

Dirigo Reads



Annual Report 2019

You never know when a passion may spark an idea that is simple, yet a bit crazy and ambitious at the same time. I guess we would say that's how it was when we started Dirigo Reads nearly two years ago. The premise was simple: Get books in the hands of first grade students—books they could love, call their own, and hopefully help encourage a lifelong love of reading. We also knew that so many kids, particularly in rural areas of Maine, do not have home libraries, let alone a single book or magazine to call their own. So, for this idea to work, we knew that what we did for one school, we wanted to eventually do for all—taking a small step closer to providing all kids with an equal chance of achieving literacy success and the promise of a bright future.

We decided to start small, inviting a pilot group of schools with a goal of having all public elementary schools in Maine on board by 2025. Come to find out, when you call schools and let them know you'd like to give their first graders books, there's a chance you might be met with some skepticism—understandably so! It takes mutual trust to start a program, and we want to sincerely thank the six schools who opened their doors to us. Not only did these schools warmly welcome us but they have been fabulous collaborators, especially when the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic hit and students had to be sent home mid-year. These schools rallied to devise a plan to ensure none of their first graders went a month during the academic year without receiving a new Dirigo Reads book. So, from the bottom of our heart, we'd like to extend a huge thank you to our Dirigo Reads pioneer schools: The Adams School in Castine, Brewer Community School, Madison Elementary, Rose M. Gaffney Elementary School in Machias, SeDoMoCha in Dover-Foxcroft, and Teague Park Elementary in Caribou.

Additionally, this program would still only be an ambitious idea if it wasn't for the support, generosity, and commitment of our partners. We are exceptionally proud to have Machias Savings Bank as our Dirigo Star Founding Partner. Their early support and shared vision helped not only make this program a reality but secured the program's viability for the future. It is also with the support of Bangor Savings Bank, Cross Insurance, The First National Bank, and Northern Light Health that we'll be able to include twenty additional Maine schools this coming year—giving approximately 450 more first graders the everlasting gift of reading. And, to United Way of Eastern Maine and Sutherland Weston—companies who encouraged us from the start and helped lay the framework for what this program could be—thank you—you will forever be a part of the Dirigo Reads story.

We hope you enjoy this summary of the organization's first year. Please take a moment to read the heartwarming comments from the administrators and teachers in our schools and know that this difference has been made possible just in one year because of your support. A difference that will hopefully continue for generations of Maine first graders to come. From the two of us—**thank you**.

— **Dan and Karen Cashman**
Co-Founders, Dirigo Reads



Dan and Karen pose with soon-to-be second grader and friend, Lydia, during the launch event of Dirigo Reads in August 2019 at Brewer Community School. Lydia shared an excerpt from Dirigo's first book, *Oliver*.



3,301

Number of books given out between September 2019 and June 2020

Featured Books

“Dirigo Reads has given first graders in the town of Madison the opportunity to build or add to their own personal library. Parents have shared with me how whenever their first grader came home with a book they would read it that night, and in many cases every night until the new book came. To some degree the gift hasn’t been the book but rather the motivation. It is my hope as an educator that this program can continue and include more first graders in Maine!”

– Scott Mitchell, Principal
Madison Elementary

September

Oliver
by Syd Hoff

October

A Picture for Harold’s Room
by Crockett Johnson

November

Amazing Tigers!
by Sarah L. Thomson

December

Splat the Cat Takes the Cake
by Rob Scotton

January

It’s Snowing! It’s Snowing!
Winter Poems
by Jack Prelutsky

February

The Berenstain Bears’ Class Trip
by Jan and Mike Berenstain

March

Amazing Bees!
by Sue Unstead

April

Flappy and Scrappy
by Arthur Yorinks

May

Pancakes, Pancakes!
by Eric Carle

June

Pete the Cat: Pete at the Beach
by James Dean



Right: Madison students cheer over the delivery of their first book, *Oliver*



Above: Students at Teague Park Elementary show off their February Dirigo Reads book, *The Berenstain Bears' Class Trip*

"What a great program! Students look forward to the monthly gift of books! They were caught reading them regularly!"

– Tim Collins, First Grade Teacher, Teague Park Elementary, Caribou



Schools Served

Teague Park Elementary School	Caribou
Brewer Community School	Brewer
Rose M. Gaffney Elementary School	Machias
SeDoMoCha	Dover-Foxcroft
Madison Elementary	Madison
Adams School	Castine

"Above and beyond improving academic achievement, we also want our students to learn to LOVE to read, and it is undeniable that children with greater access to books and print express more enjoyment of reading AND perform higher academically. What is so great about this program, is that it helps to bridge the gap between students that have books at home, and those who do not. By increasing access to high quality books for ALL kids, every month, during a critical year for literacy development, Dirigo Reads is making a huge difference in the reading lives of our first grade learners!"

– Allison Kahkonen, PK-4 Principal
Brewer Community School



Above: Dan passes out Dirigo Read's September book to excited students at SeDoMoCha in Dover-Foxcroft during the Cashman's visit.

Average Number of Students Served

330

*This is an average taken over 10 months. Student numbers fluctuated per month



"My first grade students loved receiving a new book every month. They were always excited on book distribution day! I read the books to the children and during partner reading the students would read to each other. During a class discussion about our new books the children shared where in their homes they were building their libraries. Thank you very much for putting books into the hands and homes of my young students."

— Renne Look, First Grade Teacher, Rose M Gaffney Elementary, Machias

Partnering Organizations

Dirigo Reads would not be possible without the generous support of these companies. Together, they are providing the gift of opportunity for Maine children—a foundational benefit that will last into adulthood.

Dirigo Star Founding Partner



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