

## Give us your feedback on program enhancements

Our coordinators keep coming up with great ideas, so Learning Together always has new projects in the works. We'd love to hear your suggestions about some of the enhancements that are in development—post your comments on the Sharing Board, or email them directly to [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com), and we'll send incentive gifts for your students!

- *Tutee lesson plans for after school.* What do tutees do while the tutors are being trained for the upcoming lesson? Some schools would like to have tutees extend the lessons with related activities, so we're working on a series of lesson plans that review the previous tutorial and prepare children to think ahead for the upcoming lesson.

- *Bridge-year program for "graduating" tutees.* How can we keep students plugged into Reading Together™ or Math Together™ in the year or two between participating as a tutee and volunteering as a tutor? In some districts, the answer is moving the tutee into the next grade-level program, but for many districts, providing another intervention for students who have reached grade level (hurray!) simply isn't in the budget. Coordinators tell us that going full circle

from being the one helped to being the helper is one of the most powerful parts of the program, and we're researching ways to fill that gap.

- *At-home extension activities.* Have you created activities or games the children can do at home with their families? In Reading Together™ Phase II, for example, students bring the trade books home to read, so we're working on ways to use the books as the basis for family literacy activities. If you're already doing this, please let us know!



## "Lite" contract keeps tutors on task

Some districts, such as Montgomery County, MD, use a written agreement with their adult volunteers to make sure they understand the importance of regular attendance, and of keeping information about their tutees confidential. You can download copies of a sample contract in the Resource Downloads section of the website,

## [www.learningtogether.com](http://www.learningtogether.com).

Courtesy of Montgomery County, we've also posted an excellent adult tutor registration form that can be customized for other implementations. Contact us at [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com) if you need assistance logging on.

Coordinators for cross-age programs find a contract works better for students when they help create it themselves. During an early training session, when the tutors have an idea of what the program entails, have them brainstorm rules for appropriate behavior—and consequences for not meeting those expectations. "Each of my students writes up his or her contract for the year. It's been a great way to get them to think about the responsibility tutoring entails," says Sharon, a third-year coordinator in Texas. "Every now and then during debriefing we look back at the contracts to see how we're measuring up."

### New on the web

#### *Accelerated Reader Levels*

Tutees can participate in computer-based Accelerated Reader assessments for books included in Reading Together™. Find *R2 Accelerated Reader Levels (Grades Two or Three)* in Resource Downloads, Planning Templates.

#### *Pre-Program Parent Survey*

Involve parents from the beginning by asking them about their students' reading habits and skills. Look under *R2 Pre-Program Parent Survey* in Resource Downloads, Tutee and Tutor Recruitment/Selection.



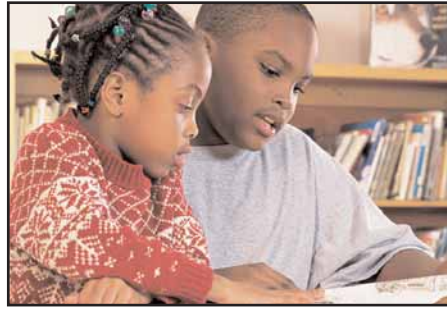
## Tips for picking tutees

Keep in mind Reading Together™ is a scripted program aimed at improving fluency and comprehension AND is being used by tutors who are not certified teachers. Tutees should have adequate decoding skills and be reading no more than a full year below grade level. In some cases, tutees may be using a lower-level student kit (Reading Together™ Grade Two for a third grader, for example). Reading Together™ has been very effective with intermediate and advanced ELL students who need additional support as they transition out of special programs.

There is no need to use an additional assessment tool to determine eligibility. Reading Together™ placement can be determined with whatever assessment the district has in place—running records, DRA, standardized testing, etc.—your L2 Educational Consultant can help set an appropriate benchmark. In most cases, the same measure is used

again mid-year and at program completion.

In addition, many schools select students who are nominally at grade level, but may be at risk of dropping back. These may include low-income students with little home support, transitioning ELL students, students with low confidence and self-esteem, etc.



