ALACHUA COUNTY, FL
Joint Alachua County BoCC /
Alachua County Children's Trust Special Meeting
Meeting Agenda

April 21, 2025
4:00 PM

County Administration Building - Grace Knight Conference Room

12 SE 1 Street, 2nd Floor, Gainesville, FL 32601

In-person **Public Comment** is taken after each non-ministerial motion A the conclusion of the meeting, **individuals** can also speak for up to 3 minutes about any matter during the **General Comment** period.

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All persons are advised that, if they decide to contest any decision made at any of these meetings, they will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose they may need to ensure that verbatim record of the proceedings is made which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. (Section 286.0105 Florida Statutes)

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If you have a disability and need an accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact the Alachua County Equal Opportunity Office at (352) 374-5275 at least 2 business days prior to the meeting. TTY users please call 711 (Florida Relay Service).

A.   Call To Order

B.   Welcome

C.   Introduction

      1.   Ken Cornell, Chair, Children's Trust

      2.   Charles Chestnut, Chair, Alachua County Commission

D.   Adoption of the Agenda
Recommended Action:
To approve the Agenda.

E.   Items For Discussion

      1.   Family Resource Centers

      2.   Community Foundation (Center for Nonprofit Excellence) Capacity Building

      3.   Gun Violence Update - For Your Information

      4.   Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment Report and Recommendation Overview

F.   Public Comment

G.   Commission General Comments and Information Discussion

      1.   County Commission Comment

      2.   Children's Trust Comment

H.   Adjourn
Recommended Action:
To adjourn the meeting.

Item:

Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment Report and Recommendation Overview (Dr. Mary Bratsch-Hines, Dr. Pamela Chalfant, Mia Jones)

Requested Action:

The Board is asked to receive the report.

Background:

In May 2023 the Children's Trust board had a joint meeting with the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners. During that meeting the Children's Trust staff were tasked with creating a Comprehensive Literacy Plan.

It was determined that a comprehensive needs assessment was needed to help inform the development of a comprehensive literacy plan aimed at improving literacy achievement for all students. In October 2023, discussions were held with UF Lastinger Center about project coordination and developing the assessment.

Project Phases and Overview:

Three Phases of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment

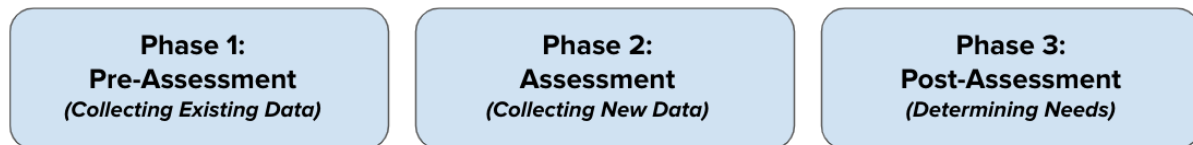| Phase 1: Pre-Assessment (Collecting Existing Data) | Phase 2: Assessment (Collecting New Data) | Phase 3: Post-Assessment (Determining Needs) |

Figure 1: Three Phase of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment adapted from Witkin & Altschuld (1995).

We have completed all phases of the project plan.

Who's at the Table:

We know that schools can't do it alone, and that it will take our entire community to reach our goal for children to be ready for kindergarten and 90% reading on grade-level by the end of third grade. We also know there are many adults in our community who are faced with literacy challenges. To help with the 3 phases of the Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment, expertise was received from:

Alachua County School District

United Way of North Central Florida

Alachua County Public Library

Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading Advisory Board

UF Anita Zucker Center	Florida Campaign for Grade Level Reading
UF Lastinger Center	Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce
Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County	University of Florida Literacy Institute
Gainesville Thrives	Peak Literacy
Cuscowillia Nature and Retreat Center	One Community Health and Wellness Center
Episcopal Children's Services	

These organizations selected a representative with expertise in the space of early childhood learning, K-12 Education systems, adult literacy, and Community. A total of 15 meetings have been held with this committee.

Cost of Literacy Needs Assessment:

The total project cost was $175,000.00 with approximately $75,000 of in-kind services provided by the Lastinger Center. It was funded in collaboration as follows:

Children's Trust of Alachua County	$62,500.00
Alachua County Board of County Commission	$62,500.00 (Received)
Alachua County School District	$50,000.00
University of Florida Lastinger Center	$75,000.00 In-kind support which includes 2 additional Lastinger Center team members and additional personnel support

Overview:

Today the Lastinger Center will provide an overview of the final report and recommendations. The Children's Trust Project Manager will share CTAC next steps toward developing a literacy plan for the community.

Programmatic Impact:

Goal 2: Children & Youth Can Learn What They Need To Be Successful

Fiscal Impact:

$175,000.00

Recommendation:

The Board is asked to receive the report.

UF Lastinger Center
and Children's Trust of Alachua County
Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment

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April & May 2025

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Project Goals (p. 3)

1 Solicit ideas for what the community *has done, is doing,* or *can do* to help children, youth, and adults in Alachua County achieve their full potential to read, write, and communicate.

2 Describe Alachua County's *existing needs* and possible improvements to meet those needs.

3 Create *specific recommendations* that, if acted upon, can promote literacy proficiency from birth through adulthood in Alachua County.

4 Provide a *comprehensive list* of organizations providing literacy-related programs, services, and resources in Alachua County.

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Overview of Literacy Needs Assessment Activities (p. 4)

Table 1. *Literacy Needs Assessment Outreach and Activities*

Activity	Number
Interviews	**74**
ACPS Educators, Principals, and District Staff	14
Elected Officials	9
Committee and Community Organizations	51
Focus Group Participants	**157**
ACPS Educators and District Staff	41
Family Members	74
Community Members	42
Survey Completers	**1,122**
ACPS Educators and District Staff	157
ACPS Students	37
Family Members	740
Community Members	188
Community Events	**11**
Classroom Visits	**3**

April 8, 2024

Beginning of literacy needs assessment activities

↓

April 15, 2024

First of monthly meetings with UF Lastinger Center, Children's Trust, and Committee members

↓

April 29-May 3, 2024

Committee member interviews

↓

May 6-July 12, 2024

Preparation of survey, interview, and focus group materials and processes

↓

June 7-December 20, 2024

Community organization interviews

August 31, 2024
Original Requested End Date

↓

June 7-December 20, 2024

Community surveys

↓

September 15-December 6, 2024

Community focus groups

December 31, 2024
First Extension

July 25-December 16, 2024

ACPS project request process (from submission to University of Florida through ACPS approval)

↓

December 16, 2024-January 13, 2025

ACPS surveys

↓
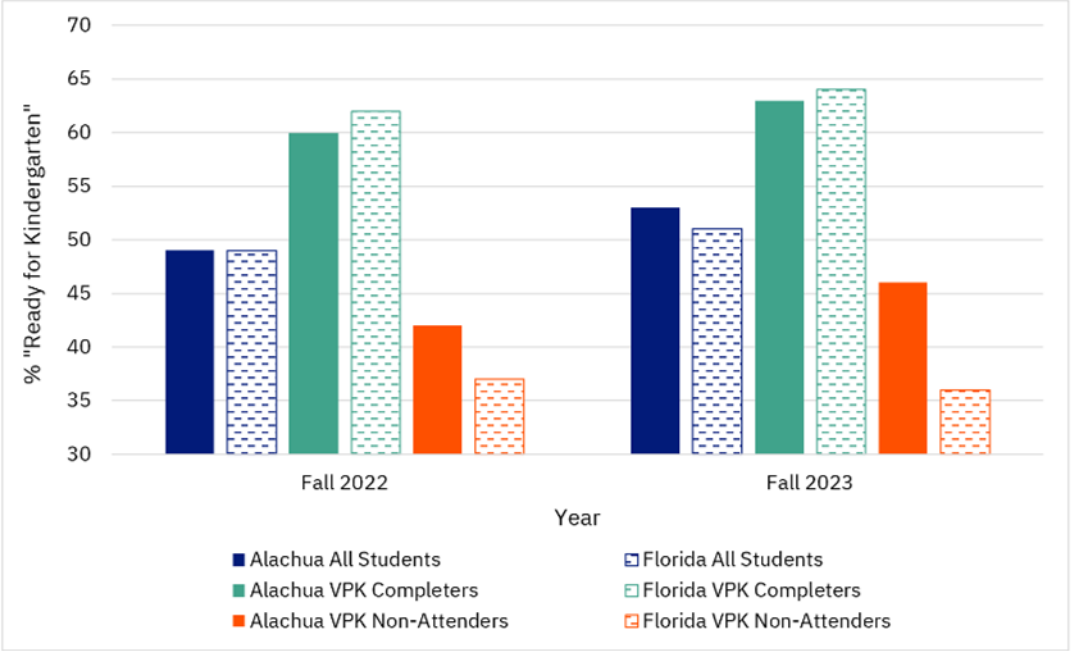
December 18, 2024-January 16, 2025

ACPS interviews

↓

January 12-17, 2025

ACPS focus groups

March 31, 2025
Second Extension

Kindergarten Readiness (p. 30)

Figure 8. *Percent of Students "Ready for Kindergarten" Based on FAST Scores at Kindergarten Entry, including by VPK, Alachua County, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023*

Legend:
- Alachua All Students
- Florida All Students
- Alachua VPK Completers
- Florida VPK Completers
- Alachua VPK Non-Attenders
- Florida VPK Non-Attenders

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Reading on Grade Level by End of Third Grade (p. 34)

Figure 10. *Third Grade Reading (At or Above Grade Level) by Student Race/Ethnicity, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
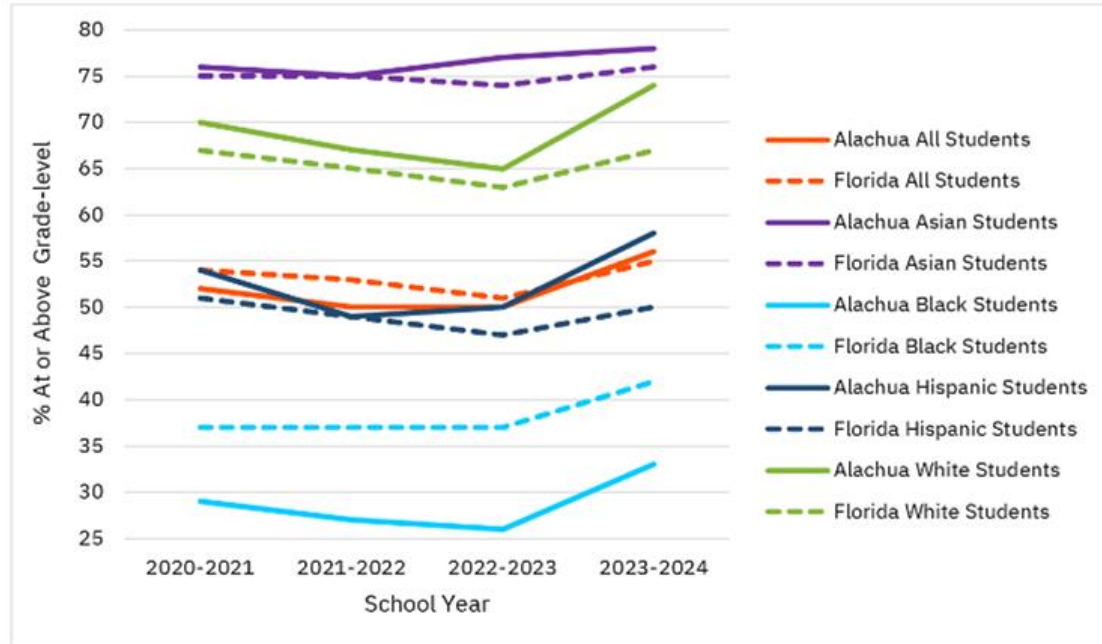
Survey Results: Family and Community Members (p. 60)

Figure 26. *Percent of Respondents, by Respondent Type, Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" About **Children and Youth** Having Necessary Literacy Skills To:*

Survey Results: ACPS Educators and District Staff (p. 67)

Figure 33. *Percent of ACPS Elementary Educators Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" That Their School's Literacy Programs Helps Students Learn How to Read or Write*
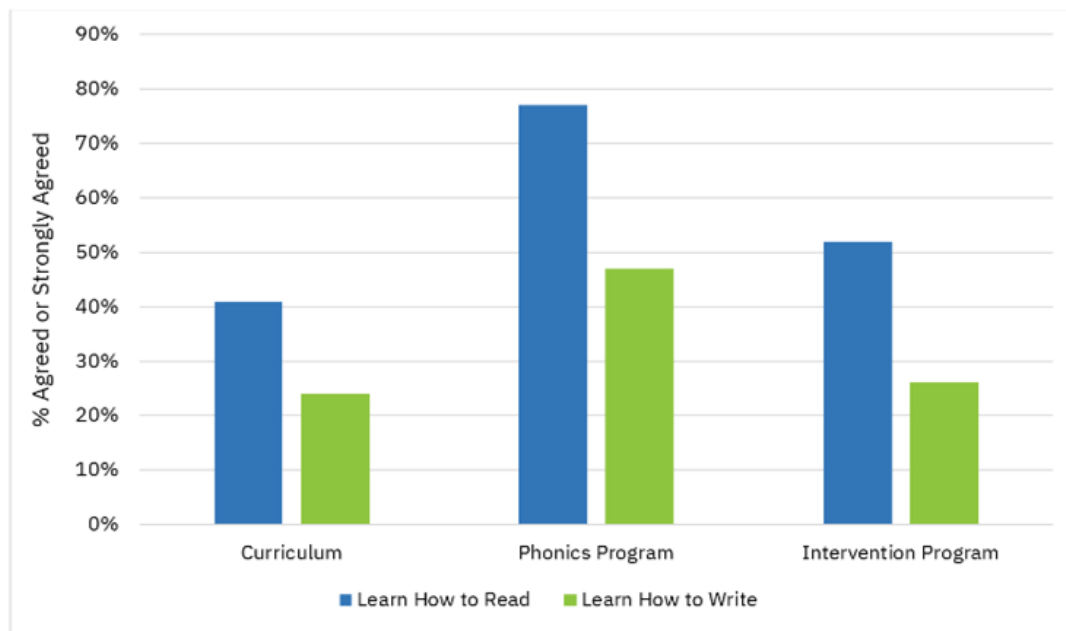
Family Needs (p. 73)

Parental Guidance on Home Instruction and Supplementary Materials. Many family members also expressed frustration over inadequate knowledge or guidance on how to effectively support their children's literacy at home. They described feeling unprepared to help with reading and writing activities, resulting in missed opportunities for their children to reinforce important skills outside the classroom.

