

Cricket eMentoring Annual Report

2023–2024 Academic Year

CricketTogether

TryEngineering
TOGETHER
Powered by IEE and In2Books®

Dear Friends and Partners,

As the founder of Cricket Media, Inc., I am thrilled to celebrate our 25th anniversary in the mentoring field with you. I know you will enjoy reading about our work together in this Annual Report.

Since 1999, when we began in Washington, DC as a nonprofit, we have worked in close partnership with schools, students, literacy experts, and corporate allies. Your invaluable feedback has been essential in shaping a platform that enhances students' self-confidence, academic skills, and professional ambitions. We deeply appreciate our ongoing collaborations with teachers, students, and corporations, which fuels our ongoing evolution.

Cricket Media, Inc. was founded to develop a scalable, affordable digital platform to enable youth, especially those in under-resourced communities, to collaborate with role models, using content from our Cricket magazines and our corporate partners. The Cricket content is highly esteemed by families, librarians, and educators and frequently integrated into curricula and assessments. This means that students engaging with our content receive vital practice for standardized tests and assessments, providing a crucial competitive edge.

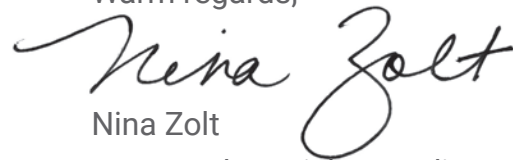
Now is an opportune moment to scale eMentoring because most schools in under-resourced communities now have devices and high-speed connectivity. This advancement opens doors for expanding our reach and impact, making it easier than ever to connect students with eMentors.

The Together programs are designed for easy customization and growth. Our dedicated team makes integration seamless, allowing you to concentrate on creating an impact.

The Together programs make reading and writing both meaningful and enjoyable for students because students are reading and writing for an authentic purpose, to communicate with their eMentors. The enthusiastic feedback from students, teachers, and eMentors highlights the success and satisfaction of our initiative. We hope you will continue to support and help us scale this vital work, as the benefits of eMentoring extend to everyone involved.

Thank you for your hard work and commitment. Together, we are making a significant difference and shaping a brighter future through impactful mentoring.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nina Zolt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nina" and the last name "Zolt" clearly distinguishable.

Nina Zolt

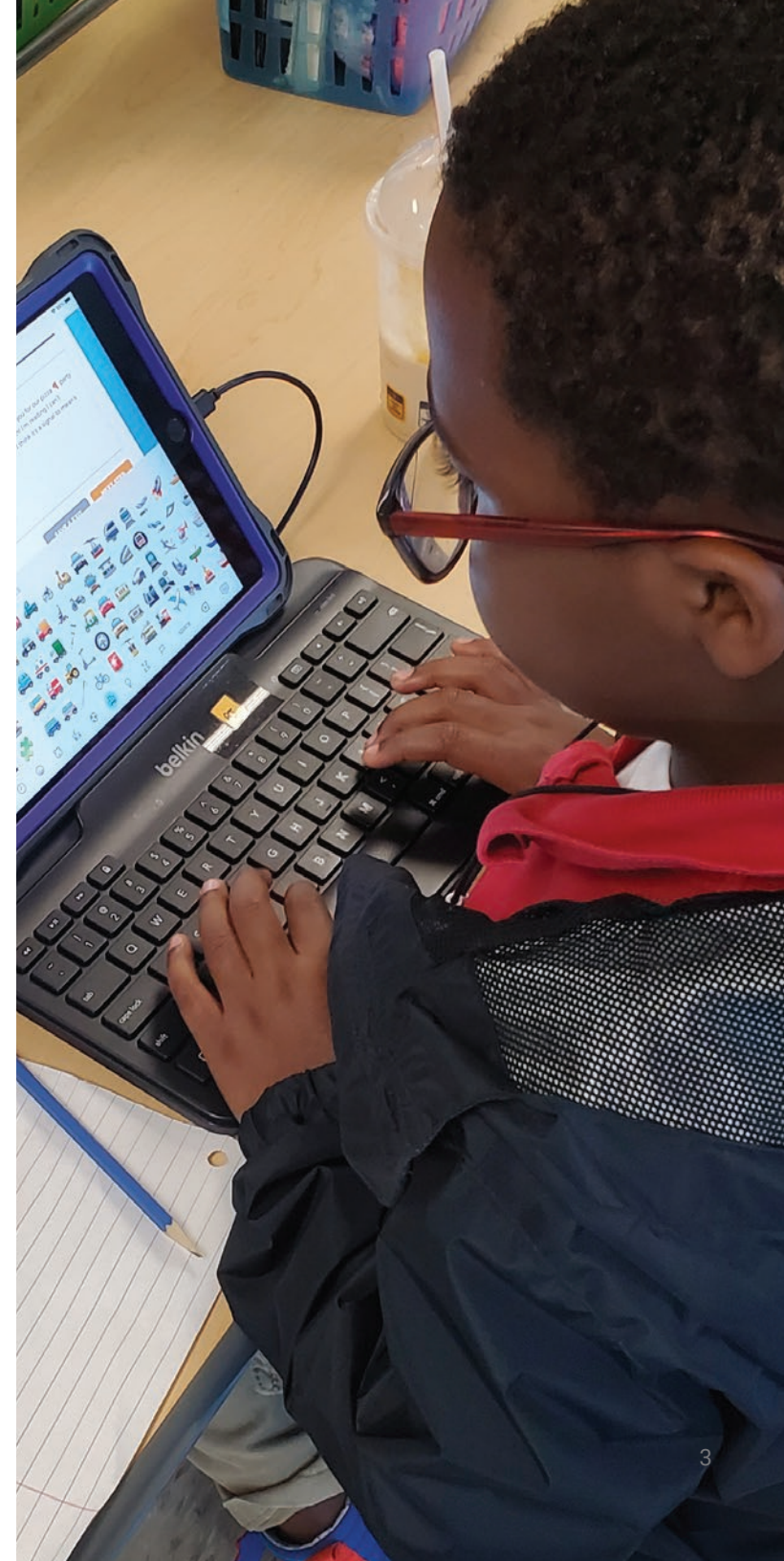
Co-Founder, Cricket Media, Inc.

