



# Cluster Tutoring PROGRAM

[www.clustertutoring.org](http://www.clustertutoring.org)

## A Year at Cluster • 2020-2021

### Changing circumstances allow Cluster to adapt & grow!

Cluster is excited to share highlights from our 2020-21 year. During the global pandemic, Cluster adapted to changing circumstances by providing virtual tutoring to 100 students throughout the school year. Our dedicated volunteers participated in an orientation introducing them to various virtual platforms and then worked with parents to coordinate a day and time to meet with their student. Many tutored more than one day per week!

We are happy to boast that we had a much higher student and volunteer retention rate than expected, with 76% of both groups returning from the previous year. We were able to continue to provide support from Cluster Reading and Math Specialists as well as send books, electronic devices, and school supplies to students. We also formed a partnership with Forty Acres Fresh Market, a woman-owned Austin based business that provided Cluster families with fresh produce delivery. Our partnership with the Mathnasium continues and students meet with their staff on a weekly basis to enrich and support the development of their foundational math skills.

Finally, while Cluster was able to provide academic support to our community virtually last year, we were excited to return to in-person tutoring in September of 2021! This year we offer students and volunteers the choice of one of three nights or a virtual option for returning pairs. For in-person tutoring, everyone is wearing masks, social distancing, and COVID safety protocols are enforced. As you read our report, we hope that you are as excited as we are to learn about the ways in which we are evolving and growing.

We are thrilled that we continue to be an integral part of the community and feel fortunate to be supported by so many generous donors. On behalf of Cluster's Board, staff, volunteers, and students — thank you for your continued support.

With gratitude,

Kara Kalnitz, Executive Director



**Executive Director Kara Kalnitz in Cluster's library at its new Monday location, Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church.**

## Coming in 2022: Cluster Tutoring will become Learning Edge Tutoring!

Next year, Cluster will rebrand itself as Learning Edge Tutoring. The new name will reflect our continued dedication to improving literacy for students from Chicago's Austin neighborhood. Our mission will be to give all students an edge in learning as they improve reading scores, math skills, and critical thinking. Stay tuned ....

# New Monday after-school program helps beginning readers at St. Catherine-St. Lucy School

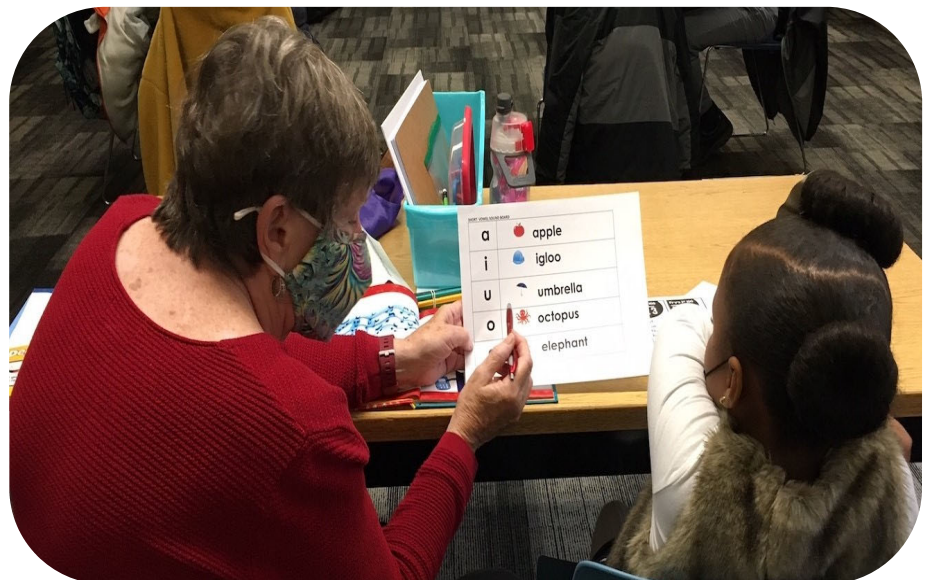
The intensive, highly structured reading project for first and second grade students is the brainchild of former tutor, Dave Holmes, who also was a Cluster board member.

The 13 students who participate were chosen by the school's teachers and principal. The program is run on Monday afternoons by Executive Director Kara Kalnitz and Bernadette Diaz, one of Cluster's reading specialists.



Each student has a blue bin containing letters, a dry erase board, letter cards, markers, and other manipulatives.

Many tutors bring a favorite book that is age-appropriate to share and read together with their students to boost young literacy. Cluster also has rhyming and picture books on hand for tutors and students to read.



**THE MISSION OF CLUSTER TUTORING** is to contribute to the lives of Chicago-area students through free one-to-one tutoring and academic enrichment opportunities enhanced by caring, mentoring relationships.

