



Behind the Book

Annual Report 2020-2021

Our mission is to develop engaged readers and writers in underserved NYC public schools by designing and delivering programs that are multi-disciplinary, culturally responsive, and promote deeper connections to books and their authors.



Dear Friends,

We are excited to share with you that our 19-year history of working in underserved NYC public schools positioned us not just to persevere during this very difficult and challenging year, but to thrive.

Our programs proved to be adaptable to the very special circumstances caused by remote learning and allowed us to work with our students and teachers in ways that enhanced their learning environments. We focused on social and emotional learning due to the circumstances, without losing sight of our commitment to the social justice and STEAM curricula.

All our schools from the past year returned, and we were able to complete 74 programs, including 16 for English language learners, and reached 1,300 students. Art and drama workshops were integral at all ages, and despite logistical hurdles we were able to publish student books for 7 classes. Many of our students went on remote field trips to places relevant to their studies, like the Elephant Nature Park in northern Thailand and La Morada, a restaurant turned mutual aid food kitchen in the Bronx. Others were treated to special virtual guests from organizations like the NYC Kids Puppets and Healing Through Art. Because we were remote, we were able to work with 17 new authors from around the country and as far away as Texas and California.



Our work in combating the lack of accessible books in our communities grew during this period. We provided 17,000 new books to our students by arranging outdoor book giveaways and stocking local shelters. Books allow children to dream and imagine worlds outside their own – this was especially important as they grappled with the daily stress of life during Covid.

Behind the scenes we were busy too. The grant we received from The William T. Grant Foundation allowed us to partner with Columbia Teachers College on an important paper analyzing the existing research on literacy engagement. This paper lets us share with the literacy community the best practices for promoting engagement and confirms that our multi-disciplinary approach has long-term success. Its findings will inform our work going forward.

We are grateful to our funders, sponsors, and board members who have continued to see the value of our unique programs and supported us during this time. And we are awed by our staff whose commitment and creativity has allowed us to move through this period stronger than ever.

Our values embrace a student-centered approach to learning that is culturally responsive and reflects the diverse background and interests of our students. We continue to believe that engaged readers and writers with strong critical thinking skills can change the world.

Behind the Book has risen to the challenge of this past year, but we know our students and teachers will need our help now more than ever. We hope that you will continue to support us in our mission to change our students' lives.

Happy reading,

Susan
Susan Elman

Jo
Jo Umans

2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

Successes

13 of our 14 schools returned for a total of **74** remote programs, consisting of **478** workshops, with PreK – 12th grade classrooms.

Brought special visitors into the remote classroom, including a marine biologist, food insecurity activists, experts in immigration and refugees, a fencer, and puppets, among others, to 21 classrooms to educate and supplement research efforts.

Published **7** student books with **15** classrooms, making **208** students published authors.

Donated **17,000** books to students, shelters, public housing, and the communities around our schools.

In FY 22 all of our schools will return, 2-3 new partner schools will be added, and our waiting list has been refreshed.

Cultural Responsiveness

Behind the Book has always understood the importance of books and authors who reflect the communities and lived experiences. Representation matters and we make sure our students see themselves in the books we provide.

This year **87%** of our programs' books had BIPOC main characters.

63% of our programs featured BIPOC authors.

Since 2003, we have:

Worked in **815** classrooms serving over **19,900** students in Title I public schools.

Donated more than **82,600** books to students, classroom & school libraries, and community organizations.

Covid-19 Impact

BtB saw a decrease in attendance, consistent with the NYC Department of Education's reporting.

We served **1,300** students as opposed to the expected **1,950**.

Workshops ran 30 – 45 minutes, compared to 90 minutes in-person, due to Zoom fatigue.

