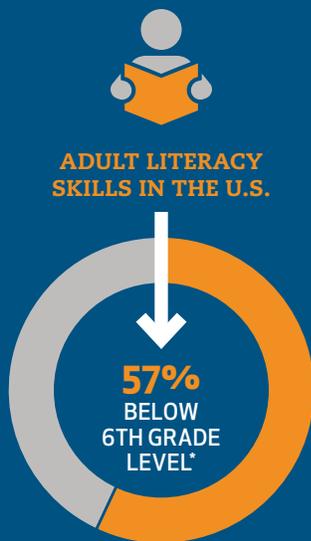
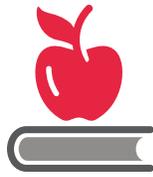


Literacy in the United States has been repeatedly identified by research as a foundational skill for student achievement and well-being. Yet, 57% of adults in this country have literacy skills below a sixth-grade level.* Early literacy initiatives aim to ensure students are reading on grade level by third grade, as early reading proficiency is one of the strongest predictors of graduation rates and later economic success.



*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Highlights of the 2023 U.S. PIAAC Results Web Report (NCES 2024-202). Washington, DC.



Duval County, where literacy rates mirror national trends, there have been several large-scale efforts in the past, including but not limited to, Read It Forward Jax, SAIL Into Reading, and currently such initiatives as READ JAX and Mayor Deegan’s River City Readers. These efforts have often included piloting best practices identified in research, such as family and community engagement strategies, awareness raising, systems building, early intervention, and high-quality literacy instruction. While each of these efforts supported growth in literacy rates in schools across the county, several factors limited implementation, scalability, or sustainability; including, chronic absenteeism, decreasing funding for education, teacher turnover, and frequent changes in piloted curricula and tools. Additionally, reading scores across the nation dropped to levels not seen since the 1990s following the COVID-19 pandemic, which obscures the full extent of literacy gains made prior to and since that time.

Alongside these efforts, learning gains across Duval County have helped contribute to Duval County Public Schools’ first-ever A rating, signaling that many of the strategies currently in place are working, even as significant work remains to accelerate progress.

To understand the Duval early literacy landscape, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF) examined national research, local data, and interviewed local literacy and education leaders to answer the following questions:

- Q1:** What are the best practices, key components, and lessons learned from successful early literacy efforts, nationally?
- Q2:** What were the key components of previous literacy efforts in Duval County, and what conditions, if any, prevented them from being more impactful?
- Q3:** What is an ideal model to replicate in Duval County, based on success with a similar student population?
- Q4:** How ready is Duval County to replicate a successful literacy model from another state, and what else will the county need?

To answer these questions, JPEF’s methodology included reviewing more than 2,000 empirical articles on birth-to-age-8 (third grade) literacy models and interventions to identify potential models for Duval County. With guidance from statewide literacy experts such as the University of Florida Lastinger Center, JPEF also conducted 23 narrative partner interviews, thematic analyses, and comparative assessments to better understand the rich history and ecosystem of existing literacy efforts and assess the level of readiness for local high-quality model implementation.

Importantly, the partners included in this landscape analysis were providing specific literacy components (such as tutoring) during the school day, after-school, or during the summer, as part of the READ JAX collaboration.

Future landscape analyses should be expanded to include partners who do not provide specific literacy components in district settings, such as social service organizations.





SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

The findings from this landscape analysis highlight three central insights:

- 1 Effective early literacy interventions are comprehensive and require a coordinated network of organizations to implement nine key components;
- 2 Duval County has a rich but loosely connected ecosystem of literacy partners working alongside the district, with meaningful progress across five of the nine components;
- 3 And while this progress is promising, further alignment and coordination are necessary to achieve sustained, large-scale gains in student literacy.

Comprehensive literacy **INTERVENTIONS** have the deepest impact. They require a network of organizations to implement. In Duval County, a rich but loose ecosystem of district, community-based, higher education, business, and additional non-profit support for birth-third grade literacy exists.



Best practices identified by ecosystem leaders include:

1. Curricula based on the Science of Reading
2. Authentic partnerships with parents & students
3. Methodical coaching & professional development (PD)
4. Additional support for students after school
5. Wrap-around supports addressing external barriers to learning

The Duval literacy **ECOSYSTEM** includes over 99 local organizations, 419 early childhood providers, and at least five national partners that provide literacy support, engagement, or implement related child well-being and success efforts in the county.



Top areas of improvement cited by ecosystem partners:

1. Birth-third grade strategies
2. Using & training educators in virtual tools or platforms that reduce their time spent on reporting & increase the time they spend with students & instructing in the classroom (such as note taking tools)
3. Supporting family access to tools through training & hardware & writing interventions

Though an ecosystem is present, a cohesive **NETWORK** of organizations and community leaders is not. Partners reported that creating structures for birth through third grade partners to work together is necessary to accelerate progress. For example, working together on expanding to full day Voluntary Pre-K or sharing information between early learning centers (ELCs) and elementary schools for tailored interventions in the important early grades.



