

Understanding Disabilities, Inc.  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Reading's Understanding Disabilities receives major grant to create a new, pioneering disability awareness curriculum**

Understanding Disabilities, Inc., a mainstay in the Reading Public Schools for 29 years, is proud to announce that it has received a \$100,000 grant from Cummings Foundation to create an innovative curriculum to teach disability awareness to school children.

“Understanding Disabilities will broaden and deepen the services we provide to Reading children as a result of this important and generous grant from Cummings Foundation,” says Paula Tucci, Understanding Disabilities Executive Director. Understanding Disabilities (UD) will use the grant to restructure and move its curriculum forward to meet the new realities of today’s inclusive classrooms. Inclusion allows for students from their earliest years to interact with classmates who range in abilities from typical learners to children with an array of disabilities. “Our ability to highlight our innate similarities, that which we all have in common, will improve when we make these changes,” says Tucci.

“What is unique about the course we are designing, is that it provides children the informational tools to develop positive relationships with their peers when they first need it, at the time they become aware of classmates with learning differences,” says Tucci. She explains that children in early grades will be taught generally about these differences, with a focus on friendship. Lessons will continue each year with age-appropriate information added. By middle school, students will have been presented with information about disabilities, society’s reactions to differences, and thought-provoking messages about understanding and respect. UD has already begun to organize an advisory board of medical and educational experts.

“Acceptance and understanding is why it's important that Understanding Disabilities offer education about disabilities,” according to Reading Superintendent of Schools Dr. John Doherty. “The awareness Understanding Disabilities brings to children supports increased classroom learning for all children, none more so than children with disabilities,” Dr. Doherty says. “We’re very fortunate to have the UD program in Reading. We look forward to working with them in providing a strong disability awareness program in our district,” he adds.

“Input from parents, teachers, students, and people with disabilities has helped shape this important improvement in teaching disability awareness, and we encourage continued conversation as we move forward,” says Priscilla Squires, Lead Teacher at Understanding Disabilities.

“We will not use this money for our yearly operating costs. In fact, the grant specifically does not allow that,” Tucci adds. The grant requires the spending focus on UD’s breakthrough curriculum

ideas. As a result, UD must continue to raise funds to cover its annual budget. “Though the schools love the program their budget cannot fund it,” Tucci says. “Our Annual Spring Appeal is underway. The Reading community is very supportive of disability awareness education, and we are counting on them to support us through this necessary and positive step forward,” she adds.

Understanding Disabilities, Inc. was one of 100 Greater Boston area nonprofits selected by Cummings Foundation to receive a grant through their “\$100K for 100” program. The 100 recipients represent a variety of causes, including underserved populations, education, healthcare, hunger relief, and homelessness prevention. Most of the grants will be paid over two to five years.

Understanding Disabilities is a non-profit organization that has been providing disability awareness programming in the Reading Public Schools for 29 years. The program helps children see beyond people's disabilities and to focus on the ways we are all the same inside.

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to Understanding Disabilities, Inc., PO Box 465, Reading, MA 01867. UD invites those interested in further information to contact them through their website at [www.UnderstandingDisabilities.org](http://www.UnderstandingDisabilities.org).

More information about Cummings Foundation can be found at [www.CummingsFoundation.org](http://www.CummingsFoundation.org).