




Literacy First

2024 annual *impact report*

Celebrating 30 years of growing bilingual readers
1994–2024

Lo lograste!
Literacy First
Certificado de Reconocimiento
adquisición de su conocimiento en Lectura
Literacy First
reconocimiento



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Image: Literacy First (Madeline Townsend)

from the director's desk

As we step into our 30th year as a program, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead an organization with such a strong legacy in Central Texas schools and as part of the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin. While we remain rooted in our local work, this past year, we reached an exciting new milestone as we offered our one-to-one tutoring program outside of Texas, partnering with a nonprofit organization in Tennessee. Our team came together this spring to both celebrate this new work and to realign our mission and vision for the future. The result was a new strategic plan to center sustainable growth and to influence change within our community and across the field of literacy instruction. Reflecting on the program's cumulative impact for the past 30 years, I am energized by the possibilities the future holds. Literacy First will continue to partner with schools and organizations to offer our signature high-impact literacy tutoring services in English and Spanish, and to explore new ways to expand our impact. I invite you to stay connected with us and to celebrate this momentous anniversary together. Thank you for your support as we expand our efforts to grow more confident, lifelong readers.

With gratitude,
Claire Hagen Alvarado, Ed.L.D.

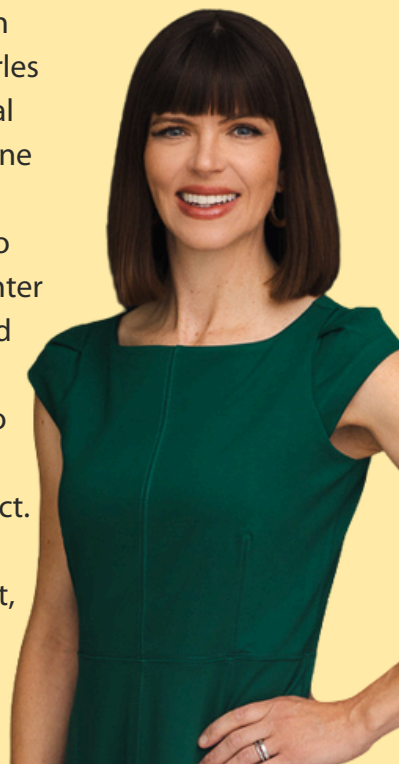
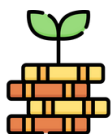


Image: Literacy First

strategic plan overview



Grow Sustainably

Build the culture, infrastructure, and systems to nurture healthy growth.



Increase Impact

Expand our K-2 high-impact tutoring program while increasing quality and efficiency.



Influence Change

Share our expertise with our community and the field of literacy instruction.

Images: Flaticon.com

key actions

- Achieve greater financial stability and diversify funding.
- Improve internal systems and culture.
- Sustain existing partnerships and pursue new opportunities.
- Enhance program replicability and adaptability.
- Identify and develop organizational strengths.
- Create materials and target platforms for disseminating knowledge.

who we are



mission

We teach young children how to read, equipping them to excel in life and realize their dreams.

vision

We view literacy as a human right and envision a world in which every child has the opportunity to become a confident, lifelong reader.

approach

We train early literacy educators to implement our model—in both English and Spanish—using our proven curricula, data tracking system, and coaching model.



Images: Flaticon.com

We partner with public, Title I elementary schools and community organizations to offer our high-impact tutoring program to emerging readers in kindergarten, first, and second grades.



Culturally sustaining practices, data, and research drive our program, which we continually adapt to meet our students' and partners' needs.



values

We embody the spirit of service in pursuit of educational opportunity and every child's right to read.

We achieve quality impact through continual learning, meaningful evaluation, and advancing expertise in literacy.

We embrace community strengths through respectful and intentional collaboration with students, parents, tutors, teachers, and partners.

We nurture a supportive culture where our staff, tutors, partners, and participants engage in honest interactions and find a sense of belonging.



