



Valley of the Sun
UNITED WAY

TOGETHER,
WE'RE CREATING

Mighty Change

IN MARICOPA
COUNTY

EDUCATION
COMMUNITY LITERACY HUBS



VALLEY OF THE SUN UNITED WAY

BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES THROUGH LITERACY

Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) exists to break the cycle of poverty and build stronger, healthier, more equitable communities throughout Maricopa County. At the heart of this mission is a **bold commitment to early childhood literacy**—because the ability to read by third grade is one of the most powerful predictors of long-term academic and life success.

Yet today, **fewer than half** of third graders in Maricopa County are reading at grade level, and children in low-income and underserved communities face even steeper barriers to success. The consequences of early reading struggles can last a lifetime.

That's why we created **Community Literacy Hubs**—safe, vibrant, literacy-rich spaces where children and families receive the tools, support, and evidence-based programs needed to help every child thrive. These hubs are **transforming the way families engage** with education and ensuring students receive consistent support both in and outside of school.

We've already established three Literacy Hubs—and with your support, we're ready to do more. Our goal: **raise \$5.25 million to expand to 9 hubs across 18% of school districts in Maricopa County by 2030**. Each gift brings us closer to reaching thousands more families and sustaining the proven programs that are changing lives.

Together, we can ensure that every child enters fourth grade ready to learn, grow, and achieve their full potential.



FEWER

THAN HALF

of third graders in Maricopa County are reading at grade level



GOAL TO RAISE

\$5.25M

by 2030



EXPAND TO

9 HUBS

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ENSURE

THOUSANDS

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THE CHALLENGE

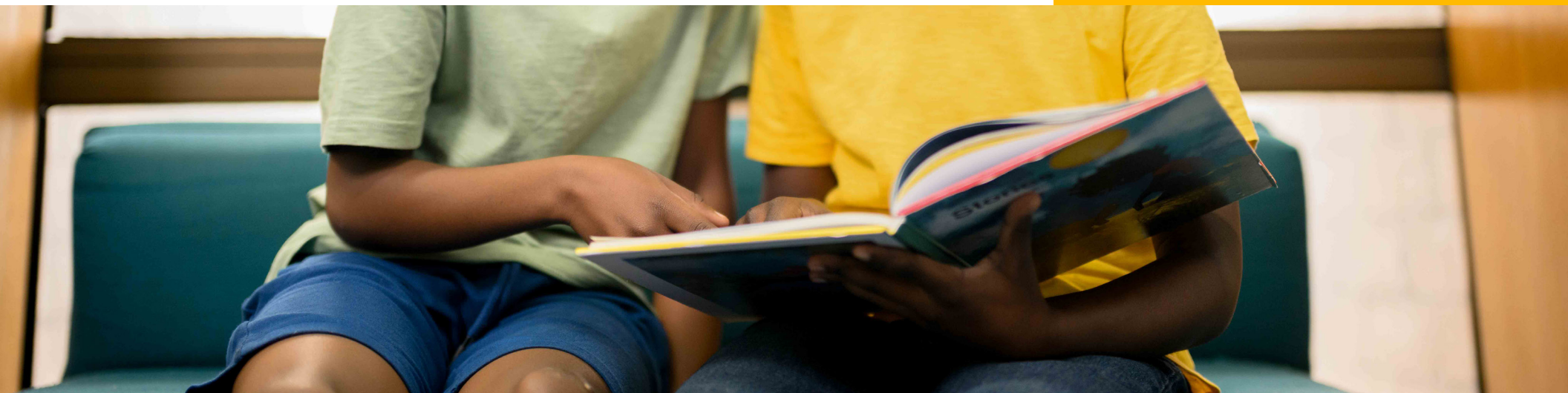
A LITERACY CRISIS WITH LASTING CONSEQUENCES

In Maricopa County, **fewer than half** of third graders are reading at grade level. Among economically disadvantaged students, the numbers are even more concerning, with just 27% meeting literacy benchmarks. These early reading challenges **lead to far-reaching consequences** for individuals and communities alike:

- Students who struggle to read by third grade are significantly **more likely to drop out of school**—an outcome strongly associated with future incarceration rates (Harlow, 2003, Bureau of Justice Statistics).
- Black and Hispanic students have **the lowest third grade reading proficiency levels**, which contributes to persistent educational inequities and higher poverty rates (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010).
- Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are more likely to **struggle with self-esteem** and disengage from school, contributing to increased behavioral challenges and long-term academic delays (Fiester, 2013, Annie E. Casey Foundation).
- Communities also suffer economically, as low literacy levels are linked to **reduced workforce productivity** and lower tax revenues (Rothwell, 2012, Brookings Institution).