Top identified barriers in previous efforts in Duval to address literacy:

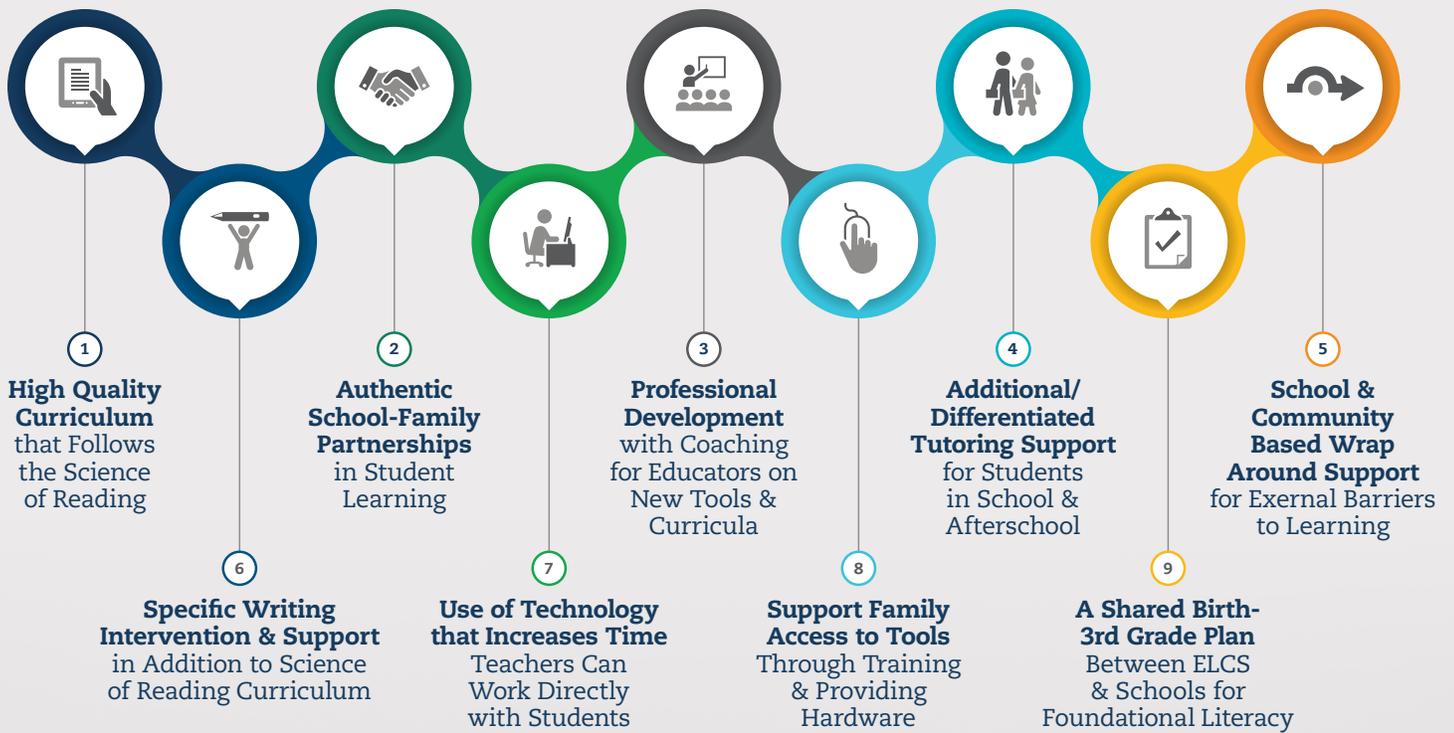
1. Chronic absenteeism
2. Funding reductions
3. Staffing shortages
4. Intergenerational (parent & child) low literacy
5. Frequent changes in curricula & tools requiring new training or retraining
6. Lack of sufficient support for exceptional student education (ESE) & multilingual students
7. The increasing politicization of education

Q1:



What are the best practices, key components, and lessons learned from successful early literacy efforts, nationally?

Previous research on effective interventions points to nine key components that drive significant gains in literacy among pre-K-third grade children.



Importantly, no one organization can provide all these components alone, so a highly aligned collective of organizations, across sectors, working with the district is recommended to fully implement all aspects of comprehensive, high-quality, effective early literacy interventions.



The existing literacy ecosystem in Duval County employs and/or delivers several of the nine components; however, its structure is loose and, as reported by its partners, in need of better alignment in student-level data sharing and expansion of birth-third grade efforts. With a deeper understanding of the roles and contributions of each organization and the scope and effectiveness of the collective, progress on literacy can be measured, modifications can be made, and literacy goals can be realized. Duval County literacy ecosystem partners have built a strong foundation of individual best practices, which have laid the groundwork for systematizing communication, shared intervention, evidence-based communication, and providing comprehensive, but not duplicative, efforts. With resources, interest, and will, the loose ecosystem can be developed into a strong, comprehensive, effective, and nimble literacy network.

