Weirton Elementary School really went to town when they tackled *One School, One Book* this fall. Literally! They christened their implementation *One School, One Book, One Community* – and they really did involve their whole community. The mayor of Weirton, W.V. issued a proclamation. The whole town wore RED – red t-shirts emblazoned with their message and moniker: Read. Every. Day.

The local library and the city joined in as official sponsors of the program. Mayor Harold Miller encouraged the whole community to assist the endeavor – and they did! Local businesses and organizations and Weirton’s middle and high schoolers all created videos and all supplied “celebrity readers” who visited the school to read chapters with students.
Businesses donated prizes and put **OSOBOC** and R.E.D. signs in their windows. In addition, the library set up a display featuring the project, provided reading logs for community members and offered chances at prizes for those who participated.

“This year truly was a community event,” said Denise Miller, assistant principal (and major Tweeter!)

Legendary educator Gordon Gee, currently the president of West Virginia University, read the first and final chapters of the book on video and told students, “Reading is such an important part of life.”

Weirton E.S. maintained a particularly active social media presence during the program. Through Facebook and Twitter, families shared photos, reading *The Enormous Egg* together both at home and elsewhere. One family read with Mickey and Minnie Mouse in Hawaii. Students wore their ‘Go R.E.D’ (Read Every Day) t-shirts each Friday. And following the mayor’s lead, all of Weirton did, too.

The program concluded with a ceremony for students, teachers, family and local community members. The gym was packed, and the crowd spilled into the halls.

“We are a very large school and implementing this literacy program where everyone was reading the same book really brought us closer together,” Denise Miller said.
AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Grace Lin is the author and illustrator of picture books, early readers and middle grade novels. Her 2010 Newbery Honor book, Where the Mountain Meets the Moon, is a OSOB selection. Her most recent book, When the Sea Turned to Silver, is a National Book Award finalist.

What excites you about writing and illustrating for younger readers?
When I was a young reader, books were really important to me. In many ways, books became my friends. What I love about creating books for younger readers is that I might be creating books that could be their friends—just like the books I read at the same age.

Do your interactions with your readers influence or inspire your writing in any way?
They do! I visit a lot of schools and, about six years ago, I would tell students I was working on a companion book to Where the Mountain Meets the Moon. They would get so excited and kept asking me, “Is Minli going to be in it? Is Dragon?” and, at the time, I had to say, “No.” And then one day, after I said that same answer to another group of kids, a boy looked at me, completely crushed, and said, “Why not?”

And it was then I realized I didn’t have a good answer. I wasn’t writing those characters because I thought it would be too hard, too complicated—but when the boy said that I realized that I was being lazy. Because I was writing a story and the beautiful things about stories is that anything can happen, there is always a way to figure things out.

So, because of my interaction with those readers, I stopped being lazy and went back to my writing desk to figure it out. And I am proud to say that I did! It took a long time (which is why it took six years to make!) but as well as being a complete story on its own, When the Sea Turned to Silver has all those characters—Minli, Magistrate Tiger, Dragon—in it. They are all interwoven in there and I can’t wait for kids to read about them again!

How important is it to you that your books are reaching such a wide audience?
Well, this question speaks a lot to the diversity issue, something close to my heart. Books can be like windows that show us the world and they can be like mirrors that show us reflections of ourselves. We all need to read both types of books and I think too often kids end up with a bookshelf of all windows or all mirrors. It seems like a small thing, but I truly feel that having a balanced bookshelf of windows and mirrors are seeds to empathy and self-worth.

So it is very important to me that my books reach as wide an audience as possible. I think my books are an opportunity for kids to read outside their comfort zone and find they actually enjoy it—which hopefully leads to a further diversification of their bookshelf and a more empathetic and self-confident kid!

What has been your experience with the Read to Them program?
I love it! I spoke above a bit about the diversity—it’s a many layered issue. Reading habits are hard to break, so sometimes because my books are not mirrors for them, people dismiss my books simply by looking at the cover. By being a part of the Read to Them program, people give the books a second chance. That is a huge game-changer. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard, “I didn't think I would like your book, but now it's my favorite book in the whole world!”
Maia Kling, Ph.D., has traveled the world to help kids learn, working in mountain villages in Mexico, third-culture communities in Europe, refugee resettlements, and high school classrooms in the U.S. Maia employs all she has learned as RTT’s Multicultural Education Specialist.

Dr. Kling focuses on three key areas: program evaluation through metrics, bilingual accessibility for existing program materials, and new bicultural/biliteracy initiatives.

“Families are the key,” Kling says. “Everything we do here is geared toward creating and sustaining positive gains in the classroom through families. We want to help strengthen the family relationship in order to support student development and achievement.”

Kling analyzes the effectiveness of RTT programs through direct feedback from educators and quantitative data from surveys. The surveys offer clues to how RTT’s program can be improved.

“Parent engagement has been a real concern for schools. The surveys have shown a resounding support for the program as an effective engagement tool,” says Kling. “Schools need the parents, and our programs help the schools engage them.”

Kling strives to bring RTT programs to more families who might otherwise struggle to participate. She interprets and translates existing materials, such as packets and other communications, for families into Spanish. She also oversees developing RTT’s base of available Spanish-language books, which she plans to expand in 2017. And in 2017, new parent resource web pages on readtothem.org.

Through Kling’s work RTT offers learning and communication strategies for families that can bolster and improve parents’ connection with participating schools.

“We want to make sure these kids have the support they need,” Kling says. “We need to engage students effectively if we want them to perform to their potential. We want to empower them and build upon what they already bring from their families to the classroom. That’s thinking multiculturally.”