Without timely intervention, these challenges follow children into adulthood, affecting graduation rates, economic opportunity, and overall community well-being.

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OUR MC2026 GOAL IS TO INCREASE THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY IN MARICOPA COUNTY.

OUR GOAL

increase third grade reading proficiency in Maricopa County

KEY TACTIC AND CORE INITIATIVE

In alignment with our MC2026 goal to **increase third grade reading proficiency** in Maricopa County by 25%, Valley of the Sun United Way leads or co-leads the third grade reading initiatives in Phoenix and the Southwest Valley.

PROJECT GOALS

SUSTAIN

Sustain three evidence-based, community literacy hubs that provide a seamless continuum of language and literacy supports through high-quality programing.

EXPAND

Expand family engagement to accelerate academic success by ensuring families have the necessary tools and resources.

LAUNCH

Launch 6 new hubs and reach an additional 2,050 families—expanding equitable access to literacy support across the region.

The Literacy Hub transformed my grandson's love for reading and school. It gave us both the tools to succeed, together.

*– Grandmother
First Grade Student*

Every strategy we use is evidence-based, aligned to best practices, and grounded in the community's strengths.

- Dawn Gerundo
Community Development and Engagement Director for Education



STRENGTH- BASED

OUR APPROACH

DRIVING LITERACY THROUGH INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP

VSUW's Community Literacy Hubs are designed to provide a seamless continuum of language and literacy support. The model is anchored in the Science of Reading, a comprehensive, interdisciplinary body of research that explains how children learn to read, emphasizing explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Built through partnerships with schools, nonprofits and municipal leaders, this approach ensures that literacy instruction is grounded in evidence-based methods proven to work for all learners.

Each hub reflects the unique needs of the community it serves and includes:

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT

Includes one-on-one tutoring, literacy-rich experiences and access to books and other learning resources tailored to student needs.

EXPANDED AND ENRICHED LEARNING TIME

Includes extended hours for families to access library books, tutoring aligned with classroom curriculum, and engaging literacy-based enrichment activities.

ACTIVE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Includes bilingual training programs, literacy events and partnerships that connect parents and caregivers to tools, technology and wraparound community resources that support student learning at home.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICES

Includes coordination with the state literacy initiative Read On Arizona and local Read On communities (Southwest Valley and Phoenix), city municipalities, school district leadership and nonprofit partners to foster sustainable, community-rooted learning ecosystems.

The Literacy Hub at Lattie Coor School offers parents a place of belonging, acceptance and cohesion that translates into a new understanding of the skills their children are learning in the classroom. This unity of classroom and home learning fosters an environment where parents can help their child succeed and teachers can set a higher standard of goals.

– Dr. Giovanni Orozco
Principal at Lattie Coor School



2024 Golden Bell Promise Program Award

See their impact on student success!