> """I didn't grow up with strong literacy skills myself, so teaching reading feels overwhelming."
>
> – Focus Group Member

> "Parents want to help, but they need accessible and practical guidance on supporting their children's reading development."
>
> – Focus Group Member

Teacher Needs (p. 81)

Key Concerns:

- Inadequate training on new curriculum tools and assessment platforms, especially for new teachers.
- Lack of professional development on effective teaching practices, curricula, and practical tools teachers are expected to implement.
- Need for mentorship and peer collaboration.

"Many teachers are left to figure out instructional strategies on their own, which isn't sustainable."

– ACPS Educator

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Organization Needs (p. 88)

"More funding would allow us to expand our literacy initiatives and offer high-quality resources to our students."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

"Better resource allocation can help us address the specific literacy needs of our students more effectively."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

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Recommendations (p. 103)

1 Enhanced Awareness and Communication

2 Focused Support

3 Expanded Professional Learning

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1. Enhanced Awareness and Communication (pp. 104-107)

→ Coordinate existing resources by building awareness within *organizations* and within the *community*

- Name a central organization to serve as the linking mechanism between organizations; use existing organizations to inform coordination of county-wide literacy efforts and develop long-term solutions
- Allocate funding for staff member(s) to create and maintain a centralized website and print materials that serve as a resource hub alerting Alachua County residents about existing programs, opportunities, and events

→ Use public dollars wisely

- Require organizations to show targeted literacy impacts to receive public funding
- Provide sufficient technical assistance so organizations can succeed

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2. Focused Support (pp. 108-112)

→ Start early! Increase public investments in key early learning and intervention organizations to pay long-term dividends

→ Provide ongoing evidence-based training for healthcare, education, and community providers serving multilingual learners, Black students, students experiencing poverty, and students with disabilities. Training topics would include the following:

- Knowledge about how children best learn how to read and write
- How to implement rigorous and systematic reading instruction
- Understanding of the assets brought by each group
- High expectations for attendance and learning

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3. Expanded Professional Learning (pp. 113-118)

→ Early learning providers, staff at community organizations, and ACPS educators all need targeted professional learning in key topics:

- Providing evidence-based practices and strategies during reading instruction and support
- Improving implementation of existing programs and technologies
- Pacing and aligning instruction across grade levels to intensify learning
- Developing a culture of data-driven decision making at all levels, including expanding access to data within and across organizations

→ Other opportunities include the following:

- Enhanced mentorship and collaboration at all levels
- Increased opportunities for coaching
- Better services for students with disabilities

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Next Steps (p. 120)

Figure 37. *Next Steps for Alachua County Literacy Improvements*
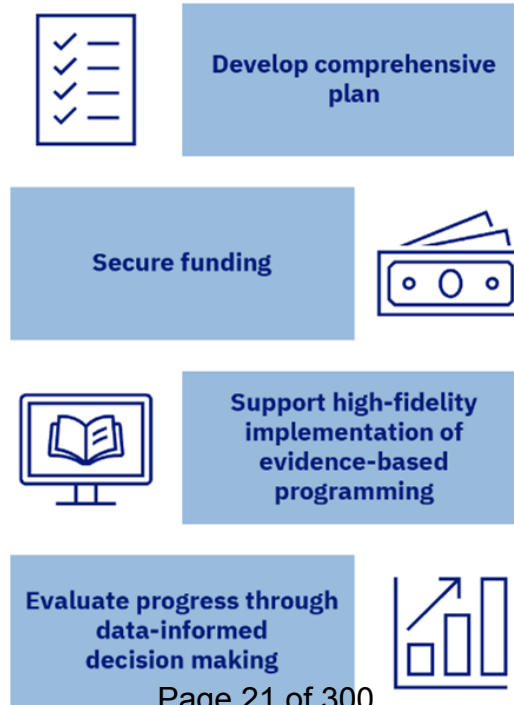
Develop comprehensive plan

Secure funding

Support high-fidelity implementation of evidence-based programming

Evaluate progress through data-informed decision making

Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment

Children's Trust of Alachua County Next Steps and Recommendations

April 21, 2025

Phase 2: Next Steps and Recommendation

Phase 2
- **Developing Plan**

Phase 3
- **Secure Funding**
- **Implementation**

Phase 4
- **Evaluation**

Phase 2: Next Steps

Next Step

Workshop Facilitator

Host Workshop

Develop plan

Time Frame

Estimate 3-5 months

Community Partners

Library

County/City Gov't

ELC & ECS4Kids

School District

Community

Housing

Alachua County Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment

Report compiled by the

University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning

in conjunction with

**Children's Trust of Alachua County,
Alachua County Board of County Commissioners,
Alachua County Public Schools, and
Citizens of Alachua County**

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Contents

Executive Summary

Reading is among the most essential skills in life. Children who gain basic reading skills during the first few years of school can experience lasting benefits, such as academic achievement, positive social-emotional development, long-term economic security, and personal health and well-being (Connor et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2025). Literacy, defined in this report as the ability to read, write, speak, and listen, is important for Alachua County citizens to fully participate in an information-rich society.

Yet, Florida's students find reading difficult. Among Florida's fourth graders in 2024, **only one third read proficiently** on a national reading test (U.S. Department of Education, 2025) and **just over half read at grade level** on the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (Florida Department of Education, 2024).

Like the rest of Florida, only about half of Alachua County's K-12 students are reading on grade level. However, scores in Alachua County are consistently lower for Black students and students with disabilities. Issues related to access to education, employment, housing, transportation, and healthcare highlight why scores may vary for different groups of students (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). **Improving reading outcomes for Alachua County students requires community-wide efforts.**

This comprehensive literacy needs assessment continues longstanding efforts by organizations and literacy leaders in Alachua County to improve literacy. In May 2023, the Children's Trust of Alachua County board had a joint meeting with the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners. The topic of discussion was the need to unite the entire community, along with schools and educational organizations, to reach the goals of **children being ready for kindergarten** and **90% of students reading on grade level by the end of third grade**. In October 2023, the Executive Director of the Children's Trust, Marsha Kiner, asked the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning to serve as the coordinator for a comprehensive literacy needs assessment.

This executive summary and the full report that follows describe education in Alachua County, detail the literacy needs assessment activities, and outline key recommendations to support literacy learning in Alachua County.

Education in Alachua County

Alachua County, Florida, has a comprehensive education system, with 132 licensed childcare programs and voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) offered by 66 local providers. The county has a range of public and private schools, including 66 elementary schools, 39 middle schools, and 38 high schools (Florida Department of Education Data Publications and Reports, n.d.).

In 2023, 63% of VPK completers were "ready for kindergarten" compared to 46% of their peers who did not attend VPK. In 2024, Alachua County earned a B grade as a district, one of 26 districts in Florida to earn a B. Alachua County is home to 15 schools with an A grade, 13 with a B, 16 with a C, and 3 with a D (Florida Department of Education School Grades Overview, n.d.). Alachua County ranks 14th in the state for third-grade English Language Arts achievement, with 58% of students meeting the standard. The on-time high school graduation rate for the 2022-2023 school year was 84%. Higher education opportunities are provided by institutions such as Santa Fe College and the University of Florida, contributing to the county's robust educational landscape (Florida Department of Education Advanced Reports, n.d.).

Literacy Needs Assessment

Description

Despite many strengths, Alachua County needs to improve reading outcomes for all children, youth, and adults. This is especially true for groups with only **1 in 3 students reading on grade level**: Black students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (Florida Department of Education Know Your Data, n.d.; see Figures 10 and 11 of the full report).

The Children's Trust and UF Lastinger Center collaborated on a comprehensive literacy needs assessment to improve literacy in Alachua County from birth through adulthood. Key partners who engaged in the literacy needs assessment included the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, School Board of Alachua County (SBAC), and Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS). Several community organizations provided guidance on this project, serving on the literacy needs assessment committee,

including Alachua County Library District, AskMeno, Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center, the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Episcopal Children's Services, Florida Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Gainesville Thrives, Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, One Community Health and Wellness Center, Peak Literacy, Sunshine Moss, UF Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, UF College of Education, UF Literacy Institute, and the United Way of North Central Florida.

Goals

The UF Lastinger Center, Children's Trust, and committee members listed above created four goals for the literacy needs assessment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Literacy Needs Assessment Goals*

1 Solicit ideas for what the community *has done, is doing,* or *can do* to help children, youth, and adults in Alachua County achieve their full potential to read, write, and communicate.

2 Describe Alachua County's *existing needs* and possible improvements to meet those needs.

3 Create *specific recommendations* that, if acted upon, can promote literacy proficiency from birth through adulthood in Alachua County.

4 Provide a *comprehensive list* of organizations providing literacy-related programs, services, and resources in Alachua County.

Activities

The UF Lastinger Center engaged in the following activities to meet these goals:
    (1) Reviewed information from prior efforts and from members of the literacy needs assessment committee and analyzed data provided by ACPS and community organizations or available from public sources.

(2) Distributed an anonymous survey throughout the county.

(3) Conducted focus groups with a wide range of family and community members and ACPS educators.

(4) Interviewed elected officials, members of community organizations, ACPS district staff, and ACPS educators after visiting their classrooms.

(5) Attended community events to create knowledge about the literacy needs assessment and solicit survey and focus group participation.

(6) Compiled this report and corresponding presentation offering recommendations for future implementation.

Participants

The UF Lastinger Center collected data through 74 interviews, 33 focus groups with 157 participants, 1,122 surveys, 11 community events, and 3 classroom visits (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Literacy Needs Assessment Outreach and Activities*

Activity	Number
Interviews	**74**
Elected Officials	9
ACPS District Staff	9
ACPS School Principals	3
ACPS Educators	2
Committee Organizations	12
Community Organizations	39
Focus Group Participants	**157**
Family Members	74
Community Members	42
ACPS Educators and District Staff	41
Survey Completers	**1,122**
Family Members	740
Community Members	188
Students	37
ACPS Educators and District Staff	157
Community Events	**11**
Classroom Visits	**3**

Key Findings

The literacy needs assessment revealed the following strengths in Alachua County:
- **Home and Community-Based Literacy Practices** – Many families reported actively engaging in literacy activities such as reading and discussing books and doing homework with their children.
- **Classroom-Based Literacy Instruction** – Educators reported having access to evidence-based strategies, such as structured phonics programs and digital learning tools, to support student learning.
- **Community and Organizational Contributions** – Local organizations reported providing valuable literacy support through resources, training, and events that complement school-based initiatives.
- **Policy and Governmental Support** – Local elected officials reported on the importance of early literacy exposure, targeted interventions, and increased resources for children and youth who need them most.

The literacy needs assessment uncovered the following issues hindering literacy progress in Alachua County:
- **Challenges Faced by Families** – Families reported having limited access to literacy resources, financial constraints, and logistical challenges, such as work schedules and transportation, which create obstacles to support their children's literacy development.
- **Challenges in Education** – Educators reported curriculum misalignment, a lack of professional development, and inadequate instructional support as key concerns.
- **Structural and Financial Challenges for Organizations** – Local organizations reported challenges with securing funding and trained staff to implement structured evidence-based literacy programs.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, this report outlines three categories of recommendations to improve literacy outcomes across the county (see Figure 2).

    (1) **Enhanced Awareness and Communication** – Strengthen collaboration among literacy organizations, create a centralized literacy resource hub, and promote community-wide literacy initiatives.

    (2) **Focused Support** – Increase funding for early literacy programs, increase reading achievement for all students but especially those shown to need additional support, expand high-dosage tutoring, and enhance adult literacy programs.

    (3) **Expanded Professional Learning** – Provide targeted professional development for educators, improve collaboration among teachers, and train educators on strategies to support students with disabilities, among other groups.

Figure 2. *Categories of Recommendations from the Literacy Needs Assessment*
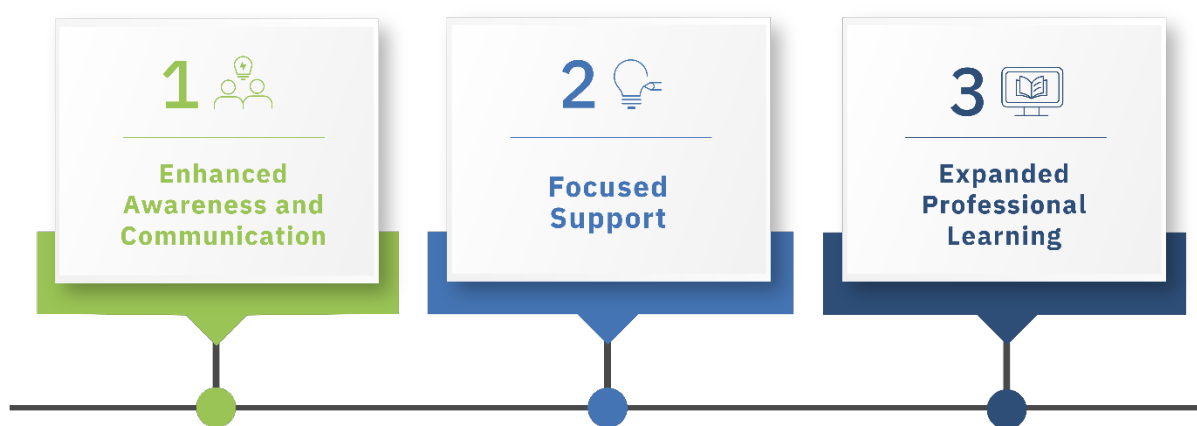
Next Steps

This report underscores the need for a coordinated, multi-sector approach to literacy improvement. Achieving long-term success will require sustained engagement from families, educators, policymakers, and community organizations. The next phase of this initiative will focus on developing a comprehensive plan, securing necessary funding, and continuing to monitor progress to ensure that all students in Alachua County achieve literacy proficiency.

