



Raising A Reader MA

Early literacy for lifelong achievement



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2012

Raising A Reader MA

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From the Director

Dear friends,

I am pleased to present our 2011-2012 annual report...it was a stellar year at Raising A Reader MA! We reached more than 8,000 children and families in seven core high need communities, and have more than 38,000 high-quality children's books in circulation. Our five-part, evidence-based parent education workshops were implemented statewide, and for the first time, our Chelsea Parent Ambassadors facilitated some of these workshops for their friends and neighbors. In addition to our partnerships with centers of early education, public schools, and home visiting programs, we reached

children and families in new and innovative settings – adult education programs, ESL classes, and places of worship. With the generous support of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, we reached more than 1,000 children through “Summer Story Times in the Park” events, where we demonstrated interactive reading for parents and provided extension activities and books for their kids.

The road ahead

We have accomplished much over the past year but there is much yet to do. Statewide, 39% of third graders scored below proficient in reading on the 2012 MCAS; the same percentage of children that research suggests arrive at school without the skills necessary for early academic success. ***This is not a coincidence.... literacy begins at birth.***

By the time a child is three years old, her brain is 80% the size it will be in her adulthood. If that three year-old child is from a low-income family, she has already heard

Children Served

Since beginning our work in Massachusetts, Raising A Reader MA has helped close the achievement gap for over 27,000 children and their families since our introduction in 2006. We have maintained steady growth since our founding.



>27,000
Children and
families served

We serve **7** core communities
Over **9,000**
Parents trained
in workshops

22,000
multi-lingual training
DVDs distributed

38,000
books circulated

>2,000 early childcare
providers trained

and support **6** Satellite
communities

30 million fewer words than her upper income peers. And so it begins....the achievement gap is evident well before a child even enters school.

Parents have power!

Research shows that a family's active participation in their child's education is twice as predictive of academic learning as a family's socioeconomic status. And the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the impact. The most effective forms of parent involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home...like shared reading.

Our goal at Raising A Reader MA is to flood high-need communities with our signature red book bags, parent workshops, and other events in order to break the cycle of low literacy in families. And our strategy

is working... *families who participate in our program are 26% more likely to read three or more times per week with their children.* This behavior is linked to demonstrated improvements in children's vocabulary, grammar, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and memory for language.

Thanks to our partners

Of course, none of this work is done in isolation – Raising A Reader MA is by nature a collaborative organization. All successes are equally shared among our program partners in the community, our deeply committed board of directors, and many of you who have supported us along the way. With your help, we will continue our work until every child has an equal opportunity for achievement, and every parent has the opportunity to excel in what may be their most important role – their child's first teacher.

I look forward to staying in touch with you about our progress. Thank you !

Donna DiFillippo, Executive Director



Donna takes time for some interactive reading with a young visitor to the office.

PS: Please remember! Raising A Reader MA is a 501 © 3 organization (EIN 80-0297898). Donations are deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

Visit www.raisingareaderma.org to make a gift online or call our office at 617.292.BOOK (2665) to talk with a member of our Development Team.

From the Board



As a parent of a college-age child and lifelong proponent of early childhood literacy, I directly understand the benefits of Raising A Reader MA's program model – increasing the availability of high quality children's books AND helping families cultivate regular home reading routines is good for *any* family living in this busy 21st century. I can think of at least a dozen reasons why family reading time might get cut short – from wanting to get back online to finish something from work or catch up on Facebook, to tending to daily household activities, to wanting more time to pursue and enjoy our own interests.

Both I and the entire Board of Raising A Reader MA understand that the life issues that might limit bedtime stories, although realistic for many families, are insignificant when compared to the issues facing low-income families. I cannot imagine trying to read to my child while juggling several jobs, cobbling together the resources needed to move out of a homeless shelter, or navigating a new country and a new culture as an immigrant. Can you? These economic and social conditions do not make it easy for families to develop, practice, and maintain habits of reading together at home, which adds risk to their children's futures. It is because of these added pressures that Raising A Reader MA is making a priority of using donor funds – your gifts - to expand the number and quality of services available to children and families living in the most vulnerable communities in the Commonwealth.

