



Because Learning Doesn't Stop When School Does



A Year at Learning Edge 2021-22

Learning Edge is back in-person!

Learning Edge (formerly Cluster Tutoring) is excited to share highlights from our 2021–2022 tutoring year. Tutoring is now taking place at four venues per week. Multiple facilities and increased space allow more options for tutors and students while ensuring safe social distancing.

Monday evenings are a new option thanks to Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church opening its doors to us. Tuesday sessions in Austin have moved a few blocks north to the refurbished Field School, which provides excellent lighting and spacious classrooms. Our busy Thursday evening sessions continue due to the generosity of First United Church of Oak Park.

Additionally, Learning Edge started a weekly afterschool program at St. Catherine–St. Lucy school where tutors provide reading support to first and second graders. While Learning Edge has no religious affiliation, we are grateful to churches and schools that have so warmly welcomed us and believe so deeply in the work we do.

Over the last year, Learning Edge worked with a total of 100 students across all four programs. Retention rates remained high with over 80% of our students and over 70% of our tutors returning from the previous year. Seventy percent of our students either maintained or improved their grades, and 100% of our first graders saw growth in reading fluency.

After the challenges of the last few years, we are especially proud of these results. We look forward to extending Learning Edge's achievements to an ever-increasing pool of students from Chicago's far west side. We thank our donors who have been key to helping us grow and thrive.

With gratitude,

Kara Kalnitz
Executive Director

The mission of Learning Edge Tutoring is to contribute to the lives of Chicago area students through free one-to-one tutoring and academic enrichment opportunities enhanced by caring, mentoring relationships.

Learning Edge tutors go above and beyond.



Dynamic Duo: Chassidy & Spencer

Fourth-grader Chassidy and her tutor, Spencer, have worked together since Chassidy was in first grade. Though starting in person, they pivoted during the pandemic to virtual tutoring. Last year, they were extremely glad to be back in the same room.

"I like having her as a tutor and she helps me more and more," says Chassidy of her tutor. In addition to their weekly sessions, they sometimes meet on Saturdays with Leslie Hodes, tutor and Learning Edge Board President, who for 14 years was principal at Heritage Middle School in South Berwyn. "Leslie helps me with sounding out words and separating the letters," says Chassidy.

Spencer appreciates the sense of community at Learning Edge. "If you have a question, there is someone with an answer. I didn't know what I was doing when I joined, and I have gotten so much support and help. It's been fun getting to know Chassidy--that's an absolute highlight. I won the lottery getting paired with her," Spencer says.

Chassidy is grateful for Spencer and her family. "I'm happy that I have all this support and a family who loves me, cares for me, and helps me out on tough challenges," she says. "Thank you, Ms. Spencer for all the help that you've given me, the support, and the lessons. And I want to say thank you for Learning Edge for helping me with the goals I am trying to do."

When Chassidy and Spencer are not at tutoring, they like to get together for lunch, park visits, and movies. Over the summer, Spencer would pick up Chassidy from acting camp and take her to the library for additional tutoring.

Chassidy and Spencer exemplify the essence of Learning Edge: **establishing supportive relationships.**

Longtime Student-Tutor Spotlight: Morgan & Judy

Judy and Morgan have been tutor and student for seven years. Their friendship formed when Morgan was in the third grade, and their bond has only grown.

"I like coming here and getting some work done in a different environment – it's not really school, but it's not home either," says Morgan. "It's something else to look forward to."



Judy, a 13-year volunteer, saw how her own children benefitted from different adults in their life. "Some things children just aren't going to get from their parents," Judy explains. "I wanted to be able to give back to somebody else in some way."

When asked for advice to give to new students, Morgan says, "At first, it's always going to be hard because it's a new person and a new environment. It's not something that you're used to but in the long run, it's really beneficial." Morgan says she will return to Learning Edge as long as possible. "I really enjoy being here and being with Judy."