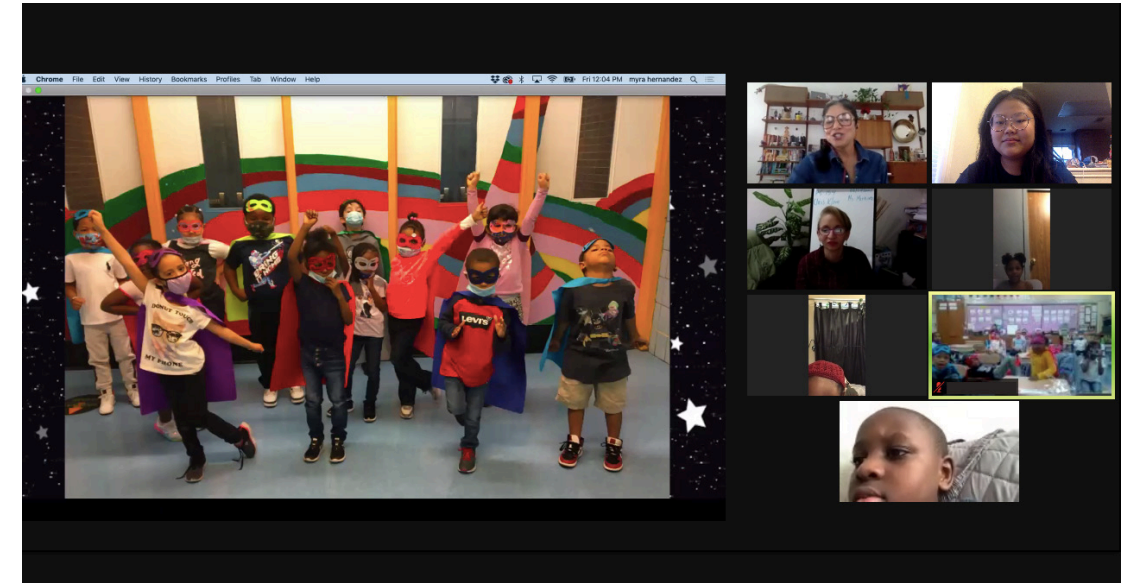
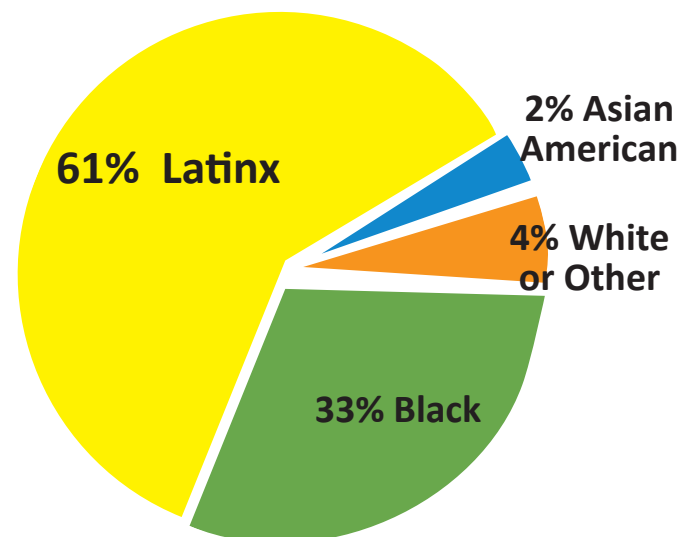
We had a significant decrease in volunteer opportunities due to the challenges of supervising them while in a remote learning setting.

Our Students

89% qualified for free lunch.

23% of our programs were customized for Special Education classes.

16 programs were designed for English language learners.



OUR PARTNER SCHOOLS

Elementary

- P.S. 4 The Duke Ellington School
Washington Heights, Manhattan
- P.S. 43 Jonas Bronck
Mott Haven, the Bronx
- P.S. 125 The Ralph Bunche School
Harlem, Manhattan
- P.S. 154 The Harriet Tubman School
Harlem, Manhattan
- P.S. 197 John B. Russwurm School
East Harlem, Manhattan

High Schools

- Explorations Academy High School
Morrisania, the Bronx
- Frederick Douglass Academy III
Morrisania, the Bronx
- International Community High School
Mott Haven, Bronx
- The Laboratory School of Finance and Technology:
MSHS 223 South Bronx
- Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning
& Social Justice
Harlem, Manhattan

Middle Schools

- The Laboratory School of Finance and Technology: MSHS 223
South Bronx
- M.S. 328 Community Math & Science Prep
Washington Heights, Manhattan
- M.S. 296 South Bronx Academy of Applied Media
Mott Haven, the Bronx
- Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning & Social Change
Harlem, Manhattan
- Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters
Mott Haven, the Bronx

[After Behind the Book,] I like to read more because Behind the Book brings in authors that make great books and you can ask them questions, making me want to read more.

**4th grade student,
P.S. 197 John B. Russwurm School**



BOOK GIVEAWAYS

Most avid readers grow up living with books in their homes, choosing books from the library or a store, discussing books with friends, and seeing family members reading for pleasure. Disappearing into another world in a book is a thing of joy and refuge for many, but it is impossible for that love to develop without access.

If you do not have positive childhood associations and don't interact with books on a regular basis, the idea of reading for pleasure can even sound strange. We see this reflected in our classrooms, where our students are often surprised to learn that our staff and volunteers read because they enjoy it. This is why book ownership is an integral part of our mission.

The more you read the better you become at it. Alternatively, the less you read, the harder it is to find it engaging. And of course reading from a textbook or a worksheet is a far cry from going on an adventure with someone who looks and talks like you. When students care about the characters, their experiences, and the outcome of the story, they are more likely to want to read.

Behind the Book formalized its book giveaway program a few years ago when we saw the need for books in our communities, not just for our students, and the Book Bash was born.

Last year we held two Book Bashes: one in front of our office in Harlem in October, where we gave away 1,560 books in four hours, and one in Washington Heights in June, where the book giveaways totaled 3,600. Both locations were chosen because we have multiple schools in those neighborhoods and knew that kids didn't have access to books during the pandemic.

We also gave out books during winter break and in June to help with Summer Slide. In addition, we donated books to the 32nd Police Precinct, shelters in the Bronx and in Harlem, as well as to community holiday parties, a food distribution center, and Little Free Libraries around the city.

