



Flexible Secondary Literacy Instruction

A Blueprint for Transforming Student Outcomes in Grades 3+



2025-26 Report

September 2026

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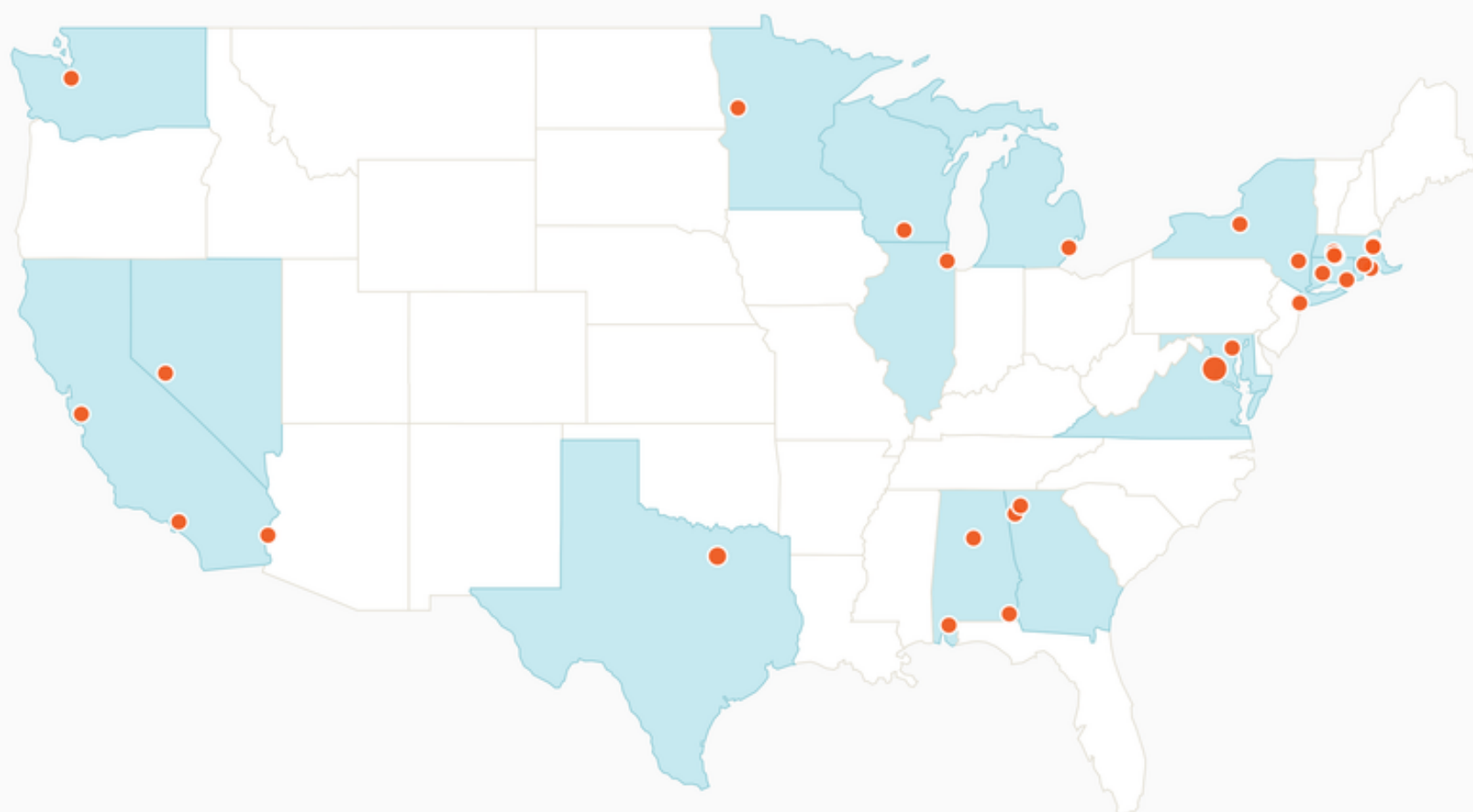
Dear Reader,

At Storyshares, we wake up every day thinking about how to turn **every single student** into an avid reader. The national rhetoric suggests that it's too late for the millions of today's 4th-12th graders who struggle with reading. But at Storyshares, we know this is false – and we set out to prove it. Storyshares is founded on the premise that to motivate and empower struggling readers beyond third grade, we must meet every reader where they are with engaging, age-appropriate content and responsive, rigorous instruction.

In August 2025, Storyshares launched Literacy Intervention for Teens (LIFT). LIFT is a first-of-its-kind intervention curriculum that centers relevant texts for older striving readers, while offering intentional, targeted guidance for secondary educators as they work to empower both literacy growth and grade-level access.

