HILL FOR LITERACY



SCHOOL YEAR 2025-26

ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Colleagues,

School Year 2025-26 was a landmark year for HILL For Literacy. We won multiple grants for new and innovative projects such as *From Seedlings to Scale* from the Institute of Education Sciences to support HILL Online Advisor development and from the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation to fund our work with East Longmeadow Public Schools and Springfield College. We fostered several promising new partnerships, and sponsored two summits focused on literacy and justice, a topic that goes to the very heart of our work.

We were thrilled to continue our partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on the Literacy Launch Institutes, a large-scale effort to spread evidence-based early literacy practices across the state. We also partnered with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) on their Comprehensive Literacy Initiative: Literacy Planning for PreK-12 Districts and Early Childhood CBOs to support Literacy Leadership Teams in PreK-12. Plus, we secured new state vendor approvals in Iowa and Nebraska.

Through our HILL Online platform alone we served over 9,000 teachers from 126 districts in School Year 2025-26. Thanks to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) *From Seedlings to Scale* grant, we were able to fund development of HILL Online Advisor. This innovative AI-powered tool is designed to provide just-in-time support that helps educators understand students' reading needs, connect assessment data to targeted instructional plans, and monitor intervention effectiveness over time.

In January 2026 the HILL participated in a unique literacy summit in Park City, UT during the Sundance Film Festival. The summit brought together experts from all over the country for eight panel discussions on research, dyslexia, storytelling, film, artificial intelligence, policy, classroom practice, and leadership. We built off that momentum again in June 2026 for two days of panels during the Tribeca Film Festival that included thought leaders and advocates from education, justice reform, technology, and policy on Literacy and Justice. We look forward to deepening these conversations and the partnerships that have arisen from both summits in the coming year.

In School Year 2026-27 we'll be continuing our state partnerships to reach more teachers and students through their statewide initiatives. We're thrilled to be working on Project REACH with RIDE and the CT Research and Innovation in Literacy Intervention project with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), both of which are funded by federal grants from the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program. We anticipate more exciting developments on HILL Online Advisor, all with an eye to provide educators in our schools with the right tools and knowledge to ensure their students receive the evidence-based instruction they need to learn and grow.

As a nonprofit, our organization's ability to continue operations is due in part to the generous donations of community members and foundations. We don't take the challenge of teaching kids to read lightly: according to the 2024 NAEP results, 69% of 4th graders fail to read at grade level each year and we know that we can help them. For nearly 25 years we've changed students' lives by translating decades of education research into practice through the installation of evidence-based systems and structures and providing targeted professional learning in our partner schools. Your support can have a tangible, meaningful impact on the lives of children in HILL schools and help us reach even more students each year. Donations can be made via our website www.hillforliteracy.org or by contacting the HILL at 1-888-860-0190.

Best Wishes,

Darci Burns, Ph.D.
Executive Director





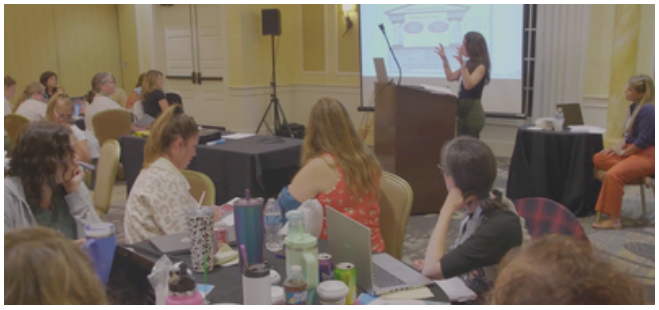
10,515
Teachers Trained





608
Schools Reached

236K+
Students Impacted



YEARLY STATS

HILL ONLINE ADVISOR



The HILL received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) *From Seedlings to Scale* grant program which invests in innovative ideas as they grow from seedlings to scalable solutions. HILL Online Advisor represents the first step in the development of the next generation of the HILL's award-winning HILL Online solution.

