



## FY 2024-2025, Q3 Reflection of WITS' Growth and Impact in Houston's Schools

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May 27, 2025

Dear Friend,

With spring giving way to summer, WITS is happy to update you on the opportunities that have blossomed through Quarter 3 of our fiscal year. We've tracked the impact and tallied the numbers, but perhaps most importantly, beyond any hard metrics, we've felt what it looks and feels like to impact our community. It means: setting up tables at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in early April to welcome hundreds of eager ears to the Meta4 Grand Slam Finale; filling the bins outside our offices with hundreds of orange folders to provide WITS Teaching Artists with resources for their growing classrooms; printing more than 50 broadsides of student work in anticipation of young writers reading their work before a packed audience at the Menil Collection; welcoming opportunities for our staff's professional growth and career development and, of course, feeling proud of the work we get to do every day.

Whether deepening school partnerships within HISD, forging new ones in districts outside of HISD, or collaborating with community organizations around the city, Writers in the Schools (WITS) maintains its core commitment to championing young voices and creative writing across Houston. And we know this is possible because of you!

We've built some wonderful momentum this school year. What began as a desire to increase access and the number of young people we serve has manifested into significant growth for WITS. Bolstered by new school, district, and community partnerships, this growth is the direct result of the intentional investment of time, resources, and dedication from our team to cultivate and retain relationships with schools, administration, parents, PTA advocates, and funders who see the value of our programming.

### Key Milestones:

- This spring, WITS had active partnerships, during and after school, with 31 schools, up from 21 last fall, or a 48% increase in just six months.
- WITS' school day program sites have increased to 25, up from 17 in November.
- We are creating access to literary arts where it is needed most. School expansion is not just a growth metric. The expansion of our presence in schools means the closing of arts desert gaps within the education system.
- This year, we delivered school-based programming within HISD, Beeville, and Katy ISD, as well as private and charter schools. Our goal to expand our presence beyond HISD in 2025-26 will be supported by a recently secured **\$26,000 grant from the CenterPoint Energy Foundation.**

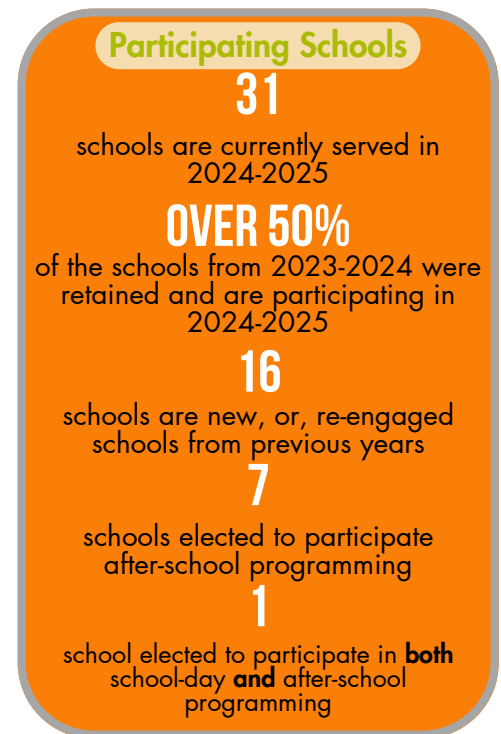
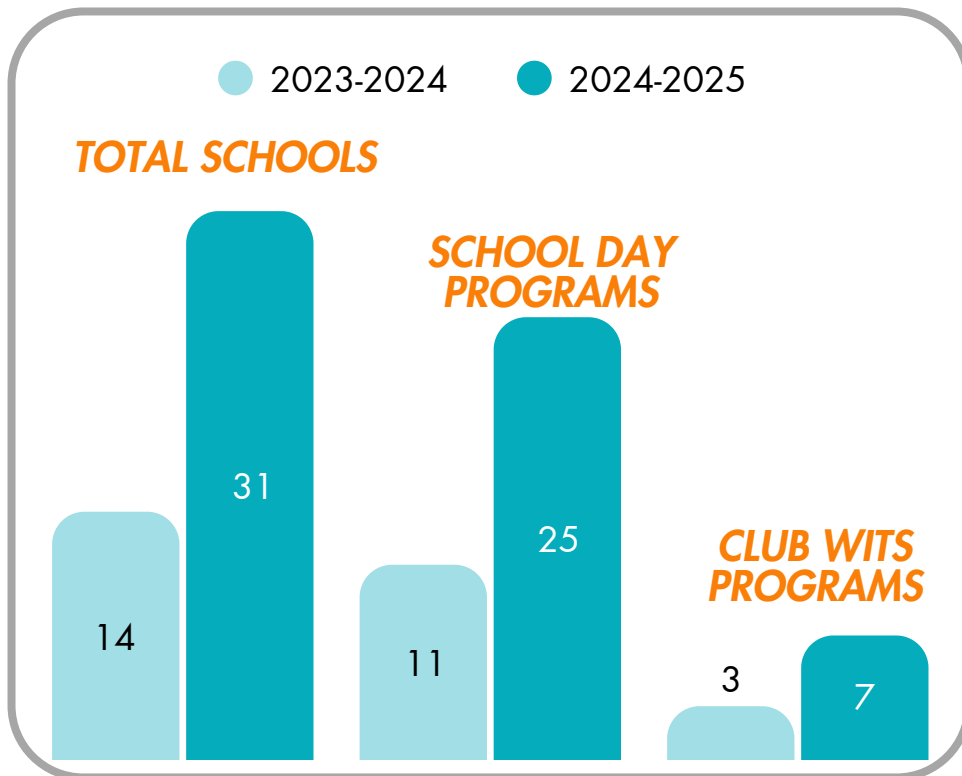
Looking ahead, we are optimistic that strategic district expansions into Alief, Spring, and Aldine will be as successful. These districts represent historically underestimated and culturally rich areas in need of bridges to traverse arts access gaps.

