

# Elevations

The latest news and updates from the Education Elevators  
Spring 2022, Vol. 12



## A Note from the Executive Director

While the masks may have come off, kids are still being impacted by Covid. The toll on their academic performance, mental health and general well-being is profound. The last school year that was not impacted by COVID-19 was 2018-2019. Many elementary school students have NEVER had a normal school year. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have declared that the pandemic-related decline in child and adolescent mental health has become a national emergency. Research shows that relationships with caring adults are critical to supporting mental health, helping kids overcome adversity and be more resilient. The lack of connection is what made the pandemic so hard on all of us, especially kids, so it's fitting that connection with others is the antidote!

Despite Covid and all its setbacks, our program has been able to grow - and kids with Elevators are even thriving. Here is what one principal said, "The program is working wonderfully here at Central, and our students who participate look forward to the visits they have with their mentors each week. I am so thankful for their hard work and dedication to our students and would highly recommend the Education Elevator program to any school who is interested."

Caitlin Latoria, a counselor at Piedmont remarked, "Nicole has gone above and beyond when meeting with Ayonna. I think that Ayonna truly feels like she has made a difference in her life and that she is a trusted adult that cares about her."

We've also expanded our community partnerships. This spring we partnered with the Amy Krouse Rosenthal Foundation and they provided copies of a popular children's book called, Exclamation Mark, for every child in our program! Next year we are also hoping to host a "Meet the Author" visit with Paris Rosenthal, a New York Times best selling author. In the fall, as part of a partnership with Inspiring Dreams Network, we'll be providing trainings to our Elevators on fostering meaningful connections and building resilience.

We wouldn't be able to continue our growth without our amazing Elevators, school and business partners and the generous support of our donors. I hope you will continue to support our work. Please consider making a donation so we can impact the lives of more students!

With Appreciation and Gratitude,

Allison McKinzie

"We will be seeing the impact of COVID in generations to come if we don't step in and do something about it now."

- Kim Legg, MA/LSW Assistant Attendance Director, Kanawha County Schools Social Worker

## PARTNER PROFILE - STEPTOE & JOHNSON



Bryan Cokeley with his student Amaad

**Why We Partner:** I am a big believer that "no child chooses their circumstances." I was blessed to be born into a stable family in rural West Virginia that had strong values at its core. I like to think that I have provided a stable and nurturing environment to my own children, who are mostly grown now. Not every child has the blessings of fortunate circumstances. Education Elevators provides us with an opportunity to have a positive influence in a child's life. These children are in our community; we have an obligation.

**Elevators' Perspective:** My children are mostly grown. Although I will be in their lives until the day that I pass, my time of modeling and nurturing sons and daughters has come and gone. This program gives me an opportunity to take those learning experiences and put them back into play. (Plus, it gives me a chance to work on my jump shot!)

Although trite to say, it truly is better to give than to receive...but I offer this refinement: It is difficult to measure the impact of one's investment of time and interest in the life of a young person. But I know, without a doubt, the warm feelings that I experience when I spend time with Amaad. When I see Amaad, my elevatee, come running across the gym with a jump in his step, I know that the effort is worthwhile.

Although not the purpose, this mentorship thing is a two-way street. We, too, become better community citizens.

-Bryan Cokeley, Managing Partner & Elevator

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## Offsetting COVID's Impact on Education

From: West Virginia Kids Count, Brief 2: COVID-19 & Kids Issue Brief Series

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child states, "Supportive relationships and active skill-building strengthen the foundations of resilience." (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

Developmental research shows that having one or more caring adults in a child's life increases the likelihood that they will flourish and become productive adults themselves. In many cases, these caring adults are the child's parents, but other relatives, neighbors, friends of parents, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and others play this role. (Murphey, et al., 2013).

Key findings indicate that children who have a mentor - like relationship with an adult outside their home are less likely to have externalizing and internalizing problems. They are also more likely to complete tasks, remain calm, show interest in learning, volunteer, engage in physical activities and participate in school-related activities (both inside and outside of school). These children are also more likely to talk with their parents or caregivers about issues that really matter. The results of this research indicate that mentor-like adults can be a positive resource for children and adolescents in promoting positive well-being. (Murphey, et al., 2013).

**66.2 % of Fourth Graders in Kanawha County are NOT reading at grade level**  
(up from 56 % in 2019), WV Kids Count Data Center

## School Perspective on Business Partnership

Elevators have helped impact Mary C. Snow Elementary by giving our students consistency and positive role models. They have improved our students' attendance and behavior. Elevators have provided our at risk students a reason to want to come to school...so they can see their Elevator!

They've helped our students form important connections with adults and have helped our students have another adult in their life to show that they care and make them feel special!



