

# **Simpson Street Free Press**

Celebrating 25 Years of Academic Achievement



## **2019-20 Service Report**

Prepared for:  
2nd Market Capital Economic Opportunity Foundation

May 6, 2020

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*Never Hand in Your First Draft!*

**Grant History:** A 2019 grant (\$20,000) from the 2mC Foundation. This grant matched a \$25,000 “Accelerator Grant” from the Nimick Forbesway Foundation.

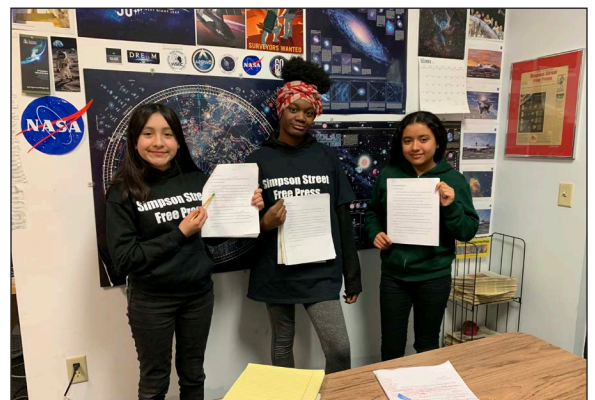
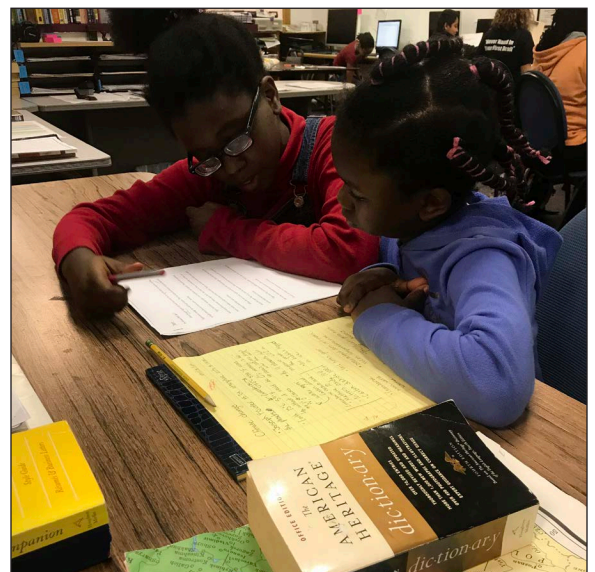
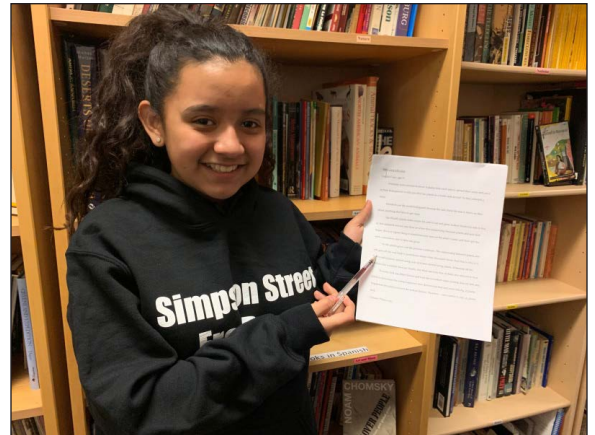
**Report Prepared By:** Taylor Kilgore, Ben Reddersen, Sarah Useche

**Grant Purpose:** Spark academic achievement and bolster reading and math scores. Grant was used to enroll additional students, launch a Wisconsin History series, and expand the popular “Science of Wisconsin’s Environment” series. We hired (promoted) additional high school and college-age editors. This increased SSFP capacity allowing us to expand our footprint at the Capital Newspapers site and extend hours of operation at our South Towne site. Further, these two grants helped us acquire new technology. SSFP students have more opportunities to write, plan, and produce podcasts and videos. SSFP newsrooms have more computer workstations and more laptops available for research, fact checking, and revision work.