# Writers in the Schools

## YEAR OVER YEAR GROWTH



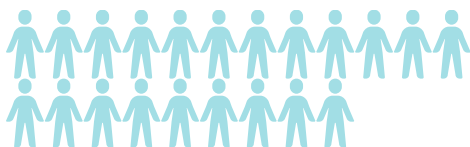
During the 2024-2025 school year, WITS will provide 32 creative writing programs across 31 schools, both during the school day and after-school. **Here's the breakdown:**



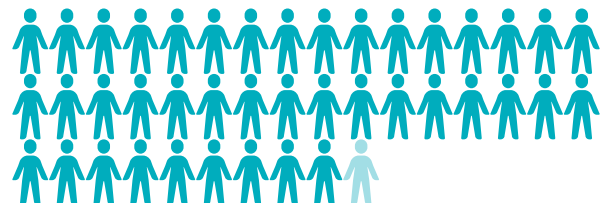
2023-2024

STUDENTS SERVED DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

2024-2025



2,100



4,156

2023-2024

STUDENTS SERVED DURING SUMMER CAMP

2024-2025



1,350



1,500+

2023-2024

CLASSROOMS SERVED

2024-2025



72



193

# Writers in the Schools

## CURRENT PLACEMENTS



### School-Day Program Sites

1. Awty International NEW
2. Beeville ISD
  - a. AC Jones HS
  - b. FMC ES
  - c. Moreno Jr High
  - d. RA Hall ES
3. Briarwood School NEW
4. Etoile Academy NEW
5. Helms
6. Holland MS NEW
7. Ketelsen ES
8. Kinkaid School NEW
9. Law ES NEW
10. Milne ES NEW
11. Morton Ranch Jr High NEW
12. Park Place ES NEW
13. Patterson
14. Pershing
15. Sinclair
16. St. Anne
17. St. Francis
18. St. Vincent de Paul
19. Stevenson MS NEW
20. Travis ES
21. Valley West ES NEW
22. Wharton Dual Language

### Club WITS Sites

1. Kolter ES (HISD)
2. TH Rogers MS (HISD) NEW
3. St. Anne (Private)
4. Condit ES (HISD)
5. Twain ES (HISD)
6. DAV Montessori (Private) NEW
7. Oak Forest ES (HISD)

### 2025 CWC Partners

1. Holy Spirit Episcopal School
2. Annunciation Orthodox School
3. St. Francis Episcopal
4. St. Anne Catholic School
5. Rice University



## From 2023-24 to 2024-25:

- The total schools we served more than doubled: from 14 to 31 (+121%).
- School-day programming grew from 11 to 25 campuses (+127%).
- The total number of classrooms we placed writers in grew from 72 to 193 (+168%).
- The total number of school-year students served grew from 2,100 to 4,156 (+98%).
  - We are expecting to serve an additional 1,500 during our summer camp creative writing programs, totaling **5,656 kids for the entire year.**
- **School Programs**
  - Flexible programming options are helping WITS meet schools where they are — and bring them deeper into our community.
  - **School day program growth increased from 11 to 25 in-school placements**
- **7 Club WITS campuses**
  - Club WITS serves as a flexible, entry-level experience for schools new to our programming. It also supports schools with budget limitations, while building trust and often paving the way for deeper engagement, like field trips or long-term residencies.
  - Club WITS participation has more than doubled year-over-year — from **3 campuses to 7** — and now includes schools across public, charter, and private sectors. These placements include embedded evaluations using pre- and post-program writing samples to measure student growth.

