

TIME
OUTS



2024



WILDLY SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

826LA



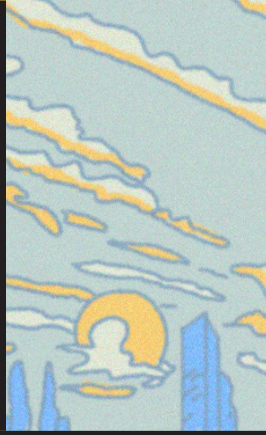
STRATEGIC PLAN 2024



Dear Professor Barnacle,

Look what we found in our time travels! It's 826LA's strategic plan. It's the roadmap of how they decided to bring the creative power of writing to students throughout Los Angeles!

Sincerely,
Timescout Camilla
Timescout Raul



Dear 826ers,

This strategic plan is an overview of 826LA's potential. Using our North Star—nurturing student voices through writing—the picture we're painting through this strategic planning process is unapologetically optimistic and bold. Over the next three years, 826LA will expand our reach, advance our brand, and ensure the long-term health and viability of our organization long after this plan has been implemented.

In 2025, as we launch this strategic plan, 826LA will celebrate our 20th anniversary. During the first twenty years of our organizational life, we will have served over 110,000 students and engaged over 19,000 volunteers. We opened writing labs in Echo Park and Mar Vista and school-based writing programs in Roosevelt, Manual Arts, and Venice High Schools.

This plan came together in a participatory way. We engaged 826LA staff, volunteers, donors, Board members, educators, families, and students through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Most of what we learned through this process is that we're on the right path. In fact, the consensus is that Los Angeles needs more of our programs. One teaching partner put it nicely when she said we should "expand the organization and increase the number of schools we're working with, especially high needs schools." One of our students cut right to the chase: "I want to see 826LA all over the world."

Through this collaborative, generative process, we have identified strategic opportunities for 826LA, including areas to improve, particularly along the lines of 826LA's visibility and community awareness of our work. A staff member put it this way: "826LA's brand is perhaps one of its biggest strengths. But the world is a much different place than when 826LA first launched. How might we continue our legacy of creative approaches to learning writing while also helping the brand grow as the organization continues to respond to the times and evolve?"

We've sketched a roadmap responsive to the feedback we've received. Our priorities can be divided into two groups: Programmatic Reach and Financial Health. The two are mutually reinforcing and we've stitched them together with a third section on Strategic Communications.

Throughout the plan, we ask ourselves: What does our future look like if we're wildly successful with Financial Health, Programmatic Reach, and Strategic Communications?

We invite you to read on and, more importantly, we invite you to join us as we move our mission forward.

Sincerely,

Jaime Balboa
Executive Director

VISION, MISSION, + CORE VALUES



VISION:

826LA envisions a Los Angeles where every child has access to quality writing education and is empowered to express themselves creatively through writing. We envision a Los Angeles where every teacher is supported in their writing-based educational objectives.

MISSION:

826LA is dedicated to unlocking and cultivating the creative power of writing for students ages 6 to 18, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write.

How we advance our mission: A nonprofit organization, our services are structured around our understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention, and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success.

With this in mind, we provide after-school tutoring in all subjects, evening and weekend workshops, in-school programs, field trips, college access, help for English language learners, and assistance with student publications.

All of our programs are challenging and enjoyable, and ultimately strengthen each student's ability to express ideas effectively, creatively, confidently, and in their own voice.

CORE VALUES

826LA values joy in the service of achieving educational goals. Our community norms value diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. We therefore prioritize partnerships with Title 1 Schools, engagement with historically marginalized populations, and training and deploying community-based volunteers in support of our mission. As a teaching approach, we value creativity, authenticity, empathy, and lively, rigorous, and student-centered writing education. As an educational enrichment organization, we value supporting teachers, principals, and other school staff in the pursuit of excellence.



PROGRAMMATIC REACH



At 826LA, we meet students where they are with their interests, confidence, and skills in writing. Students from all over Los Angeles experience the whimsy and academic rigor of 826LA programs through multiple points of entry and at different depth levels.

Woven throughout 826LA's programs are initiatives and approaches that have buoyed our recent successes.

We successfully doubled the number of students served from our pandemic lows, reaching 6,177 students in the 2022-23 school year. Going forward, 826LA will use this figure as our measure for minimum reach.

