

Annual Report 2024



A Message From Our CEO



Matt Hill, Ed.D

CEO, Waterford.org

“Waterford has been at the forefront of early education, and it is thanks to your generous support that we WILL continue empowering young learners on their journey toward a bright future.”

Dear Waterford Community,

As I reflect on my first six months as CEO of Waterford.org, I am grateful for the incredible impact your partnership has helped us achieve. With nearly five decades of experience, Waterford has been at the forefront of early education, and it is thanks to your generous support that we can continue empowering young learners on their journey toward a bright future.

This year, I'm proud to share stories that showcase the profound impact of our collective work. You'll meet Mahari from Louisiana, who showed up for school despite the storms that kept everyone else away. You'll meet Raven, a joyful 4-year-old with a natural love for learning, and hear from Dr. Jessica Kallin, whose own childhood Waterford experience inspired her to bring our program to her community. These stories are just a few examples of the incredible outcomes made possible by your commitment to early education.

At Waterford, we are driven by a shared belief in the transformative power of early learning. The progress we have made is not just a reflection of our efforts but of the collaboration we have with partners like you. The early years matter and your support is helping us build that critical foundation. With your backing, we can ensure that children in PreK through 2nd grade have the resources and tools they need to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. Your belief in this mission allows us to focus on making a measurable impact in the lives of children, families, and educators.

We know that none of this work would be possible without the partnerships we have built with families, educators, and communities. With these partnerships, we can serve students wherever they learn - whether at home, school, or other community spaces—and ensure that our programs are adapting to their needs. We remain focused on fostering

strong connections—whether through professional development for educators, advancing our family engagement efforts via our [CARES framework](#), or establishing collaborative relationships with community partners and families.

What sets Waterford apart is our unwavering commitment to a research-backed, adaptive curriculum. Your partnership helps us to continue to make sure our curriculum meets the needs of every child.

Peer-reviewed research studies continue to show that Waterford programs help children make learning gains beyond what they would have achieved in a year.

Thank you for being an essential part of our journey. Your belief in our mission and your generous support make all of this possible. I look forward to all we will continue to accomplish together in the coming years.



Sincerely,

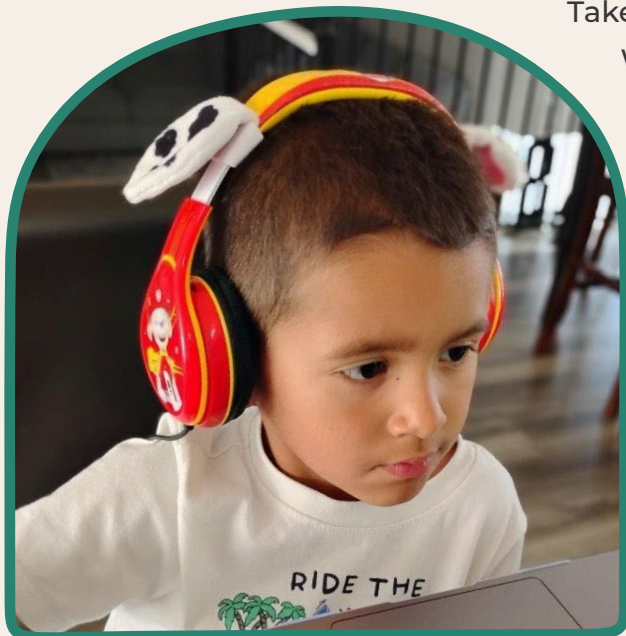
Matt Hill, Ed.D.
CEO, [Waterford.org](#)

About Waterford

Waterford.org is a national early education nonprofit that provides research-backed PreK through second grade reading, math, and science programs that children can use wherever they learn. Our tailored programs help children reach critical milestones by third grade, laying the foundation for future success for every child.