## WITS Teaching Artists

We're not just reaching more students — we're strengthening the educators who inspire them. Forty-four WITS Teaching Artists (WITS Writers) were placed in classroom and workshop spaces, supporting educators and campuses. Of these, 8 WITS Writers worked with us in after-school placements, and 36 WITS Writers in school-day or community placements.

These Teaching Artists are being offered professional development opportunities monthly, as opposed to the quarterly engagements previously offered. We are investing in our teaching artists as the lifeblood of our mission. The expansion of PD builds not just skills, but a shared culture that ensures quality as our footprint expands. This sustained investment makes a meaningful difference in the classroom experience.

Additionally, to provide professional opportunities for our young people, we continue to grow our internship offerings. This year, we have 28 Summer Interns set up for Summer Camp, and the majority hail from Rice University's student pool. We have 5 alumni from WITS programming, and 2 are returning interns from last year.

Internally, our organization's work is continuously striving toward the completion of the goals we set out in our strategic plan. We are looking for ways to leverage and communicate our impact through evaluation methods that began last summer and have continued through this Spring. This means that student performance will be reviewed both qualitatively and quantitatively, but the method is not focused solely on writing revision technicalities; it is focused on growth in writing discovery. This year, WITS measured student growth by collecting samples of work from randomly selected and anonymized students at the beginning and end of their WITS semester. Each piece was evaluated by a team of writers using a rubric that scored Vocabulary, Sentence Complexity, and Figurative Language. Using these scores, we were able to calculate the percentage of improvement for each student. We found that, throughout a 12-week WITS course, students improved on average by 34% in vocabulary, 36% in sentence complexity, and used 63% more figurative language.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2025 IMPACT METRICS SCORING SHEET SAMPLE							
Vocabulary:							
	1 =	The text is restricted to a limit vocabulary of basic words; no attempts are made to use more advanced words.					
	10 =	The text incorporates an impressive variety of advanced descriptive vocabulary words to express ideas.					
Sentence/line variation:							
	1 =	The text is dominated by the exact same sentence/line structure, length, and/or opening words, and the repetition does not seem to be an intentional creative choice.					
	10 =	Sentences/lines are of varying lengths and structures, with different opening words, and depict range throughout; any repetition seems imaginative and intentional (e.g., anaphora).					
Figurative language:							
	1 =	The text uses no figurative language. Ideas and descriptions are expressed directly, without elaboration or imaginative flair.					
	10 =	The text is filled with numerous and various instances of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, and imagery.					
What you, the evaluator, will complete (Taken from work samples)							
Sample Evaluator ID	Sample Work ID	Vocabulary (1-10)	SAMPLE SCORES		Figurative Language (1-10)		
S251234	14201	3	4		3		
S251234	14305	1	2		6		
S251234	14411	7	9		8		
etc.	etc.	etc.	etc.		etc.		

## Arts + Cultural Partnerships | The Menil Young Writers Reading on May 23, 2025

Creativity thrives when students see their ideas reflected in the world around them. **1,393 students were served** through Menil Collection field trips this year. The Menil offers exclusive access for WITS-coordinated field trips, opening the museum to our visiting students before regular public hours, Tuesday through Thursday, during the school year. As the Menil's sole educational partner for over a decade, WITS collaborates year-round with museum staff for field trips, and WITS' teaching writers guide students through a journey of observation, imagination, and reflection. The experience culminates in both a public reading and a professionally bound anthology, affirming each student's identity as a published author.



These field trips offer more than a change of scenery, however. They connect student writing with real-world art and interdisciplinary learning and offer many students the opportunity to see artwork for the first time.



This year's Menil Anthology includes **50 featured student writers, 40 of whom read at the May 23 celebration** — a **33% increase** in live participation from last year. The integration of visual and literary arts enriches student learning and reinforces the value of creativity across subjects. Over 200 guests gathered for the annual Menil Young Writers' Reading, where these 40 student creatives shared original work inspired by their visit to the Menil Collection.

*Miss out on the action?*

- Read the 2024-2025 *The Watchful Eye* anthology by downloading it [here](#).
- [Check out photos from the event!](#)

### Luncheon Highlights and Recent Funding Successes:

We planted and nurtured a Legacy Tree, and on April 17th, our annual benefit generated a collection of support, stories, and testimonies. \$142,632.41 was raised from over 200 supporters. See the highlights from that day in our recap [video](#) or see if you can spot yourself in the [photos](#)!