Alachua County Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment: Full Report

Introduction

Learning to communicate, read, and write is vital in our society (UNESCO, 2024). These skills help children do well in school, leading to a greater chance of earning a high school diploma or equivalent, attending higher education, being employed, achieving economic wellbeing, and being an informed citizen (Kree et al., 2022).

Literacy | **Literacy** is defined as the ability to read, write, speak, and listen to fully participate in an information-rich society.

Improving literacy in areas marked by significant income and quality-of-life disparities can be a transformative force for individuals and communities (Rothwell, 2020). Enhancing literacy rates can equip individuals with the skills needed to access better educational and employment opportunities and helps to break cycles of poverty that often perpetuate inequality (Kree et al., 2022). On a community level, higher literacy rates are associated with improved civic participation and foster a more engaged and

informed population (Hansen & Tyner, 2019). Further, literacy contributes to improved public health outcomes because individuals are better able to understand healthcare information and make more informed decisions for themselves and their families (Vernon et al., 2007). By narrowing literacy gaps, communities can foster an environment where economic mobility, social cohesion, and collective wellbeing are more attainable (Feister, 2013).

Continued low literacy rates, on the other hand, can undermine the stability and growth of a region by magnifying income inequality and reducing social and economic advancement (Reardon, 2011). Low levels of literacy lead to reduced workforce productivity, increased reliance on social programs, lower lifetime earnings, increases in incarceration rates, and a wide range of other adverse health outcomes (DeWalt et al., 2004). Over time, widespread literacy challenges can entrench existing disparities and create a feedback loop where these disparities are reinforced (Reardon, 2011).

Report Roadmap

The purpose behind this literacy needs assessment is to improve literacy learning for *all* children, youth, and adults in Alachua County in order to enhance the county's future growth and opportunities. The data presented below show that some residents need additional and enriched resources, services, and programs, including people in Alachua County's Black communities, Hispanic/Latino communities, people who are disabled, and people who have low incomes or are experiencing poverty (see, for example, Figures 10-12 on pp. 35–37). These data show that **more work is needed to improve literacy opportunities for all Alachua County residents.**

The literacy needs assessment was designed to provide recommendations for making key literacy improvements in Alachua County. The remainder of the introduction describes the Alachua County context, prior efforts that have been made to address literacy improvements, and the goals of the literacy needs assessment. The report is then comprised of the following sections, which are differentiated by pages with a green background and/or photos:
- Literacy needs assessment activities
- Data analyzed from Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS), community organizations, and public sources detailing how Alachua County is served by

existing resources for children in early learning environments (birth-age 5), students in K-12 educational settings, and adults in continuing education
- Findings from the surveys, focus groups, and interviews
- Recommendations and next steps for how Alachua County can enhance and improve literacy outcomes for all residents
- Details about the numerous organizations that strive to meet the literacy needs of Alachua County (see Appendix A)

Alachua County Context

Alachua County is the 22nd largest and 25th most populous county out of 67 counties in Florida. Over 275,000 people live in Alachua County. The poverty rate in Alachua County in 2023 was 19% as compared to 12% for the state of Florida (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Over 17% of children in Alachua County experience poverty. Estimates from 2023 showed that more White, Black, and Asian citizens, but fewer Hispanic/Latino citizens, lived in Alachua County as compared to the state of Florida (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Building on Prior Efforts

This project continues prior efforts by Alachua County literacy leaders and organizations (see Figure 3), as well as other initiatives. For example, the Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading, hosted by the United Way of North Central Florida, is a network of agencies, community members, providers, institutions, and individuals that meet once per month to maximize the efforts of the community and organizations to ensure children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. The Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading holds active membership with the Florida Campaign for Grade Level Reading and is an affiliate of the National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, which was launched to reverse the trend of children not reading on grade level by supporting solutions at the federal, state, and local levels. In communities nationwide, the Campaign works within four solution areas that promote third grade reading proficiency: (1) School Readiness, (2) Out of School Learning, (3) Parental and Family Support, and (4) Attendance.

In the fall of 2020, eight Alachua County literacy leaders participated in the Lectio Institute to lay the groundwork for enhancing the Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading. As part of this work, information about literacy programming from 12 organizations was compiled. Committees were formed to address the following three areas aligned with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading: (1) School Readiness, (2) Out of School Time, and (3) Family Engagement and Support. Each of these committees met throughout 2021.

The following themes from the committees were compiled by Lectio in May 2022:
- Need for continued, focused data gathering within the literacy landscape (e.g., programming, impact)
- Interest in building capacity through tools and data to enhance the delivery of literacy programs
- Importance of a culture of learning and community of practice for partners
- Recognition of the need to support parents and caregivers

Figure 3. *Timeline of Literacy Improvement Efforts in Alachua County*

2020	**2021**
Alachua County Literacy Leaders Attend Lectio Institute to Enhance Alachua County Campaign for Grade-Level Reading	Committee Members Meet to Discuss Topic Areas of *School Readiness*, *Out of School Time*, and *Family Engagement*

2022	**2023**
Lectio Identifies Themes from Committees, such as *Continued Data Gathering* and *Strengthened Family Support*	Board of County Commissioners and Children's Trust Agree to Children's Trust Creating a Literacy Plan with Help from Expert Organizations

2024	**2025**
Organizations Continue to Meet; UF Lastinger Center Conducts Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment throughout Alachua County	UF Lastinger Center, CTAC, and Organizations Report Literacy Needs Assessment Findings to Inform Creation of Literacy Action Plan

In May 2023, the Children's Trust board had a joint meeting with the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners. The topic of discussion was the need to unite the entire community, along with schools and educational organizations, to reach the goals of **children being ready for kindergarten** and **90% of students reading on grade level by the end of third grade**. During that meeting, the Board of County Commissioners and the Children's Trust agreed that the Children's Trust would assist with creating a comprehensive literacy plan. To help with the creation of the plan, Children's Trust staff created a committee comprised of representatives of the following organizations who are experts in the space of early care and education, K-12 education systems, and community literacy support: Alachua County Library District, AskMeno, Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center, Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Episcopal Children's Services, Florida Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Gainesville Thrives, Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, One Community Health and Wellness Center, Peak Literacy, Dr. Sunshine Moss, UF Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, UF College of Education, UF Literacy Institute, and the United Way of North Central Florida.

The committee met five times between May 2023 and April 2024. Topics of discussion included the following:

- Set a purpose, describe literacy gaps from member perspectives, and identify other interested parties who should be included in the plan development.
- Review and discuss the work completed by the Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading.
- Review and discuss research and the Literacy Roadmap completed by Dr. Sunshine Moss.
- Look at plans and talk with other communities, such as Martin County Children's Services Council, that have focused on supporting early learning, strong families, and success in school and life.

In October 2023, the Executive Director of the Children's Trust, Marsha Kiner, asked the UF Lastinger Center to serve as coordinator for a comprehensive literacy needs assessment intended to help Alachua County form an action plan to improve literacy in the county. The literacy needs assessment, which began in April 2024, included the following phases: Phase 1: Pre-Assessment (Collect Existing Data); Phase 2: Assessment (Collect New Data); and Phase 3: Post-Assessment (Determining Needs). In this role, the UF Lastinger Center created and administered surveys, completed

organization interviews, conducted focus groups, attended public events, and visited schools. Community leaders, community members, families, students, educators, and staff at community organizations – over 1,300 people – participated in the literacy needs assessment between June 2024 and January 2025. The UF Lastinger Center met monthly with literacy needs assessment committee members to continually inform the project, soliciting guidance and direction for project activities.

Goals of the Literacy Needs Assessment

The Children's Trust, UF Lastinger Center, and committee members established goals of the literacy needs assessment (see Figure 4, which is the same as Figure 1 from the Executive Summary). The goals were as follows: (1) collect data throughout the community to understand what is working and what needs to be improved, (2) present information related to Alachua County's current needs, (3) create specific recommendations to help target improvements, and (4) provide a list of organizations serving children, youth, and adults in Alachua County.

Figure 4. *Goals of Literacy Needs Assessment*

1	2	3	4
Solicit ideas for what the community *has done, is doing,* or *can do* to help children, youth, and adults in Alachua County achieve their full potential to read, write, and communicate.	Describe Alachua County's *existing needs* and possible improvements to meet those needs.	Create *specific recommendations* that, if acted upon, can promote literacy proficiency from birth through adulthood in Alachua County.	Provide a *comprehensive list* of organizations providing literacy-related programs, services, and resources in Alachua County.

Description of Literacy Needs Assessment Activities

The UF Lastinger Center engaged in the following activities to meet these goals:
  (1) Reviewed information from prior efforts and from members of the literacy needs assessment committee and analyzed data provided by ACPS and community organizations or available from public sources.
  (2) Distributed an anonymous survey throughout the county.
  (3) Conducted focus groups with a wide range of family and community members and ACPS educators.
  (4) Interviewed elected officials, members of community organizations, ACPS district staff, and ACPS educators after visiting their classrooms.
  (5) Attended community events to create knowledge about the literacy needs assessment and solicit survey and focus group participation.
  (6) Compiled this report and corresponding presentation offering recommendations for future implementation.

This section describes how these activities were conducted, who participated in the literacy needs assessment, and how data were analyzed.

Review and Analysis of Existing Data Sources

To create the tables and figures depicted below, UF Lastinger Center examined publicly available data from the following data sources:
- [Florida Department of Education](#)
- [Florida Department of Health](#)
- [School Board of Alachua County Board Docs](#)
- [City of Alachua Education Taskforce](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

The UF Lastinger Center requested data from Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS), the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, and other organizations to ask for student, educator, and school/program data to inform the literacy needs assessment. Data were received in December 2025.

Participant Groups and Recruitment Strategies

The UF Lastinger Center engaged in numerous activities with the aim of hearing from Alachua County residents from the following groups:
- Parents/guardians/caregivers of children enrolled in K-12 schools, homeschool, or early learning programs/centers in Alachua County
- Students enrolled in or recently graduated from K-12 schools, homeschool, or higher education in Alachua County
- Adult education program staff and students
- General public/community members living or working in Alachua County
- ACPS district staff, school principals, educators, and instructional support staff
- Elected officials
- Staff or volunteers in organizations providing literacy resources or support
- Alachua county and municipality staff
- UF staff and faculty in education- and health-related departments
- Senior citizens

Survey and focus group participants were recruited in the following ways:
- Webpage on the UF Lastinger Center website
- Social media posts, including via a toolkit created by the UF Lastinger Center communications team and shared with literacy needs assessment committee organizations
- Emails created for the literacy needs assessment committee organizations to share widely
- Community organization gatherings and meetings
- Conversations and postcards distributed at community events
- Emails to UF Lastinger Center's existing list of contacts, including enrolled educators and families
- Emails to all ACPS educators and families

Interview participants were recruited via email and were identified by the following strategies:
- Organizations on the literacy needs assessment committee
- Organizations named on a comprehensive list that was created in conjunction with the Children's Trust and the literacy needs assessment committee
- Organizations found through web searches
- Organizations referred to during interviews
- Elected officials, including Alachua County Commissioners, Gainesville City Commissioners, and School Board of Alachua County
- Organizations and departments from ACPS

Data Collection Procedures and Measures

The UF Lastinger Center created questions for surveys, focus groups, and interviews that asked for Alachua County residents' thoughts on literacy learning for children, youth, and adults. The UF Lastinger Center also attended community events to ask people to complete surveys. This section describes how data were collected, when the data were collected, and information about the respondents and participants. All of the questions that were asked on the surveys, focus groups, and interviews are available upon request from the UF Lastinger Center (email Lastinger@coe.ufl.edu for more information).

Surveys

Surveys were collected throughout Alachua County. Families, community members, students, ACPS educators, and ACPS district staff were offered different surveys. People were eligible to complete a survey if they (1) live in Alachua County, (2) work in Alachua County, (3) currently attend school in Alachua County, (4) attended school in Alachua County in the last five years, (5) have a child currently attending school in Alachua County, and/or (6) have a child who attended school in Alachua County in the last five years. The surveys were anonymous, offered in English and Spanish, and collected online via Qualtrics. Respondents could decide which items they wanted to answer, so the response rates were different for each item.

The UF Lastinger Center collected surveys between June 7, 2024, and January 13, 2025. During that time, 1,784 people started a survey and 1,122 people (63%) did the entire survey and completed the final item (see Table 2). A total of 56 respondents (3%) answered the survey in Spanish. The rest completed the survey in English.

Table 2. *Survey Completion Numbers, by Respondent Type*

	Started Survey	Completed Survey
Family Members	1,073	740
Community Members	369	188
ACPS Educators and District Staff	269	157
K-12 Students	73	37
Total	1,784	1,122

Respondents had the option to write in open-ended responses, and 1,015 people (90% of survey completers) chose to do so (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Provided Written Feedback, by Respondent Type*

	Completed Survey	Wrote Answers
Family Members	740	690
Community Members	188	146
ACPS Educators and District Staff	157	149
K-12 Students	37	30
Total	1,122	1,015

Survey respondents answered items about their background, education, and income. This information was compiled for all respondent groups (family members, community members, students, and ACPS educators/district staff), along with U.S. Census data for Alachua County as a whole (see Table 4). Survey respondents, for the most part, had more advanced education degrees; spoke English, although 8% spoke Spanish and 5% indicated 21 other languages; were female; and were in higher income brackets. The race/ethnicity of survey respondents largely reflected the race/ethnicity of Alachua County residents. The largest discrepancies (that is, more than 5% difference) between survey respondents and the larger population of Alachua County residents included the following: Survey respondents were more likely to have higher education degrees (master's degree or higher), speak English in the home, be in the 35-54 age bracket, and have higher incomes.

