

Impact Report 2025





Literacy First

Literacy First teaches young children how to read, equipping them to excel in life and realize their dreams. We view literacy as a human right and envision a world in which every child has the opportunity to become a confident, lifelong reader.



The University of Texas at Austin Charles A. Dana Center

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.

2024–2025 School Year Highlights

Reaching More Students

11,374 students screened for reading difficulties

2,338 students in the Literacy First program

84% of students showed accelerated improvement in targeted reading skills



Growing With Our Collaborators



173 tutors



55 schools, including 16 new sites



8 school districts

We already have students that have benefited so greatly from [the Literacy First program], and so the goal is to expand that across to other campuses where we have this similar need.

—Sonja Howard, Former Chief Academic Officer, Georgetown ISD



Achieving Milestones

- Celebrated 30 years of teaching children how to read.
- Shared powerful former tutor testimonies at the Texas Book Festival in honor of our anniversary.
- Highlighted in [The Austin Chronicle](#) for our work in Austin Independent School District (Austin ISD).
- Awarded the Tutoring Program Design Badge from the [National Student Success Accelerator](#) at Stanford University.



Thank You

This year was full of both exciting accomplishments and challenges for Literacy First.

In the fall, we kicked off celebrations in honor of our 30th anniversary. Tutors from the past three decades shared uplifting stories about how their students' lives—as well as their own—were positively impacted by our work. These moments of connection reminded us of why we do what we do.



Federal funding disruptions affected over 40% of AmeriCorps programs in the spring; however, Literacy First was not directly impacted by those cuts. Some school districts also faced difficult budgeting decisions and scaled back Literacy First support. Despite these challenges, we were able to begin new collaborations with pilot programs at Georgetown Independent School District (ISD) in Central Texas and Lincoln Elementary School in Salinas, California.

Both difficulties as well as opportunities pushed us to think about expanding our work in different contexts and offering adaptations of our signature tutoring program to better address differing literacy needs. As we prepare for the 2025–2026 school year, we are grateful for and inspired by our community. We remain hopeful that your support will guide us through future challenges. Looking forward, we are excited to thoughtfully deepen our impact and dream of new ways to improve literacy outcomes for students across the nation.

All my best,

Dr. Claire Hagen Alvarado

Literacy First Director

Thanks to our 2024–2025 implementation collaborators

- Austin Achieve Public Schools
- Austin ISD
- Chattanooga 2.0
- Del Valle ISD
- Elgin ISD
- Georgetown ISD
- Hamilton County Schools
- KIPP Austin Obras
- Lincoln Elementary (of Salinas City Elementary School District)

Thanks to our advisory board

- Elizabeth Bayer Morgan (Chair)
- Tracy Benedict
- John Costilla
- Dr. Paul Cruz
- Marisol Foster
- Dax González
- Kristi Jordan
- Linda Leibfarth
- Holly McIntush-Mobley
- Sheena Moore
- Jeff Pinsker
- Rhona Willams London

What We Do

Literacy First collaborates with public schools and community organizations to offer high impact early childhood literacy tutoring to emerging readers.

Our tutoring program is multilingual, providing support in English or Spanish, which allows children the opportunity to develop literacy skills in their primary language of instruction.

Our expert staff trains educators—including paraprofessional tutors, instructional coaches, and teachers—to support primarily students in kindergarten, first, and second grades (K–2) in their reading development.

Key Aspects of Literacy First Instruction



We teach our **proprietary curricula**, *Alma del lector* and *Literacy First Phonics*, which have been carefully researched and refined through practice.

We use **custom-built data and assessment systems** that allow educators to track student progress and make data-informed decisions for instruction.



We believe in a **coaching framework**—drawing on individual strengths and expertise and building educator capacity—to implement our program.

We embrace a **culturally sustaining approach** to affirm students' identities and ways of knowing, while creating a strong foundation for literacy.