Coordinators also should solicit recommendations from classroom teachers. In many cases, students who are nominally at grade level would benefit from the academic support and social development found in the mentoring relationship.

## Tips for picking tutors

Tutors may be cross-age students two or more grades older than tutees; these tutors generally show significant improvement in their own reading and leadership skills. Tutors also may be family members, community volunteers, senior citizens, high school or college students, paraprofessionals and others. Tutors must be able to read at a fourth-grade level, and exhibit appropriate communication skills. They need to be available for all training sessions and committed to completing 30 tutorial lessons. One or more alternate tutors should be selected, depending on the size of the program, to anticipate absences and relocations.

### Cross-Age Model

The best scenario is to use tutors at least two grades above tutees. When practical middle school or high school students also make great tutors. Reading Together™ encourages schools to consider students who may not be traditionally chosen for leadership roles. A student who may have been a struggling reader often has the most empathy for the tutees. In fact, many Reading Together programs regularly use former tutees as tutors with excellent results. Other schools have chosen to use whole classes of fifth or other grade students to tutor, or former ELL students to work with intermediate or advanced ELL students. Coordinators should train one or more alternate tutors in case a student moves (details about managing alternates are covered in the Coordinator's Manual).

Student tutors are selected based on reading test results, recommendations from classroom teachers, a tutor application and a personal interview. While the application and interview are optional, coordinators say these two items are valuable learning experiences for young students and help assure their commitment to the

*(Continued on back page)*

### Checklist for Selecting Tutees

Based on the DRA Benchmarks and Learning Together recommendations, the following guidelines are suggested for selecting tutees:

- Students must be able to decode
- They should be no more than one reading level below grade level
  - o Grade two tutees — DRA reading level 10 – 20
  - o Grade three tutees — DRA reading level 16 – 28
  - o Intermediate — DRA reading level 24
- They may be “bubble students” who would benefit from extra time. (Bubble students are considered those that are not at risk for failing, but are struggling to meet grade level standards)
- Teacher recommendation considering:
  - o lack of motivation or confidence
  - o regular attendance
  - o potential for improvement in given time frame
  - o consideration of other services being provided by student
  - o parent/guardian willingness for student participation
- Intermediate or advanced ELL students
- Successful completion of Reading Recovery® in first grade

### Tips for picking tutors *(Continued from page 3)*

program. Applications and parent permission letters are included in the Coordinator's Manual.

Recommendations from classroom teachers are another valuable part of the selection process. For pull-out programs, teachers may be initially reluctant to allow tutors out of the classroom for tutor prep and tutorials. They need to understand how Reading Together improves the reading, organizational and leadership skills for their students. Teachers may assign a study buddy for each tutor so he/she can get any missed work.

#### Adult Model

Paraprofessionals, parents, senior citizens, high school and college students, and corporate/community volunteers all make effective tutors. Generally the district assumes responsibility for recruiting and screening volunteer tutors (recruitment materials, contact sheets and other templates are included with the coordinator materials).

Adult tutors do not require as much training as the cross-age tutors, but still must commit to the training the coordinator deems necessary. In most cases, this is a two-hour orientation, supplemented by the Tutor Training DVD included in each student kit. Tutors should make sure their schedule accommodates the tutorial schedule set by the coordinator, and should be screened according to the district's normal standards. Recruitment and management materials are included with the program.

#### Meet Nedra Baldwin



Many of you feel as if you know Nedra, our Customer Relationship Coordinator, from her many phone calls and emails. Nedra joined Learning Together in 2002. In addition to providing site coordinator support, trouble-shooting, obtaining program feedback and processing orders, she works closely with districts to bring Learning Together to their schools. Nedra says one of the most rewarding aspects of her position is sharing student success stories with administrators who are considering the program. "When they can visualize the potential academic shift in their schools and actually decide to try our program, based on the information I have shared, I know they will not be disappointed. Furthermore," she adds, "I love bragging about the success children have experienced over the past five years with Reading Together!" When not working, Nedra enjoys reading non-fiction, traveling, and spending quality time with her husband and children.

## Contributors

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