



Background and Education Philosophy

Forest Lakes Elementary is a PK–5 school located in Oldsmar, Florida, a large suburban area in North Pinellas County. Pinellas County has a total of 76 elementary schools. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) assigns school grades based on a school's overall student achievement on the Florida Standards assessments in English language arts (ELA) and math; student achievement is measured by the percentage of students performing at levels 3 and above (satisfactory to mastery) on the assessments. We have been rated a B school for the last seven years, and were rated an A school in 2014 and from 2000–2012. Our dedicated teachers and teacher assistants work hard because we believe in providing our students with an equitable and sustainable learning environment; we recognize that literacy is the key to opportunity and success and that elementary education is the foundation that drives this future success.

Evidence-based research on literacy—National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and National Center for Education Sciences under the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), International Literacy Association (ILA), National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, ProLiteracy Organization, Annie E. Casey Foundation, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) among others—overwhelmingly agree that improving literacy is critical for creating a more equitable and productive future for our students. Research indicates that our nation's poverty, unemployment, and crime issues are all tied to low literacy. According to NCES, 130 million Americans (54% of adults between the ages of 16 and 74 years old) read at a sixth-grade level.¹ Florida ranks 42 out of 50 in literacy with 23.7% of adults having low literacy.² We want to reverse this trend here and now for our students and our communities.

Our school's mission is "100% student success." We advocate a positive, equitable, and enriching school environment and we strive to achieve this by increasing community involvement through several channels, such as our parent-teacher organization, Pro-Dads committee, student advisory groups, volunteers, school events—literacy night, math night, student concerts, astronomy star gazing events, stem fairs—and through a policy of open communication. We also work with local businesses to enhance academic opportunities for our students. In addition, we work with the University of South Florida and St. Petersburg College,

providing their students internship opportunities within our school. These college students are great role models, motivating our students to work hard and to value education. Such efforts make our community stronger and prepare our students for lifelong learning and a successful future.

Our Student Population

Forest Lakes Elementary serves all exceptional student populations including students with hearing and visual impairments, specific learning disorders, speech disorders, autism, Section 504 rehabilitation plans, giftedness, and English language learners (ELL). The most current data available from NCES in 2018 ranked Florida as having the third highest ELL student population in the nation with 282,023 ELL students enrolled in its elementary and secondary schools—California was first, Texas second.³ The NCES data also shows that the number of ELL students in Florida has been steadily rising since the year 2000. Florida's ELL population is also the most diverse in the country.⁴

Our total student population this year is 492. The population has fluctuated between 493 and 541 over the last five years.⁵ An important demographic in our student population is the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in our school. The percentage has fluctuated between 33.7 and 42.7 percent in the last five years. Economically disadvantaged students are sometimes also disadvantaged in terms of literacy, social skills, and educational support at home. Some of these students make up the category of students we are trying to serve through this grant.

Student Progress

Although we are a high-performing elementary school in terms of test scores on Florida Standards assessments, we have identified test score disparities in our student population which we are addressing and trying to eliminate. This population comprises students who perform at the lowest 25th percentile in English language arts (ELA) based on scores on the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test.⁶ NWEA is a research-based, nonprofit organization who develops PK–12 assessment tests for school districts worldwide. Grade-level benchmarks for the MAP test define a percentile score of 21 as low and one below 40 as below average. We refer to these students as “L25s” because they received scores of 25 or less.

The MAP test is administered by Pinellas County three times a year to students in grades 1 and 2, and twice a year to students in grades K and 3–5. It is a computer-adaptive test uniquely designed to measure a student's progress and achievement level in ELA over time. It is an adaptive test because test questions are customized in difficulty according to a student's responses to previous questions on the test. Questions are generated from a large database where each corresponds in difficulty to a particular score.

The majority of L25 students are ELLs, but there is a concerning percentage of non-ELL students (students in the general education population) also performing at low and below-average ELA benchmarks. Further, the percentage of underperforming ELL L25 students has been

steadily increasing since 2019. Information on Table 1 is generated from our school's database of student scores.

