



Literacy First

IMPACT REPORT

2022-2023



A Note from Our Director

Almost 30 years ago, Literacy First was founded with the goal of addressing early education opportunity gaps. We began by training AmeriCorps members to deliver high-quality, research-based instruction to students in Austin-area schools, which we continue to do today. As our program has grown and changed, we've strengthened our early literacy intervention and dreamed of how to have a more equitable impact in our community.

Since our program's founding, we've seen monumental shifts in Austin. The past few decades have brought rapid gentrification to our community, exacerbating existing inequities. As the city grew and the cost of living rose, we realized we also needed to adapt to continue offering our services to the students in Central Texas, who would benefit from them the most. Our team has developed creative solutions to meet the need in suburban, exurban, and rural areas outside of Austin, building local school districts' capacities to deliver the Literacy First curricula and program model. This capacity-building work is vital to deepening our impact as a small organization. This past year, we celebrated a milestone as our largest district partner signed onto the program. Looking forward, we are excited to imagine other ways we can evolve and best support young students in learning to read.

I am immensely proud of our team for their visionary ideas that center our students. Together we have found ways to not only reach more students but also strengthen schools' capacities to provide evidence-based, data-driven, and joyful reading instruction. We aspire to provide equitable educational opportunities for all children in the early grades so they can grow to be their brightest selves, and we thank you for your support.



All my best,
Claire Hagen Alvarado, Ed.L.D.

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Who We Are

MISSION

We partner with school districts to ensure all children learn to read by the end of second grade.

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.



OUR 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.

PROGRAM MODELS

AMERICORPS MODEL

Literacy First hires and trains AmeriCorps members dedicating a year of service to the community.

DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL (DCBM)

Literacy First trains school district staff (full-time tutors and instructional coaches) to deliver the Literacy First program, with the goal of building community capacity over time.

How Our Intervention Works



ONE-TO-ONE DAILY SESSIONS

Our highly trained tutors work one-to-one with every student, in English or Spanish, for 30 minutes daily. They use our research-based curriculum to develop skills that predict reading success, such as phonological awareness, letter knowledge, phonics, and oral reading fluency.



EXPERT SUPPORT

Literacy First staff who are experts in reading are onsite weekly to observe lessons, provide real-time coaching, monitor student progress, and make adjustments to meet individual student needs.



DATA-DRIVEN

We assess all students at the beginning of the year to determine who needs support to develop critical early literacy skills. We measure student progress weekly to ensure they are responding to the lessons and accelerating their reading skills.



GROWING GRADUATES

Students graduate from the program when they reach grade-level benchmarks. We measure student progress all year to ensure they maintain their gains.

“My students that work with Literacy First tutors always show growth in such a short period of time. More importantly, their love of reading and self-confidence grow as well.”

—CLASSROOM TEACHER

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Why We Target Early Literacy Skills

We view literacy as a fundamental human right with the power to increase the agency, access, and quality of life of the reader and their communities. Students who are reading proficiently by the end of second grade are more likely to graduate from high school on time, better preparing them for future opportunities.

THE NEED IN TEXAS

62% TEXAS STUDENTS MET KINDERGARTEN-READINESS STANDARDS ON LITERACY ASSESSMENT

In 2021, as reported by [E3 Alliance](#)

48% THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS MET GRADE LEVEL IN READING-LANGUAGE ARTS ON THE STAAR®

In 2023, according to the [Texas Education Agency](#)

Both data sets show that students from minoritized backgrounds—specifically Black, Latino, and students experiencing poverty—disproportionately place lower on standardized assessments than their wealthier and white peers. At Literacy First, we believe literacy is a tool for equity and with a solid foundation in reading, students impacted by systemic inequities can access better learning and employment opportunities later in life.



WHERE WE COME IN

In Texas, students complete The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in third grade. Prior to third grade, data are not collected on a large-scale level to measure academic readiness and early literacy skills.