Table 4. *Survey Respondent Information*

	Alachua County		All Respond-ents[a]	Family Members[b]	Commun-ity Members[c]	ACPS Educators and Staff[d]	Students[e]
Education							
Less than high school	N/A		2%	2%	3%	0%	N/A
High school or GED	18%	>	7%	6%	12%	1%	
Some college	16%	>	10%	10%	11%	1%	
Associate's degree	11%		11%	12%	11%	0%	
Bachelor's degree	22%		24%	24%	20%	29%	
Master's degree or higher	29%	<	46%	46%	42%	69%	
Language(s)							
English	86%	<	92%	92%	89%	95%	83%
Spanish	7%		8%	8%	10%	2%	8%
Another language	9%		5%	5%	6%	3%	14%
Age							
18-24	15%	>	3%	1%	10%	3%	N/A
25-34	15%		14%	12%	20%	13%	
35-44	11%	<	41%	50%	20%	24%	
45-54	10%	<	26%	29%	17%	32%	
>55	25%	>	15%	9%	32%	28%	
Sex							
Female	51%	<	86%	87%	81%	87%	N/A

	Alachua County	All Respondents[a]	Family Members[b]	Community Members[c]	ACPS Educators and Staff[d]	Students[e]
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian	0.3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Asian	7%	5%	5%	4%	2%	15%
Black	19%	23%	24%	24%	12%	30%
Hispanic/Latino	12%	14%	14%	16%	11%	27%
White	61%	65%	56%	56%	75%	37%
Income						
<$10,000	10% >	4%	4%	8%	0%	N/A
$10,001-$25,000	8%	6%	5%	12%	2%	
$25,001-$50,000	20%	16%	14%	21%	15%	
$50,001-$75,000	15%	18%	18%	13%	30%	
$75,001-$100,000	12%	15%	15%	17%	19%	
$100,001-$150,000	14% <	21%	23%	17%	21%	
>$150,000	15%	19%	22%	11%	13%	

Source for Alachua County percentages: U.S. Census Bureau. Note: N/A = not asked. [a] (All Survey Respondents) Education N = 1,027 (ages =>25); Language N = 1,030; Age N = 1,042; Sex N = 1,077; Race/Ethnicity N = 1,020; Income N = 850. [b] (Family Members) Education N = 746 (ages =>25); Language N = 708, family members indicated speaking Afrikaans, American Sign Language, Arabic, Cebuano, Creole, Czech, Filipino, French, German, Malagasy, Marathi, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Yoruba; Age N = 740; Sex N = 720; Race/Ethnicity N = 704; Income N = 613. [c] (Community Members) Education N = 170 (ages =>25); Language N = 176, community members indicated speaking Arabic, Bangla, Creole, and German; Age N = 188; Sex N = 180; Race/Ethnicity N = 177; Income N = 141. [d] (ACPS Educators and District Staff) Education N = 154 (ages =>25); Language N = 151, ACPS educators and district staff indicated speaking American Sign Language, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi; Age N = 157; Sex N = 149; Race/Ethnicity N = 147; Income N = 132. [e] (Students) Language N = 36, students indicated speaking Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, and Persian; Race/Ethnicity N = 33.

Students answered an additional item about what type of school they attended (see Table 5), with just over half attending elementary school.

Table 5. *Student Survey Respondent Information*

Characteristic	%
School Level	
Elementary	51%
Middle	21%
High	28%

Note: School Level N = 43.

ACPS educators and district staff answered additional items about their role, certifications, and age/grade levels (see Table 6). Most described themselves as teachers (76%), although other roles included district or school administrators (6%). Most (89%) considered themselves to be directly teaching or supporting the teaching of reading. Eighty-three percent had professional certification, but 17% did not.

Table 6. *ACPS Educators and District Staff Survey Respondent Information*

Characteristic	%
Role	
District or School Administrator	6%
Teacher	76%
Instructional Support Staff	5%
Non-Instructional Support Staff	9%
Paraprofessional or Tutor	1%
Provides Reading Instruction or Support for Reading Instruction	89%
Certification	
Professional Certification to Teach	83%
Temporary Certification to Teach	13%
No Certification to Teach	4%
Age/Grade Level	
Early Childhood	3%
Elementary	53%
Middle	22%
High	22%

Note: Role *N* = 205, Provides Reading Instruction *N* = 184, Certification *N* = 192, School Level *N* = 184.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were different from interviews in that they included two or more participants at a time. Focus groups were role specific and included questions related to the participant's role as an educator, family member, or community member. Some participants had multiple roles. Educators were asked about literacy instruction, challenges with student learning, and professional learning opportunities. Families were asked about the importance of literacy for their children, their children's literacy progress, and what families and schools can do to promote literacy for their children. Community members were asked about how the larger community can help children,

youth, and adults gain literacy skills. Focus groups were conducted either in person or through Zoom. Focus groups were audio recorded, and the recordings were transcribed.

The UF Lastinger Center completed 33 focus groups between September 15, 2024 and January 16, 2025. One hundred fifty-nine people participated in a focus group. Focus group participants were more likely to speak English, range in age from 25 to 44, be female, Black, and less likely to be White than Alachua County as a whole (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Focus Group Participant Information*

	Alachua County		All Focus Group Members[a]	Family Members[b]	Community Members[c]	ACPS Educators and Staff[d]
Education						
Less than high school	N/A		6%	2%	18%	
High school or GED	18%	>	11%	11%	15%	
Some college	16%		14%	19%	8%	
Associate's degree	11%		7%	9%	8%	
Bachelor's degree	22%		22%	22%	13%	45%
Master's degree or higher	29%		34%	33%	28%	55%
Language(s)						
English	86%	<	100%	100%	100%	100%
Spanish	7%		6%	4%	14%	0%
Another language	9%	>	1%	3%	0%	0%
Age						
18-24	15%		13%	11%	10%	3%
25-34	15%	<	26%	25%	19%	32%
35-44	11%	<	30%	43%	14%	32%
45-54	10%	<	18%	18%	14%	23%
>55	25%	>	16%	3%	40%	10%
Sex						
Female	51%	<	84%	88%	74%	90%
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian	0.3%		3%	1%	7%	3%
Asian	7%		2%	3%	2%	0%
Black	19%	<	41%	46%	55%	6%
Hispanic/Latino	12%		13%	7%	21%	16%
White	61%	>	47%	47%	26%	84%

	Alachua County	All Focus Group Members[a]	Family Members[b]	Community Members[c]	ACPS Educators and Staff[d]
Income					
<$10,000	10%	12%	6%	26%	0%
$10,001-$25,000	8%	7%	7%	12%	0%
$25,001-$50,000	20%	24%	28%	14%	23%
$50,001-$75,000	15% <	22%	21%	14%	35%
$75,001-$100,000	12%	11%	10%	7%	19%
$100,001-$150,000	14%	9%	13%	5%	13%
>$150,000	15% >	6%	6%	10%	6%

Source for Alachua County percentages: U.S. Census Bureau. Note: [a] (All Focus Group Participants *N* = 157) Education *N* = 128 (ages =>25); Language *N* = 141; Age *N* = 141; Sex *N* = 141; Race/Ethnicity *N* = 141; Income *N* = 141. [b] (Family Members) Education *N* = 64 (ages =>25); Language *N* = 72; Age *N* = 72; Sex *N* = 72; Race/Ethnicity *N* = 72; Income *N* = 72. [c] (Community Members) Education *N* = 39 (ages =>25); Language *N* = 42; Age *N* = 42; Sex *N* = 42; Race/ Ethnicity *N* = 42; Income *N* = 42. [d] (ACPS Educators and District Staff) Education *N* = 29 (ages =>25); Language *N* = 31; Age *N* = 31; Sex *N* = 31; Race/Ethnicity *N* = 31; Income *N* = 31.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to map community assets, or the resources that are currently available in Alachua County. Elected officials, staff at literacy needs assessment committee organizations, staff at literacy-related organizations, ACPS educators, and ACPS district staff participated in interviews. Staff were asked to complete surveys about their organizations/departments. Interview questions asked about literacy-related program activities, staffing (including volunteers), learners served, professional learning opportunities, funding, and collaboration. Interviews were conducted through Zoom. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The UF Lastinger Center completed 73 interviews between April 29, 2024 and January 16, 2025. The following people were interviewed: 9 local elected officials, 9 ACPS district staff, 3 ACPS school principals, 2 ACPS educators, staff members at 12 committee organizations, and staff members at 38 community organizations. One organization provided survey data but was not interviewed. In addition, 35 organizations were contacted but not surveyed or interviewed for various reasons. Thus, a total of 109 organizations were approached (see Table 8).

In-person school visits were conducted in January 2025. The purpose of the school visits was to observe literacy-related instruction. The UF Lastinger Center completed 2 school visits, observing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in 3 classrooms: kindergarten and third grade at Lake Forest Elementary School and an intensive reading class at Kanapaha Middle School. Follow-up interviews were conducted with two of the participating teachers.

Table 8. *Interviews Conducted for Literacy Needs Assessment*

Type of Contact	Number of Interviews or Number of Organizations Contacted but Not Interviewed
Surveyed/Interviewed	*74*
County Commissioners	4
Gainesville City Commissioners	1
School Board of Alachua County	4
ACPS District Staff	9
ACPS Principals	3
ACPS Educators	2
Literacy Needs Assessment Committee Organizations	12
Community Organizations	38
Provided Survey Data (No Interview)	1
Not Surveyed/Interviewed	*35*
Called (Confirmed No Literacy Focus)	13
Called or Emailed (No Response)	19
Emailed (Declined)	3
Total	*109*

Community Events

The UF Lastinger Center participated in tabling at events throughout Alachua County (see Table 9), which provided community members with the opportunity to complete surveys and sign up for focus groups.

Table 9. *Events Attended During Literacy Needs Assessment*

Event	Sponsor	Date
Fanfare and Fireworks	WUFT-FM	07/03/2024
Backpack Event	Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County	07/13/2024
Stop the Violence Backpack Event	People Against Violence Enterprises	07/27/2024
Back to School Giveaway High Springs	Alachua County Children's Trust	08/11/2024
Fall Teen Art Show	Alachua County Library District	10/12/2024
Coon Hollo Farm Fall Festival	Coon Hollo	10/14/2024
Monthly Dinner	SWAG	10/17/2024
Lights on Afterschool	Alachua County Children's Trust	10/24/2024
YMCA Trunk-or Treat	YMCA of North Central FL	10/25/2024
Superhero 5k	Partnership for Strong Families	11/03/2024
Family Fishing Day	Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences	11/09/2024

Data Analysis

Survey items were coded to represent the percent of respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" on individual items. These responses were examined descriptively and presented in tables and figures.

Detailed notes and transcripts were produced from the virtual and in-person focus groups and interviews. Notes and transcripts were analyzed using generative AI tools offered through UF. Generative AI has been found useful in qualitative data analysis by streamlining data processing. It has also been found effective in thematic analysis,

such as identifying recurring patterns, themes, and trends within qualitative data (Hitch, 2023; Zhang, et al., 2023). Generative AI specifically enhances efficiency of the coding process and summarizes large volumes of qualitative data without losing critical details (Hitch, 2023; Morgan, 2023) and is now integrated into the most recent version of NVivo 15 (Lumivero, 2023), a qualitative analysis tool that is widely used in academic, social science, and business research to process large volumes of unstructured data (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019; Sinha, et al., 2024).

UF's GPT-4 AI model has advanced natural language understanding (NLU). In this application, the GPT-4 model was used to identify patterns, categorize, and generate summaries of responses. To ensure the accuracy, validity, and ethical integrity of the assessment, research team members independently reviewed analyzed data and regularly convened to discuss and refine themes through the consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach to check and confirm consistency in thematic interpretation (Hill, 2012).

Transcripts and spreadsheets of survey data without any names or identifying information were uploaded into AI tools by type (survey open-ended responses, focus groups, interviews) and by participant group (families and community members, ACPS educators and district staff, students, committee and community organization staff members, and elected officials). Specific questions were asked when uploading files in the AI tools, including what's working and what challenges exist for each group, and what each group recommended to improve literacy skills. These questions and more details about the AI analysis are available upon request from the UF Lastinger Center (email Lastinger@coe.ufl.edu for more information).

The AI tools returned major themes, a description of findings from each theme, and representative quotes from the participants on each theme. From there, UF Lastinger staff, aided by staff at Children's Trust and committee organizations, extensively reviewed the findings. Repetitive information was condensed. Recommendations were included if they had an evidence base or support from research and, if so, prioritized based on perceived importance and practicality.

Thus, the UF Lastinger Center synthesized data from multiple sources to draw out key themes, which are outlined in the following sections describing findings from the literacy needs assessment.

