



2023  
2024

Access  
Books  
Annual  
Report

 ACCESS  
BOOKS  
With literacy and access for all  
[WWW.ACCESSBOOKS.NET](http://WWW.ACCESSBOOKS.NET)

# OUR VALUES:

## SCHOOL LIBRARIES MATTER

Many see school libraries as outdated and irrelevant. We know this is not the case. In this digital world, school libraries are crucial in preparing students to problem solve and make sense of fact from fiction. As Carol Kocivar, past president of the California PTA stated, "at its heart, the school library is a place where students strengthen their literacy skills and learn how to think critically using a variety of resources." Access Books sees the school library as a critical aspect of democracy- creating well-informed citizens. A quality school library allows students unlimited access to diverse ideas and provides skills to be lifelong learners. School libraries provide a safe oasis where children can explore their interests and learn new interests. Research shows that students are more likely to read more when they can choose what they read. Student choice is powerful when it comes to fostering a love of reading. There is a direct correlation between the quality of a school library and reading ability. Although school libraries are advantageous to all students, vulnerable populations see even greater benefits.

## DIVERSITY & REPRESENTATION MATTER

When the books in a school library do not reflect the lives and reality of the students at the school, or are full of outdated information and harmful stereotypes, children are not inspired to read. We believe that every child has the right to see themselves in the books they read, as well as to become inspired, and gain empathy by walking in the shoes of others.

## THE MISSION

of Access Books is to provide high-interest reading material to underserved children & youth in Los Angeles by providing a myriad of literacy opportunities and access to high-interest books.



*To have access to such high-quality book selections in such great spaces is truly life changing. For many kids, this will be the only bridge getting to, staying in, and maybe going further after high school"*

Teacher Librarian



With literacy and access for all

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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Access Books is committed to equitable access to high-quality and diverse reading materials that reflect what students want to read. Each year this mission becomes more challenging. A dozen years ago, the State of California passed the local control funding formula which discontinued earmarking state funds for specific purposes, including school libraries. Districts have the discretion as to how to spend funds. This has resulted in inequitable access to quality school libraries for the students we serve. School libraries are too often treated as a luxury rather than an essential part of the public education system with a proven impact on learning. Wealthy districts and parent groups consistently support school library programs. This funding formula has resulted in outdated collections, minimal staffing and of course, less reading. Without financial support, libraries remain stagnant and unconnected to the students they serve. It is critical that students have access to a wide range of material and that they can choose their own material to read.

Sadly, many school districts are spending critical funds on reading apps. A common app requires students to “read” on the app for at least 45 minutes twice a week. This is troubling for many reasons: students have no time to actually read a book. They have no opportunity to share what they have read with other readers, the librarian or a teacher. Rather than a joy, reading is a chore. Most importantly, students report it is boring. They would much rather read a book. There is clear evidence that extended screen time is harmful to students. It is disconcerting that districts are requiring children to spend more time on a screen when they want to be reading a book.

Hundreds of volunteers spent the school year supporting equity in literacy. Some helped refurbish libraries. Many conducted book drives. Dozens created and delivered book bundles. Authors, poets, illustrators and artists visited schools. Thanks to Access Books donors, volunteers and staff, we provided more than **289,200 books** for school, classroom and home libraries. Donors were generous in supporting our many endeavors. There are more libraries to create, more books to read and more authors to meet. **We look forward to another year of literacy and access for all.**

**Rebecca Constantino, Ph.D.**  
Founder & Executive Director



It's been difficult to open the newspaper, glance at an app, or turn on the television without being confronted with sadness, tragedy, and injustice. Access Books wants to emphasize the good things happening in the world. Every time a child borrows a book from her school library or discovers a new author and shares a book with a friend, good things happen. Our team is honored to help connect children to books that bring happiness and improve their quality of life. The school year was jam-packed with projects that emphasized community partnership and a shared love of reading.

