

Driving Academic Progress

Leveraging community educators in learning

Discover the ways schools are leveraging community educators to deepen learning for students. Community educators include youth-serving professionals and volunteers who leverage their knowledge and skills to support learners and complement professional educators. Below, KIPP Indy Unite Elementary's bus drivers assume community educator roles between driving shifts.



Recurring sessions



Multiple community educators



Literacy



Tutoring

What it is, and why we love it

"It's just a sense of relief," says Director of Early Literacy Ruth Wells, "knowing that I personally cannot help every student in this school and know everything about everyone, that I have a team of people pouring in and loving on these kids. It really does make a difference."

Coming out of the pandemic, there were days where KIPP Indy Unite Elementary students experienced barriers due to a bus driver shortage in Indianapolis. To incentivize bus drivers to select the KIPP Indy bus route and simultaneously address post-pandemic literacy loss, the director of operations proposed a solution that would address both challenges: Driving Academic Progress (DAP) – bringing bus drivers in as literacy tutors between driving shifts.

After preliminary training in early literacy skills (e.g., phonemic awareness) and data collection (e.g., site word assessments), bus drivers and monitors are hired to come in and work with young readers. Each DAP Tutor is partnered with a classroom where they provide daily support from 10 a.m.–1 p.m. – supporting the bus drivers' unique working hours – with the exception of Fridays when they run the school's mobile library. Classroom teachers communicate with tutors to identify students needing additional support based on state literacy tests and weekly classroom assessments. Lead DAP Tutor Tracie Johnson explains that depending on the individual student's need, tutors either push into classrooms or pull out for one-on-one intervention in small doses, ensuring they are not missing primary instructional time. The tutors also join students for lunch and recess, building relationships with the entire class in addition to the students identified for remedial support.



Our DAP program is different than other programs in that it is long-term. Our tutors are already a part of the community investing in our students. They're the first person a lot of our kids see when they meet them at the bus stop. Other programs might come and volunteer for a day or do an event, but our tutors are here for the long run. They're here every day, building long-term relationships."

– Ruth Wells, director of early literacy, KIPP Indy

The DAP program began in October 2022, launching with eight literacy tutors. KIPP Indy now has 30 bus drivers who have stepped in for the 2023–24 school year. Tutors in this role not only play a critical role in academic support and cultural equity; because of this additional partnership, they also provide a seamless transition from the bus to the school and back. Wells remarks that this program is an opportunity to meet students and families where they are and provide students and teachers additional support from existing assets within the community.

What's made this program a success

Program logistics

- To seek participants, the literacy department passed out fliers to bus drivers who were already on their campus, inviting them to an informational meeting.
- Monday through Thursday, bus drivers complete their morning route, stay on campus to tutor from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m., then finish the day with their afternoon route. Students receive individualized support from the same tutor during the school day, two or three times a week.
- On Fridays, DAP tutors take on the role of librarians and facilitate the school's Lending Library – a mobile cart filled with books for students to check out, on a weekly basis. The uniqueness of this program stems from utilizing existing staff to fill gaps affecting multiple areas within the ecosystem.

Lasting connections

- In addition to supporting a handful of identified students on a regular basis, DAP tutors attend lunch and recess with their assigned class, building lasting, mutually-beneficial relationships with the class at large.
- KIPP Indy's bus drivers are often the first person students see when they arrive to the bus stop in the morning. Increased interactions from tutoring sessions, provide students the opportunity to connect with other caring adults, expanding their social network.
- The DAP program encourages bus drivers to drive for KIPP Indy, in turn supporting the bus driver shortage which began during the pandemic.

Prepared teachers and staff

- To support young readers, bus drivers receive preliminary training in early literacy skills such as phonemes.
- Classroom teachers review state assessments to identify students in need of remedial support and communicate with DAP tutors on focus areas for each student.
- The literacy department provides additional training for tutors throughout the year – once a month on average, or as the need arises.
- Prior to the start of the program's second year running, the literacy department strategically requested for DAP tutors to request KIPP Indy bus routes, ensuring their tutors could return.

Considerations for implementation

- KIPP Indy is a network of public charter schools located in the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood of Indianapolis. Across our three schools, we enroll 1,500 students in grades K-12. Together with families and communities, KIPP Indy creates joyful, academically excellent schools that prepare students with the skills and confidence to pursue the paths they choose – college, career, and beyond – so they can lead fulfilling lives and create a more just world.
- Support for the DAP program comes from foundations and other partnerships.

Impact on learning for students	Impact on teachers	Impact on classified staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive personalized learning support from consistent, caring adults • Students' social networks expand with additional members of their community stepping in as mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers receive consistent, reliable and trained literacy support during the school day • Teachers are able to collaborate with trusted colleagues as extended team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in bus driver retention; majority staying throughout the year • Sense of belonging with the professional educator team; their work has evolved over time to support the classroom