-Destiny Spencer, Principal  
Mary C. Snow Elementary

## School Counselor Perspective

Education Elevators is an amazing program! Students light up when I tell them that their Elevator is here.

Student attendance, school performance and confidence have all improved! Students smile more and are more comfortable when talking to adults (this is even with students who really struggled previously with trusting people). One student who used to not make eye contact now stops me in the hall to talk!

Students also engage more with their peers and are happier in general. Another student, who last year would just look down at her desk and wasn't affectionate at all, is now seen skipping down the hallways always saying "Hi Ms. Natalie!" She has given me three hugs!

I wish I had more Elevators to match with students! It's really incredible to see the impact they have on our students! I LOVE this program!

-Natalie Blevins, After School Director  
Mary C. Snow Elementary

## Elevator Spotlight

**How would you describe Harley?**  
I would describe Harley as energetic, spirited, and curious.

**What do you enjoy most about your time with Harley?** Hearing about Harley's day to day life is what I enjoy most about my time with him. Speaking with him regularly has given me a fresh perspective on many things.

**Have you noticed any changes in Harley since you have started meeting with him?** Since I started meeting with Harley, he has become more open with me about his feelings, thoughts, and experiences. I believe this is very important to our ultimate goal of mentoring him to be the best that he can be.

**What do you like best about being an Elevator?** My favorite part of being an Education Elevator is that I get an opportunity to give back to my community by mentoring a child while also learning more about myself.



Marcus Black, Elevator from Steptoe & Johnson, with his student Harley

"Marcus Black and Harley are a great match! Harley sometimes struggles with appropriate words and behavior. However, his teacher (AND his aunt) said that Harley's behavior has improved greatly since he started meeting with Marcus! When they couldn't meet over spring break, Harley's aunt told me that Harley was "tore up" about not being able to see Marcus!

I have noticed Harley laughing, smiling more and he has shown growth in self control. Harley really, REALLY likes Marcus! Now there are NINE 3rd grade boys asking me for an Elevator because Harley talks about Marcus so much!"

-Natalie Blevins

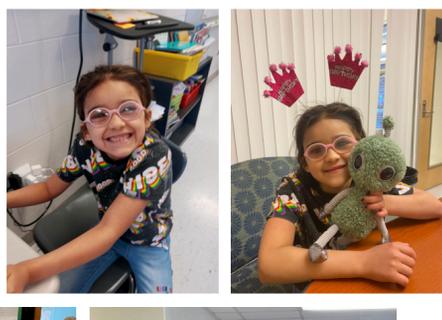
## ELEVATOR MOMENTS

Elevators are amazing at making the students in our program feel loved. We are so grateful for our Elevators!

One of our Elevators, Nicole, describes her role as an Elevator to her student Ayonna: "I am just here for you. Once a week for about an hour, we can do whatever you want. We can play, we can color, we can create, we can do your homework, or we can just sit here and talk." I have never been able to explain why I am there each week, but I hope that, throughout the time I have spent with her, she knows that I am someone she can count on.



Here is the reaction one little girl had when she learned that her Elevator, Kelly, was coming to see her on her Birthday! Kelly brought her some items to make her feel special!



"I love having Elevators in my school. I am never sure who is getting the most joy out of it. Lenny has as much joy and spark in his eye as Jeffrey does when they end the session. Jeffrey loves having Lenny come to school and he wants to make Lenny proud. They have a really cool connection that makes them a great match."

-Julie Sayre, Principal, Malden Elementary



After not being able to see each other for awhile, this Elevator, Chris, said about their visit, "He ran out of the classroom and jumped up on me and threw his arms and legs around me." The school counselor said she had to hold tears back!

## Thank you Amy Krouse Rosenthal Foundation!



"This book was a lot of fun to read. It helps you learn about life." - Aleeah, Malden Elementary

We are honored to be named by WV Living Magazine as one of five organizations that are making a positive impact in the state.

**FIVE THINGS All Kinds of Good**

Five organizations putting in the work.

MOUNTAIN STATE ORGANIZATIONS are creating new ways to better assist the diverse communities inside and outside West Virginia—and the positive change they seek, sometimes comes in surprising forms.

WRITTEN BY DEVIN LACY

Education Elevators is a local program that pairs West Virginia businesses and organizations with local schools and students, creating mentoring bonds and support teams that can go a long way in changing a student's life. These role models just may learn a thing or two from their mentees as well.

We are pleased to announce that we have a new website courtesy of Bricks Without Straw! Please also follow us on Facebook and Instagram @education.elevators

## Want to Support our Work?

Your financial contributions are critical to our program. Please visit our website at: [www.educationelevators.org](http://www.educationelevators.org) to learn more, donate, and connect with us.

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