1 in 3 students in the U.S. exit our school system without ever having a mentor. They never have an adult outside their family that shows up for them or invests in them.

We're on a mission to change that.

We're celebrating 25 years of increasing equitable access to mentors, matching children from historically underrepresented groups with their own champion who consistently fuels them with care, encouragement, and academic support.

This is our story of bridging the opportunity gap with eMentors.



Our Mission

Connect, support, and sustain 1:1 eMentoring relationships that empower every child to unlock their full personal and academic potential.

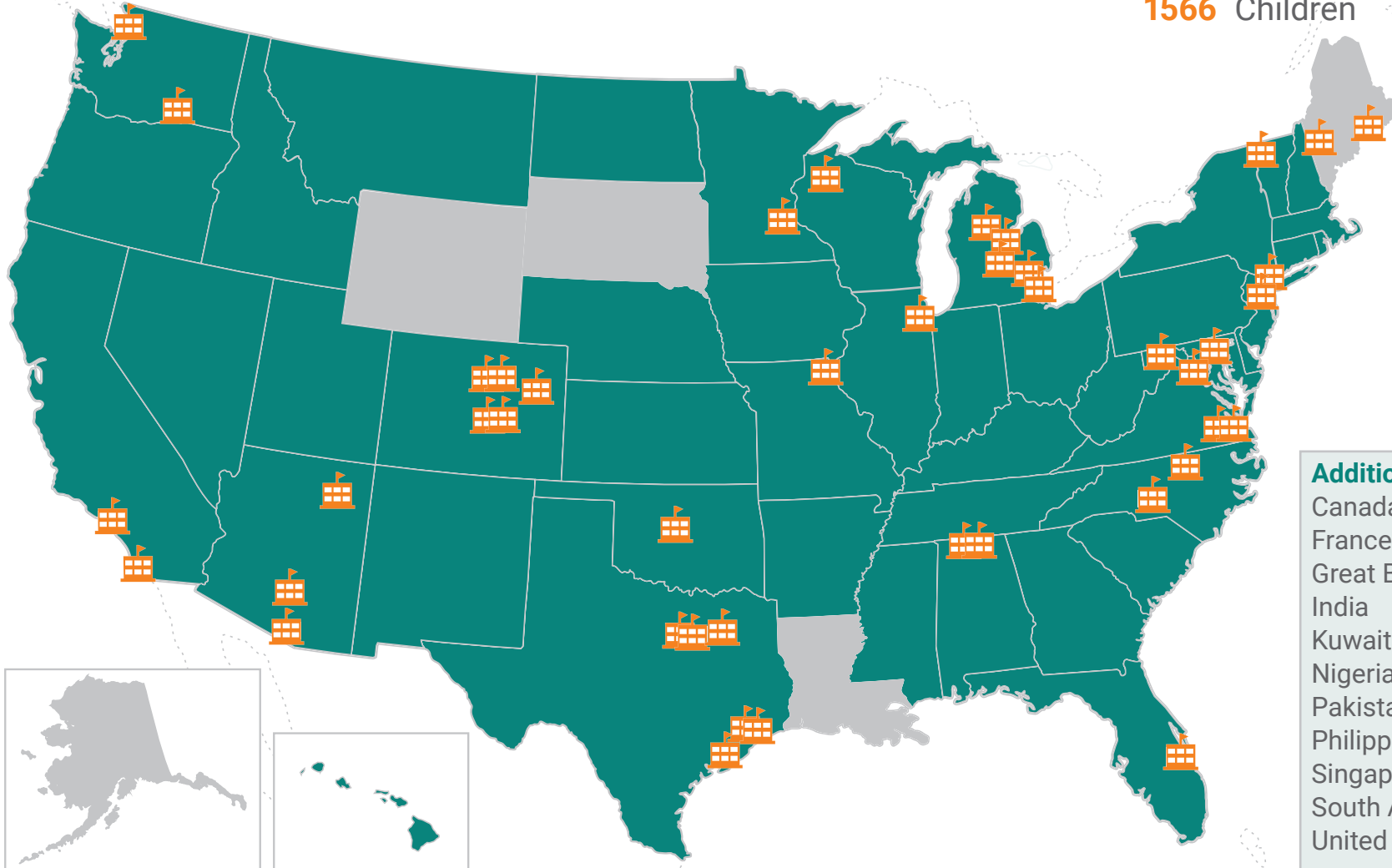
Our Method

Use online mentorship, eMentoring, to break down barriers and scale mentoring.



In 2023–24, we connected **mentors** from **45** states and **12** countries to:

 **44** Schools
75 Classrooms
1566 Children



92% of participating schools are in underserved communities.

Prior to our program just 10% of our children had a mentor in their lives.

After our program, 100% of our children had a relationship with a personal mentor, and they described their relationships as:

1. **Engaging:** we shared ideas
2. **Educational:** we learned together
3. **Supportive:** they cared about me
4. **Fun:** we joked a lot
5. **Close:** we became friends.



Our Strategy

We scale our impact by bringing together schools and our trusted partners who invest in our future generation. Corporations provide funding and their employees step up to serve as eMentors.

For the 2023–2024 school year, we connected **19 corporations** directly with classrooms. Volunteers served as eMentors in our year long volunteer opportunity where employees each mentored a student through the use of our eMentoring state of the art digital learning platform. Volunteers supported a personalized learning experience where they become role models for students.



