



Because Learning Doesn't Stop When School Does



Lenetta Thomas & Keandre

A Year at Learning Edge 2022-2023

Making a difference with Learning Edge Tutoring



About eleven years ago, I became a tutor for Learning Edge (known as Cluster Tutoring in those days). After retiring from being a principal I wanted to continue to contribute to the lives of children, especially any that needed a lot of help given that I had a background in special education.

My first student was a 6th grade girl and working with her put all of my skills to the test. Both her schoolwork and her attitude improved, but she did not return to the program the following year. Another student I tutored, a fifth grader (pictured above with me in 2023), was a nonreader and struggled in school as a result. Fortunately, teaching low readers is my forte, and this child just needed help. Over time we developed a strong working relationship, and I worked with her from 5th grade through her sophomore year of high school. She is currently a freshman at Illinois State University and is thriving.

Currently, I have a fourth grader who started as a nonreader in second grade. He has come a long way and so has our relationship. It can take a while to build a relationship, but my experience is that each week, each month, each year the bond can get stronger and stronger as you and your student develop trust and a sense of partnership. As I leave my student on Thursday evenings, I have a smile on my face knowing that I've made a difference in the life of a child.

Thank you to everyone reading this for your support of Learning Edge and being instrumental in our ability to positively impact the lives of our students.

Leslie Hodes
Board President

The mission of Learning Edge is to strive for more equity in education by providing Chicago area students who live in underserved communities free one-to-one tutoring and academic enrichment opportunities enhanced by caring, mentoring relationships.

Learning Edge high school seniors plan for the future

Khamyra

For the past 7 years, Khamyra has worked with her tutor, Liz Keys, on developing her reading and math skills and believes she has grown so much as a writer and reader. “We used to practice writing paragraphs,” Khamyra recalls. “We always practice reading and that really helps. We’ve done a whole lot with math too.”



Outside of school and tutoring, Khamyra likes to hang out with friends, watch television, and listen to pop music, as well as attend concerts. Liz points out that one of the things that Khamyra likes to do every year that’s special is to go with her mother and sister to see the touring company of “Dancing with the Stars”. Khamyra is still figuring out her next steps, but ultimately plans to study nursing.

Dillon

Dillon started at Learning Edge in 6th grade, and he has worked with his tutor, Joe Crossetto, since 7th grade. Joe’s specialty is fine arts. Over the years, they have worked on many projects together, with some occasional extra assistance for math. When Dillon was a freshman, they designed a thank you card for Learning Edge that was sent to its donors.



A master of multiple instruments, Dillon especially loves the guitar and plays in his school’s rock band. Dillon and his friends are working on a mixtape with plans for music videos and a listening party. In addition to his love of music, Dillon is also on the volleyball team, likes to draw, and plays video games.

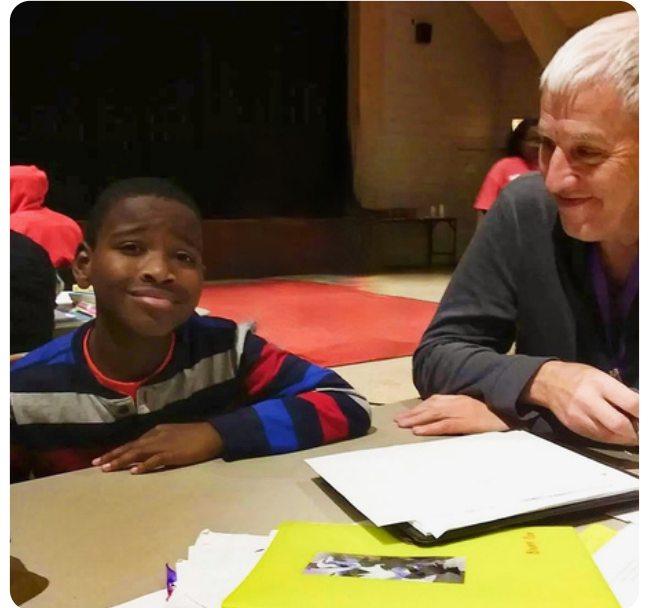
In college, Dillon plans to major in Mechanical Engineering. “I like building stuff and trying to figure out how to build things,” Dillon says. His favorite subjects include English, Physics, Environmental Science, and AP Government. He also considers himself a history nerd, but music has always been a constant.

The Learning Edge community commends its high school seniors, Khamyra and Dillon, for their commitment to their education and personal growth. We are grateful to their tutors, Liz and Joe, for their years-long commitment that has helped their students grow both academically and as individuals.

Longtime Tutor Spotlight: Bob Martin

For the past 21 years and counting, Bob Martin has volunteered as a tutor one night a week at Learning Edge. Although Bob runs a textile business with his family, he always liked the idea of tutoring. "I've often thought that I might have become a teacher if I knew what I wanted earlier in life," he recalls. "One day, Cluster Tutoring had a booth set up at Oak Park's *Day in Our Village*." It seemed perfect for Bob.

Bob started working with his current student, Blake, in 2017, when Blake was in 3rd grade. Now, Blake is an 8th grader who is beginning to prepare for high school. Blake plays basketball and likes to read. "Sometimes we'll talk about a certain subject and Blake will ask a lot of questions. He is very curious," Bob explains.



