

COMMUNITY

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Education Not Incarceration

How MI-RAMP is Rewriting the Futures of Metro Detroit's Youngest Learners

By Dr. T. Carter Gilmer, Founder

Teaching reading to a child is extremely important because it forms the foundation for all learning. Reading helps children develop language skills, improve vocabulary, and understand how to communicate clearly. When children learn to read early, they gain confidence and become more curious about the world around them. Reading also strengthens thinking and imagination, allowing children to explore new ideas, cultures, and experiences. It supports academic success by helping children understand instructions, solve problems, and perform better in all subjects. Most importantly, reading empowers children to become independent learners, giving them the tools they need to grow, succeed, and enjoy learning throughout their lives. Reading can take a child to places that they have never dreamed of.

"Reading is fun. Let's not stop." That simple sentence, joyfully exclaimed by a 5-year-old boy during a virtual tutoring session, encapsulates the spirit behind MI-RAMP: Michigan-Reading And Math (STEM) Performance.

Founded in 2019 and formally established as a 501(c)(3) community charity in 2020, MI-RAMP was created to bridge the learning gap for metro Detroit's underserved youth, ages 4 to 12. What began with just 7 students during the pandemic has now grown into a thriving virtual educational model with over 40 young scholars per cohort and a waitlist, of more than 60 names of phenomenal excited students.

MI-RAMP's founders saw the writing on the wall: poor

reading skills in early childhood often lead to diminished life outcomes, from lower graduation rates to increased risk of incarceration. Responses were concise—deliver free, individualized, high-quality tutoring in reading, math, and critical thinking via a unique 3-person model: student, parent, and teacher-tutor (TT).

Each 10-week cohort features weekly 30-minute sessions where TTs, often retired educators, engage both the student and a participating parent in focused, level-appropriate lessons. Parent surveys routinely show significant gains in reading and math, as well as increased self-confidence.

The Power of People and Partnerships MI-RAMP thrives on community. Its board includes dedicated professionals from education, STEM, and nonprofit sectors. Talented TTs, like Ms. Lory Armstrong and Ms. Jameca Aaron, use a mix of phonics, sight words, math games, and problem-solving activities to inspire growth.

Support also comes from a village of partners: The Skillman Foundation, Southfield Kappa Foundation, Pearls of Promise (AKA), Torch of Wisdom Foundation (DST), DTE Energy and local bridge clubs and churches. These partnerships help fund student incentives like \$2 bills and \$25 gift cards and provide essential learning tools like books and flashcards. **"Education, not Incarceration" isn't just a motto. It's a movement**