Findings: Literacy Learning in Alachua County's Educational Settings

Data from numerous sources were compiled and analyzed to provide information about how the literacy needs of children, youth, and adults are currently met by programs, schools, and organizations throughout Alachua County. These findings are organized into the following sections: Early Learning, K-12, College and Workforce Readiness, and Adult Education.
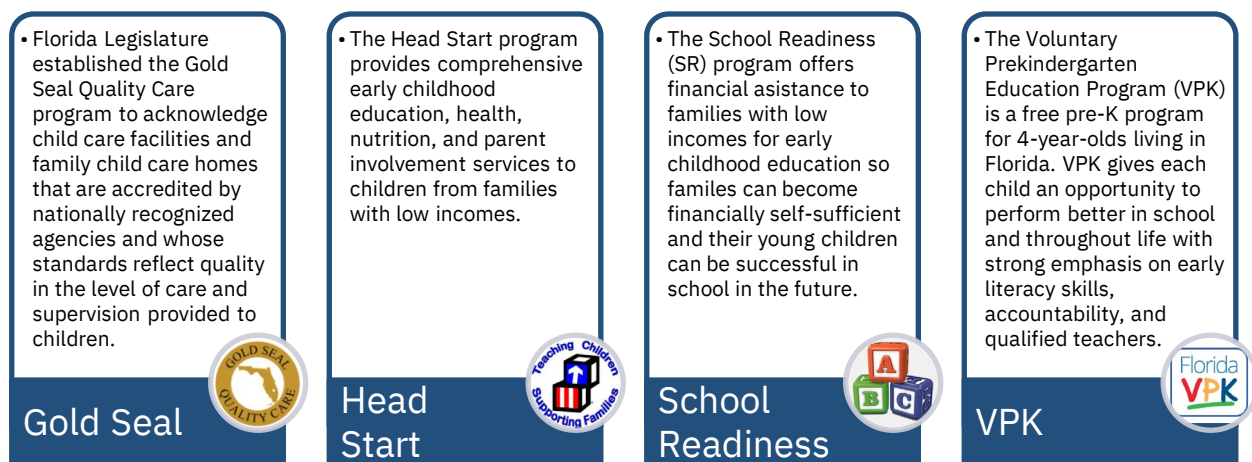
Early Learning

Children's earliest years are instrumental in setting the foundation for literacy learning (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). Access to high-quality early learning environments from birth through age five, both in the home and in early childhood education settings, can improve children's early communication skills, language development, and emergent literacy (Davis Schoch et al., 2023). The characteristics of "high-quality early learning" vary slightly by age level (infants, toddlers, preschoolers), but all children ideally have access to language-rich environments that include back-and-forth conversations with adults, exposure to new words and word meanings, and a focus on building familiarity with many topics. Talking *with* – not just talking *to* – children is important in helping children build language skills that will later impact their ability to read. Children should also have multiple opportunities to engage in meaningful ways with books, print, and

writing materials (Bowne et al., 2017; Cabell et al., 2015; Grifenhagen et al., 2017; Hadley et al., 2022; Hindman et al., 2019; Justice et al., 2018; Neuman et al., 2000; Romeo et al., 2018).

In Alachua County, children from ages 0-5 are cared for at home, in family childcare homes, at community-based childcare centers, and at schools. Over 130 providers offer licensed childcare options for families in Alachua County. School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) are both publicly funded by the state. Head Start is federally funded. Gold Seal accreditation helps families select high-quality programs (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Child Care Services*

Gold Seal	Head Start	School Readiness	VPK
Florida Legislature established the Gold Seal Quality Care program to acknowledge child care facilities and family child care homes that are accredited by nationally recognized agencies and whose standards reflect quality in the level of care and supervision provided to children.	The Head Start program provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to children from families with low incomes.	The School Readiness (SR) program offers financial asistance to families with low incomes for early childhood education so familes can become financially self-sufficient and their young children can be successful in school in the future.	The Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) is a free pre-K program for 4-year-olds living in Florida. VPK gives each child an opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life with strong emphasis on early literacy skills, accountability, and qualified teachers.

Source: Florida Department of Children and Families

The Florida Department of Children and Families provides a childcare provider search function on its website. Families can find provider name, address, license number, provider type, capacity, days and hours of operation, services offered, and three-year inspection history of each provider.

Organizations Serving Young Children and Families in Alachua County

The UF Lastinger Center interviewed several organizations that serve the language and emergent literacy needs of young children in Alachua County (see Appendix A). For example, the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County serves as a resource to families and child care providers. Their goal is to ensure that children and families have access to quality, affordable early learning programs. Episcopal Children's Services

supports families in Alachua County by providing Head Start, VPK, and School Readiness services. Staff from both organizations serve on the literacy needs assessment committee.

The following sections describe information related to access and quality of VPK and SR in Alachua County.

Participation in VPK

A smaller percentage of Alachua County four-year-olds are enrolled in VPK as compared to the Florida average. This has been consistently true since 2020, but the percentage especially declined starting in 2021 (see Figure 6). This is problematic because children enrolled in VPK have higher school readiness compared to unenrolled children (see pp. 18–19), so increasing VPK participation is important.

Figure 6. *Percent of Eligible 4-Year-Olds Attending VPK, Alachua County and Florida, 2020 through 2023*
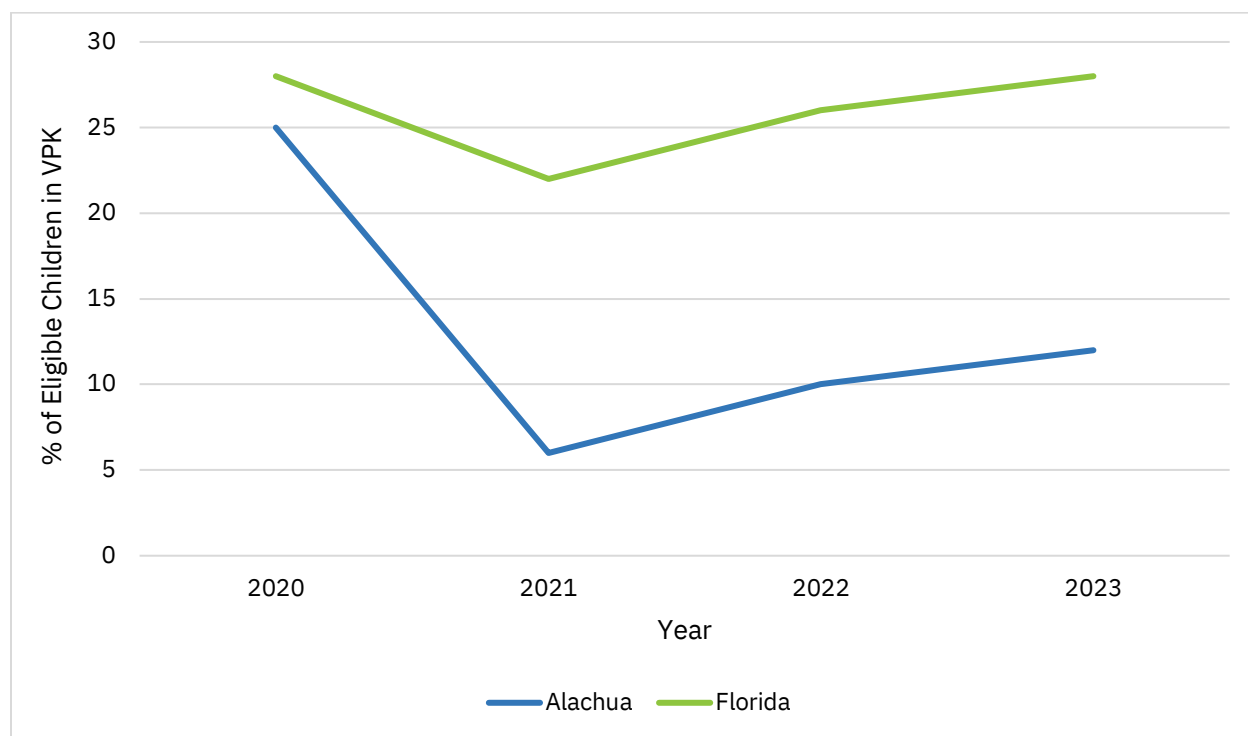
Source: Florida Department of Health

Quality of VPK and SR

Florida requires VPK and SR classrooms to meet quality standards using an observation tool called the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008). Observers rate VPK and SR classrooms on CLASS indicators, which are averaged to create three CLASS domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Combined, these domains show the quality of teacher-child interactions in classroom settings. VPK classrooms are required to have an average of 4 (on a scale of 7) on CLASS indicators as a "quality threshold."

Data provided from the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County to the UF Lastinger Center included CLASS scores by provider type (childcare facility, family childcare home, or public school). Instructional Support scores across Florida and the US are typically lower than Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores, but Alachua County childcare providers scored well in Instructional Support (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. *Alachua County VPK Scores by Childcare Type, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024*
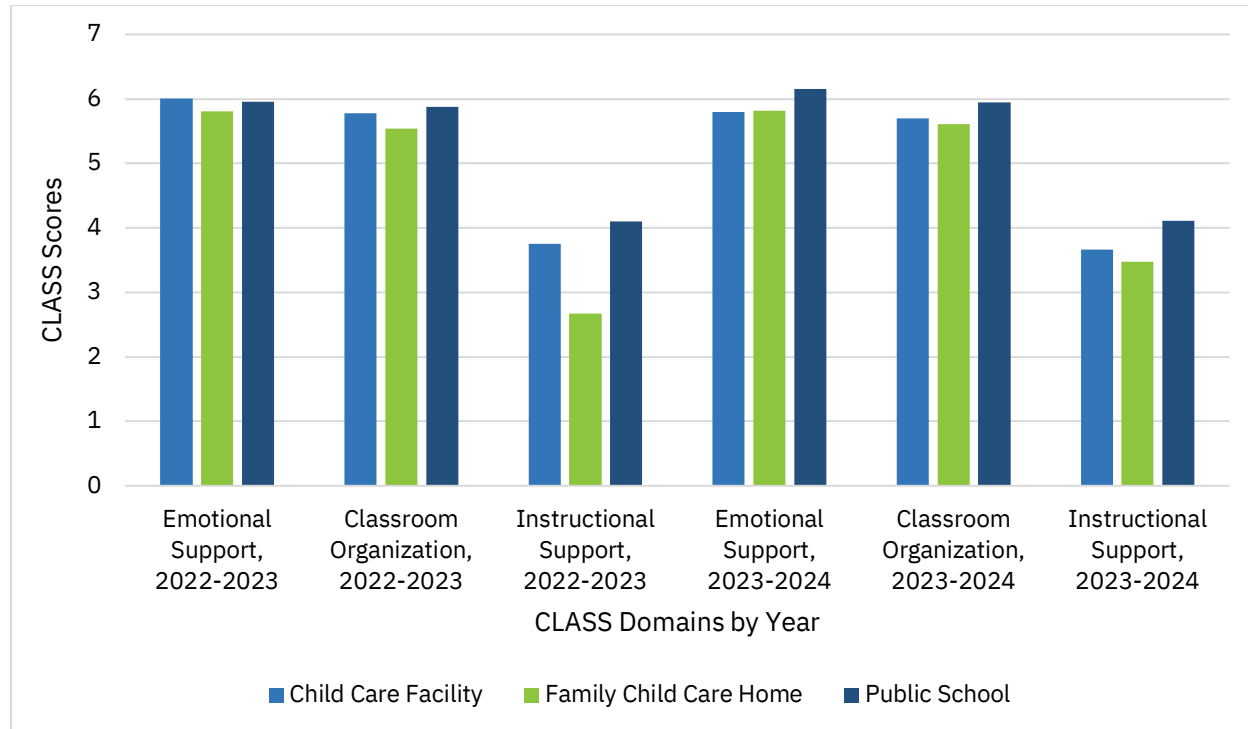
Source: Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County

School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry

The Florida legislature has defined *"ready for kindergarten"* through student scores on assessments administered in the fall of kindergarten. Results are based on the first assessment administered to each student. Prior to 2022-2023, Florida used the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS), with a score of 500 or higher indicating "ready for kindergarten" per Rule 6M-8.601, F.A.C.

Starting in 2022-2023, Florida adopted a statewide coordinated screening and progress monitoring system known as the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) Star Early Literacy. FAST Star Early Literacy now serves as the state's kindergarten screener. A score of 690 on FAST Star Early Literacy is equivalent to a score of 500 on the FLKRS. FAST Star Early Literacy is also implemented in all VPK programs as required by s. 1002.68, F.S., and used to assess student achievement of the performance standards established in s. 1002.67(1)(a), F.S., in early literacy and mathematics.

In most years, Alachua County children had slightly higher school readiness scores than the Florida average (2023 was an exception; see Table 10). Children who completed VPK tended to have the highest readiness scores in 2022 and 2023, both in Alachua County and Florida (see Table 10 and Figure 8).

Table 10. *School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry, All Students, Alachua County and Florida*

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Alachua	56.9%	58.4%	54.8%	48.6%	52.5%
Florida	53.4%	56.9%	50.0%	49.2%	51.0%

Source: Florida Department of Health

Figure 8. *Percent of Students "Ready for Kindergarten" Based on FAST Scores at Kindergarten Entry, including by VPK, Alachua County, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023*
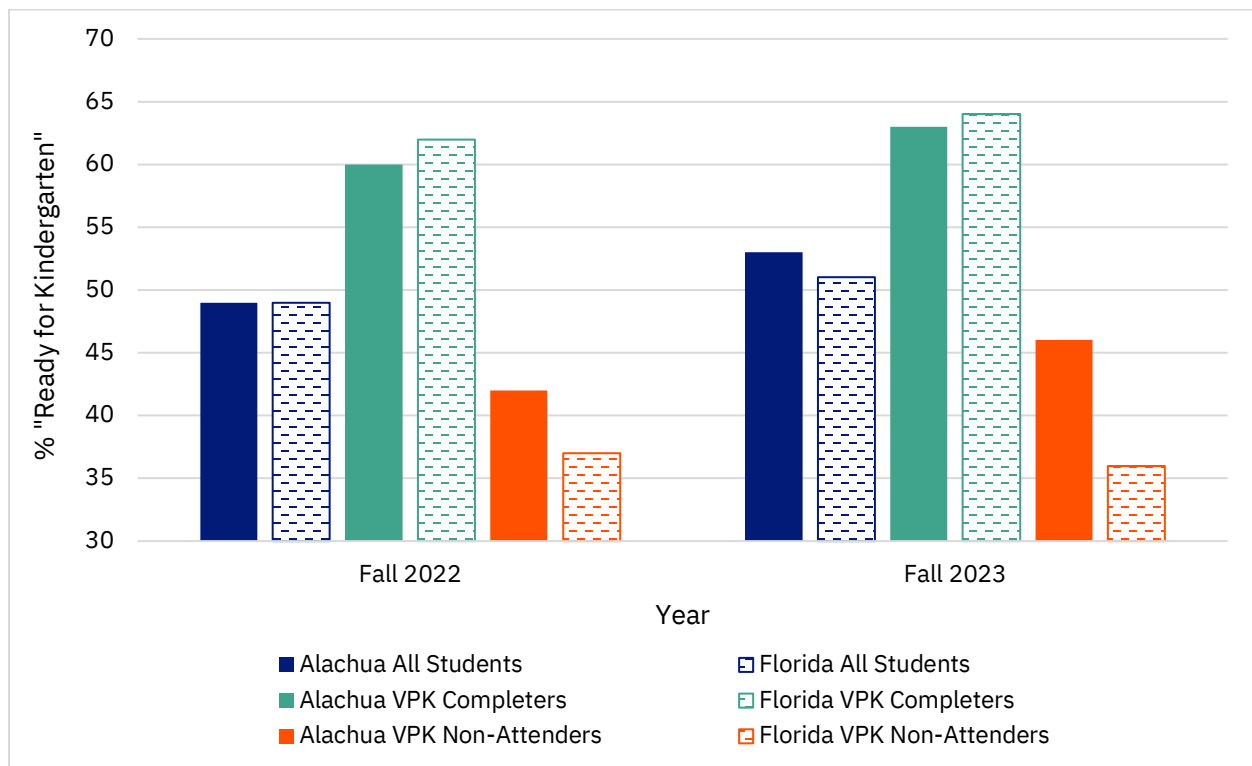
Source: FAST 2022, 2023 data; Note: "All Students" refers to all children who took beginning of year (BOY) FAST assessment at the beginning of kindergarten. "VPK Completers" refers to children who attended =>70% of VPK the year before kindergarten. "VPK Non-Attenders" refers to children in kindergarten who did not attend VPK or were unmatched to a VPK record; these children may have experienced home care or other forms of childcare.

