

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Can't find the time to tutor? Online literacy tutoring program linking professionals and at-risk readers aims to help

[BY JESSICA KWONG](#)

2015-08-21 18:32:22

SANTA ANA – Corporate employees under the impression that they're too busy to tutor students in the classroom are about to be schooled on that thought.

This school year, the Santa Ana Unified School District will be the first in Southern California to embrace TutorMate, an online literacy tutoring program that links professionals and at-risk readers during the work and school day through a phone-to-Skype connection.

Called Santa Ana Reads, the new partnership involving TutorMate seeks to sign on 250 local corporate workers to tutor 250 first- and second-graders throughout the district, paired in groups of 10, once a week each.

TutorMate, running in 14 other major school districts across the country including Oakland, allows volunteers to select a 30-minute slot that can change weekly, call the classroom and help a student improve through literacy exercises and reading stories online.

The program supports the district's "Literacy by 3rd" movement aimed at having every student reading on grade level by the end of third grade. That goal is based on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's finding from several years ago that students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to leave school without a diploma.

"Reading is really the key to education," said Santa Ana School Board President John Palacio at an informational meeting for volunteers last week. "There's no question in my mind this program will continue to be successful as it has in the past."

Nationwide, TutorMate has established partnerships with about 110 corporations including United Parcel Service, which had employees from its Southern California district attend the volunteer meeting.

Corporate recruitment is beginning next month, and the program will run from October to June.

"UPS is everywhere and we expect to start with about 100 employees educating, volunteering during the workday," said Morgan Price, human resources operations director for the company's Southern California district.

Volunteers ideally would be located within 50 miles from the district and be able to meet the students face-to-face once or twice during the school year.

Orange County United Way, a nonprofit with a goal to cut the high school dropout rate across Orange County in half by 2024, contributed \$30,000 to Santa Ana Reads and will be a partner in the effort.

The district "has a high low-income population and English-learner population, and that is what we're focusing on right now," said Sergio Contreras, senior manager of education for Orange County United Way.

TutorMate National Director Dan Weisberg said Innovations for Learning, the Chicago-based nonprofit that developed the online tutoring program, approached Santa Ana Unified because they look specifically for large urban school districts in economically disadvantaged communities and "the affinity of our philosophies are very much aligned."

TutorMate plans to focus on developing the program in Santa Ana before expanding to other school districts in

Southern California, Weisberg said.

"I think we're really going to build a footprint in Santa Ana," he said. "It's got a lot of kids in need."

**Contact the writer:** [jkwong@ocregister.com](mailto:jkwong@ocregister.com)

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Jonas Gustavsson made 21 saves in the Red Wings' 3-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

#### RED WINGS

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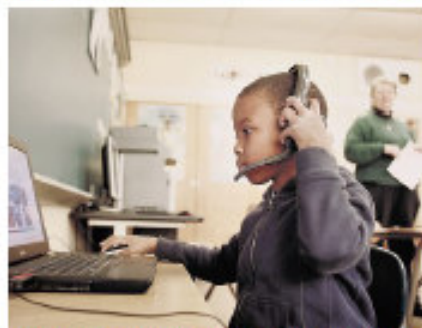
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# Kids spell success with online tutors

Reading skills for DPS students improve with innovative help



Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit is the picture of concentration as she sits at a laptop in the classroom for her online reading tutor on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit. PHOTOS BY TIM GALLOWAY/SPECIAL TO THE DETROIT FREE PRESS



Dylan Scott, 6, of Detroit greets an online tutor. Teacher Alana McKibben, in back, said she hopes the program improves the students' oral fluency and confidence.

By Chastity Pratt Dawsey  
Detroit Free Press Education Writer

The computer in a first-grade class at Chrysler Elementary in Detroit let out a chime that sounded like a ringing phone on a recent rainy Friday.

A little boy got up from the floor where the class was sitting and listening to a teacher read a story and went to the computer. He put on a headset, and after a mouse click said, "Hello. This is Ms. McKibben's class. I am Dylan. How may I help you?"

On the other end of the line was Anne Di Iorio, a banking coach at Quicken Loans in downtown Detroit. She was looking for student Paris Burg.

Six-year-old Paris, wearing a blue jumper and a wide grin that showed one missing front tooth, put on the computer's headset and opened an online story called, "The Circus."

It was time for her weekly virtual tutoring session with Di Iorio.

See TUTORING, Page 8A

# U.S. gets \$41B in student loan profit

That could cover year of U-M tuition for about 3 million kids

By David Jesso  
Detroit Free Press Education Writer

The federal government made enough money on student loans over the last year that, if it wanted, it could provide maximum-level Pell Grants of \$5,645 to 7.3 million college students.

The \$41.3 billion profit for the 2013 fiscal year is down \$3.6 billion from the previous year but still enough to pay for one year of tuition at the University of Michigan for 29,554,426 Michigan residents.

It's a higher profit level than all but two companies in the world: Exxon Mobil cleared \$44.9 billion in 2012, and Apple cleared \$11.7 billion.

"It's actually neither accurate nor fair to characterize the student loan program as making a profit," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said during a July conference call with reporters after the Free Press and other news media reported on profits from student loans. The department did not return calls or e-mails seeking comment this week.