HILL Online Advisor, aimed at teachers of grades K-2, is envisioned as an integrated, user-friendly interface supporting teachers in: (a) evaluating students' current reading abilities; (b) linking student assessment data to instructional recommendations; (c) enabling teacher access to targeted professional learning resources; (d) monitoring student progress and intervention efficacy; and (e) assessing user engagement with recommended practice, as powered by the engagement of educators.

HILL Online Advisor enables ongoing, job-embedded learning with real-time alerts, recommendations, microlearning, and seamless communication as part of classroom routines. The platform unifies evidence-based practices, professional learning, instruction, and workflow management, ensuring progress for both teachers and students. The system can flexibly set school-wide expectations, monitor implementation, track learning, and offer timely support; teachers receive actionable insights, resources, and opportunities to identify needs. The system documents the full cycle—from screening to action steps and professional development—ensuring continuity of learning for students.

Over the past year, we've developed a working prototype based on feedback from surveys and focus groups conducted with over 320 educators. In the prototype, a teacher moves from preparing and reviewing data to assigning instructional focus to grouping for intervention and planning next steps, all while being provided with access to just right, just in time support. The product is designed to organize the work, surface recommendations, and keep educators in control of decisions. The design is grounded in what educators told us they want the most: a unified dashboard, automated grouping, and just in time recommendations.

HILL Online Advisor is a breakthrough because it's thoughtfully crafted as a unified support hub that gives teachers guidance connected to actual instructional decisions.

LITERACY LAUNCH INSTITUTES

Our latest statewide project is the Literacy Launch Institutes in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Rennie Center, and RMC. Literacy Launch Institutes is a multi-year initiative designed to spread powerful, evidence-based early literacy practices that celebrate Massachusetts students' cultural and linguistic strengths. The Institutes provide 4 days of free in-person professional learning with 5 differentiated tracks for educators teaching students from PK-3. Educators who complete an Institute have the opportunity to earn a stipend, PDPs, and optional Graduate credit.

In SY2025-26, we held 2 summer institutes and 2 additional institutes during the school year, serving 680 teachers from 296 schools around the state.

In addition to offering 5 dedicated learning tracks to meet a variety of educator needs, Literacy Launch Institutes include more learning opportunities beyond the four initial days of training:

- Follow-up Coaching for School Teams
- Free Orton-Gillingham Training
- Fellows Program
- Community of Practice

Watch Video

After the first year into the initiative, the Literacy Launch Institutes are already having an incredible impact.

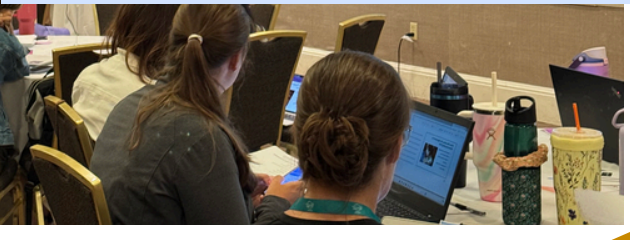
680
Teachers Trained

296
Schools Reached

160
Districts Reached

19
Ed Prep Programs





DAVIS FOUNDATION GRANTS

THE IRENE E. & GEORGE A. Davis Foundation

HILL for Literacy is deeply grateful to The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation for investing in two important projects of which we are a key partner.

In spring 2026, the HILL and East Longmeadow Public Schools partnered on an Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation Foundation-funded initiative to implement a coherent, evidence-based K-3 literacy model across the district. The HILL serves as the professional learning and implementation partner, providing project management, leadership development, and instructional coaching aligned to evidence-based reading practices and MTSS. East Longmeadow Public Schools is leading local implementation through strong site-based leadership, data-driven decision-making, and instructional support. Together, this partnership is strengthening leadership systems, enhancing instructional practice, and building lasting professional capacity to improve early literacy outcomes for students across Hampden County.

In addition, the Springfield College Department of Education was recently awarded a grant from the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation to support its early literacy preparation programs. The HILL will partner with the College to provide professional learning for teacher candidates focused on curriculum literacy and the effective implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). The training will be embedded into the required coursework during the 2026-27 academic year.