**During the 2023-2024 school year, we provided 289,200 books for school, classroom and home libraries. Hundreds of volunteers helped create or refurbish libraries and bundle books for home libraries. Authors, poets, artists and illustrators visited schools. Students attended festivals and memories were made.**



For communities we serve, the school library is more important than ever. The library is not only a bridge for academics, it is a nourishing part of their life. As one student at Laurel Avenue Elementary School in Compton said, **“I just feel so good when I come into the library. I feel calm. Honestly, I feel like the library loves me.”**

## FALL 2023- SPRING 2024

### 295,900 BOOKS

**Total:** 178,450 for libraries

#### 20 Libraries

2 Middle School Libraries

1 High School Library

3 Middle School Reading Rooms

1 Reading Garden

4 Parent Ed Workshops

14 “Year of the Dragon” Events  
for 250 students

400 Students at YALLWEST

4,500 Books at YALLWEST

81,000 Books at Giveaway Events

Foster Care Program 6,700

Welcome Baby Program 1,500

7,000 Books to 7 Health Care Centers

1,500 Books to Emancipated Foster Youth

800 Book Club Books

11,000 Books in Mexico

1,000 Books to Pasitos de Luz in Jalisco, Mexico

3,200 Books at 22 Author Visits

## LIBRARY REFURBISHMENTS:

During the 2023-2024 school year, we created or refurbished **20 school libraries**. In addition to our elementary school refurbishments, we refurbished **2 middle schools** and **a high school**, **added 2 middle school libraries** and created a library in an underserved community in **Mexico**. In total, we provided **178,450 books** to school libraries. Thanks to generous donors, two schools we served will have year-long activities centered around the love of reading.



## PHASE 1: OUT WITH THE OLD

At each school site Access Books staff and volunteers spent about a month prior to the service date weeding out the outdated and tattered books. Many library aides do not know how to weed because they have not been trained properly. At every school we serve, the library aide or teacher librarian is hesitant to weed out outdated and tattered books. If they were to follow school library guidelines, the shelves would be empty or close to empty. Said Corinna, a library aide, "I don't know what's worse. Seeing old books or no books." Many library aides spend hours at home repairing books. "The day I bring back a book I have repaired, it is checked out. We have a few popular books and they are in constant circulation. It is so bad that I spend my own money to buy a new set," Jocelyn, a librarian reported in her application for service. Sadly, tattered, outdated and uninteresting books send students a message that the library and books and ultimately, their literacy are not important. It is not uncommon to weed a book from the 1950s. Most schools we serve have an average publication of 1970. Commented one library aide, **"most books are older than I am! There are books here my parents would have checked out if they came here. They are that old!"**

Depending on the school, Access Books is typically at a school site for 3 weeks cleaning out the collection. At every site, it is evident the students are interested in the library and eager to read. **"At every school, every day we are there, students come to the library to see what we are doing and are very interested in when they will get new books and when the library will be open. There is a lot of excitement around us being there,"** said Anne-Marie, Access Books staff member.



## PHASE 2: CREATING A NEW COLLECTION



We spend several months curating the collection for the elementary library and creating a collection for the middle school students. “We want the collection to reflect what students are interested in reading, a lot of popular books, but also we wanted to balance it with books we know the teachers will need for the curriculum and we wanted newer copies of classics that are always in demand,” Anne-Marie of Access Books stated. “We strive to create a collection that is really appealing to the students with a lot of books they want to read. We also strive to have diverse books from diverse writers. Once we bring them into the library, they can peruse the shelves and see books they did not know about,” added Ann-Marie.



At one school, parent rep, Isabella, spent the morning helping with Spanish-speaking parents in their volunteer tasks, replenishing snacks and moving books. At the end of the day, she walked into the library, sat at the table and cried. “I have been wanting to cry from happiness all day. Honestly, when I heard what the plan was, I was sure we would get books people didn’t want and was positive the murals would be left incomplete. So many people and groups promise a lot but it does not work out- either they don’t come, they don’t finish or what they give is not great. **When I opened the first box of books, I lost my breath. Every time I walked by the library, I was amazed at the artists. I am so happy right now.**” Her 3rd-grade daughter asked the best question of the day: “will the library be open on Monday?”