Table 1

| Percentage of Students Classified as L25 | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2017–2018 | 2018–2019 | 2019–2020 | 2020–2021 | 2021–2022 |
| ELL students | 72.2% | 61.3% | 38.1% | 51.2% | 56.9% |
| Non-ELL students | 12.0% | 12.6% | 11.2% | 11.4% | 10.5% |

The ACCESS for ELL test, also based on English development language standards, is administered once a year to ELL students only. It measures a student's proficiency in the English language through reading, speaking, listening, and writing assessments. Test scores on ACCESS determine whether a student remains in the English as a second language (ESOL) program or moves to the general education program. A student needs to obtain a score of 4 (6 is considered proficient) to exit the ESOL program. The student scoring a 4 will, of course, remain under observation to make sure the student is performing at an acceptable level and progressing academically. Test scores are also used by teachers to plan educational interventions that support student learning progress.

Table 2 presents the following information by academic year: (1) the number of ELL students at our school, (2) the number of ELL students classified as L25s, and (3) the percentage of ELL L25s to total ELL students.

Table 2

| Academic Year | Total ELL Students | # of ELL Students Classified as L25s | % of L25s to Total ELL Students |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2021-2022 | 51 | 29 | 56.9% |
| 2020-2021 | 43 | 22 | 51.2% |
| 2019-2020 | 42 | 16 | 38.1% |
| 2018-2019 | 31 | 19 | 61.3% |
| 2017-2018 | 18 | 13 | 72.2% |

Table 3 presents the same information as Table 2, except that it relates to the general education (Gen. Ed.) students.

Table 3

| Academic Year | Total K-5 Gen. Ed. Students | Gen. Ed. Students Classified as L25s | % of Gen. Ed. L25s to Total Gen. Ed. Students |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2021-2022 | 390 | 41 | 10.5% |
| 2020-2021 | 403 | 46 | 11.4% |
| 2019-2020 | 446 | 50 | 11.2% |
| 2018-2019 | 437 | 55 | 12.6% |
| 2017-2018 | 449 | 54 | 12.0% |

Project Description – “Reading for Fun” Program for L25 Students

We are concerned with the rising number of L25 students (those performing at the lowest 25th percentile in ELA) at our school. Our concern is heightened because we have recently learned that effective academic year 2022–2023 we will lose our ESOL teacher position due to budgetary constraints. As a result of these constraints, the criteria used by FLDOE to determine teacher needs has changed. Accordingly, a school must have a minimum of 40 ELL students scoring between levels 1 and 3 on the ACCESS for ELL assessment to qualify for a dedicated ESOL teacher. Note that a score of 6 is considered proficient and a score of 4 exits the student from the ESOL program.

We will be able to keep our Bilingual Assistant on staff to provide classroom assistance, but only to ELL L25 students scoring at levels 1 and 2. Those scoring at level 3 do not qualify for classroom assistance (due to budgetary constraints), but they will have access to language learning resources available through our school online platforms, such as MyOn, Duolingo, and BrainPop.

Currently, the ESOL teacher and Bilingual Assistant coordinate services for *all* ELL students. As such, they help with instructional/curriculum content in the regular classroom (which takes the bulk of their time), as well as facilitate cooperative small group reading/phonics/vocabulary work and limited individual assistance with specific skill deficits—phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, phonological awareness—when time permits. Under the new policy, assistance to ELL students will be very limited, further widening the performance gap among students.

To help with this situation, we will designate volunteers to specifically help the ELL and the non-ELL L25 students at our school under the direction of the English teachers and the help of the Bilingual Assistant. We want these volunteers to commit to a regular schedule, ensuring that these students get the help they need to improve and stay engaged. These volunteers will also help with our proposed Reading for Fun program.

Our proposed Reading for Fun program involves creating a small library of engaging, leveled books for our struggling L25 students. Right now, these students don’t have time at school for pleasure reading of their choice. Under the Reading for Fun program, the students will be able to choose leveled books that interest them, check them out, and take them home to read. The idea developed from our research into strategies to increase students’ motivation to read, confidence with the language, and vocabulary development. Stephen D. Krashen, Ph.D., a well-known American linguist and educational researcher at the University of Southern California, has published several articles about the power of reading—more specifically, reading for pleasure or “extracurricular reading,” a clear predictor of academic success.⁷ Another study found that cooperative reading activities were not as effective as independent or silent reading when readers were able to select the books to read.⁸

Our goal is to increase L25 student reading motivation, engagement, and literacy. According to Chetty et al., reading performance is a key predictor of college success and economic opportunity.⁹

Our proposal is for the purchase of six sets (one for each grade level K-5) of engaging, leveled, fiction and nonfiction books with a range of age-appropriate topics. The books will be purchased from Sundance Newbridge, a publisher of ELA educational books for PK–8 students known for their high-quality, age-appropriate, standards-aligned, engaging resources in the areas of reading comprehension and early literacy. The cost of the books is \$2,160.90, including shipping. We would also like to order one set of library cards (from Amazon) with adhesive pockets to attach to the books. The set of library cards costs \$18.99. The total cost of the books and library cards is \$2,179.89.

