



You're looking at  
the newest graduate of



Literacy First

I can read! ←

Literacy First

2020-2021 IMPACT REPORT

Literacy First



Our students cannot afford to take a year off;  
neither can we.

MARY ELLEN ISAACS, PH.D, DIRECTOR OF LITERACY FIRST

### **VISION**

Every child in Central Texas develops reading skills that allow them to realize their full potential with regard to education, economic opportunity, civic engagement, and personal development.

### **MISSION**

We partner with school districts to ensure all children are reading at or above grade level by third grade.

### **APPROACH**

We fulfill our mission by offering a variety of support services, with a particular focus on achieving racially equitable outcomes for growing readers, including one-to-one literacy interventions, teacher and staff training, instructional coaching, data-centered advising, and bilingual and culturally relevant reading resources and interventions.

## Dear Friends of Literacy First,



Had someone asked me a few years ago whether we could execute a fully virtual early literacy tutoring program for an entire year, I would have said it was impossible. But, during the 2020-2021 school year, we had no other choice than to do just that. More students than ever before are in need of the services Literacy First provides. Our students cannot afford to take a year off; neither can we.

And so, in the summer of 2020, Literacy First staff shifted our entire program online. We collaborated with our partner districts to help equip students with devices and internet connectivity. Staff visited the homes of students to assist parents/guardians having difficulty logging into school platforms. We enrolled and trained nearly 100 tutors and reading coaches remotely, preparing them for the challenge of keeping elementary students focused on Zoom for 30 minutes of reading lessons every day. For the first time ever, we engaged 3rd grade students in the program, allowing the chance to recoup reading losses experienced during Spring 2020 school closures.

Coordinating with teachers for those students who were in the classroom, and parents/guardians when students were learning from home, we were able to reach over 700 K-3 students throughout the year. And our data demonstrates that when those students attended lessons consistently, they made significant progress toward grade level reading goals. We celebrated student graduations as enthusiastically as ever, with some staff even making socially distanced visits to homes to deliver certificates to proud students.

I am tremendously proud of the accomplishments of this program in the past year. I also know that the students we serve have experienced a significant loss in learning opportunities, and continue to have a greater need for the additional support we provide, as the COVID-19 pandemic has both highlighted and exacerbated long-standing disparities in access to a quality early education. In addition to our programmatic work, Literacy First staff developed a robust Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion framework that seeks to build awareness of those disparities, and equip our tutors with the tools to help dismantle inequity through their daily work.

We move forward from the 2020-2021 school year with the knowledge that together, Literacy First staff, tutors, and students are capable of the impossible. And with the support of you, our community, anything is possible. Thank you for building bright futures with us.

Sincerely,

**MARY ELLEN ISAACS, PH.D.**  
**DIRECTOR OF LITERACY FIRST**

# STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS

The first year executing the 2020-2024 Literacy First Strategic Plan was filled with challenges and opportunities. While the pandemic stretched us to deliver our core model in new and different ways, it also created opportunities to partner with schools, districts, the Texas Education Association, and the state of Louisiana. As hoped, our strategic plan helped us stay grounded, guiding our decision-making as we dealt with an ongoing crisis and when unforeseen opportunities emerged. Our goals and strategies remained intact and flexible even as our activities, at times, needed to shift in order to reach and serve students.

## SAMPLE OF YEAR 1 COMPLETED ACTIVITIES

Recruited a **MORE LOCAL, MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE GROUP OF AMERICORPS MEMBERS** who better reflect the demographic composition of the young readers we tutor.

Sustained current teacher pipeline partnerships and explored **NEW PATHWAYS FOR GROWING TEACHERS**.

Developed a **LITERACY FIRST PHONICS PROGRAM** to allow for more nimble and cost-effective program expansion.