Impact Summary

At Waterford.org, the true measure of our impact lies in the lives of the children we serve. While the data helps tell the story, behind the numbers are thousands of caregivers and educators who have taken important steps to ensure a strong educational foundation for children. Thanks to the support of donors, partners, legislators, educators, and families, these children are building the skills and confidence they need to succeed.



Take Mateo in Utah, for example. Through Waterford's tailored learning experiences, Mateo has grown in reading, math, and science—and his mom, Claudia, has seen his confidence soar as he's developed a love for learning. Stories like Mateo's remind us why early education matters.

Together, we can ensure every child has access to quality learning opportunities in their earliest years—an investment that creates brighter futures for all.

“It's so exciting to see him learn and apply what he's learning in real life. Every day, he's growing more confident as he moves ahead in the program.”

- Claudia (Mateo's Mother) -

Evaluation Data

Among the children who used Waterford in the year before kindergarten and took our assessment at the end of the program:

89.5%

assessed at the Kindergarten Beginning level (Kindergarten Ready)

54.5%

assessed at a Kindergarten Advanced level putting them a full year ahead of where they need to be

66.2%

grew at least one level (e.g., Intermediate to Advanced)

73.3%

who pretested at PreK level ended at Kindergarten Beginning level or higher, on average

“Through our partnership (with Waterford), we have created environments and opportunities for families and staff to build the foundation for school readiness and success.”

- Nita Norphlet-Thompson, Executive Director Mississippi Head Start -

Stories of Impact

Rain or Shine: Mahari's Commitment to Education

A torrential downpour can't stop four-year-old Mahari's excitement for learning.

Despite the heavy rain and storm warnings that kept the rest of her classmates at home, Mahari's love for school remained unshakable. She was the only student to attend her Head Start class that day.

With her dedicated teacher by her side, Mahari transformed a quiet classroom into a day full of learning and exploration. Together, they dove into reading, math, and science using Waterford, making the most of their one-on-one time.

Her family is incredibly proud of her determination and passion for learning. They shared that Mahari dreams of becoming a doctor one day—a dream that reflects the strong educational foundation she's building.



"I just want her to excel."

- Markest (Mahari's father) -

With the help of her Head Start teachers and Waterford, Marhari's father, Markest has seen his daughter advance in reading skills and vocabulary. He supports his daughter every step of the way in her early education and future goals.

At Waterford, we are committed to ensuring that, like Mahari, every child is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The generous support of our donors and partners makes it possible to provide the tools and resources needed to help young learners succeed.

By supporting Waterford, you are helping to create bright futures for children like Mahari, who are ready to take on the world—rain or shine.



**Watch *Rain or Shine:*
*Mahari's Passion for Learning***

Early Learner to Education Advocate: Jessica Kallin's Journey with Waterford Upstart

Dr. Jessica Kallin, executive director of [Haverhill Promise](#), knows firsthand the transformative power of education. As a child, she was among the first to use the Waterford Upstart program, where her love for learning began with Rusty and Rosy. “My family and friends still sing the songs,” Jessica said about her early learning experience with Waterford. “It was such a fun way to learn.”



Years later, while working in refugee resettlement in Salt Lake City, Jessica witnessed the transformative impact of Waterford.org on young learners. She implemented the program to help children prepare for kindergarten, seeing firsthand how it built confidence and set them on a path to success. “It’s just the best experience to see young children feel that sense of accomplishment,” Jessica said. “I think that’s something that guides them through their whole school experience.”

Upon moving to Haverhill, Massachusetts, Jessica introduced Waterford Upstart to a new community, recognizing its potential to enhance early education, especially for multilingual learners. “Access to the coaches is so important, and they’re such an asset to the program because they communicate in the family’s home language,” she said. Under Jessica’s leadership, Haverhill Promise has united schools, nonprofits, parents, and community leaders to help children achieve grade-level reading by third grade.

“The earlier we can set these kids up for success, the better off we’re going to be five, ten, 20 years from now,” Jessica said.