826LA recognizes that our students are growing up in an age of stress and trauma resulting in absenteeism and other forms of disengagement and emotional distraction. By integrating a mindful teaching approach—from simple breathing exercises to mindful journaling—we create environments where students feel safe to engage in the learning process.

826LA already serves a diverse student population, with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income students representing significant majorities of students served each year at 90% and 75%, respectively. Still, in order to reach more Black and African American students, in 2022-23, 826LA launched Project 553, an effort to increase Black and African American student participation by 550 over three years.

There are three depth levels at which we serve students. 826 National helps us characterize the students who experience those different depths as waders, swimmers, and divers.

TRAITS OF WADERS, SWIMMER, AND DIVERS:

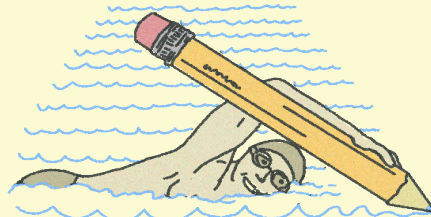


WADER

Students may or may not be familiar with 826LA and our work.

Students we work with once through self-contained programs using a time-limited curriculum.

Objective(s): Expand access, spark joy in the writing process, build foundational skills that facilitate further motivation to write.

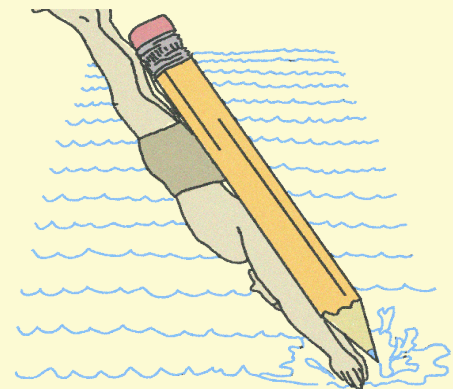


SWIMMER

Students may have some familiarity with 826LA's brand and work.

Students we work with more than once through multiple one-off programs with a curriculum on varying topics, media, and genres, fortifying key writing skills.

Objective(s): Build a connection to writing.



DIVER

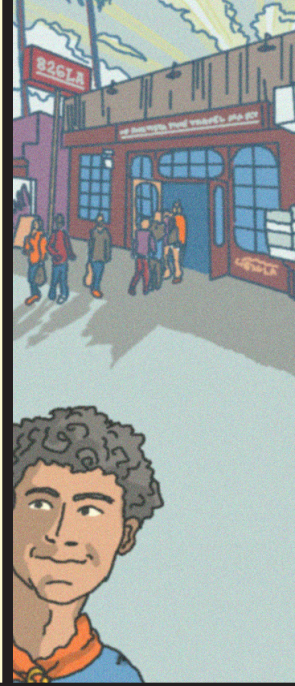
Students tend to be very familiar with 826LA's brand and work.

Students we work with on multiple occasions with a curriculum that is connected, builds on itself, and typically focuses on strengthening the same piece(s) of writing during the entire program experience.

Objective(s): Build individualized and more advanced, concrete writing skills as well as an enduring confidence in writing.

All students need support with writing, and all in unique and varied ways. It is essential that we continue to meet students where they are and serve them in multiple capacities to meet these needs. This means it is not only important to steadily increase the number of students we serve over the next three years, but to proportionally increase the numbers of students within each depth level - waders, swimmers, and divers alike - while also continuing the trajectory of our demographic composition along economic and racial diversity lines.

Unlocking and honing the power of writing in students is the first priority of 826LA's mission. But a second, enduring aspect of our mission is to support teachers in their endeavor to cultivate the love and skills of writing in students. Traditionally, we have supported teachers by partnering with them for book projects, supporting lessons and teacher-identified learning objectives, providing educational field trips and workshops, and offering high school students college application essay workshops. 826LA will continue to provide teachers with these forms of support, but we ask ourselves, can we do more? What would it look like to dive deeper into the space of teacher support?



CONTINUED SUCCESS

826LA maintains or modestly increases the number of students served each year, improving our program delivery and student outcomes. We continue to serve as a resource for teachers through academic enrichment programs.

EXPANDED SUCCESS

826LA moderately increases the number of students served by expanding the schools and neighborhoods from where we draw students. We experiment with new partnerships and programs to achieve these goals.