1,564
Students Mentored



8,657.5
Volunteer Hours

Our Trusted Partners demonstrated their commitment to future generations:



Our Process

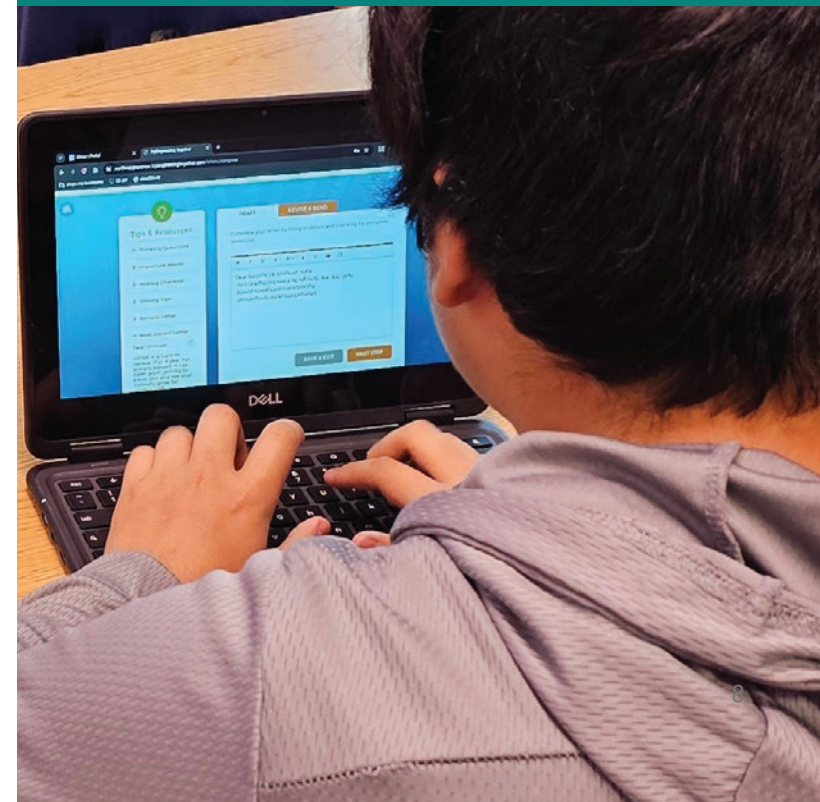
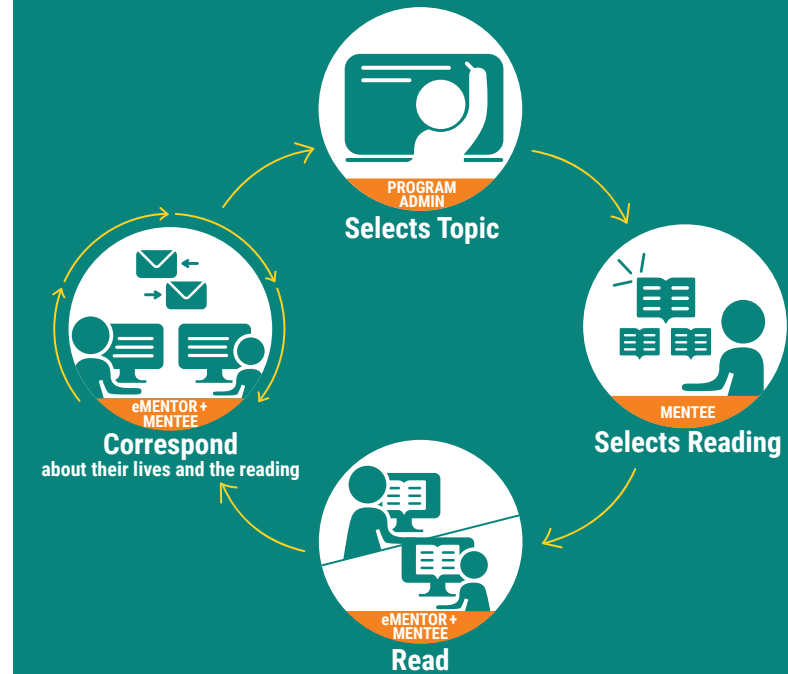
Within our safe and secure online environment, students and eMentors participate in an ongoing letter exchange about their lives and the subjects they learned about. Together, they correspond about quality Cricket stories and articles that are selected by the child and overseen by the teacher. This ongoing cycle of reading and corresponding results in significant knowledge-building alongside the development of literacy skills, including close reading and writing. Over the course of the academic year, both the mentor and mentee grow, building a relationship as they see the world through each other's eyes.



7,820
Articles Read



30,117
Letters Exchanged



Our Programs

This year, we provided three program options across grades 3-8 that broaden students' educational experience.



Build Literacy, Learning, and Social-Emotional Skills! Adult eMentors and students discuss Cricket's thought-provoking stories and articles. This enhances literacy, learning, and social-emotional development through empathy, communication, and emotional awareness.



Build STEM Skills! Adult eMentors correspond with students around Cricket's STEM-based articles and related hands-on activities to support the next generation of STEM professionals.



Build Relationships through Online Communication and Experience Sharing! This portal supports mentoring organizations seeking to provide an online, face-to-face, and hybrid solutions to safely connect mentors and mentees.



Student Survey

Program Experience

97% Said that they **enjoyed their experience** and relationships with their eMentors.

95% Reported that they would **recommend the program** to other students.

“**THANK YOU** to my eMentor for liking the stories I chose and reading my letters. It was super fun to see your visions of the stories we read together. Thank you for calling me smart. That made me super happy because I have worked hard! I might go to college, become a writer, and then an artist. I will miss my eMentor. I love CricketTogether. It is the best program ever.”

Social-Emotional Responses

99% Reported that their eMentors **care about them**.

98% Shared that their eMentors helped them feel like **they can succeed**.

96% Felt that their eMentors **were supportive and believed in them**.

“**I LOVED** how my eMentor always made me laugh and was super supportive of me in every letter that they wrote. It has helped build my confidence. You made me feel special about myself. Cricket isn't just a website I have to do in school, it's a friendship.”

Academic Responses

96% Expressed that **reading is important**.

96% Felt that they can **put their ideas into writing**.

78% Expressed that they **would like to attend college**.

“**CRICKETTOGETHER HELPED ME** improve my reading skills. We read a lot of stories and wrote a lot. It helped me pay attention a little more when reading. After I read the passage, I read my eMentor's letter and it made me a little more efficient writing mine because I have seen what it should look like. I learned that all I have to do is write my thoughts and statements in the same way my eMentor did. This has helped me with my efficiency of communication, which helps a lot for next year going into middle school.”



eMentor Survey

Program Experience

98% Said that they **enjoyed their experience**.