www.vsuw.org/bell

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

THE LITERACY HUB AT LATTIE COOR SCHOOL

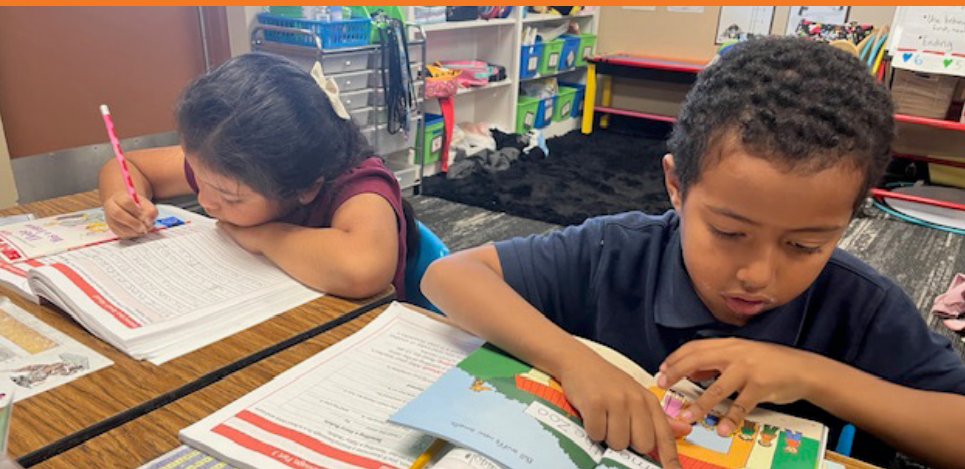
The Literacy Hub at Lattie Coor School is one way United Way and its partners are meeting the community where they are to address inequities and needs.

Through Lattie Coor's Literacy Hub, teachers can connect with families on a wholistic level to develop substantial relationships that translate to campus-wide success.

Families see the Lattie Coor Literacy Hub as a place of belonging. While students receive additional academic support directly from their teachers, parents work in partnership with educators in the Literacy Hub to gain a better understanding—in their native languages—of the curriculum and skills their children are learning in the classroom. This family support offers coherence between home and school and allows families to understand that education doesn't stop when the school bell rings, but is a continuous and ongoing learning experience.



In addition to seeing more family connection and involvement with teachers and the school, the Literacy Hub can be directly tied to increased test scores.



BEYOND THE BENCHMARKS

THE STORY OF LESAI AND HIS GRANDMA

When Lesai first joined the Literacy Hub in kindergarten, he faced more challenges than most. His attendance was inconsistent, and he needed extra academic support to catch up to his peers. But from the beginning, there was someone unwavering in his corner: his grandma.

By first grade, Lesai was still participating in the Literacy Hub—and making real strides. His absences decreased, his confidence grew, and his love for learning started to blossom. At the heart of his progress was Grandma, who came to every single Lit Hub session. She asked thoughtful questions, engaged deeply with the materials, and made sure to use every resource available at home. Her partnership with Lesai's teachers and consistent encouragement created the structure and support he needed to thrive.

At the beginning of the school year, Lesai's reading scores showed just how far behind he was. But by the end of Quarter 1, the results spoke volumes: he had exceeded every benchmark. Lesai had not only caught up—he tested out of early reading assessments altogether. Today, he has officially met every first grade DIBELS reading goal for the year.

Lesai's story is one of perseverance, partnership, and possibility. It's also a testament to the power of family engagement. His grandma's dedication is the heartbeat of his success—and proof that when a student and their support system show up consistently, transformation follows.

COMMUNITY LITERACY HUBS

PROGRESS TO DATE

Each strategy and intervention implemented through the hubs is evidence-based and designed to enhance literacy outcomes and drive academic success.

Resource allocation across Community Literacy Hubs is tailored to the specific needs and capacities of each location, ensuring that support is both relevant and effective. Not all hubs offer identical resources, as services are designed to align with the unique requirements of the community they serve. By leveraging data-driven insights, we are strategically scaling successful initiatives to enhance accessibility and better meet the evolving needs of families.

LITERACY PROGRAMS

700+ families **served** across 3 hubs
99% of parents **increased** their reading interactions with their child
93% of students **improved** their early literacy skills

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

96% of parents **gained** digital literacy skills
86% of families **increased** engagement with the school

LITERACY RESOURCES

1,320 of tutoring **delivered** in one year
26,756 books **distributed**

AT SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY LITERACY HUBS, THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY RATES HAVE STEADILY INCREASED, WHILE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM HAS DECLINED.