**Impact:** About 25 new students joined SSFP during the fall semester of 2019, and 14 new students enrolled at SSFP during spring semester of 2020. Most of these new/additional students had been wait listed (prior to the 2mC grant and Nimick Forbesway match). This new group of “2mC kids” published 82 articles, columns, and book reviews during 2019-20. About 20 Wisconsin History features were published so far during this reporting period. The “Science of Wisconsin’s Environment” series and our emphasis on financial literacy expanded. Even with more students enrolled, one-on-one instruction time at SSFP has increased. Our partnership with the UW-Madison Physics Department helps SSFP provide high-quality math tutoring. Our partnership with the UW-Madison School of Journalism helps SSFP high school journalists follow current events topics in ongoing ways.

SSFP uses specific benchmarks to measure academic progress among enrolled students. Reading scores improved for all (100%) of middle school-age participants. According to fall semester MAP scores, about two-thirds (66%) of participants in grades 2-8 improved reading/language arts scores better than grade-level expected. MAP scores for participating students also improved in other subjects, including math. Student retention is excellent. Of the original (2019) 2mC Kids, 23 are still enrolled at SSFP and will complete at least three program semesters at SSFP. (2020 Updates: Obviously, we have not been able to examine 2020 spring semester MAP scores. SSFP planned ahead, and we quickly shifted to remote learning. So, we are confident the academic improvements we saw in 2018-19 will continue in 2020-21.)

**Key Activities and Demographics:** About 45% of SSFP participants are ELL students and/or enrolled in DLI programs at their schools. Our instructional approach includes writing workshops, math tutoring, close reading, and other key activities that support successful preparation for high school and college. SSFP students study and write across the curriculum. Research and writing assignments focus on the core-subject areas: history, science, book reviews, and financial literacy/college prep. All (100%) of SSFP students have access to modern technology. SSFP offers youth book clubs for students in grades 3-8. High school students serve as book club captains. As always, SSFP summer semester activities ramped up during 2019.





Many of our high school students and some of our middle school participants served internships or completed special assignments during the summer semester. Support from 2mC foundation allows us to offer more work hours for college-age editors, which in turn provided increased one-on-one instruction time. This creates an important ripple effect. Support from 2mC helps college students afford higher education while working part-time jobs that serve the community.

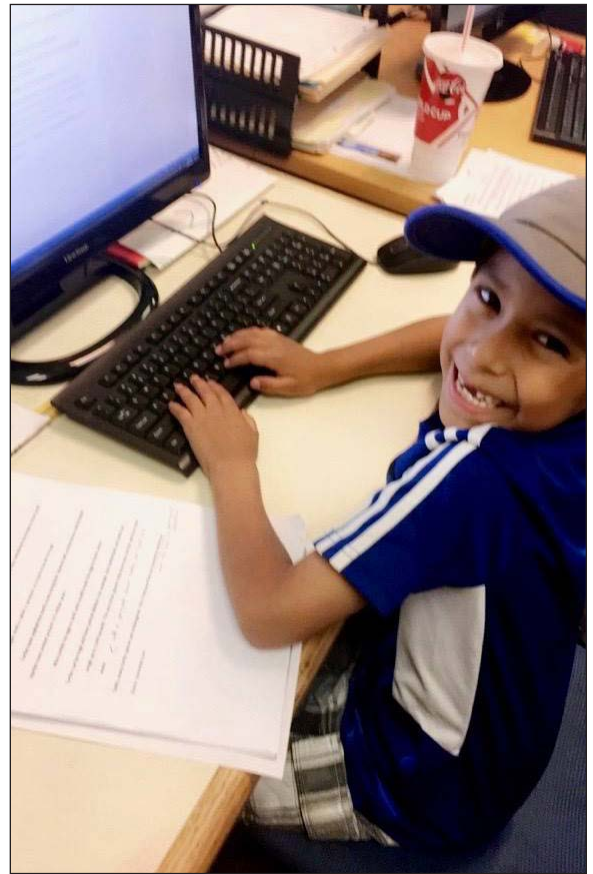
**Additional 2019 Results:** Wisconsin Forward Exam results further document 2019 academic progress among SSFP students. Among participating 7th and 8th graders, more than 90% showed better than grade-level jumps in reading/language arts. We operated book clubs and published newspaper content in Spanish and English. Forward Exam results showed solid academic progress among ESL and DLI students.

