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Reading Allowed

SEPTEMBER, 2026

A Note from our Executive Director

Friends,

There is something special about September. New backpacks, fresh notebooks, familiar faces, and the excitement and sometimes nervousness of a new school year. For our students, a new school year is also a new opportunity: to grow, to build confidence, and to discover what they are capable of.

At Reading Allowed, we are excited to begin another year alongside our students, families, instructors, and school partners. Instruction begins soon, and our team is busy preparing to make this year meaningful and successful for every student we serve.

We know that learning to read is about so much more than academics. Reading opens doors. It builds independence, confidence, and the ability to fully participate in school and in the world around us. That is why the individualized support our incredible instructors provide is so important. Every session is an opportunity to help a student take another step forward and empower them. As we head into this new school year, I am especially grateful to everyone who makes this work possible. To our dedicated instructors and

school partners, to our families, donors, and supporters, each of you are an important part of the success of our students.

September also marks the beginning of **Hispanic Heritage Month**, a time to celebrate the rich cultures, histories, traditions, and contributions of Hispanic and Latino communities. Books and literacy give us another powerful way to see ourselves, learn about one another, and appreciate the many stories that strengthen our communities. Here are a few wonderful books that celebrate Hispanic heritage to explore with young readers:

- ***Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal: A beautiful story about family, identity, and the meaning behind a child's name.**
- ***Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales: An inspiring and beautifully illustrated story about immigration, family, and discovering the power of books.**
- ***Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied Méndez: A thoughtful story about heritage, identity, and the many places and people that shape who we are.**
- ***Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina: A touching story about family, language, and finding connection across generations.**
- ***Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* by Sonia Sotomayor: A celebration of differences and the unique qualities that make each of us who we are.**

Here is to a new school year filled with curiosity, growth, confidence, and possibility!

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Onward,





Tamara N. Smith
Executive Director
tamara@readingallowed.org

PLEASE GIVE

Events/Happenings



Concilios Annual Puerto Rican Day Parade
September 27, 2026, 12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Benjamin Franklin Parkway (centered around Logan Square, moving towards the Philadelphia Museum of Art).

This monumental celebration marks a premier event during Hispanic Heritage Month in Philadelphia. The 2026 parade theme is "Our Roots. Our Art. Our Legacy." and directly honors the deep-rooted resilience, vibrant creative expressions, and historical contributions of the city's Puerto Rican diaspora.

MORE INFO HERE



Philadelphia Literacy Day 2026
September 5, 2026, 12:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Tree House Books - 1400 - 1600 Blocks of W Susquehanna Avenue, Philadelphia.

This is a free event, but it's best to reserve a spot. Expect readings and book signings with local and national authors, free books, and family activities. We love this event because it brings the community together for readings and book signings with local and national authors, plus music, food, vendors, and more! You can volunteer or register by clicking below.

REGISTER HERE



K-12 Philly School Fair
September 19th, 2026, 10 AM to 4 PM
PA Convention Center

Connect directly with over 150 public district, public charter, private, and faith-based schools at this annual free event. With nearly all of Philadelphia's school options in one place, the Fair is open to families with children of any age who are looking for a K-12 school for the following academic year. Whether planning for kindergarten, high school, or anywhere in between, families can speak directly with school staff, learn about

programs and student supports, and even apply onsite.



Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in Grand Style. Check out VisitPhilly's list!

Our friends at VisitPhilly have put together a stellar list of over 20 ways to celebrate Hispanic culture. Remember, reading a menu is STILL reading. If you're a foodie family, you won't want to miss Sazon Latin Food Festival 2026, a family-friendly outdoor festival featuring Latin music and curated food from across Latin America, happening on 9/19. Also, Dine Latino Restaurant Week returns beginning 10/4. Click on the link below to see all the choices, including family-friendly Salsa Sundays at Bok Bar!

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Stories to Inspire

Setting Up Struggling Readers for a Strong School Year



If you're wondering **how to help a struggling reader start the school year**, the answer isn't to squeeze in extra worksheets before bedtime.

Our friends at the Roberts Academy at Mercer University suggest that parents/guardians begin by building relationships.

