

# READ TO LEAD



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2021

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## A Pivotal Moment

*Middle school is a pivotal moment, when students either lose interest in school or take ownership of their learning. Read to Lead meets this critical moment for students, providing innovative online learning games and a holistic learning experience that empowers them to choose the trajectory of their lives.*

*For middle school students and teachers nationwide, your partnership is vital.*

*With your support, Read to Lead provides students with the opportunity to develop their reading, writing, and social and emotional learning skills while immersing themselves in diverse career worlds. Through our free online learning platform, we equip teachers with a proven curriculum, tools, and resources, all of which lead to a transformative impact for their students' academic and social-emotional skills.*

*In our 2021 annual report, you'll see how your dedicated support is making it possible for Read to Lead to enter a new phase of innovation and impact, building on the 30-year history of Classroom, Inc.*



## Board of *Directors*

We're deeply grateful for our Board of Directors, who contribute their time, talents, and support to bring Read to Lead's impactful programs to teachers and students across the country.



**Lewis W. Bernard**  
*Chair, Read to Lead;  
Chairman, American Museum  
of Natural History*



**Nicole Campbell**  
*Founder, Ownership  
is the Future*



**Beverly Fanger Chase**  
*Secretary, Read to Lead;  
Senior Counsel, Davis Polk  
& Wardwell LLP*



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**Jon Friedland**  
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**Lisa Kennedy**  
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**Shannon Kete**  
*COO, Education Organizations*



**Mita Patnaik**  
*Vice President of Customer  
Success, Oracle NetSuite, Inc.*



**Nicholas Rudenstine**  
*Private Investor*



**Carl W. Turnipseed**  
*Executive Vice President  
(Retired), Federal Reserve  
Bank of New York*



**Cynthia Vance**  
*Advisor, Public Education  
Organizations*

## The Evolution to Read to Lead

For nearly 30 years, Read to Lead (formerly Classroom, Inc.) has created learning games that invite middle school students to **“be the boss”** in virtual workplace scenarios and empower them to build the skills to succeed in school, in their careers, and in life. With the dedicated support of our donors and partners, we have achieved significant milestones in both innovation and impact.

**1990**

### *It started with an idea*

Lewis W. Bernard has an innovative idea: the simulation software used to train his company's global workforce could be adapted to change the way that students learn. In the era of floppy disks, his idea introduces the concept of career exploration through game-based learning and technology.



**1992**

### *Classroom, Inc. is founded*

Lewis founds Classroom, Inc., joined by leaders such as Board Member Carl W. Turnipseed. In partnership with Columbia Teachers College and Bank Street College of Education, Classroom, Inc. creates *The Parkside Hotel*, a software-based simulation where students manage a hotel.



**2015**

### *Read to Lead is born*

With a grant from the Gates Foundation, Classroom, Inc. pilots our Read to Lead digital learning platform, inviting students to “be the boss” in various career worlds. As a freely accessible, web-based technology, Read to Lead hones in on literacy and leadership skills and provides teachers with a new level of data and insight into student progress.



**2019**

### *Impacting classrooms nationwide*

Read to Lead digital learning games, curriculum, and resources reach a new milestone: supporting a total of 1 million students since Classroom, Inc.'s founding. The Million Words Read Challenge launches to encourage classes to read 1M words together.

**2021**

### *Entering a new era*

We have entered a new era as Classroom, Inc. officially changes its name to Read to Lead.



As we continue to innovate and scale for impact, embracing Read to Lead as both the organization and program name better encapsulates our mission, vision, and proven approach to learning.



### *Most importantly,*

Read to Lead is how the communities we serve know us already.

**2022**



*On top of improving their reading comprehension, Read to Lead taught [my students] the skills they need to be effective leaders. The Read to Lead games are immersive, real-world workplace environments where students are challenged to make important decisions, preparing them for life outside of their classrooms.”*

**Kiwonda Riley**

Assistant Principal, Kyle, Texas



# Empowering the *next* generation of readers and leaders

Read to Lead provides middle school teachers and students with a holistic learning model and curriculum that combines literacy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and career exploration.