Judy believes tutors learn just as much from their students. "I have certainly learned from Morgan. We have such totally different skillsets. I'm in awe of her drawing and I couldn't draw more than a stick figure to save myself. I realized how differently she sees the world because of that talent."

Judy adds, "Everyone is here voluntarily. We are here because we want to be here and work together. That's always a good feeling." As Morgan and Judy can testify, **students and tutors learn from each other.**

Program Updates

Learning Edge Tutoring has a new location for Tuesday nights



Learning Edge is excited to announce its new Tuesday evening location, the Field School at 535 N. Parkside Avenue in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. The Field School is within a half mile of the program's former Tuesday location.

Recently renovated, the school offers spacious rooms and great lighting. We are grateful to have been so warmly welcomed by Field School administration and staff.

Amy Lazzeretti joins the Learning Edge Board



Amy is a recently retired special education teacher and assistant principal. As her roles within the education system shift, her dedication to making a difference with students in the Chicagoland area remains steady. Amy, who is also a tutor for us, believes Learning Edge is important for several reasons; "So the parent doesn't feel like they're by themselves, and so the student knows people in the community care about them."

Hurray for the Mathnasium!



Over the summer, Learning Edge partnered with the Mathnasium in Oak Park to offer 10 "Back to School" math enrichment sessions to our students. Many students struggle with math, and the aim of this program is to improve their foundational and mental math skills. This effort was primarily funded by the John A. Kenealy Memorial Fund, which was founded to specifically support Learning Edge students. Ten students participated and received individual instruction using the Mathnasium's proprietary curriculum.

In Memoriam - Janet Jones



Longtime volunteer, Janet Jones, passed away in September of this year. Janet was one of the original tutors for the Cluster Tutoring Program. She represented Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church, which was one of the original members of the "cluster."

Janet was an excellent tutor no matter who her student was. Her first student was in the first graduating class at Walter Payton High School and went to the University of Illinois on a Golden Apple scholarship.

Janet's next student had a congenital birth defect that limited his ability to learn. Janet plunged into tutoring this boy with the same level of energy as her first student and would bring in special workbooks for them to use. When it was time for him to go to high school, he was accepted at a parochial school that deemed his reading ability sufficient for the curriculum.

The last student she tutored was a bright girl who was behind in reading. She often had problems pronouncing everyday words. Janet brought in more workbooks, and this student was up to grade level in reading by the end of the year.

Janet's kind spirit and devotion to her students made her an incredible asset to the program. Her legacy lives on through their academic and personal success.

Learning Edge celebrates volunteers at annual social event!

On Saturday, October 29, the Learning Edge program held a volunteer social event at the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association in Oak Park. Learning Edge organized the event to recognize and celebrate the impact that each volunteer tutor has on their student and the community at large. Due to COVID-19, it had been a couple of years since the prior event. This year, the banquet hall drew longtime volunteers, as well as new volunteers and Learning Edge Board members.

Learning Edge Board members and tutors, Cathy Rennau & Spencer Baker, shared their experience. They spoke eloquently about the way that each tutor and student that work together naturally become a bigger part of each other's lives. They become like family and the relationships go beyond tutoring. The event served as a reminder that ***through the support of community, we can all find our own version of success and help each other grow.***



Learning Edge is more than tutoring, it's a community.



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Joan Richards, Reading Specialist
Meg Loughran, Special Education Consultant
Julia Schroeder, Program Assistant, Monday
Joseph Price, Program Assistant, Tuesday
Aliyah Washington, Program Assistant, Thursday
Sher Watts-Spooner, Marketing Coordinator



Program Assistant promoted to Marketing Coordinator



Julia Schroeder, who previously served as a Program Assistant for Learning Edge, has been promoted to Marketing Coordinator. She is responsible for assembling bimonthly newsletters, managing our social media, and writing feature articles and news stories for the Learning Edge website. Learning Edge is fortunate to benefit from her many talents!

Thank you to our donors: August 2021-July 31, 2022

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<https://learningedgetutoring.org>