In total, we gave 17,000 new books to young people and adults who don't have them, making them proud book owners.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed A Neighborhood by Tony Hillery

Many of our students live in food deserts, neighborhoods where fresh, affordable food is inaccessible to residents. This personal experience brought Tony Hillery's *Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed a Neighborhood* to life for 5th graders at P.S. 154 in Harlem. The book details Hillery's personal quest to take a neglected lot in Harlem and transform it into a useable, local urban farm, which provides fresh food to the community. Since its founding in 2011, the little garden Tony created has blossomed into a network of small urban farms in the neighborhood and strategic partnerships with area schools, including P.S. 154 itself.

The program kicked off with workshops to help students understand the root causes of food insecurity, which is defined as whether or not a person has access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all members in a family. Students learned about the food justice movement, a community-based response to ensure that those who harvest, prepare, and serve food are paid living wages and able to purchase the food they need. Later, during the author visit, Tony discussed the process of taking his idea from vision to reality, including the setbacks he faced.

Inspired by the book and Tony's visit, students went on to research food deserts in their communities and learned about community needs and food resources during a special visit with Anthony De La Rosa. Through a mapping exercise, they discovered community fridges, which are stocked by businesses and residents to share fresh food with those who may need it. Ultimately, the students were tasked with creating a digital resource pamphlet, which included sections on food justice and why it matters, what food resources are available in the community (food pantries, mutual aid, and gardens), and how others can give back to support their neighbors. This completed pamphlet was published on the school's listserv and was met with a resounding response from supporters. Students learned that you don't have to be an adult to make an impact on your community – and it can all start with a book.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT
Woke: A Young Poet's Call to Justice by Mahogany L. Browne with Elizabeth Acevedo and Olivia Gatwood



How should we celebrate other people's individuality? What does true freedom look, sound, and feel like? These were some of the key questions at the heart of the program for three classes of eighth grade students at Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters who grappled with what it means to be an activist as they read *Woke: A Young Poet's Call to Justice*. This collection of poems by Mahogany L. Browne, Elizabeth Acevedo, and Olivia Gatwood reflects the struggle, joy, and passion in the fight for social justice, tackling topics from discrimination to empathy, and acceptance to speaking out.

Using the concept 'woke' as defined by Browne - "to be aware, to understand that equality and justice for some is not equality and justice for all" - students were asked to select a social justice topic and write a poem to 'wake' others to a cause they care deeply about. Prior to starting the writing process, the classes were introduced to the work of celebrated inaugural poet Amanda Gorman in addition to the writers featured in the *Woke* anthology. They learned about different poetic forms, including the ode, which they practiced writing before beginning their own drafts. Students wrote odes to family and friends, and even Sonic the Hedgehog!

Students also worked with ARTE, a social justice organization that engages young people to amplify their voices and organize for human rights through visual arts. Based on issues discussed throughout the program and the topics they chose to write about, they were tasked with creating two images – how the world looks now and what the issue would look like if the world was more equal.

During visits from Mahogany and fellow poet and guest speaker Amere Soul, students were treated to hearing the poets read their work out loud, which helped to drive home the importance of word choice when creating in the genre. They gave insight into beginning and ending a poem and shared tips about how to be confident when performing in front of an audience. Finally, in an all-grade Zoom Poetry Slam with Amere, a Bronx native, twenty of our students bravely recited their own work, a cathartic and moving experience for all involved.

My favorite part of the behind the book [sic] program was meeting the author and doing the art project. I like these ones because they made me feel inspired and made me want to create art of my own. Also they were very fun and I had a good time doing them.