# PHASE 3: PROJECT DAY

**At each school site, close to 60 volunteers from the school, from groups and Access Books regulars, spend the morning on several projects for the school:**

We purchase books at a substantial discount and pay an outside vendor to create the catalog labels. After a brief training from our on-site librarian, volunteers catalog each book. A wonderful aspect of this task is there is something for everyone; even little ones can help by putting stickers in books. Said Jan a long-time volunteer, "my family comes at least once a month. There is something for everyone to do and now, my 12-year-old can lead a group. He gets a lot of confidence working here and we love that we see the end product before we leave. We really get a lot done!"

Once the books are cataloged, a group shelves the titles following specific shelving procedures. This is very time-consuming and necessary so students and the library aide can access them easily.

Our head artist, Sydney Kysar arrives at the site very early and draws out the murals chosen by the school. Once this is completed, she rotates volunteers who want to paint. We also have several "artists in residence" students. They are middle and high school art students who arrive early, help draw murals and lead groups painting. Said the mother of one artist who has been participating for 5 years, "my son learned so much in terms of people skills, leadership skills and art skills. It really changed his life. He has so much confidence now."

Sydney added, "most people don't get to paint a mural and it is very exciting and fun. I try to make sure everyone who wants to paint has a chance. They are always amazed when they step back and see what they did." It is extra special when a student paints at their own school. Said one principal, **"they come back with such pride that they were part of creating art and the art will be around for some time. It is really special."**

Along with books and murals, we create a reading space with comfortable leather couches and a large reading rug.



# SPECIAL PROJECTS

During the school year, we had several special projects. We refurbished Hollenbeck Middle School and El Sereno Middle School as well as Wilson High School. These projects received separate targeted funding. We worked closely with the teacher librarian at each site to create the collection. "It was so fun to do this. Access Books let me make a lot of decisions about the collection. They understand that I know my students and their reading habits and needs best. I am amazed at what we have now," said Jenny Hertz-Newman, El Sereno's teacher librarian. Jenny helped us select the collection for other secondary projects. The libraries are a big hit with the students.

One reported, "on Monday, word quickly spread that there was a new library space and students poured in all day to see it. Ximena, a 7th grader, could not contain her excitement. "If you look in that section (she pointed to a corner), I want to read every one of those books. I just can't believe this. I am so happy." 8th grader Matthew lamented, "why did this have to happen my last year? This place is great. I love it." Perhaps Jazmine said it best, "I want to just come and hang out. It feels so peaceful and fun. I love the painting and I love the couch. I want to spend some time looking at all the new books. I hope the library is open a lot because I want to keep coming back."

Within days the libraries see increased traffic. "The kids are just coming in to hang out. It is like a lounge for them. They don't have this kind of space anywhere else." At Wilson High School in East Los Angeles, an Access Books staff member dropped by to check on things. "I got behind the desk and helped check out books. There was a line all day! Kids are super excited to have such great quality books." One student said, "I just can't believe it. There is not enough time to read everything that I want."

**Thanks to generous donors, in addition to the elementary library we added a middle school library collection to three schools. Roosevelt, Dickison and McKinley Elementary Schools in Compton added middle school grades several years ago but sadly, no or few middle school books to the library.**

Roosevelt Elementary School serves 800 students, 150 are middle school students. Before the project, there was one shelf with titles for this "reading level." "We have no chapter books, graphic novels or interesting books for the upper grades. They have nothing to select from in the library. It is really sad," stated Ms. Merritt, the library aid. The principal added, "we want to have the library be a place where everyone wants to come. We want great books but also a great space." The middle school collection had 3 books per student. The main collection had 7 books per student, far below the recommended number.

With plenty of empty shelves and an open room, the library was an ideal space for more books and a section dedicated to middle school students. We provided new books for all levels and created a separate section in the library for middle school students. With murals from books they read and new couches, it feels like a separate space. "I really want the upper-grade students to feel like this is their space. Before, it was for the younger students. In addition to having great books for them, we wanted a space that feels appropriate," Rayjanette Conley, the principal stated. After the project, a student reported, "I love to read, I just wish we had more to read. Books are just about my favorite thing. It is great to have more."



## DICKISON YEAR-LONG PROJECT

A generous year-long grant from RPO allowed us to provide additional services to Dickison Elementary. Along with the refurbished library, we created a separate middle school reading room, an outdoor reading garden and year-long literacy activities. Several author visits occurred and we held our first book fair where each student and teacher received funds. In addition, we provided book bundles to every student at winter break, Read Across America week and summer break. Lastly, we held two parent education workshops on how to read to children and get them excited about books. Each parent received 50 books to create a home library.