K-12

K-12 education plays a foundational role in shaping students' literacy skills, which are critical for academic success and broader life outcomes. Early literacy development in kindergarten through third grade has long been established as critical in setting students' literacy trajectories (Stanovich, 1986). Although it is never too late to intervene, research indicates helping older students is significantly more resource-intensive than preventing reading difficulties in the elementary years (Torgesen, 2004). However, effective literacy instruction must extend beyond elementary grades to support students at all grade levels. Secondary students who struggle with reading require targeted, evidence-based interventions that recognize their unique needs and build on their strengths. A commitment to literacy at every age ensures that each learner has access to the instruction and support needed to develop strong literacy skills.

Alachua County's literacy data provides valuable insight into students' reading proficiency, progress over time, and areas of concern. Disparities in literacy achievement can highlight challenges that impact specific student populations, including Black and Hispanic/Latino students, students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, or English language learners. Reviewing trends helps Alachua County identify strengths and gaps in literacy supports.

Organizations Serving K-12 Students and Families in Alachua County

The UF Lastinger Center interviewed several organizations that serve the language and literacy needs of K-12 children and youth in Alachua County (see Appendix A).

K-12 Literacy Achievement

The state of Florida has used various standardized assessments over time to measure grade level proficiency for K-12 students. During the data collection window for this literacy needs assessment, Florida used two standardized assessments: Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST). FSA was the statewide standardized test used in Florida from 2015 through the 2021-2022 school year to measure student proficiency in the English Language Arts (ELA) standards in grades 3–10. FSA was a summative assessment, administered once at the end of the school year, providing a snapshot of student achievement. Florida replaced FSA with FAST during the 2022-2023 school year. FAST also measures students' proficiency with ELA standards but is administered three times per year, allowing educators to monitor students' progress throughout the year and adjust instruction as needed. The timing of FAST assessments is referred to as "progress monitoring" or "PM." PM1 is fall, PM2 is winter, and PM3 is spring.

Both FSA and FAST describe a student's proficiency as falling within a range of 5 achievement levels, (Level 1 is the lowest and Level 5 is the highest). Level 3 or higher is used to determine which students are considered at or above grade level.

The percentage of students in grades 3–10 in Alachua County scoring at or above grade level generally falls either slightly above or slightly below the state average (see Figure 9). Students in the middle and high school grades tend to slightly outperform students across the state in terms of total percentage scoring at or above a level 3 over time. More third grade students in Alachua County are performing at or above grade level than the state average as of the 2023-2024 school year.
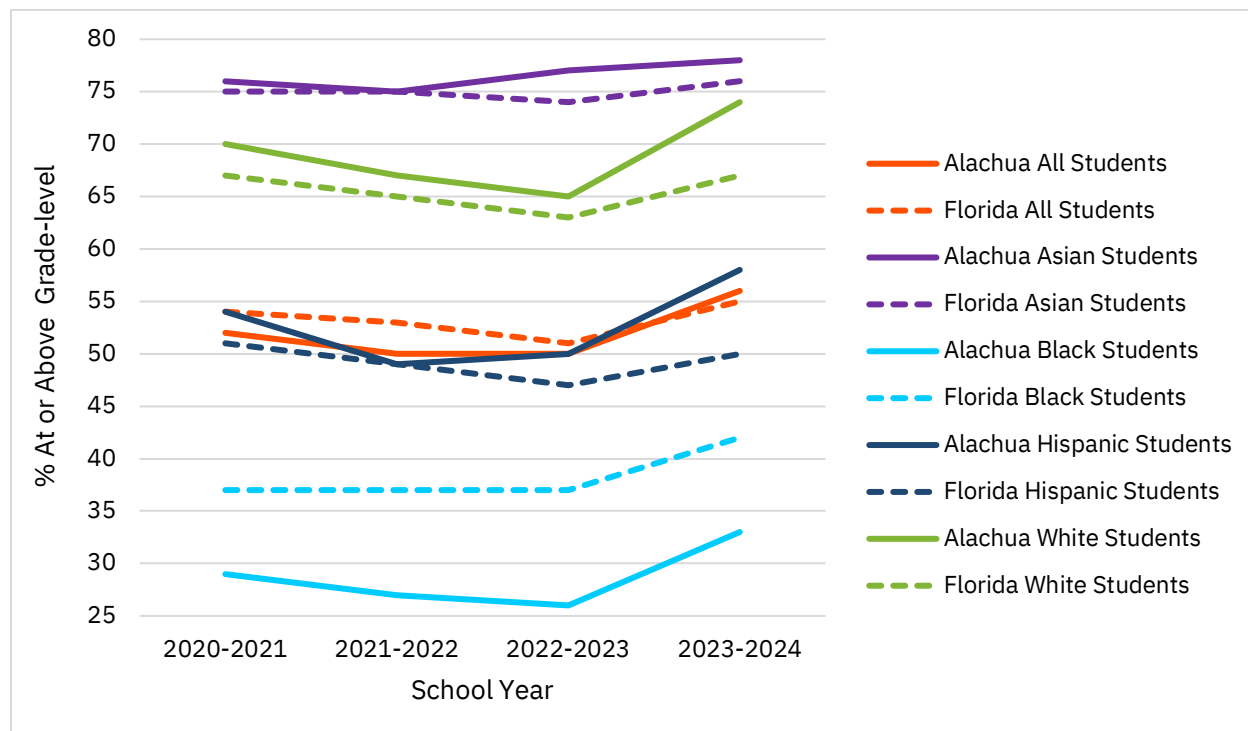
Figure 9. *Percent of Students At or Above Grade Level Reading Proficiency Rates (score 3 or higher), Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
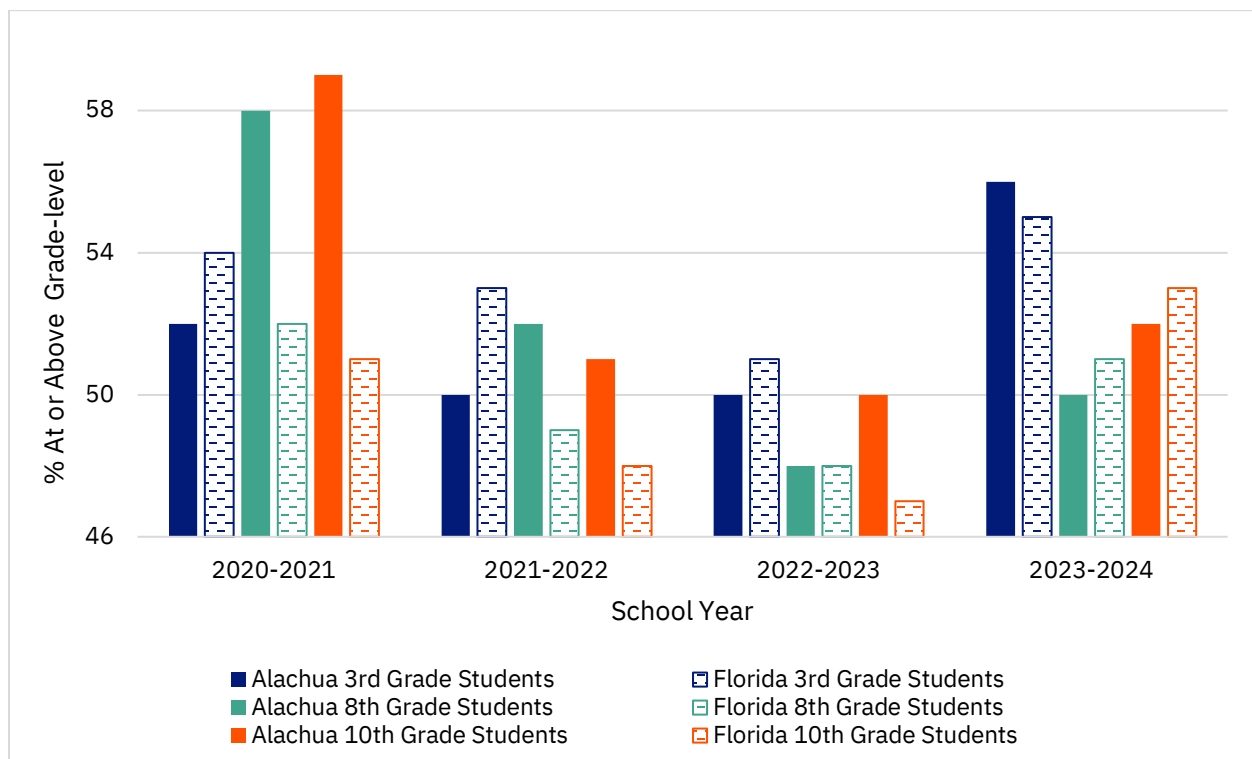
Source: Florida Department of Education

The total percentage of third grade students scoring at or above grade level is roughly similar between Alachua County and the state average (see Figure 10). However, an analysis of performance by race/ethnicity and other subgroups reveals significant differences across groups. Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and White students in Alachua County consistently perform similar to, or better than, statewide averages for those groups. Yet, there is a consistent trend of a much smaller percentage of Black students in Alachua County scoring at or above grade level than Black students across the state. Scores trended upwards in 2023-2024, both in Alachua County and Florida.

Figure 10. *Third Grade Reading (At or Above Grade Level) by Student Race/Ethnicity, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

Source: [Florida Department of Education](#)

Economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities in Alachua County also underperformed relative to similar groups of third graders across the state (see Figure 11). During the 2023-2024 school year, English language learners in Alachua County appeared to have made significant gains relative to the average statewide performance.

Figure 11. *Third Grade Reading (At or Above Grade Level) by Student English Language Learner, Economic Disadvantage, and Disability Status, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
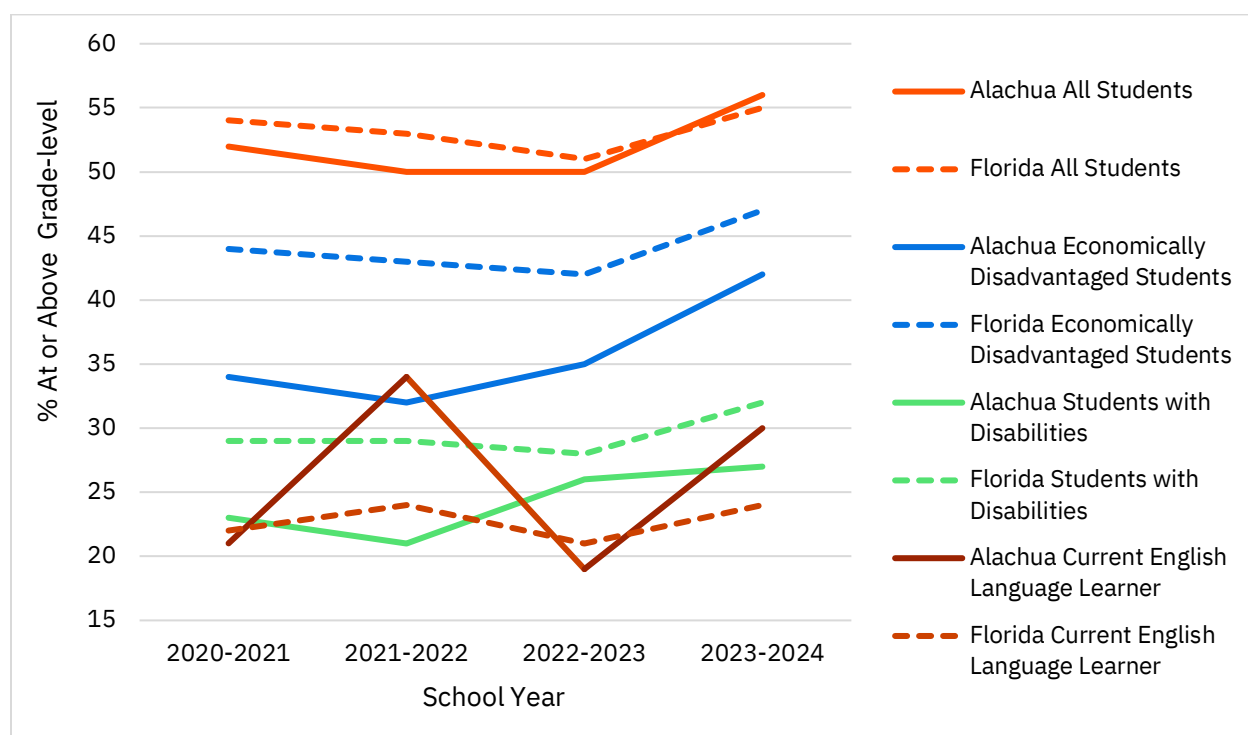
Source: Florida Department of Education

In addition to reviewing publicly data from the Florida department of Education, the UF Lastinger Center analyzed data received from Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS). ACPS FAST data for PM3 in Spring 2024 confirmed that less than 12% of Black students and 29% of Hispanic/Latino students scored 4 or 5 on the ELA assessment (see Figure 12). The data shown in this figure suggests that Black and Hispanic/Latino students are not adequately getting their literacy needs met in the current educational environment.