Image: Literacy First

program strengths

Since 1994, Literacy First has offered early childhood literacy tutoring services to partner school districts in Central Texas. Our model is based on student data and trends, partner feedback, and community need. We offer comprehensive capacity building support services to districts and organizations that are committed to replicating our model.

reading instruction in Spanish

Literacy First is the only early childhood literacy tutoring program in the country to teach in both English and Spanish. Committed to delivering high-quality, research-based interventions, we designed our own phonics and fluency resources in both English and Spanish to maximize efficiency and student learning. We advocate for bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths that create opportunities for our students. Their strong foundational reading skills in one language transfer to and support the development of their reading skills in other languages.

high-impact intervention

Our proven, high-dosage tutoring program complements a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model and is often described as a Tier 2, or even a Tier 3, intervention due to its intensive, individualized nature. We target grades K-2 to help detect and address reading difficulties early in students' educational journeys. Each student works one-to-one with their trained Literacy First tutor for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, allowing us to meet each student's developmental reading needs.

comprehensive data services

We provide our partners with custom-built, user-friendly, and secure data services and guide them on using their student data to drive instructional decisions. Our tutors are trained to collect, organize, and analyze data. They also screen eligible K-2 students at each campus, using grade-level appropriate literacy skill assessments, to determine which students qualify for additional support. This past year, we screened over 7,500 students across all campuses. Once students enter the program, we track their progress weekly, adjusting instruction as needed.

educator career pathways

Literacy First tutors either serve through AmeriCorps, dedicating their time to addressing challenges in their communities through national service, or are hired by our replication partners as paraprofessionals. Both types of roles provide different opportunities for professional development, such as access to alternative teaching certification programs. Many Literacy First tutors are inspired to pursue careers in education, often choosing to continue to work in Title I schools. Some pursue other education-related roles such as reading specialist, interventionist, administrator, librarian, or school counselor.

partner spotlight

Del Valle Independent School District (ISD)

In 2018, we co-created and piloted our Capacity Building Model with Del Valle ISD. This year, the school district became our first partner to administer the program independently. Their highly skilled Literacy First tutors, campus staff, and district staff ensure fidelity to our intervention and demonstrate excellent results. Del Valle ISD has even adapted our program, offering tutoring in afterschool and summer school settings. This year, 454 students participated in the program and 82% achieved growth in early reading skills beyond the expected rate.

*Image: Del Valle ISD
(Kei Matsumoto)*



celebrating our 30-year *impact*



30,000+ students

engaged through classroom support, small group activities, and one-to-one tutoring

2,000 tutor roles

in our AmeriCorps, work-study, and Capacity Building Model programs

2,650,000 hours

served by dedicated tutors to support emerging readers

20% of tutors

go on to become teachers or work in other school-based roles, often in Title I schools



Images: Literacy First

our history

On September 21, 1993 President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act, creating AmeriCorps.

founded Literacy First

1994

Originally named AmeriCorps for Math and Literacy, our program was founded by former Executive Director of the Charles A. Dana Center, Uri Triesman, and Deputy Director at The University of Texas at Austin, Jackie McCaffrey. We are one of the longest running AmeriCorps programs in Texas and the nation. Tutors were initially trained to deliver reading interventions that targeted first-grade students, facilitate small group math games, and support pre-K and K students in the classroom under teacher direction.

narrowed our focus to early literacy

2000

We pivoted to focus primarily on literacy instruction and working with pre-K through second grade as later grades received more specialist support. We added five campuses and more tutors, and expanded the PALs program.



pursued new partnerships

2006

Entering another period of growth, we increased our number of tutors, school partners, and staff. We also began a seven-year partnership with the Lucy Read Pre-K School, placing tutors in classrooms and supporting literacy activities on campus.