But a great program is only half the answer. The harder question, which we set out to uncover last year, is this: *What does true adolescent literacy transformation looks like in practice?*

What we learned is that transformation doesn't take just one form, and it doesn't need to. LIFT ran as a daily class period and as a six-week after-school pilot, with seventh graders and with high school seniors, in 30-minute, 45-minute, and 60-minute sessions. Different grades, schedules, and staffing... but with one common thread: **every school achieved real transformation.**



16 states

30 school and district partners

9/10 teachers reported significant growth in students' literacy skills

LIFT was built with flexibility at its core, designed to grow and adapt with every reader. While each school's approach to adolescent literacy intervention differed, their stories share a common theme: students growing not only their foundational literacy skills, but also their confidence and motivation as readers.

After a successful first year of implementing LIFT, we are thrilled to expand to more students and educators across the country. **School doesn't end in third grade, and literacy instruction does not need to either.**

Everyone deserves the power to read.

Storyshares reimagines how we approach literacy for older students: empowering readers, writers, and educators to strengthen skills and inspire a love of reading beyond K-3.

The case study that follows highlights snapshots of six distinct contexts where LIFT was implemented last year (2025-26). We've compiled this "report" to showcase some of the bright spots in the adolescent literacy world, and to capture the beautiful but chaotic complexity of secondary literacy transformation in practice.

Behind the scenes at Storyshares, we're a team of former teachers, feverishly trying to build the resources and supports we craved in our classrooms. Everything we make is continuously informed – and inspired! – by the students, educators, and school leaders we work with along the way. Our hope is that this series of snapshots serves as the beginning of a larger conversation around not *"what exists now,"* but instead, *"what could we create, in our wildest dreams? If we took out a blank sheet of paper, a freshly sharpened pencil, and began?"*

In the following pages we will look at the range of contexts where LIFT can be implemented, spotlighting six of our 2025-26 school and district partners to do so. We invite you to view this document as a conversation starter: What do we know works for empowering striving readers? *Let's shout it from the rooftops.* What questions remain? *Let's hash them out.* What ideas or opportunities are yet to be seized? *Let's huddle up to brainstorm.* Together, we have the power to ensure that **every student can become a reader**, no matter their age or background.

Next move is yours!

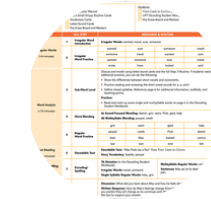
♥ The Storyshares Team



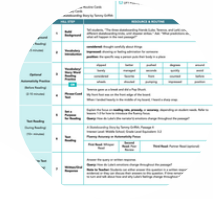
Program Components



Decodable & High-Low Books



75 Decoding Lessons



60 Fluency Lessons



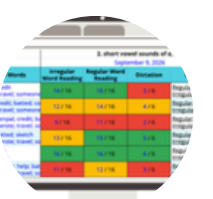
Educator Manual



Visual Vocabulary Routines



Letter-Sound Cards



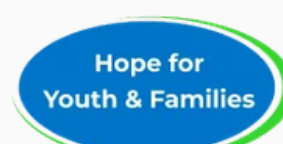
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Small group decoding and fluency intervention for 6th-8th grade students at Montebello middle school

4. Alternative High School



School-wide literacy revamp for 14-22 year old students in an overaged undercredited program

5. High School Extended Day Pilot



Charter school pilot program to open a new 9th grade academy that centers and integrates literacy

6. Summer School



Practicum program where school-year educators learned how to teach LIFT to 4th-5th grade students

An Organic Partnership

LIFT began as a happy accident – the result of a small-scale community collaboration where Storyshares was called in to provide engaging books for a 6-8th grade summer academy. Not only did we prove out the **dramatic growth** possible in a single summer (as many as 5 grade levels), but we saw firsthand what’s possible when we join forces to conquer big challenges. The result? A brand new approach to truly **transform secondary literacy across** the nation. Our design process started with **partnership and community**, not a product roadmap.



**responsive adolescent
literacy intervention**

In the summer of 2024, Hope for Youth & Families brought Storyshares and the HILL for Literacy together to support Springfield Public Schools. The HILL brought evidence-based instructional routines for small-group decoding and fluency practice; Storyshares brought engaging, decodable, and high-low books built for older readers. Both organizations provided professional learning to ensure implementation success and worked to marry the HILL’s instructional routines with Storyshares content. That partnership laid the foundation for what would become LIFT.

What Educators Told Us

As we surveyed teachers and leaders to inform the next phase of LIFT’s development, we heard the same frustrations over and over again.

“I can’t seem to find something that is 1) at the appropriate level and 2) interesting enough to keep the attention of an 8th grader.”

