

## **Commuting, Computing and Mentoring: Meet Community Volunteer Brendan O'Keefe**

Last school year SPS Volunteer Brendan O'Keefe met with fifth grader AJ every Thursday morning before school at the West Somerville Neighborhood School. They'd talk about books, homework, how to build computers, school, and life. Brendan had been a camp counselor working with middle grades students through the University of Rhode Island before moving to Somerville. When he arrived, Brendan was looking for ways to connect with youth and reached out to Somerville Public Schools to see how he could help out. Brendan was matched with a student for one-to-one reading and mentoring.

During the school year when his rent was increased, Brendan was forced to move to Norwood. Despite the much longer commute, Brendan continued to volunteer at WSNS before heading to work—a testament to his commitment to the student and his volunteering in Somerville.

This school year Brendan is living more locally and has been mentoring again every week. He and the student work on projects for school, homework, talk computer sciences and video games—with the student teaching Brendan a thing or two about coding—play board games, read and work on puzzles.

No more daunting commutes and fun before work and school make for some mutually rewarding mentoring. The SPS Volunteer Program spoke with AJ and Brendan about their work together:

### **What have you both liked about meeting together?**

AJ: 'I like reading out loud and getting some help with homework before school. It's also good because I get my homework in on time. And I'm better at reading out loud now.'

BOK: 'It's been great getting to know AJ. The commute's longer, but it's worth it and AJ is such a fun and interesting kid.'

### **Do you remember the first things you talked about when you met?**

AJ: 'We talked about stories, my favorite things to do, how I built a computer over the Summer and how the console and motherboard caught on fire.'

BOK: [Laughs] 'Yeah, that sounds about right.'

### **What do you usually read and what have been your favorites?**

AJ: 'I liked the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, and for most of this year it was Harry Potter. I liked Harry Potter.'

### **What would you say to other students about coming in before school to meet with a volunteer?**

AJ: 'I'd say definitely do it. It's not that early and you get to meet someone new. And it makes homework and reading more fun.'

*Volunteers in Somerville serve as tutors and mentors, and sometimes work with the same student for multiple years.*

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*[www.somerville.k12.ma.us/volunteer](http://www.somerville.k12.ma.us/volunteer).*