See STUDENT LOANS, Page 9A



Find more on student loans at [freep.com/pellgrants](http://freep.com/pellgrants) and [freep.com/studentdebt](http://freep.com/studentdebt)



Paul Jaramillo, 5, of Rochester Hills writes to Santa at the Somerset Collection's holiday store for kids. ROMAN BLANCHARD/STEF

# Somerset shop gives kids joy of playing Santa



# Detroit Free Press

MONDAY 11.25.2013

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Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit is the picture of concentration as she sits at a laptop in the classroom for her online reading tutor on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit.  
photos by Tim Galloway/Special to the Detroit Free

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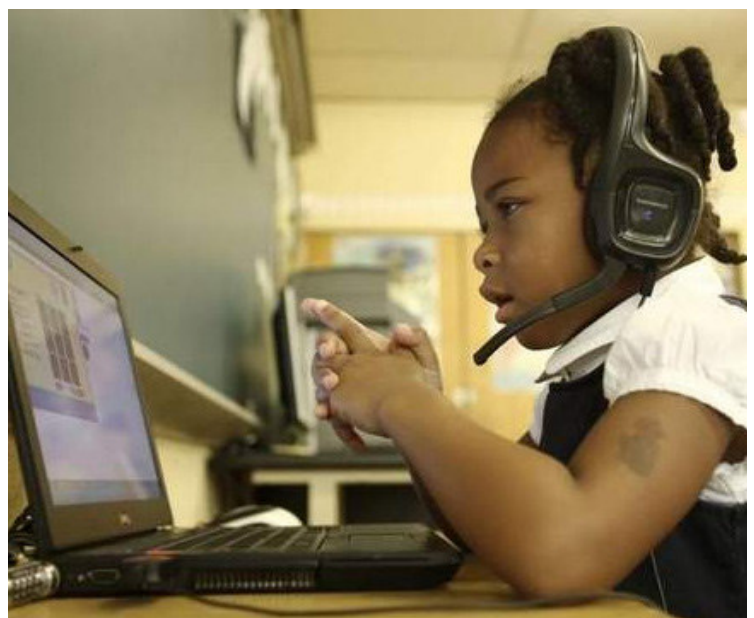
It was time for her weekly virtual tutoring session with Di Iorio.

Paris is among about 180 Detroit Public Schools students from six schools taking part in an online literacy program called TutorMate, a system that makes it possible for professionals to volunteer at schools without leaving their workplace. The students are in first and second grades.

For the past four years, a growing number of tutors have signed up to be reading partners for children using an Internet connection.

The tutors log on and help children learn to read 30 minutes per week.

During each session, the tutor and student see the same short story on each of their computers. They don't see one another but talk to each other using a headset and microphone.



Paris Burg, 6, of Detroit, thinks about her answer during a word game during her online tutoring session on Nov. 7 at Chrysler Elementary School in Detroit.



Dylan answers the computer as an online tutor contacts the classroom. He is one of about 180 first- and second-grade students taking part in an online literacy program called TutorMate.

The first-graders are learning about phonics, word families, sight words and aiming to become fluent readers who can read about 47 words per minute. Students selected to participate in this program need extra help with meeting grade-level expectations or they are learning to be strong oral readers, said Paris' teacher, Alana McKibben.

McKibben said she hopes the program improves the students' oral fluency and confidence.

"Kids really like that one-on-one attention time, it's very empowering for them," she said.

## Program goals

Dan Weisberg, a native Detroit and national director of corporate alliances for the program's creator, Innovations for Learning, said he hopes to reach 250 Detroit students and grow from six participating companies — Quicken Loans, AT&T, Chase Bank, Comerica Bank, GM and Crain Communications — to 10 this year.

"It's all aimed at helping at-risk students in under-resourced school districts," Weisberg said. "By giving them personal attention at a time when they're 6, 7 years old ... with just a little bit of work, you really can have the most impact on a student's long-term academic career."

Innovations for Learning, a nonprofit company based in Evanston, Ill., started in 1993 and operates the program in 10 major cities with about 1,800 tutors, he said.

During Paris' tutoring session, Di Iorio helped her sound out words in the story, then played word games with her. When Paris struggled, Di Iorio buoyed her with encouragement. When Paris lost a game, Di Iorio kept it moving

— without commenting on the loss — until Paris sounded out all of the words correctly.

## Humbling partnership

Between the words, they get to know each other. After Paris read the word, "dog," Di Iorio learned that Paris has a shih tzu named Misty.

It's a humbling partnership.

"I've never done anything so fundamental as teaching a kid to read," said Di Iorio, 24, of Ferndale.

The online setup helps her to volunteer easily and is comfortable for the kids, too, she said.

"Meeting with someone new in person could be intimidating" for a child, she said. "The headset helps a kid to come out of their shell more quickly. She can feel comfortable and confident learning in her everyday environment."

At year-end, the volunteers will meet the children.

But reading together online has its advantages over reading a handheld book, Paris said. The illustrations move and light up.

"The computer is funner," she said.

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or [cpratt@freepress.com](mailto:cpratt@freepress.com)

May 17, 2013, 3:00am PDT

# Corporate Citizenship: Tutoring students without ever leaving the office

Brad Broberg, Contributing Writer

Julia Martin, Eugene Onishi and Patrick Mahaffy are helping Seattle School District students learn to read — and they're doing it without leaving work. They're among 105 volunteers from 10 local corporations and the Port of Seattle participating in an online tutoring program called TutorMate.