## MCKINLEY YEAR-LONG PROJECT

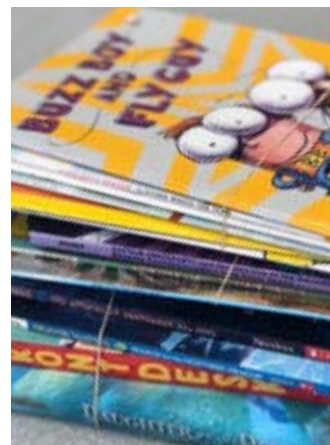


A year-long grant provides an abundance of literacy opportunities for students at McKinley Elementary. An updated elementary library collection has created excitement to visit the library. "Students come before breakfast and at recess to check out books. Everyone is so happy," reported Corrina, the library aide. An empty classroom was converted into a middle school reading room. New couches and murals make the space welcoming and warm. With one wall of windows, the space is cheery and inviting. The grant sponsored a school-wide literacy day. The multi-purpose room, dance room, library and middle school reading room provided plenty of space for popular authors to spend the day presenting and visiting students. Every student received books signed by the author. "It was just about the best day I ever had at school," 1st grader Damont exclaimed! End-of-the-year book bundles were passed out and 2 parent education workshops will take place over the summer.

# BOOK BUNDLES

During the 2023-2024 school year, dozens of volunteers helped bundle and deliver **81,000** books before school breaks and for Read Across America.

While books and reading are critical for academic growth, Access Books knows books provide refuge, calm and a chance to see the world outside your community. Book bundles are a sought-after and popular aspect of our program. As one teacher said, "my students want to hold, read and own books. When they get a book to keep, they treasure it." Each student received a set of high-interest books that students want to read. As one student said when he was given his bundle, "these are all books I want to read. I can't believe I got all these!" Another student asked, "Miss, all for me?, are you sure?" While we know these books will assist in becoming better readers, they also welcome and encourage students to be part of the community of readers for fun, pleasure and adventure!





## AUTHOR VISITS

**During the school year, we sponsored 22 author visits and provided 3,900 books to students.**

One of the most popular programs we provide is author visits. Each student who attends the presentation receives a book by that author. "I can't believe I got the book and he signed it!" one excited student exclaimed. "Students were anticipating the visit so there was a lot of excitement. After some students had seen an author and they started reading the book or shared about the visit, other students could not wait to have their turn," said Takisha Spears, principal at McKinley Elementary School. Every author made the visit special and for some, maybe, life changing. "When students see an author that looks like them or has similar experiences and that author tells them they can be a writer, that really means something. The authors have no idea the impact they have," Ms. Spears stated. We are so fortunate to work with engaging, fun and generous authors.



## BOOK FAIR

We successfully held our first book fair. Each student and teacher received funds to spend freely. Many students were skeptical that they got to choose a book and keep a book. "Really, Miss? For me?" was a constant refrain. A teacher told staff, "my students could not wait for our class to go and after they got their books, there was no interest in lunch or recess. They just wanted to read." The success and importance of the event were evident with so many students huddled over their books.



**JEN TORRES**



**JORGE CHAM**

**STUART GIBBS**



## ERNESTO CISNEROS



## HELENA KU RHEE

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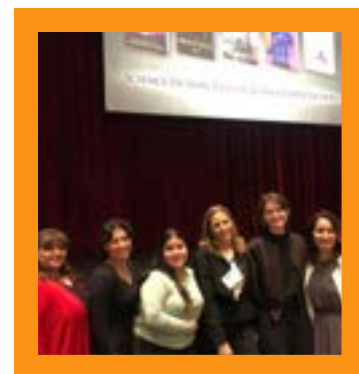
We had a 4-day special event in April to celebrate the Year of the Dragon. **250 students at 4 schools** read *Wings of Fire: The Dragonet Prophecy* by Tui T. Sutherland. The book discusses many emotions. After reading the book, the students participated with a visiting artist where they learned to make an image of themselves in dragon form. "I had no idea what to expect with this. Honestly, I thought this was going to be one more boring thing at school but it was really fun! I can't believe she taught me how to make a dragon myself. I wish we had more stuff like this," said Antonio at Laurel Elementary in Compton.