1997

expanded the program & strengthened training

Former Literacy First Director, Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs, was hired as the first tutor trainer. Renamed AmeriCorps for Community Engagement and Education (ACEE), the program expanded to serve students in pre-K through fourth grades, and tutors worked with students one-to-one twice a week and also spent time working under the teacher's direction. We launched the Parent Advocates for Literacy (PALs) program, which paired parents from the community and our tutors to deliver small group lessons to pre-K students, focusing on enriching emergent literacy activities.

2003

refined lesson framework

Despite a national cut in AmeriCorps funding, we continued to work at four schools during this grant cycle, developing a stronger lesson framework, particularly for K and first grade.



Images: Literacy First

integrated data & explored curriculum development

2009

In collaboration with Minnesota Reading Corps, we implemented a more data-driven, response-to-intervention approach, which doubled the number of students we worked with, produced more measurable outcomes, and became the basis for the model we use today. Our program was rebranded as A Community for Education (ACE), and we began developing our own Spanish literacy curriculum for first and second grades.

proved intervention efficacy

2015

We participated in studies to demonstrate program efficacy, including a fully funded [Randomized Control Trial study by the American Institutes for Research](#). Nationally, we were recognized by the White House as a ["Bright Spot in Hispanic Education."](#) In 2016, we rebranded our program as Literacy First.

navigated transitions

2021

After temporarily offering our program virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we returned to in-person tutoring in 2021. The negative effects of the pandemic on early literacy development were evident, as more students than before qualified for our program from 2021 through this school year. Elgin ISD became the second district to join our Capacity Building Model. We also worked with the Louisiana Department of Education to deliver the K-2 Literacy Content Leader Training. Later that year, former Director Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs announced her retirement after 25 years of leadership. In early 2022, Dr. Claire Hagen Alvarado joined our team as the new director. We debuted [Literacy First Phonics](#), our proprietary English phonics curriculum that year.

bright futures ahead

2024

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary and reflect on our growth and impact, we look forward to exploring new horizons as we continue to grow.

2011

launched our Spanish literacy curriculum

We implemented our proprietary Spanish literacy curriculum, [Alma del Lector](#), for first and second grades. We experienced tremendous growth during the AmeriCorps cycle beginning in 2012, jumping from employing 40 to over 100 full-time tutors and working in 30 schools in Central Texas.

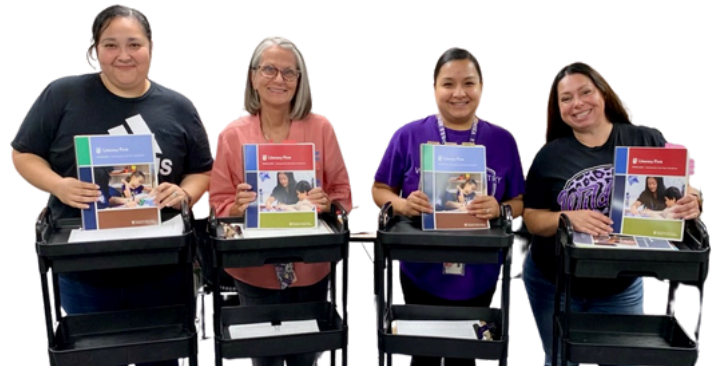


Images: Literacy First

2018

piloted Capacity Building Model

We began a pilot at one campus in Del Valle ISD to train paraprofessional tutors and reading specialists to implement and sustain the program. In 2019, this program was expanded district-wide. This pilot project grew into our current Capacity Building Model.



2023

expanded capacity building work

Austin ISD became the largest district to adopt our Capacity Building Model. We expanded this model for the first time out of state, piloting it in partnership with a local nonprofit organization, Chattanooga 2.0, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In another pilot, we started testing lesson structure and resources for small group settings at Padrón Elementary. Del Valle ISD became our first partner to enter the independent phase of the Capacity Building Model, operating the program with minimal Literacy First staff support.