Figure 12. *Percent of Students reaching FAST ELA Achievement Level by Race and Ethnicity, Alachua, Grades 3–10, PM3 2023-2024*
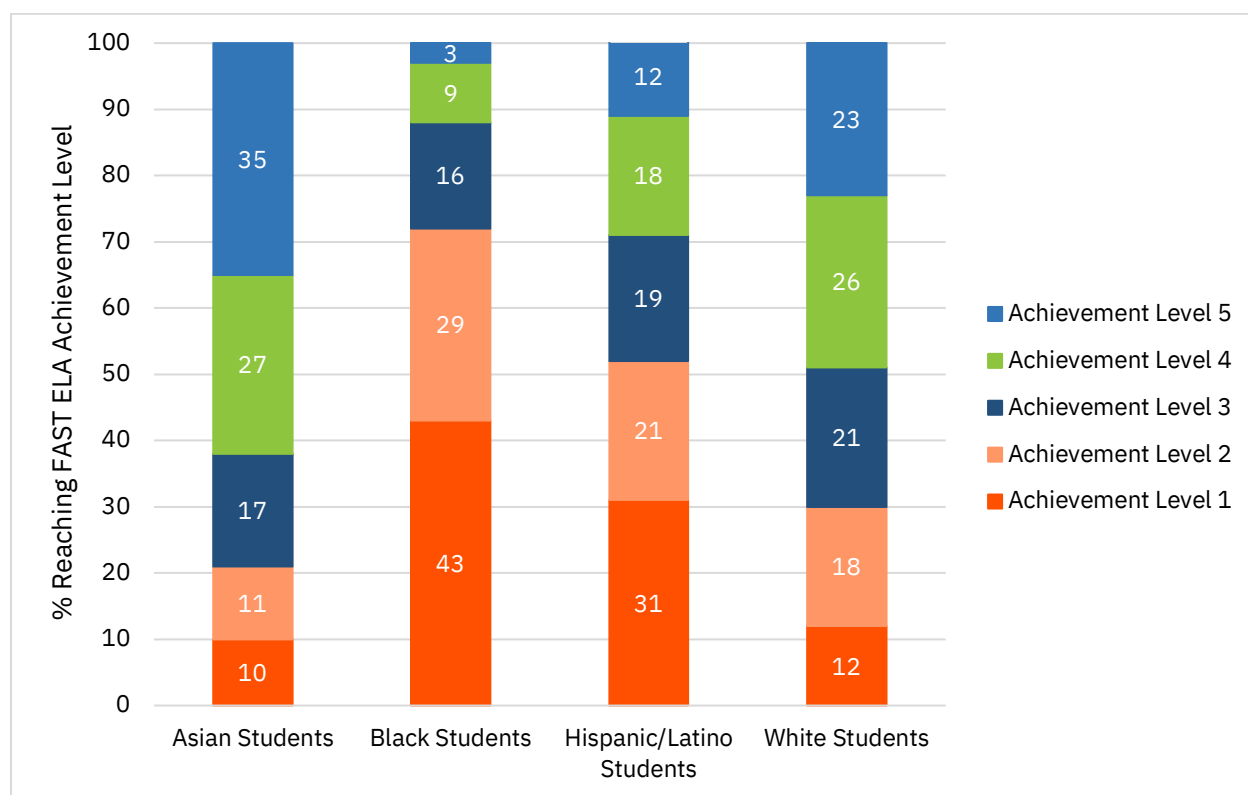
Source: Alachua County Public Schools

K-12 Attendance and On-Time Graduation

Direct literacy instruction plays a crucial role in developing reading and writing skills. Several non-instructional factors within the school environment also significantly influence literacy outcomes. Attendance patterns, including chronic absenteeism, affect students' exposure to instruction and opportunities for literacy development (Ginsburg et al., 2014). High suspension rates reduce valuable instructional time, disproportionately impacting students who may already be struggling with literacy skills (LiCalsi et al., 2021).

Additionally, ELA grades often reflect students' ability to engage with text, comprehend content, and express their understanding, all of which are deeply tied to literacy proficiency. Graduation rates offer another important lens through which to view literacy outcomes, as students who struggle with reading, writing, and communication are at a greater risk of dropping out or failing to complete high school on time (Hernandez, 2012). These factors do not exist in isolation. They interact with literacy achievement in complex ways, reinforcing either success or challenges.

Understanding these non-instructional outcomes provides essential context for assessing literacy needs and developing targeted interventions. By examining these broader indicators, a more comprehensive view emerges of the challenges with learning to read and opportunities to improve outcomes.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason. ACPS tracks the percentage of school days attended for all students enrolled in the district for at least 10 days during the school year. Overall, Alachua County's absence rates were similar to state averages (see Table 11).

Table 11. *Student Attendance, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

|	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua
% Students Absent =>21 Days	17%	16%	21%	19%	19%	19%	20%	20%
% Students Absent =>10%	25%	24%	32%	30%	31%	30%	31%	32%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Average rates of chronic absence increased for all students in Alachua County between the 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 school years (see Figures 13–15). This follows statewide trends of increasing chronic absence since pandemic school closures in 2020. Across all school levels, Black and Hispanic/Latino students have the highest rates of chronic absence while Asian students exhibit the lowest rates.

Figure 13. *Percent of Chronically Absent K-5 Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
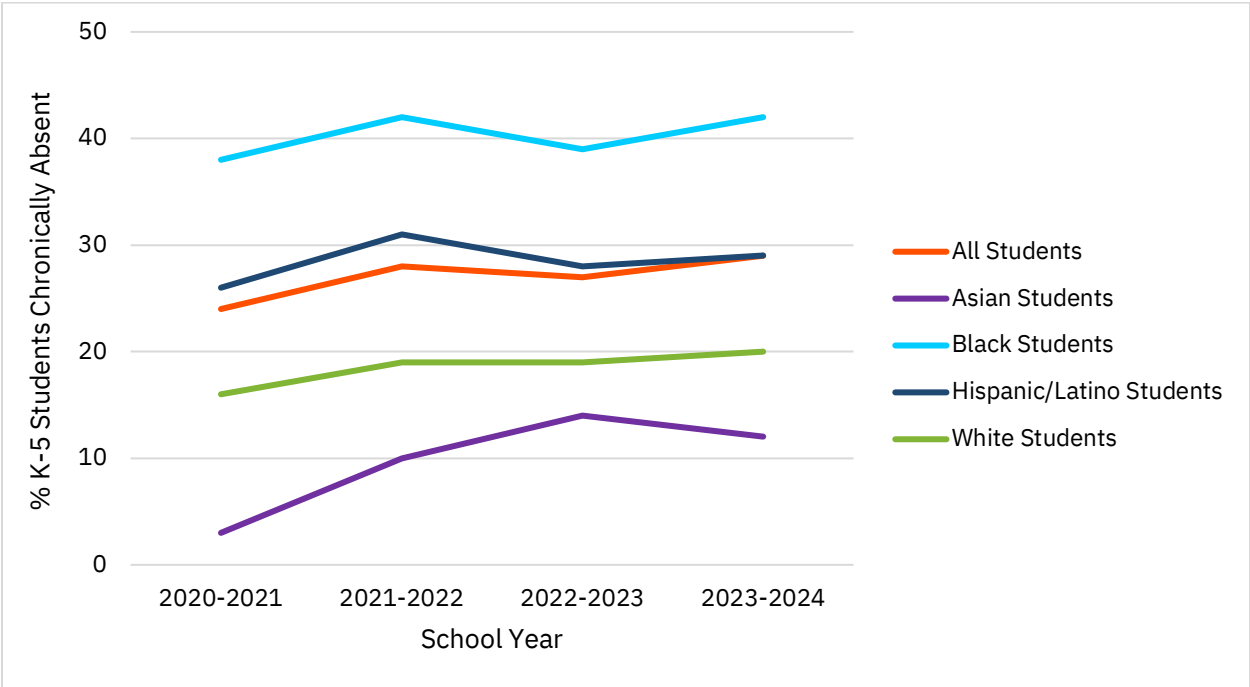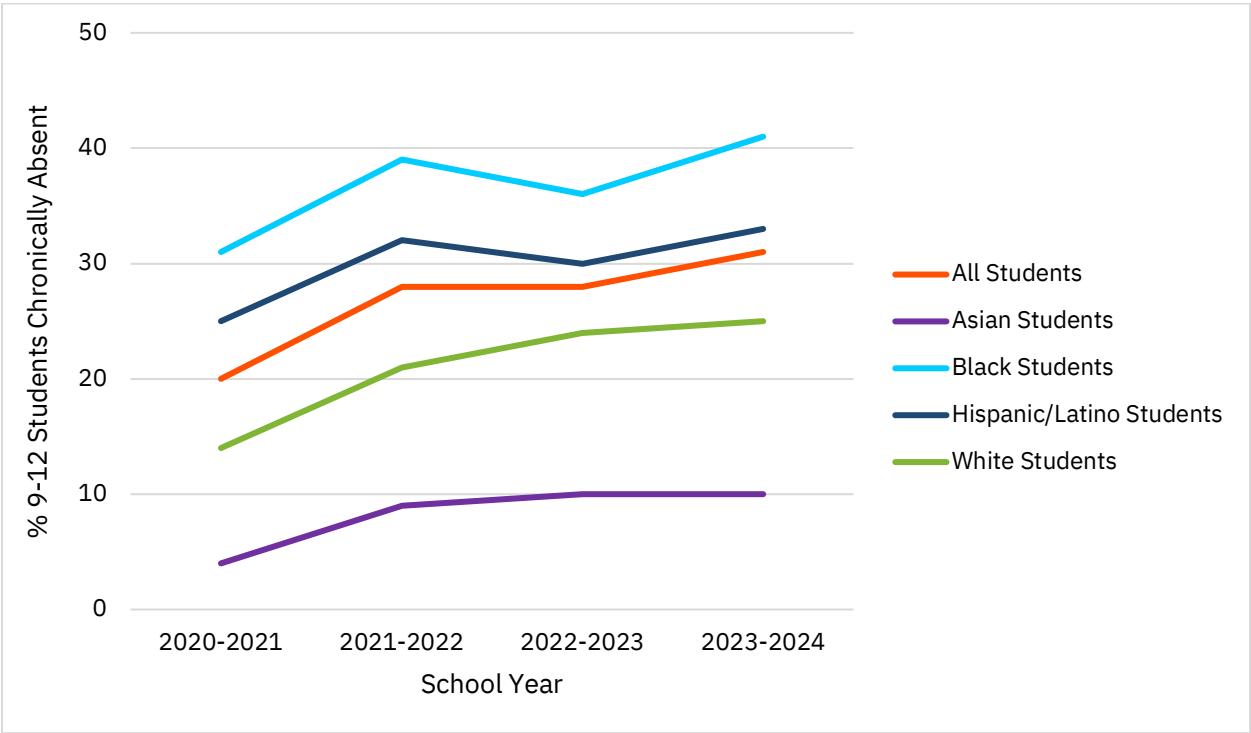

Source: Alachua County Public Schools; Note: Chronically absent is defined as missing 10% or more of school days that the child was enrolled in ACPS.

Figure 14. *Percent of Chronically Absent 6-8 Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
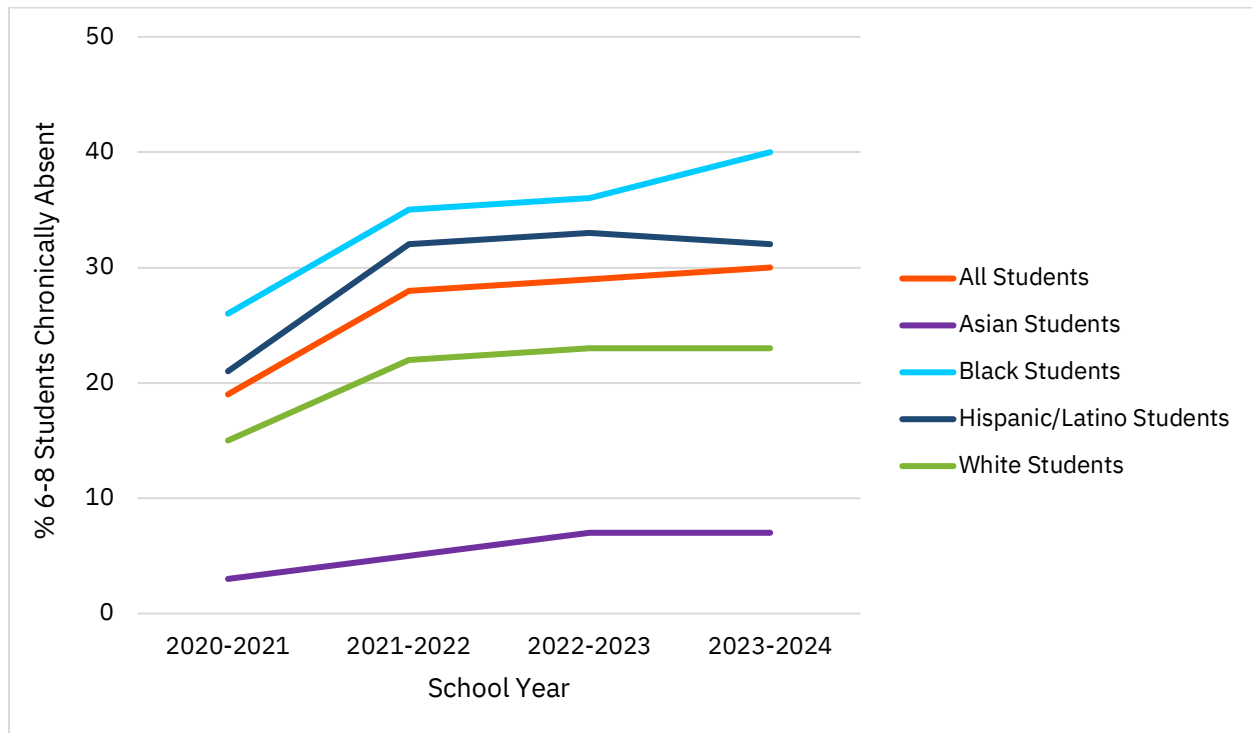
Source: Alachua County Public Schools; Note: Chronically absent is defined as missing 10% or more of school days that the child was enrolled in ACPS.