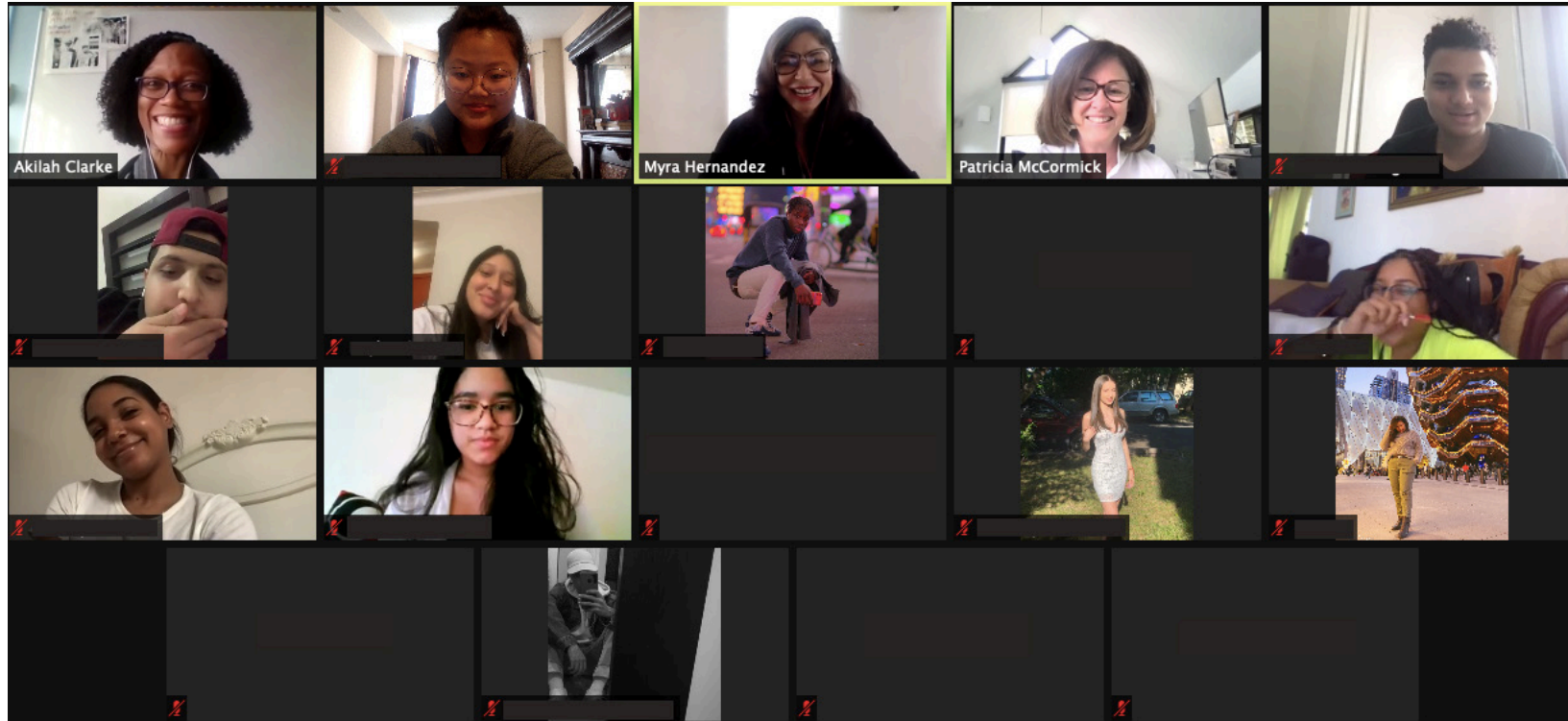
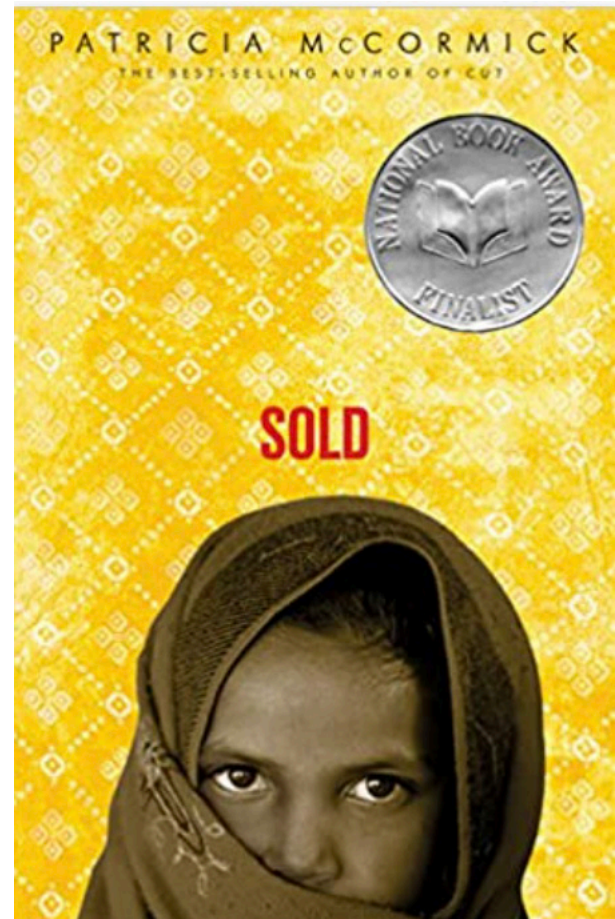
**8th grade student, M.S. 296
 South Bronx Academy of Applied Media, South Bronx**

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT *Sold* by Patricia McCormick

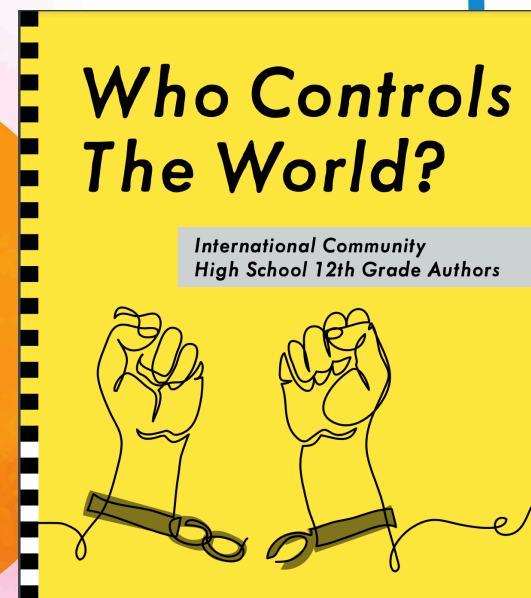
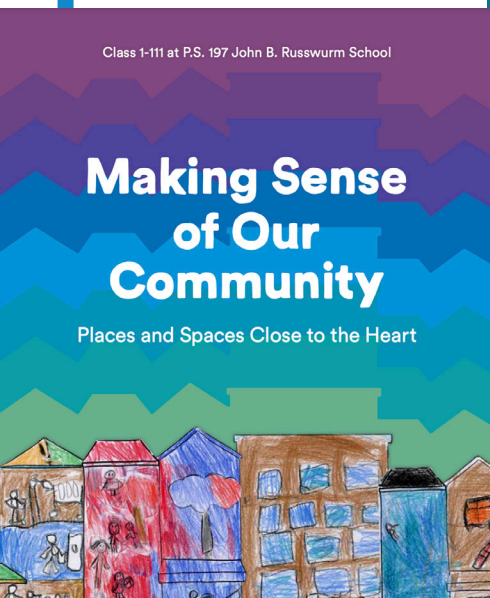
Seniors at International Community High School in the Bronx engaged in a four-workshop program designed to explore how race, gender, and economics influence society and individual identity. Students chose a character from either Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Patricia McCormick's *Sold*, which details the struggles of a young Nepalese girl who is sold to a brothel as a result of poverty, limited opportunities for girls, and a lack of education. Using either a Marxist, feminist, or race theory lens, students examined the text they chose with the aim of providing a more multi-faceted reading of their character.