99% Shared that they felt they were a **good role model**.

“**GIVING BACK** is very important to me and I believe education is vital for a more equal society. It is important to inspire young students and make them aware of the opportunities that education will provide.”

Social-Emotional Responses

98% Reported that they had a **good relationship** with their mentee.

96% Felt that their mentee **trusted them**.

93% Stated that their mentee **shared personal experiences** with them.

“**THIS IS MY 6TH YEAR** being an eMentor and I hope I never have to stop. I love connecting with these students and telling them how important STEM is in our world--not just in school or work, but in life. The articles that we read actually taught me things I never knew, and I love sharing knowledge and wisdom with the students. It is so fulfilling forming a relationship with your mentee/student even though you've never met them.”

Academic Responses

96% Expressed that they were good at **motivating** their mentees to learn and grow.

94% Discussed their own **career and other career development**.

79% Shared that they felt their mentees' **writing improved** over time.

“**WATCHING THE LIGHT BULB** go off after every article, classroom experiment, museum trip, and letter was all a constant highlight for me. I don't believe the kids knew what STEM meant at the beginning of the year and by the end of the year, they had been exposed to so much. It was inspiring to see the evolution.”



Teacher Survey

Program Experience

100% Said they are **satisfied** with the program and **would recommend** to another teacher.

100% Reported that students were **excited to receive letters** from their eMentors.

“**THE TRYENGINEERING** eMentoring Program was not just a chance for my students to learn from experienced professionals in the field; it is also a gateway to inspiration, knowledge, and growth. By connecting with eMentors from your esteemed organization, our students gained invaluable insights, guidance, and encouragement as they navigated their educational and career journeys in the field of engineering.”

Social-Emotional Responses

100% Reported that student and eMentor **relationships grew** over time.

100% Shared that students' **curiosity and interest in STEM increased** by the end of the program.

100% Stated that the program helped them to see the **benefit of connecting** students with professionals and volunteer eMentors.

“**I FEEL THAT MY STUDENTS** were blessed with amazing eMentors. Each and every one of them did such a great job of engaging my students, encouraging them with real life (and relevant) examples and helping to boost their self-esteem. I could not have asked for a better experience for my students! Thank you SO much for all that you have done for my students!”

Academic Responses

100% Conveyed that students' **reading and writing skills increased** by the end of the program.

100% Shared that students' awareness of **STEM careers increased** by the end of the program.

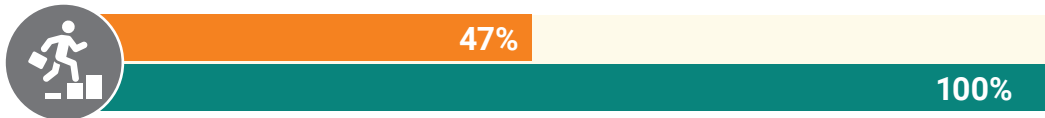
100% Reported that **students improved** in their ability to **ask questions** of their eMentors by the end of the program.

“**I WANT TO TAKE A MOMENT** to share my gratitude for each one of you. Your letters promote a deeper connection with your student. It's so fun to overhear the children tell others about you, find where you live on the map, share stories about your pets, and talk about your careers. Thank you so much for taking the time to share a small piece of your life with all of us!”

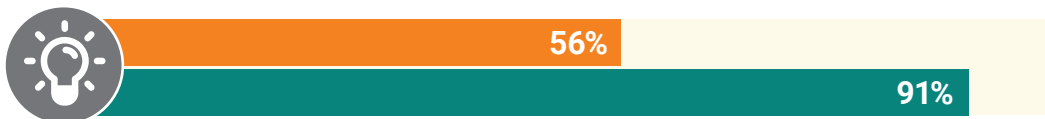


Career Affinity: Before and After

We asked over 1500 students to share their interest in STEM before and after their participation in the TryEngineering Together eMentoring program. Initially, students expressed a moderate interest in STEM careers and some exposure to interest in the STEM fields. After completing the programs, there was a marked increase in their enthusiasm for learning and a stronger interest in pursuing STEM careers. This demonstrates the programs' effectiveness in inspiring and preparing students for future success.



I have been exposed to careers in STEM



I am interested in STEM careers.



“MY FAVORITE PART of doing TryEngineering Together was to be able to talk to a real engineer. They know everything and helped me get better and learn. It was great to share my curiosity with my eMentor.”

—student

Our Stories

Across our eMentoring ecosystem, each series of letters highlights how relationships offer powerful solutions to the social, emotional, and academic needs in our children. This year, we feature three stories showcasing how innovation drives our approach forward.

Cricket Together

TryEngineering
TOGETHER
Powered by ISEE and In2Books®

Big Brothers Big Sisters: A Cross-Age eMentoring Experience

The CricketTogether program, in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Saint John, pioneered a unique cross-age eMentoring model, matching 90 students in grades 3–5 with 90 students in grades 8–12 for a year-long online mentorship. Coordinated through the BBBS agency in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, this initiative is the first of its kind in Canada to use CricketTogether.

Collaborating with teachers in the local school district, the program fostered friendships and connections between older and younger students through over 2,000 online letters. Both groups saw significant improvements in literacy skills, with high schoolers experiencing their first opportunity to mentor younger peers, an experience they might not have pursued independently.

