



Strong Start to reading™
"Making a difference in the life of a child"

Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program At a Glance

About Strong Start®

Strong Start® offers a literacy program called *Letters, Sounds and Words™*, which has been specifically designed to help young children who need extra practice when learning essential early reading skills. As a registered Canadian charity, Strong Start® is supported through financial donations from charitable foundations, service clubs, corporations, individuals, community groups and modest school board/school fees. Strong Start® works closely with its school board partners to ensure that the *Letters, Sounds and Words™* program is delivered successfully and with ease. This high quality program provides the opportunity for schools to engage trained community volunteers to work one-on-one with children. All materials, training and administrative tools needed to implement the program in a school are provided by Strong Start®.

Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program

The *Letters, Sounds and Words™* program is a unique 10-week program for 5-9 year-old children delivered by trained community volunteers. Originally authored in 2001 by a retired educator from Waterloo Region, today it is used in over 340 schools in ten school boards (Public and Catholic). The program uses carefully designed, short games/activities that, through repetition, help young children recognize letters, their sounds, practice phonemic awareness and sound-blending skills and learn to read words. The *Letters, Sounds and Words™* program aligns with the recommendations in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Report (2022), the Science of Reading and the Ontario Language Curriculum (2023) expectations. Volunteer Coaches work with one child at a time and follow prescribed activities using the materials and manuals provided. The program and training sessions enable volunteers to deliver the program very independently.

[To read feedback from our partners in the education community, see reverse.](#)



Key Features

- Volunteers receive four hours of training from Strong Start (online or in-person)
- Games and activities are developmentally appropriate and designed by educators
- Program is easy to implement
- All materials are provided by Strong Start®
- Children are selected by their teachers to participate in the program
- Pre- and post-assessments are conducted for all participating children
- Over two decades of assessment results prove the program is highly effective and consistent in building children's literacy skills
- Program provides a great opportunity for schools to make meaningful community connections- bringing volunteers into schools for a rewarding experience

Community Feedback

Associate Director of Education

“A great advantage of the Strong Start program is the community volunteer involvement in support of children’s literacy skill development. This program fosters community connections while at the same time provides direct, explicit instruction in the area of literacy. Our students benefit greatly from this partnership.”

*Riley Culhane, Associate Director of Education
Thames Valley District School Board*

University

“This program supports the Ontario curriculum because everything that is done within the program is research-based. For example, phonemic awareness is supported in the sounds portion of the program and we know from research that phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of future reading success in children. This is just one of the things this program does for young children (2021).”

*Kristiina Montero, Professor, Faculty of Education,
Wilfrid Laurier University*

Principal

“Strong Start’s been a great opportunity for parents and community members to get involved in the education of our students. I think community partnerships are really important and this is a great program for us to get connected with other people and for them to feel good about making a difference in the lives of our students as well.”

*Elizabeth Martz, Principal,
Wilson Avenue Public School, Kitchener*

Teacher

“The students who have completed the Strong Start program have gained a lot of confidence and also increased their knowledge of letter sounds. That has really helped to improve their reading skills in the kindergarten classroom.”

*Sandra Ewald, Kindergarten Teacher,
Westvale Public School, Waterloo*

English as a Second Language Learner Specialist

“Our English Language Learners tend to do extraordinarily well. They really have a tremendous increase in their ability with letters, sounds and words. What’s really impactful with English Language Learners is that they develop an amazing sense of self confidence from working one-on-one.”

*Wendy Campbell, ESL Itinerant Resource Teacher,
Waterloo Region District School Board*



Over **4,000 children** participate in Strong Start each year and to date, the organization has helped over **56,171 children.**