The capstone event was a visit from McCormick, who explained how she researched and developed the characters in *Sold* and provided the students with writing tips, including how to tell a story in an engaging way which allows the reader to piece together information themselves. Students shared their own writing with Patricia in an interactive feedback session and then used her constructive criticism to polish their own essay drafts.

Of course in true Behind the Book fashion, art was integrated into the program to provide another way of seeing. Using found objects from home, students created sculptures of themselves to visually articulate their own multidimensionality. They shared pictures of their work with their completed final writing in the class student book, which they titled *Who Controls the World?* This interactive, interdisciplinary program was extremely impactful for the youth involved, combining valuable literacy skills with critical thinking and hands-on learning. Students gained a deeper understanding of the social constructs that influence identity and perpetuate inequities, and how these power structures must be challenged to effect change.



Foundations



STUDENT BOOKS

Last year, creating student books proved to be a challenge due to the pandemic. Generally, our staff scan original materials and send them to our designers, but since we were all working remotely, we didn't have direct access to our students' art and writing. To overcome this difficulty, we taught our students and their parents how to take photos of their work so that the designers could include them. While it was not a perfect system, we still managed to create seven beautiful books written and illustrated by 15 classes, making 208 students published authors.

A special shout out to all of our designers: thank you for helping us bring a sense of accomplishment and pride to our students during a dark period.

Zach Bokhour
Erica Carras
Liliana Guia
Kristyn Kalnes
Kristin Lilley
Stephanie Nuñez

It felt really good [to be published in a student book] because I can get share my stuff and a bit of my stories to the community.

8th grade student, M.S. 296
South Bronx Academy of Applied Media, South Bronx

SUPPORTERS

We'd like to thank everyone who supports Behind the Book:

Government

CreateNYC Language Access Fund
New York City Council
Discretionary Funds
New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs

Foundations

Amazon Smile Foundation
Clara & Kurt Hellmuth Foundation
Columbia Community Service
Corner Foundation
David Buntzman Foundation
Ebb Point Foundation
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Susan Verde
Renée Watson

Individuals

Alan Adelman
Julie Allen
Andre Allen
Emily Altschul & John Miller
Susan Appel
Judith & Alan Applebaum
Cameca Bacchus
Gail Balph Gordon
Cathy Baron Tamraz
Beverly Bartow & Jim Stengel
Scott & Leigh Beal
Andrew Beaudoin
Michael Brennen
Randolph & Margaret Brown
Melissa Brown & David Siegel
Carla Burns
Karen & Ron Butler
Joan Canter
Robin Canter & Sally Susman
Laura Cappiello
Jenny Cheng

The special speakers gave the students a chance to learn about programs that give back to the community. I think it was also a great opportunity for students to see that success can be cultivated no matter one's circumstances.

Edwina Bogle, 8th grade teacher,
M.S. 296 South Bronx Academy of Applied Media

Jacqueline & Tim Chezar
 Casey Cornelius
 Livia Corredor
 Joy & Darnell Crenshaw
 Mila & Rahul Dani
 Douglas & Sandy Davidson
 D&S Davidson Family Foundation
 Marty Delaney & Ken Ringler
 Ellen & Michael Diamant
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 Peter D'Sa
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 Barbara & William Haney
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 Pamela Hogan & Jeffrey Kimball
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 Penny Zuckerwise & Linda Mintz

553 Donations under \$500 for \$70,685



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NYC shut down right as we were writing our drafts. It was the worst time possible, with a lot of unknowns and quick changes- in school one day and by Monday never to return. Yet students kept writing, and trying. So I would say they did this because of Myra and the program in general. They felt like they had to finish this project. It was really hard to continue, but I think this project grounded them and gave them some sanity at a point when everything they knew as normal was falling apart rapidly.