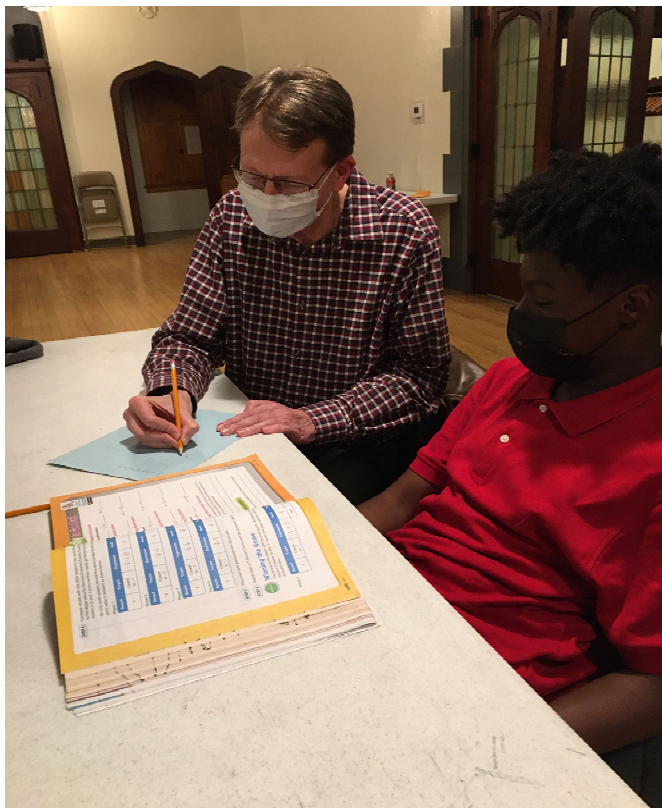
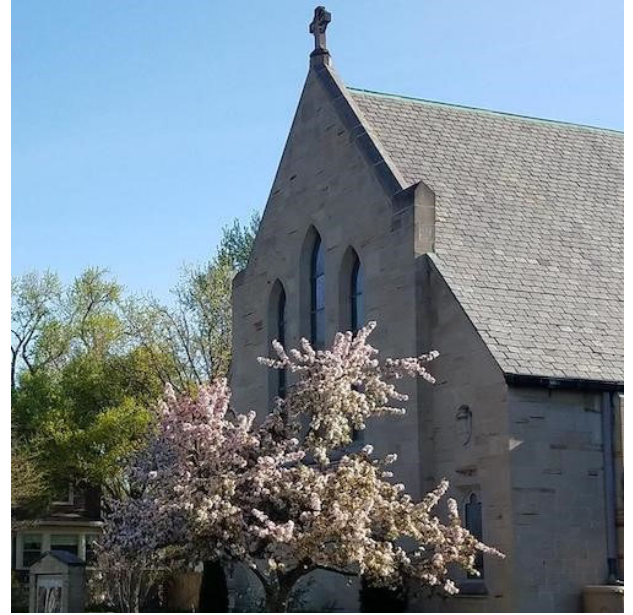
# Cluster expands to third night at Fair Oaks Church

The new addition for Cluster is a Monday night tutoring option at Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church in Oak Park. Fair Oaks joins the Tuesday night venue in the Circle Urban Ministries Building at 118 N. Central Ave. in Chicago and the Thursday night venue of First United Church of Oak Park at 848 Lake St.

“For a number of years, we have been looking for ways to make our building available to serve the community, and when our Mission Committee learned that Cluster Tutoring was looking for a space for students to receive support on Monday nights, we knew Fair Oaks could be that space,” said the Rev. Hailey Braden Lynch, co-pastor of Fair Oaks along with her husband, the Rev. Ben Lynch. “We want our church to be a place that builds up the community.”

Having a third night of tutoring allows Cluster to limit the number of tutors and students on any given evening. And as Thursday has always been the night with the most students, new tutors and new students have the option of joining on Monday or Tuesday nights, as those nights aren't as crowded. Given the necessary safety protocols because of COVID-19, student-tutor pairs are better able to spread out on all three nights. Only one pair can be at any table, and the number of pairs in each room is limited. Masks also must be worn by all tutors and students, and hand sanitizer is available throughout each site.

Eight rooms at Fair Oaks are used for Cluster Tutoring on the first and second floors. These include church school classrooms on the upper floor and a social hall on the first floor. There's also space for a library, which is similar to the libraries in our Tuesday and Thursday night tutoring spaces. Thanks, Fair Oaks Church, and welcome to the family of learning!



# Seniors graduated after a year of online tutoring

Even though Cluster Tutoring seniors only saw their tutors over a screen, they still got in a full year of help. Here's the story of one tutoring pair where now-graduate Jaylin learned math through sports.



When Jaylin started working with tutor Han Schiet in Jaylin's sophomore year, it was apparent to both tutor and student that Jaylin had a lot of catching up to do in math. Although Jaylin had been attending Cluster Tutoring since kindergarten, he always struggled with the subject.

Jaylin played wide receiver and sometimes safety on the football team for Christ the King Jesuit College Prep. He also ran track and played on the school's volleyball team. So Han used football — as well as basketball — to explain math concepts.

"At first, he correlated what I do in football into math," Jaylin said. "He's a sports fan, so it worked."

For instance, Han explained that he would use measurements of feet on a basketball court to illustrate the Pythagorean Theorem, the mathematical formula figuring out the third side of a right triangle ( $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ ).