The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation is a Massachusetts-based private family foundation that supports nonprofits in Hampden County to improve quality of life, with a particular focus on children, youth, and families. Its funding priorities include early childhood, literacy, education, youth development, and economic opportunity, guided by a long-term, holistic approach that strengthens both individual outcomes and community well-being.



ESSA TIER 2

Read Report

An independent evaluation by LXD Research of the HILL implementation model concluded that it meets the requirements for Tier 2, Moderate Evidence (Multiple Studies) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence framework.

The evaluation reviewed two studies for school-level student reading outcomes and educator learning outcomes. Both studies demonstrated statistically significant results, leading to the ESSA Tier 2 validation.

STUDY 1 · QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL

Connecticut Literacy Model — Tier 1 Classroom Reading Instruction

Coyne et al. (2024), published in *The Elementary School Journal*. A successive cohort design across 686 K–3 students in four high-need Connecticut schools, evaluated on DIBELS 8th Edition composites.

KEY FINDING

↑ +3.5 ↑ +5.6 Year 2

additional months of reading growth

STUDY 2 · RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED

Science of Reading PD Series — Paraprofessional Knowledge and Self-Efficacy

Melton (2026), University of Connecticut. A randomized waitlist control trial with 69 paraprofessionals across three Pacific Northwest districts, paired with focus group interviews.

KEY FINDING

↑ +22 *self-efficacy* ↑ +39 *SOR knowledge*

percentile point gain vs. waitlist controls

Source: LXD Research

STRATFORD, CT PARTNERSHIP

Recently, Stratford Public Schools was selected by Business View Magazine to showcase in their August 2026 issue along with 17 other schools across the country. All of these districts are focused on exciting, innovative ways to serve their students. As a key partner with Stratford Public Schools, HILL for Literacy was highlighted in the article as well.

Read Article

Our work with Stratford Public Schools began with the HILL MTSS Model: the professional development, structures, and strategies that ensure schools can implement multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) effectively for students with diverse needs. They also engaged in professional learning in the Science of Reading across the district, followed by classroom-based coaching from HILL facilitators to support educators as they learned evidence-based practices and aligned them with their newly adopted HQIM. Our model operationalizes the standard MTSS framework that many schools struggle with into a powerful tool for literacy instruction, an approach which has been continuously validated through peer-reviewed research. **The results? In just one school year, the percentage of Stratford's 1st-6th grade students reading grade level passages increased from 44% to 51%.**



DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT
DANBURY, CT

Source: LXD Research

Danbury Public Schools—Connecticut's most multilingual district—partnered with HILL for Literacy to build a consistent, science of reading-aligned approach across 13 elementary schools and changed the trajectory for its youngest readers. With the highest percentage of multilingual learners in the state, Danbury Public Schools knew that improving literacy outcomes would take more than a new curriculum or isolated professional development sessions. District leaders needed a consistent instructional approach across schools, along with a stronger shared understanding of the science of reading.

"Teachers are working incredibly hard, and now they're seeing the results in their classrooms. When students are more proficient and engaged, it feels good to know that all of that effort is making a difference."

—**Mackenzie Merati**, *Elementary Literacy Supervisor*, Danbury Public Schools

The HILL has a unique relationship with the Connecticut State Department of Education and University of Connecticut called the CT Literacy Model (CTLM). Through CTLM, Danbury chose HILL for Literacy because the support felt tailored to the district's specific goals and realities rather than a one-size-fits-all model.

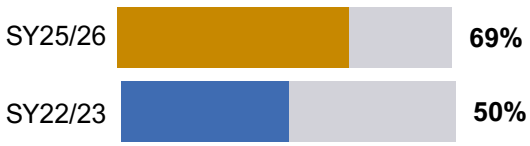
Beginning in 2024–25, teachers completed asynchronous learning modules grounded in the science of reading, followed by in-classroom visits with HILL facilitators to immediately apply strategies with students. This component quickly became one of the most valuable parts of the partnership. Danbury also expanded the work beyond classroom teachers. Building leaders participated in administrator awareness training, district leadership teams met regularly with facilitators, and the district offered a voluntary summer academy so teachers could deepen their understanding and receive additional support.