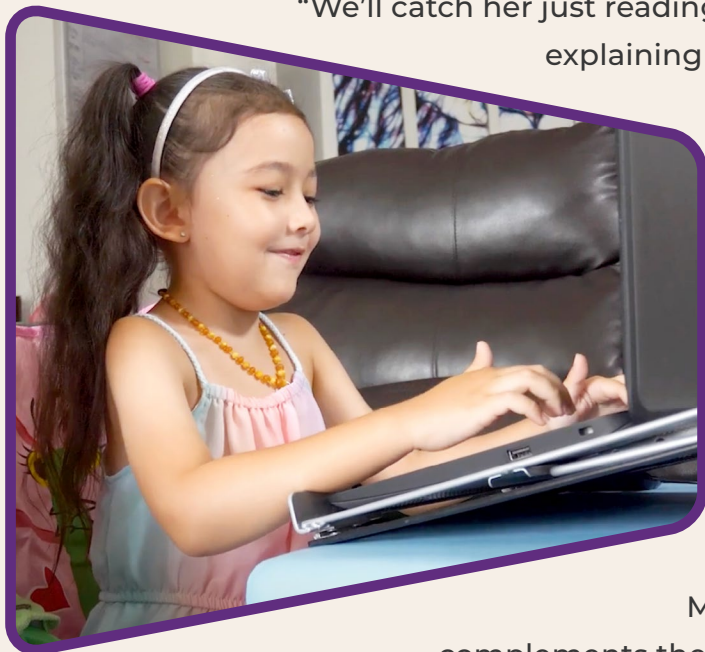
Jessica’s journey—from early learner to advocate—demonstrates the transformative power of early education. Today, she continues sharing the program that shaped her own path, building a brighter future for the next generation.



**Watch From Learner to Leader:
Dr. Jessica Kallin's Journey**

Raven's Joyful Adventure with Early Learning

Five-year-old Raven twirls and dances through her daily learning activities, her enthusiasm for education is boundless. Some mornings, she helps cook breakfast before diving into lessons; other days, she can't wait to start learning. Thanks to Waterford Upstart's New Mexico pilot program, Raven has found a flexible learning companion.



"We'll catch her just reading by herself," said Crystal, her mother, explaining how Waterford Upstart channels Raven's curiosity into academic progress.

For Crystal, who has experienced both traditional schooling and homeschooling with her older daughter, Waterford Upstart seamlessly integrates family involvement with professional educational support.

"Parents and caregivers are eager to support their child's success," said Kim Fischer, Waterford's EVP of

Marketing & Communications. "Waterford

complements their at-home efforts with access to expert early learning resources and support." This partnership between family and the program has been especially meaningful for Raven, who enjoys individual support and engagement. The adaptive technology responds to Raven's learning pace and style, turning what could have been challenges into opportunities for growth.

"This program helps no matter what – whether you send your student to public school or keep them home," Crystal shared.

Crystal's experience offers a powerful message for early education administrators: when technology-enabled learning meets family engagement, children flourish.

Raven's growing enthusiasm for learning shows how a tailored approach can positively influence a child's entire relationship with education.