Each volunteer works with a first-grader at one of six elementary schools, connecting via phone and computer for half-hour lessons once a week. Tutors and students read stories together, sound out words and play educational games — all part of a cloud-based system developed by a Chicago nonprofit called Innovations for Learning (IFL).

Introduced in Seattle this fall, TutorMate opens a door to community involvement for busy professionals who can carve out 30 minutes a week to tutor a student online but not the additional time needed to travel to a school.

"It's very hard to break away from the desk and the building," said Martin, a senior business analyst with Federal Way-based Weyerhaeuser. "This really fits the bill for me." Onishi, a technology strategist at Redmond-based Microsoft, appreciates TutorMate's flexibility. "All I need is my laptop and a phone," he said. "I can be at the office. I can be working at home. I could be at a customer site."

The biggest reward for volunteers is the satisfaction of helping a child master a vital skill, but it's not the only one.

"It's a nice break during a stressful work day," said Mahaffy, a promotions manager for Seattle-based Starbucks.

TutorMate complements another IFL program called TeacherMate that enables teachers to create personalized reading lessons for students to practice online with an iPad or iPod Touch. While TutorMate is available to just some students in a given classroom, all are assisted by TeacherMate.

Both programs are the brainchild of Seth Weinberger, a former Chicago attorney. Two decades ago, he decided to do something about illiteracy among children in disadvantaged communities. His idea: Use the technology that makes computer games so vivid and enticing to help young students read well from the get-go.

"If (students in poverty) don't learn to read by the end of the first grade, the data is overwhelming that they're





going to eventually drop out, with all of the negative consequences of that,” he said. Weinberger began by enlisting the help of some small technology companies that were clients of the law firm where he practiced. Then he taught himself to program while testing and refining his approach in Chicago schools. Over time, royalties from the software he developed allowed him to hire a team and take his crusade to another level.

TeacherMate costs \$2,500 per classroom in licensing and teacher training fees. Schools also must supply the necessary hardware. TutorMate costs \$1,000 per classroom, but is free to schools because IFL asks each tutor’s employer to foot the bill.

Partners of ’63, a group of philanthropic Harvard Business School grads focused on improving education, has helped fund IFL’s ongoing expansion. The group, which includes former Seattle School Board president Don Nielsen, held its 2012 annual meeting in Seattle. John Keller, a Chicago businessman and member of Partners of ’63, suggested the group pick up the tab for bringing TeacherMate — and by extension TutorMate — to Seattle as a gift to the city.

IFL’s programs target schools where a high-percentage of students come from low income families as defined by the federal Title I program. Combining TutorMate with TeacherMate fills a void for many of these children.

“It’s fabulous because a lot of these kids aren’t read to at home,” Keller said. “They develop a relationship with the tutor and look forward to talking with them. And the tutors love it because they don’t have to leave their desk and they can see in a year that they’ve helped a child learn to read. How satisfying is that?”

About 2,000 people nationwide signed up for TutorMate this year. Weinberger expects 5,000 to volunteer next year. TutorMate’s convenience is a big magnet, but so is the program’s highly orchestrated structure and content. Tutors know their time has been well spent because the system makes it simple to provide the right level of help for their individual student, Weinberger said.

Tutors and students view the same colorful stories, exercises and games on their individual computer screens. Students wear a headset plugged into their computer and tutors use their phone to communicate as they work on fluency, comprehension, phonics and spelling. “I was nervous because I’d never tutored before (but) my experience has been that it really, really works well,” Martin said.

A recent study of students using TeacherMate/TutorMate in Washington, D.C., showed a 13 percent gain in first-grade reading scores, Weinberger said. IFL is working with Georgetown University to conduct more research.

Arbor Heights Elementary

School is one of the Seattle schools using TeacherMate/TutorMate. A recent round of standardized testing showed marked improvement in reading skills among first-graders, said principal Christy Collins. Although she can’t say for sure that the two online programs made the difference, Collins knows students love working with their tutors. She recently watched as one boy stared at the clock waiting for his tutor to call.

“The minute he got on the computer ... he was beaming,” Collins said. “It means a lot that he has his own special session where someone listens to him read.”

### **Become a tutor**

TutorMate is looking for teams of 10 or more active employees to tutor, with the full support of their employers. The teams then are assigned to their own adopted classrooms as a group. Contact: Dan Weisberg, national director of the TutorMate Program, at [dan@tutormate.org](mailto:dan@tutormate.org).

### **Participating employers**

- Accenture
- Costco
- DLA Piper
- Intel
- JPMorgan Chase
- Microsoft
- Pemco Insurance
- Port of Seattle
- Starbucks Corp.
- Symetra
- Weyerhaeuser

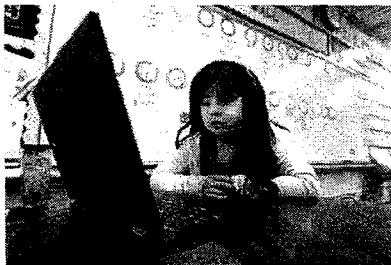
# The Florida Times-Union

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### HOME/NEWS

## Skype tutoring takes hold in Duval schools

By Denise Smith Amos Wed, Feb 12, 2014 @ 6:48 pm | updated Thu, Feb 13, 2014 @ 6:28 am



The Florida Times-Union  
Bob.Self@jacksonville.com Kimberly Cardoza, 6, a first-grader at Windy Hill Elementary School, works with her tutor during Monday morning's class. Students in Nilda Allen's first grade classroom get help with their studies by working online with a volunteer.