Akilah Clarke, 12th grade teacher, International Community High School, the Bronx

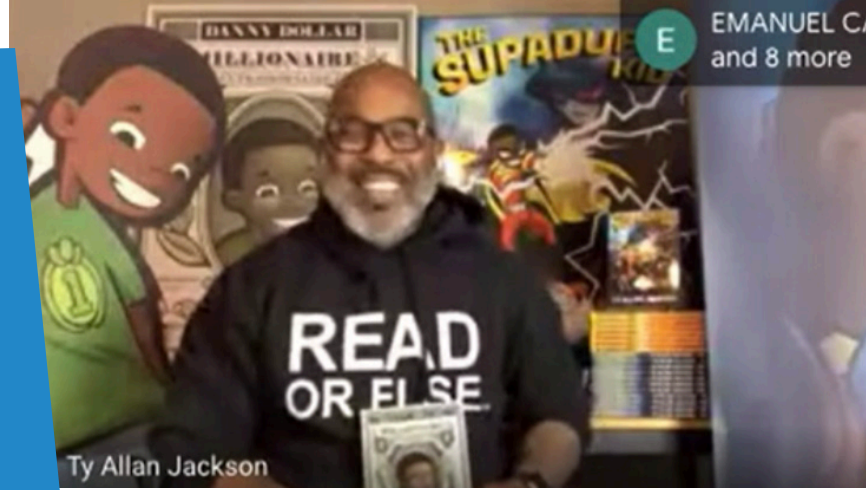
Staff

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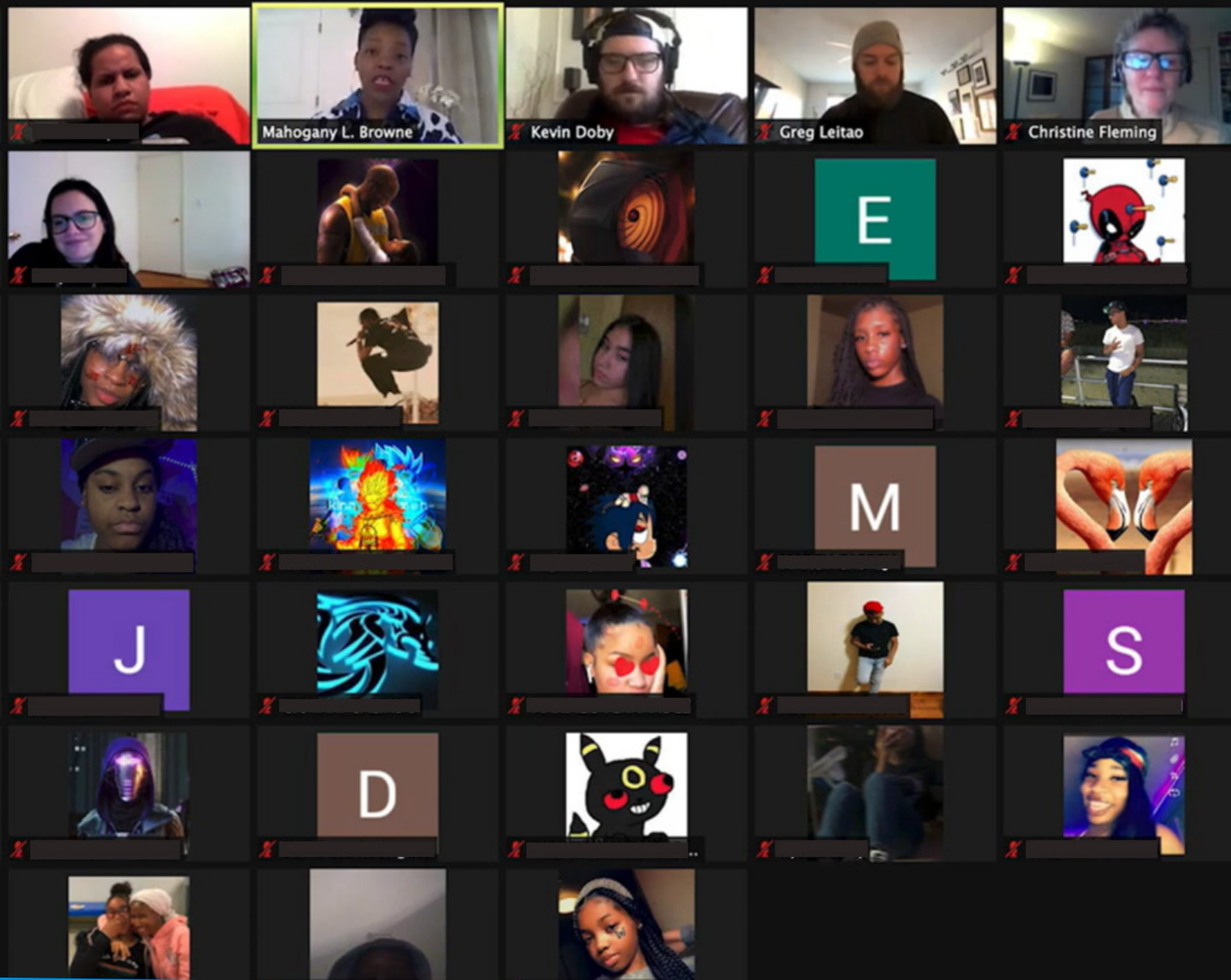
Christine Fleming
 Lisa Gomez
 Myra Hernandez
 Christy Hood
 Candice Humphries
 Kristen Kalnes
 Jo Umans

Meeting the author was very important to me because when meeting book authors you are able to hear about their thought process while writing and about what inspired them to write the book.