Literacy ecosystem leadership considers five of the nine components somewhat to be well-established in Duval County. **The five components in place are:**

-
- Using the Science of Reading (the ingredients that make up literacy, such as phonics and vocabulary) as a basis of **CURRICULUM**
 - Creating increasingly authentic **PARTNERSHIPS** with parents and students
 - Providing high-quality **COACHING** and professional development
 - Providing additional and differentiated **TUTORING** to students in and after school
 - Wrap-around **SUPPORTS** addressing external barriers to learning

These components should be reinforced and continued as Duval County literacy partners move forward. Interviews also pointed to opportunities to strengthen **emerging efforts** in the following areas:

-
- Sharing birth through third grade **INFORMATION** to track progress and design targeted interventions for students during foundational learning ages
 - Including and training teachers on virtual **TOOLS** that decrease the time they spend reporting and increase the time they can spend working with and instructing students.
For example, an artificial intelligence (AI) tool can support notetaking on student progress and summaries of content covered in the class for follow-up
 - Supporting family **ACCESS** to literacy tools (such as district-provided apps that have books students can read at home), through training and providing hardware
 - Adding a specific writing **INTERVENTION**

Q2:



What were the key components of previous literacy efforts in Duval County, and what conditions, if any, prevented them from being more impactful?

In general, intervention and replication science is clear that knowing the components of an intervention is essential, but not the only necessary foundation for successful adoption of a new intervention. Equally important to successful adoption of impactful interventions is the willingness, opportunity, and capacity of the community, organizations, leadership, and key individuals to adopt the intervention components. While the literacy ecosystem in Duval County has had the willingness and expertise to adopt interventions, many barriers have affected the opportunity and capacity to accelerate and sustain high-quality literacy efforts, including:

- Significant **FUNDING** reductions in the education sector across all levels of government
- Chronic **ABSENTEEISM**
- Economic **BARRIERS**
- The number of students and families that require wrap-around supports often exceeds the human and financial **CAPACITY** of schools
- A lack of coordinated birth through third grade **EFFORTS** among literacy partners
- A lack of infrastructure, sharing, analysis, and narrative evidence-based **REPORTING**
- Intergenerational/parent-driven barriers to **ENGAGEMENT**
- Negative media **NARRATIVES** regarding student and community progress on literacy
- Lack of **SUPPORT** for ESE and multilingual students and families
- Lack of collective working **STRUCTURE** to the literacy ecosystem



The Duval County literacy ecosystem has many partners who specialize in a particular population, age group, or approach, but ultimately provide efforts that span across the effective literacy strategies identified in the literature and beyond target populations. For example, an organization that specializes in supporting students with disabilities may have programs that include tutoring, early learning, adult learning, and reducing barriers to accessing existing services across the lifespan. This has been identified as both a strength and an opportunity for improvement by a variety of ecosystem partners.

It is a strength that the community is full of individuals and organizations who are implementing more comprehensive approaches to literacy.

However, it has also contributed to lack of role clarity and scope of work and ultimately impacts communication across the ecosystem.



Q3:



ECOSYSTEM PROGRESS



What is an ideal model to replicate in Duval County, based on success with a similar student population?

Based on recommendations from the literature, a coordinated network of organizations that work within and in partnership with the school district and families would lead to the greatest impact. However, the current set of ecosystem partners engaged in early literacy interventions has varying ways of describing their own work and relationships to one another, which often leads to organizations spreading themselves thin. Since five components, which represent

over half of the nine components identified in the research, are in place, it suggests that the ecosystem would see most progress if it focused on the **alignment, connection, and communication of its partner organizations** rather than seek to adopt additional interventions. Additionally, bolstering the funding and human capacity of existing organizations is necessary to sustain the best practices in place and opens the opportunity to include the other four components, which are still emerging.

The full report includes detailed descriptions of existing organizations in Duval that demonstrate how they employ best practices in early literacy interventions as identified by the literature. Other models to consider learning from or exploring partnerships include the Pinellas Early Literacy Initiative (PELI), which is implemented by the school district in partnership with the Pinellas County Early Learning Coalition (PCELC), as well as the Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI).



Important differences in these models from Duval County's current ecosystem of early literacy partners include:

- **Robust INVESTMENT** in early literacy readiness.
For example, parents in Duval and across the state of Florida can enroll their children in three hours of Voluntary Pre-K for free, with an additional fee for the remaining three hours. The PELI model, through partnership with the PCELC, has vouchers for full-day VPK.
- **Diverse FUNDING** sources in the early literacy space, often obtained in collaboration with network partners.
For example, CLI is funded through a combination of fee-for-service contracts with school districts and individual schools, as well as by philanthropic donations; for example, federal grant awards were matched by other philanthropic funders.