Duval County public schools are test-driving "remote tutoring," a new strategy that matches local corporate volunteers with some of the district's youngest learners struggling with reading.

But no one goes anywhere. It's all done online.

First-graders in seven Duval elementary schools have been working with 70 tutors online, using TutorMate, a computer-based program that allows tutors and students to work

together remotely on reading, sounding out words and comprehension issues via computer.

Each day, tutors make their weekly scheduled phone call to their assigned classroom and student and the session begins.

The students use Skype, a laptop and earphones with a microphone. The software includes specially selected books, stories and exercises to match each student's reading level and classwork.

So far students at Andrew Robinson, Fishweir, Henry F. Kite, Lone Star, R.V. Daniels, San Mateo and Windy Hill elementary schools are the first pilots of the program. Duval school officials say they plan to add more schools each year, as schools get new or improved wireless capability.

TutorMate is free to the district. A nonprofit company called Innovations for Learning in Evanston, Ill., supplies software, laptops, earphones and tutor training.

The employer most often pays the \$1,000 fee for 10 tutors per classroom.

Initially, JP Morgan Chase offices in Jacksonville are supplying tutors, although other employers are beginning to commit, said Kim Whitten, Innovations for Learning's executive director of Florida.

At Windy Hill, at least seven first-graders are learning to speak English as a second language but they have trouble comprehending what they're reading, said Nilda Allen, their teacher.

Some are shy about asking adults, even Allen, for help, she said. Others are nervous about revealing what they don't know or don't understand.

That's where online tutoring can help.



The students don't see their tutors' faces, not even online, so they must practice listening skills and concentrate, Allen said. Also students can't take the common shortcut of reading adults' facial expressions for hints, Allen said.

And they're less distracted from their task.

"It's one more thing to motivate them," Allen said. "It has that engagement factor. These are kids living in the 21st century; they know how to use apps and tablets."

Online learning in general is exploding in the nation's classrooms.

But in Allen's school, where 77 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, online tutoring has started small but is catching on.

At 10:30 Monday morning, just after Allen finished reading with all 20 of her students, the class phone rang and "greeter" Tatiana Mancia, 6, answered it politely.

"Ms. Allen's class," she said before gesturing to Kimberly Cardoza, also 6. Kimberly nearly sprinted over, put on earphones and sat at a laptop as a colorful story filled its screen.

On the other end was Athina Francis, a mortgage underwriter who works at JP Morgan Chase in Jacksonville. Normally, Francis' computer is filled with numbers, she said, but this day she was happy to work with a first-grader and a colorful story.

Francis, who has tutored and mentored youngsters before, all face-to-face, said online tutoring is harder because you have to listen and pay attention to where and when students hesitate, rather than reading their faces for cues.

For instance, Francis noticed that Kimberly hesitated mostly on the words that were marked as the hardest on her reading level.

Francis knows to let Kimberly keep trying. She is making progress.

"I think it's a start," Francis said of online tutoring. "But I think that after a while, they're going to need more personal contact."

Francis is partly right, Whitten said. That's why at the end of the school year, the tutors are all invited to meet their students and to give them books from TutorMate to read over the summer.

Unlike many other tutoring programs, the biggest problem is getting tutors to let go, Whitten said.

"Our biggest problem is that tutors want to follow their kids to the next grade," she said.

Denise Amos: (904) 359-4083

#### Sound Off: Readers get their say on legalizing medical marijuana

5:42pm

#### Fact Check: Medicare, hospitals and being 'under observation'

5:40pm

#### Member crew filming Greg Allman project struck and killed on train tracks in Jesup

5:39pm

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**TWITTER**

# The New York Times

NEW YORK, MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2012

## Sharing a Screen, if Not a Classroom

By KYLE SPENCER  
Published: January 22, 2012

In a hushed first-grade classroom at Public School 55 in the South Bronx, Edward Muñoz, a bashful 7-year-old in scuffed sneakers and a worn hoodie, was sounding out tricky words with his tutor.

Together they plowed through a book about a birthday barbecue, tackling the words “party” and “presents.” Then they played a rousing game of word-based tic-tac-toe, with Edward eventually declaring victory.

Exchanges like theirs take place every day in classrooms around the country, now that links between early literacy gains and later school success have been clearly documented.

But Edward’s tutor was not in the classroom. His school, a 20-minute walk from the nearest subway stop in a crime-plagued neighborhood, has long had trouble finding tutors willing to visit. “It is hard to get anyone to volunteer,” said the school’s principal, Luis Torres, who sometimes cancels fire drills because of the gunfire he hears outside.

Now, newly designed software for the tutoring of beginning readers has bridged the gap, allowing volunteers to meet students online from a distance. P.S. 55 is testing the program with students in its four first-grade classes.

Edward’s tutor, Jenny Chan, was an hour away in Midtown, on a bustling trading floor at JPMorgan



Librado Romero/The New York Times

Edward Muñoz, a first grader at P.S. 55 in the Bronx, works out tricky words with Jenny Chan, his tutor in Midtown Manhattan.

