

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

30 YEARS

OF SMALL STEPS

FRIENDS OF SMALL STEPS,

The 2025-2026 school year marked an incredible milestone in the history of Small Steps: our 30th anniversary. Since 1995, Small Steps has remained dedicated to providing our exemplary early childhood program to economically at-risk children and their families. What started as a reading group in a park for local pre-school-age children has grown into a program serving 240 students across our two campuses in the Fifth Ward and Gulfton/Sharpstown neighborhoods.

We are honored to continue growing and evolving every year we open our doors. This past year, we opened a new classroom for two- and three-year-olds at our Fifth Ward campus, the third classroom out of four in our newly built wing. We invested in our students’ early development by creating a nurturing and enriching learning environment with small class sizes and well-equipped, passionate teachers. Our literacy-focused curriculum centered around language and writing development, with math and science concepts incorporated to support a well-rounded education.

Small Steps also transitioned to a new method of academic assessment for pre-K students, the Children’s Learning Institute’s CIRCLE assessment. By tracking academic milestones through CIRCLE, we are better equipped to ensure students remain on track for kindergarten and that teachers have the tools to support their progress.

The evolution of Small Steps from a small group at a park to our robust, high-quality program is a testament to the unwavering faith and support of our community. For 30 years, Small Steps has been lifted up in prayer and stewarded by our community’s generosity. With your support, we look forward to continuing our critical work for many years to come.

Annette Mullins
Board President

Barbara Allen
Executive Director



2006

Our Fifth Ward campus officially opens due to increasing demand.

2021

Our Gulfton campus opens in partnership with St. Luke’s United Methodist Church.

2026

After expanding the Fifth Ward campus again, Small Steps will now serve 255 students annually.

30



THE FOUNDATION

This school year, our Board of Directors and Foundation Board launched a fundraising campaign focused on growing the Small Steps Nurturing Center Foundation, a separate 501(c)(3) created in 2019 to support our long-term financial sustainability. With Small Steps serving more students than ever before, we are committed to growing our funding to ensure that we provide our early childhood program for many years to come.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



LUNAR NEW YEAR

The year of the horse began on February 17, ushering in a time of courage and optimism. Our students celebrated with a parade full of homemade masks and dragon costumes!



CHRISTMAS CHEER

The holiday season always brings a smile to our faces, with chapel performances and plenty of classroom fun to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the joy He brought the world.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This school year, we implemented a new form of after-school care by bringing our program in-house. This new aftercare program is more academically robust and extends our high-quality instruction beyond the school day.



THANKSGIVING FEAST

What a joy it was to revive an old Small Steps tradition: sharing a meal with our students and families to celebrate all the blessings God has given us! Volunteers from Riverbend Energy Group helped serve the delicious feast at both campuses.





4,860
Volunteer Hours
Logged



27
Students Using
Transportation
Services



240
Students Served
Across Two Campuses



73,500
Meals Served
(Breakfast & Lunch)



8:1
Maximum Student-
Teacher Ratio In
Every Classroom



2,417
Parent Tuition Hours
Earned Through
Volunteering &
Parent Education



91%
Average Student
Attendance Rate

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PROGRAM

Small Steps believes in building a relationship-based program through intentionally involving families, teachers, volunteers, and therapy team members in a student’s early childhood experience. Our SET (Social Emotional Tools) for Life© program is integrated into every element of our program and focuses on the use of relational and linguistic tools to address a child’s needs and provide them with the resources they need to thrive.



TEACHERS

Every child has unique needs, so the relationships their teachers build with them and their families are instrumental in setting them up for success during these formative years. As teachers interact with students every day of the school year, they are able to closely monitor progress and identify potential academic or social-emotional areas of growth.



FAMILIES

Involving families and caregivers is essential to the holistic program that Small Steps offers. To promote parent participation and involvement, we require 10 tuition hours to be completed annually through parent education or volunteering. In the 2025-2026 school year, 100% of our parents completed their tuition hours.



VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers have the opportunity to see our mission in action and gain a passion for early childhood. Through the buddy program, volunteers develop a meaningful one-on-one relationship with a student by engaging in child-directed play for 30 minutes each week throughout the school year.

SET

Small Steps’ SET team, led by our Director of Student and Family Support, collaborates with teachers and families to assess student needs and develop individual support plans. During the school day, members of the SET team work with students both in and out of the classroom to develop social-emotional skills and meet their unique goals. Small Steps also works with contract occupational and speech therapists to help students with additional needs.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORY

Sarah* was always an energetic and talkative child. However, when she started Small Steps’ program at two years old, she lacked many foundational academic skills needed to meet future kindergarten readiness goals. During the first two years of our program, the SET team helped her expand her vocabulary to identify key emotions, which created a strong foundation for learning. By the time she entered her final pre-K 4 year, she was better able to focus on and engage in academic instruction. At the beginning of the school year, assessments showed that she could not recall any letters, sounds, or numbers. Recognizing Sarah’s potential, her teacher partnered closely with her mother to reinforce learning beyond the classroom. Every week, the teacher sent home activities tailored to Sarah’s specific academic needs and goals, and each week, Sarah’s mother ensured the work was completed and returned. This consistent collaboration between home and school created opportunities for Sarah to practice and strengthen her skills every day. By the end of the 2025-2026 school year, Sarah could identify nearly all her upper- and lower-case letters, accurately match letters to their sounds, and recognize numbers 0-9. Sarah’s success represents both the power of strong family engagement and Small Steps’ commitment to a relationship-based approach that supports the whole child and empowers families as partners in their child’s education.

**Name changed to protect the privacy of our students and families.*

2025-2026 FINANCIALS

REVENUE: \$6,683,937

Donations	\$3,146,519
Fundraising Events (Net)	\$2,242,913
Government Grants	\$643,946
Investment Income	\$213,161
Other	\$4,589
SSNC Foundation Campaign	\$432,809

EXPENSES: \$6,042,280

Program	\$4,787,853
Management & General	\$592,310
Fundraising	\$662,117

**Note: These are unaudited financials for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.*



OUR MISSION

To provide an exemplary early childhood program to instill and foster the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth of economically at-risk children and their families.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Annette Mullins, <i>President</i>	Bob Duran
Jeremy Goebel, <i>Vice President</i>	Alicia Fertitta
Haley Boehm, <i>Secretary</i>	Thomas Galloway
Tom Bastian, <i>Treasurer</i>	John F. Griffin
Carolyn Benton Aiman	Dawn Krieg
Cameron Robert Brown	Laura Mullervy
Kathleen Curnutt	R. Linda Alonzo Saenz
Karen David-Green*	Julie P. Samson
Afsheen Sayed Davis	Stephanie Sauer
Mundo de la Fuente	Emily Sheeren*
Brooks Despot*	Bryan Stahl
Benjamin Dubois	Nazareth Tekeste

**Completed Board term mid-year or at the end of the 2025-2026 fiscal year.*



FIFTH WARD CAMPUS

**2902 Jensen Drive
Houston, TX 77026**

GULFTON CAMPUS

**6856 Bellaire Boulevard
Houston, TX 77074**

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