	Third Grade Reading Scores		Chronic Absenteeism Rate	
	SY23	SY24	SY23	SY24
Avondale Lattie Coor/Eliseo C. Felix*	15%	19%	36.4%	28.7%
Murphy William R. Sullivan	16%	23%	34%	18.52%
Cartwright Peralta	19%	▼	32.9%	▼

* Attendance is average between the two locations

▼ Data pending - programs take three years for full implementation

AZ Report Card did not publish attendance until 2022

DATA AT A GLANCE

STUDENT SUCCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

To track growth toward 3rd-grade reading proficiency, we use publicly available, credible data from sources like the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Education Forward Arizona, and Read On Arizona, along with evidence-based assessments selected by districts from ADE's approved list. Through Memorandums of Agreement with partner districts, we collect aggregate benchmark and growth data quarterly, ensuring compliance with FERPA while gaining insights into literacy progress and chronic absenteeism trends.

Our year-over-year data shows encouraging progress in both academic outcomes and student engagement. At schools participating in Community Literacy Hubs, third grade reading proficiency rates have steadily increased, while chronic absenteeism has declined. These trends demonstrate the impact of pairing evidence-based literacy instruction with strong family partnerships and extended learning opportunities. When students feel supported and families are engaged, learning accelerates—and attendance and achievement improve together.

Definitions

SY = School year August-June

Chronic Absenteeism Rate: Percentage of students missing more than 10% of the scheduled school days, i.e. missing 18 or more days in a 180 day school year

Third Grade Reading Scores: Percentage of students meeting the AZ State English Language Arts (ELA) requirement

OUR HISTORY

BUILDING ON A LEGACY

Founded in 1925, Valley of the Sun United Way has nearly a century of experience improving lives across Maricopa County. We've led large-scale efforts in education, health and housing—convening public, private and nonprofit partners to drive impact.

In 2020, we launched **Mighty Change 2026** (MC2026), a bold five-year plan grounded in community priorities and data to drive measurable progress in four key areas: education, housing and homelessness, health and workforce development. Our MC2026 education goal—to increase third grade reading proficiency by 25%—has driven innovative strategies like the Community Literacy Hubs, which are already demonstrating success.

Through trusted relationships, transparent impact reporting, and deep community roots, VSUW serves over 700,000 people annually in partnership with more than 100 organizations. We've earned the confidence of donors and the community alike through financial accountability, collaborative leadership and a legacy of results-oriented programming.

Your investment fuels this vision—ensuring every child has the chance to succeed, every family has access to resources and every neighborhood becomes a place where reading is a shared joy.

SCALING SUCCESS

OUR VISION FOR 2028 AND BEYOND

By 2030, we aim to establish 9 Literacy Hubs, expanding our reach to ensure more families have access to the tools and supports they need to succeed. These Hubs will be strategically selected through a data-driven process that prioritizes communities with low 3rd-grade reading scores, Title I designation, childcare gaps, district support, available space, and connections to Read On Communities. This targeted approach will ensure equitable access to high-quality services and maximize the Hubs' impact by leveraging existing networks and resources.

Our goal is not only to scale, but to deepen impact—ensuring that every hub delivers measurable gains in reading proficiency, school attendance and family engagement. This thoughtful expansion will reflect the best practices we've learned, laying the groundwork for generational change across Maricopa County.