8th grade student, M.S. 296 South Bronx Academy of Applied Media

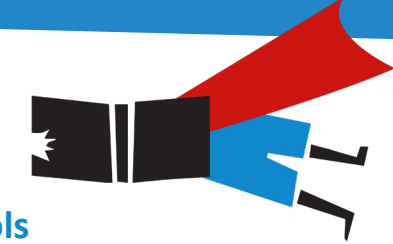


Ty Allan Jackson



The art piece is so critical to this. Students don't get art exposure much and so when they do, the benefit is incredible. The volunteer aspect is crucial too because students hear from someone outside of their teacher.

Ms. Rosado, 7th grade teacher,
 MS/HS 223 Laboratory School of Finance & Technology



Authors in Schools

- Fred Aceves
- David A. Adler
- Varsha Bajaj
- Rebecca Balcarcel
- Mahogany Browne
- Kerrine Bryan
- Ernesto Cisneros
- Lesla Cline-Ransome
- Jerry Craft
- Pat Cummings
- Ann Davila Cardinal
- Matt de la Peña
- Deborah Diesen
- Paul Griffin
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- Lilliam Rivera
- Cecilia Ruiz
- Martha Samaniego Calderón & Dan Heiman
- Jamiyl Samuels & Tracy-Ann Samuels
- Erik Talkin
- Duncan Tonatiuh
- Susan Verde
- Lily Williams
- Katie Yamasaki



ee Mirchandani



Patricia McCormick



Kevin McCloskey

Volunteers

Shirley Abraham
Maddy Arnstein
Cameca Bacchus
Andrew Beaudoin
Angela Brown
Karen Butler
Jake Campbell
Joyce Campbell Priveterre
Jenny Cheng
Francisco Chocholous
Christine Clancy
Christopher Corona
Gabrielle Curran
Joni Daidone
Asad Dandia
Jerome Davis
Tara DeWorsop
Sha'tina Dockery
Jisha Dymond
Susan Elman
John Ferretti
Christine Fleming
Ellen Freilich
Jessie Garretson
Susom Ghosh
Jill Giovan
Lisa Goiens
Chris Haines
Barbara Haney
Mary Hanrahan

Mark Hofmaier
Christy Hood
Carolyn Horn
Kathryn Hurley Bhirud
Geraldine Ivins
Kenya Kirkman
Kim Landsman
Marvin Larry
Dylan Levin
Ann Levine
Gisselle Madariaga
Art C. Magic
Jacob Michelman
Veronica Millender
Charles Miller
Tiara Mitchell
Katharine Mohana
Sabrina Morrison
Enid Natkins
Caroline Nguyen
Liz Ostertag
Linda Ouyang
Ilitch Peters
Hunter Phillips
Andrea Phillips-Merriman
Tim Pittman
Eleanor Prince
Sheila Quintana
Virginia Quintanta
Marisabel Raymond

Brad Rodney
Mary Salvaggio
Janelle Simmons
Teak Sittipunt
Maritza Struyvenberg
Stephanie Tam
Jennifer Thomas
Deirdre Towers
Brian Trauman
Jo Umans
Rob Weisstuch
Justin White
Derry Wilkens
Ellen Woods

Behind the Book limited our use of volunteers in classrooms last year. We attempted to use Zoom breakout rooms to host volunteers, since we know how much students enjoy it and how much teachers appreciate the help, but we ultimately found it was difficult for our small staff to monitor these virtual spaces. After this learning experience, we opted to conduct research workshops by having students learn from subject experts, and our program coordinators led the writing workshops themselves.

I had an incredible time with the students assigned to me. They were truly engaged during the activity and had reviewed the material beforehand. I liked this volunteer opportunity so much that I wished it was longer. I truly enjoyed it.

Israel Villa, KPMG classroom volunteer

Corporate Volunteers

KPMG
Christina Baldwin
Chris Eliades
Ingrid Gonzalez
Ezra Gonzalez
Tristan Heffler
Susannah Hochuli
Emily Manion
Xavier Pedroza
Benjamin Richards
Jeremey Thomas
Israel Villa
Gloria Zarate

Nuveen
Azeneth Holloway
Randy Olivas

Twitter
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Joshua Deitel
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Financials