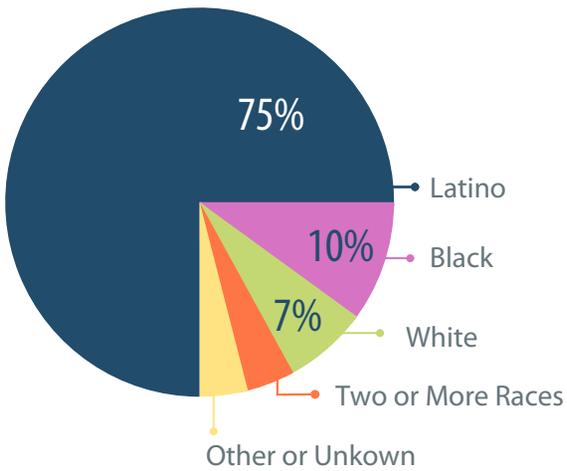
However, students need to develop important predictors of literacy success, such as letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness, well before they begin third grade to thrive academically. Resources have not historically been allocated to target kindergarten through second-grade students. We tutor students in these underserved early grades to provide the opportunity to reach grade level before it becomes more difficult later in their school careers.

Who We Tutor

1,520 STUDENTS TUTORED IN CENTRAL TEXAS THIS YEAR



Del Valle Independent School District DCBM tutors worked with third-grade students in a special after-school program. Our primary intervention model works with students in K-2.



90% TYPICALLY PARTICIPATE IN FREE/REDUCED MEAL PROGRAMS



We teach foundational reading skills in Spanish or English and make language decisions based on students' linguistic backgrounds and their instructional settings. When students learn to read in their primary language, they are able to learn an additional language more quickly and effectively. Foundational reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency also transfer between languages, ensuring students become fully biliterate as they progress in their academic trajectories.

“Our scholars have developed bigger learning gaps due to COVID and virtual learning. Our scholars who are typically last to get interventions, which are the groups in K-2nd grade, are getting the interventions needed from Literacy First.”

—SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Where We Tutor



KEY

AMERICORPS MODEL SCHOOLS

- Austin Achieve Public Schools
- Austin Independent School District
- Wayside Schools

DISTRICT CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL SCHOOLS

- Del Valle Independent School District
- Elgin Independent School District

DISTRICT PARTNERS

We partner with public Title I elementary schools, which receive federal funding for serving a large number of students who come from families experiencing poverty.

IN THE 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR, WE PARTNERED WITH **33** CENTRAL TEXAS SCHOOLS ACROSS **5** DISTRICTS



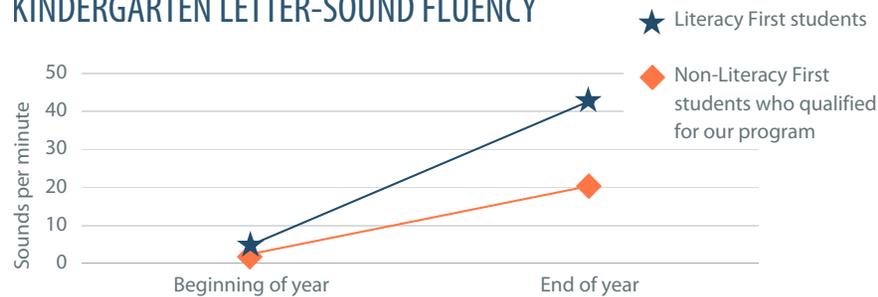
Results

70% STUDENTS SHOWED ACCELERATED GROWTH IN READING SKILLS
57% STUDENTS EXITED THE PROGRAM ON OR NEAR GRADE LEVEL

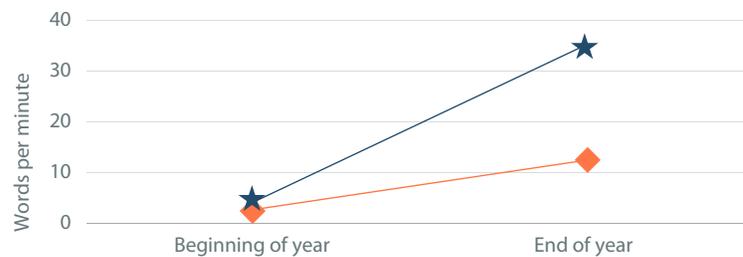
INTERVENTION RESPONSES

Compared to students who qualified for our program but did not receive Literacy First tutoring services due to limited capacity and funding, students in our program showed significant growth on literacy skills assessments throughout the year.

