



one adult, one child, one book at a time

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 4, 2009

## Reaching More At-Risk Readers Thanks to The Polk Bros. Foundation

*WITS to Receive \$100,000 Grant for Literacy Programs in CPS*

**CHICAGO, IL** - The Polk Bros. Foundation recently awarded Working in the Schools (WITS) with a \$50,000 grant for two years to advance the nonprofit's signature program, Power Lunch. WITS, a local 501(c)3 organization promotes literacy and the love of reading among Chicago's youth by providing one-on-one tutoring and mentoring programs.

Polk's grant will further the Power Lunch program, which sends area-business and government groups into the schools to read one-on-one with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students during the work week. "Power Lunch has made such a positive impact on my classroom," explains Martha Polley, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at Jenner School. "Not only has the one-on-one attention improved my students' listening and reading skills, but it has also helped them develop a love for books. The attention my students receive from their reading buddies also helps to increase their self-esteem by providing each of them with an adult role model, who is a constant source of encouragement in their lives."

Started in 2001, Power Lunch has expanded into twelve CPS schools with the help of sixteen corporate, government, and community partners. Polk Bros. Foundation has played a fundamental role in this continued growth and success. As a founding contributor to Power Lunch, Polk has generously supported the organization since 1994 giving nearly \$200,000 over WITS lifetime. While most foundations and corporations are cutting back on their funding due to the economy, Polk continues to show unyielding support during this time.

"I continue to be impressed with the work WITS does to ensure their literacy efforts have the greatest possible impact, including working with university-based literacy experts last summer to revise its volunteer training materials," expresses Suzanne Kerbow, Associate Director of Polk Bros. "Power Lunch not only improves the reading skills of CPS third graders in high-need schools, it also brings another caring adult into their lives and upgrades their classroom libraries. Corporate takeovers and downsizing have made it difficult for WITS to retain corporate volunteers, but it has redoubled its recruitment efforts and has several new corporate partners in the pipeline for the fall. The organization was fortunate to have been able to increase its cash reserves last year, and is making sound financial decisions to ensure its ongoing viability."

"The dedication of Polk Bros. to literacy in Chicago has continued to yield real, outstanding results in education. For WITS, the Power Lunch program continues to demonstrate a heightened success for the students involved in terms of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and most importantly, reading motivation and attitudes," applauds WITS Executive Director, Jenné Myers. "The educational opportunities for our students provided by the one-on-one reading environment would not be possible without the unyielding generosity of foundations like The Polk Bros. Foundation. While I can really only speak for Polk's impact on WITS, I know The Foundation continues to have a lasting impression on education programs throughout Chicago."

WITS plans to use the grant totaling \$100,000 over two years to support the literacy and mentor-focused, Power Lunch program throughout Chicago Public Schools.

*The Polk Bros. Foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for the people of Chicago. We partner with local nonprofit organizations that work to reduce the impact of poverty and provide area residents with better access to quality education, preventive health care and basic human services. Through our grantmaking, we strive to make Chicago a place where all people have the opportunity to reach their full potential.*

*Working in the Schools (WITS) is a 501(c)3 organization that promotes literacy and the love of reading among Chicago's youth by providing one-on-one tutoring and mentoring programs.*

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