



2021-2022 IMPACT REPORT

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DIRECTOR'S CHAIR



In December 2021, Director of Literacy First Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs announced she would retire in March 2022 after 25 years with the program. Our community joined us in celebrating Mary Ellen's incredible legacy and expressing our deepest gratitude for her service. A nationwide search to find the next director was well underway, with a committee of staff, Advisory Board members, and external stakeholders considering more than 100 applicants throughout the process. In her farewell message, Mary Ellen shared her enthusiasm for the future of the program under newly-appointed Director Dr. Claire Hagen Alvarado.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends of Literacy First,

I began as Director of Literacy First in March 2022 and was no stranger to the organization or to reading education. What I realized in these first few months is that I only knew a sliver of Literacy First's expertise and excellence. At every turn, I have been deeply impressed by the systems, thoughtfulness, and care with which our team approaches the critical work of teaching children how to read. I am deeply grateful to serve as director, and to have the opportunity to harness my passion for bilingualism and literacy to advocate for our youngest Central Texas readers. The legacy of service built by my predecessor, Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs, the extensive expertise and experience possessed by staff, and the program infrastructure and fidelity strengthened over nearly 30 years, have combined to create a solid foundation for Literacy First. It is that foundation that has allowed us, as you'll see in the following pages, to continue making an impact even in the most challenging of times in education and the world. And, as we look forward to the coming years, we recognize the urgent need to expand that impact immensely. Literacy First is prepared to double the number of students we reach by 2024, to train and coach educators, and to share our insights with the field. Your generous support makes this possible. Thank you.

Claire Hagen Alvarado, Ed.L.D.
Director of Literacy First



[CONNECT WITH CLAIRE AT LINKEDIN.COM/IN/CLAIREHGNALV/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/clairehgnalv/)



WHO WE ARE

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 have the opportunity to learn to read well in the early grades.

APPROACH

We fulfill our mission by offering a variety of support services in Spanish and English, 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 sustaining reading resources and interventions.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

SUPPORT STUDENTS LEARNING TO READ YEAR-ROUND
WITH YOUR MONTHLY GIFT TO LITERACY FIRST.

GIVE NOW AT LITERACYFIRST.ORG/DONATE



Our students who would otherwise potentially fall further behind are able to 'catch up' with their peers and participate fully in the grade level instruction. It also does wonders in boosting their self-esteem and makes them more successful learners in all subjects.

-Principal of a Literacy First Partner School

COMPOUNDING NEED

AS THEY CONTINUE TO BE IMPACTED BY PANDEMIC-RELATED LOSS OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, MORE STUDENTS THAN EVER BEFORE ARE IN NEED OF THE READING SUPPORT LITERACY FIRST PROVIDES.

In addition, those students who did qualify for the program during the 2021-2022 school year started out reading further below grade-level reading expectations than in previous years, thus requiring more targeted instruction and individualized support.



Out of all the 2nd grade students who participated in benchmark testing in fall 2021, **NEARLY HALF** were unable to read more than just a few words.

Student absences, schedule disruptions, class quarantines, and more contributed to a much **HIGHER NUMBER OF MISSED SESSIONS** than previous years.

Teacher shortages meant that District Capacity Building Model paraprofessionals were sometimes **PULLED FROM TUTORING** to serve as substitute teachers or provide other classroom support.



Pre-pandemic, around **50%** of all students who participated in benchmark testing at the beginning of a school year would qualify for Literacy First.



In fall 2021, **70%** of all students who participated in benchmark testing qualified for the program.

DESPITE THE MYRIAD CHALLENGES FACED, THE RATE OF GROWTH FOR LITERACY FIRST STUDENTS IN 2021-2022 WAS COMPARABLE TO PRE-PANDEMIC YEARS.

Students stayed in the program longer because they had further to grow, but the speed with which they progressed toward grade-level reading expectations was approximately the same.