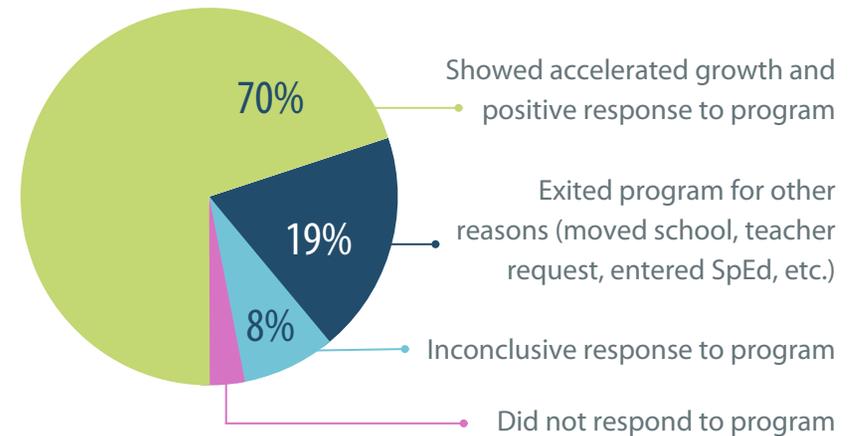
KINDERGARTEN LETTER-SOUND FLUENCY



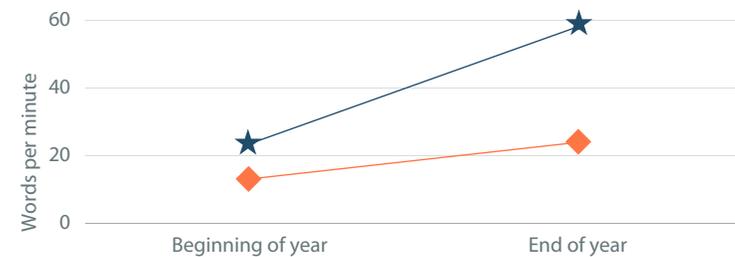
FIRST-GRADE ORAL READING FLUENCY



STATUS OF LITERACY FIRST STUDENTS AT END OF YEAR



SECOND-GRADE ORAL READING FLUENCY



Challenges

Prior to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, about 50% of students placed below grade level in reading and qualified for our program. Since 2021, this number has risen to—and remained at—70%. In the last few years, we have seen second-grade students demonstrating reading skills that were typical of kindergarten students in the past. Students are entering our program at a lower level and on average are taking longer to reach grade-level standards. There continues to be an unmet need for the high-dosage tutoring services we provide. In our partner schools, 60% of students who qualified for the Literacy First program did not receive individualized support outside of classroom instruction due to capacity and funding limits.

STUDENTS WHO QUALIFIED FOR LITERACY FIRST SERVICES



HOW CAN YOU HELP?



We are always looking for new partnerships to reach more students. If you are a teacher, administrator, parent, or community advocate who would like to see Literacy First in your school or district, please email us at support.literacyfirst@austin.utexas.edu or call 512-232-2286. If you are interested in joining our team as a tutor, scan the code below to [learn more](#).

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“Without this program, it would not be possible to offer this daily 1:1 intervention to our students.”
—SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR



Student Spotlight

Written by Mariana Paz Quiroz, 2022-2023 Spanish Literacy Tutor

Andrés is a kindergarten student I have worked with for a while. He is always incredibly eager to learn and consistently tries his best. His mistakes only fuel him. One day while focusing on learning syllables, he found huge success in his reading. His excitement was infectious when he realized he had read all of the syllables without a single error.

Next, he needed to put those syllables together to form words. It was time for Andrés to take his first skills assessment. He breezed through the letter-sounds and worked diligently to sound out the syllables before putting them back together. When we got to word reading, I helped him as he did his best to read the words. Unfortunately, out of the six words, he only read one correctly without my help. I felt like I had failed him. We returned to practicing letter-sounds and I got him to tell me a word that started with that letter sound. We did that for the rest of his lesson that day. I thought this exercise would be a good brain break for Andrés and give me time to figure out how to help him put syllables together into words.