Watch *Dancing Through Learning: Raven's Journey*

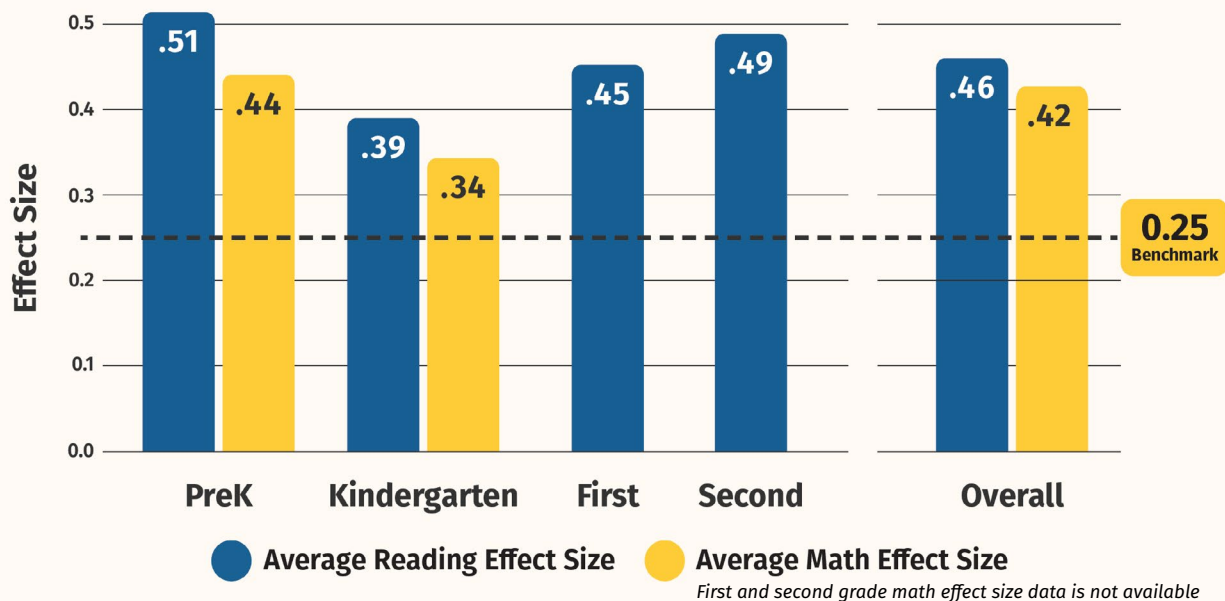
Data Driven & Research-Backed

Waterford Efficacy Meta-Analysis

Educators and caregivers make decisions that shape children's futures every day. They see firsthand how access to the right tools can illuminate a student's understanding. It's crucial to understand the impact on children's learning outcomes.

Waterford's Impact Proven Across 38 Peer-Reviewed Studies

- On average, **students advance more than a full year beyond expected growth.**
- Effect sizes **over .25** are considered **educationally important.**



A comprehensive meta-analysis study examining Waterford's impact over the past decade reveals encouraging results. Researchers analyzed data from over 79,000 young learners—spanning a decade and including a longitudinal analysis—who used Waterford across various backgrounds, uncovering something remarkable. **On average, students using Waterford programs consistently progress a full year or more beyond expected growth.**¹

The research shows especially promising results on average for students who have been historically underserved. Black/African American, Latino/a, and multilingual learners

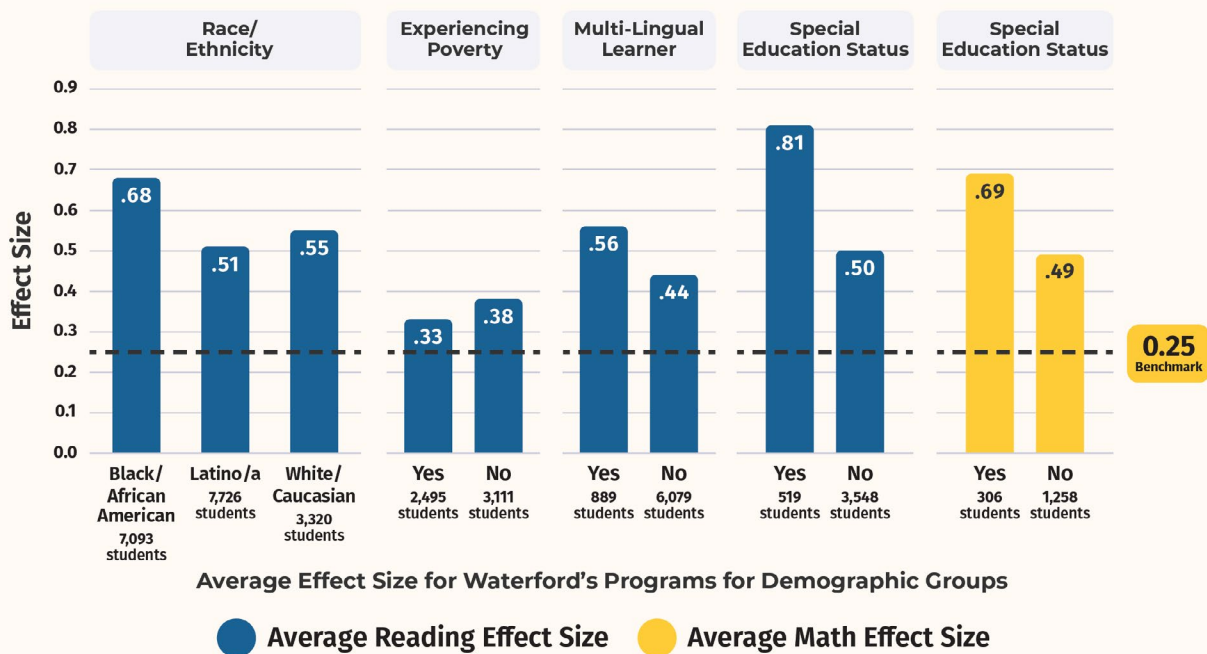
“I’ve been able to see what a year can do for our students, and the data speaks for itself.”