“At the elementary level, there are more intervention opportunities. Our middle/high school virtually have none... We have many students who are reading WELL below grade level.”

“Everything I’m finding is written in a way that I worry will make my students feel like they’re being treated like babies.”

These insights became design principles: LIFT paired systematic foundational skills instruction with books that respect the lived experiences of older students. We did this through incorporating feedback from teachers and students through an iterative and community-engaged process.

Implementation with Integrity

We talk a lot about “implementation with fidelity.” This refers to the idea that interventions should be delivered precisely as designed. “Fidelity” often assumes that there is one right way to implement something (and many wrong ways). In watching implementation unfold across classrooms this past year, we started to think differently about what fidelity actually requires. As one LIFT educator put it, what matters most is **implementation with integrity**: staying true to the intervention’s core while still meeting the needs of the students in front of you. In the stories that follow, we outline what that looks like in practice: **a flexible model built around the realities of real schools.**



High School WIN Period & 1:1 Tutoring



What Students Need

Melissa Whitmore, interventionist at the **School District of Belleville**, matched students to the interventions that filled in their unique skill gaps during WIN (“What I Need”) periods.

At a Glance



Belleville, Wisconsin



Grades 7-8



Melissa Whitmore, MS/HS Interventionist

Implementation



Full school year



2-3 days / week



38 min / session

Why LIFT?

LIFT was the intervention Melissa Whitmore looked forward to teaching most. The books and lessons:

- opened the door to **meaningful conversations**,
- helped build **stronger connections** with students, and
- inspired **curiosity, confidence**, and **learning**

The Results

Students who participated in the LIFT program (decoding pathway) showed growth in foundational literacy skills *and* increased engagement and motivation.



“

My students went from shared reading to wanting to read to me to show off their skills. That's a big deal. Their confidence has exploded. They feel good as readers, especially our students who are second language learners. ~ **Melissa Whitmore, Reading Interventionist**

”

Future Expansion

After a fulfilling and successful first year of implementation, Belleville Schools will continue to implement LIFT and **pilot our LIFT for Newcomers program** to continue to support older striving readers in building strong foundational literacy skills.





Middle School Special Education



Building Student Reading Identities in Grades 5-8

In Jamie's self-contained classroom at Montebello Intermediate School, LIFT Decoding and Fluency lessons didn't just build literacy skills; they helped struggling readers fall in love with books and identify as readers for the first time.

At a Glance



Montebello, California



Grades 6-8



Jamie Class, Special Education Teacher

Implementation



Full school year



5 days / week



45 min / session

Why LIFT?

After years of searching for an intervention program that **respected her students' identities**, Ms. Class was thrilled to find Storyshares for its unique approach to empower older readers, including:

- engaging books that are hard to put down,
- powerful fluency routines and practice texts
- ease of implementation and access

The Results

Students in the LIFT program grew an average of 2 full grade levels in just 6 months



2+

grade levels in
6 months

2+

years in reading
level per iReady



“

I had reluctant readers coming into class asking, 'Are we reading today?' I had struggling readers ask, "Can I read a whole page instead of half?" It has a sheer delight to watch my students fall in love with reading."

~ Jamie Class, Special Education Teacher

”

Future Expansion

Next year, Jamie will **continue to teach LIFT** at Montebello Intermediate School and is excited to partner with the reading interventionist at her school to scale implementation.



Closing the Engagement Gap in an After School Context

Two interventionists at RISE Prep Lower Academy piloted LIFT Decoding and LIFT Fluency in their afterschool program — and it worked. Students showed up excited for intervention, and by the end of the small-scale pilot, RISE Prep decided to make LIFT *the* intervention for their 9th grade program.

At a Glance



**Woonsocket,
Rhode Island**



Grades 9-12



**Molly Tracy-Harris, Literacy Coach
Kasey Slattery, Literacy Coach**

Implementation



**After School
Program; 6 weeks**



3 days / week



35-45 min / session

Why LIFT?

Ms. Slattery needed an intervention program that centered middle schoolers, not one meant for little kids. LIFT stood out from other interventions, with:

- texts that are **user-friendly** and **relatable to students**, leading to
- **increased engagement** and **reading motivation**

The Results

100% of students in the LIFT pilot demonstrated significant growth on the NWEA MAP test, compared to just 60% of their peers outside the program.



100% of LIFT students demonstrated growth

+13 points on NWEA MAP Reading Assessment

“

These texts create that balance through intentional word recognition practice alongside questions and activities that develop the language comprehension strand of the reading rope.