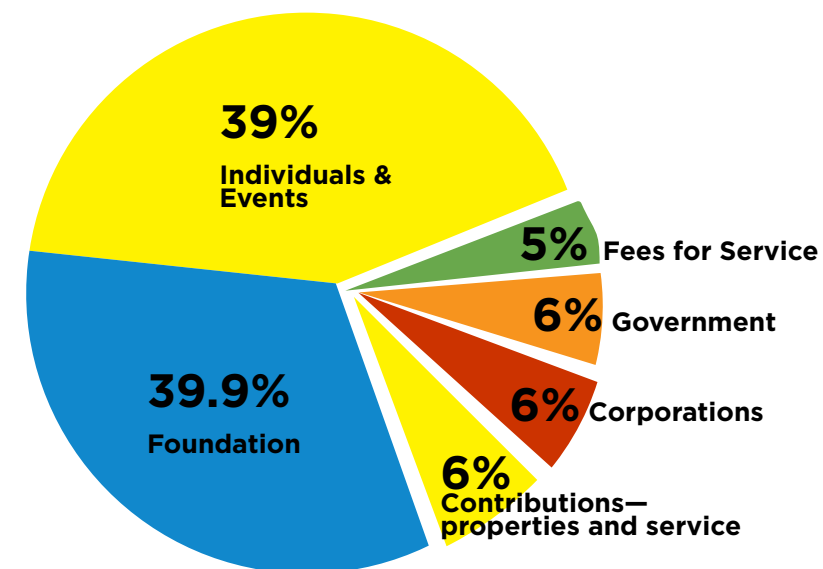
Assets, Liabilities, Net Assets

	2021	2020	2019
Assets	\$779,322	\$572,434	\$320,254
Liabilities	\$107,826	\$98,986	\$10,538
Net Assets	\$671,496	\$473,448	\$309,716

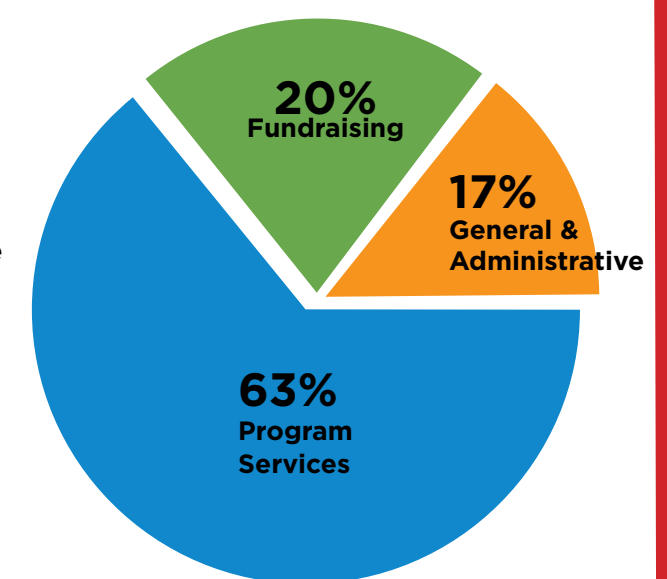
Summary of Revenue & Expenses

	2021	2020	2019
Contributions	\$1,009,858	\$895,794	\$752,001
Contributions - properties & services	\$72,358	\$73,508	\$111,883
Investment Income	\$1,153	\$292	\$197
Program Service Income	\$56,099	\$69,082	\$80,645
Direct Cost of Special Events	(\$25,494)	(\$39,153)	(\$40,474)
Total Revenue & Support	\$1,110,676	\$999,523	\$904,252

Revenue



Expenses

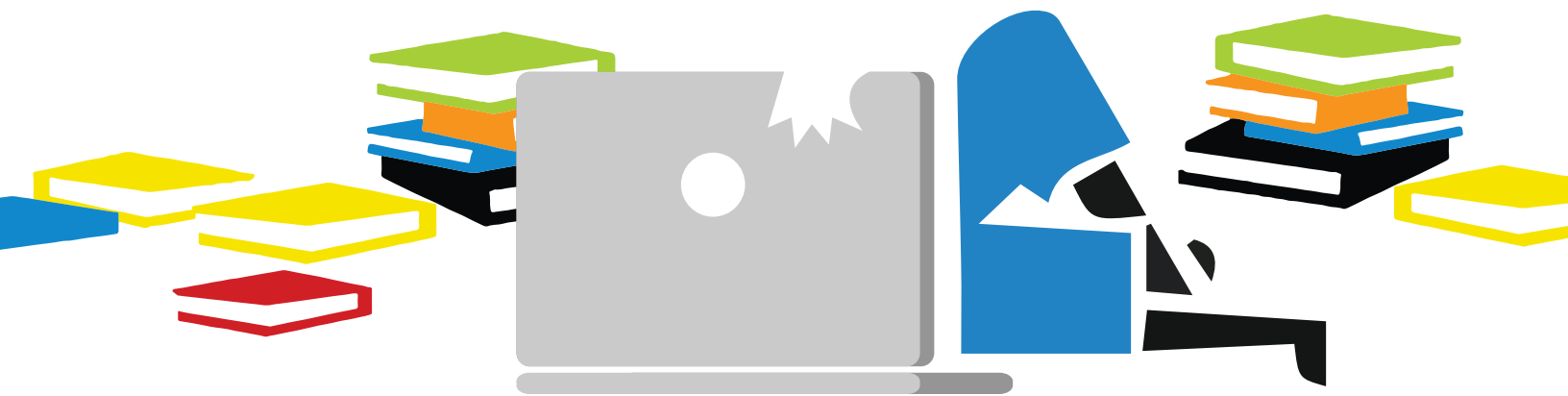


We all have to take the life train, sometimes it takes longer to get to your stop, but as long as you are on your way, just call to let LIFE know you're late.

We are characterized by being...

One generation + incredible teachers X their creativity together = a book full of diversity and creativity!

- International Community High School Seniors book dedication, 2021



Behind the Book

216 W 135th Street, Ground Floor

New York, NY 10030

(212) 222-3627

info@behindthebook.org

www.behindthebook.org