- Dr. Lisa Mitchell, Executive Director Fresno Unified School -

saw the most significant outcomes in reading, with learning gains exceeding what are typically achieved in a single academic year. Additionally, for students receiving special education services, learners achieved significant academic gains in mathematics and two times the academic gains typical in a school year in reading. These positive results for historically underserved populations highlight Waterford’s opportunity to close academic achievement gaps.

Effective Across Demographics

- **Of various races and ethnicities:** Significant growth in reading across the board.
- **Experiencing poverty:** Strong reading gains, showing improvement beyond half a year’s expected growth.
- **Multilingual learners:** Waterford students advance more than a full year beyond expected growth.
- **Receiving special education services:** Waterford helps them make large improvements in both reading and math.



Following these students over time, researchers confirmed what educators hope for most: these early gains stick, as highlighted in the [executive summary](#) of our meta-analysis. The message is clear for educational leaders seeking evidence-based solutions that work for all students. The skills children learn through Waterford programs become building blocks for future learning and long-term academic success.



Download Our Meta-Analysis Executive Summary

Funder's Impact

Every child needs the support of caring adults for positive growth and development. It takes families, educators, and community leaders working together to help children develop foundational literacy, math, and science skills for limitless possibilities. Waterford.org is proud to partner with philanthropic, government, tribal, and community organizations to help prepare young learners and their families for a lifetime of academic success. Our partners make the work we do possible.

Opportunities for All: EIR Grant Boosts Rural Education

In December 2023, Waterford.org secured a \$14 million Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to build equitable education opportunities in rural communities.

This award, supported by bipartisan federal legislators, marks our third federal grant and represents a significant expansion of our mission to bring high-quality early education to underserved communities. Over the next three years, we will examine how early learning interventions impact thousands of students from PreK through 2nd grade in rural settings.

The first year of this grant has already shown promising developments. We've established pilot programs in Kentucky and New Mexico to test our expanded rural outreach strategy. These carefully monitored pilots are helping us determine our approach before launching broader research studies across southern rural communities.

To ensure our work reflects the needs and values of rural communities, we've assembled an advisory group of early education experts with proven experience serving rural populations. This group convened for their inaugural in-person meeting in 2024, providing valuable insights into building authentic community partnerships and establishing trust in new regions.

Our commitment to evidence-based practice continues as demonstrated by our tailored learning approach in reading, math, and science. Waterford submits research for third-



party review and has 11 studies that meet the EESA Tier 1 criteria, with three published by the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

This grant enables us to create a scalable blueprint for supporting student achievement in rural communities. We're working hard to ensure that geography never determines a child's access to quality early education.

