

Tempe starts school year as national model for unique tutoring program

As the new school year gets underway, the City of Tempe is serving as a national model for a unique literacy program that matches older adults and young students to boost reading skills and encourage school success.

Tempe's longtime success with the AARP Foundation Experience Corps program led to its larger role developing and implementing a tutoring model to be used by other communities across the country. Every year, more than 30,000 students in 22 cities are served through the program.

"Experience Corps is tremendously proud of the work being done by our Tempe program," said Keanne Henry, vice president of AARP Foundation Experience Corps. "Experience Corps Tempe is an integral part of Read On Arizona, continuing to produce strong outcomes year after year. Their contributions to the Experience Corps network have helped to increase the focus and clarity of Experience Corps nationally."

Experience Corps matches highly-trained volunteers age 50 and older with students in kindergarten through third grades. These volunteers work one-on-one with boys and girls, reading together and working their way through multiple books during the school year. That individual attention drives kids who started the school year with a 200-word book to end it with a 1,200-word book.

Tempe joined the program 12 years ago in partnership with the Tempe Elementary School District. Volunteer tutors in the city have since helped roughly 3,000 at-risk students reach grade-level reading benchmarks.

This school year, more than 500 students will be served through the tutoring program at elementary schools and after-school sites citywide.

Experience Corps is vitally important. Fourth graders who can't read at grade level are four times less likely to graduate from high school.

"Tempe's Experience Corps program makes a measurable difference in the lives of hundreds of young children each year, transforming them from struggling students to confident grade-level readers in the course of a school year," said Marie Raymond, human services manager for Tempe. "When we improve a child's

literacy, we are helping set the stage for school success and ultimately strengthening our community.”

Experience Corps fits perfectly into Tempe’s larger Education Roadmap, which seeks to improve the lives of all children in the city by enhancing their education from cradle to career, Raymond said. It also aligns with the city’s commitment to provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for seniors and to fill education gaps for boys and young men of color through the My Brother’s Keeper initiative.

Tutors like Rich Favaro, a retired tech executive in Tempe, are grateful for the opportunity to help keep kids on the road to success with Experience Corps.

“One of my kids is going to finish high school that wouldn’t have, one of them is going to go to college that wouldn’t have,” he said. “I will never know. But if a kid goes to college that wouldn’t have, think of what a difference that makes in his life.”

For more information, visit www.tempe.gov/ExperienceCorps.

Media contact: Susie Steckner – susie_steckner@tempe.gov or 480-734-5186