COMPOUNDING NEED

STUDENTS IN THE LITERACY FIRST PROGRAM THIS YEAR MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, BUT THERE WERE MANY STUDENTS IN NEED OF SUPPORT THAT WE WERE NOT ABLE TO REACH.

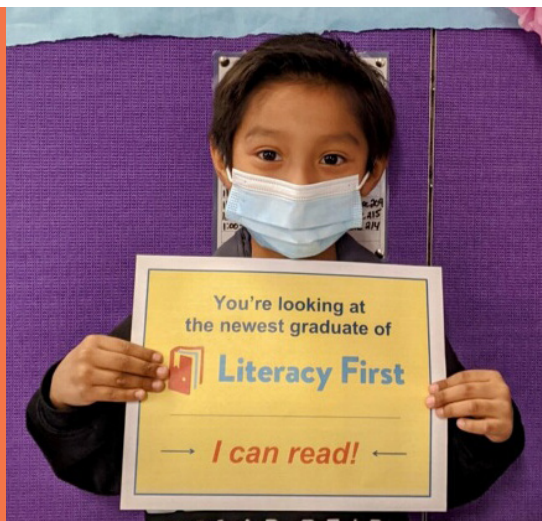


Prior to the pandemic, Literacy First was able to work with **50-60%** of the students who demonstrated a need for early literacy tutoring each year.



During the 2021-2022 school year, Literacy First was only able to provide tutoring to around **30%** of all students who demonstrated a need for individualized support.

GOING FORWARD, THIS TREMENDOUS NEED WILL ONLY BE COMPOUNDED FOR OUR MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS.



WITH INCREASED CAPACITY,
LITERACY FIRST IS POISED TO PROVIDE MORE
STUDENTS WITH THE SUPPORT NECESSARY
TO CLOSE THE READING GAP.

AMERICORPS MODEL

LITERACY FIRST HIRES AND TRAINS AMERICORPS MEMBERS DEDICATING A YEAR OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY TO IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING.

899

STUDENTS SERVED

65%

OF STUDENTS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS
TOWARD GRADE-LEVEL READING EXPECTATIONS

62,000

HOURS OF READING INSTRUCTION PROVIDED

21

SCHOOLS ACROSS AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
DISTRICT, AUSTIN ACHIEVE, AND WAYSIDE SCHOOLS

325

KINDERGARTEN
STUDENTS

301

1ST GRADE
STUDENTS

273

2ND GRADE
STUDENTS



567

STUDENTS RECEIVING
ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

332

STUDENTS RECEIVING
SPANISH INSTRUCTION



87

AMERICORPS TUTORS AT THE
BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

58

AMERICORPS TUTORS AT
THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

19

AMERICORPS TUTORS RESIGNED BEFORE THE SCHOOL YEAR STARTED
BECAUSE OF CONCERN REGARDING COVID-19 AND IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

“

Literacy First has been critical in helping us close literacy gaps of our students returning from [the] pandemic.

-Principal of a Literacy First Partner School

AMERICORPS MODEL

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

By Alyssa Raley, 2021-2022 Literacy First AmeriCorps Tutor

The first couple of days that I picked up Kindergarten student Alana for her Literacy First lessons were quiet. As we walked to the tutoring room, I would ask questions about her day, but there would be no response. When we would go over letter sounds, half of Alana's answers would be "no sé." She seemed nervous about making mistakes, and would not answer at all rather than give the wrong answer.

I tried hard to build a trusting relationship with Alana, and she slowly grew more comfortable, began to open up, and gained confidence. A real turning point came when we had a conversation about how it was okay when we're learning to make mistakes, and that I wanted Alana to try her best, even when she wasn't sure if she was right. I told Alana that I was always there to help her and support her, and she took my promise to heart.

From then on, Alana rarely said "no sé" again. She started reciting letter sounds with confidence, and didn't get discouraged when I had to correct her. Simply letting Alana know that she had a safe place to learn was more than enough to propel her reading journey forward. In fact, when she was especially sure of herself, Alana would sometimes nearly shout out an answer. While I had to remind her of our friends in the room who were also trying to learn, I couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm.