Q4:



How ready is Duval County to replicate a successful literacy model from another state, and what else will the county need?

Ecosystem partners acknowledge that nine components offer the roadmap to improve literacy in Duval County. They are all on the same page, so to speak, in terms of what to do. This, in itself, is an important starting point for adopting a comprehensive literacy

intervention. Duval County also has strong evidence of willingness and the opportunity to improve and expand existing efforts. Ecosystem partners have been working with the school district for years on the nine components, which accounts for why

five of them are in place. Relationships are strong between ecosystem partners and the school district, which suggests that other components can be adopted and strengthened more easily.

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION REPLICATION

Knowledge & Confidence with Components

Strong evidence across ecosystem partner interviews for the nine components, with *five already in place in Duval County.*

Opportunity & Willingness

Partners have been working for several years on the nine components; they are ready and willing to find ways to *streamline and amplify their impact.*

Capability

Evidence that the expertise to provide *all aspects of early literacy interventions exists* across Duval County. There are significant financial, economic, and structural barriers to sustaining and expanding current efforts.

National research and ecosystem partner interviews highlight instructional time in the early years as a critical enabler of literacy development. Within this context, *expanding access to full-day Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)* has emerged as a promising strategy to strengthen foundational literacy and support continuity across the birth-third-grade continuum.



Despite the readiness and willingness of partners documented in this report, the financial, economic, and staffing reality across the sector hinders overall capability.

National initiatives with evidence of effectiveness are often supported by a combination of federal, district, school, and philanthropic funding, an area that will need to grow for the ecosystem of literacy partners in Duval County to create historic gains in early childhood literacy.

SUMMARY

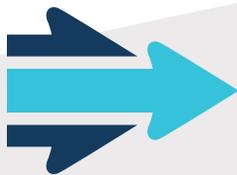


CONCLUSION

There is a rich, but loose, ecosystem in Duval County of school district, community-based, higher education, and business supporting key components documented in the literature as effective for improving early literacy.

Partners report implementing most of the nine components of effective literacy interventions that were identified in the literature. JPEF's research found that partners are in high agreement on best practices regarding literacy interventions, student growth, and family engagement. However, decades of declining funding for education at the federal and state levels have led to staffing shortages, increased competition and mission drift for funding, and reduced capacity to convene across organizations in ways that would strengthen and enhance the effectiveness, evidence-based sharing, and sustainability of early literacy efforts.

Taken together, the findings of this report underscore a clear path forward: effective early literacy interventions require a comprehensive, coordinated network of organizations; Duval County has already built a strong foundation with progress across five of the nine core components; and to realize historic gains in student literacy, the ecosystem must now be intentionally transformed and solidified into a true, aligned collaboration.



ACTION STEPS

- **Solidify the existing ecosystem.**
Convene partners, establish clear indicators of which students are reached by each program and what progress is made, and improve data-driven reviews of financial and human capacity to determine where additional or consolidated efforts would enhance effectiveness.
- **Decide on a unified hub for early literacy efforts.**
Determine a lead agency or separate entity, that has not acted as a backbone organizer to previous literacy collaborations, to be unified hub for all Duval efforts; this agency would be responsible for convening, tracking, and providing data-driven guidance to ecosystem partners.*
- **Explore and advance full-day Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) as a foundational literacy strategy.**
Convene district, early learning, philanthropic, and policy partners to examine research, cost models, and implementation considerations for expanding access to full-day VPK in Duval County, with a focus on strengthening early literacy outcomes and birth-third-grade alignment.
- **Conduct further research.**
Expand the landscape to include categories of partners JPEF did not look at in this round but provide essential support for students in families in Duval County, such as social services and physical health organizations.



8 STEPS TO TRANSFORMING THE ECOSYSTEM

FOR STRONG COLLABORATION

✓ STEP 1.



Ensure all partners involved in current early childhood literacy interventions, collaborations, or committees have a **shared language** for discussing their primary contribution to the ecosystem. Develop metrics to describe each organization's primary contributions:

- All partners utilize a combination of district-reported data of student performance on statewide literacy assessments at three time points in the academic year, as well as their own internal processes of collecting data on their support and effect on students every day. Currently, internal processes and definitions of success metrics vary across organizations, which makes it more difficult to coordinate evidence-based reporting and shared efforts. Partners should have a shared language for describing their metrics for assessing effectiveness in ways aligned with comprehensive early literacy interventions.
- Kids Hope Alliance includes at least 25 types of resources provided by organizations in their expansive network, and this list can be used as a starting point to ensure partners are able to discuss practices and categories with the same understanding and language.

✓ STEP 2.



Partners reaffirm primary categories of work regarding early literacy, defined as the areas in which most of their organizational capacity or expenditures are allocated, and include these in a **dashboard** of overall early literacy services and practices.