[Their] tutor may be the one adult that the student sees one-on-one for 30 minutes in their entire day. It's this beautiful moment. You'll see our students look at the clock—they know when their tutor is going to come and they're sitting and waiting. Knowing that they are going to have that one-on-one adult attention and reading intervention, that's their moment to shine and be with that adult.

—Sara Tapia, Assistant Principal, Padrón Elementary, Austin ISD

How We Do It

Our signature, one-to-one tutoring program is at the center of what we do. This program is implemented through two different funding, staffing, and coaching structures.

AmeriCorps

Since 1994, Literacy First has been a continuous AmeriCorps grantee. AmeriCorps is a federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges. AmeriCorps Texas programs are administered by OneStar and Literacy First is part of the AmeriCorps Central Texas collaborative. Each year, we recruit and train around 75 AmeriCorps members, who commit to nine months of national service as Literacy First tutors.

Capacity Building

In 2018, Literacy First created the Capacity Building Model to replicate our program in school districts and build community capacity to address early literacy needs. With this model, Literacy First trains staff employed by school districts or community organizations to deliver our intervention. Our collaborators operate the program independently through gradual release of responsibilities. Last year, we worked with seven coaches and 98 paraprofessional tutors through our Capacity Building work.

Why We Do It

Because students who read proficiently by third grade are much more likely to excel in school and have better outcomes in other aspects of their lives, Literacy First equips students with essential reading skills and affirms their right to read, increasing the agency, access, and quality of life of readers and their communities.

Students who learn to read by age eight experience:

- stronger relationships, better self-regulation, increased confidence.
- fewer behavioral challenges, more classroom engagement.
- higher test scores, reduced retention, better performance in math and science.
- improved memory, reasoning, and problem solving.
- greater likelihood of high school graduation, college graduation and career success.

[The students] are more engaged. They're more likely to answer questions. They're able to complete tasks with less support than they were in the beginning. The teachers are seeing that kids are able to use those skills across content, which is just a dream. It's the hope.

—Greg Wilkey, Principal, East Side Elementary, Hamilton County Schools



Our Unique Approach



English or Spanish Instruction

Literacy First is the only high impact early literacy intervention in the U.S. to offer tutoring in both English and Spanish. In Texas, schools with 20 or more emergent bilingual students per grade level are required to provide bilingual programming. We provide literacy tutoring in English or Spanish based on each student's instructional context and language background to complement dual language classrooms. This approach allows students to develop as both bilingual and biliterate learners.

Individualized Support

Each tutor works with an average of 15 students throughout the year, delivering one-to-one instruction for 30 minutes daily, five days a week. Our human-centric approach encourages tutors to build relationships with students and the school community. Of 124 respondents surveyed, 93% of teachers and administrators agreed that Literacy First helped students become more confident or enjoy reading more.

How can we better support students?

In the schools we collaborate with, 60% of K–2 students did not read proficiently for their grade level and qualified for our program this year. Yet due to limited funding and capacity, only 34% of those students received tutoring.

An additional 3,700 students could have benefited from Literacy First tutoring. Help us grow our capacity to serve more students by donating today. As an independently funded program, your gift is critical to help us provide students with the support they need to thrive as readers.

Visit literacyfirst.org/donate to give the gift of reading.



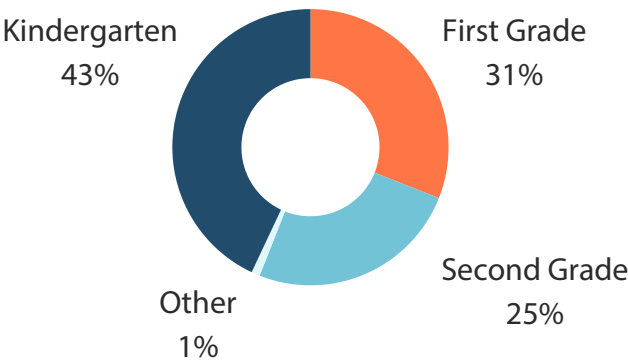
The Power of the Paraprofessional

Literacy First tutors come to the program with a range of professional and personal experiences: Some are retired educators who enjoy working one-to-one with students, others are aspiring teachers, and some have no background in the education field. In the 30 years of operating Literacy First, we have learned that with comprehensive training and mentorship, paraprofessional tutors have the ability to become as effective as reading specialists.