After a few months of growing confidence and skills in our daily lessons, Alana was ready to graduate from the Literacy First program. On the day we held her 'graduation ceremony,' I thought back to the quiet, unsure Alana I had first met, and how far she had come since then. And when I told Alana what an incredible reader she had become, she beamed back at me and said, "Sí, lo sé."



DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL

LITERACY FIRST WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH KEY DISTRICT AND SCHOOL STAFF TO TRAIN AND SUPPORT CAMPUS-BASED PARAPROFESSIONALS IN IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING.

635

STUDENTS SERVED

75%

OF STUDENTS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARD GRADE-LEVEL READING EXPECTATIONS

12

SCHOOLS ACROSS DEL VALLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ELGIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

183

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

236

1ST GRADE STUDENTS

214

2ND GRADE STUDENTS

2

3RD GRADE STUDENTS



297

STUDENTS RECEIVING ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

338

STUDENTS RECEIVING SPANISH INSTRUCTION



39

PARAPROFESSIONAL TUTORS

13

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

“

This work has demonstrated the untapped power of the paraprofessional and their ability to meet their own communities' needs.

-Jason Buckingham, Manager of Innovation Projects, Literacy First

DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL

FOUR YEARS AFTER AN INITIAL PILOT AT ONE DEL VALLE CAMPUS, OUR DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL HAS EXPANDED DISTRICT-WIDE IN BOTH DEL VALLE AND ELGIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND RESULTED IN A VARIETY OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES, INCLUDING SOME UNFORESEEN.

COMMUNITY STRENGTH

Because the vast majority of District Capacity Building Model (DCBM) tutors come from the communities in which they serve, they report a high level of commitment and engagement and remain in their positions for multiple years, resulting in a cumulative effect on their skills as interventionists.

Many DCBM tutors are former Teaching Assistants, and already possess a deep knowledge of both the school community and the students/teachers with whom they work, as well as experience working with students one-to-one and in small groups. These tutors are adept at managing student behavior, and rarely exit students for behavioral reasons.

WORKFORCE & TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

DCBM tutors can earn a living wage with benefits from school districts, allowing a diverse corps of tutors to access the professional development, civic engagement, and opportunity Literacy First provides.

DCBM tutors are often hired to work in the same district in which they live, creating an educator pipeline increasing workforce development in the community.

10-15% of DCBM tutors have gone on to careers as teachers, librarians, and parent support specialists, helping meet the critical need for educators.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Through training, a coherent structure, and weekly support, Literacy First staff have been able to successfully replicate our program model with district paraprofessionals and leaders, building the capacity of districts.





MISSION FORWARD

LITERACY FIRST CONTINUED TO WORK TOWARD CREATING A MORE DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION FOR ALL STAFF, TUTORS, STUDENTS, PARTNERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS. THE FOLLOWING ARE INITIATIVES THAT WERE UNDERTAKEN DURING THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR.

MEMBER TRAINING

Developed and executed a yearlong DEI-focused curriculum for AmeriCorps members, including virtual learning modules on various DEI topics, and Civic Reflections, which are staff-led discussions that “use readings, images and video to engage people in deep, productive conversation about issues that impact their communities and work, as well as build bridges of understanding in the midst of differences.” (via the Center for Civic Reflection)

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Facilitated DEI-related activity at monthly staff meetings, with the goal of encouraging staff learning and reflection, as well as providing a monthly update to staff regarding the work of the DEI Committee, with the goal of increasing transparency and full staff engagement.

PROGRESS TRACKING

Administered third year of Promise 54 Staff DEI Survey; reviewed and discussed results with all staff.

GOAL SETTING

Reviewed and revised organizational DEI goals in 2021-2022 portion of Strategic Plan, and planned for 2022-2023.