The next day, we focused on the review from the day before. He was flying through the syllables. Once more, it was time to read words. When we got to the practice word, he was able to read it! I started getting this bubbly feeling of happiness and emotions in my chest because as we read through the practice words, Andrés was able to read every single one all by himself. I tried not to get ahead of myself since we had only been through the review once. I then gave Andrés the skills test from the day before.

Unsurprisingly, he aced the syllable portion. We read the practice word together, and then I let him know he would read the six words left on his own. He read every single one with ease. My praise got louder as he read through the words. I felt like I was watching a different student than the one I tested the day before. I felt the tears swell in my eyes. I took one look at Andrés and could tell he was also feeling something big.

This is why I do what I do. For moments like this. For children like Andrés who just need time, patience, and grace—and then they'll surprise you quite literally overnight.



Photo: Mariana with one of her students at an end-of-year celebration.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

2022-2023

Long-time AmeriCorps model district partner, Austin Independent School District (AISD), became our largest district partner to join the DCBM program. We partnered with 16 schools in AISD through the AmeriCorps program.

Del Valle Independent School District (DVISD), our first DCBM partner, completed year four of its contract. We also worked with three schools in a professional development series to strengthen literacy programming.

We worked with 91 tutors across both models of our program. Around 62% of tutors identified as Latino, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, or two or more races. We estimate 80% of all tutors were from Texas or have lived long-term in the communities they taught.

We continued our work in collaboration with the Charles A. Dana Center to develop science-of-reading trainings for the Louisiana Department of Education.



2023-2024

We will add one AmeriCorps model school and seven DCBM schools to our portfolio, for a total of 24 AISD partner schools.

This will be DVISD's first year operating the Literacy First program independently. The professional development series will now be offered district-wide.

We achieved a higher return rate for AmeriCorps tutors than in past years at 43%. With our DCBM model, 92% of paraprofessional tutors returned to their roles. As a result of collaborative DEI initiatives, our 2023-2024 tutor corps is one of the most diverse and community-connected groups recruited to date.

After years of innovative capacity-building work, we're confident our program is replicable and scalable. We are now hoping to deepen our impact and expand to geographic areas outside of Central Texas.



Partners & Endorsements

PARTNERS



Literacy First is a program of the *Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin*. The Dana Center works with our nation's education systems to ensure that all students have access to and success in a high-quality and modern mathematics, science, and literacy education.



AmeriCorps is the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges.

AmeriCorps Central Texas | BookSpring | E3 Alliance | Families as Partners | Greater Austin Reading Coalition
OneStar Foundation | PBS Austin | United Way for Greater Austin | Univision Austin

EVALUATIONS & ENDORSEMENTS



Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, a project within the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, named Literacy First a certified promising program.



ANNENBERG
BROWN UNIVERSITY

The Annenberg Institute at Brown University has included Literacy First in its sample of vetted early literacy tutoring programs as part of the National Student Support Accelerator.

Proven ✓
Tutoring

Proven Tutoring appointed Literacy First a member of its coalition of reading and math tutoring programs proven effective in rigorous research.

Thank You

Thank you to our incredible community for supporting our work. We are so grateful to all of our donors, board members, supporters, volunteers, tutor alums, current tutors, funders, and partners for seeing the value in what we do and uplifting our mission. We aspire to create a community where every child develops reading skills that allow them to realize their full potential with regard to education, economic opportunity, civic engagement, and personal development. Thank you for believing in this vision alongside us.

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

25% AMERICORPS

27% SCHOOL & DISTRICT FEES

48% FOUNDATION, CORPORATION & INDIVIDUAL PHILANTHROPY

SUPPORT LITERACY FIRST

While we celebrate the successes of this past school year, we know our work isn't done. We know more school districts need and want our partnership. We know more students can benefit from the one-to-one tutoring we provide. We know our impact can and must grow. [Consider supporting our work with a donation.](#) Scan the QR code below to become part of our giving community.

“Student success in the Literacy First program is leading to greater success in the classroom and has been a good predictor of future success in reading.”

—SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR





Literacy First



Literacy First

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