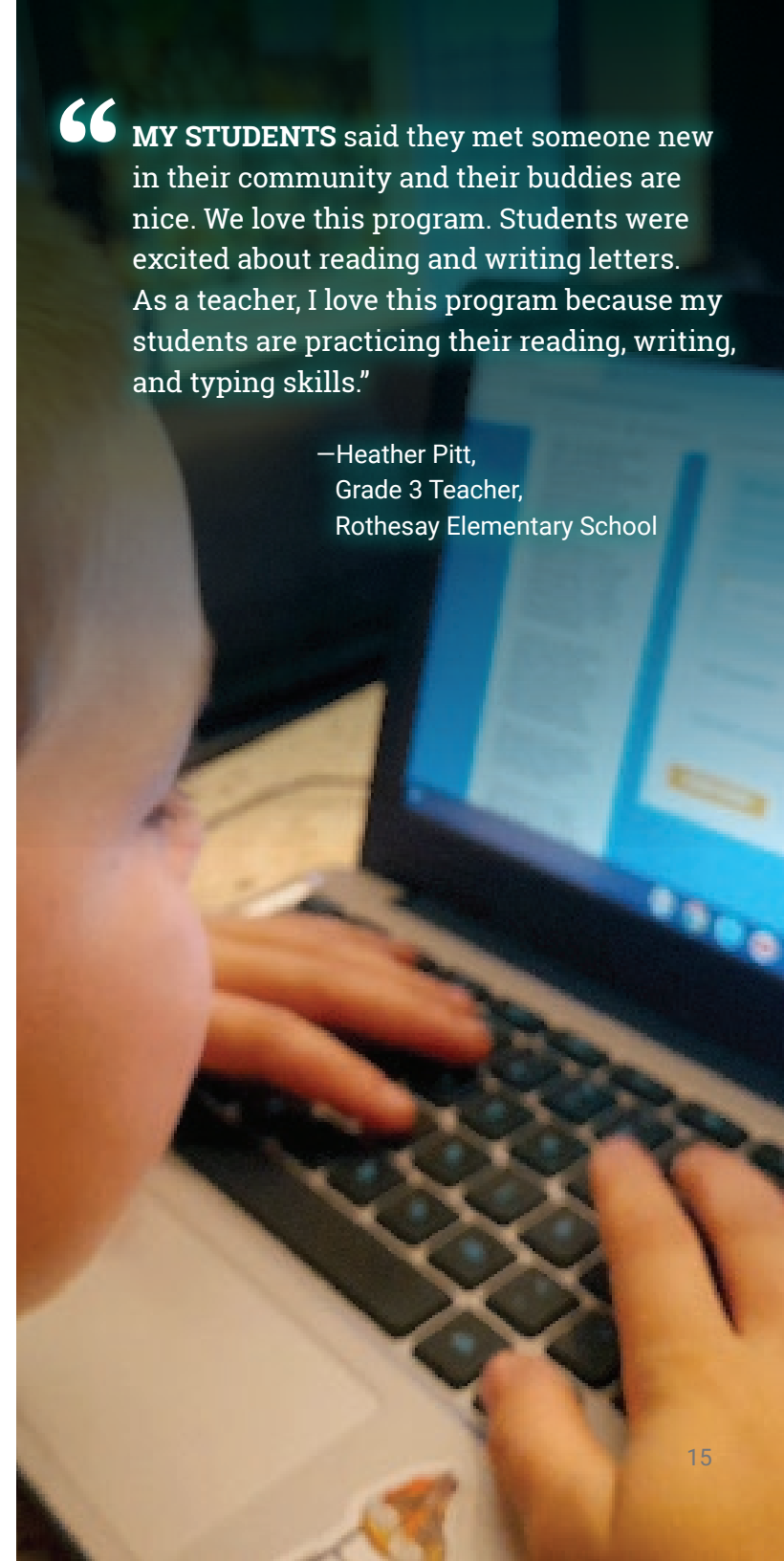
BBBS coordinator Meaghan Hickey-Hare commented, “We have witnessed friendships flourish letter by letter, with excitement and anticipation building as the students prepare to meet in person for a wrap-up celebration at the end of the school year. This program has not only enhanced literacy skills but also created lasting community connections that enrich the school experience for all participants.”

“ **I HAVE NOTICED** a big change in your writing since I first started talking to you. I think you’re doing great. I just wanted to tell you to keep up the great work. A wise person once told me, if you work hard, you can get anywhere in life.”

—eMentor

“ **MY STUDENTS** said they met someone new in their community and their buddies are nice. We love this program. Students were excited about reading and writing letters. As a teacher, I love this program because my students are practicing their reading, writing, and typing skills.”