Before concerns arise, introduce yourself to your child's teacher. Share information about your child's strengths, challenges, and the strategies that have (and haven't)

worked in the past.

If your child has accommodations, discuss how they'll be implemented from the first week rather than waiting until difficulties emerge.

Organizations like Understood.org and the National Center on Improving Literacy emphasize that consistent partnership between home and school helps children receive more coordinated support.

It's also important to prepare your child emotionally.
Rather than saying, "I hope reading is easier this year," try asking:

- What are you excited about?
- Is there anything you're nervous about?
- What helped you learn best last year?

These conversations remind children that they are active participants in their education. They also communicate an important message:
Struggling with reading isn't something to hide. It's something we work through together.

Strong Readers Start With Strong Teachers
Read by 4th Lunch and Learn



On 9/10/26 at noon, join Read by 4th's free Lunch and Learn (via Zoom) for a conversation with Scott Gaiber, Deputy Chief of Talent Initiatives at Elevate 215. He'll discuss the Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition's work to recruit, retain, and develop diverse, effective teachers.

You'll explore the realities shaping Philadelphia's teacher workforce, from vacancies and emergency permits to changing enrollment and teacher retention. Participants will also look at what teachers need to feel prepared and supported in the classroom, and what it will take to make Philadelphia's public schools a place where great educators want to build a lasting career. This talk will lean into the notion of "If we want our children to become strong readers, we have to invest in the people who teach them."

REGISTER HERE

Remembering Dolly



We can't deploy September's newsletter without remembering an iconic music artist (and literacy advocate), Dolly Parton. This country music legend's passing has impacted fans all over the world, but her impact and her passion for connecting kids with exciting reading adventures will live on through her program, Imagination Library. What a legacy! Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a free book-gifting program that mails one age-appropriate book each month to program participants from birth through age five, creating a personal home library before a child starts school. Books are selected each year by a committee of early childhood literacy experts and are published exclusively by Penguin Random House.

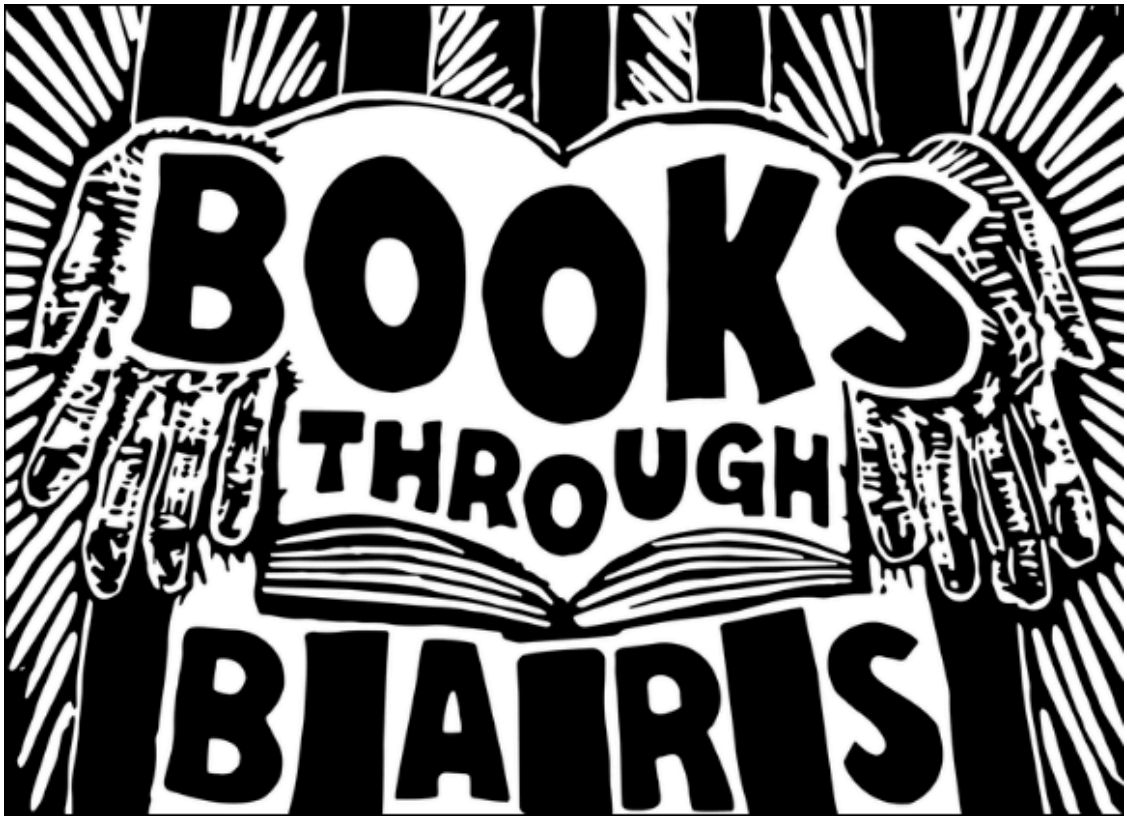
> "You can never get enough books into the hands of young children."- Dolly Parton