Because we believe so passionately that early literacy and education are critical to the development and success of EVERY child, Raising A Reader MA is developing a five-year plan to guide our expansion into a majority of the Governor's Gateway Communities, which will serve families at highest risk, without sacrificing the quality and breadth of services available to children and families living in communities with less intense need. (Less intense is no less important.) Our strategic planning work is being facilitated through our partnership with Social Venture Partners (SVP) Boston.

None of this would be possible without the passion for our mission by Raising A Reader MA staff, volunteers, donors and institutional funders. On behalf of the entire Board, I wanted to thank and acknowledge all of our donors and volunteers, particularly those from SVP Boston.

I am proud to be both a major donor and Chair of the Board of Raising A Reader MA at a time when many of our Massachusetts communities are helping build a statewide infrastructure for early literacy and lifelong achievement. I look forward to sharing our progress over the next year!

Sincerely,

Steve DiPietro, Chair of the Board, Raising A Reader MA

PS: Please consider expanding your support for Raising A Reader MA during this important time. Call the office or visit us on the web to learn more about volunteer and financial needs at www.raisingareaderma.org or 617.292.BOOK (2665).

Executive Committee

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Overview



In the 2011-2012 program year, **Raising A Reader MA staff performed 700 site visits** to assess program implementation, give partners tips for success, and read with participating children.

Raising A Reader seeks to close the academic achievement gap by helping families of young children (newborn to age 5) develop, practice and maintain habits of reading together at home. We do this by delivering the following services to children and families:

1. Increasing *access to books at home* through our signature Red Bag book rotation program
2. Offering multilingual workshops and support to help parents use these books to strengthen the culture of reading at home. Workshop topics include:
 - Asking good questions
 - Expanding on answers
 - Using recall and prediction
 - Making connections
 - Creating extension activities
3. Making it easy for early educators and other family support workers to encourage families to read with their children at home.

We offer our services year-round through partnerships with centers of early education and care and other community-based organizations where families consistently access education, social and other support services (e.g. Head Start, adult basic education programs, community centers, public schools, and preschools).

Did you know?

- **35% of children enter kindergarten unprepared to learn.** (*Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991*)
- In Massachusetts **39% percent of third graders did not meet proficiency standards for reading.** This figure jumps to **60% for low income children.** (*Massachusetts Department of Education, www.doe.mass.edu, 2012*)
- Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are **four times more likely to leave school without a diploma.** Low-income children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are **six times more likely to leave school without a diploma.** Low-income children of color who aren't reading proficiently by third grade are **EIGHT times more likely to drop out of high school.** (*Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011*)

Program Report

A culture of data and evaluation: In the six years since we were launched by the GreenLight Fund, our annual program evaluation has shown consistent success in meeting our impact goals. Our annual program evaluation answers three key questions.

Evaluation Question 1: Are families actually receiving the red bags from their early education and care provider or another community partner?

Evaluation Question 2: Are families attending the workshops?

Evaluation Question 3: Are families changing their reading behaviors as a result of these activities?

Research shows that, when we meet our goals in these three areas, children enter kindergarten ready to learn, which kicks off a lifetime of academic success. Table 1 below shows our success in the 2011-2012 program year.