Chase, where she provides technology support. She was talking to Edward by phone and seeing the story he was reading with screen-sharing software on her desktop computer.

JPMorgan Chase is sponsoring the remote tutoring program and encouraging its employees to get involved from their desks during the school day. This is a boon for Ms. Chan, who has participated in corporate-sponsored volunteer reading programs at other firms. But since having two children and receiving a promotion, she has been unable to make the lunchtime trek to a school, particularly one as far away as P.S. 55.

As for Edward, he was perched on a blue plastic chair, listening to Ms. Chan’s encouragements through headphones as he read haltingly into the microphone. When he mispronounced a word, Ms. Chan prompted him to try alternatives, occasionally proclaiming, “Good job!” From her desk, she followed along and turned the pages of a virtual book for her budding reader.

The program is the creation of Seth Weinberger, a

56-year-old former technology lawyer from Evanston, Ill., and the founder of Innovations for Learning, a 19-year-old nonprofit organization that has set its sights on raising persistently low reading scores among the nation's poorest children. The tutoring software is being tried by over 550 volunteers in 60 low-performing classrooms in Chicago, Detroit, Miami and Washington, as well as at P.S. 55, where in 2010, only 15 percent of the third graders passed the state English exam.

Countless studies, many outlined in an exhaustive 1998 literacy report by the National Research Council, indicate that there is a strong connection between how fast young readers progress and how often they encounter written language. But according to the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health, less than half of the nation's young are read to at home on a daily basis.

As a result, the literacy organization Everybody Wins! New York plants more than 1,000 volunteers in city schools. New York Cares sponsors volunteers in an early morning reading program. And in September, the national advocacy group Reading Partners began a volunteer tutoring initiative in seven of the city's poorest-performing elementary schools.

What sets Mr. Weinberg's program apart is that the tutors arrive via technology. "If it takes a village to raise a child," he said, "it now takes technology to connect that village."

His methods are not without critics. At schools like P.S. 3, in the West Village, parents gush about the "magical" connection in-school mentors develop with the students they help. There, where 78 percent of third graders passed the statewide English exam, dozens of reading volunteers show up "live" every week.

At schools like P.S. 55, the Innovations for Learning program presents a welcome solution to a persistent problem.

To get the program started, I.F.L. trained educators at the school and installed Mr. Weinberger's software on dedicated laptops donated by JPMorgan Chase. Volunteer tutors were required to watch a one-hour Web seminar and read a 20-page guide to basic reading skills, such as

"chunking" groups of letters together to decipher a word, or using pictures to help get the gist of a story.

When a student and a tutor log on, they choose from 10 original stories, all suited to that student's reading level, as well as games that use words from the stories. After the session, students can reread their stories on classroom iPod Touches.

Brenda Salazar, a first-grade teacher, says the greatest advantage of the program is the provision, which she can oversee, of much-needed one-on-one instruction for struggling readers. The software allows teachers to communicate with tutors about students' problem areas via a messaging system. "When they come back to doing their reading and writing with me, they'll often say: 'I know that. I did that with my tutor.'"

Still, the program has yet to be studied, and at a time when educators are pondering the pros and cons of on-line learning, there are skeptics. Some question whether young learners, particularly struggling ones, have the communication skills needed to benefit from a virtual connection.

Joanne Meier, a research consultant at Reading Rockets, a literacy initiative based in Arlington, Va., wonders how effective tutors can be if they don't have access to students' facial expressions and body language. "Subtleties are missed with a phone call," she said. Ms. Chan, the P.S. 55 tutor, acknowledges this challenge. "You do lose the face-to-face," she said. "But this is a good alternative."

After her recent session with Edward, Ms. Chan hung up, and the 7-year-old unhooked his headphones and sauntered back to his desk, where his classmates were rifling through picture books. What was his favorite part of the new program, he was asked. He said it was when the phone rang in his classroom, a signal that a tutor was online. "They get excited," Mr. Torres said. "They all want to be on that call."

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# Chicago Tribune

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2011

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

## Group links students, tutors through computers

### Workers volunteer time to help first-graders with reading

By **LESLIE MANN**  
Special to the Tribune

Every Wednesday at 10 a.m. last school year, Deshaun Patterson picked up a phone in his first-grade classroom at Hay Community Academy in Chicago to talk to his volunteer reading tutor. Across town, at JPMorgan Chase & Co., his tutor, an attorney, fired up her laptop to work with Deshaun for a half-hour.

The two spoke by phone while looking at the same program on their computers. Deshaun would pick a story or word game preselected by his teacher to coincide with her curriculum. When he got stuck, his tutor helped him out.

The company that linked the reading partners is the nonprofit Innovations for Learning in Evanston. It was launched by Seth Weinberger, whose firm also makes the software used by the tutors.

Since its 2004 inception, Innovations for Learning's tutoring program has grown to include about 2,000 first-graders annually, half of whom are in the Chicago area. In Illinois, it includes classrooms in Chicago and Hanover Park.

The teachers choose which students get tutors.

"Those who are in the lower to middle reading level seem to benefit the most," said Patterson's first-grade teacher, Marcie Gutierrez. "Those below that need more intense help. The parents may be illiterate or not have time to read to the kids."

"Or their parents' first language is not English," added Weinberger.