the students we support

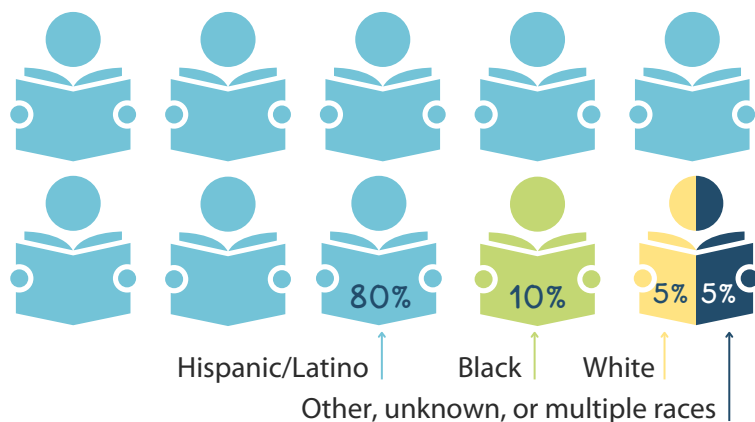


Image: Literacy First (Gabriela Soto)

1,777 students participated in our early childhood literacy intervention during the 2023–2024 school year

We primarily provide support for growing readers in kindergarten, first, and second grades. This year, we worked with an average of 575 students from each of these grade levels. We also worked with 45 students in third and fourth grades through an afterschool program at Del Valle ISD and at campuses where there were scheduling conflicts for grades K-2.

student demographics



54%
instructed in English

46%
instructed in Spanish



Over half of Literacy First students are multilingual and speak a language other than English at home

100% attend Title I schools and **84%** qualify for free or reduced lunch programs

student spotlight

The Gift of Reading with Julian

On the last day of school, Julian couldn't wait to give his Literacy First tutor, Katy, a goodbye gift that he and his mom had thoughtfully put together. As Katy opened it, she noticed a bookmark that read, "A teacher takes a hand, opens a mind, and touches a heart." These words reminded Katy that being a literacy tutor is about so much more than teaching reading. Katy had seen Julian grow both as a reader and person during their time together. This touching gift from Julian's mother acknowledged both Katy's hard work and Julian's growth. [Learn more about Julian's reading journey on our blog.](#)



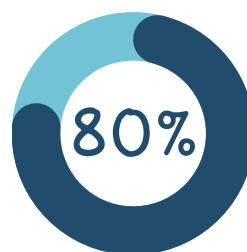
the progress students show



Students qualify for Literacy First tutoring if they are not yet at the expected reading level for their grade. The students enrolled in our program are typically performing in the lowest 10th percentile on national reading norms.