**School-wide poetry day:** One unique event took place at Renaissance High School of the Arts. California poet laureate Lee Herrick was joined by three other poets for a day-long poetry fest. Each student received a book of poetry. "I felt like a grownup today. The poets spoke to us like we had something to say and they were interested in it. I did not know I loved poetry until class this year. I can't believe they came to my school. It was really cool," said one student.

# Los Angeles Times FESTIVAL OF BOOKS UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

We want to thank the **LA Times Festival of Books** for honoring us with the Innovator's Award. The irony is not missed: we are not working to innovate but to get back to basics (quality libraries and quality books). We know our mission is relevant as one library aide emailed us months after the refurbishment, "I really thought the excitement of a new library and all the books would slow down but it has not. Students are still waiting before breakfast to come in, they are still joining me at recess and they are still sharing with others what they are reading. They just love books." This award is shared with our volunteers, staff and donors.

**Thanks to our volunteers, staff and donors, we had a busy, book-filled semester!**



# COMMUNITY PROJECTS

With the help of dozens of volunteers, we provided close to 6,700 books to foster youth through our partnership with USC Pediatrics: Violence Intervention Program (VIP)

Thanks to an impactful partnership with LA Care, we provided nearly 7,000 books to seven community clinics. We hosted three author visits at clinics and provided take-home libraries. We also gave 1,500 board books to the Welcome Baby program at White Memorial Hospital. “Mothers were so excited to get the new books,” said the program’s community outreach coordinator. “It reiterates the importance of reading and starting early. The fact that they were new books and great books made the mothers feel special.”

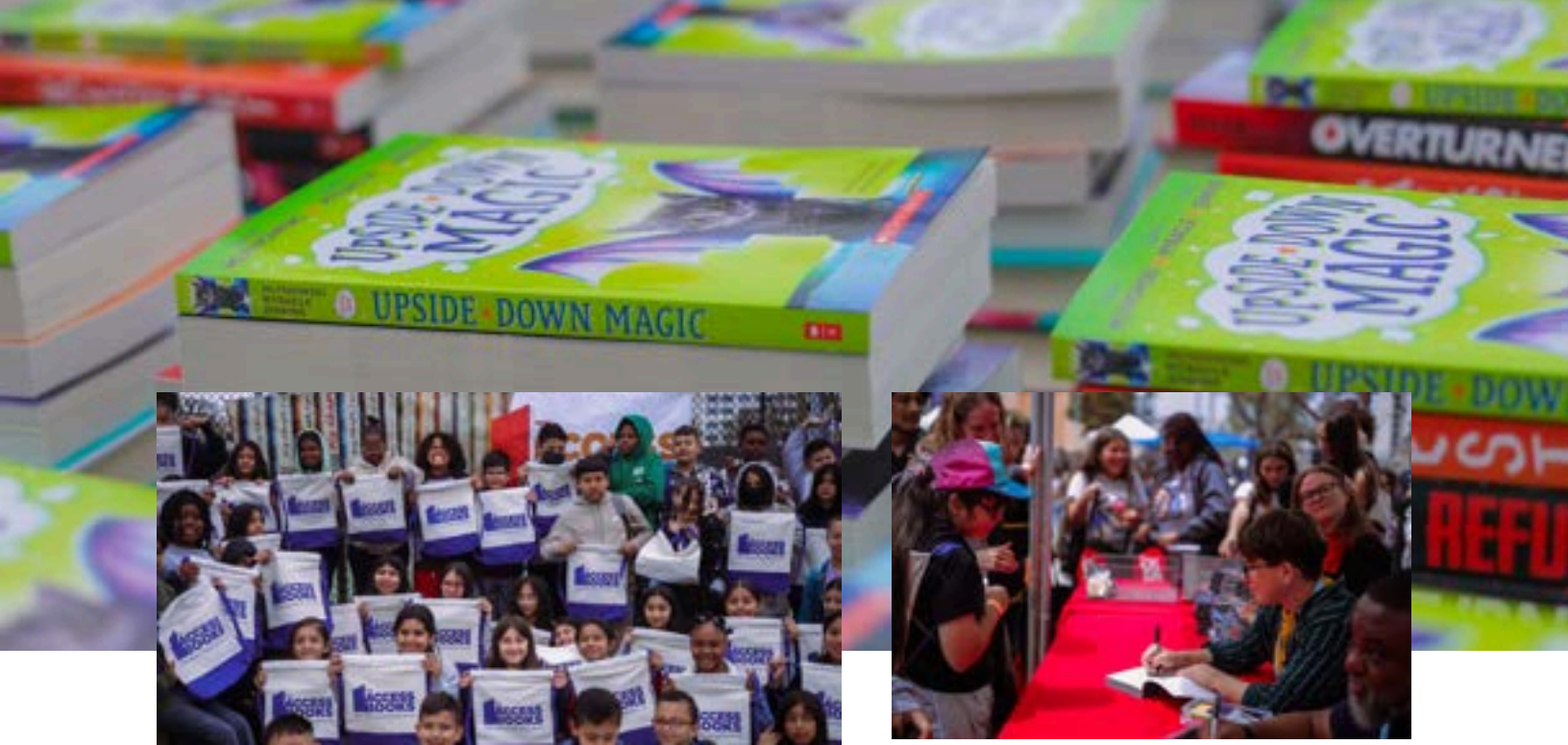
In the fall we worked with Los Angeles Room and Board to create libraries in local residences that serve emancipated foster youth attending college. The students have limited funds, and pleasure reading titles are not on the “must have” list.

