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### Thank You...

To Pine Avenue United Church and First United Church of Oak Park for donating tutoring space on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry for donating healthy snacks each week for students.



Cluster is committed to helping youth from the Austin community realize their potential through the power of learning in an environment that strengthens the student, the tutor, and the community.

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Visit us on the web at  
[www.clustertutoring.org](http://www.clustertutoring.org)

Cluster is a nonprofit, 501c3 community organization. All donations are 100% tax deductible.



## Annual Update • Fall 2018



Joshua, a third grader, works with retired physician Burton Andersen.



Ninth grader Jarel has worked with his tutor, John Rice, for over seven years.

### Spend any time with Cluster Tutoring and you soon see the connection between volunteer tutors and students

Cluster is proud to share some special highlights from our 2017 – 18 year. You'll read about the accomplishments of Cluster alum, Jessica Thompson, now a second-grade teacher, and her continuing friendship with her long-time tutors.

We'd like to introduce you to Jamiya, who started Cluster as a second grader and enrolled this Fall as a freshman at Northern Illinois University. During all those years, she worked with the same tutor!

You'll learn about improvements to our libraries, and how our kids avoid the 'summer slide' by attending a dynamic summer reading program that gets results.

2017 – 18 was a year when we really focused on partnerships that opened up new ways of learning. In addition to the summer reading program, Concordia University's Center for Literacy offered small-group reading and writing lessons to our students during the school year. Over the summer, Cluster students strengthened their math skills at Oak Park's Mathnasium, a place where numbers are king. These new partnerships benefit our kids as well as the larger community.

As friends and supporters of Cluster, you are critical to making these opportunities and resources a reality.

On behalf of Cluster's board, thank you for your continued support.

**Warmly,**  
**Karen Heller, Board President**  
**Kara Kalnitz, Executive Director**



## Long-Term Mentoring = Academic Success

Student of the Year, Jocelyn Pacheco

Jocelyn P. and her tutor, Darla, have been working together at Cluster for the past five years. During the 2017-2018 year, Jocelyn's dedication to her school work was recognized when she received one of Cluster's Student of the Year awards.

Over the course of the year, her grades had improved by 46%, her reading fluency increased by 12%, and she consistently exhibited a positive and joyful attitude. In fact, the tutor who worked with Jocelyn's brother noted that after arriving at Cluster, she would take her seat and get to work right away—even if her tutor had not arrived yet.

"Jocelyn has matured into a confident student that cares about school and is a kind and caring person. Spending time with Jocelyn on Tuesday is the highlight of my week!", according to tutor Darla. "Cluster has provided us with the tutoring resources to help keep Jocelyn on track academically."



## Cluster's 2017-2018 Major Achievements:

- 115 students from the west side of Chicago were paired with 114 volunteer tutors.
- Cluster saw an 83% improvement in reading fluency, and 53% improvement in vocabulary over the course of the tutoring year.
- All of Cluster's ninth graders are on track to graduate. In fact, all of Cluster's students in the past 26 years have graduated from high school!
- 100% of Cluster's graduates created post-secondary education plans with the assistance of our Project Next Step program. All of them were admitted to the college of their choice.
- Parents of Cluster students reported a 98% satisfaction rate with the tutoring program as a whole.
- 77% of students that participated in the Summer Reading Program improved their reading fluency.
- Cluster formed partnerships with Concordia University's Center for Literacy and Mathnasium of Oak Park to bring additional learning resources to Cluster's youth.

THE MISSION OF CLUSTER TUTORING is to help students realize their potential through the power of learning in an environment that strengthens the student, the tutor, and the community.

## Cluster Students Beat "Summer Slide" and Excel at Reading

Summer vacations are a great time to recharge and have fun. Unfortunately, students can lose up to three months of reading achievement over the summer. The cumulative effect of this time off can put children years behind their peers, making them more likely to drop out of school.

Cluster's Summer Reading Program provides an antidote to "summer slide". For the second year in a row, Cluster partnered with AWAKE, an affiliate of Unity Lutheran Church of Berwyn. There were 43 students from grades K through 6 registered for the program, and an average of 30 students attended six weeks of classes, two evenings a week. They were taught by four teachers and helped by four program aides (the latter were hired from a pool of Cluster's high school students). Program participation grew 20% in 2018.

Teachers focused on a variety of reading and writing skills, including reading fluency and vocabulary. The aim of the program was to encourage an enjoyment of reading and to reduce the "summer slide".

**Overall, 77% of the students assessed made improvement in reading fluency.** Cluster looks forward to continuing the Summer Reading Program in 2019. Thank you to First United Church of Oak Park for the use of their space for the Summer Reading Program and to the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry for providing snacks for the students.