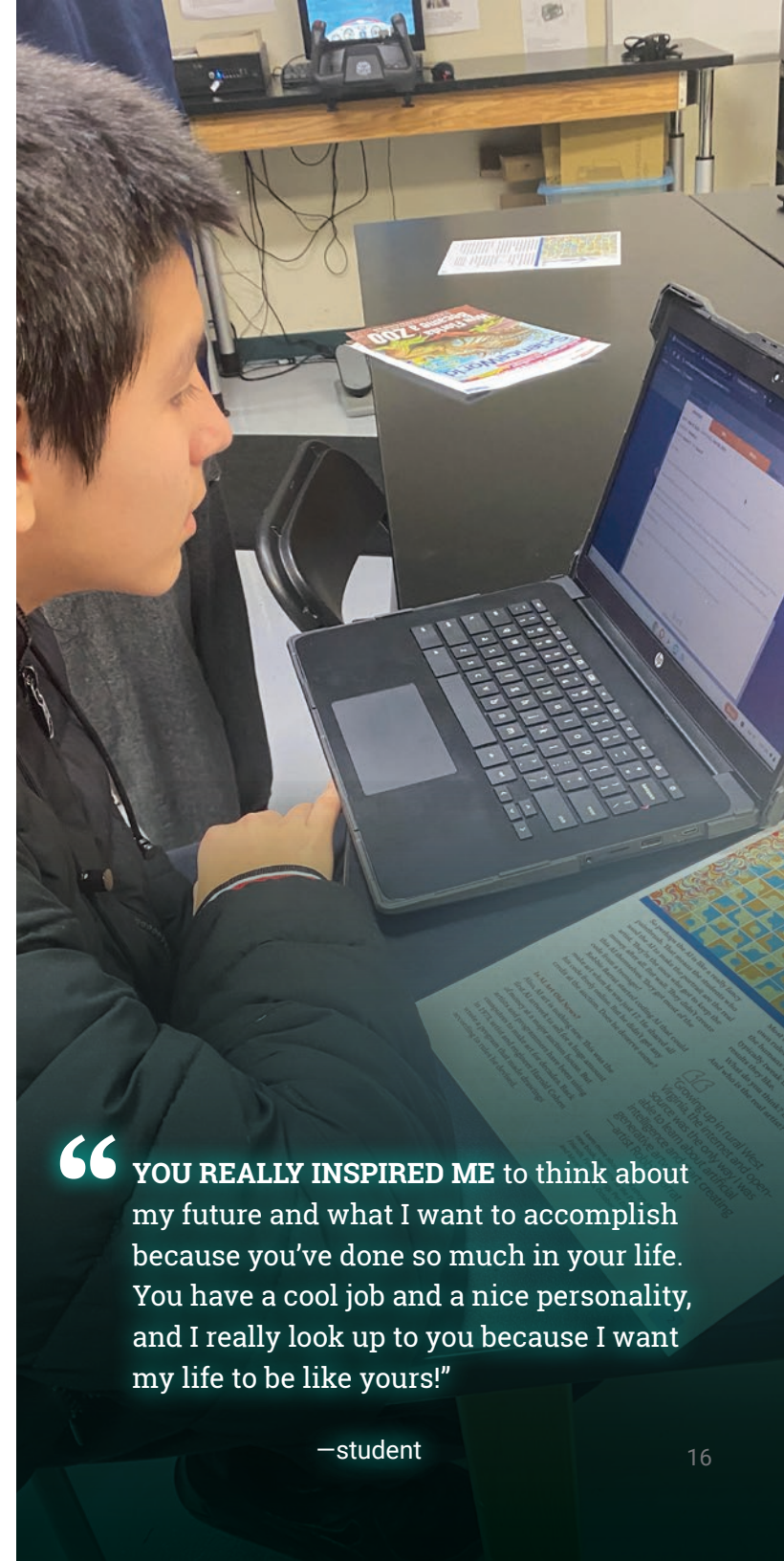
—Heather Pitt,
Grade 3 Teacher,
Rothsay Elementary School



Inspiring STEM Learning at Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe, an Indigenous School

LOCATED IN HAYWARD, Wisconsin, on the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation, the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School serves the educational needs of the Native American community, primarily the Ojibwe (Chippewa) tribe. The school integrates traditional Ojibwe language, culture, and values with standard academic subjects to foster a supportive learning environment that respects and promotes the students' heritage and identity. A notable achievement this year at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School was the first-time implementation of the TryEngineering Together eMentoring program in Mrs. Tammy Moncel's 8th-grade class. Each of her 27 students were connected 1:1 with their own STEM professional for a year-long online correspondence about STEM articles selected by the students, related hands-on activities, and their daily lives.

Over the course of the academic year, students and eMentors built intellectual friendships as they exchanged an average of 30 letters per match, discussing topics such as 3D printing, Sound Energy, Robotics, and AI. Teacher Tammy Moncel was thrilled with the increase in student motivation and STEM knowledge, "Most students were reluctant to write at first and were uncomfortable with the idea of communicating with a stranger. Students quickly warmed up as they learned about their eMentors, where they live, their families, and pets. The eMentors were able to give practical application examples of our STEM unit topics and were able to share pictures or article links for extension. The eMentors shared a lot about new technologies and it was fun to be able to learn along with my students. The students all enjoyed the experience and I saw a definite improvement with the speed of organizing and expressing thoughts, as well as self-correction for grammar and punctuation errors."



“ YOU REALLY INSPIRED ME to think about my future and what I want to accomplish because you've done so much in your life. You have a cool job and a nice personality, and I really look up to you because I want my life to be like yours!”