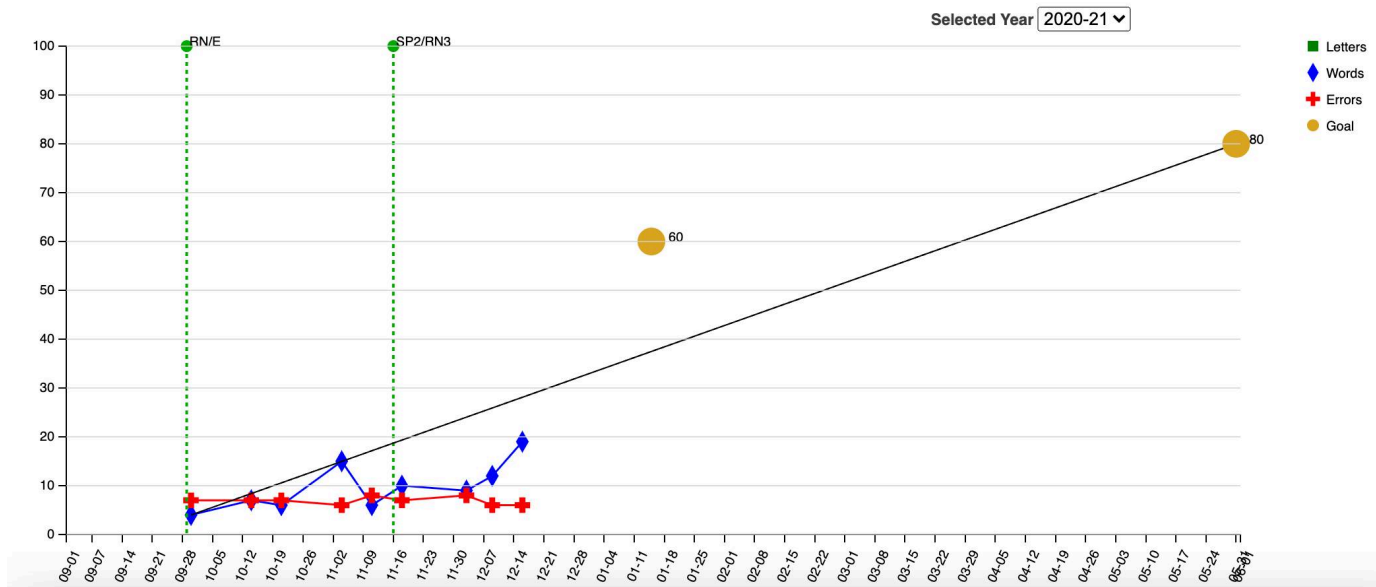
Continued and strengthened our **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR RETURNING MEMBERS** to increase tutor retention and effectiveness.

Developed **ONLINE 1:1 TUTORING SOLUTIONS** that responded to and will sustain beyond the pandemic.

# AMERICORPS MODEL

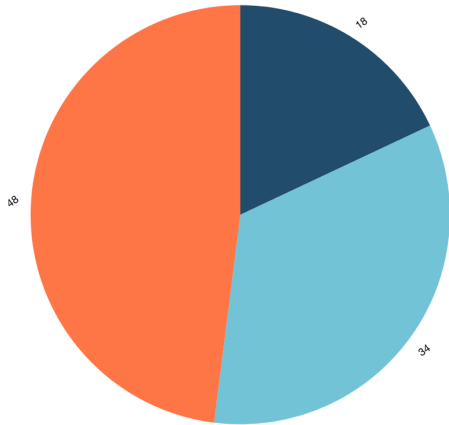
## Literacy First hired and trained AmeriCorps tutors to deliver the program in 17 Austin Independent School District schools.

Literacy First worked with teachers and school staff to identify and serve 1st through 3rd grade students during a most challenging academic year. We focused our tutoring at these grade levels because of the unique challenges the virtual environment poses for Kindergarten students. Our staff worked tirelessly to provide our evidence-based curriculum and tutor and student support virtually, so that we were able to serve students whether they were learning from home or were joining virtual tutoring sessions from the classroom.



Literacy First tutors put tremendous effort into teaching elementary students to read in 2020-2021. From interruptions from pets and siblings, to keeping young children engaged on small electronic devices, tutors faced a monumental task.

However, the determination of both tutor and student is evident in the data we collected. The sample graph shown here demonstrates that when the student was able to attend lessons (where the data points are closer together), the number of words per minute the student was able to read correctly (the blue data line) increased. Inversely, when the student was not able to attend lessons due to school closures, parent and guardian work schedules, unreliable WiFi, etc., the number of words per minute read decreased (24.0% of students served exited the program prematurely, with the majority exiting due to excessive absences). This trend was consistent throughout the year. Overall, by the time they graduated or reached the end of the school year, 42.2% of students served were reading at or near grade level. **When we are able to reach students consistently, we know that our intervention works.**



