ROBBI and MATTHEW'S BUSLOAD of BOOKS

The Busload of Books is a literacy access and equity project by children's author/illustrator duo Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr. Every school year, Robbi and Matthew:

- visit ten Title I elementary schools across the country
- give free assemblies and a free book to every student and teacher
- collect data for a landmark research study of literacy interventions.

OUR GOALS

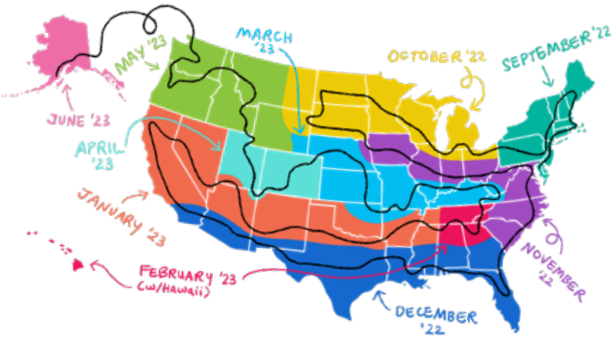
- **empower reading, creativity, and collaboration** in the schools we visit
- **increase awareness** of the challenges faced by our country's public schools
- **conduct a major research study** with Washington College to measure the impact of author/illustrator visits (filling a key gap in the research on this topic)

HOW WE GOT THE IDEA

In 2019, we received an unsolicited, no-strings-attached $30,000 grant and were told to use it to "do something awesome." We had already been doing free author/illustrator visits and book giveaways in our local communities, but the grant inspired us to try the idea on a national scale.

THE BUSLOAD OF BOOKS TOUR

We spent the 2022-2023 school year traveling the country in our tiny home school bus, doing free assemblies at Title I (high-need) 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).



THE WORK CONTINUES

We plan to do another twelve-month, national tour during the 2030-2031 school year. **In the mean time, we'll continue to serve ten Title I schools each year**—giving away books, promoting creativity, and highlighting the great work of our nation's public school teachers.

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS

Author/illustrator school visits do tremendous good—promoting reading and energizing communities—but many public schools can't afford them. By visiting Title I schools and highlighting the stories of public educators working wonders with limited resources, we hope to build awareness of the challenges facing our nation's public schools while bringing books and goodwill to communities across the country. We are both products of Title I elementary schools. Our kids go to Title I schools. This is personal for us.

HOW WE CHOOSE THE SCHOOLS WE VISIT

We partner with the incredible nonprofit First Book to select schools from their membership—prioritizing communities where our books and programming would make the biggest impact and selecting schools from the widest range of sizes, settings, and demographic profiles.

THE BOOKS WE'RE GIVING AWAY

The pre-K-2nd graders will get *Everywhere, Wonder,* a picture book about observation and storytelling. The 3rd-5th graders will get *Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom*, an illustrated middle grade novel about figuring out what's most important and living one's life to the fullest.
Learn more about these books and the related assemblies.

AN UNPRECEDENTED RESEARCH PROJECT

Our Busload of Books work creates a rare opportunity for the first-ever, large scale study of how author/illustrator visits impact elementary student attitudes about reading, writing and drawing—filling a critical gap in the research on this topic. The data will provide tools to inform policy, shape curriculum, and facilitate future literacy programming. The study is being conducted by the departments of education and sociology at Washington College. *Contact the research team.*

CHESTERTOWN, MARYLAND
WASHINGTON COLLEGE
ESTABLISHED 1782

FIRST BOOK

BUILD-A-BEAR FOUNDATION

OUR INCREDIBLE PARTNERS

Fueled by a shared belief that every kid should have access to books, **our three-way partnership with First Book and Build-A-Bear Foundation** provides invaluable logistical support and funds a free book for every student and teacher in every school we visit.

HOW WE'RE FUNDING THIS PROJECT

Our work has been made possible through grassroots contributions from more than 1,700 individuals. Visit our donation page to help us put books on the bus. Due to our 501(c)(3) status, all donations are tax-deductible.

OUR ROLLING BILLBOARD FOR LITERACY AND JOY

Our 24-foot Thomas school bus travels with us to every in-person school visit, raising smiles and fist pumps on the highway. After our assemblies, the kids come out to the bus to see the bus, meet our dogs, and take photos.

FOLLOW THE BUS

We post every day about our lives as creators, advocates and parents. To follow our adventures, join us on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube.

WHO WE ARE

Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr are husband/wife, author/illustrator creators of the Cookie Chronicles series, the Real McCoys trilogy, and the illustrated novel *Life On the Moon,* as well as several picture books. They are the co-founders of Busload of Books, a literacy nonprofit that brings free books and author/illustrator visits to students and teachers in Title I schools across the country. Most of the time, they live on the Eastern Shore of Maryland with their four kids and two dogs. Each June and July they run a commercial salmon fishing operation in Bristol Bay, Alaska.

FOR MORE (AND MORE DETAILED) INFO: VISIT OUR FAQ

LINKS AND EQUITY

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