We infused these spaces with new, high-interest books and sponsored five on-site book clubs.



## BOOK CLUBS

It is important to the Access Books community that students we serve have the same opportunities around books and are reading the same books that middle class and affluent students do. One popular program is book clubs. Schools simply request books and we provide them in English or Spanish. There is no book report, no homework; just discussion around what was read. “The students here can’t stop talking about our visit from Ernesto Cisneros. It had a great impact on them and their families as well. I also had a book club with the parents and we read Efrén Divided in Spanish. Not one dry eye!” said Christina Campos, library aide at Nueva Vista Elementary School. This year, we provided 800 books to host 25 book clubs. Popular titles were Magic Tree House, Junie B. Jones, Chalk Box Kid and Wonder.



## YALLWEST

Thanks to generous donors, we sponsored close to 400 students for a day of books, authors, stories and illustrations at the 10th annual Yallwest book festival. Along with transportation, students received lunch, backpacks and a bundle of 9 books. It was a big hit. As one student said, "I had no idea that Stuart Gibbs would be here and I saw him in person. I have read every book he wrote and he signed my bag. It ended up being a super fun day." Another student met Jason Reynolds, a prolific and popular writer. He told his teacher, "He was more than I imagined. He is just so cool and smart and he was so funny. I could not believe his talk made me cry." The teacher added, "it is so important for students to meet authors and even better when the author looks like them or comes from a similar place."





**“IT COULD NOT  
HAVE BEEN MORE  
MAGICAL.”**

Volunteer

## MEXICO

### Puerto Vallarta

Access Books volunteers spent Thanksgiving break in Mexico at Pasitos de Luz. The Center provides free therapy to low-income and orphaned learning-disabled children. It was a privilege to provide a library, to paint murals at the site and to see the warm, nurturing, and empowering center. Down a dirt road, surrounded by fields, the program offers traditional therapy and infuses nature in the process. All children spend time outside in a garden-like setting. The animals — from pigs and chickens to stray dogs — instinctively know what each child needs and they seem to provide extra care.

### Tijuana

This spring, a group of volunteers delivered **10,000 Spanish language books** to 3 elementary schools in Tijuana, Mexico.



Tijuana, Mexico



## EL SALVADOR

Inspired by their participation in the Mexico trip, the Morales family partnered with Access Books to bring books to a small village school, Colegio Clarita Quiros in El Salvador. Mother and daughter volunteer weekly in the Los Angeles area. Thanks to our partnership with Scholastic Books, the family of three distributed **1,000 Spanish language books** and **400 English language books**. The school held an assembly for book distribution. “We felt like rock stars giving out books. The students were so overwhelmed to see the books and receive some to take home,” Sylvia told us. She continued, “the excitement was contagious as the students cheered. We received countless expressions of gratitude, hugs and smiles!”