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has made high-quality books accessible for young readers in ways that go far beyond sending stories in the mail. She worked with partner organizations to provide books in alternate formats such as Braille and audio that help to fill a critical gap in the availability of accessible picture books for young readers. Many of her books are also available in a variety of other accessible formats, including audiobooks narrated by Dolly herself. What a tremendous gift for kids all over the globe!

Free monthly book delivery is currently limited to specific West Philadelphia ZIP codes: 19104, 19131, 19139, 19143, and 19151. Through this program, children from birth to age five can receive a free, high-quality book in the mail every month — at no cost to their families. Learn more about (and enroll in) this West Philadelphia partnership with the West Philadelphia Alliance for Children by clicking below.

MORE INFO

Looking for a great place to Donate Your Books?



Did you know Books Through Bars has been sending free books and educational resources to incarcerated people for nearly two decades in Philadelphia? Many prison libraries are inadequate and inaccessible, while access to resources from the outside is limited by prison restrictions and poverty levels. Each year, BTB receives thousands of book requests from incarcerated people. They mobilize hundreds of volunteers to run every aspect of their important work, from data entry to soliciting book donations to library organization.

This dedicated organization strives to send the books individuals request, supporting self-determination, self-education, and healing behind bars. You can learn how to donate books to this amazing program by clicking the button below.

LEARN HOW TO DONATE BOOKS HERE

"Take Two Books and Call Me in the Morning!"



In case you missed the WHYY article update on 8/4, it's a great read or listen!

Pediatricians at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia "prescribe" books to young patients and their families to encourage reading. The practice is part of the national Reach Out and Read model, which aims to improve literacy rates and school readiness. (CHOP/Reach Out and Read).

Dr. Trude Haecker and her colleagues at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia have been "prescribing" new books to children and families. They send them home with a new book after visits, along with encouragement to read together as a family. Their goal is to support literacy rates and school readiness, especially as reading levels have stayed flat or even fallen in many communities in recent years.

Distributing books that families can use to spend more time together at home can also help create stronger relationships between parents and children, Haecker said.

Health systems and practices in Pennsylvania's major cities, as well as large communities like Lancaster, adopted the Reach Out and Read model many years ago. But Haecker said there's an opportunity to expand services to health providers and families in rural areas.

"Family practice is the other place we're really trying to work with, because Pennsylvania has a lot of family practitioners, in rural areas, particularly," she said.

"We want to reach out to them, as well as nurse practitioners, to make sure that they're aware."

Under the new statewide affiliate, Reach Out and Read leaders will help more doctors and nurses adopt the model throughout the US. To learn more about Reach Out and Read, click the button below.

LEARN MORE NOW

Download RA's Reading Tracker!

According to research completed by Hasbrouck and Tindal (for grades 1-6) and Marc Brysbaert for other grade levels. Piqosity.com published a guide showing the recommended minimum daily reading times by grades K through 12. Across grade levels, the data is remarkably consistent.