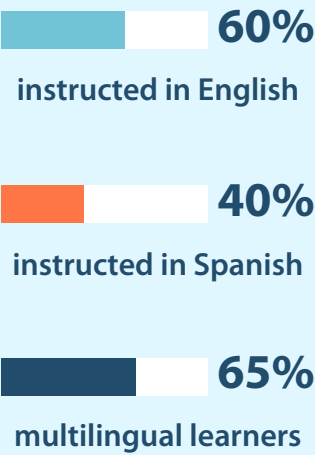
The Students We Teach

2,338 students participated in one-to-one Literacy First tutoring this school year

Grade Levels

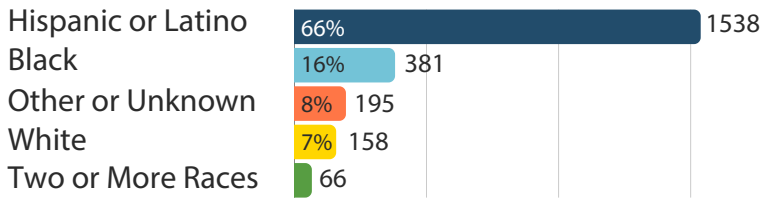


Language Backgrounds



Additional Characteristics

Race or Ethnicity



About 82% of students in the program qualified for free or reduced lunch.



[Marcel’s] reading assessments improved steadily. During one session, he correctly identified all of the sight words we had previously reviewed together. It was an incredible moment to see my student—who had once been overwhelmed by the alphabet—now actively use it in his second language.

—Andrea Villegas, Literacy First tutor

[Read Andrea’s story](#) about working with Marcel on our blog.



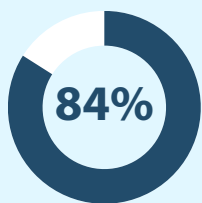
Locations



Student Outcomes

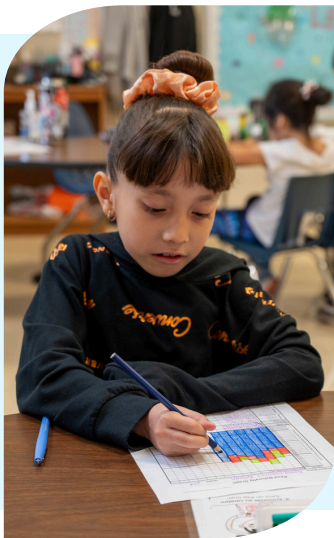
How We Collect Data

At the beginning, middle, and end of year, Literacy First tutors test most K–2 students at each campus to determine which students are eligible for our intervention and to gather comparison data. Once enrolled in the program, students take weekly assessments to evaluate targeted skills. Tutors and coaches monitor their progress and adjust instruction as needed. Students “graduate” from the program if they meet basic proficiency standards for their grade level before the end of the school year.



84% of Literacy First students exceeded the expected growth rate for their grade level.

Students in the program showed 2–3 times the growth on grade-level skills assessments compared to students who qualified for the program but did not receive support (comparison group). See average student growth across the year by grade level and skill below.