## CROP Hunger Walk

A big thank you to the organizers, walkers, donors, and other supporters of the CROP Hunger Walk. Its subsidiary, Hunger Walkathon West, gave Cluster a much appreciated donation of \$2,200, which will go a long way toward buying snacks for hungry Cluster students on Tuesday and Thursday nights throughout the tutoring year.

The Hunger Walkathon West raised a record amount of \$82,500 this year. That amount is directed both to international groups fighting hunger and food insecurity and to ten local organizations that fight hunger, including several food pantries. The global recipients are Church World Service international relief and development programs.

We're also grateful that so many tutors and tutoring families stepped up to volunteer or make donations. The CROP Hunger Walk is held annually on the first Sunday in May.

Tutor and Cluster Board Member Amy Stearns accepted Cluster's check from CROP Hunger Walk.





## Mentoring Relationships between Tutors and Students are Key to Cluster's Success

Jamiya S. first came to Cluster Tutoring when she was in 2nd grade. In June 2018, she graduated from Lake View High School, after having been accepted at 11 colleges! The lucky winner? Northern Illinois University.

From second grade through senior year, Lia Colbert was Jamiya's steadfast tutor.

"Jamiya liked to take on a big load," Lia said. "Sometimes she got frustrated at the same time, but she could do it. She could do the work."



Tutor Lia Colbert and Jamiya have worked together since Jamiya was just eight years old.

Jamiya wants to be a nurse, a profession that runs in the family: an aunt, sister, and cousin are all nurses.

"I've always liked science," Jamiya said. "Sometimes I struggled with it, but I always overcame it."

Active in high school, she was vice president of Lake View's Black Student Union and took a leadership role as a school ambassador. Jamiya doesn't know exactly what kind of nursing she wants to pursue, but she's thinking of becoming a nurse midwife or a nurse practitioner. She credits Cluster and Lia for all the help and encouragement. "I always appreciated the extra help and the opportunities!" she said.

## Cluster Libraries Encourage Adventure

The Libraries at Cluster's two sites are hives of activity, housing books, educational materials, and computers. On tutoring nights, students and tutors buzz in and out, checking out books, flash cards, reserving a computer, or just getting an extra pencil.

This past summer, Executive Director Kara Kalnitz re-organized and freshened the libraries by gathering book donations from local organizations. She also purchased many new titles that added ethnic diversity and would appeal to this generation's kids and teens. Students can find old favorites, such as classic books by Dr. Seuss, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, and the "Goosebumps" series, along with more recent graphic novels and fantasies so beloved by kids in a post-Harry Potter world. Tutors and students enjoy reading aloud together.

If you're having trouble deciding on a good book, just ask our new librarians, Laura Bermudez, on Tuesday night, or Debbie Morris and Mary Sue Voth on Thursday. They will be happy to set you up with a good read!



## Cluster Alum Jessica Thompson—Teaching the Next Generation

We always love to hear what students accomplish after they graduate from Cluster Tutoring, so we're happy to report on the success of Jessica Thompson.

Tutor David Holmes started working with Jessica when she was in seventh grade. David's wife, Suzanne Holmes, joined Cluster when Jessica was a sophomore in high school, and the couple alternated weeks with Jessica. She graduated high school, and finished Cluster in May 2013, and enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, majoring in education.

Jessica graduated in December 2017 and now teaches second grade at Harvard Park Elementary School in Springfield, IL. Suzanne and David have kept in touch with Jessica and are so proud of her. Suzanne still tutors, having started with a new first grader five years ago.



## Cluster Alum Jessica Thompson with her second grade class at Harvard Park Elementary in Springfield, IL.





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 Parkview Presbyterian Church  
 Pilgrim Congregational Church  
 St. Giles Family Mass Community

# 114 Volunteers Donated Over 6,500 Hours Mentoring and Tutoring 115 Cluster Students in 2017-2018



On May 18, 2018, close to 70 tutors gathered for Cluster's second annual Tutor Social. The group enjoyed dinner and great conversation.



### Tutor Facts:

- In 2017-2018, Cluster had an all-time high tutor retention rate of 86% overall and 91% for Thursday tutors.
- On average, tutors stay with Cluster for four years.
- Tutors range in age from 16—90.
- The majority of Cluster's tutors live in Oak Park, IL.
- Almost half of our tutors are retired and come from a wide range of professions.
- Current tutors are teachers, doctors, scientists, social workers, attorneys, moms, dads, grandparents, and high school students.
- Many tutors donate financially to Cluster in addition to their tutoring hours.
- Many tutors stay in contact with their students long after they graduate high school.

According to our volunteers, the #1 reason they tutor is getting the chance to watch a young person grow and mature over the years.

**JOIN US...become a Cluster Tutor Today!**