### Recent Funding Awards:

- **CenterPoint Energy Foundation** - An incredible **\$26,000 grant** was awarded on behalf of the CenterPoint Energy Foundation to support our FY 25- 26 district expansion objectives. (THANK YOU!)
- **Powell Foundation** - The Powell Foundation has thoughtfully invested in WITS to continue its programming in HISD, and, over two years, from FY 25- 27, also pilot expanded district objectives.
- **Travelers Foundation** - Recently supported WITS with a \$15,000 programmatic grant award to champion Meta4 Houston in advance of the Brave New Voices competition for this year.

## 2025 Meta4 Houston Slam Team Selected

On April 3, six youth poets, including three returning members, earned their spot on the 2025 Meta4 Houston Youth Slam Poetry team. Welcome, Amaya, Cristina, Mya, Herman, Divya, and Sharron! ([View the Grand Slam Photos](#) here!)

Each brings a unique voice and vision to the team, and their evolution as emerging artists and leaders is already taking shape in powerful ways.

Since the launch of the Meta4 Houston Fellowship Fund, WITS and Meta4 have been able to achieve the following:

- **Program Development:** The fellows recently participated in four hours of professional development focused on CVs vs. resumes, artist development, crafting artist statements, and plan to learn about financial opportunities for artists that include grant-funded stipends as they grow into their creative futures.
- **Space City Weekend Regional Slams:** A large portion of the training and practice to prepare these team members takes place during our Regional Slam, aka Space City Weekend, from June 19-21st. This is a jam-packed weekend filled with competitions, workshops, and cross-collaboration with other regional and out-of-state youth slam poetry teams! We invite you to attend some of the weekend if you'd like to mark your calendars, or register [here](#) for participation as an individual or team!
- **Upcoming Travel to Brave New Voices:** The team has purchased their tickets for Brave New Voices and is aiming for a third consecutive win as national champions. This year, it's going to be in Madison, WI, from July 16th to July 19th!



## Alumni Spotlight

"I believe her early exposure to reading and writing through WITS played an important role in her development. It helped her find her voice and build confidence in expressing herself." – Daniel Chu, parent of Thierry Chu, WITS alum, and newly elected VP of Student Government at UT Austin.

## Summer Camp Programming

Turning the corner, summer programming means **CAMP!** Our energy doesn't dwindle when the school year breaks for summer. We've got summer camp creative writing programs starting on June 2nd. (While securing a spot at many of our camps can be quite competitive, fear not, we still have some spots available and encourage you to sign up!)

We expect to surpass last year's summer camp enrollment and are currently projecting our summer camp registration to reach 1,350 young writers.

## Upcoming Opportunities - Summer Camp Site Visits

We are offering the opportunity to join us during our Summer Camp creative writing programming to observe students who are pursuing writing over the summer, which includes a guided exploration followed by a writing workshop led by WITS Writers. Traditionally, WITS' summer camp programs have been a vital and intensive 8-week set of multi-participant sites and age groups.

Email Aubrey Burghardt, Development Director, at [aburghardt@witshouston.org](mailto:aburghardt@witshouston.org) to coordinate a site visit and observe WITS in action for you or a group at one of our featured partner sites. Camp visits are typically available from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

- June 2-6 Holy Spirit
- June 9-13 Annunciation Orthodox & Rice University
- June 23-27 St. Anne Catholic School
- July 7-11 St. Francis
- July 14-18 Annunciation Orthodox & Rice University
- July 21-25 Rice University

## View the 2025 WITS Summer Camp Calendar

June	Duchesne, CWC, UHD, JCC, St Catherine, DAV					
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						5/31 Holy Spirit orientation
1	2 Holy Spirit UHD St Catherine	3 Holy Spirit UHD St Catherine	4 Holy Spirit UHD St Catherine	5 Holy Spirit UHD St Catherine	6 Holy Spirit UHD St Catherine	7 AOS orientation RICE 1 orientation
8	9 AOS RICE 1 UHD	10 AOS RICE 1 UHD	11 AOS RICE 1 UHD	12 AOS RICE 1 UHD	13 AOS RICE 1 UHD	14
15	16 UHD JCC	17 UHD JCC	18 UHD JCC	19 No CWC JCC?	20 UHD JCC	21 St Anne orientation
22	23 St Anne Duchesne 1 UHD JCC	24 St Anne Duchesne 1 UHD JCC	25 St Anne Duchesne 1 UHD JCC	26 St Anne Duchesne 1 UHD JCC	27 St Anne Duchesne 1 UHD JCC	28 SFE orientation
29	30 Virtual UHD					