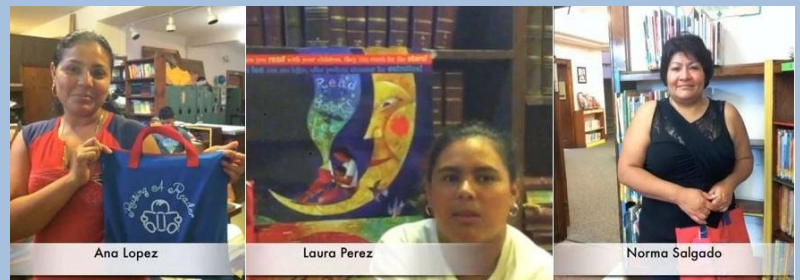
Nearly **450 partner implementers**- teachers, home visitors, family child care providers, playgroup facilitators, and program administrators- rotated red bags to **8,239 children and their families** in the 2011-2012 Program Year.

Table1: Raising A Reader MA's success in the 2011-2012 program year

Evaluation Question	2011-2012 Goal	2011-2012 Outcomes
<i>Evaluation Question 1:</i> Are families actually receiving the red bags from their early education and care provider or other community partner?	90% fidelity to the model	95%
<i>Evaluation Question 2:</i> Are families participating in educational programs?	25% parent participation rate	36%
<i>Evaluation Question 3:</i> Are families changing their reading behaviors as a result of these activities?	75% of families reading 3 or more times a week with their children after Raising A Reader MA	76%

In their own words: Parent Ambassadors explain the value of Raising A Reader MA

Parent Ambassadors are peer leaders who are motivated by their experience with Raising A Reader MA to inspire other parents in their communities to develop, practice, and maintain habits of reading with their young children. Excerpts from video interviews with Ana, Laura, and Norma, three members of our team of parent leaders in Chelsea, MA offer a glimpse into the impact of the program on the families we serve.



Raising A Reader MA: Why is early education so important?

Laura Perez: Imagine reading is a door that opens up the future for our children. We have to start reading with our children at a young age so that they can succeed.

RARMA: Why do you value sharing books with your child?

Ana Lopez: I think it is very important because reading, from even a very young age, stimulates our children's brains...I have to continue exposing them to reading because this will mean a better future for my children.



Lower income and non-English speaking families participating in Raising A Reader MA increased their reading frequency by 32-35% over the 2011-2012 program year, compared to the average statewide increase of 26%.

Red Bag book rotations: Our red bags lie at the heart of our program, and we depend on our partners' commitment to rotate the bags among families' homes. To ensure that bag rotations happen successfully, Raising A Reader MA staff perform two key tasks:

- 1) Lead implementer orientations that address early literacy and brain development and the logistics of Raising A Reader MA.
- 2) Perform site visits with each implementer multiple times each year. These site visits provide an opportunity to check in about program success, share best practices and resources, and read with the participating children. A site rating rubric, completed at each visit, provides us with continuous quality improvement data that is used to support to each implementer.

Maintaining this high level of fidelity to our model is critical in assuring that bags and books make their way into the hands of children and parents.

"I enjoy how we can make up stories to the pictures. I think it's a great program not only for the children but for the parents too. It definitely showed me a different way to read "

--Raising A Reader MA Parent, 2012

Parent workshops: Our work is successful in both increasing the rate at which parents read together with their young children, and expanding their use of Dialogic Reading, a style of interactive storytelling that has a statistically significant impact on young children's pre-literacy skills. Actively engaging parents in strengthening the culture of reading in their families makes Raising A Reader MA unique among early literacy organizations. In Winter 2011, with support from Bank New York Mellon, we piloted a five-part parent workshop series at the John Silber Early Learning Center in Chelsea. Based on the success of this pilot test, we integrated the five-part series into our core program in all of our communities in Fall 2011. In each Dialogic Reading workshop, parents learn a specific strategy, such as how to ask open-ended questions, that they can use immediately at home. Workshops are complemented by our multilingual DVD, *Storytime: How to share books with your child*, distributed to every family through the Red Bag rotation program.

RARMA: What obstacles did you experience in establishing a daily reading routine with your child? What advice would you give to parents who are struggling with their own obstacles?

LP: (The biggest) obstacle was my husband's work schedule. He works at night, so I had to help him get ready for work instead of using that time to read with my children. But, we have managed to overcome all the obstacles and have established a routine reading schedule.