- Though impactful early literacy interventions require a comprehensive approach to student and youth well-being, providers need to reaffirm where their staff and expertise would be best leveraged, if funding was available, to determine areas of overlap or gaps.
- Reporting organizational-level estimates, like the Children's Literacy Initiative's Cost per Impact metric, can inform more accurate estimates of the total costs of a comprehensive and impactful intervention.

✓ STEP 3.



Organizations delineate **clear definitions of services** (e.g., Pre-K and early learning, mental health, parenting classes, special needs, afterschool care, basic needs, coaching) and how they are connected to their reported outcomes.

- This information is necessary to understand what the specific effect of each organization is and how that is achieved.
- The Literacy Alliance provides an example of describing nine distinct programs, specific definitions of activities, and how they are connected to the organization's overall goal of providing literacy support to anyone over the age of sixteen.

✓ STEP 4.



Determine **student population coverage** by including the number of students served by each organization over the past three years, visualized in a **shared dashboard**.

- This information is essential for conveying the overall coverage and strength of existing organizations engaged in best practices identified in previous evidence-based effective early literacy interventions, as well as identifying areas of overlap or gaps.
- The Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida's Catalyst convening series has already drawn from the expertise of many of the partners in the early literacy ecosystem to create a cross-sector dashboard, which will help in the development of this students-served dashboard.





STEP 5.



Share and align the best tools across the district and organizations.

- a. Schools frequently utilize different early literacy tools due to inconsistent funding sources, limited guidance on available options, and few opportunities to share best practice feedback across the district. While some adaptation is necessary, greater consistency in tools, such as reading apps, would streamline data sharing across the district and partner organizations.
- b. The school district is best situated to provide an annual survey of educators' digital tool use and rationale, utilizing the results to standardize district-level guidance and reduce variation in reporting across schools.

STEP 6.



Review cost estimates across organizations, including per student expenditures, organizational capacity, evidence of effectiveness, and coverage, to determine whether joint or consolidated efforts would improve efficiency.

- a. This review and resulting action will provide a clear and standardized return on investment (ROI) estimate for funders and investors to sustain and expand work.
- b. To reduce bias, this should be conducted by an organization that is not involved in the ecosystem.

STEP 7.



Identify Ecosystem Data Navigators responsible for ensuring biannual updates of partners' students served, expenditures, and progress metrics.

- a. Organizational staff must prioritize the delivery of high-quality services to students and families. Common recurring issues in reporting effectiveness include that the number of students and families who require additional wrap-around supports often exceeds the financial and human capital resources partners can provide, and that there is limited time to consistently document traditional evaluation metrics. Ecosystem navigators could fill this gap while partners are aligning data-sharing structures to reduce the burden on programmatic staff, and also ensuring the data required for analysis and continuous improvement are collected.
- b. To reduce bias, this function should be carried out by an organization that is not involved in the ecosystem, or one nominated by ecosystem partners.

STEP 8.



Collaborate to obtain sustainable funding for the whole ecosystem.

- a. Decreasing funding sources and resulting competition to maintain basic services have reduced the capacity of partners to more effectively work together and share their narratives of how they contribute to improving literacy. There is a growing need to intentionally work towards sustainable, diversified, forms of funding that are resilient to external barriers like leadership turnover, so that organizations can focus on providing high-quality early literacy intervention supports.

Thank you to the Rice Family Foundation for supporting this research.

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is an independent think-and-do tank that believes every student should graduate high school inspired and prepared for success in college or a career and life. JPEF serves as a bridge in support of public education, activating community support, connecting partners, and advancing effective ideas for the success of all students. For more information: jaxpef.org.

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SPOTLIGHT—EFFECTIVE LITERACY INTERVENTION:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT with Coaching for Educators on New Tools & Curricula



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Coaching and professional development are essential for educators to ensure high fidelity of implementation, improve teacher confidence, continuous improvement, and proactive timely problem solving. In this current climate of staffing shortages and turnover, additional support is increasingly necessary for new teachers and educators that are new to changing curriculum and tools.

EXAMPLE PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

Children’s Literacy Initiative (CLI)—CLI has provided professional instruction and coaching to pre-K-3rd grade educators nationally for over 36 years. Key approaches include:

- School or district wide PD
- Full and half day training, small group coaching
- Culturally sustaining and representative high-quality books and materials
- Peer/mentor coaching
- Leader training and coaching
- Online resources (CLI.org)

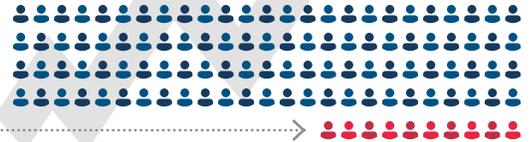
EVIDENCE:

- Students with CLI trained teachers had significantly higher literacy gains than students without CLI trained teachers (What Works Clearinghouse)

