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*Teaching reading is about much more than helping kids ace the reading tests. Starting children on a love affair with reading— for information, for pleasure, for life—is the vision of Boundless Readers. And that starts with teachers who are themselves both passionate about reading and skilled at teaching literacy.*

The folks at Boundless Readers know a great deal about teaching literacy, but they're just as interested in what teachers know and can teach each other.

The Andersonville-based organization was started to honor a respected Chicago Public School librarian, Rochelle Lee (after whom it was originally named), who worked to get high-quality children's books into school classrooms and inspire teachers to incorporate literature into their work. Its longstanding and highly successful literacy program has provided professional development for nearly 5,500 Chicago teachers, helping them pursue goals they identify as priorities for their students. Up to 400 teachers participate each year. As part of its overall commitment to improve teacher professional development, Fry Foundation funding is supporting middleschool teachers from Chicago schools throughout the city, across a range of subject areas, to join the program and pursue ways to integrate reading into their teaching practice.

Rather than starting with a focus on reading scores, Boundless Readers starts with books. Participants get a \$500 allowance and a discount to order books for their classrooms, and they can browse the extensive collection at the Boundless Readers library to help make their selection. They also join regular book discussion groups, on the theory that people who are themselves readers will be able to communicate their enthusiasm— and be more thoughtful about how to enrich a child's reading experience. Summer workshops offer creative ideas: engaging kids in theater games to encourage them to act out what they've read, or using picture books to help young children explore concepts of justice and social responsibility.

The heart of the program is the study groups, where several teachers from one school work together to set goals for improving students' reading and then meet once or twice a month to share results, strategies, and frustrations. They also observe in each other's classrooms and give feedback. Boundless Readers staff serve as coaches, making suggestions for how to get the most out of the group



process. By deciding together to pursue goals tied to their students' needs and then reporting back on how they're doing, teachers reinforce one another's commitment to make changes to their teaching practices and, in the process, change the overall teaching style at their school.

"We've learned over 21 years of working with incredibly talented teachers that you can have great conversations where you talk about doing new things, but the trick is to get people to actually do those things, more than once, and refine what they're doing over time," says executive director Mary Hicks. "We've found that teacher study groups are a way to build capacity, help develop new practices, and sustain them in the classroom." Program evaluations show that, in comparison to other CPS teachers, Boundless Readers participants are more likely to adopt and maintain literacy "best practices," such as reading aloud, providing independent reading time, and incorporating highquality children's literature into the curriculum. And their students score better on reading tests than children whose teachers have not participated.

At a workshop last summer, teachers who had participated in study groups and were signing up to lead new groups talked about their experience. "Your colleagues become mentors, you share one another's expertise," said one. "We're there as readers and learners, as well as teachers," commented another. Participants cited the benefits they had reaped: reflection, collaboration, accountability, professionalism, community.

Those last points are important: Hicks says that a key benefit of the program is building a sense of professionalism and efficacy within the group. "The research on effective schools talks about the importance of creating a community of learners. Teachers as leaders, professionals, and learners—that's what we're helping to create."