The students are all seated in their assigned groups, patiently awaiting our arrival. When we walk in the classroom we are stunned. Everyone is where they need to be and they are on time. It’s a strange feeling to walk into the calmness rather than the chaos that normally categorizes our Friday afternoons at Mark Twain. But, it’s quite wonderful to find out that after all the stress of trying to organize classrooms and communicate with teachers over the course of the year, our efforts appear to be moving in a positive direction.

One of the biggest challenges that WeRead as an organization faces is communication with the school administration with Mark Twain. Because of high staff turnover, we rarely see the same teachers, principal and vice principal year after year. In the three years that I have been part of this organization, there has been a new principal each year. We must form a new relationship and establish the credibility of our organization with each person. The lack of communication between the administration and teachers also inhibits our effectiveness, although it is something that is mostly out of our control. In the beginning of the year, one of the board members would email the administration each week to remind them we would indeed be arriving on Friday afternoon to work with the kids. However, this often led to miscommunications with the classrooms because the administration would not always inform the teachers of our confirmation. This led to challenges because sometime we would show up to the school and the students would be on a field trip or would be in a classroom different than what they told us, and it would end up wasting our times and theirs. One way we attempted to change this problem was by talking to the teachers in person as well as including them in our weekly emails. The emails helped to ensure that the class would indeed be at the school that day and would not be on a field trip or didn’t have a day off. By talking to the teachers, we were able to smooth out classroom location. For example, in the 5th grade classroom, the students tended to be late because they were coming from their science class. After talking to their teacher, Ms. Brandon, we brought up the issue and resolved to meet the students in their homeroom, because it was closer to their science classroom. These small problems emphasized the importance of communication and honesty. We had to find ways to talk with the teachers and administration and let them know the challenges that we were encountering. It ended up paying off though, as we finally had a smooth arrival at the end of the year.

As many a WeRead participant will attest, we do what we do “for the kids.”. The chaos, time and energy put into our organization is all worth it when we walk into the classroom Friday afternoon and are welcomed with cheers and smiling faces. We are able to continue what we do thanks to the generous funding provided by groups such as the Barger Leadership Institute.