2-3 x the growth

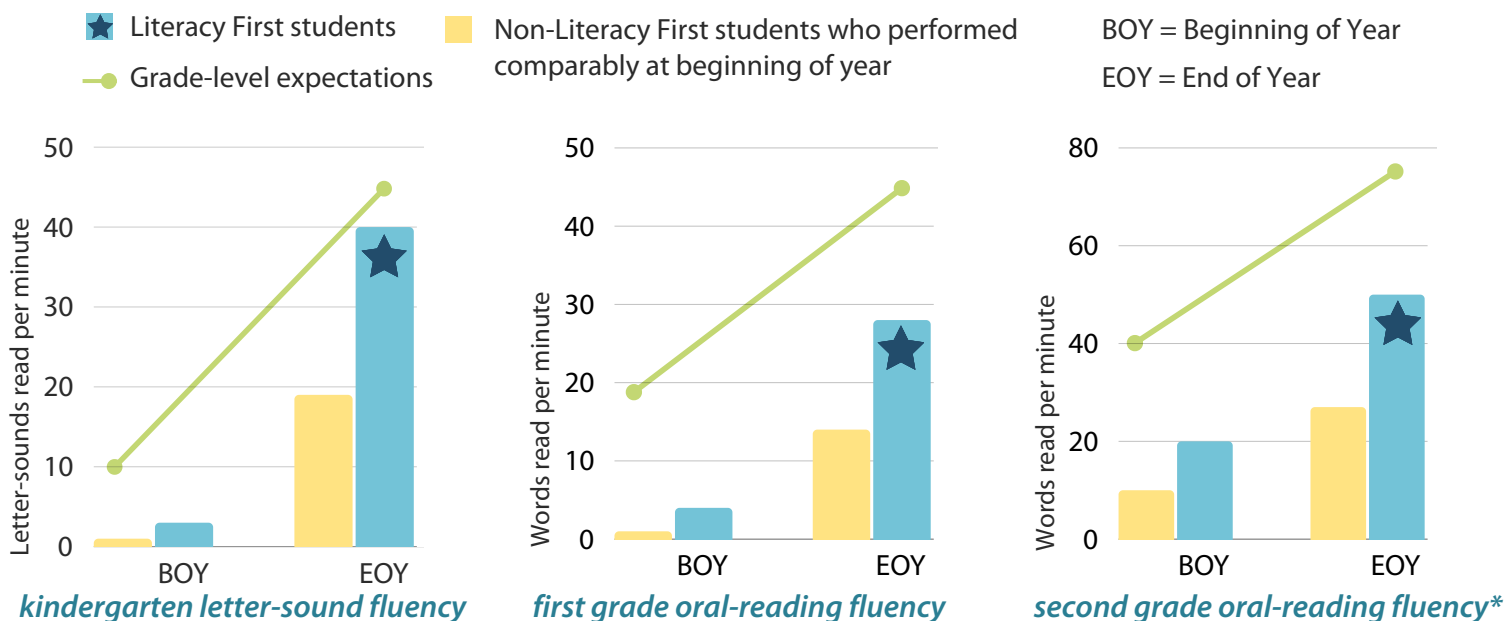
On average, Literacy First students showed 2–3 times the growth on literacy skills assessments compared to their peers who performed similarly at the beginning of the year but did not participate in the program.



students who showed significant, measurable progress toward grade-level goals

Only 3% of students did not show a clear, positive response to the intervention.

average student gains by skill and grade level



*Although reading success in second grade is typically measured in terms of oral-reading fluency, some of our students enter the program without the foundational skills needed to practice fluency. About 33% of second-grade students in Literacy First needed several months of instruction to develop skills typically learned in kindergarten or first grade, such as phonics and decoding. Around 15% did not progress to working on fluency before the end of the year.

the partners we work with

We are grateful for our school district, nonprofit, operational, and funding partners. Our work would not be possible without their support. This past school year, we offered our program at 42 elementary schools in partnership with five school districts—Austin Achieve Public Schools, Austin Independent School District, Del Valle Independent School District, Elgin Independent School District, and Wayside Schools—and one nonprofit organization—Chattanooga 2.0.



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.



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

new partner spotlight

Chattanooga 2.0

This year, we piloted our Capacity Building Model outside of Central Texas. We offered our program at an elementary school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in partnership with local nonprofit [Chattanooga 2.0](#). Director of Literacy and Student Strategy Brandon Hubbard-Heitz shared, "Literacy First's tutoring model is a key strategy in our effort to build a robust and aligned system of literacy supports for children beginning from birth at home, in school, and across the community." This successful pilot led the Hamilton County School District to extend the model to 11 additional schools and to staff two District Lead Coaches and 33 additional paraprofessional tutors for the 2024–2025 academic year.

Image: Chattanooga Times Free Press (Olivia Ross)



the tutors powering our program

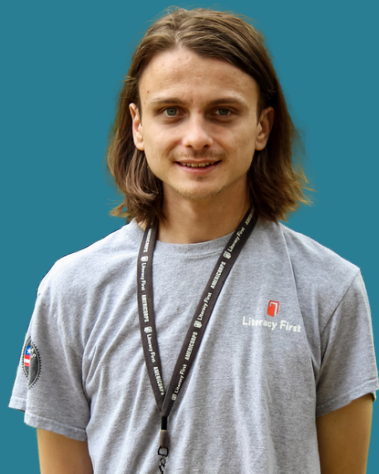


paraprofessional tutors

In our Capacity Building Model, our district and nonprofit partners directly hire paraprofessional tutors. This year, our partners employed 50 paraprofessional Literacy First tutors; next year, we expect this number to grow to 90. Most tutors in these roles have deep community connections, and a few had been elementary students in the schools where they now work. These personal connections enhance the tutor-student relationships, leading to a positive impact on student outcomes.