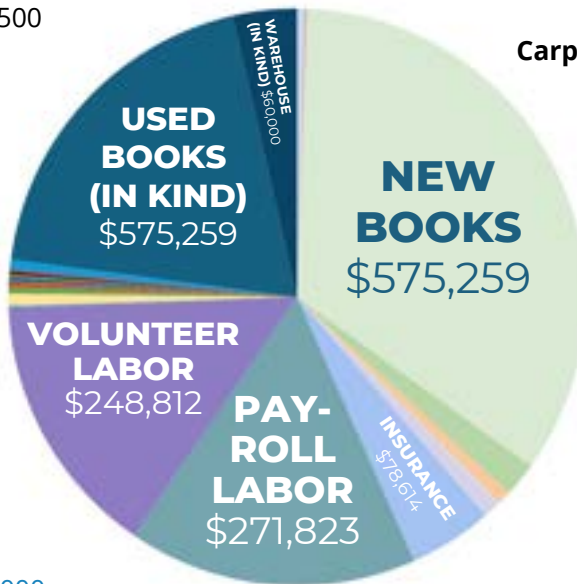


**In total we provided 148,000 books in 2023.**

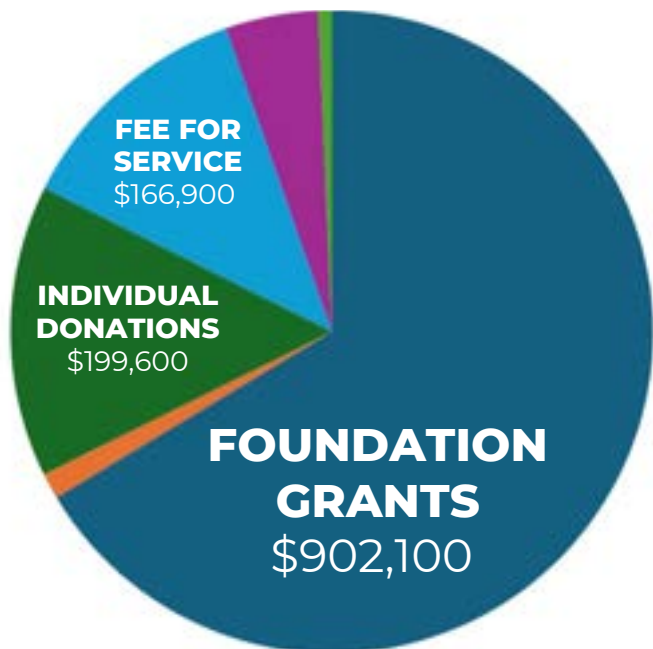
**We can't do this without the school staff at each site, the wonderful donors, and the dedicated volunteers. So many groups and individuals consistently show up and “do a little bit of good.”**

# EXPENSES: \$1,054,503

- Marketing \$1,149
- Office supplies \$11,699
- Paint and equipment \$7,500
- Phone \$2,063
- Photography \$322
- Postage \$1,603
- Printer (In Kind) \$3,000
- Printing \$3,163
- Repairs \$43
- Subscriptions \$2,503
- Supplies \$1,331
- Transportation \$996
- Travel \$9,145
- Warehouse (In Kind) \$60,000
- Used Books (In Kind) \$324,048
- Volunteer appreciation \$192
- Website fee \$84



- Accounting \$6,365
- Author workshops \$3,140
- Bank service charge \$175
- New books \$575,259
- Buses \$816
- Carpet and furnishings \$32,551
- Catalog supplies \$13,425
- Catering \$2,341
- Coding fee \$12,397
- Fundraising \$1,080
- Gifts \$902
- Insurance \$78,614
- Payroll Labor \$271,823
- Volunteer Labor \$248,812
- Legal \$200
- Licenses and fees \$422



# INCOME: \$1,359,050

- Foundation Grants \$902,100
- Corporate Grants \$17,755
- Individual Donations \$199,600
- Fee for Service \$166,900
- Community Organizations \$63,400
- Interest \$9,295





The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation



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