826LA brings its student writing assessments to more students, in schools.

826LA offers new forms of teacher support like writing workshops and other professional development opportunities.

WILD SUCCESS

826LA dramatically increases the number of students served by creating new partnerships, reaching into parts of Los Angeles that are unknown to us, and us to them.

826LA works with educators to develop multi-year writing scaffolding guided by 826 writing assessments.

826LA becomes a pillar of teacher professional development in Los Angeles—a “go-to” for teachers and administrators alike for teacher renewal and curricular innovation.



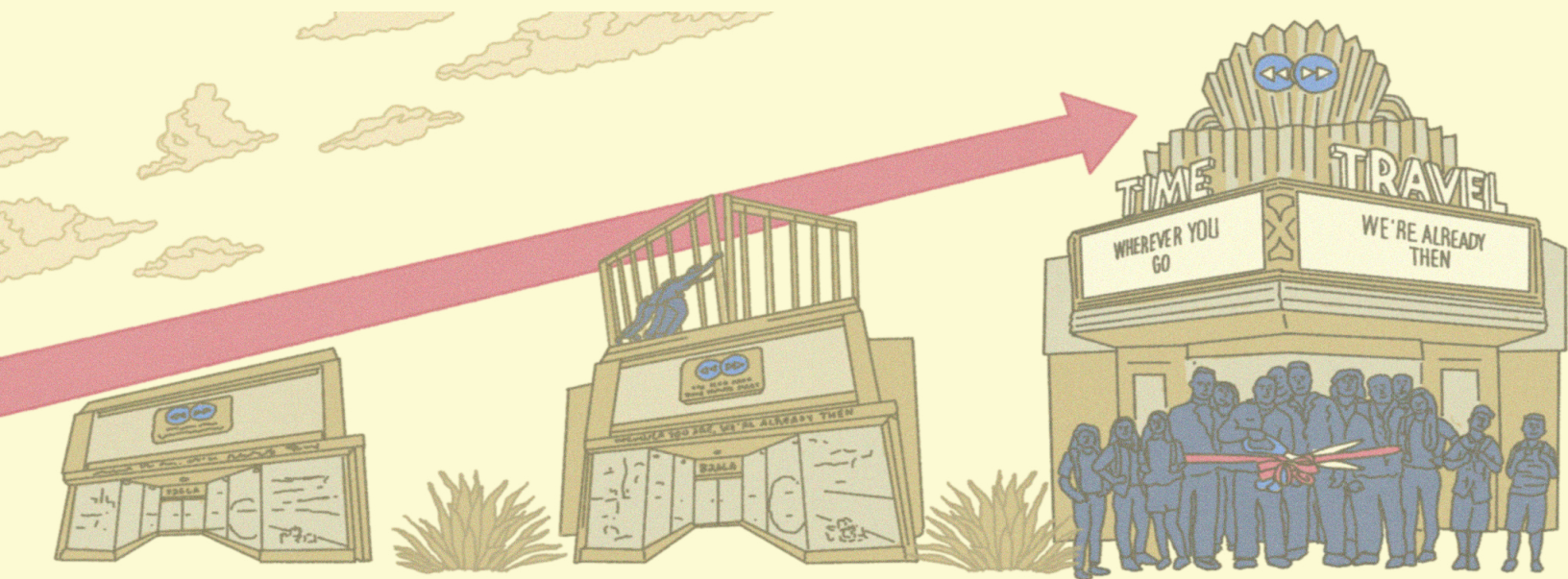
FINANCIAL HEALTH: THE FOUNDATION WE BUILD UPON

At the heart of 826LA's strategic plan lies a commitment to maintaining and enhancing our financial health. This is the prerequisite of any other strategic objective. Our solid financial foundation is essential to fueling our mission and driving sustainable impact. Expanding our strong financial position will serve as a bedrock upon which we can confidently pursue our goals, innovate, and respond to the ever-changing needs of our students and community.

Expanding financial success will require 826LA to further diversify our revenue sources. Planned giving, fees for services, and licensed intellectual property are among the avenues the organization will pursue along with increased support from individuals. With continued, expanded, or wild success, 826LA will be able to achieve its strategic priorities: more students, deeply served, a more stable staff corps, and better served teachers.