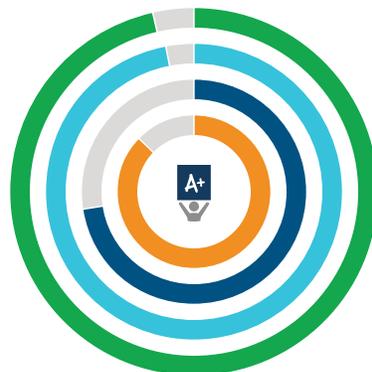


16,468+ Students across **124** schools have been served

- For every 100 students who demonstrate gains in a CLI trained teacher classroom, **6-10 more on average achieve 3rd grade literacy benchmarks**



LITERACY GAINS



- **96.4%** of responding teachers said that CLI had helped them feel better prepared to implement effective literacy practices
- **97.2%** of responding teachers said that CLI has helped to improve their literacy instructional practice
- **72.7%** of responding teachers reported an increase in grade level collaboration with peers that they attributed to CLI
- **87.3%** of responding teachers said that CLI was helping prepare them to address the new Common Core standards for reading



○ WHAT DOES IT COST TO IMPLEMENT?

According to an external evaluation of CLI services, in 2024 the annual cost to implement the complete package of CLI services and materials across a school (k-3) was \$55,000. Importantly, CLI is funded through a combination of fee-for-service contracts with school districts and individual schools, as well as by philanthropic donations; for example, federal grant awards were matched by other philanthropic funders.



CLI:
Children's
Literacy
Initiative

\$55k/yr. Cost for full CLI services & materials across a K-3 school



In 2015, CLI reported their operating revenue to about a third fee-for-service contracts, a third federal grant, and a third other philanthropic funding.



○ REPORTED COST PER IMPACT:

Based on costs and estimates provided by CLI, public information on national trends in teacher tenure, and their own evaluation feedback on teacher perceptions of and satisfaction their services, they estimate a "bang for buck" of approximately \$1,300 to \$1,700 for each incremental student from a high poverty, urban school that can now read proficiently by third grade.



\$1,300-\$1,700 per student in high-poverty schools reaching grade-level reading

○ REPORTED CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK:

- The long-term approach is necessary to develop the infrastructure required to ensure school personnel can sustain the intervention beyond CLI's direct involvement.
- The multiple levels and variety of funding sources are foundational to CLI's ability to provide high-quality, long-term intervention support in schools.
- Current Duval Literacy Ecosystem partners report inconsistent or declining levels of annual funding support which can cause disruptions in the scope or long-term engagement of their interventions.

LONG-TERM INTERVENTION



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SPOTLIGHT—EFFECTIVE LITERACY INTERVENTION:

AUTHENTIC SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS in Student Learning



ENGAGEMENT & TRUST BUILDING

○ AUTHENTIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

I'm A Star Foundation—Since 2010, the I'm A Star Foundation has supported the leadership and community engagement of students ages 12-18. In partnership with the literacy ecosystem partners, the I'm A Star Foundation has been identified as a key organization responsible for improving family engagement at target literacy intervention schools, in partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS).

Key aspects include:

- Family-school engagement plans and event execution
- Welcoming and interesting family engagement activities where literacy information and resources are shared
- Regular engagement and trust building with families and school staff



○ OUTCOMES & EVIDENCE:

- They have been credited with creating events that have significantly increased parent attendance at four schools.
- One school reported a family engagement increase of 92 parents from the previous year to 1,500 parents across all events the year after engaging with I'm A Star.



○ REPORTED CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK:

- I'm A Star Foundation is a good example of the power of an organization that is focused on one aspect of the model, authentic family and student engagement; with strong qualitative testimony from school and community partners.
- There is great opportunity to learn from, document, and bolster their approach to work with even more schools and improve reporting of effectiveness.



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SPOTLIGHT—EFFECTIVE LITERACY INTERVENTION:

ADDITIONAL/DIFFERENTIATED Tutoring Support for Students in School & Afterschool



JACKSONVILLE PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

Research has demonstrated that additional tutoring, especially in small groups or differentiated based on student data, is highly effective at improving student literacy rates on state-standardized assessments. There are several partners that provide additional capacity for school-based and after-school literacy support.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE

EXAMPLE PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

Since 2019, READ USA has trained, paid, and supervised high school and early college students to tutor 2nd-5th graders in over 50 Duval County Public Schools, and has served over 5,300 students during the past six years. In 2024, READ USA enrolled 1,081 students in its Literacy Tutoring intervention, who received literacy lessons from 379 tutors.



Key approaches included:

- Paid tutors
- High-quality literacy tutor training for high school and early college students
- High-dosage, one-to-one Literacy Tutoring (40-minute tutoring, 3 days a week)
- Additional teacher training and in-the-moment teacher support for tutors
- Celebration and informational events for families
- Book choice for elementary students

OUTCOMES & EVIDENCE:

- Students who participated in READ USA's intervention demonstrated greater, statistically significant gains in reading comprehension, fluency, and accuracy than students who did not.
- 95% of tutors reported improvement in problem-solving, communication, and other workforce metrics.



