



## Reach the World – Chicago

### About Reach the World

While volunteering in disadvantaged schools, Heather Halstead and Marc Gustafson became concerned about teachers' preparedness to meet the demands of the 21st Century and students' isolation from the global community. In 1998, they founded Reach the World, an education nonprofit headquartered in New York City with a chapter in Chicago, IL. RTW's mission is to help elementary and secondary school students and teachers to develop the knowledge, attitudes, values and thinking skills needed for responsible citizenship in a complex, culturally diverse and rapidly changing world.

### Reach the World: Chicagoland

Established in Chicago in 2006 by a team of entrepreneurial Northwestern University graduates, Reach the World is now serving 75 classrooms per school year in the Chicago public school system. The focus is on elementary and middle school classrooms.

### How it Works

Reach the World invites teachers in under-resourced schools in Chicago to use RTW's website and curriculum resources, which are based on real-life, real-time journeys taking place around the world. Over the past two years, Chicago students and teachers have had access to volunteer travelers on a journey around the world aboard a sailboat and a bike expedition through Africa. To support our teachers, RTW has developed an Interns Program. Through this program, classroom interns train teachers to use technology and integrate interdisciplinary materials into the curriculum.

As part of their commitment to Reach the World, teachers agree to use RTW's online content during at least one class period per week, bringing an international dimension to Literacy, Science and Social Studies classes. Teachers also agree to custom-design at least one curricular unit per semester in partnership with their intern(s) and the RTW staff. These projects integrate our online journeys into the curriculum and reinforce new skills.

Through participation in Reach the World, ninety-seven percent of RTW students correspond with someone from another country, compared to eleven percent nationwide – a key factor in advancing geography proficiency. All RTW teachers deliver weekly instruction in foreign countries and cultures, compared to twenty-three percent nationwide.

The Reach the World program ensures that teachers integrate world human and physical geography studies into their literacy curriculums. Reading and writing are often taught in isolation from the other subjects. An increasing number of studies, however, are demonstrating the value of geography as a tool for teaching literacy. A 2006 study on geography and vocabulary development found that for children whose low reading levels precluded reading-to-learn, explorations of geography content provided an effective means for them to internalize new vocabulary and read expository texts confidently. Another study, *What Works in Geography Education* (2006), found that integration of geography and literacy in elementary school improved student achievement in literacy by five percent.

### RTW Program Component: Interns Program

A linchpin of the Reach the World model is its Interns Program, which was founded in 1998 at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City. RTW is pursuing a partnership with National-Louis University to replicate its Interns Program in Chicago. RTW's interns serve as teacher trainers and student mentors. In the absence of programs like RTW, broken equipment, spotty Internet connections, over-scheduling in the computer lab and behavioral problems prevent students from getting the technology-rich, interdisciplinary curriculums that they need.

Reach the World recruits interns in the fall and spring semesters. We match each intern with a team of three to four teachers. The interns work on-site with their teachers and students for 6-8 hours each week, helping them to incorporate the online journeys into the curriculum and build new technology skills. The intern-classroom relationship lasts for at least one semester, but interns may choose to stay on for an entire school year.

### **Interns Program: Teachers' Testimonials**

"Meghan is great with the students and always has so many wonderful things to share with them. She is well traveled and enjoys sharing her wonderful adventures with the students."

- Nicole Henderson, Rosenwald Elementary, grade 5

"We kept her very busy and the class related well with her. She was always eager and excited to share and help my class with their many projects. They also culminated this year's RTW travels with a "super duper" project using our hallway wall as the ocean to create a partial world map of the countries RTW traveled to. We did lots and could not have learned so much without our wonderful intern!"

- Hanan Zayid, Rosenwald Elementary, grades 5 & 6

"Alex was great with the students and helped to give every student a chance to experience the Reach the World voyage."

- Kristy Snape, Grade 2, Henderson Elementary

### **RTW Program Component: Field Trips and School Visits Program**

Reach the World's Field Trips and School Visits Program is a critical part of the program for students. Most of RTW's students have never left their own neighborhoods, never mind traveled to a foreign country. Without a knowledge base grounded in experience, abstraction is difficult, if not impossible, for these students. RTW's annual field trips give students a necessary, hands-on connection to the journey(s) they follow online. RTW's travelers also visit our classrooms annually in order to introduce themselves and their journeys to our students. These visits help students invest personally in the journeys they follow online.

### **Contact Information**

For more information about Reach the World, or to become a participating classroom, please contact us:

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