

The logo for the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Counseling (CTL) at CSUN, featuring the letters 'CTL' in a large, white, serif font on a black background.The text 'ON THE CUTTING EDGE' in a white, serif font, centered within a black rectangular box.

L.A. Times Literacy Center at CSUN

by Dominic J. Grasso, Ph.D.

November 2023

During the summer of 2023, Dr. Dominic Grasso, an assistant professor in Elementary Education at CSUN, collaborated with Dr. Mira Pak, a CSUN professor in Secondary Education, and Dr. Sue Sears, a CSUN professor in Special Education to re-open the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* at California State University, Northridge. The *L.A. Times Literacy Center* is one branch of CSUN's Teaching, Learning, and Counseling Consortium, which provides low-cost tutoring in literacy to elementary-aged children throughout the Los Angeles area. The *L.A. Times Literacy Center* was last operating prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the re-opening of the center is already filling a much-needed gap in the community, servicing over 50 graduate students at CSUN, as well as over 45 elementary-aged children requiring support in literacy instruction.

A central component of CSUN's graduate programs in education, specifically, the M.A. in Elementary Education (language and literacy focus), as well as the Reading and Literacy Added Authorization (RLAA) is a clinical fieldwork experience requiring individualized assessment, instruction, and progress monitoring in literacy. Clinical fieldwork in education, specifically literacy education, is an essential component in preparing literacy leaders at their local school sites (McDonald et al., 2014). The clinical fieldwork at the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* takes place during two courses: EED 625A/L and EED 625 B/L: Literacy Assessment and Teaching Strategies. The courses run sequentially, with hopes that candidates complete a yearlong clinical experience over the course of two semesters. In addition to being an essential need for high quality graduate education, the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* also fills a community need, as the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that fourth grade literacy scores across the nation have either remained stagnant, or decreased over the past five years (USDOE, 2022).

To re-open the *L.A. Times Literacy Center*, Dr. Grasso first had to ensure that high quality literacy resources were available for M.A. and RLAA candidates to use. Dr. Grasso collaborated with Dr. Pak and utilized funds from the Ballmer Foundation Grant awarded to Dr. Pak to purchase brand new materials for use in the *L.A. Times Literacy Center*. All materials purchased for the center emphasize culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and are aligned with best practices as evidenced by the Science of Reading research and were vetted using materials such as *The Reading League Compass* to ensure that candidates would be using materials that would align with best practices highlighted in course instruction. One of the new essential components found in the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* is an expansive library for social justice.

The *L.A. Times Literacy Center* officially reopened its doors in June of 2023 to high demand, enrolling 35 elementary-aged students to work with 54 RLAA candidates. The broad admission criteria for the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* provides RLAA and M.A. candidates with the opportunity to work with a broad range of students, similar to what they might encounter at their school or classroom site. Elementary-aged students enrolled in the program come from a wide variety of backgrounds with many different support needs, including students with dyslexia, students with IEPs, emergent bilingual students, and students with visual and/or hearing impairments.

The summer reopening of the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* was a great success for both graduate candidates, parents, students, and the CSUN community. One parent, who enrolled multiple children, expressed “*My daughter has just made so much progress in her reading skills. She just loves coming here and seeing her tutor. I’ve never seen her enjoy reading so much. I hope the program keeps going all year!*” In addition, the clinical fieldwork experience has been equally appreciated by CSUN graduate students. One student who was enrolled in the RLAA program over the summer expressed how valuable the tutoring experience was, “*Over the summer, I had the valuable opportunity to work one-on-one with my student focusing on enhancing his reading skills. Through our sessions, I witnessed significant progress in all the areas where he had specific gaps. The way the sessions were set up in 30-minute blocks with breaks in between made it so that my student stayed engaged during the lessons and wasn't overwhelmed. The enrichment block gave us an opportunity to bond while playing games and using interactive activities to make the learning fun. Thank you for the wealth of resources available! A teacher's dream is the L.A. Times Literacy Center!*”

Currently, the *L.A. Times Literacy Center* has over 30 elementary-aged students enrolled, including a virtual cohort of students, which has allowed for an expanded network of students, including some from the east coast. CSUN is looking forward to the future growth and expansion of the center, which will open again in Summer 2024.


Check out this site for more information: <https://www.thereadingleague.org/compass/>

References

McDonald, M., Kazemi, E., Kelley-Petersen, M., Mikolasy, K., Thompson, J., Valencia, S. W., & Windschitl, M. (2014). Practice makes practice: Learning to teach in teacher education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89(4), 500–515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2014.938997>

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessment.

This article is sponsored by Schools First Federal Credit Union. 

All work conducted by the CSUN CTL is due to the generous endowment by the Eisner Foundation. 



CSUN

MICHAEL D. EISNER
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Connect with us!

@CTLatCSUN