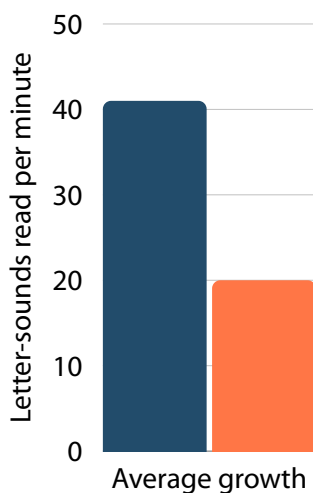


Literacy First students

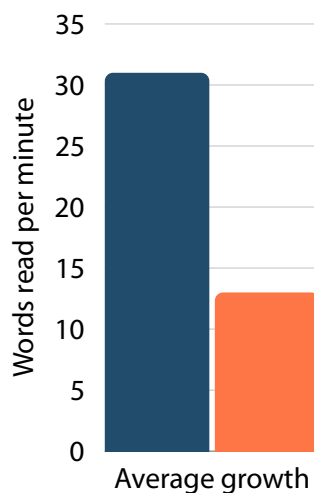


Comparison group

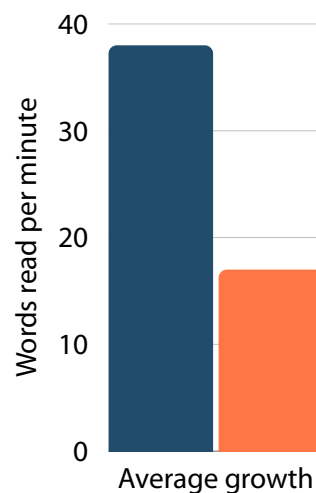
Kindergarten Letter-Sound Fluency



First Grade Oral-Reading Fluency



Second Grade Oral-Reading Fluency



Me gusta trabajar con Ms. Diana porque me enseña a leer mucho. Y me gusta que ella me enseña a leer mucho porque yo aprendo más. [I like to work with Ms. Diana because she teaches me to read a lot. And I like that she teaches me to read a lot because I learn more.]

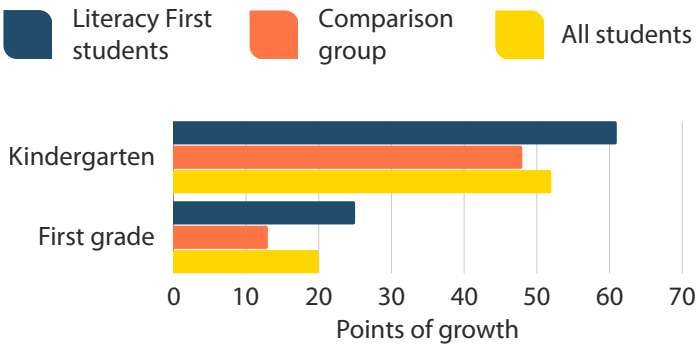
—Literacy First student

Independent Evaluations

Our nonprofit collaborator, [Chattanooga 2.0](#), evaluated the efficacy of Literacy First tutors in Hamilton County Schools. Findings showed that from fall to spring, Literacy First students experienced significantly greater growth than their peers who did not participate in our program. In Hamilton County Schools, most students who qualified for a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention received it, highlighting Literacy First's effectiveness compared to other interventions.

[An analysis conducted by Austin ISD's Campus and District Accountability team](#) indicated that, one to two years after participating in our program, students performed better on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading tests than a control group who did not receive our intervention. More Literacy First students reached the "exceeds," "meets," and "approaches," grade-level tiers for reading on the 2023 and 2024 STAAR reading assessments in both English and Spanish, compared to control groups who did not receive Literacy First tutoring.

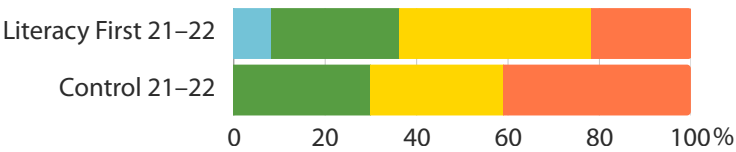
Average Student Growth From Fall to Spring in Hamilton County Schools



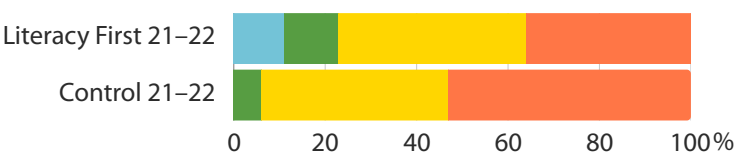
Austin ISD 2023 STAAR Reading Performance Comparisons

Exceeds Meets Approaches Does not meet

Received support and tested in English



Received support and tested in Spanish



I have seen tremendous student reading growth every year with Literacy First supporting our students. Literacy First is able to give more direct attention to students during their sessions and close any reading/phonics gaps that students may have. I have seen countless students graduate out of the program and successfully reading at grade level.