As implementation continued, district leaders began noticing changes not just in student outcomes, but in classroom practice and teacher confidence. Over time, the district also saw increased collaboration across schools as teachers developed a more unified understanding of effective literacy instruction. Now, the district's literacy data shows meaningful gains across grade levels, particularly in kindergarten and first grade.

KINDERGARTEN PROFICIENCY



GRADE 1 PROFICIENCY



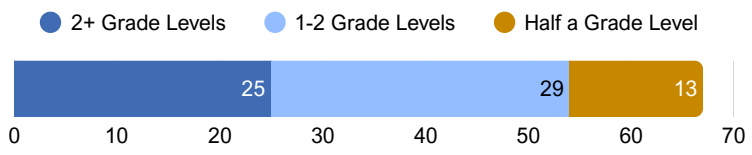


STORYSHARES PARTNERSHIP

HILL For Literacy is partnering with publisher Storyshares to amplify our goal of tackling adolescent literacy. By pairing the HILL's evidence-based training and coaching designed specifically for educators in grades 6-12 with Storyshares's LIFT (Literacy Intervention For Teens) curriculum, we can provide integrated, wraparound support for secondary schools to meet the diverse needs of every reader.

LIFT grew out of a joint partnership in Summer 2024 on a reading pilot program initiated by Hope For Youth & Families for middle school students in Springfield, MA during their summer program. . Storyshares provided high-interest books made for teens at an appropriate reading level, while HILL for Literacy provided training and coaching for the staff.

Overall, 70% of students in the summer program increased their reading level by at least half a grade or more compared to students who did not participate.



Watch Video

> I started going to coaching sessions with the HILL and StoryShares, and I started getting lessons from them and learning how it all worked. And seeing that for the first time in my career there was a solution to help those students who were disengaged. Sometimes they wouldn't even open the book because they were so distraught and struggling that they didn't have the motivation to try. **I had those students now sitting next to me flying through books.**
>
> —**Samantha Krzyzanowski**, *Director of Innovative Reading*, Hope For Youth & Families



4
Weeks

60
Hours of Instruction

11
Instructors and Coaches

44
Students

LITERACY SUMMITS DURING SUNDANCE & TRIBECA

In January 2026, the HILL helped organize the Literacy Summit during Sundance which convened leaders from education, health, media, technology, and policy at the Heretic Films Lounge for a first-of-its-kind conversation. Against the Sundance Film Festival's creative backdrop, the Summit united voices from a cross-section of education sectors around a bold and urgent idea: literacy as a public health imperative.

Across four intentionally curated Acts, the expert panels wove together research, dyslexia, storytelling, film, artificial intelligence, policy, classroom practice, and leadership—demonstrating how interconnected these fields truly are. As one attendee reflected, "People talk about breaking silos down all the time—today we did it."

Then in June 2026, the New York City Literacy & Justice Summit built off this success to bring together thought leaders and advocates from education, justice reform, technology, and policy for a unique two days of panels during the Tribeca Film Festival.

We tackled topics such as parent advocacy, the role of AI in education, the importance of community representation in filmmaking with Rudy Valdez and picture books with Malcolm Mitchell, and effective systems to ensure effective instruction. Linking all panels was the power of connection. When we strive to make connections with our students and each other, everyone succeeds.

The last day concluded with a thought-provoking panel on how to transform good advocacy into measurable actions. We look forward to these continued conversations and the partnerships that have arisen from the summits in Tribeca and Sundance as we work toward a common goal: literacy and justice for all.