EQUITABLE ACCESS

Raised member stipend to equivalent of \$16/hour in order to increase accessibility to a year of service for community members.

SHARED OWNERSHIP

Developed and launched AmeriCorps Member DEI Feedback & Evaluation Process, to provide members the opportunity to shape their future learning.

TRANSPARENCY

Distributed first edition of AmeriCorps Member DEI Report to increase transparency for AmeriCorps members around DEI work led by staff.

TEACHER PIPELINE



TUTOR TO TEACHER

For many years, Literacy First has contributed to the Central Texas 'teacher pipeline' through our partnership with the Region 13 Educator Certification Program. Second-year Literacy First AmeriCorps tutors are able to obtain their teaching certification, while also gaining invaluable classroom experience, making them more prepared, effective educators who persist in their positions longer than their peers.

However, as the pandemic exacerbated challenges faced by educators, Literacy First saw the same depletion of our teacher pipeline as has been occurring nationwide. During the 2021-2022 school year, only one returning AmeriCorps tutor participated in the Region 13 program.

ADDRESSING THE SHORTAGE

Seeking to counteract this shortage, Literacy First continues to explore new avenues for workforce development. Our District Capacity Building Model has demonstrated promising results in the first four years of implementation, as tutors hired by the district find a pathway to education in the communities in which they live and serve.

Going forward, Literacy First is enthusiastic about expanding the significant professional and career development opportunities offered to our tutors via several workforce development grants awarded to the organization (see *Funding Highlights*).

“

These tutors are very knowledgeable about how to support their scholars, provide instruction, accommodate to support scholar needs, and articulate the data.

-Reading Specialist from a Literacy First Partner School



OUR COMMUNITY

GREATER AUSTIN READING COALITION

As a member of the Greater Austin Reading Coalition (GARC), Literacy First joins a diverse group of literacy advocates convened by United Way for Greater Austin to increase the number of children in our community reading on grade level.

YMCA SUMMER CAMPS

This spring and summer, Literacy First partnered with GARC and the YMCA to bring our proven high-dosage tutoring model to YMCA summer camps. After completing a year of national service, two highly trained and experienced Literacy First tutors, guided by two Literacy First Lead Coaches, provided daily one-to-one reading intervention to a caseload of four to six students over eight weeks in June and July. Through this partnership, Literacy First is supporting foundational gains in reading for participating students, as well as continuing our exploration of the efficacy of providing high-quality literacy intervention in out-of-school contexts, such as after school and summer camp programs.

BOOKSPRING

Partnering with fellow GARC member BookSpring during the 2021-2022 school year, Literacy First was able to distribute a total of 10,000 high-interest, grade-appropriate books in both English and Spanish for students to take home and keep as their own. Literacy First teaches students to read, and through this partnership with a fellow local nonprofit, those students can continue reading.

CHARLES A. DANA CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Literacy First collaborated with the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, The Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana, Keys to Literacy, and The New Teacher Project to develop and deliver the K-2 Literacy Content Leader Training for the Louisiana Department of Education. The training prepared elementary educators to share their expertise with other teachers with the goal of improving the quality of early literacy instruction in Louisiana schools and school systems.



FUNDING HIGHLIGHTS

OUR WORK IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN BRIGHT FUTURES FOR STUDENTS IN CENTRAL TEXAS. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROSITY OF NUMEROUS INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, FOUNDATIONS, CORPORATIONS, GOVERNMENT ENTITIES, AND PARTNERS. *THANK YOU.*

DECEMBER 2021

Literacy First was chosen as a recipient of Texas Mutual's Workforce Development Grant. The grant supports continued expansion of the significant professional and career development opportunities offered to our early literacy tutors, as well as engaging more adults from the communities in which we serve as tutors, therefore building the long-term capacity of districts and communities.