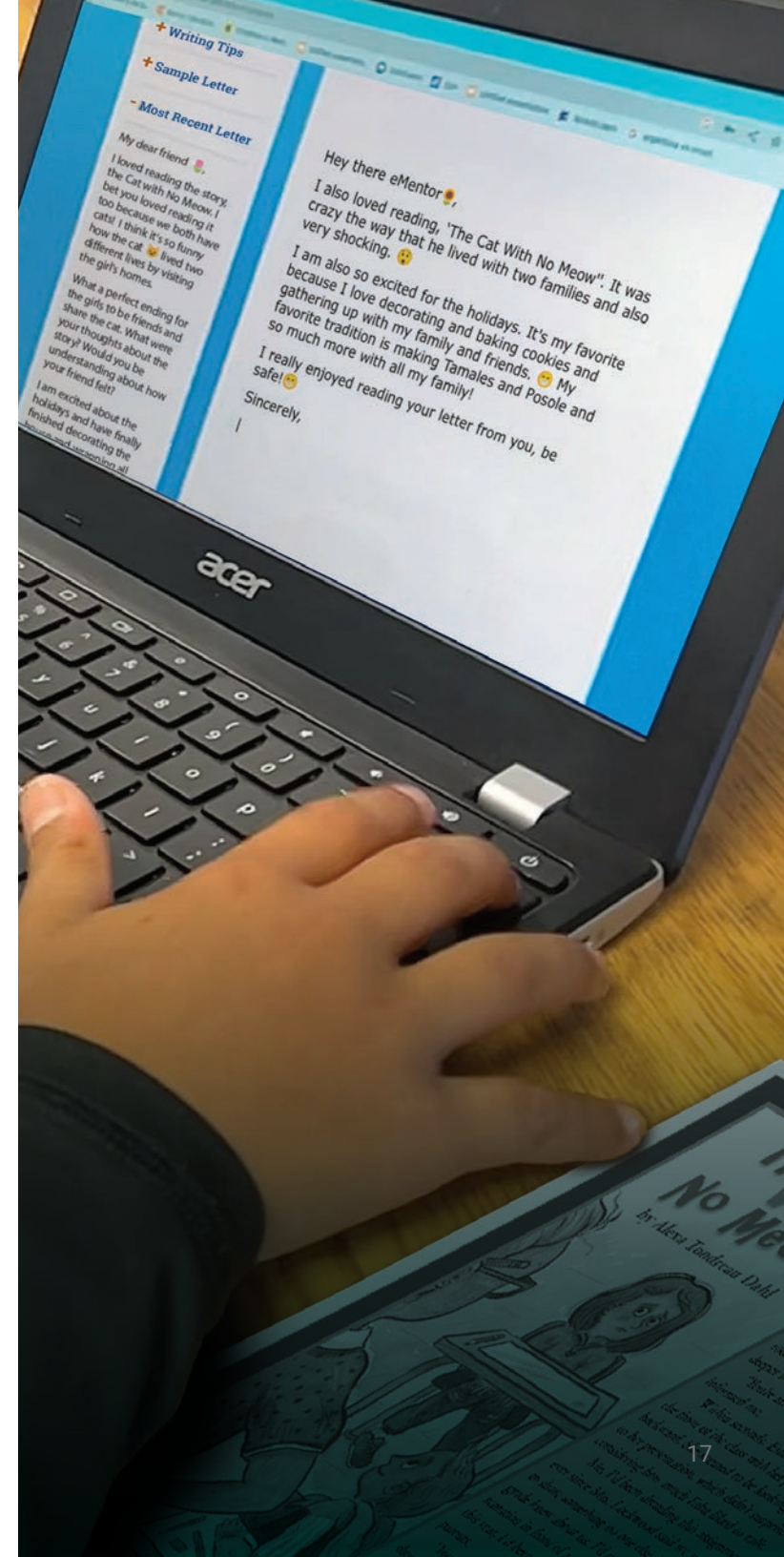
—student

Empowering Language: An eMentoring Journey for Adolescent Native Spanish Speakers

IN RURAL TEXAS, Quinlan Independent School District engaged CricketTogether to pair ten native Spanish-speaking students in grades 6–8 with ten volunteer eMentors. Director Kathleen Witte reflected on the 388 letters written by her students and their eMentors over the course of the academic year, saying, “Helping students build confidence in English in a safe environment is a big benefit.”

The correspondence, based on student-selected stories, often revolved around personal interests like cooking, sports, and hobbies. This interaction helped students who are originally from Mexico and Central America to apply English authentically, and they eagerly anticipated each letter.

A seventh grader shared, “My favorite part about CricketTogether is that I got to talk to someone new and learn about them.” The authentic human interaction increased students’ language acquisition along with their self-confidence. Teacher Sasha Fernandez told the eMentors, “It’s so fun to overhear the children tell others about you, find where you live on the map, share stories about your pets, and talk about your careers. Thank you so much for taking the time to share a small piece of your life with all of us!”



Exploring the Impact of Ongoing Written Correspondence on Student Growth: A Case Study of Ishmael and his eMentor, Steven

MEET ISHMAEL, a sixth-grade student of Mexican heritage who loves his Rubik's cube and notes that math is his favorite subject. Ishmael attends Southeast Middle School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Over 1300 miles away in San Diego, California, meet Steven Bouchett, a Mission Solutions Architect at Northrop Grumman with over 30 years of leadership in space and defense engineering, who volunteered through his company as a first time eMentor.

Breaking down the barriers of distance and the boundaries of social capital, Ishmael and Steven were brought together as mentor and mentee by TryEngineering Together.

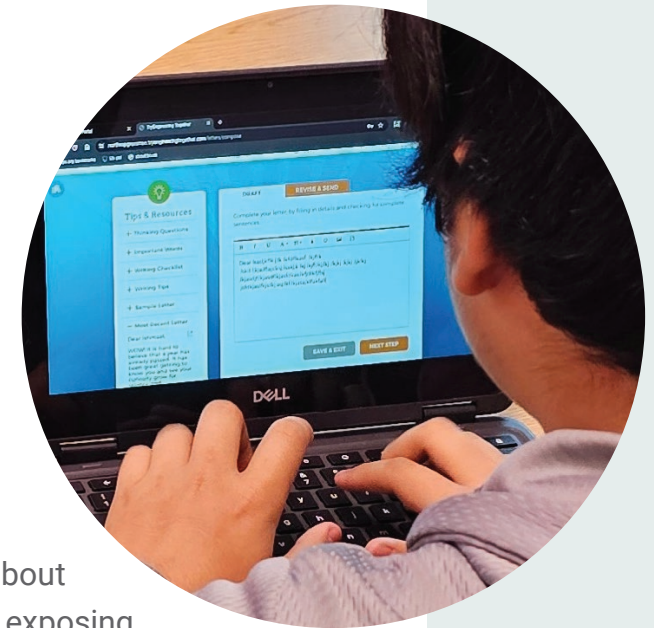
Steven introduced himself with his love for science fiction literature, and Ishmael shared his love of video games and doodling. Their correspondence shows the growth of Ishmael's trust, with Ishmael admitting in his third letter, "I am now liking this eMentor thing! It was great talking to you again!"

Over the course of the academic year, Ishmael and Steven exchanged online letters on a bi-weekly basis,

sharing information about their lives while discussing articles Ishmael and his teacher selected through the STEM eMentoring program.

Steven took the time to write about things going on in his own life, exposing Ishmael to his travels and his work project on laser communications technology, while always keeping up with what was going on in Ishmael's world. The two discussed Ishmael's trouble with feminine and masculine nouns in Spanish, and Steven empathized and encouraged Ishmael to stick with his studies.

Steven nurtured Ishmael's intellectually curious nature, posing questions as they moved through readings sharing their curiosities about a space elevator, 3D printing, bridge making, prosthetics, AI, ChatGPT, patterns, data, sunspots, human space travel, eclipses, and more. Along the way, Ishmael taught Steven about algorithms for solving the Rubik's cube, and the two shared their video game experiences and an intellectual friendship.