One of the primary reasons to expand financial success relates to 826LA staffing. 826LA's staff contributes greatly to achieving our mission. Consistent staff members bring a deep understanding of our mission, values, and operations, fostering the sense of whimsy, inclusion, community, and joy that define 826LA. In order to reap the programmatic benefits of expanded or wild financial success, 826LA will continue to invest in its staff with the dual goals of increasing staff tenure and developing staff further. Longer staff tenure will enhance collaboration and communication among team members, leading to more effective program development and implementation. It also contributes to student, educator, donor, volunteer, and other stakeholder confidence.

826LA asks itself, if we are wildly successful financially, how would that enable us to better serve the deserving students of Los Angeles?



CONTINUED SUCCESS

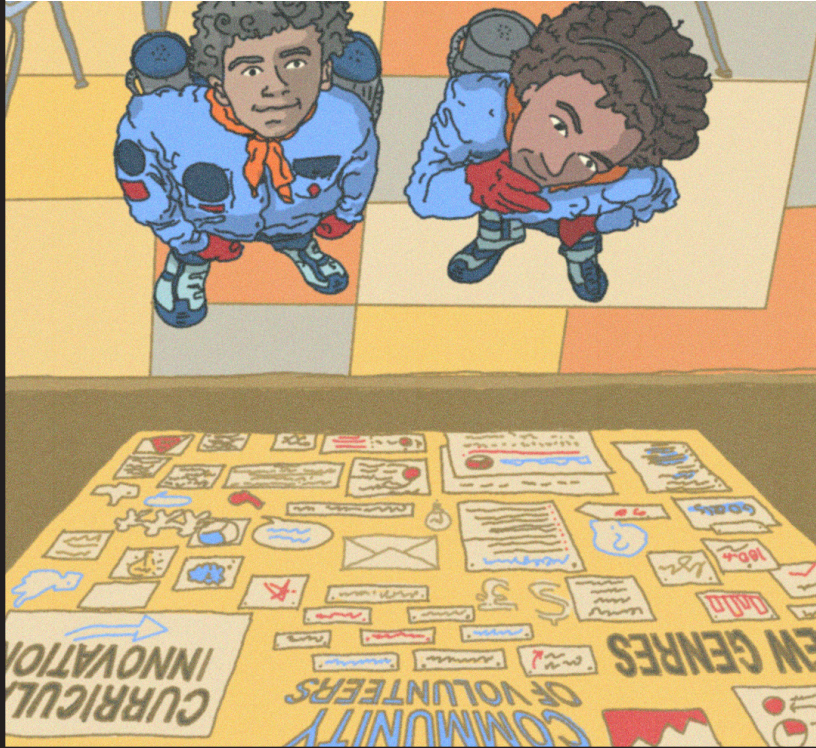
826LA steadily increases our annual budget and cash reserves, enabling stable or modest growth in students served. Our current rate of roughly 3% growth year over year remains steady.

EXPANDED SUCCESS

826LA's annual budget increases at a rate enabling enduring financial stability and accelerated, planned programmatic growth. Cash reserves and surpluses are transformed into a permanent, revenue-generating endowed fund. Revenue exceeds the 3% year over year growth rate, approaching 10%.

WILD SUCCESS

In addition to the funds required for planned programmatic growth, 826LA secures funds for financial stability beyond the horizon of this strategic plan, enabling new school-based writers' rooms and/or the establishment of a third-space, expansive and permanent 826LA writers' hub.