MARCH 2022

We announced the largest gift in Literacy First's history; a 5-year, \$2 million pledge from Helen and Sandy Watkins and Family. The longtime friends of Literacy First expressed their determination to increase the capacity of the program and provide more students with the opportunity to learn to read.

APRIL 2022

The Austin Community Foundation's Hispanic Impact Fund awarded Literacy First a grant centered on the impact area of 'Job Skills & Entrepreneurship.' These funds will be used to continue and expand our efforts to hire and train more Latinx community members as Literacy First tutors.

LITERACY FIRST
FUNDING SOURCES



AMERICORPS 25%

SCHOOLS/DISTRICTS (FEE FOR SERVICE) 25%

FOUNDATION/INDIVIDUAL/CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY 50%



PARTNERS

LITERACY FIRST ADVISORY BOARD

Following years of dedicated service, Jackie Mata ended her tenure as Chair of the Literacy First Advisory Board during the 2021-2022 school year. We are tremendously grateful for Jackie's thoughtful and strategic insight, willingness to share her broad network, and the tenacity she demonstrated in support of the Literacy First mission.

Marisol Foster, Executive Director of the Webber Family Foundation, has graciously accepted the role of Chair of the Literacy First Advisory Board. We are thrilled to have Marisol continue lending her extensive nonprofit expertise in support of the Literacy First Board's initiatives, in addition to the program as a whole. She is a true partner to her fellow Board members and Literacy First staff, and we look forward to the year ahead under her leadership.

MARISOL FOSTER (CHAIR), Webber Family Foundation

ELLEN ARNOLD, Arnold Public Affairs

JACKIE MATA (FORMER CHAIR), Community Volunteer

ELIZABETH BAYER MORGAN, Long-View Micro School

SHEENA MOORE, Texas Domestic Slave Project, The University of Texas at Austin & Literacy First Alumnus

CLAIRE MORRIS, CapStar Lending

JUAN TORNOE, Cultural Strategies

LEADERS FOR LITERACY

Leaders for Literacy is a group of engaged community members who are enthusiastic about helping children in Central Texas learn to read, and supporting the Literacy First tutors that make it possible. The committee originated as Lawyers for Literacy, and has since expanded to include civic-minded volunteers from a variety of backgrounds, including former Literacy First tutors.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the committee curated Welcome Kits with snacks, stickers, hand sanitizer, and other necessities for tutors, supported Literacy First's Amplify Austin fundraising efforts, contributed to end-of-year tutor gatherings, and more.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS INTERESTED IN JOINING LEADERS FOR LITERACY SHOULD CONTACT
SUPPORT.LITERACYFIRST@AUSTIN.UTEXAS.EDU



PARTNERS



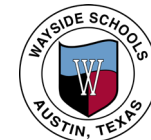
AMERICORPS is a network of national service programs that gives people the chance to serve in locations across the country. AmeriCorps*Texas programs give members the opportunity to strengthen Texas communities while being part of a national service movement.



AMERICORPS CENTRAL TEXAS (ACT) is a collaboration of eleven local nonprofit organizations that provide direct service to youth and adults living in low-income communities in Central Texas; offering members a wide range of opportunities to create a better future for themselves and Central Texas through paid AmeriCorps service.



Literacy First is a program of **THE CHARLES A. DANA CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**, which works with our nation's education systems to ensure that every student leaves school prepared for success in a post-secondary education and the contemporary workplace.



THE ANNENBERG INSTITUTE AT BROWN UNIVERSITY has included Literacy First in their sample of vetted early literacy tutoring programs as part of the [National Student Support Accelerator](#).

Proven ✓
Tutoring

PROVEN TUTORING appointed Literacy First as a member of their [coalition of reading and math tutoring programs](#) proven effective in rigorous research.



Literacy First is a member of the **TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY'S (TEA) Vetted Texas Tutor Corps (VTC)**, an [initiative](#) aimed at accelerating student learning through high impact tutoring.



VISIT US AT [LITERACYFIRST.ORG](https://literacyfirst.org)



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