AL: Sometimes as parents we say we don't have time (to read), but there is time. Whether it is 5 or 10 minutes, we have time to share books with our children.

RARMA: What changes have you observed since you started to share books with your child?

LP: (My children) love when we read books together. They pay attention and every day they ask "Can we read ONE MORE book?!"

AL: Even though my son is only 6 years old, he recognizes a lot of words. He reads sentences and he understands a lot for his age.

Norma Salgado: The most important change occurred within myself. I felt motivated (to read), which encouraged me to motivate my son. He really likes to read books because I am encouraging him to read. He loves picking out books, and, no matter where we are going he says, "I am going to look at the books!"

You can hear Ana, Laura, and Norma in their own voices in the "Meet Our Parent Ambassadors" video on our YouTube Channel, www.youtube.com/raisingareaderma.



Off the Grid in Everett: Raising A Reader MA partners with St. Anthony's Parish

Across the state, 70% of pre-school aged children are enrolled in a licensed early education program (*Strategies for Children*, <http://www.strategiesforchildren.org>). However, in the Gateway Communities that Raising A Reader MA serves, this number is much lower. In Chelsea only 49% of children are enrolled; in Everett, only 38%.

We've asked ourselves, ***"Where are these children? How can we provide them with educational experiences that will prepare them for kindergarten?"*** These questions led us to develop "off-the-grid" partnerships, or those efforts to deliver Raising A Reader MA's unique combination of early literacy and family engagement services to children not enrolled in the formal system of education and care.

One of our first off-the-grid partners is St. Anthony's Parish in Everett, a church with a primarily Brazilian congregation. The partnership was spearheaded by a parent, Marcia Davantel. Ms. Davantel, after participating in Raising A Reader MA at her son's pre-school, realized that parents at her church would benefit from the program as well.

The partnership with St. Anthony's Church was launched in Spring 2012 with fifteen children and their families. Each Sunday when families attended church, they met Marcia to trade their red bag for a new bag of books to share. Once a month a Raising A Reader MA facilitator led a special coffee-time training before Mass to deliver the parent workshop.



The parents of fifteen children at St. Anthony's Parish in Everett benefitted from Raising A Reader MA in Spring 2012.

The initial partnership between St. Anthony's and Raising A Reader MA was a success. All of the parents receiving the red bags also attended the workshops, a 100% participation rate! In addition, the engagement of a member of the parish in shaping the program helped ensure the books and workshops were tailored to the needs and strengths of the communities. For example, a large percentage of books circulated were in Portuguese, and the monthly Dialogic Reading workshops were offered in parents' native language.

At the conclusion of the first series of workshops, each participant received a thank-you gift bag that included a mix of Portuguese and English book to enhance their home libraries, and maintain positive literacy routines.



In the 2011-2012 program year, Raising A Reader MA offered 158 educational programs, reaching 36% of eligible parents. Research on the Raising A Reader MA core model shows that reaching 25% of parents is sufficient to reach the tipping point in family behavior change.

The more they come the better they do:

Research on Raising A Reader at the University of Texas showed that when parents had the opportunity to attend multiple trainings, their children's pre-literacy outcomes improved significantly (Anthony, forthcoming). In the 2011-2012 program year, 36% of eligible parents participated in at

least one of evidence-based, Dialogic Reading workshops. This research shows that an average 25% attendance rate is sufficient to reach the tipping point of making an impact on all children. So how did we exceed our parent participation goals this year?