## A uniquely engaging way to learn

Read to Lead online learning games put students in charge in authentic workplace scenarios where they have to **read** closely, **think** critically, **lead** a diverse team, and **solve** complex problems.



The characters in our games **reflect the diversity of the communities we serve**, allowing students from all backgrounds to envision themselves as leaders and to become agents of their own learning.

*"My students got so caught up in Read to Lead and solving the situations that they didn't even realize they were reading so many words or think of it as a "reading assignment."*

**Louanne Smith**  
8th Grade English Teacher, Jefferson, South Carolina

## A proven literacy tool

Research shows that reading is the main predictor of a student's ability to transition into high school and achieve future educational and economic success, but **80% of 8th graders** living in poverty are **below proficiency in reading**.

**In each learning game, a student...**

☒ Reads 3,000+ words

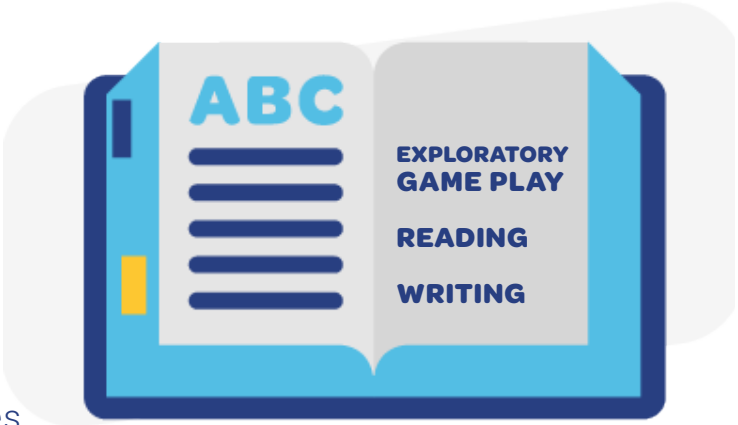
☒ Makes 7+ leadership decisions

☒ Writes an evidence-based reflection

☒ Completes an ELA assessment

### WHAT DOES READ TO LEAD PROVIDE?

Read to Lead combines **exploratory gameplay** with **reading** and **writing** opportunities that provide educators with embedded assessments and help them improve their students' learning outcomes.



*"Read to Lead changed how I felt about reading and writing. I saw a lot of crises in episodes, and because I had to read and write in detail to make decisions and get the job done, I was able to become a stronger writer."*

**Macayla C.**  
Ninth grade student, Tarrant, Alabama

## Social-emotional skill development



As **“the boss”** in a virtual workplace, students must collect information, assess multiple viewpoints, and ultimately... **make difficult decisions to solve real-world problems.**



Read to Lead provides students with opportunities to try new approaches, make mistakes, and learn from them — helping them to develop social-emotional skills to succeed in life.

## Insight into career possibilities

Career exploration plateaus in 8th grade. Tellingly, 81% of high school dropouts report that real-world learning opportunities would have improved their chances of staying in school.



**“Read to Lead was a new way to experience being in the medical field – it’s very different from having to read an article and answer some questions. You get to interact with other professionals in the game. It really makes you feel like you’re in the workplace.”**

**Ninth grade student, Bronx, New York**

Read to Lead offers **career exposure at the critical middle school moment.** Through game-based learning, students experience over 30 careers at the time when occupational identity is beginning to form.