"My degree is in math and computer science, so I can easily do high school math," Han said. "At the beginning, he was having trouble with basic subtraction and negative numbers."

By the end of Jaylin's senior year, when the two were tutoring over Zoom, Han was explaining quadratic equations with an online white board.

Jaylin is now attending Millikin University in Decatur, where he was set to play several sports. "If I don't make it in professional sports, I'll try archeology," Jaylin said. "Or real estate."



## New duties at Cluster for Erin Agboola

Erin was a volunteer at Cluster for more than two years before she joined the staff as the program coordinator for Cluster's Project Next Step college and career preparation program. Erin has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.

In 2021, Erin was promoted to Program Coordinator for Student Services. She is now responsible for student recruitment through Austin community engagement, new student orientation sessions, and developing academic enrichment opportunities for Cluster participants.



## Special thanks to the Mathnasium!

The Mathnasium in Oak Park offers special online math help through its Sparq program to 19 Cluster students in first through eighth grade. Trained Mathnasium instructors meet virtually with students on Sunday afternoons to offer math tutoring beyond homework help. The aim of the intensive program is to improve students' foundational and mental math skills.

# In Tribute

Cluster Tutoring is saddened to pass on news of participants no longer with us

## Nell Lurain

Long-time Cluster Tutor and board member Nell Lurain passed away in August. She first started tutoring in 2006, tutoring four students over the years.

Nell spent over 25 years as a professor of Immunology and Microbiology at Rush University, retiring in 2020. In 2019, she received the Rush Faculty Excellence in Education Award.

Nell's tutoring was a family affair. She tutored both William Baker and his sister, Micah, after William graduated from high school. Micah remembers that when she took physics, Nell "brushed up" by reading the entire physics textbook.

Nell and her husband, John, also a Cluster tutor, had two daughters. Throughout their childhood, Nell was a dedicated presence on the sidelines at sporting events, reading scientific journal articles in between bursts of cheering.

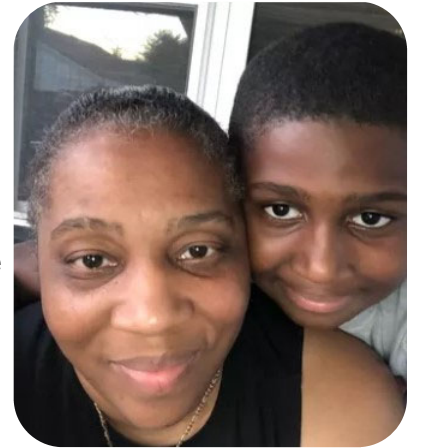


**Nell with student William Baker, who received a full scholarship to Tuskegee University. She was able to watch his graduation online. Nell also tutored his sister, Micah, who is now at Howard University.**

## Katrice Pates

Cluster parent, Katrice Pates, passed away in March. Her son, Jayden, has been a Cluster student since he was in Kindergarten and he is now in the 4th grade. He has worked with the same tutor for all of this time.

Katrice was an outstanding program participant and parent, and her presence at weekly tutoring is greatly missed. Prior to her passing, she had planned to join Cluster's Board of Directors.



## Susan Fleming

Cluster tutor, Susan Fleming, passed away in October. Susan joined the program in 2014 and worked with her student, Elijah, from the time that he was in 5th grade until shortly before her death. Elijah is now a senior in high school. She was a wonderful tutor who, as many do in our program, went above and beyond for her student.

In addition to volunteering for Cluster, Susan was a retired educator who was instrumental in bringing an SAT preparation program to our junior and senior students.



## A view from each night of tutoring!

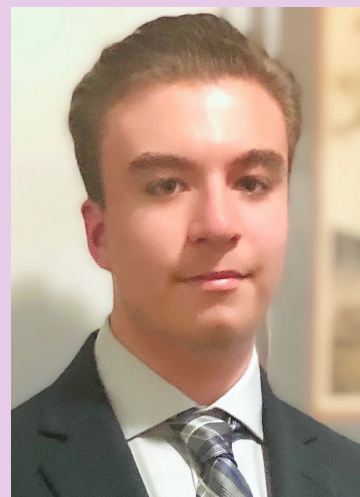


**Monday  
night  
tutor  
Kristen  
reads with  
her  
student  
Avani.**

**Tuesday  
night tutor  
Brian and  
his student  
Caleb tackle  
some home-  
work.**



**Julia Schroeder, Monday**



**Joseph Price, Tuesday**



**Thursday  
night tutor  
Mariel and  
her student  
Danielle  
read a  
graphic  
novel.**



**Aliyah Washington, Thursday**

# Thank You to Our Donors: August 1, 2020 – July 31, 2021

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Tishara Akins  
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Nell Lurain  
Marge Lyon  
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## Cluster Staff 2020-2021:

Kara Kalnitz, Executive Director  
Cathy Lazuka, Development Director  
Joan Richards, Reading Specialist  
Bernadette Diaz, Reading Specialist  
Erin Agboola, Program Coordinator  
Meg Loughran, Special Education  
Consultant  
Sher Watts Spooner, Marketing  
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