July	Duchesne, CWC, UHD, St Catherine, DAV					
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	30 Virtual UHD	1 Virtual UHD	2 Virtual UHD	3 Virtual UHD	4 No CWC	5
6	7 Virtual SFE Duchesne 2 UHD DAV	8 Virtual SFE Duchesne 2 UHD DAV	9 Virtual SFE Duchesne 2 UHD DAV	10 Virtual SFE Duchesne 2 UHD DAV	11 Virtual SFE Duchesne 2 UHD DAV	12 AOS orientation RICE 2 orientation
13	14 AOS 2 RICE 2 Duchesne 2	15 AOS 2 RICE 2 Duchesne 2	16 AOS 2 RICE 2 Duchesne 2	17 AOS 2 RICE 2 Duchesne 2	18 AOS 2 RICE 2 Duchesne 2	19 RICE 3 orientation
20	21 RICE 3 Duchesne 3 St Catherine DAV	22 RICE 3 Duchesne 3 St Catherine DAV	23 RICE 3 Duchesne 3 St Catherine DAV	24 RICE 3 Duchesne 3 St Catherine DAV	25 RICE 3 Duchesne 3 St Catherine DAV	26
27	28	29	30	31		

# CREATIVE WRITING CAMP 2025



## Summer Writing Camp for K-12 Students

Creative Writing Camp (CWC), a collaboration between Writers in the Schools and Rice University's School Literacy and Culture, has inspired young writers for over 30 years. Our in-person and online camps explore writing topics that hone creativity and prepare students for future success. With low student-teacher ratios and mentorship from professional writers and teachers, CWC offers an incredible writing experience!

**Cost: Virtual Camp - \$495; On-Campus - \$525; Sibling Discount (Two or more) - 5% discount per student**

### Summer 2025 Opportunities - *Registration opens Jan. 27, 2025*

#### **JUNE 2-6: HOLY SPIRIT EPISCOPAL SCHOOL**

12535 Perthshire Rd, Houston, TX 77024  
Incoming K - 5th grade  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

#### **JUNE 9-13: ANNUNCIATION ORTHODOX SCHOOL**

3600 Yoakum Blvd, Houston, TX 77006  
Incoming K - 5th grade  
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

#### **JUNE 9-13: RICE UNIVERSITY**

6100 Main St, Houston, TX 77005  
Incoming 6th - 12th grade  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

#### **JUNE 23-27: ST. ANNE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

2120 Westheimer Rd, Houston, TX 77098  
Incoming K - 8th grade  
8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

#### **JUNE 30-JULY 11: VIRTUAL**

*9 days of camp total - no camp July 4*  
Canvas Online Learning Platform  
Incoming 3rd - 5th grade 9 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.  
Incoming 6th - 12th grade 12:45 - 4 p.m.

#### **JULY 7-11: ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL SCHOOL**

335 Piney Point Rd, Houston, TX 77024  
Incoming K - 5th grade  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

#### **JULY 14-18: ANNUNCIATION ORTHODOX SCHOOL**

3600 Yoakum Blvd, Houston, TX 77006  
Incoming K - 5th grade  
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

#### **JULY 14-18: RICE UNIVERSITY**

6100 Main St, Houston, TX 77005  
Incoming 6th - 12th grade  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

#### **JULY 21-25: RICE UNIVERSITY**

6100 Main St, Houston, TX 77005  
Incoming 6th - 12th grade  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**For more details and  
to sign up for updates,  
please visit:**



[continue.rice.edu/creative-writing-camp](https://continue.rice.edu/creative-writing-camp)

## Looking Ahead

As we prepare for Fall 2025, the goals we've set organizationally for next year include:

- Expansion into 3–5 additional schools across Houston and beyond
- Deepen our collaboration with HISD and other districts
- Develop new constituent support from alumni, partners, and writers

WITS is not just growing — we are evolving to meet the needs of a changing world. Thank you for believing in this mission and for continuing to stand with WITS. Your belief in the power of youth voice sustains our mission and deepens our impact.

If you'd like to learn more, see the work in action, or recommend schools, partners, or supporters, please coordinate with Aubrey Burghardt, Development Director, by emailing [aburghardt@witshouston.org](mailto:aburghardt@witshouston.org)

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Giuseppe Taurino". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

## Recent Press & Articles

- [WITS was featured in a Houston Chronicle article](#) detailing arts deserts and the critical need for arts programming in schools this past April.
- [State of the Arts Report Released](#) – 19% of HISD campuses have no fine arts teachers. Only 22% have arts partnerships.
- [Shiftpress Feature](#): Young Houston Poet Laureates in Conversation. Aris Kian and Ariana Lee discuss slam poetry, abolition, the HISD takeover, and more.