## LEARNING HOW TO LEAD

**“Read to Lead taught us **determination.** It pushed us forward to persist. You see people in the [virtual] workplace like **Clive** who works with volunteers. Even though they had bad beginnings, he gave them the chance to change the world and provide for the community. So it doesn’t matter how you started. If you persist, you will do well; you will actually be a good person.”**

**Clive**

**Middle school student, Brownsville, New York**

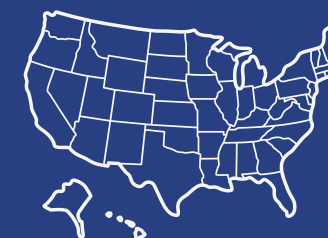


## Who Read to Lead Serves

**50k**  
students  
nationwide



**59%**  
identify as Black,  
Indigenous, or  
People of Color



**82%**  
attend Title 1  
schools





## Jalen's **READ TO LEAD** Journey

In 2015, a group of middle school students from the Tarrant City public school system had the opportunity to experience Read to Lead learning games for the first time. Enrolled in a summer program in their hometown of Tarrant, Alabama, they quickly learned what it meant to **“be the boss.”** They were introduced to diverse storylines and characters that allowed them to imagine careers and new possibilities..

One of the students from the first Read to Lead cohort in Tarrant is Jalen, who is now an 11th grader. When he reflects on his Read to Lead experience in middle school, he remembers it being something that made him excited to come to class and see reading in a new and positive way. Being “the boss” in a virtual workplace

scenario also made him picture himself even more as a leader in middle school and in his future adult life. To Jalen, a leader is a person who is hardworking and motivated, and who perseveres through hard times.

Jalen shared that reading has helped him expand his vocabulary. When he writes, he thinks about how he could develop his thoughts and create a story out of them. As he looks forward to his next steps after high school, he told us,

***“Now that I’m getting closer, I see myself taking on my next challenge in life. I see myself getting into photography or videography. I see myself going to college to get these skills.”***

Since **2015**, more than **1,500 students** in Tarrant City Schools and in Greater Birmingham have benefited from Read to Lead digital learning games and lessons. Our partnerships in Greater Birmingham are made possible by the generous support of the **Max and Lorayne Cooper Foundation**, who made a leadership grant of \$500,000 in 2021 to continue to expand our impact in the community over the next three years.



## **READ TO LEAD**

### Classroom Spotlight

Like many teachers, Lindsey Barlow, a 5th Grade Reading and Social Studies teacher from Polk County Public Schools in Florida, found herself struggling with students who were skimming through reading course material without closely reading and comprehending it. With the Florida State Assessment (FSA) quickly approaching, Lindsey needed a program that would spark her students’ interests, encourage them to read closely, and boost outcomes.

Lindsey began implementing Read to Lead in her “Intervention and Reading” blocks for about 30 minutes each day. When time allowed, she would also use the discussion prompts, debate questions, and wrap-around content provided on the platform to deepen the learning.

Lindsey shared:

***“Students were reading so closely that after playing a game, they would ask each other what decisions they made and why – really rationalizing their choices.”***

She was surprised to see how the real-world element of being in a virtual workplace setting helped her students expand their vocabularies. The essay writing, highlighting, and summarizing exercises also helped them stay engaged throughout the game and prepare for the FSA.

On top of test preparation, two of Lindsey’s classes read over 1 million words together and joined the Read to Lead Millionaires Club – all of which contributed to a successful end to the school year.



## Driving innovation **forward**

Donors drive innovation and impact

### **New York Life Foundation**

The New York Life Foundation has been a leadership partner of Read to Lead for more than ten years, contributing philanthropic grants and hundreds of hours of volunteer support.



### **Our Board of Directors**

Read to Lead's Board of Directors provide strategic guidance, professional expertise, and financial resources to advance our mission.

### **Read to Lead Supporters**

At every pivotal moment, our donors have made innovation possible, from launching Read to Lead to creating our Million Words Read Challenge to keeping Read to Lead freely accessible.

### **AT&T Aspire Accelerator**

Read to Lead was selected as part of the 2021 AT&T Aspire Accelerator, a six-month program that provided the funding and mentorship to scale our efforts to narrow the homework gap and stem the tide of COVID-19 learning loss.



***"Read to Lead instills leadership in the minds of young people, so they believe in themselves as leaders and seek a path through one of the most important channels - reading."***

**Carl W. Turnipseed**

*Read to Lead Board Member*

## Creating the **next** generation of Read to Lead

### **Introducing the role of Lead Pharmacist**



Read to Lead collaborated with the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy's faculty and students to create a new series of online learning games that immerse middle school students in the role of a lead pharmacist. The new games provide an in-demand career world for students to explore and a model for the creation of other games across career fields.