As a tutor, Bob wants to support Blake with all of his endeavors. His main academic goal for Blake is for him to gain a comfort level with math, especially with fractions, and percentages. However, Bob believes that he has success by being there and genuinely trying to help. "I'm happy to have gotten to know Blake. He is such a good person. He's also been through some difficult family experiences," Bob adds. "I don't know if I helped, but I'm glad I could be there."

The student-tutor pair kept up with tutoring throughout the pandemic, meeting over Zoom. "Some things work almost better on Zoom, but other things were more difficult," Bob explains. "On Zoom, there were no other distractions. What made it difficult was I never had a good system for how to set up a math problem. In-person, it's nice to be able to sit there and show things on paper."

Occasionally, Bob and Blake still opt to meet over Zoom. "When Blake has his basketball games, if it was a few years ago, we may not have been able to stick with it as easily," says Bob. "It's good to have Zoom as an option."

Bob shares that he often wonders if he is making any difference, as he didn't think he was good at tutoring. "I've learned that you can make differences you're not aware of," Bob says. "I think it'd be interesting to talk to someone 10 years removed from Learning Edge about things they may have gotten out of it that they realized years later that stick with them."

Program Updates

Learning Edge Tutoring at St. Catherine-St. Lucy School

In May, Learning Edge concluded its 2nd year with our afterschool program at the St. Catherine-St. Lucy School (SCSL). In the previous year (2021-2022), Learning Edge provided one hour of one-to-one tutoring on Monday afternoons, specifically focused on reading. With feedback from volunteers and SCSL staff, we expanded the program to include first through third grade students and, in addition to reading, tutors assisted with homework and in building foundational math skills. There were 17 students in the program, which was a 24% increase from the previous year.



Tracy Rowan & Ky'Zah



Dave Holmes & Da'Vione

Along with adding several new books (particularly for third-grade students), Learning Edge purchased educational reading and math games that students and tutors could play after their academic work was done. The students particularly enjoyed playing Sight Word Bingo!

In addition, SCSL provided staff and volunteers with results from the students' fall I-Ready assessments. These provided helpful information about specific deficits in a students' reading and math skills. SCSL also asked teachers to meet with the tutors upon their request to encourage service coordination. We were fortunate to recruit seasoned tutors as well as retired educators as a part of our volunteer pool.

Summer reading returned in 2023!



Suzanne McLeese & Ava

Over the summer, Learning Edge's summer reading program served our students who were identified as having the highest need for additional support. Developed by our Reading Specialist, Bernadette Diaz, students received individualized instruction in improving phonics skills and reading comprehension. The program met two nights per week for four weeks at First United Church of Oak Park. Learning Edge anticipates expanding the program in the summer of 2024.

In Memoriam - Sylvia Menninga



For over 10 years, Sylvia Menninga was a volunteer at Learning Edge. She started as a tutor, but after her student did not return one year, she readily accepted the position of Tuesday librarian as offered by former Executive Director, Kathy McCabe.

She noted at that time that the library was pretty much of a mess, and she was instrumental in organizing and throwing out unused items. One summer, the library was moved to a different location, and Sylvia's husband, Gy Menninga, volunteered by building and putting up shelves. "There was a lot more space for books after that," Sylvia said at the time.

Sylvia was beloved by tutors, students, and staff. She was kind, helpful, and had a great sense of humor. She was an inspiration to many, and made the world a better, brighter, and more caring place.

John Lurain joins the Learning Edge Board

The Learning Edge Board is pleased to announce its newest member, John Lurain. Following in the footsteps of his late wife, Nell, John says it's an honor to be a board member. "She was a role model for me. I saw her tutor two siblings beginning in grade school and all the way through high school," John says. "We had both grown up in households of teachers, and we saw firsthand the value and joy of learning. We felt that we could make an impact on a young person's education through the one-on-one tutoring program provided by Learning Edge. I firmly believe that one person can make a difference."



As a board member for Learning Edge, John hopes to bring a new perspective and contribute to the program's continued growth and success. "I am especially interested in the recruitment of new tutors who will serve as both educators and role models for students in the program," he says. "Education is one of the most important things that empowers young people to succeed in life," John says. "Tutoring programs like Learning Edge provide a personalized approach to learning that is not as often available in the usual classroom experience. These programs can help students who need additional instruction to succeed in school and can show them the fun of learning, which will hopefully inspire a life-long quest for knowledge."

Learning Edge is more than tutoring, it's a community.

Learning Edge Board embraces Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training

In the spring of 2023, the Board of Directors participated in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training led by Ravae Duhaney (pictured right). Ms. Duhaney is an accomplished leader of diversity work and adult facilitation. During four DEI training sessions, members of the Board explored their thinking, personal journeys, and the historical context of the Learning Edge community. Ms. Duhaney used a framework that consisted of five parts: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation in supporting individuals as they further integrate this work into their personal and professional lives. Through these sessions, Board members gained additional tools to recognize and disrupt systemic racism. Learning Edge plans to expand this training to its volunteer tutors within the next two years.



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Megan Finkelman & Jordyn

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