• Since its inception, READ USA has provided training & employed

1,995 tutors &

480+ teachers

to serve

5,300+ students.





WHAT IS THE COST & CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT?



- Nearly 90% of READ USA's reported expenditures are directly for program services.



REPORTED CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK:

- Produced accelerated growth in reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. In 3 months of instruction, students on average made 8 months of growth in reading accuracy, 5 months of growth in fluency, and almost 7.5 months of growth in comprehension.



- Intervention effects are consistent for all students across subsets (IEP, ELL, Race, Gender, SES, etc.). Still, they are particularly beneficial to minoritized students in developing their comprehension skills, which is the ultimate measure of reading proficiency.

An evaluation report found that student gains will taper off soon after the intervention ends. This suggests that high-quality tutoring is significantly implicated in student gains, but that students require this support all year to document long-term impact.

- Taken together, this suggests that intensive, high-quality tutoring and coaching should be sustained throughout the academic year to ensure long-term sustained impact on early literacy outcomes.



ACCELERATED GROWTH



JACKSONVILLE PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

Powering Potential

This spotlight is part of JPEF research on the literacy landscape in Duval County. Thank you to the Rice Family Foundation for supporting this research.

SPOTLIGHT—EFFECTIVE LITERACY INTERVENTION:

HIGH QUALITY CURRICULUM that Follows the Science of Reading



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Based on over 20 years of research, the Science of Reading is a framework for the individual ingredients that make up literacy. These ingredients include: Phonological awareness, Oral language, Phonics, Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency. There are multiple curricula that follow the science of reading, Duval County Public Schools utilizes the University of Florida Literacy Institutes Foundations Toolbox to standardize high quality literacy instruction.

EXAMPLE PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

Duval County Public Schools—the largest provider of structured curriculum and supplemental tools that allow schools to focus on all aspects of the science of reading across grade levels, including:

- **Amira** (virtual tutoring for grades 2-5)
- **iReady** (supports grades 1-5 for reading and math)
- **Freckle** (supports grades 3-5 reading)
- **UFLI** (structured literacy phonics program for K-2; intervention in grades 3-5)
- **Supplemental resources:** Magnetic Reading and Florida Best for tutoring and small group instruction
- **Benchmark Advance Intervention Kits**
- **District created differentiated tutoring modules** (grades 2-5)

EVIDENCE:

- Literacy rates increased to pre-COVID levels to 53% →
- DCPS gains in 4th grade literacy were greater than 9 other similar sized districts last year
- 100% of district and literacy support staff named the science of reading when describing their approach to improving student literacy and connected it to impact
- 100% of interviewed school leaders identified University of Florida Literacy Institute (ULFI) Foundations as impactful for phonics in K-2, and could identify additional resources to support the other ingredients of the science of reading



The Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) also provides the Instructional Focus Calendar (IFC) for Benchmark Advanced (core curriculum); a strategic planning tool designed to guide teachers in delivering instruction throughout the academic year. It outlines what content and skills should be taught at specific times to ensure alignment with state standards and to support student achievement. Additional literacy interventions, tools, and support are delivered in alignment with the IFC.



HIGH QUALITY



KEY COMPONENTS OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS CALENDAR:

- **Pacing Guide:**
The IFC breaks down the school year into units or weeks, specifying which concepts, standards, and skills should be taught during each period. This helps ensure that teachers cover all required content before state assessments.
- **Standards Alignment:**
The calendar is closely aligned with Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards (Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking), ensuring that instruction meets state expectations in subjects like math, reading, science, and social studies.
- **Instructional Priorities:**
It identifies highly-effective skills that are critical for student success, focusing on areas where students typically struggle. This helps teachers prioritize instructional time effectively.
- **Assessment Integration:**
The IFC includes benchmark assessment windows and schedules for formative and summative assessments. This allows teachers to monitor student progress regularly and adjust instruction as needed.
- **Flexibility for Differentiation:**
While the IFC provides a framework, it allows for some flexibility. Teachers can adapt lessons based on their students' needs, reteaching concepts when necessary.
- **Professional Development Alignment:**
The calendar often aligns with professional development opportunities, guiding educators on instructional strategies to support the focus areas.

KEY FEATURES OF UFLI FOUNDATIONS:

- 1 **Structured Literacy Approach:**
It follows the principles of structured literacy, emphasizing direct, explicit, and sequential instruction in phonics and word recognition skills.
- 2 **Multisensory Methods:**
The program integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile activities to reinforce learning, which is especially helpful for students with dyslexia or other reading difficulties. Including games.
- 3 **Decodable Texts:**
UFLI Foundations includes Benchmark Advance decodable texts aligned with the phonics patterns students are learning, allowing them to practice skills in context.
- 4 **Assessment and Progress Monitoring:**
The program provides tools for assessing students' skills and tracking progress over time, supporting data-driven instruction.
- 5 **Teacher-Friendly Design:**
It includes lesson plans, instructional routines, and resources to help teachers implement effective phonics instruction without extensive prep time.