"Deshaun is shy and is not the one to speak up," said his mother, Crystal Patterson. "So the one-on-one instruction gave him the extra attention he needed."

Innovations' tutoring program is funded by grants. Chase donates one laptop per participating classroom, and the tutors volunteer their time.

"We're not saving the world but we can make a differ-



JOSÉ M. OSORIO/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Marcie Gutierrez, a first-grade teacher at Hay Community Academy, gets student Ariel Eggleston, 6, set up with an online tutoring program.

ence," said tutor Don Cavalli, a vice president at Northern Trust Corp. in Chicago. "I was terrified at first because I don't have kids. But my first student jumped five reading levels. The teacher said he had a behavioral problem but he lived for the tutoring time."

That was six years and five students ago for Cavalli. All have jumped at least three reading levels, their teachers have told him.

"It's our social responsibility to help the kids who don't have the advantages other kids have. As a mom, I know it makes a difference," said Diane Sciacca, an attorney with Chase who had her first tutoring student last year at Pilsen Community Academy in Chicago. "It's only a half-hour a week. Because we use a computer, we can do it if we're at the office, traveling or working from home."

Other companies that provide tutors in the Chicago area are Bank of America, Microsoft, Morningstar, Peoples Energy Corp. and Vienna Beef.

Although some other companies match tutors from the business world with students, most are for-profit and pay their tutors. Tutor.com, for example, hires professionals from different disciplines to work remotely with students by computer.

Weinberger said feedback from the tutors, teachers and parents prompts him to expand the program.

"A survey among the teachers of last year's students said the tutoring helped every student," he said. "They tell us it helps with their fluency, comprehension and word knowledge."

FEBRUARY 6, 2013

# Online literacy program links Metro Detroit students, volunteers

BY JENNIFER CHAMBERS THE DETROIT NEWS



Daniel Estrella-Rodriguez, a second-grader at Bennett Elementary School in Detroit, goes online to get reading help from Tracie Zettler, a volunteer tutor 20 miles away in Warren. They connect through headphones, laptop computers and TutorMate, an online literacy program. (Daniel Mears / The Detroit News)

It's hard to tell who is more excited about reading this day: the student or the teacher.

Second-grader Daniel Estrella-Rodriguez is smiling ear to ear, sitting patiently at his desk. Tutor Tracie Zettler is giddy, wiggling in her seat as both begin their 30 minutes of reading together.

Daniel and Zettler are 20 miles apart —he inside his elementary school classroom in southwest Detroit and she inside General Motors Co.'s Warren Technical Center.

They are connected via headphones, laptop computers and TutorMate, an online literacy program that allows professionals to remotely tutor a student in reading without leaving the office.

The program, created by Chicago-based Innovations for Learning, provides an opportunity to full-time employees who crave volunteer experiences yet cannot commit to leaving the office every week.

About 1,200 tutors across the U.S. volunteer in the program, with about 120 active in Metro Detroit. Tutors from GM, Comerica Bank, AT&T, Team Detroit and Chase Bank are connected with schoolchildren across the city, including more than a dozen classrooms in Detroit Public Schools.

TutorMate donates a laptop, headphone set and program software to each school. Tutors typically use their own company computer or personal laptop and perform the work during business hours.

Educators like the program because it gives students one-on-one attention and nurturing, positive feedback.

Daniel's teacher at Bennett Elementary School, Cecilia Ly, says the twice-weekly tutoring, which started in October, has helped the second-grader.

"I've seen an increase in his self-esteem," she said. "They get special time with someone who cares about them. It makes them feel special."

Tutoring is done at the same time every week and begins with the tutor connecting with the student's computer in school via a conference call.

The student wears headphones to hear the tutor; the volunteer speaks via a mini-microphone and hears the child through a telephone headset.

Once connected, the student's mouse is disabled, allowing the tutor to do all of the typing and clicking to turn book pages.

A typical 30-minute session includes selecting and reading a story with the student, asking questions about the story and then playing some games or other activities.

Depending on the student's ability, tutors and students can take turns reading pages, read the same pages one at a time or have the student read independently.

Tutors can use pointing tools to help students as they read and they can write words in a text box

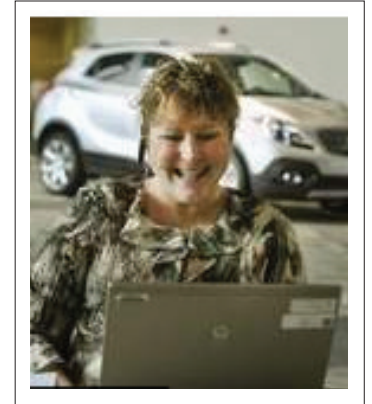
so students can practice typing and spelling.

At the end of each story, the tutor has a chance to ask questions about the material to make sure the student comprehends what he or she read, program officials said.

For the tutor, the experience doesn't end there. Once students are done with their sessions, the tutor fills out a weekly feedback form that teachers

read to keep abreast of a student's progress or challenges.

In Daniel's case, the twice-weekly tutoring has improved the 7-year-old's ability to read—from 14 to 35 words a minute. It also has benefited Zettler, who has donated her time to other causes such as Habitat for Humanity and the Special Olympics.



Tutor Tracie Zettler, a logistics planner for General Motors.