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SERVED BY GRADE

■ 1st Grade, 18   ■ 2nd Grade, 48   ■ 3rd Grade, 34

**408**

STUDENTS SERVED

**68,680**

HOURS OF TUTORING DELIVERED

**45**

TUTORS PROVIDED ADDITIONAL SUMMER PROGRAMMING WITH LOCAL PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

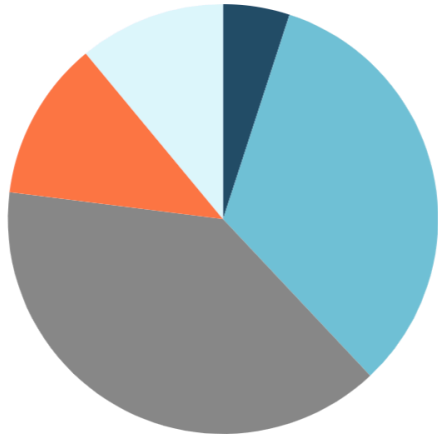
**12**

SECOND-YEAR TUTOR LEADERS PARTICIPATED IN LITERACY FIRST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

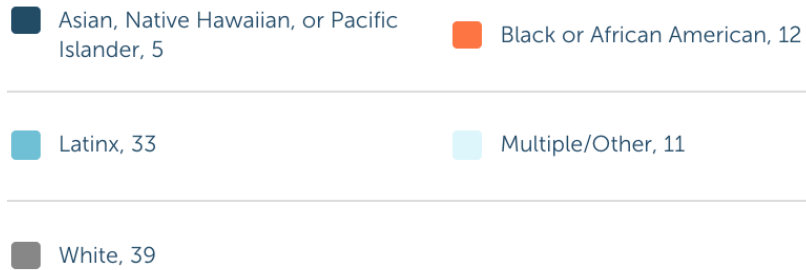
"I tried to Zoom you over the weekend, because I wanted my mom to meet you."

**-STUDENT TO THEIR LITERACY FIRST TUTOR**

## AMERICORPS TUTORS



### PERCENTAGE OF TUTORS BY RACE/ETHNICITY



57

AMERICORPS TUTORS

3,745

SERVICE HOURS WITH PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

23

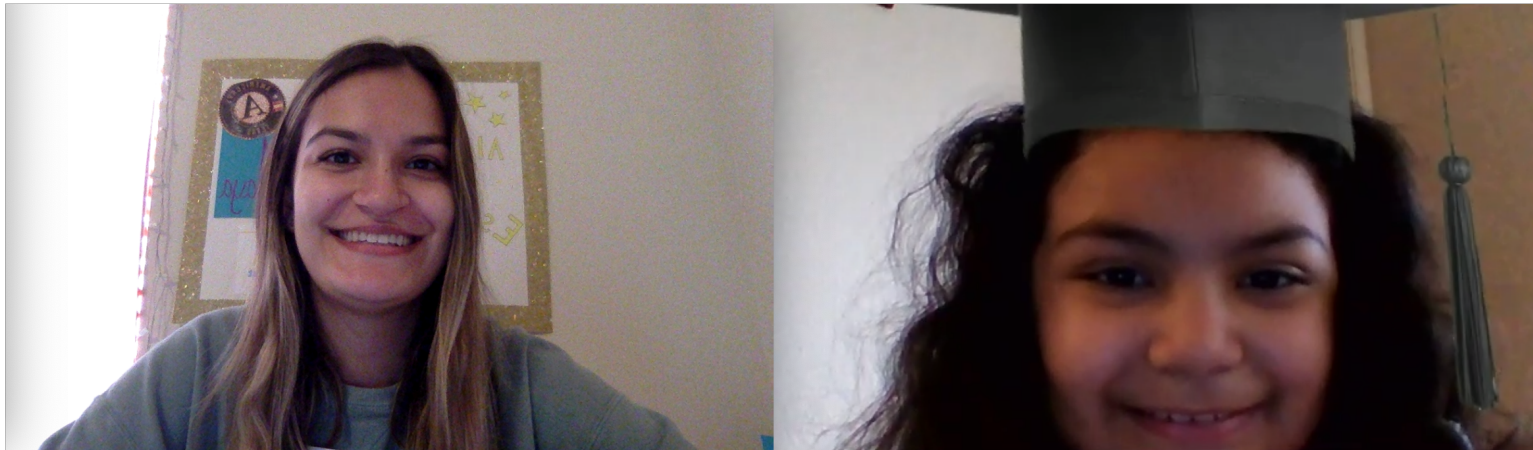
FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

6

REGION 13 TEACHER CERTIFICATION PARTICIPANTS,  
ALL EMPLOYED AS TEACHERS IN 2021-2022

"Before your mentoring, he had given up reading for fun, and I had to 'make' him read just to get assignments done. Since your guys' sessions, he actually picks up a book again on his own, or finds something just to read for fun. That means so much to me. Thank you!!!"