REPORTED CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK:

- **Nearly 33% of students were chronically absent (missed 20+ days of school).** This number has doubled since 2019. While the district has been making strides in standardizing high quality instruction and literacy supports, there is a significant portion of students who cannot benefit from improved school-day instruction. Additional support tackling the barriers to getting to school is necessary to accelerate progress in early literacy.
- Though the district has strong partnerships for providing wrap around supports and case management for students and families, the number of students and families who can benefit from them **exceed the financial and human capacity of school staff and additional community-based staff.**
- **As of now, there is no process for sharing data between ELC's and elementary schools in DCPS.** Creating a process for sharing information and tracking student progress from birth to third grade would provide foundational information on student readiness and effectiveness of interventions.



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PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:

Strengthening Literacy Through Strategic Partnerships: **KIDS HOPE ALLIANCE** (KHA)



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Kids Hope Alliance has played a critical role in advancing our city's literacy goals, and literacy stakeholders described the progress made in strengthening the cohesion and collective impact of the literacy ecosystem, under a unified hub, as promising.

Over the past several years, KHA has provided support for high-impact after-school-serving organizations in a coordinated, multi-year intervention across eight schools serving our highest-need students. This work is aligned with READ JAX, a citywide coalition of literacy experts, community partners, and business leaders committed to improving reading outcomes.



A PROMISING,
UNIFIED HUB

○ The intervention focuses on **FOUR CORE AREAS KNOWN TO DRIVE LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT:**



1

School-day literacy support to strengthen classroom instruction



2

Afterschool & summer literacy programming to increase meaningful reading time



3

Family engagement strategies that empower caregivers

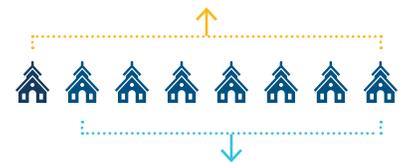


4

Case management to address academic & non-academic barriers to learning



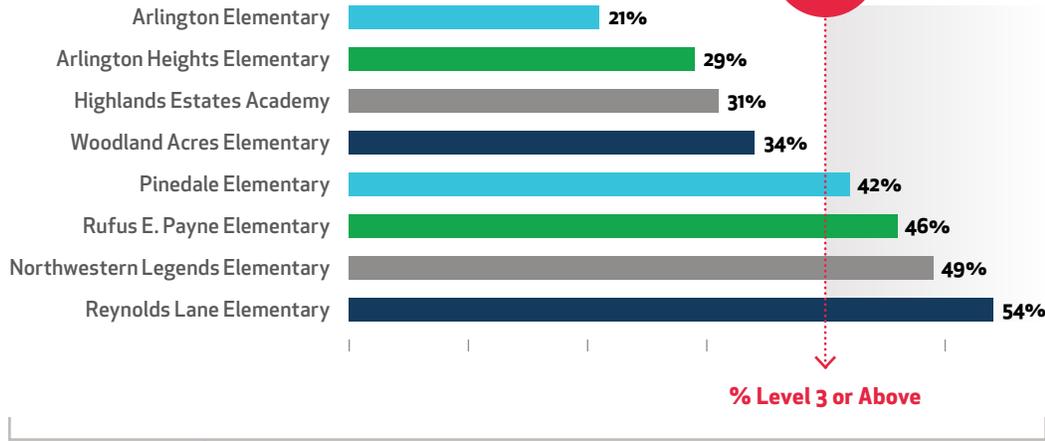
All 8 participating schools experienced growth in third-grade literacy performance.



7 of the eight principals reported that the coordinated efforts of the intervention partners made a **significant contribution** to achieving their school's academic progress.



GRADE 3 ELA – % Level 3 or Above:



*

It is important to recognize the context of this work:

every participating school began the intervention performing well below the district average.



As the intervention enters its second year, partners report that aligning school systems with nonprofit partners has required more time and coordination than initially anticipated. Despite these challenges, schools are demonstrating measurable improvements and stronger alignment among all partners.

These results underscore the importance of sustained, strategic investment in the literacy ecosystem. Through continued collaboration, KHA is committed to ensuring that every child in our city has the foundational reading skills needed for long-term success.

By situating these findings within the broader evidence base on family and community literacy interventions, the data illustrate both urgency and opportunity. These target schools represent critical sites where the district’s overall goals for literacy intersect with the need for place-based solutions that community-based and non-profit organizations provide. The gaps identified in this landscape align with the broader themes from previous causal evidence studies: **that responsive, evidence-based literacy strategies and strong home-school connections are essential to closing achievement gaps.** Creating long-term, intentional investments in a subset of schools as demonstration sites for best practices can help the region move from diagnosis to action, ensuring that families, educators, and community partners work together to improve literacy outcomes for all children in Jacksonville.

URGENCY & OPPORTUNITY



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