We have selected one book series for our students:

- The Grade Level Collection series includes 50 leveled books per set for grades K to 5, each set comprising colorful and engaging fiction and nonfiction books of various age-appropriate topics.

The Bilingual Assistant and grade-level English teachers, together with the help of our volunteers, will manage the small library. The library will be housed in the Bilingual Assistant's room. The books will be classified by genre and reading level and organized in display boxes for easy access. The Bilingual Assistant and English teachers will introduce the students to the library and to the process of selecting just-right books and checking them out to take home. The Bilingual Assistant works with these students in the classroom and will be able to provide appropriate scaffolding and guidance to students to facilitate the process of independent reading.

Library time will be designated within the daily 30–45 minutes that the Bilingual Assistant spends with students outside the classroom. Students will be allowed to choose books they would like to take home to read. They will be taught the process for checking out and returning books to the library. Students will be asked to write down new words to share with the Bilingual Assistant, English teacher, or volunteer when the book is returned. They will also be encouraged to share new words with peers. The Bilingual Assistant, English teacher, or volunteer will engage the student with questions about the book—what it was about, whether they enjoyed reading, and what they learned—to gauge comprehension and interest. We will encourage parents to motivate their children to read the books they bring home and to encourage their children to talk about what they liked and what they learned. We will also encourage the students to share their impressions with peers to build their confidence in reading.

According to a 2019 study by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), only 35% of fourth-grade students and 34% of eighth-grade students in the United States can read at a proficient level.¹⁰ Data indicate that “students who cannot read proficiently by third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school than proficient readers.”¹¹ With your help, we can improve the lives of our struggling low-performing students by improving their reading skills now, giving them an opportunity to be successful in school and in life.

Budget

Table 4 below lists information about the books we wish to purchase for the L25 students. The link presented below Table 4 includes a list of the books in each set.

Table 4

| Grade Level | Description | Reading Levels | Set/# of books | Item # | Qty. | Price | Total |
|--------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------|------|----------|-------------------|
| Kindergarten | Grade-level collection | A–E | F/50 | SYV40539 | 1 | \$305.00 | \$305.00 |
| Grade 1 | Grade-level collection | C–I | C/50 | SYV36314 | 1 | \$315.00 | \$315.00 |
| Grade 2 | Grade-level collection | G–M | C/50 | SYV36315 | 1 | \$335.00 | \$335.00 |
| Grade 3 | Grade-level collection | J–P | A/50 | SYV33422 | 1 | \$350.00 | \$350.00 |
| Grade 4 | Grade-level collection | N–S | A/50 | SYV33424 | 1 | \$368.00 | \$368.00 |
| Grade 5 | Grade-level collection | P–X | B/50 | SYV36318 | 1 | \$385.00 | \$385.00 |
| | Library cards (set of 100) | | | | 1 | \$18.99 | \$18.99 |
| | Shipping cost for the books | | | | | | \$102.90 |
| Total | | | | | | | \$2,179.89 |

List of Sundance Newbridge Books by Collection

This book series is perfect for our struggling L25 students for a number of reasons. First, the series comprises leveled books from a variety of genres and include topics in science, social studies, fiction, and math. The students will surely find topics of interest to read and engage with. As their reading skills improve, they can access a variety of increasingly challenging books to read. We feel this series provides a balanced set of reading materials to motivate our students to read, thus developing their literacy skills. The back of each book presents questions for students to think about and to generate teacher discussions. Some of the books also have a glossary of new words, which will be helpful for vocabulary development. The books are about eight by six inches in size with smooth, glossy, colorful pages with attractive images that would entice any child to open and read.

The library cards will be used to keep track of the names of the students who check books out, the dates books are checked out, and the date they are returned.

We are excited about our program after reading an article in “School Talk” published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) that discusses the importance of encouraging ELL students to read independently by modeling the strategies for selecting the right book—one that is comprehensible and interesting—and for using clues in the content to decode the message and derive meaning. Learning these strategies and putting them into action will provide a venue for improving student engagement and creating lifelong learners.¹² We hope that these book collections will contribute to our students developing a love of reading and learning critical for success.