Watch Panels

OUR SUPPORTERS

KEY PARTNERS

- ATS Hub
- Black & Puerto Rican Caucus of the Connecticut General Assembly
- Boston University Evidence-Based AI Learning (EVAL) Industry Collaborative
- B&W Evaluation
- Center on Teaching and Learning, University of Oregon
- Center for Behavioral Education & Research, University of Connecticut
- Classlink
- Clever
- Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors
- Connecticut State Department of Education
- Crafting Minds
- Educational Consulting Services
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- Hope For Youth & Families
- International MTSS Association
- Institute of Education Sciences
- IRIS
- Literacy How
- LXD Research
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
- National Center on Improving Literacy
- NeuEon, Inc.
- New Hampshire Teaching, Learning, and Leading Association
- Releasing Writers
- The Rennie Center
- Rhode Island Department of Education
- Right to Read CT
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- RTI International
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- Storyshares
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
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- Westfield State University
- YPTC

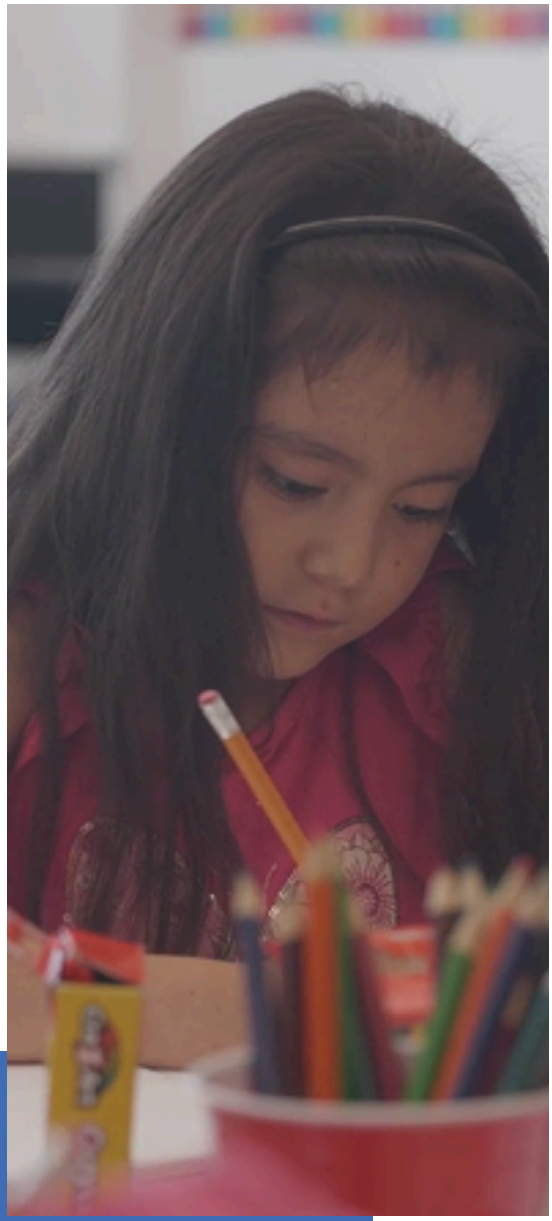
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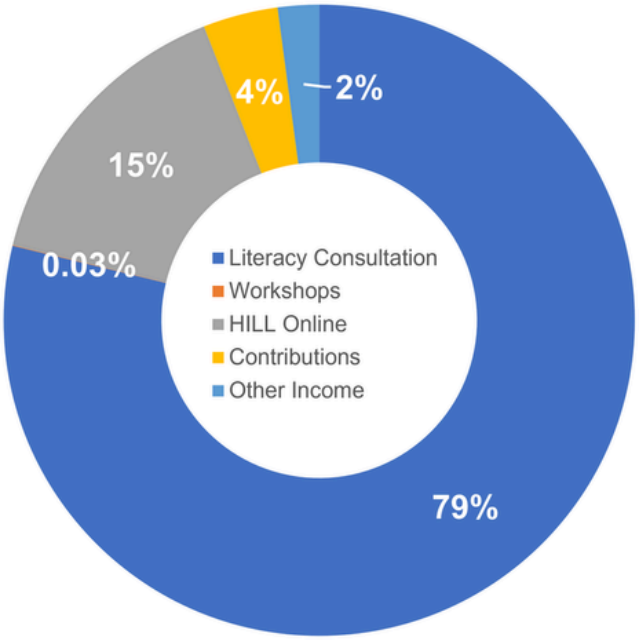