As mentioned above, the 2mC grant and Nimick Forbesway match cause ripple effects and multipliers. These projects provide leadership opportunities and paid newsroom jobs for high school and college-age students. Experienced older students guide and mentor the middle school and elementary-age staff writers working at SSFP. Thus, the 2mC foundation helps put skilled local young people (ages 16-23) to work on Madison's most persistent challenge—unacceptable achievement gaps. These projects spark academic confidence among younger students (ages 7-15) and help older students (SSFP editors) save for and pay for college. SSFP high school and college-age editors are backed by a dedicated group of credentialed volunteers.

**Conclusions:** In our original conversations with and proposal to 2mC Foundation, SSFP said we “expect specific outcomes and immediate results.” Project results, demonstrated by MAP reading scores and Forward Exam results, are clear and specific. We also told 2mC that “SSFP initiatives are never one and done.” Excellent student retention (even during C-19) is contributing to specific academic outcomes. Almost all “2mC kids” are still working at SSFP and still showing strong academic progress. This plan uses research-backed, sequential curriculum strategies. Results will be sustained over time.

The original 2mC proposal said SSFP will foster young leaders—a professional development pipeline. We will establish concrete and permanent assets. This “pipeline” approach works. Middle school and elementary-age students in the 2mC cohort clearly benefit from one-on-one instruction time with experienced high school and college-age editors. Project data demonstrates that using after-school and summer hours for close-reading instruction, wordsmithing, fact checking and publishing sparks classroom performance.

The original project proposal emphasized writing, skill acquisition, and academic confidence. But this project impacts far more than 25-30 new kids. SSFP readership increased by 20% in 2019. In fact, we reached more young readers than ever before. Compelling content like the new Wisconsin History Series draws young readers into SSFP publications. Young people across Dane County and around Wisconsin find authentic articles and stories written by local student reporters.



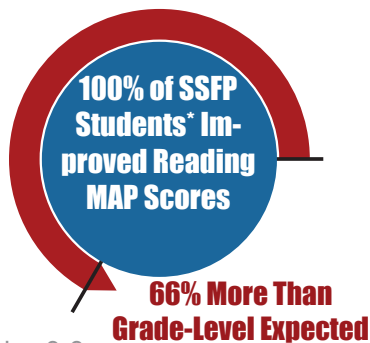
## May 6, 2020: C-19 Addendum

SSFP planned ahead for COVID-19 and were by no means unprepared. We see the COVID-19 crisis much like Madison's notorious "summer slide." SSFP is actively addressing this key part of the crisis. We continue to provide crucial academic support to over 200 local kids. In turn, the young journalists of SSFP (grades 2-12) inspire young readers across Wisconsin. All SSFP programs continue in robust and important ways.

SSFP has transitioned. Student writers work online and continue writing articles, columns, and features. Most importantly, kids continue to receive high-impact academic support. SSFP managed to provide enough laptops so that every student can work online. We helped about two dozen families secure reliable internet access. Our skilled volunteers and dedicated staff assist student reporters with edits, research, and revisions. Then we publish. SSFP students continue to research and write the "Science of Wisconsin's Environment" and "Women in Science and Math" series. Our Space Science and Education News sections are full of new content. Middle school students continue to produce compelling Wisconsin history features. At SSFP, Students of all ages learn practical, 21<sup>st</sup> century job skills right now—even in these challenging times. SSFP students publish online, in Spanish and English, on various SSFP platforms and in other publications.



## SSFP Students Show Progress on Core Academic Measures



\*Grades 3-8

**Math Scores Improved for 82% of students**



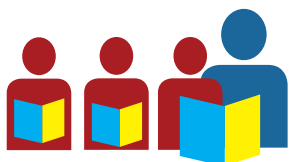
*"Simpson Street Free Press is one of the best achievement gap closers we've got going. With even more attention focused on public education in our state, on disparities and achievement gaps, and on strategies like out-of-school-time or after-school programs, the Simpson Street Free Press model and curriculum is going to increasingly be held up as an example of success."*

Neil Heinen, Ch. 3 News

*"As an educator, middle school principal, and parent, I understand the value of high-quality after-school activities. Simpson Street Free Press is an innovative idea whose time has come."*

Dr. Angie Hicks, Principal, James Wright Middle School

## 2mC Helps Accelerate Close Reading Support



Every 2mC Kid participated in at least one book club. All (100%) received extra reading help.

### Close Reading Doses '18-'19

Average Doses Per SSFP Student Per Semester

