentive that reinforces positive behavior and a good work ethic.

**Friday Funday!**

Friday Funday is also new to our afterschool program this year. Every Friday a reader plans a series of fun, outdoor activities. So far we have had a water day and a chalk day. Water day included water balloon tosses and sponge races, while chalk day allowed for students to decorate the whole village.
Spotlight on Norwood Elementary

BY CHELSEA SNYDER AND EMILY BROOKE

New Changes at Norwood!

This semester has brought a lot of change for USC ReadersPlus at Norwood Elementary School. With lots of new construction going on at Norwood, classroom space is highly coveted; yet the Readers are grateful to have an entire room to themselves. The old room that was shared with Peace Games is now exclusively ReadersPlus, which means expanded space for one-on-ones.

Walk into our room on a Tuesday morning and you will see at least 4 Readers busy working with their students on the chalkboard or at the desks inspiring some great learning to take place. The extra space also means the ability to have our after-school program again which is a fantastic opportunity for the third grade students.

After School Program at Norwood

Norwood USC ReadersPlus is happy to announce the resumption of their after-school program this semester! A new room and lots of new Readers and math mentors have spawned a wonderful after-school program. The students are motivated every day to finish their homework and earn another star on the Star Chart. Of course, they also know that if they end the day on blue or green on the Behavior Chart in the room, they can get an additional star. When they earn 20 stars, they get a prize from our prize drawer which has small prizes. The students have been having a blast doing enrichment activities like Science and Environment week, and if they have a little extra time, they are always begging for a chance to play more math and reading games!

This semester, Christian Perez, who is in third grade is our Star Scholar. Christian is almost always on green or blue at the end of the day, is always working hard on his homework and willing to help. We in the After-School Program love having Christian for his insatiable appetite to learn. He is constantly requesting to play our math games instead of going to recess or having any other activity. Christian is a great student and always brings a smile to every one of the Readers faces!

Christian Perez on top of a student pyramid
This week’s Reader of the Week is Daniele Acuna. Danielle is a Graduate student working towards a Teaching career. She has already got some very hands on experience with our USC Readers Plus Afterschool Program. This past week she led Art Week in our program. On one of the days, she taught the students about the Art of Greek Drama Masks. Students were shown some examples of masks that would be worn by the Greeks to symbolize a Tragedy, a Comedy, and a Drama. The students then were tasked with creating their own masks, and showing off just how creative they could be!

Our New Reader Spotlight today follows Jorge Guerreiro. Jorge has had a great time adjusting to the Weemes Family. He comes from Los Angeles, so he is familiar with giving back to this particular community. He is a Sociology major who is learning about Gang Prevention and Intervention. He works well with kids, and is oftentimes one of the silliest Readers. For example when teaching a get to know you lesson, he listed the activities he enjoys as “bear-wrestling,” his favorite food as Chocolate Banana Cupcakes, and rated “Finding Nemo” a perfect 10/10. We are glad to have such an eccentric personality working with us.

The Importance of Storytelling

One of the most important aspects of our program is using targeted lessons and learning to get to the heart of why our students may be behind. Collaboration with the Teacher on this goal is crucial in creating a learning environment that suits our student’s needs, and enriches their class experience. For example, Serena Hernandez with the help of one of our third grade teachers, Mr. Umana, was able to create a lesson that was tailored to helping her third grader better comprehend the material that he was reading. She created a grid that the student was to describe as he was reading what had just happened, who was doing the actions, and to anticipate what would be coming next in the story. He was then tasked with telling back the story with his own characters. The student in this way was better able to stay focused on what was actually happening in the story, and better synthesize the material in his own way.
This year USC ReadersPlus at Vermont is focusing on making and achieving goals. All of our one-on-one students learned about goals and worked with tutors to set specific academic goals. Each student wrote their goal on a bright construction paper star and pinned it onto our “Shooting Stars” bulletin board. One of our Kindergarten students, Blanca really wants to know all of her letters. The stars are a visible reminder of our goals as students and tutors, because all of our kids are shooting of toward a great academic future!

A Special Visit from President Nikias

USC President Nikias made a visit to Vermont Elementary and came to speak with us in the Readers’ room and get a first-hand look at how USC is impacting the students in the local community. The kids were very excited to meet President Nikias, and displayed a lot of Trojan pride! It was quite a day!