### **Supporting social-emotional learning (SEL)**



Through a partnership with Digital Promise and generous support from the S & L Marx Foundation, we created new features to support SEL skill development, including a holistic dashboard that provides teachers with real-time insight into student progress.

### **Developing a new financial services game**

In 2022, Read to Lead is partnering with BlackRock to create games set in the financial services industry. BlackRock team members are informing the creation of realistic scenarios that provide windows for students into financial careers, as well as decision points that reinforce healthy financial choices and behaviors.



# A Transformative **Impact** on Teachers and Students

As Read to Lead envisions its future, our goal is to provide a holistic learning experience that impacts middle school students and teachers at scale and provides educators with the tools and resources they need to boost student engagement and achievement. Key initiatives include:

## **Building a powerful network of Educator Leaders**

In 2020, we launched a new network of Educator Leaders. Coming from diverse backgrounds and communities, our Educator Leaders provide insight into the development of new learning games and teacher support resources and serve as proud ambassadors for Read to Lead.



## **Providing early career exposure and exploration**

Read to Lead: Live! is an interactive webinar series where students get a front-row seat for career exploration and learn how the skills they're building within the learning games can lead to real world careers. In its inaugural year, 38,000 students heard from 9 leaders who are passionate about what they do and are making a difference in the world.

After attending American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Misty Copeland's webinar, Read to Lead student Zhasa shared,

**"My favorite part was to learn about a Black legend in ballet because I'm Black too. It was amazing to meet a Prima Ballerina and an author at the same time!"**

## **Expanding the Million Words Read Challenge**

An integral way Read to Lead is building on innovation and scaling for impact is through our Million Words Read Challenge. In 2019, we launched our first ever challenge for classes to read one million words together. Since then, more than 5,000 students across 238 classes have crossed the finish line and achieved the 1M words milestone.

At New Bedford Public Schools in Massachusetts, the Teaching and Learning Specialist at the school saw the Million Words Read Challenge on Facebook and immediately started brainstorming with the teachers how they could use this challenge to fuel reading engagement with their 5th graders.

After a few days of using Read to Lead, students in Amanda's class were hooked. Not only did their motivation to read improve, but the students started to become curious about various career paths.

Read to Lead also allowed Amanda to differentiate instruction as needed. Some students used the Text to Speech feature,



while others didn't need it. When active inside the game, students can opt to have the text read to them. *"This is helpful because all my students are at different [reading] levels,"* Amanda said.

***"My favorite moment in using Read to Lead is when a student came in on a Monday after the weekend and said "Mrs. Flanagan, I moved us from 25th to 24th on the leaderboard when I finished the last game! They were playing over the weekend because they wanted to reach Millionaire Status!"***

**Amanda Flanagan**  
5th Grade Teacher, Massachusetts

# Corporate & Foundation Partners

The support of our donors makes our impact possible. In addition to our generous individual donors, our corporate and foundation partners include:

