

Truist and EVERFI bring no-cost early literacy digital education to teachers, families and communities nationwide

New program tackles reading losses of youngest learners to address systemic financial and workforce disparities tied to illiteracy

CHARLOTTE, N.C. and WASHINGTON, Aug. 24, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Truist Financial Corporation (NYSE: TFC) and [EVERFI Inc.](#), the leading Impact-as-a-Service™ education innovator, today announced all elementary students nationwide will soon have access to WORD Force Universe, a proven, no-cost digital early literacy program. Designed for students in grades K-2, the interactive, online program empowers children to learn to read and is available for educators, community-based organizations and for families to use at home.

From January 2020 through June 2021, Truist conducted a pilot of the WORD Force program, reaching more than 17,000 students at 684 schools. Over half of the schools and students who used the program during the pilot phase were identified as low- to moderate-income. Students improved their literacy and reading skills across the board with notable improvements in their ability to sound out more complex letter patterns, understand word tense, build longer words, read and understand new vocabulary, make new words and spell high-frequency words.

"[Studies show](#) nearly two-thirds of fourth-graders don't read at a proficient level, and that's not acceptable because being proficient in reading has lifelong implications," said Truist Chairman and CEO Kelly S. King. "At Truist our purpose is to inspire and build better lives and communities. For us, that means focusing on educational equity to eradicate literacy gaps and conditions of poverty. Government alone cannot fix this and other critical skills issues, so businesses have a responsibility to step up to solve some of society's greatest problems."

A 2019 [report](#) on prekindergarten to third-grade literacy found elementary school students across the country struggle to learn basic reading skills, and third graders who aren't proficient in reading are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Furthermore, the link between literacy and future success is clear. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), "individuals demonstrating higher levels of literacy were more likely to be employed, work more weeks in a year and earn higher wages than individuals demonstrating lower proficiencies."

"I used WORD Force with my second graders and couldn't have planned a better course if I had developed it myself. The flow of the course allowed my students to see the progression of how one learns to read and how everything is tied together from phonics to sight words to sentence building," said Stephanie Macier, second-grade teacher, Seagoville Elementary School, Dallas Independent School District. "My students were so excited to go through the program and their confidence, especially of my students who came in below grade level, shot through the roof. As they started to learn and pass the levels in the game they were also answering more questions in class, speaking out, more and identifying letter sounds in everything we did."

The interactive, online program meets the student when and where they can access the curriculum, allowing optimal flexibility and convenience. WORD Force Universe is designed to ensure all students have equal access to literacy fundamentals, including phonics, letter-sound/letter name matching, word building, sight words, vocabulary and reading comprehension. It aligns with standards and, through EVERFI's team of in-community implementation specialists, will be an additional resource for all elementary school teachers across Truist's markets in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C., as they kick off the new school year.

Offering engaging learning outside the classroom

In September Truist and EVERFI will also launch a national hub — with Truist funding the program — to allow families and community-based organizations to take advantage of the WORD Force Universe in their out-of-school settings at no cost.

Researchers found a child's access to the technology necessary for online learning varied across school systems and household income levels, with a higher percentage of students having access to at least one device the more affluent their school district. The difference in "technology access in relation to family income suggests school efforts to provide online learning during the COVID-19 closures were [not fully equitable](#)."

Truist hopes to reach as many children as possible with this critical education in various environments by engaging community-based organizations and families directly. This approach is designed to empower parents/guardians to play an active role in their child's literacy education and equips community organizations to deliver a low-effort literacy program.

"Learning how to read is one of the most fundamental skills we teach children, and studies have repeatedly shown the ability to read at a proficient level is key to future success, academically, professionally and financially," said EVERFI President and Co-founder Ray Martinez. "The earlier we can reach students, especially those in low- to moderate-income communities who may not have access to the same resources as their middle- and upper-income peers, the sooner we can develop not just a proficiency but also a passion for reading — with the ultimate goal of helping to break the cycle of poverty. We're grateful for

Truist's commitment to driving impact in the communities they serve and are proud to work alongside them to bring this program to so many teachers, schools, families and community organizations with their support."

To learn more about WORD Force Universe and access the national hub when it launches in September, please visit <https://everfi.com/k-12/wordforce/>.

About Truist

Truist Financial Corporation is a purpose-driven financial services company committed to inspiring and building better lives and communities. Formed by the historic merger of equals of BB&T and SunTrust, Truist has leading market share in many high-growth markets in the country. The company offers a wide range of services including retail, small business and commercial banking; asset management; capital markets; commercial real estate; corporate and institutional banking; insurance; mortgage; payments; specialized lending; and wealth management. Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, Truist is a top 10 U.S. commercial bank with total assets of \$522 billion as of June 30, 2021. Truist Bank, Member FDIC. Learn more at [Truist.com](https://truist.com).

About EVERFI Inc.

EVERFI is an international technology company driving social impact through education to address the most challenging issues affecting society ranging from financial wellness to mental health to workplace conduct and other critical topics. Founded in 2008, EVERFI's Impact-as-a-Service™ solution and digital educational content have reached more than 41 million learners globally. In 2020, the company was recognized as one of the World's Most Innovative Companies by *Fast Company* and was featured on *Fortune Magazine's* Impact 20 List. The company was also named to the 2021 GSV EdTech 150, a list of the most transformative growth companies in digital learning. Some of America's leading CEOs and venture capital firms are EVERFI investors, including Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos, Google Chairman Eric Schmidt, Twitter founder Evan Williams, as well as Advance, Rethink Education, Rethink Impact, The Rise Fund, and TPG Growth. To learn more about EVERFI and how you can #answerthecall, please visit everfi.com or follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#) @EVERFI.

SOURCE Truist Financial Corporation

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Additional assets available online:  [Photos \(1\)](#)

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