Shooting Stars at Vermont

To celebrate Halloween we held a Halloween party in our after-school program. We had different "centers" around the room, with different activities, such as scary stories, Dia de los Muertos masks, coloring pages, and everyone's favorite Monster Body parts. We put different items like small shells for fingernails, jello brains, Vienna sausages as fingers, and Elmer's glue for boogers into little bowls inside of paper bags, and the kids had to reach in without looking and guess which body part they were feeling. It was a little messy, but a lot of fun!!

Frightastic Friday!

Welcome to Vermont!

BY PAIGE GARTLAND AND ANNE-MARIE WHITE
Volunteer Events

Spirits at Troy

BY STACEY CHIU

This Halloween, USC ReadersPlus Mentors teamed up with the JEP Program Assistants (PA’s) to host a pumpkin decorating booth at USC URSC’s Annual Spirits at Troy carnival. The event took place on Halloween at McCarthy Quad. Children from the surrounding neighborhoods were invited to come and trick-or-treat on campus. Readers from all five sites volunteered at the JEP booth and helped cute little ghosts and goblins decorate pumpkins. Markers and paints were provided to help unleash the creative spirits of the Halloween revelers. Everyone had a great time, Readers and PA’s included. Thank you, JEP volunteers for making the event a definite treat!

More Volunteering Opportunities!

USC ReadersPlus is continuing its tradition of fighting on against cancer with our annual Relay for Life team. Relay for Life is a 24 fundraising event for the American Cancer Society, held in communities around the world. Sign up now for the USC ReadersPlus team so you can fundraise and participate in numerous activities throughout the year! Last year, ReadersPlus had a great time at Relay for Life! 21 Choices donated gift certificates to team members and volunteers decorated small puzzles, which were delivered to children cancer patients.

Left: Reader Kenneth Martin dressed as a penguin

Right: Anthony Gonzalez showing off his Halloween candy
Welcome Fall 2010 New Readers!

Norwood Elementary  Coordinator: Chelsea Snyder  Assistant Coordinator: Emily Brooke
Vermont Elementary  Coordinator: Paige Gartland  Assistant Coordinator: Anne-Marie White
Foshay Elementary  Coordinator: Ariel Willis  Assistant Coordinator: David Bostrom
32nd Street Elementary  Coordinator: Jacqueline Tobin  Assistant Coordinator: Rebeca Corleto
Weemes Elementary  Coordinator: Michael Garcia  Assistant Coordinator: Jacquelyn Derian

Our Team of Coordinators

The Office Staff

Tina Koneazny
JEP Associate Director, Administration and Educational Outreach

Elizabeth Inglese  Claire Brown
Literacy Director  Math Director

Stacey Chiu
Central Coordinator
**Who we are:** USC ReadersPlus is a literacy and math tutoring program under the USC College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. The program is administered by the Joint Educational Project and funded in part through the Good Neighbor's Campaign. Our mentors work with the “Family of Five” schools surrounding USC.

**How we started:** In 1996, President Clinton launched legislation that would provide additional work-study money to colleges and universities with the condition that a large portion of it go to one on one literacy programs for children grades K-6. The JEP version of America Reads was the first in the nation to begin working under these guidelines, launching on May 19, 1997. In May of 1999, America Counts was added to include math education and it was at this time that the USC Readers program name was changed to USC ReadersPlus.

---

**USC ReadersPlus**
801 West 34th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0471
Phone: 213-740-1834
Fax: 213-740-1825

---

**Share these USC ReadersPlus Opportunities!**
Check out our website for applications for the positions below:

**USC Reader/Math Mentor**
Who: undergraduates with work-study
What: mentor kids at local elementary schools eight hours a week in math or reading development

**Literacy Project Volunteer**
Who: alumni, faculty, graduate & undergraduate students
What: mentor kids at local elementary schools 1-2 hours a week in literacy development

**Central Office Coordinator**
*Position opening next fall in the ReadersPlus office*
Who: undergraduates with work-study
What: Work with program directors across all five sites, maintaining communications and creating the program newsletter. If you are interested, email Stacey (staceygc@usc.edu).