~ Molly Tracy-Harris, Literacy Coach

”

Future Expansion

After a successful six week pilot of LIFT as an after school program for four high school students, Rise Prep Academies will expand the LIFT program to reach **32 students** in the **2026-2027** school year and will be implementing the intervention program during the school day in their 9th grade reading block period.



It's Never Too Late

Phoenix Charter Academy Chelsea, an alternative charter school for students ages 14-22, implemented both LIFT Decoding and LIFT Fluency during their reading period to expand on the growth they had seen in previous years by addressing the specific needs of students at more foundational skill levels.

At a Glance



**Chelsea,
Massachusetts**



Grades 9-12



**Annaliz Lopez, Humanities Teacher
Jedd Cohen, ELD Teacher**

Implementation



Full school year

5 days / week



60 min / session

Why LIFT?

Principal Zoia identified literacy as his #1 priority, recognizing that students' low literacy skills were the biggest barrier to their achievement. He sought a partner who could build on previous growth to also provide:

- Robust **professional learning** & coaching for foundational skills instruction, including assessment alignment & support for content area teachers
- Books that feature characters who serve as **mirrors** to students' experiences, regardless of their reading level

The Results: Phoenix students showed unprecedented literacy skill growth.



60%

improved their scaled
STAR reading scores

14

students placed out of the
intervention program within
7 months



"I had a student test out of the 0-2 reading level (GLE) class and go into the 2-3 reading level classroom, focusing more on fluency. When I am reading aloud, I have students jumping in right away to read after I am done."

~ Chris Fedders, Educator

"The stories feel **authentic** and **relatable**. The language is simpler so students can **access** it, but it is still rich in emotion and connects to things in their real life." ~ Dawn Stockwell, Director of Curriculum

Future Expansion

Next year, Phoenix Charter Academy will expand the LIFT program to all **three** of its schools in Massachusetts: campuses in Springfield, Lawrence and Chelsea. LIFT will reach an **additional 313** students. The network will also be **piloting our LIFT Newcomers** program this fall, providing specific literacy support to adolescent newcomer students.



A Groundbreaking Curriculum

The **Literacy Academy Collective schools** underwent a rigorous selection process to choose a foundational skills curriculum for their first sixth grade class. They chose LIFT and set out to implement it right away, through a summer practicum program at a NYC Public Schools Summer Rising site.

At a Glance



New York, NY



Grades 4-5



Christina Cover, Reading Interventionist
Monique Dols, Reading Interventionist

Implementation



Summer Program
6 weeks



4 days / week



45 mins / session

Why LIFT?

The team at LAC needed a relevant research-based program that fit the following criteria:

- A **foundational skills program** for 6th graders with language-based learning disabilities
- Aligns most closely with the **IES Practice Guide** for Reading Interventions for Grades 4-9
- Includes **instructional routine scripts** for every part of the lesson plan
- Books feature characters, topics, and themes that are **compelling to older students**

The Results



77%

improved their
word reading
scores

+10

average
improvement in
whole words read



“

If you could see what they were like on the first day of intervention, they were like **‘I don’t want to do this’**. And today, **they didn’t want to stop talking about the text** when the period was over, and that’s a testament to your program.

”

Future Expansion

South Bronx Literacy Academy will continue to pilot LIFT with over forty 6th-grade students (in 2026-2027), with the goal of **expanding the program into grades 7 and 8** and, ultimately, to students at LAC’s Central Brooklyn campus within the next 3 years.





The Future is Bright

Learning to read is something we tend to associate with young children. But in reality, only about 30% of US students master literacy in elementary school. The other 2/3 of students – and their teachers – are faced with challenges that can feel insurmountable: no time in the school day schedule; insufficient literacy training for secondary educators; a deep disconnect between students' basic skills and grade level rigor, a dearth of relevant books for struggling readers, and more...

We set out to prove that these barriers – while daunting – are overcomeable. What changes when schools are willing to prioritize foundational literacy development for their older students? While their paths to and conditions for implementation vary, the answer is the same across all these schools: **true transformation**.

The national rhetoric tells us to give up on the students whose growth we cite in this report, because it is “too late” for them to learn to read. At Storyshares, we know this is not true. When we provide older striving readers with the right content and instruction, they excel and add to a toolbox of strategies that they can independently draw from to continue to learn, grow, and achieve their full potential.

A literate society benefits all of us, and it's **within our reach**.

Onward,

Louise Baigelman

Storyshares Founder & CEO

Coming Spring 2027: LIFT for Newcomers

An engaging and culturally responsive structured literacy program built for students whose path to reading is shaped by language acquisition.

Learn more: www.storyshares.org

Made for:



Newcomer ELLs



SLIFE students



Adult education



Contact Us

Reach out to learn about our approach to transforming adolescent literacy.



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www.storyshares.org