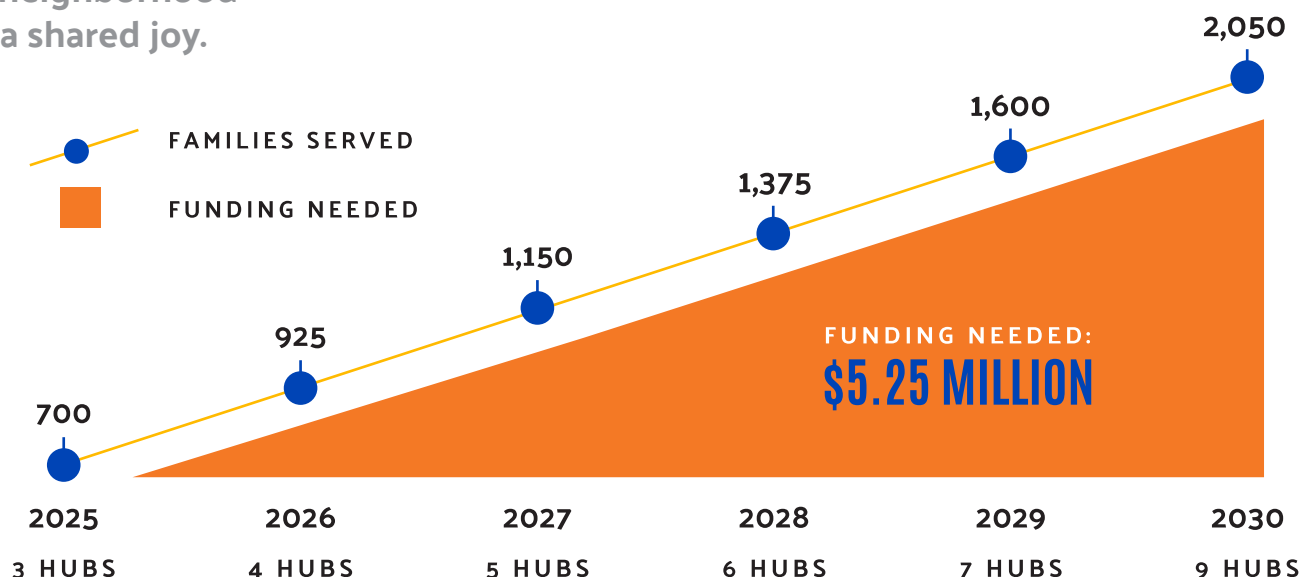
This expansion will:

- Reach 18% of Maricopa County school districts
- Serve over 2,050 families—almost tripling our current reach and helping close opportunity gaps in underserved communities
- Launch 6 new hubs and reach 1,350 additional families by 2030—expanding equitable access to literacy support across the region

BY 2030
YOUR INVESTMENT
↓

3X MORE HUBS


3X MORE FAMILIES





AWARDS AND CREDENTIALS



Accredited Charity
Better Business Bureau



Platinum Seal of Transparency
Candid/Guidestar



Four-Star Charity (100% score)
Charity Navigator

Compliance with National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework 2.0
National Institute of Standards and Technology

YOUR MOMENT TO CREATE MIGHTY CHANGE

With your help, Valley of the Sun United Way will expand to serve thousands more children and families through a total of **9 Community Literacy Hubs** by 2030. Based on this ambitious vision, we estimate a **total investment of \$5.25 million** will be needed to launch and sustain these hubs across Maricopa County.

Our evidence-based, continuously evaluated approach prioritizes district partnerships to ensure long-term impact. As districts eventually maintain the programs through sustainable funding, we can shift focus to collaborative leadership and resource-braiding, reducing reliance on a single funding stream. Through an expanded fundraising strategy - including individual donors, corporate and foundation partnerships, and public funding - Valley of the Sun United Way will build a diversified, durable funding base to ensure long-term program sustainability.

This growth is made possible through continued collaboration with school districts, municipalities, and philanthropic partners like you. Your support today brings us closer to establishing three additional high-need hubs over the next two school years.

This is a call to rewrite the story for thousands of children struggling to read. With your help, we can make a lasting impact.

WAYS TO GIVE

- Make a one-time or recurring donation to support our Literacy Hubs
- Sponsor a hub in your community
- Underwrite a program component like tutoring, books, or family events
- Contribute in honor or memory of a loved one
- Establish a named fund or endowment to sustain literacy work for years to come

HOW TO GIVE

- Visit vsuw.org/donate to give online
- Mail a check to:
Valley of the Sun United Way
3200 E. Camelback Rd. Suite 375
Phoenix, AZ 85018
- Inquire about legacy or planned giving opportunities
- Ask your employer about matching gift programs

MAKE YOUR IMPACT TODAY AND CONTACT:

Rafael Cantu, CFRE
Director of Corporate and Foundation Partnerships

✉ rcantu@vsuw.org

🌐 vsuw.org



Mighty Change

The sky is the limit. We can change things; they don't have to be the way they have always been. We have to be disrupters and Valley of the Sun United Way is doing that in a very strong way.

- Monica Villalobos, Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

VSUW.ORG/MIGHTYCHANGE