- 1) *Multiple locations:* Workshops were offered at program sites and in the community, making it simpler for parents to find a location that worked for their busy schedules.
- 2) *Multiple times:* We held workshops in the mornings, afternoons, evenings, and weekends to accommodate families' hectic lives.
- 3) *Food and childcare:* Putting food on the table and making sure their children are well-taken care of are priorities for all our families. We removed these obstacles by offering food and childcare during workshops.
- 4) *Parent Ambassadors:* Parent leaders helped recruit their peers to attend workshops and to engage in Dialogic Reading at home. **Parents were three times as likely to attend multiple workshops if a Parent Ambassador was involved.**

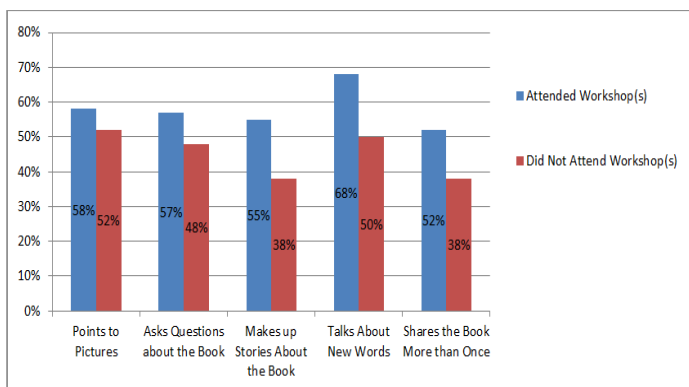
"We are successful as a city when we're giving people the skills and abilities to move on and succeed...Raising A Reader MA is one of the ways we do this for families."

--Jay Ash, City Manager, Chelsea, MA, 2012

Improving quality and quantity of family reading time:

How often families read together is just one part of the puzzle; what happens during these interactions is just as important. Raising A Reader MA promotes Dialogic Reading, a style of storytelling in which the parent doesn't read AT their child but rather read WITH their child. In the 2011-2012 program year, **parent surveys show that parents increased their use of Dialogic Reading strategies** such as asking questions and talking about new vocabulary. Families who attended workshops were even more likely to consistently use these proven practices (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Parents' use of Dialogic Reading skills after benefitting from Raising A Reader MA for one year, 2011-2012.



Benefitting through kindergarten: When children enter Kindergarten with the foundational skills to learn to read and write, they are more likely to be proficient readers in 3rd grade. This in turn, leads to success in the later grades, and ultimately high school graduation. When children start behind, it is unlikely that they will catch up. So how does Raising A Reader MA's success from birth through age 5 contribute to this preparedness? Years of research in Chelsea show that **27% of children who benefitted from Raising A Reader programming in their early education programs were rated "above average" in overall literacy skills in kindergarten, as opposed to 11% of their non-Raising A Reader MA peers.**

Research shows that teachers rate Raising A Reader MA children higher on measures of vocabulary, reading enjoyment and overall literacy skills.

Moving forward: Raising A Reader MA is at a critical turning point in our growth as we approach serving 10,000 children across the state. We are moving into the 2012-2013 program year with four key priorities:

- 1) Expand access to our parent educational workshops
- 2) Nurture parents as leaders among their peers
- 3) Develop and maintain a sophisticated data measurement system
- 4) Measure child level outcomes

Stay in touch at www.raisingareaderma.org to see how we do!

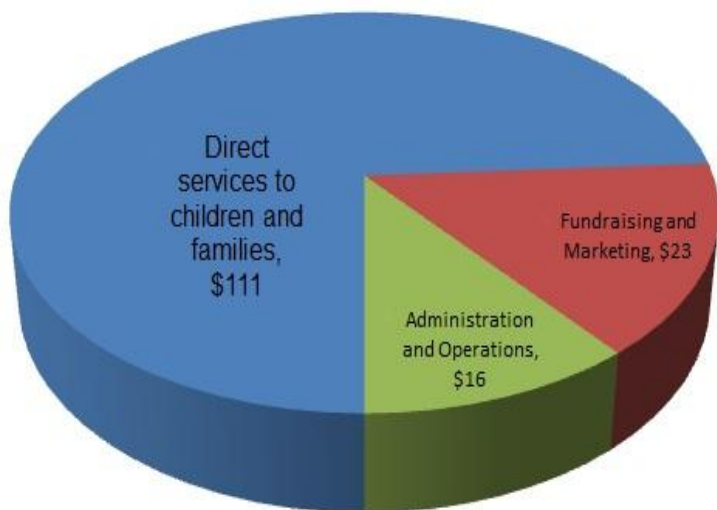


Figure 3: More than 70% of Raising A Reader MA's revenue pays for direct services to children and families.