ALTMAN  
FOUNDATION



THE  
BARKER  
WELFARE FOUNDATION

Booth Ferris Foundation

MAX AND LORAYNE COOPER  
FOUNDATION



EMPIRE STATE  
REALTY TRUST

**Epic**



Mary Alice Fortin Foundation



HEARST *foundations*

The Hyde and Watson Foundation

**Lone Pine Foundation, Inc.**

Morgan  
Stanley



COMCAST  
NBCUNIVERSAL



NEW YORK  
LIFE NEW YORK LIFE  
FOUNDATION

ORACLE®



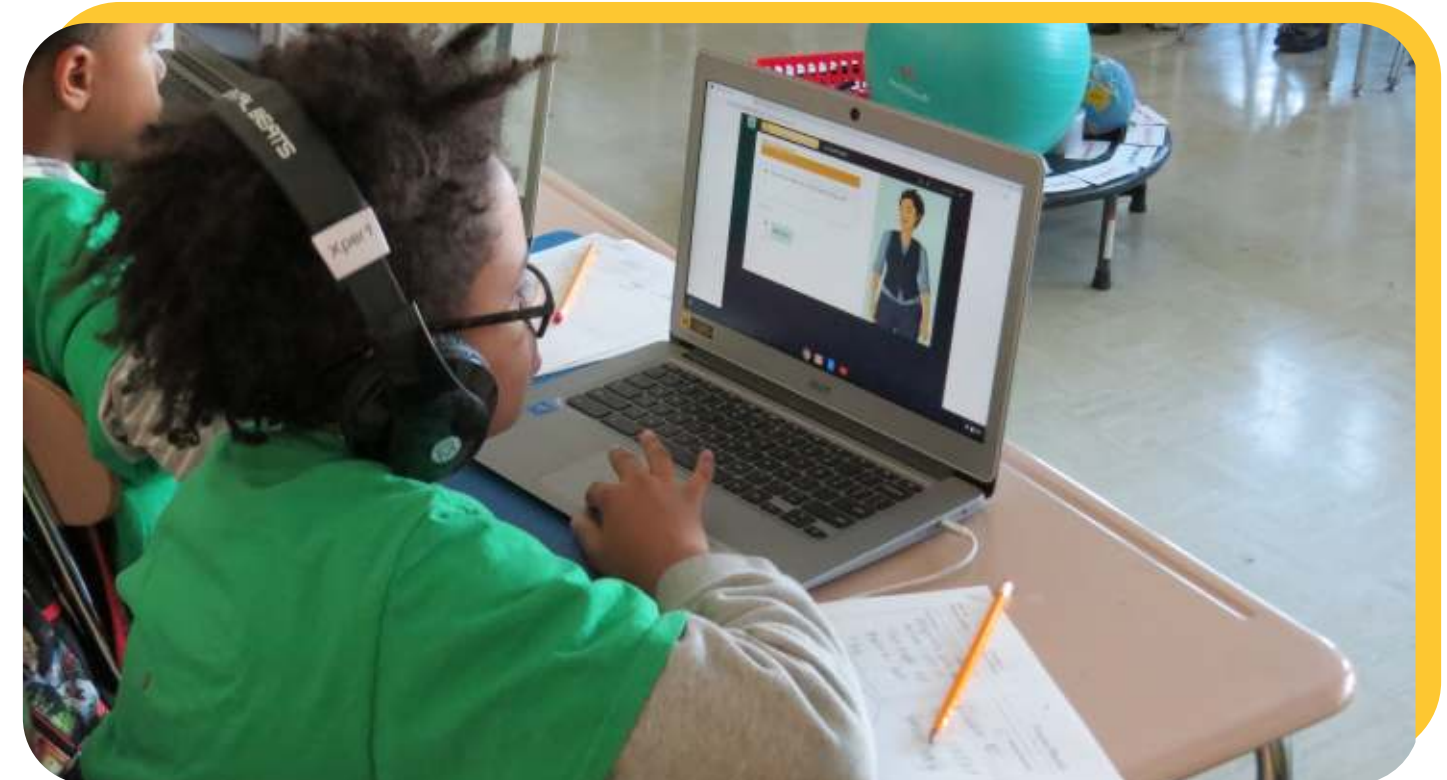
**pwc**



THE VIDDA  
FOUNDATION

<https://readtolead.org/financials/>

Visit to view our audited  
financial statements.



*"What's unique about Read to Lead is that students are learning to enhance their academic skills, but they're also learning about themselves and what might be possible for their future."*

**Pat Duff**  
Read to Lead Donor



# Our Supporters

Acacia Capital Corporation	Carolyn Chaliff	Allen Feliz	Hultquist Foundation	The Moriah Fund	Bret Rubin
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**Empowering the next  
generation of readers  
and leaders**

**READ TO LEAD**