FINANCIALS

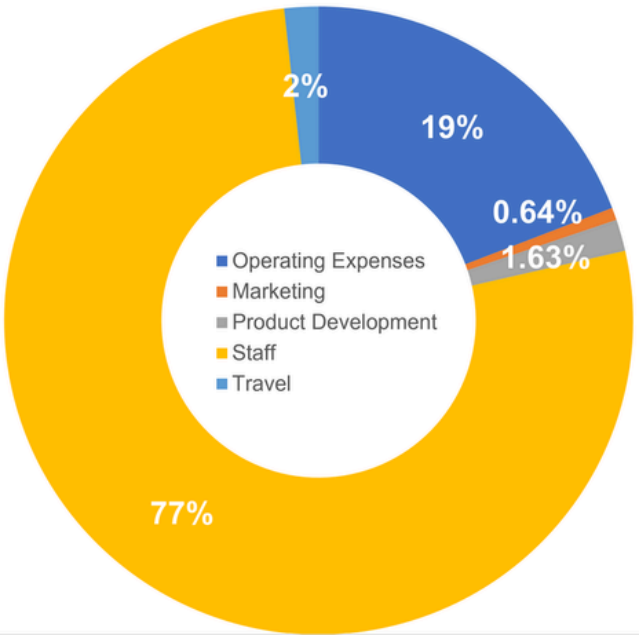
from the FY2025-26 financial audit



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EXPENSES



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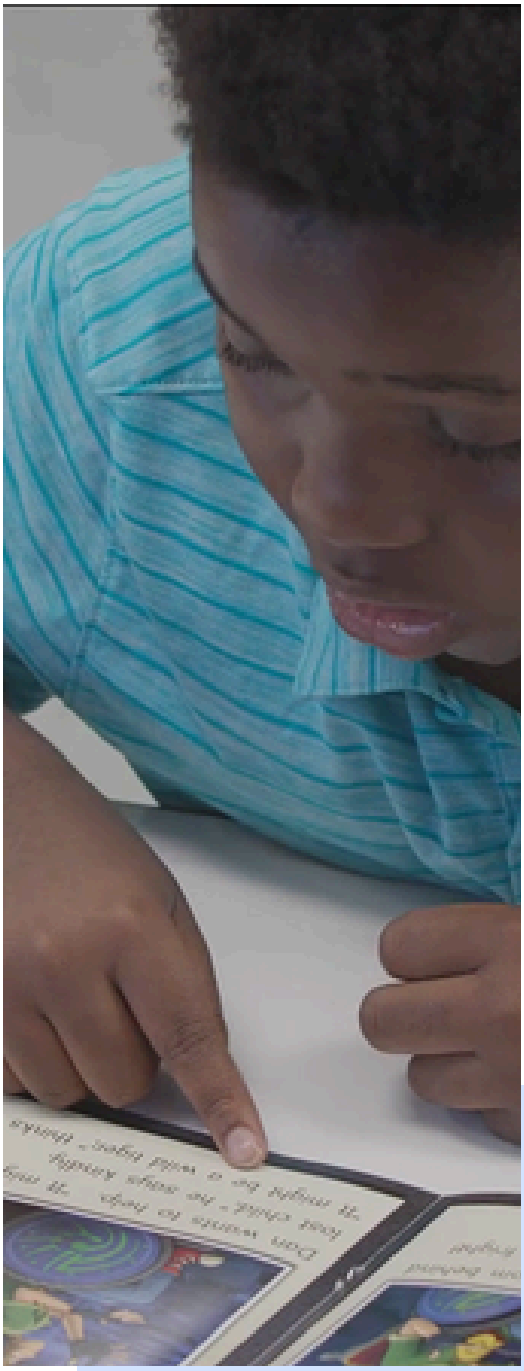
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HILL for Literacy strives to create a world where every child is a reader. We are dedicated to advancing equitable literacy outcomes for PreK-12 students by equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality, responsive literacy instruction that meets the unique needs of every child.



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