Helping children fall in love with reading for an average of \$150 per year

Raising A Reader MA's *average* cost per child per year is \$150.

What makes up these costs?

\$111 is spent on direct services to children and families.
 \$69 – Program staff salaries and benefits
 \$26 – Red Bag Book Rotation and other activity supplies
 \$12 – Program overhead (e.g. travel, copying)
 \$4 – Miscellaneous expenses including evaluation data entry, evaluation software, and Parent Ambassadors

The remaining costs are central office costs and include:
 \$23 - Fundraising and marketing, including web communication, PR and other promotional activities
 \$16 - Administration and operations

Financial Report

High efficiency and slow growth: Fiscal Year 2012 was characterized by high efficiencies and slower than anticipated growth, resulting in a change of net assets of \$102,498. Over the course of the year, we served 8,239 children and their families with an operating expense budget of \$912,169. Actual operating expenses were 81% of those budgeted; planned growth in Brockton was 50% lower than anticipated, which resulted in staffing and program savings. This was complemented by efficiencies in program supply ordering and fundraising expenses.

Meeting fundraising expectations: While fundraising expenses were lower than budgeted, revenue generation remained on pace with expectations. A challenge grant from Strategic Grant Partners helped spur donations during our May “Spring Into Reading” fund drive. Foundations continue to be our primary source of revenue accounting for 66% of revenue. The remainder of our FYE 2012 revenue came primarily from individual and corporate donations. (Figure 4)

New areas of revenue generation: In FYE 2012 we saw growth in two new areas of revenue: fee-for-service contracts with new program partners in communities, and a new requirement that program partners cover the cost of replacing lost or damaged materials. We are planning for growth in both areas of revenue in FYE 2013.

Areas of growth: From 2010 to 2012 we nearly doubled our staff, from eight to fourteen. At the same time, we expanded the number of children and families served by 35%. In FYE 2013, we will again expand services, bringing the total number of children and families to over 10,000; this includes the introduction of programming in Springfield, MA and the expansion of our indirect service model made possible by the Commonwealth’s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

For more details on Raising A Reader MA’s finances, browse our profile on the Giving Common website:
<http://www.givingcommon.org/>

	FYE 2011	FYE 2012
Revenue		
Foundations	\$653,974	\$669,005
Corporations	\$39,785	\$113,738
Donations (individuals)	\$310,655	\$181,513
Contracts/Fee-for-Service	\$0	\$33,849
In-kind	\$30,628	\$1,500
Other	\$3,460	\$15,062
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,038,502	\$1,014,667
Expenses		
Development	\$229,641	\$186,243
Administration	\$120,930	\$119,623
Program	\$591,730	\$606,303
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$942,301	\$912,169
Change in net assets	\$96,201	\$102,498