An analysis of Ishmael's letters reveals how Steven's correspondence impacted his growth:

- **Academic Vocabulary Usage:** Analysis of Ishmael's letters revealed a notable increase in the use of targeted academic vocabulary throughout the academic year. Initially, Ishmael's letters contained basic language and vocabulary typical of a sixth-grade student. However, as the correspondence progressed, Ishmael began to incorporate more sophisticated terminology relevant to the topics discussed, indicating growth in his academic language skills.
- **Expression of Thoughts about Reading:** As Steven inquired, Ishmael shared his thoughts and reflections on the articles they had read. Initially, Ishmael's responses were brief and focused primarily on summarizing the content. However, as the correspondence continued, Ishmael began to engage in more in-depth analysis and interpretation of the texts, demonstrating improved critical thinking skills and comprehension.
- **Personal Connections and Sharing:** Over time, Ishmael became more comfortable sharing personal experiences and insights with Steven. His letters evolved from simple updates on his daily life to thoughtful reflections on his goals, hobbies, and challenges. This increased openness and willingness to share indicate a growing sense of trust and connection between Ishmael and his eMentor.
- **Responsiveness to Mentor's Questions:** Ishmael's responses to questions posed by Steven demonstrated his engagement and comprehension of the topics discussed. His motivation to respond to Steven sparked an increase in his critical thinking and enhanced his communication skills.
- **Discussion of Future Goals:** Ishmael expressed his aspirations for the future, including his passion for math and his inclination towards exploring mechanical engineering (modeling after his eMentor Steven). This dialogue fostered goal-setting skills and encouraged Ishmael to envision a bright future.
- **Boost in Self-Confidence:** Ishmael's self-confidence was notably boosted throughout the duration of the correspondence with Steven. As Ishmael received empathy, encouragement, and validation from his eMentor, he became more assured in expressing his thoughts and ideas. This newfound confidence extended beyond the written correspondence and positively impacted Ishmael's overall attitude towards learning and self-expression.



In the normal course of events, it's unlikely that Ishmael would have met Steven. Through eMentoring, the two were brought together and Ishmael experienced the significant impact of ongoing written correspondence with an eMentor. Through regular communication with his eMentor, Ishmael demonstrated growth in his academic vocabulary, critical thinking skills, personal expression, and self-confidence.

Steven said, "participating in the TryEngineering Together program has been a truly enriching experience. Through our monthly email exchanges, I've had the pleasure of discussing fascinating engineering concepts with Ishmael. Through our email exchanges we were able to explore how engineers tackle real-world problems and innovate solutions. Beyond the technical discussions, I've enjoyed getting to know Ishmael personally, his love of gaming and getting to learn about engineering. It's rewarding to see Ishmael's curiosity and excitement about engineering grow with each new article and our exchanges."

As we celebrate Ishmael and Steven's journey, we recognize the broader implications of eMentoring in nurturing student potential. By providing a platform for meaningful connection and personalized support, this innovative program equips students with the tools they need to thrive academically and personally.

“ WATCHING ISHMAEL FLOURISH throughout the mentoring experience has been so cool. He started off the year shy and quiet and has grown in confidence—sharing his ideas and answers to the whole class and leading group conversations when working on projects. We have seen Ishmael's growth in other academic areas as well—as noted in his language arts, science, and geography classes!”

—Dru Humphrey
teacher

Developing Content Together

Many thanks to our generous sponsors, whose contributions supported the development of six new content units in the 2023–2024 academic year. These units provide rich, engaging content to fuel relationships and foster knowledge building between their students and their eMentors. Thank you, sponsors!



Sustainability Students examine the importance of sustainable practices in engineering and in everyday life.



STEM Career Pathways Students look at the many pathways to a STEM career, including internships, hobbies, the military, and certification programs.



Living in Space Students explore how engineers overcome the challenges of living in space.



Managing Natural Disasters Students learn about how engineers design solutions to protect people and property when disaster strikes.



Everyday Engineering Students explore how engineering influences our everyday lives.



Financial Wellness and You Students look at examples of financial wellness and responsible decision-making.



Our Advisory Board

This year, the Hopewell Fund's Learning Together Project Fund (LTPF) Advisory Board convened to help us problem-solve and plan for retention and expansion of new partners, providing a meaningful and impactful eMentoring experience for students, eMentors, teachers, sponsors, and mentoring organizations. Our future goals include obtaining grants and donations to the LTPF to enable program implementation, and building relationships with universities or other research partners that can assist in conducting program efficacy research and funding opportunities around the use of our platform. We extend our deepest appreciation to the LTPF Advisory Board.



Marta Heinrich

Advisory Board Chair
Business Operations
Leader-US Services,
Schneider Electric



DeBora King

Advisory Board Member
Security Risk &
Compliance Lead,
Robinson Bradshaw



Stephanie Sharis

Advisory Board Member
Digital Innovator, Entrepreneur,
Storyteller, Empath, Co-CEO/
President Good News Network



Dudley Sylla

Advisory Board Member
Partnership Director,
Axim Collaborative



MaryEllen Vogt

Advisory Board Member
Director & Reading Specialist,
Reading Intervention
& Enrichment,
Professor Emerita, CSULB



Nina Zolt

Advisory Board Member
Co-Founder,
Cricket Media, Inc.



“THE eMENTORING PROGRAM is impacting the future generation, one virtual connection at a time. The minimal time investment and maximum flexibility the program provides gives our volunteers a chance to participate when it is convenient for them. Not only does the program inspire students in reading, writing, and STEM, but our volunteers also learn and grow alongside the students. In the exchanges, both students and mentors find a refreshing break from the everyday.”

—Marta Heinrich
Advisory Board Chair

Program Recognition

In 2024, Cricket Media, Inc. was named as part of MENTOR's 2024 National Corporate Mentoring Honor Roll for our dedication to empowering youth.

The National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS) Hub at the Everyone Graduates Center launched a new resource: A toolkit for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) specifically for leaders centered around engaging corporate volunteers in NPSS-aligned roles as tutors, mentors, and postsecondary transition coaches. TryEngineering Together is a featured program spotlight and example for engaging corporate volunteers.

Program Spotlight:

CricketTogether | The National Partnership for Student Success
partnershipstudentsuccess.org

To get involved or learn more about Cricket's eMentoring programs, contact us at support@crickettogether.com.