“It is important for funding to be available for programs like these so that children walk into school prepared. They're prepared with their sounds and how to spell their name. Those things give the kids confidence and empower them to do and to learn and to be in a school setting.”

- Danyelle Schauer, Waterford Upstart Mom -

Valhalla's Impact: Transforming Early Learning Through Waterford Innovation

Valhalla Foundation's funding has been transformative in helping Waterford.org modernize its program and expand its impact on school readiness. This two-and-a-half-year effort aligns with Valhalla's mission to close achievement gaps by supporting scalable, proven solutions that prepare children for school success.

Thanks to Valhalla's support, Waterford has embarked on a comprehensive effort to align its digital activities more closely with the latest science on how children learn. Over 1,100 explicit lessons are being reimaged in a next-generation framework, enabling the program to be more agile and effective. The revamped activities incorporate modern visuals and scenarios that reflect children's real-world experiences, drawing on what's



familiar. These updates not only make learning more relatable but also introduce children to new contexts, building essential background knowledge, and expanding their understanding of the world.

Accessibility has also been prioritized with enhancements to ensure Waterford works seamlessly on tablets and other devices. A refreshed interface, improved audio, and expanded Spanish language support create a more engaging experience for learners. Building on its long history of proven efficacy, the Waterford curriculum aligns with best practices from the Science of Reading and principles of effective instruction to deliver measurable outcomes.

This work is already making a meaningful impact on PreK–2nd grade children who use the program, demonstrating essential foundational skills across communities. With Valhalla’s investment, Waterford continues to demonstrate its commitment to supporting children through innovative, research-based solutions that help them succeed in school and beyond.



This video, *Drop Magic E*, was funded through the Valhalla Foundation.



Watch *Drop Magic E*

Looking Ahead

At Waterford.org, our focus remains on the individual success of each child. As we look to the future, we are committed to expanding our impact by ensuring access to our high-quality early education programs. We will continue to strengthen our partnerships with families, educators, and community stakeholders, as collaboration is key to our shared success.

Our dedication to addressing the varied needs of every learner remains at the heart of our mission. By leveraging peer-reviewed research, we will refine our curriculum to ensure it stays rooted in evidence-based practices. This approach will allow us to continually adapt, ensuring that each child has the tools needed to thrive, regardless of where they learn.

We are focused on ensuring that children achieve program success, particularly in preparation for kindergarten and in reaching critical milestones in reading, math, and science by third grade.

With your continued support, we are confident that together, we will make a lasting impact on the lives of children, families, and educators. Thank you for being an essential part of our journey.



“Literacy is the backbone of everything. I think that if we can get that started early, it will follow (our students) all the way through their education.”