**-PARENT TO THEIR CHILD'S LITERACY FIRST TUTOR**



From 2017-2019, the American Institutes for Research partnered with Literacy First to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of the Literacy First AmeriCorps model on student outcomes via a two-year gold standard evaluation (randomized controlled trial). Overall, the study showed that students who received Literacy First tutoring outperformed students who did not receive Literacy First tutoring on all included outcome measures, demonstrating significant improvement in early reading skills, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension within the same school year. In addition, students who received Literacy First tutoring in Grade 2 scored higher on the STAAR Grade 3 for both reading and mathematics.

Rigorous evaluation continues to confirm the long-term impact of the program.



# DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL

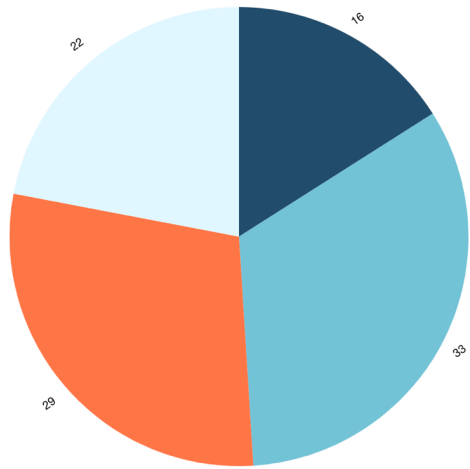
**Literacy First staff trained school district staff (full-time tutors and reading coaches) in 9 Del Valle Independent School District schools to deliver the Literacy First program, with the goal of building community capacity over time.**

Through our expansion work in Del Valle Independent School District, we have learned that district paraprofessional tutors using our intervention are equally effective in accelerating students' reading to grade level as are AmeriCorps tutors. The District Capacity Building Model has helped expand our tutor pool, allowing our tutors to better reflect the communities we serve. And by training school staff and hiring from the community, we are building the capacity of districts to sustain the program over time. The model also offers significant training and professional development, preparing the tutors for the workforce, especially in the field of education. This addition to Literacy First's "teacher pipeline" comes at a critical time, as the nationwide teacher shortage has been worsened by the pandemic. Both Literacy First district paraprofessionals and AmeriCorps members gain real experience and training that help them to be successful and persist longer than their peers in post-service careers in education.



# 308

STUDENTS SERVED



### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SERVED BY GRADE

■ Kindergarten, 16
 ■ 1st Grade, 29
 ■ 2nd Grade, 33
 ■ 3rd Grade, 22

# 7

FORMER PARAPROFESSIONAL TUTORS WHO ARE NOW EDUCATORS OR IN SCHOOL FOR EDUCATION

# 8,956

HOURS OF TUTORING DELIVERED

# 89%

PERCENTAGE OF 2020-2021 TUTORS RETURNING FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

"For Alaina, having Imelda by her side during this difficult year was really important. Her family lost so much this year. Having Imelda connecting with her every day, even when they weren't able to be in person together, was the constant in her school life that she could count on. While I was teaching other students, I knew that Alaina was in good hands with Imelda. She had Alaina's back during some very difficult times. So I really appreciate this collaboration - it meant the world for all of us."

**-DEL VALLE ISD TEACHER**

## FROM OUR STAFF



Our donors, supporters and funders have stepped up in ways we did not know possible. They continue to believe in this work and understand the immense need ahead. We are humbled and inspired by their willingness to stay in this journey with us, to serve as many students as possible now and well into the future.

**RACHEL MALLERNEE, CFRE**  
**DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT**



More than anything else, our experience during the pandemic really drove home for me the value of the type of work we do with students. Sitting next to a student, giving them 100% of our attention every day, practicing their reading skills – that kind of instruction is such a precious and rare thing.

**SEBASTIAN WREN**  
**SENIOR ACADEMIC PROGRAM COORDINATOR**



In the words of Winston Churchill, "Difficulties mastered are opportunities won." During these difficult and unprecedented times, the Literacy First program has seized opportunities to create new ways to continue to meet the literacy needs of Central Texas children. Unstoppable!