Project Objectives and Evaluation

Several objectives drive and support our project goal of increasing L25 student motivation to read, engagement, and literacy. We want to help our L25 students be successful in school and in life. The following objectives, and the tasks supporting those objectives, must be accomplished to meet our project goal:

1. Increase the level of reading performance on the MAP test by a minimum of one level from fall to spring. *This objective can be measured by comparing the student's scores from the fall and spring, which quantify the progress made by the student.*
 - a. The Bilingual Assistant and English teachers:
 - i. initiate small group discussions to encourage students to talk about the books they read—what they liked about them and what they learned—to gauge comprehension.
 - ii. talk one-on-one with students about the books they like to read and why (teacher-led talks). This conversation will inform the teacher about topics that interest the student, opening opportunities for the teacher to suggest good books to read.
 - iii. measure reading progress every quarter by presenting progressively difficult text to students.
 - iv. model effective reading and raise students' curiosity about stories.
 - v. explain the meaning of reading levels and why it's important to use them as a guide when selecting books for independent reading.
 - vi. monitor the student book choices to ensure they make reading gains.
2. Attain Level-4 in reading proficiency on the ACCESS for ELL standardized test within a year. *This objective can be measured by comparing test scores on the ACCESS test from year to year to assess improvement.*
 - a. The Bilingual Assistant and the English teachers:
 - i. invite students to check books out to read at home.
 - ii. provide incentives in the form of praise to students when they demonstrate engagement and reading progress.
 - iii. ask students questions about the books they read to verify comprehension.
 - iv. direct students to write a description of one of the characters from the books they've read and share with peers.
 - v. require and verify that students write down new vocabulary words found in the reading material.
 - vi. invite students to talk about a favorite book in class to assess comprehension and motivate peers.
3. Increase the number of books students read each month. *This objective can be measured by counting the number of books the student checks out and reads each month.*
 - a. The Bilingual Assistant and the English teachers:
 - i. start small group discussions about favorite books to inspire other students.
 - ii. keep track of books read by each student on a poster board in the classroom.
 - iii. monitor the frequency students check books out.
 - iv. suggest new books to read based on students' interests.
 - v. read aloud to students to engage them in reading.

Sustainability

We plan to sustain our reading library through the active involvement of the Bilingual Assistant, English teachers, and volunteers. The school administration supports the Reading for Fun program and is invested in its success. We will monitor the program's effectiveness and its impact on L25 student performance on a continuous basis through teacher- and student-led discussions, classroom performance, and through students' performance on the various standardized assessments.

We plan to include our reading library in our fundraising efforts to ensure a supply of quality books. We will also reach out to our parents for support in maintaining this essential resource for our struggling students in line with our mission of 100% student success.

DeBartolo Family Foundation shares our mission of providing a quality education to the youth in our community because we both believe they are our future. We want to provide *all* our students the opportunity to go to college and lead productive lives right here in our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal.

¹ <http://map.barbarabush.org>

² <https://map.barbarabush.org/assets/cards/BBFFL-Literacy-Card-FL.pdf>

³ [Nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_204.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_204.20.asp)

⁴ <http://fldoe.org/academics/eng-language-learners>

⁵ Florida Department of Education information portal, PK-12 enrollment accessibility reports at the district and school levels.

⁶ [Nwea.org/about](http://nwea.org/about)

⁷ Stephen D. Krashen, "Free voluntary reading wins again" (*Substance News*, 2011).

⁸ Liu Siping and Jian Wang, "Reading Cooperatively or Independently? Study on ELL Student Reading Development" (Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal, 2015).

⁹ R. Chetty, J.N. Friedman, N. Hilger, E. Saez, D.W. Schanzenbach, and D. Yagan, "How Does Your Kindergarten Classroom Affect Your Earnings Evidence From Project Star" NBER Working Paper No. 16381 (2010).

¹⁰ National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), "Interpreting NAEP Reading Results" https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/interpret_results.aspx.

¹¹ L. Feister, "Early warning confirmed: A research update on third-grade reading." Annie Casey Foundation (2013), <https://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-confirmed>

¹² National Council of Teachers of English, "School Talk," 15, no. 3 (March 2010): 5.