- Doug Ogle, Superintendent Perkins Tryon Public Schools -

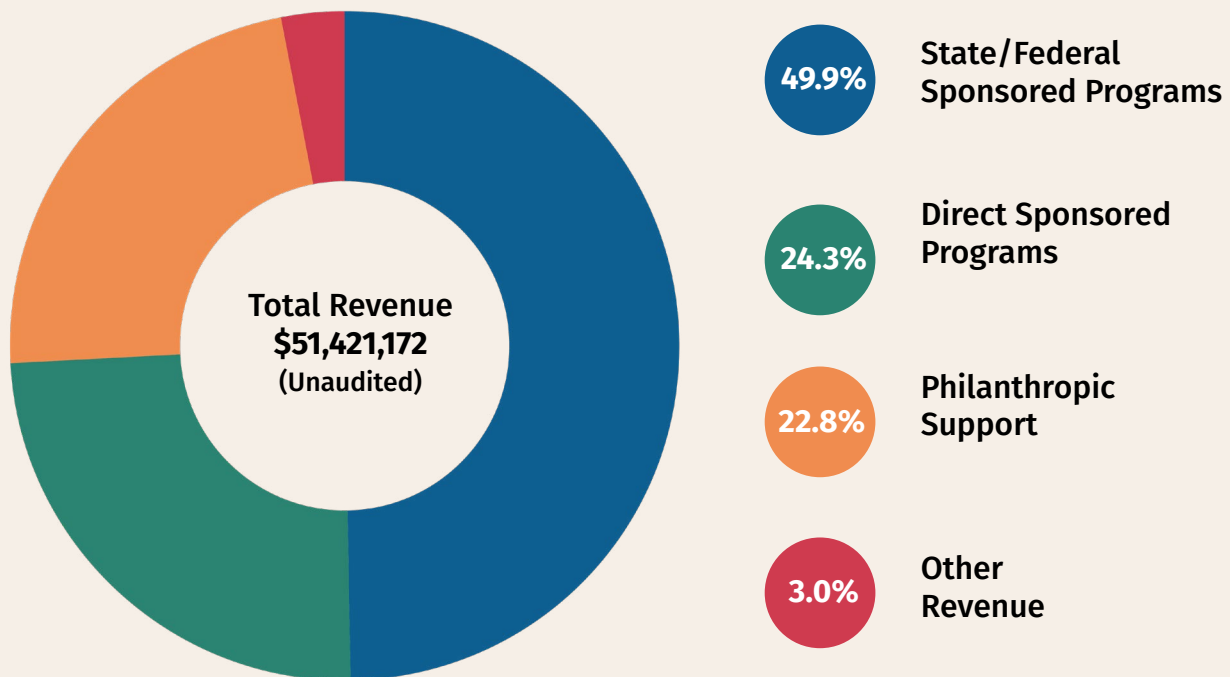
Waterford's Operating Model

We focus on maximizing our reach and impact while minimizing overall cost per student. We rely upon philanthropic partners to fund research and innovation, operational enhancements, and introduce our programs to new states and communities that want to test and prove the effectiveness of Waterford programs.

The majority of our revenue comes from schools, districts, and states that invest in the ongoing implementation of Waterford programs because of extraordinarily positive results realized in their students' academic growth.

As a nonprofit that aims to serve as many learners as possible, we dedicate all available resources to our mission within the responsible limits of our financial capacity.

2024 Revenue Sources



Waterford.org Board of Trustees

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each member of our Board of Trustees. Their decades of expertise and deep understanding of the early learning landscape significantly enhance Waterford.org's mission and programs. Through their visionary leadership and unwavering support, we are able to create brighter futures for children everywhere.



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Ernest Blackwell
Founder & CEO
Equity and Beyond



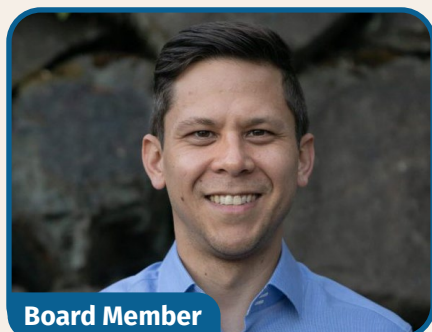
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¹ Determining the effect size that corresponds to a year of academic growth can vary by context, but a commonly referenced benchmark in education research suggests that an effect size of around 0.4 is the average effect we would expect from a year's worth of schooling. This benchmark comes from John Hattie's research, detailed in the book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*, which analyzed numerous educational interventions to establish a baseline. However, the exact effect size that represents a year of growth can differ depending on factors like:

Subject and Grade Level: Younger students or students in subjects with steeper learning curves may show different growth rates, and an effect size equivalent to a year's growth can vary with grade-level.

Assessment Used: Different standardized assessments and measures may yield varying interpretations of what a year's growth looks like in terms of effect size.

Educational Context: Schools or programs with high variability in instructional quality may see a shift in what constitutes "typical" growth.

While 0.4 is a general guideline, careful consideration of the specific educational setting and assessments is needed to interpret this effectively."