"I love to help people and I love to volunteer," said Zettler, a logistics planner at GM. "I have butterflies when we talk. I feel like I want to hug him. And he tries so hard."

Daniel, a quiet boy with brown hair and an easy smile, said, "Miss Tracie helps me sound out a word if I don't know it" and she "tells me that I'm good and that I'm paying attention."

At GM, the program is so popular there's a waiting list for would-be tutors.

Dan Weisberg, national director for corporation alliances for TutorMate, said in most cases a traditional tutoring session requires one to two hours, between driving time and actual interaction.

The online program requires 30 minutes, yet has a huge impact on both tutor and student, he said. "It's the best return on your time investment of any volunteer program we've ever seen," Weisberg said.

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From The Detroit News: <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20130206/>



## Innovations for Learning



### USING TECHNOLOGY TO INSPIRE A LOVE FOR READING

#### About our Partnership

Booz Allen Hamilton is proud to partner with the nonprofit organization Innovations for Learning® (IFL). Our employee volunteers use IFL's technology and curriculum to support classroom learning, conveniently from their places of work. As strategy and technology consultants, we recognize the importance of investing in people and in systems to cultivate their growth and development. Our employees demonstrate every day that virtual working environments can produce positive results and meaningful relationships, and we look forward to seeing the same outcomes in schools our employees support.

Get Involved ▶

### INTERVIEW WITH DAN WEISBERG, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, TUTORMATE ONLINE LITERACY PROGRAM



For insight into what it means to be an IFL volunteer tutor, we interviewed Dan Weisberg, National Director, TutorMate Online Literacy Program.

#### What is the mission of Innovations for Learning?

We are a Chicago-based nonprofit that has been dedicated for over 20 years to improving early grade student literacy. IFL's strategy is to connect the power of technology, teaching, and tutoring. We provide schools with a technology-based system for differentiated instruction and blended learning, called TeacherMate™. We also provide an online volunteer tutoring program, called TutorMate™, designed to reinforce reading skills and proficiency.

#### Who are the students receiving tutoring?

Tutors work with first and second graders at inner-city public schools. Teachers identify students who need extra help, and who, with extra individualized attention, are capable of solid growth during the year.

#### What impact is your program having?

Teachers report that students who are regularly tutored develop stronger vocabularies and exhibit improved reading confidence, fluency, and oral skills. Tutors find it highly rewarding to contribute to the growth of students' abilities during the school year.

#### What does a typical tutoring session look like?

When it's time to tutor, you call the classroom using a landline or cell phone. Your student comes to the phone, and you launch our online tutoring interface from your computer. At that point, you and your student share a common screen that includes stories and various reading games. The fun begins, and our interactive software guides you along the way.

#### What is the time commitment tutors must make?

Tutors commit to a weekly 30-minute timeslot during school hours, knowing that this time can be changed as needed to accommodate your schedule. These timeslots have been defined by the classroom teacher, so that your student will be available

and you aren't disrupting other learning activities.

You can tutor from anywhere, as long as you have a telephone and a computer with Internet access. No commuting to schools is required! Most of our tutors – even busy professionals – are able to make the commitment of 30 minutes per week. But tutors who can volunteer only twice a month can team with another volunteer in order to tutor one student.

**Are there any special requirements of tutors?**

Learning to tutor online is easy, and no prior experience is needed. When you sign up to become a tutor, you select one of our upcoming one-hour training webinars. This training provides you with all the skills you need to tutor your student successfully.

**Where are schools using the IFL tutoring program?**

Our major implementations are in Chicago, Washington D.C., Miami, and Seattle, where a substantial percentage of first grade students are benefitting from our system. We are also supporting schools in New York City, Detroit, Denver, Los Angeles, and Oakland. And this list is growing as more school districts request our services.

**What if I want to become a tutor, but Innovations for Learning is not working with schools in my community?**

We prefer to match tutors with schools in the same location. This allows tutors and students the option to meet at an end-of-year celebration! However, our primary goal is match every student selected for tutoring with a tutor. Collaborating with corporations like Booz Allen enables us to find large numbers of tutors based in the regions where are key school districts happen to be, and to supplement this with their employees working in smaller offices or remote locations.

**How can Booz Allen employees get started?**

Booz Allen employees can log in to their [employee site](#) to access Booz Allen Cares and learn more about the Time to Inspire initiative.

**How can other professionals who are not Booz Allen employees get started?**

Complete a [Request for Information form](#) and Booz Allen will help you get connected to IFL. You can also learn more about IFL by visiting [www.innovationsforlearning.org](http://www.innovationsforlearning.org). We have had great media coverage and you'll find links to these print and TV stories on our web site.

[Back to Time to Inspire](#)

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## FAQ's for New Tutors

### **How do I get started as a tutor?**

Let your Tutor Coordinator know that you would like to volunteer as a tutor. Your coordinator will send you an email with a link to Innovations for Learning (IFL)'s registration site and a link to sign up for a webinar training session. After you have completed your training, we will send you your login information, your student's name and reading level, your teacher's name and email, the classroom computer phone number, the date tutoring will start, a school calendar, and other information to get you started.

### **Do I need experience with reading, tutoring, or computers?**

No experience is necessary. IFL provides a one-hour training, which typically is conducted via conference call webinar. Our interactive software easily guides you through every step of tutoring during each session and throughout the school year.