There is a clear correlation between reading more pages daily, reading more often for fun, and better performance on reading assessments and higher percentile rankings. Talk to kids about their personal reading goals, and have them write them on a sticky note and place it on the bathroom mirror or somewhere they can see every day. This visual will be a constant reminder of their reading goal and may even remind them to pick up a book for independent reading! You can read Piqosity's entire article **here.**

See below for a handy infographic from the Piqosity article.

Grade Band	Minimum Time Students Should Read Daily	Median WPM for Age Range	Minimum Words Students Should Read Daily	Average Word Per Page for Grade Appropriate Books	Minimum Pages Students Should Read Daily	Strong Weekly Reading Page Goal
K-2	15-20 mins	101	1,515-2,020	150*	10-14	80
3-5	15-25 mins	150	2,250-3,750	200	11-19	100
6-8	20-30 mins	177	3,540-5,310	250	14-22	130
9-12	20-30 mins	250	5,000-7,500	300	17-25	150



DOWNLOAD IT NOW

Does your kiddo need a bit more motivation? In the Philadelphia area, these programs could provide just the right incentive! Everyone likes a reward for hard work. We recommend checking with your local destinations to confirm they are active participants! *Note: Reading Allowed is in no way affiliated with the national programs below.*

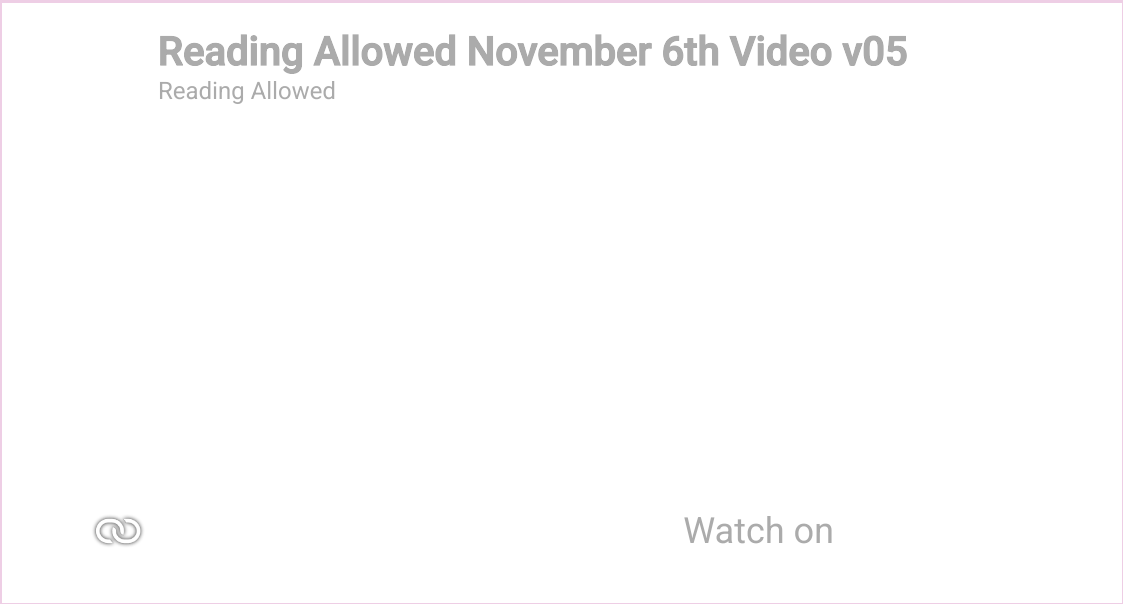
Pizza Hut BOOK IT!: This is the nation's longest-running corporate literacy program. Teachers enroll classrooms during the school year (October through March), and parents can sign up for the digital Camp BOOK IT! summer

extension. Kids earn a free single-topping Personal Pan Pizza by meeting monthly reading goals.

Panda Express Read With Me: Teachers or groups can enroll online. Children who read five books receive a coupon for a free kids meal.

Chuck E. Cheese Reading Rewards: Families can download and print a two-week Reading Rewards calendar. Once completed, children bring the certificate in with a food purchase to earn free play points.

In Philadelphia, Too Many Students Fall Behind We Want to Change that



PLEASE HELP US REACH OUR GOAL



STAY CONNECTED

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