—Teacher, Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary,
Del Valle ISD

Sustainable Growth and Future Work

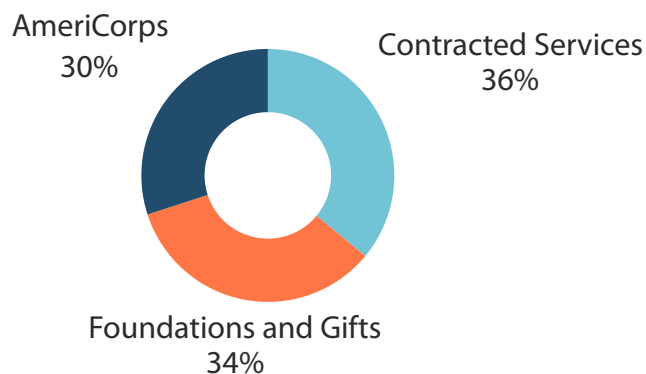
Funding Highlights

Literacy First's work is made possible by the generous support of local foundations, corporate sponsors, and community members who share our commitment to early learning and student success.

This year, we celebrated several fundraising successes:

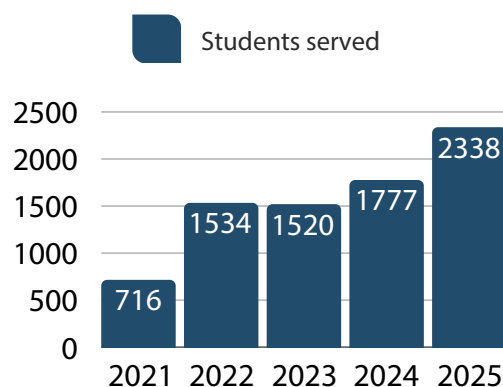
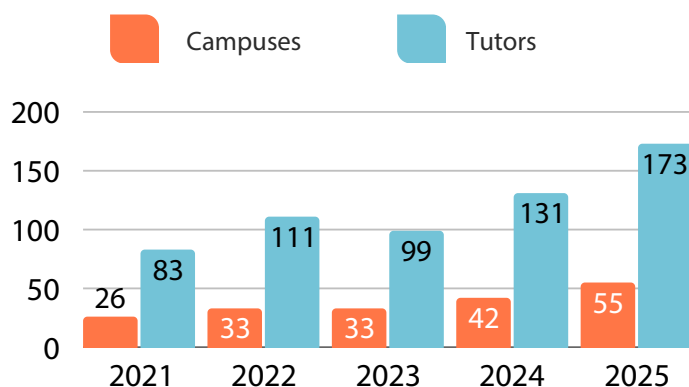
- Received a transformative \$750,000 multiyear grant from the Moody Foundation's Education M-Pact Fund.
- Maintained AmeriCorps funding despite cuts.
- Raised over \$47,000 during our end of year campaign.

Sources



Thank you to all of our supporters who contributed this year!

Recent Growth



Looking Forward

Literacy First is adapting its signature tutoring model to meet collaborator needs by:

- Accommodating the program for one-to-two and small group instructional settings.
- Honing expertise with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to further assist our schools with data-driven instruction, progress monitoring, and cohesion across tiers.
- Researching and improving the social and emotional learning (SEL) outcomes for students in our program.
- Expanding our offerings of curricular resources in English and Spanish.

We are proud of our recent expansion to new districts, which allowed Literacy First to reach more students than in previous years. We hope to sustain this growth moving forward. Thank you for your support as we continue to grow more successful readers!

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