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

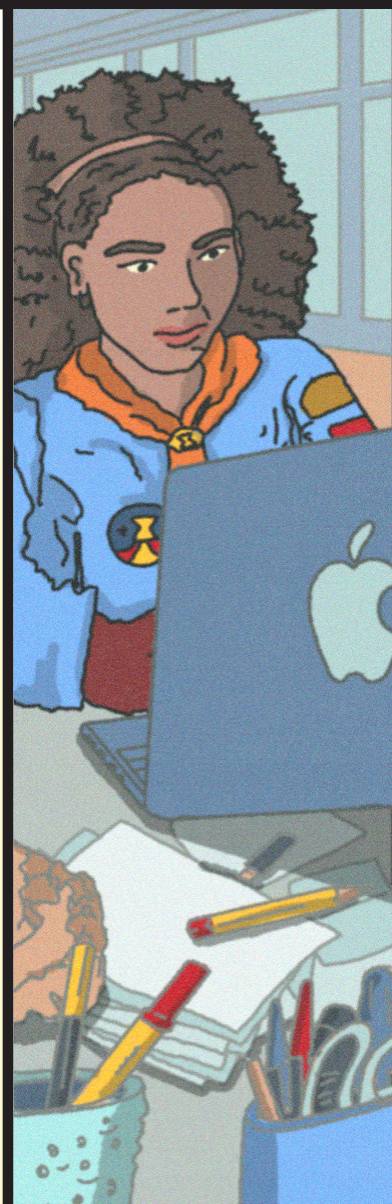
In all of our surveys, focus groups, and interviews this much was crystal clear: those who know us, love us. Students want more time with us. Teachers want more programs with us. Year after year, volunteers and donors return to 826LA. As an organization, we have a fantastic story to tell.

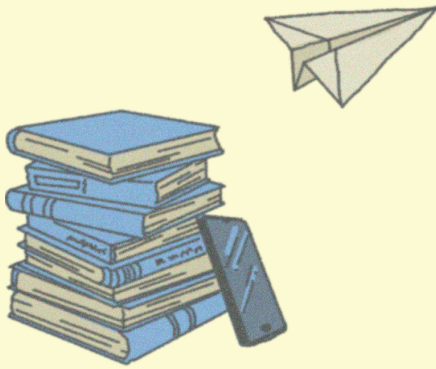
Through intentional and well-crafted messaging, we convey our organization's vision, values, and objectives to specific audiences—like educators, students and their families, volunteers, and donors—expanding upon our decades-in-the-making robust foundation of support. We showcase student programs, student writing, volunteers, and 826LA milestones and achievements. By tailoring our communication strategies to each stakeholder group 826LA creates a comprehensive ecosystem of collaboration and engagement.

826LA should think expansively to harness opportunities that broaden our audience and deepen the public's understanding of our work. During the span of this strategic plan, for example, 826LA will turn 20 and 21. These milestones present opportunities from a communications perspective that 826LA will actively leverage.

Our strategic communications approach will expand to encompass both traditional and digital channels, including social media, leveraging the power of storytelling, press releases, and community events to convey our message. By adopting a data-driven approach, we will continually assess the effectiveness of our communication efforts, adjusting our tactics to optimize engagement and resonance. Through clear and consistent messaging, we will establish ourselves as thought leaders in our field, cultivating trust and credibility that furthers 826LA's mission and amplifies the impact of our programs.

As with 826LA's financial and programmatic goals, we ask ourselves, what would wild success in strategic communications look like?





CONTINUED SUCCESS

826LA builds off of its brand recognition to engage more teachers and students through our current media.

Volunteers and donors continue to learn about us through visibility and engagement tactics across outreach channels.

EXPANDED SUCCESS

826LA expands programs and communications to highlight student accomplishments to broader audiences such as social influencers and elected officials and the 826LA teaching approach to more teachers. Better use of online media, earned and paid media highlights our outcomes and makes 826LA synonymous with teaching writing.

Social media following increases by 25% igniting growth in all stakeholders. Participation in 826LA events increases markedly, creating community, generating funds, and showcasing students and teachers.