AmeriCorps members

We have been a proud AmeriCorps grantee since our program's inception. Each year, we train about 75 AmeriCorps members who dedicate a year of national service as tutors, delivering our high-impact intervention in schools. Members may serve up to four terms through AmeriCorps and have access to opportunities for career growth and exploration. Our member return rate has risen to 40% in recent years, surpassing our average of about 33% over the past 10 years.



2023–2024 tutor facts

hours of literacy instruction provided to students	103,264
number of Literacy First tutors	125
average number of students each tutor taught	15
age range of tutors	18–78
number hired locally	80%+



Images: Literacy First

former tutor spotlight

Aaron Remotigue

Aaron served as an AmeriCorps member for four terms (2018–2023) with Literacy First, the maximum allowed through AmeriCorps. As a tutor, Aaron rediscovered his love of libraries through a placement with a school librarian for summer school and through a volunteer partnership with Austin Public Library. During that time, he earned his master's degree in Library and Information Sciences from the University of Southern Mississippi. Aaron now applies skills he learned through Literacy First in his role as an adult services librarian at the Arlington Public Library in Arlington, Texas.

current tutor spotlight

Charlotte Blanch

Charlotte recently completed her third year as an AmeriCorps member with Literacy First. Although she initially became a tutor due to her interest in teaching youth photography, her service inspired her to become a reading interventionist. She shared, "Literacy First offered a good opportunity to learn more about how readers learned, which then helped me strengthen my education advocacy voice. It's been a life-changing experience that has not only affected my and my family's life, but it has also changed the lives of the young learners I've had the privilege to tutor." Charlotte is now pursuing dyslexia therapist training and hopes to become a Certified Academic Language Therapist.

how to get involved



Images: Literacy First

Due to limited capacity and funding, 66% of students who qualified for our program did not have the opportunity to work with a Literacy First tutor this school year. Your support as a donor, tutor, or partner helps more students benefit from one-to-one tutoring to develop their literacy skills.

2,835

students who qualified for our program but did not have the opportunity to participate



donate

In honor of our 30th anniversary, we set an ambitious goal to raise over \$30,000 in individual donations next year. Your gift to Literacy First helps students achieve their reading goals and sets them up for long-term success in school and in life. [Visit our website to give](#) a one-time donation or pledge a sustaining gift to help us grow lifelong readers.



become a tutor or refer someone you know

We are always searching for English and Spanish speakers to join our corps of early childhood literacy tutors! If you are interested in working with children, pursuing a career in education, entering the nonprofit sector, or looking for ways to engage in your community, consider serving as an AmeriCorps member with Literacy First or refer someone who may be a good fit for this role. [Visit our website to learn more.](#)



partner with us

We aim to develop new partnerships with school districts and other organizations that are interested in adopting our program. If you think Literacy First can help your community reach its literacy goals, call us at 512-232-2286 or send an email to support.literacyfirst@austin.utexas.edu.



thank you for your generous support

Whether you are a former or current tutor, donor or funder, advocate for our program, or connected in another way to Literacy First, we are so grateful for your support. Thank you for advancing our mission to teach young children how to read, equipping them to excel in life and realize their dreams.



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Texas Domestic Slave Project at UT Austin and Literacy First Tutor Alum
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thank you, partners

AmeriCorps Central Texas
Austin PBS, KLRU-TV
BookSpring
E3 Alliance
Friends of the Children
Greater Austin Reading Coalition
The Meadows Center for Preventing
Educational Risk
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Image: Literacy First (Skylar Joseph)

