



To Whom It May Concern:

In spring 2015, staff from Row Cypher Inc., in collaboration with the Good Life Alliance, successfully executed a 14 week spoken word empowerment program in 3 Chicago Public Schools in Network 4. The program was funded by an attendance grant through Chicago Public School's Office of College and Career Success. The three schools served during the grant period were Lincoln Park High School, Alcott College Prep, and Kelvyn Park High School.

The primary goal of the grant was to improve attendance rates among students who had below average attendance. The program primarily addressed this goal by engaging students in activities and assignments that strengthened their investment in their own education, as well as in their school community and school culture. Row Cypher staff delivered a *Spoken Word Empowerment Series* curriculum in the three schools. The curriculum promoted the social and emotional learning competencies through spoken word poetry, hip-hop, and performance-based entrepreneurship. The optimal level of success of the program was defined with the end goal of institutionalizing a sustainable school-based *open mic*.

Row Cypher staff worked with students to explore and develop their own creative voice, their identity as a community and a spoken word club, and eventually to institute school-based *open mics*. With regard to writing, students were coached to meet Common Core State Writing Standards for 9th & 10th grade. Several sections of the curriculum required them to "*write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through effective selection, organization and analysis of content.*"

The open mics were well-attended by students, teachers, families and other members of the school communities. Row Cypher Staff empowered youth to feel comfortable performing in front of peers and operating in leadership positions. The students learned to write well, create, build and promote a brand, along with marketing and event management skills. The students successfully demonstrated these skills during the program. For example, by the time Lincoln Park students hosted their second open mic, the students did not need much help from the instructors.

Row Cypher staff were able to successfully meet the grant requirements and adapt and respond to school and network requests in the process. The Row Cypher staff communicated well with all parties and worked to solve problems quickly and thoroughly. I recommend Row Cypher Inc. to schools and other community partners that may benefit from their expertise and programming.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Hurwitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Laura Hurwitz, LCSW  
Network 4 SEL Specialist