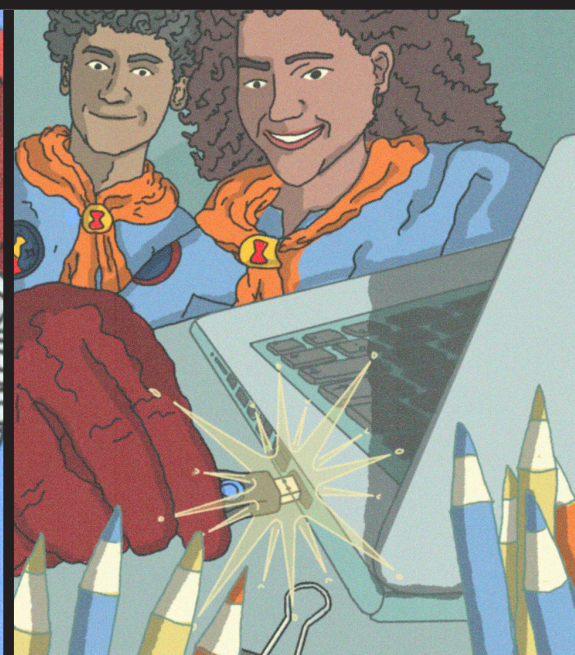
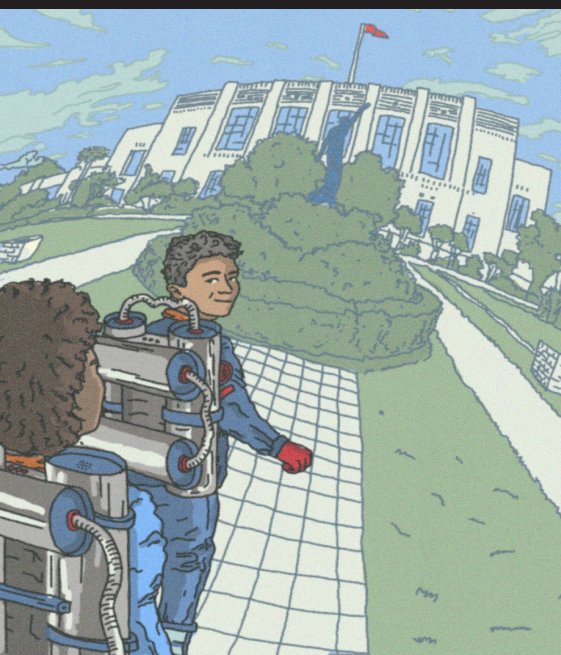
WILD SUCCESS

Educators and media outlets seek out 826LA as thought leaders in the creativity and literacy spaces; 826LA regularly lands interviews with diverse media outlets.

826LA forges new partnerships with influential organizations to co-create programs and expand organizational reach.

Regular 826LA podcasts showcase student accomplishments drawing a roster of influential guests.

826LA's intellectual property, especially through the Time Travel Mart, take off, creating highly successful sub-brands for 826LA.



ABOUT 826LA: PROGRAMS



After-School Writing Programs

Mondays through Thursdays, students attend 826LA for after-school writing programs. Students participate in community building activities, work on homework or reading with trained tutors, and of course, write! Students submit their writing for inclusion in chapbooks, which 826LA publishes twice a year. To celebrate students' hard work, 826LA unveils these chapbooks at book release parties, where students read their work to thunderous applause from their volunteers, families, and peers.

Field Trips

During the week, 826LA invites teachers and their students to our writing labs to participate in a morning of collaboration, creativity, and writing. Whether Storytelling & Bookmaking, Well-Wishing & Poetry, Choose Your Own Adventure, or Memoir, field trips at 826LA support teacher curriculum and student learning by offering a safe space for students to be their most imaginative and to work on their writing skills. In a few short hours, students brainstorm, write, edit their work, and leave with something tangible—a bound book—as well as a renewed confidence in their ability to tell their stories.

In-Schools Programs & Writers' Rooms

Because not all students can come to us, 826LA brings specially trained volunteer tutors into classrooms throughout Los Angeles. There, volunteers provide one-on-one or small group assistance with writing projects. 826LA works with teachers to craft all projects, which are designed to engage students while targeting curricular needs. In addition to visiting twenty schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District each year, 826LA has additional sites within Manual Arts High School, Roosevelt High School, and Venice High School called The 826LA Writers' Rooms.

Workshops

826LA's workshops bring students together with artists, writers, and professionals for creative collaboration. Whether the subject is journalism or preparing for the zombie apocalypse, our workshops foster student creativity while strengthening writing skills. This program includes two long running partnerships with Paramount Pictures and the Hammer Museum.

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Join the Future Bestsellers Club!

Sign up to make a monthly donation to 826LA and you'll join our Future Bestsellers Club. For as little as ten dollars each month, we'll deliver writing from our brilliant, emerging authors right to you!

Go to 826LA.org/donate and click on Future Bestsellers Club to join.



826LA would like to thank the students, families, educators, volunteers, staff, donors, and board members who provided their invaluable feedback, creative ideas, and unique perspectives that helped shape this plan. 826LA would also like to thank the Strategic Planning Committee, Susan Ko, Sarah Varet, Karen Van Kirk, David Ullendorff, Jaime Balboa, and Maddie Silva, for their work in spearheading and crafting the plan.