### **Who will my student be?**

Your student will be a first or second grader at an inner city public school. Teachers identify students who need extra help, but who are capable of solid growth during the year.

### **How do I connect with my student?**

You will call the classroom using a landline or cell phone. When your student comes to the phone, you launch our online tutoring interface from your computer. At that point, you and your student share a common screen that includes our stories and various reading games.

### **What is my tutoring commitment?**

As a volunteer, you will tutor your student in reading for 30 minutes each week during the school year. You will select a regular weekly tutoring timeslot during school hours, knowing that this time always can be changed. You can tutor from anywhere, as long as you have a telephone and a computer with Internet access. You can skip weeks for vacations or other reasons, but we ask that you connect with your student during most weeks. Tutors who can volunteer only twice a month can team with another volunteer to tutor one student.

### **What if I'm not sure I have time to tutor?**

If you're not sure about the time commitment, we really urge you try it out and see how it works. Just about every tutor who has tried tutoring has decided to continue, realizing that the time commitment is minimal and the flexibility is great.

### **What if I can't make my scheduled tutoring timeslot?**

Because the student does not expect you to call at any particular time during the week, you can change your tutoring time, even at the last minute. The classroom tutoring schedule is accessible online so you easily can select an alternate time.



### **What is my student is inattentive or disinterested?**

Feel free to start with a game. Typically, after students play a game or two, they are ready and eager to begin reading. If the classroom is noisy and seems distracting, encourage your student to raise the “Quiet Sign” that is housed near the computer. If you suspect that your student is bored or overwhelmed, feel free to go up or down a level to see if another level seems more appropriate. If you think you’d like to switch your student’s level on an ongoing basis, please email your student’s teacher after the session to let him or her know of the change.

### **What if my student is absent?**

If your student is not in school when you call, your teacher may ask if you would like to tutor another student that day. It is completely up to you whether or not you choose to tutor another student. If you have set aside the time and would indeed like to tutor, please feel free to do so. In this situation, teachers typically send students to the phone who do not have tutors, and these children always love the opportunity to feel special for a day. Since you will not know the student’s reading level, and you are only tutoring for a short time, we recommend that you choose a story from the C or D level. Please remember, however, that you are under no obligation to tutor another student.

### **Are there opportunities to meet my student in person?**

Depending on the policy of the school, there may be opportunities to meet your student. Some teachers welcome their tutors to visit the classroom on an individual basis. In addition, it may be possible for your corporation to organize end-of-year parties to celebrate the year’s accomplishments.

### **How can I contact my student’s teacher?**

We will provide you with your teacher’s email to address questions and concerns or to share your student’s accomplishments. However, please be aware that teachers have limited time to review emails. Since teachers are busy throughout the school day, it is also important to remember that they most likely will not get back to you immediately.

### **How do I reach IFL for technical assistance?**

You can chat with IFL’s technical support team by clicking on the *IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE* button, which is accessible from every page of the tutoring program. You also can access tech support by calling (800) 975-3452, ext 2. Use the *IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE* button if the classroom phone is busy or unanswered *OR* if you or your student cannot access the tutoring program. Please note that you can still tutor – and there is no need to contact IFL immediately -- if your computer is not connected to your student’s computer as long as you can hear your student on the phone and you can each see the program on your computers; just be sure to verbally instruct your student to click on the same buttons that you click on throughout the session. After your session, click the *CONTACT IFL* button to let us know that you were unable to connect with your student’s computer.

### **What are the benefits of tutoring?**

Teachers report that students who are regularly tutored develop strong vocabularies and exhibit improved reading confidence, fluency, and oral skills; tutors find it highly rewarding to experience the growth in their students’ abilities during the school year. In addition, students and their tutors enjoy building warm and meaningful relationships.

# Help a child learn to read in just 30 minutes, once a week.

## Volunteer

**Health Care Service Corp. is partnering with nonprofit Innovations For Learning (IFL) to bring their web-based online tutoring program, TutorMate,<sup>®</sup> to at-risk first-graders in Chicago Public Schools.**

IFL, dedicated to bringing innovative technologies to K-2 classrooms, has successfully implemented TutorMate in cities across the country. With only a telephone, Internet connection, and 30 minutes a week, you can make a difference in the life of a young student and help to promote their success in school **right from your desk.**

We link  
students  
& tutors  
remotely



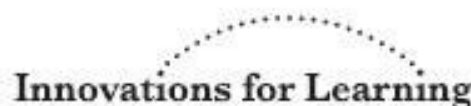
Online  
tutoring is  
rewarding  
& flexible



- Quick and simple 60-minute online training
- You choose your weekly tutoring time
- Tutoring sessions are only 30 minutes weekly during the school year and take place right from your desk
- Easy-to-use software walks you through each session
- Ongoing support provided
- No experience necessary

## Register Now!

**For more info or to register, contact:**  
**Shelley Long Phone: 312.653.4940**  
**eMail: [Shelley\\_Long@bcbsil.com](mailto:Shelley_Long@bcbsil.com)**

  
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Short terrific video: <http://tiny.cc/tutormate>  
TutorMate press: <http://tiny.cc/tutormatepress>  
TutorMate FAQs: <http://tiny.cc/iflfaq>  
In-depth video: <http://tiny.cc/ifltutormate30>  
Contact IFL: [heather@tutormate.org](mailto:heather@tutormate.org)