**ANIQUE REESE**  
**SENIOR ACADEMIC PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

# EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Equity is at the forefront of Literacy First's organizational goals. Staff continued efforts in 2020-2021 to ensure the entire organization reflects this core value, including twice monthly meetings of the Literacy First DEI Committee to plan and execute initiatives.

Staff created **ONLINE LEARNING MODULES** for tutors, addressing topics such as the **HISTORY OF SEGREGATION IN AUSTIN AND ITS SCHOOLS**, unconscious biases, and microaggressions.

DEI Committee members participated in a multi-week training led by Clem Consulting on **FACILITATING DEI-FOCUSED WORKSHOPS AND CONVERSATIONS**.

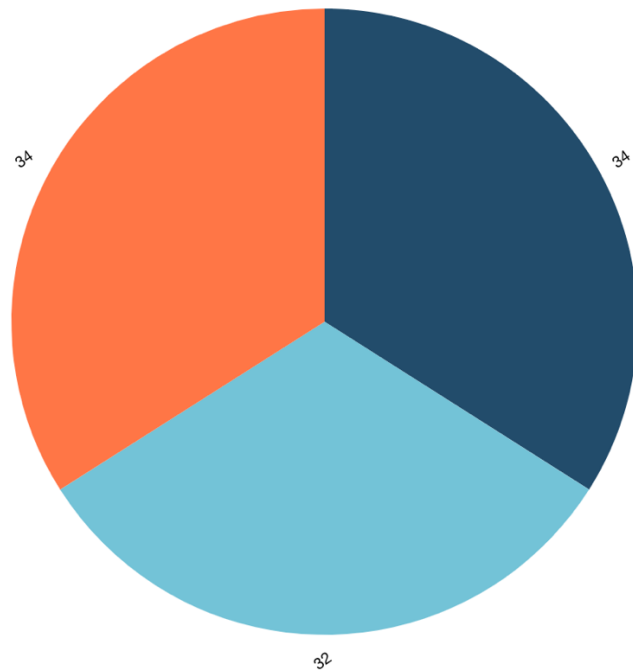
Program staff initiated the creation of support materials and training modules with the intention of **BETTER EQUIPPING PARENTS AND GUARDIANS (SPECIFICALLY MONOLINGUAL SPANISH-SPEAKING) TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD'S READING JOURNEY**.

Trained staff hosted **CIVIC REFLECTIONS** for tutors around topics such as **RACE, PRIVILEGE, AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION**.

Staff members conducted a **REVIEW OF APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR TUTORS** and implemented revisions, including eliminating the mandatory 2-year college requirement.

Program staff continue to assess and revise **BILINGUAL CURRICULUM MATERIALS** to ensure the inclusion of **CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONTENT**.

## BY THE NUMBERS



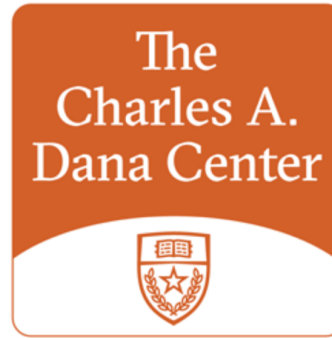
### FUNDING SOURCES

- AmeriCorps, 34
- Philanthropy, 34
- Schools/Districts (Fee for Service), 32

# 94%

PORTION OF TOTAL BUDGET USED FOR DIRECT PROGRAM COSTS

## FRIENDS & PARTNERS



### ADVISORY BOARD

**Jackie Mata** Texas Capital Bank, *Chair*  
**Ellen Arnold** Arnold Public Affairs  
**Elizabeth Bayer Morgan** Long-View Micro School  
**Marisol Foster** Webber Family Foundation  
**Sheena Moore** Texas Domestic Slave Project, *Alumnus*  
**Claire Morris** CapStar Lending  
**Juan Tornoe** Cultural Strategies

### LEADERS FOR LITERACY

**Holly McIntush Mobley** *Chair*  
**Elizabeth Bayer Morgan**  
**Anna Bodine**  
**Anne Boswell**  
**Michelle Castillo** *Alumnus*  
**Carmen Crawford**  
**David Courreges**  
**Liliana de la Pena**  
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**Jessica Witte**