Table 2: Revenue and expenses, FYE 2011 and FYE 2012

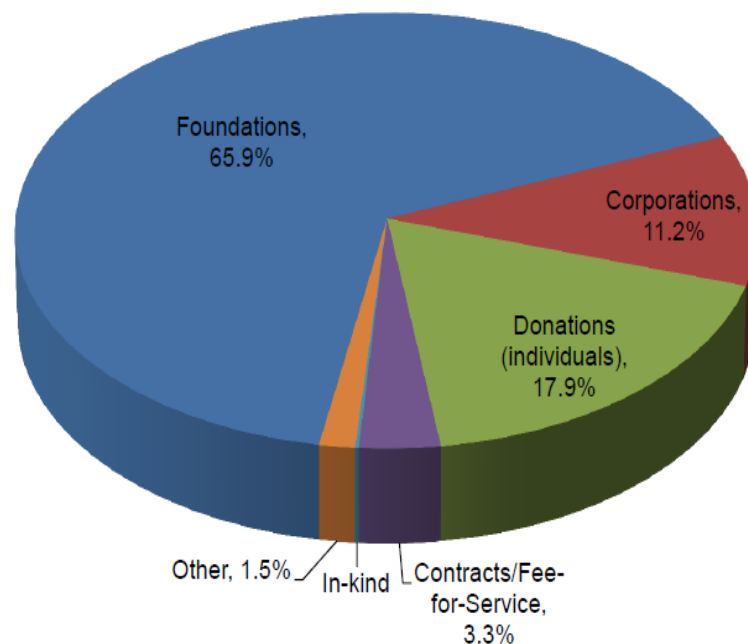


Figure 4: Breakdown of funding sources for FYE 2012

Supporters



Raising A Reader MA's signature spring fundraising event brings donors together with local literary luminaries at an exclusive dinner party. Pictured from left to right: Susan Reed (*Up! Up! Up!*), Chris Van Allsburg (*The Polar Express*) and Holly LeCraw (*The Swimming Pool*).

Photo credit: Jeff Cutler

\$50,000 and higher

Amelia Peabody Foundation
Edith Glick Shoolman Children's Foundation
Irene F. and George A. Davis Foundation
Jessie B. Cox Charitable Lead Trust at The Boston Foundation
Mabel Louise Riley Foundation
Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation
Strategic Grant Partners

\$20,000-\$49,999

Anonymous
Arthur F. Blanchard Trust at BNY Mellon
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Boston Bruins Foundation
Cabot Family Charitable Trust
GreenLight Fund
Rodman Ride for Kids
Sheehan Family Foundation
Social Venture Partners Boston
Theodore Edson Parker Foundation

\$10,000-\$19,999

A.C. Ratshesky Foundation
Dana Farber Cancer Institute
Lawrence J. and Anne Rubenstein Foundation
P&G Gillette
UniFirst

\$1,000-\$9,999

Boston Security Traders Association
Bostonian Group
Couch Family Foundation
Eastern Bank
Frances R. Dewing Foundation
Goulston & Storrs
Holly McGrath and David Bruce
Ira J. and Nicki Harris Foundation
Jog Nog
Rashi School of Dedham
Rasky Baerlein Strategic Communications
Revere High School Read-A-Thon
Salem 5 Charitable Foundation
Spector Fund at The Boston Foundation

Vision Fund at The Boston Foundation
Yozell Associates

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Lawrence Public Library
Lowell Public Library
MS Walker
New England Patriots
Privateer Rum
Quebrada Bakery
Rasky Baerlein Strategic Communications
Rowe's Wharf Sea Grille at the Boston Harbor Hotel
TD Bank
The Boston Foundation
Walsh Brothers

Save the Date!

Wednesday, April 3, 2013

Raising A Reader MA's Dinner with an Author
6:00-9:00 PM at the Hampshire House

Please plan to join us for an exclusive dinner party with local literary greats such as Claire Messud and Michael Palmer.

We're putting the finishing touches on the VIP Author list Please look for

information in the mail and online., www.raisingareaderma.org





Raising A Reader MA is an evidence-based early literacy program that is closing the academic achievement gap by helping families of young children develop, practice and maintain habits of reading together at home. Our work, which both increases access to books and offers families resources and support for strengthening the culture of reading at home, is driven by 25 years of research that shows a significant factor affecting a child's academic success is being regularly read to by a parent or other adult caregiver before starting kindergarten.

Our goal is to end the cycle of low literacy by helping families across Massachusetts develop high impact home reading routines that lay the groundwork for a lifetime of learning, success, and productive, responsible citizenship.

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