For Immediate Release
info@busloadofbooks.com

News Release

Children's author/illustrator duo Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr launch the fourth year of their national literacy access and awareness initiative Busload of Books—with plans to do ten free Title I author/illustrator visits and all-school book giveaways throughout the 2026-2027 school year.

After spending the 2022-2023 school year on their Busload of Books Tour, traveling 34,000 miles across the United States in a tiny home school bus with their four children and two dogs, visiting Title I (underserved) elementary schools in all 50 states, and distributing 150,000 free books and 25,000 free "reading buddy" teddy bears (in partnership with First Book and Build-A-Bear Foundation) Robbi and Matthew continue to serve Title I schools across the country through Busload of Books—now a 510(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The key objectives of Busload of Books are 1) raising awareness of the challenges facing America's public schools, 2) empowering reading, creativity, and collaboration in elementary school children, and 3) facilitating a landmark research study to measure the benefits of author/illustrator visits.

Throughout the 2026-2027 school year, Swanson and Behr will:

• **Provide free assemblies and book giveaways to eleven Title I elementary schools across the country**:

- five in-person visits (Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia)
- and six virtual visits (Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, and two schools in Texas)

• **Partner with First Book and Build-A-Bear Foundation**, which will fund, source, and distribute free books to every student and teacher in each of the 11 schools.

• **Continue their groundbreaking research study with Washington College**, in Chestertown, Md., to measure the impact of author/illustrator visits (filling a key gap in the research on this topic).

• **Provide a glimpse into the excellent work being done in Title I schools**—despite limited resources and the challenges of serving high-need populations.

The Maryland-based couple developed the idea for Busload of Books in 2019 when they received a $30,000 grant to "do something awesome." This initial support swelled with contributions from 1,500+ individual donors, making their nationwide tour and ongoing literacy work a reality.

"We've seen hundreds of times the empowering impact author/illustrator visits can have on school communities. When kids realize we're just regular people, they recognize their own capacity to create. They start reading, writing, drawing, and telling their own stories."
-Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr

Author/illustrator visits promote reading and creativity, but many schools can't afford to bring in authors or buy new books (including most of the nation's 47,000 Title I schools). By offering free books and programming, Swanson and Behr (themselves the products of Title I schools) create opportunities for historically underserved communities and highlight the heroic work of public educators.

Swanson and Behr partner with First Book to select the schools they serve and distribute the books they give away. First Book is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit that provides books to underserved schools and educators across the United States.

Pre-K-2nd graders will receive *Everywhere, Wonder*, a picture book about observation and storytelling. The 3rd-5th graders will receive *Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom*, an illustrated middle grade book (the first in a series of seven) about figuring out what's most important and living one's life to the fullest.

"I've noticed a significant boost in enthusiasm for reading, writing, and drawing since Robbi and Matthew's visit. They both have so much JOY! I could go on and on about how much we needed this visit and how much we gained by having them at our school."
-Beckie Nieman, librarian, North Pike Elementary School, Summit, Mississippi

Swanson and Behr are partnering with the departments of education and sociology at Washington College to measure the impact of one-time author visits in Title I elementary schools. The resulting data has the potential to dramatically amplify the reach of the Busload of Books project by informing policy, shaping curriculum, and justifying funding for literacy interventions in schools across the country.

For more information: Please visit the Busload of Books website (www.busloadofbooks.com)

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