Figure 15. *Percent of Chronically Absent 9-12 Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

Source: Alachua County Public Schools; Note: Chronically absent is defined as missing 10% or more of school days that the child was enrolled in ACPS.

Data about student ELA grades was also provided by ACPS. The chance of failing an ELA course for students in ninth through twelve grades was calculated from 2020-2021 through 2022-2023. Failure rates averaged 16% for fall courses and 19% for spring courses. An additional indicator of academic success is the percentage of students graduating from high school. Alachua County had lower rates of on-time graduation than Florida averages, a gap of 6% in 2023-2024 (see Table 12).

Table 12. *On-Time Twelfth Grade High School Graduation Rates, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021	**2021-2022**	**2022-2023**	**2023-2024**
Alachua	87%	86%	84%	84%
Florida	90%	87%	88%	90%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Except for Asian students, smaller percentages of all Alachua County student subgroups graduated on time compared to similar subgroups across Florida (see Figure 16). On-time graduation rates across student subgroups have declined since the 2020-2021 school year, with a sharp decline for Black students in recent years.

Figure 16. *Percent of On-Time Twelfth Grade High School Graduation by Race/Ethnicity, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
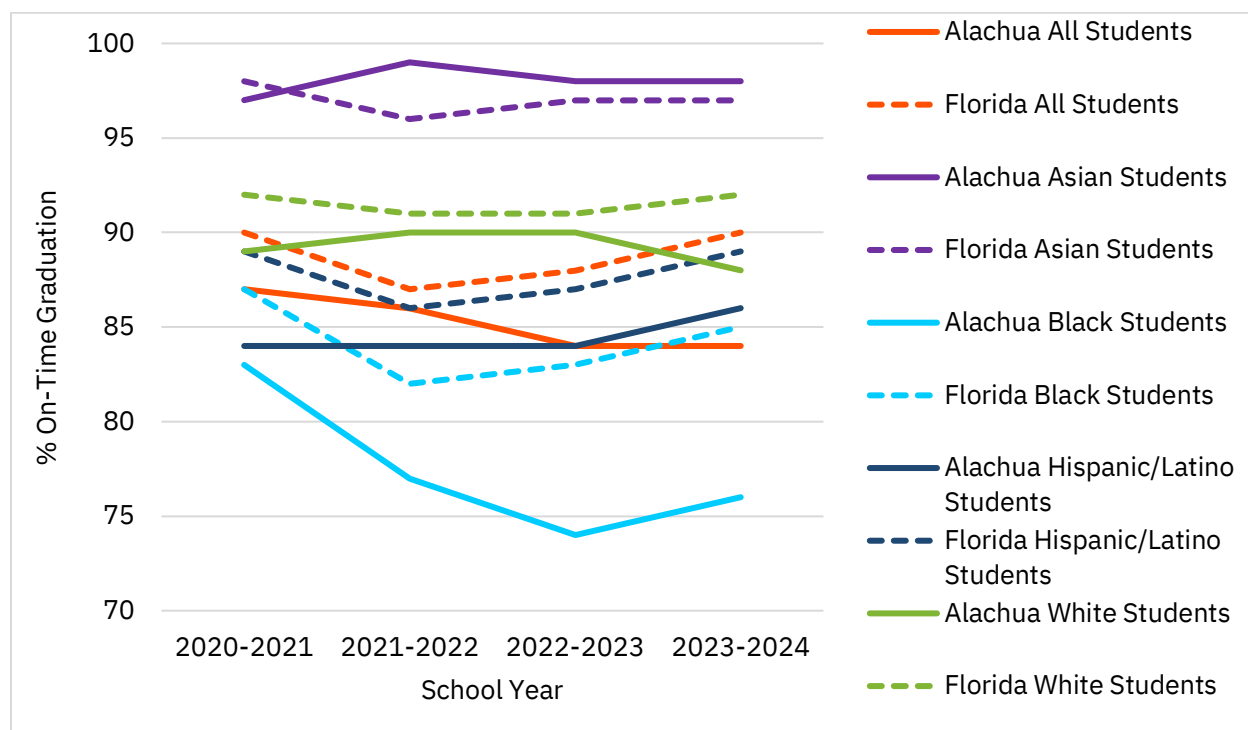
Source: Florida Department of Education

Smaller percentages of Alachua County students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, English learners, and students with disabilities graduate on time when compared with similar subgroups across the state (see Figure 17). Percentages of students graduating on time decreased across the state from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022. Yet, the state averages are roughly similar to or better than pre-pandemic levels, whereas Alachua County's on-time graduation rate continues to lag behind state averages for the above subgroups. Increases occurred for most subgroups in 2023-2024.

Figure 17. *Percent of On-Time Twelfth Grade High School Graduation by Student English Learner, Economic Disadvantage, and Disability Status, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*
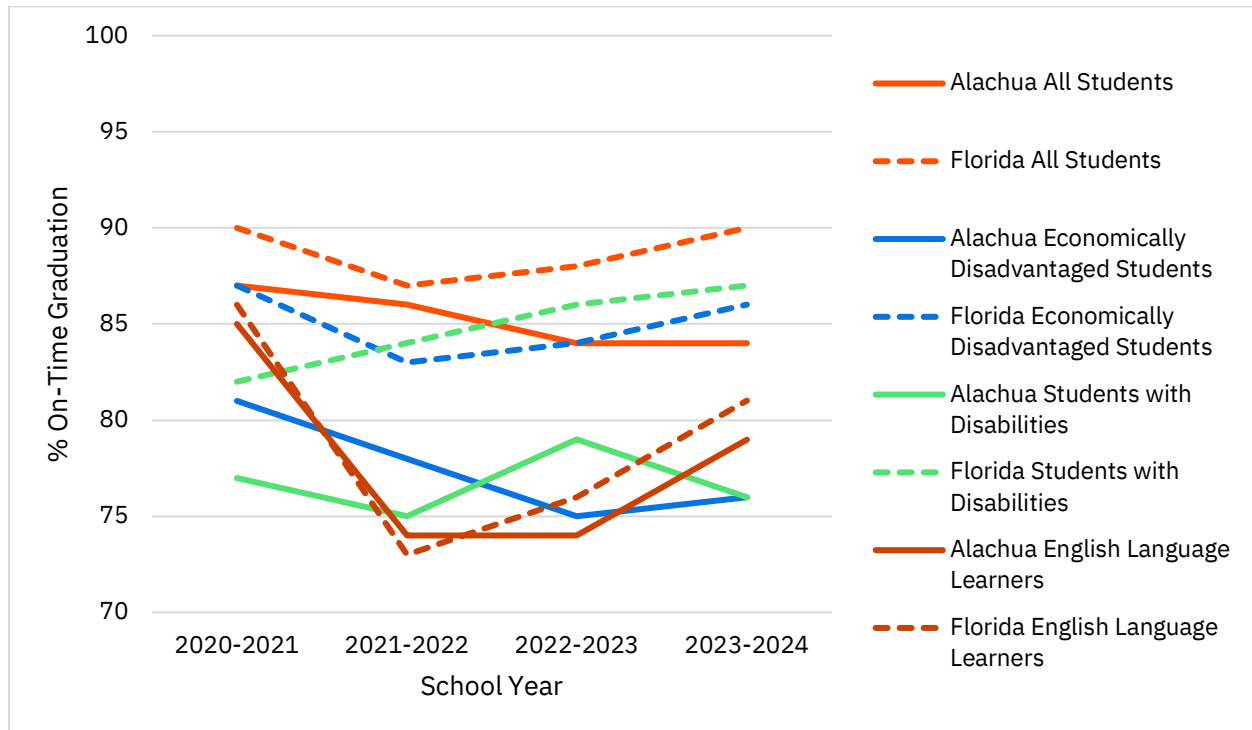
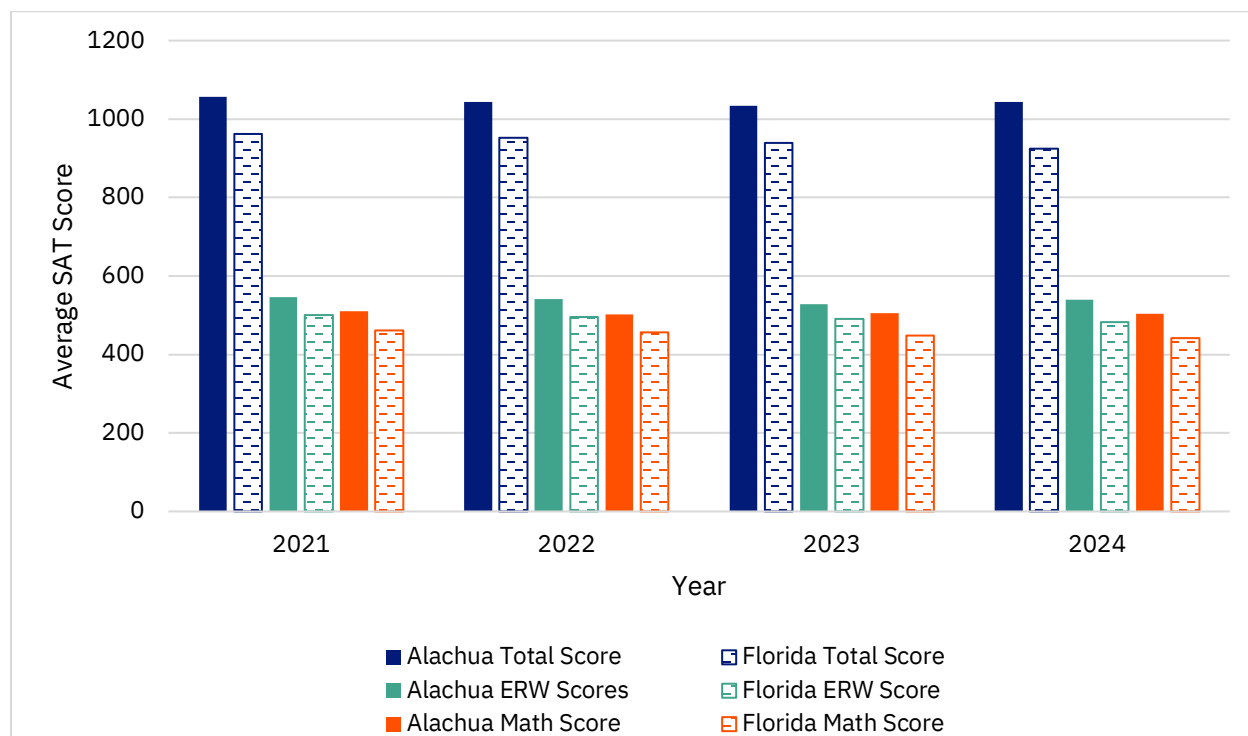Source: Florida Department of Education

College and Workforce Readiness

College entrance exams serve as critical tools for assessing workforce readiness by measuring essential academic, technical, and problem-solving skills of individuals 16 and older. These assessments help determine preparedness for higher education and career pathways and align individuals with roles that match their competencies. College entrance exams measure reading comprehension and written communication skills and ensure candidates can analyze information and articulate ideas effectively in academic and professional environments. The exams help students identify academic strengths and guide career choices based on their performance in different subject areas (Allen & Radunzel, 2017; College Board, 2025). The exams establish a standardized framework to evaluate communication, numerical reasoning, and logical problem-solving skills—core competencies for many professional roles. College entrance exams serve as indicators of readiness for both academic and vocational training.

The most common college entrance exams in the United States are the SAT, published by the College Board, and the ACT, published by ACT, Inc.

The College Board has investigated the connection between SAT scores and college course grades and early career success. They found that students with an Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW) score of at least 480 and a Math score of at least 530 are likely to be successful in pursuing post-secondary education or joining the workforce (The College Board, n.d.). On average, Alachua County Public School students exceed the ERW benchmark of 480 but not the Math benchmark of 530 (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. *Average SAT Section Score Compared to College and Career Readiness Benchmarks, Alachua and Florida, 2021-2024*

Note: Data in this chart reflects the highest SAT score of all students who took the SAT in the given year, including high school graduates. Data provided on request by Florida Department of Education. Max Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW)/Math score = 800. Max total score = 1600.

ACT, Inc. has also published college readiness benchmarks which, if met, indicate that a student is likely to be successful with a typical first-year college student course load. The college readiness benchmarks for each ACT section are as follows: English, 18; Math, 22; Reading, 22; Science, 23 (ACT Inc., 2017). According to the Florida Department of Education, in 2024, 31% of ACPS students met all four of the ACT College Readiness benchmarks, compared to 15% across all of Florida. 63% of ACPS students met the English benchmark and 52% met the Reading benchmark. This is consistent with the percentage of students meeting ACT English and Reading benchmarks for the previous three years. However, the average ACT English and Reading scores in Alachua County are below the readiness benchmarks (see Figure 19). This indicates that 40-50% of students who are not meeting the benchmark are scoring low enough to reduce the district's average score.

**Figure 19.** *Average ACT Section Score Compared to College Readiness Benchmarks, Alachua and Florida, 2021-2024*
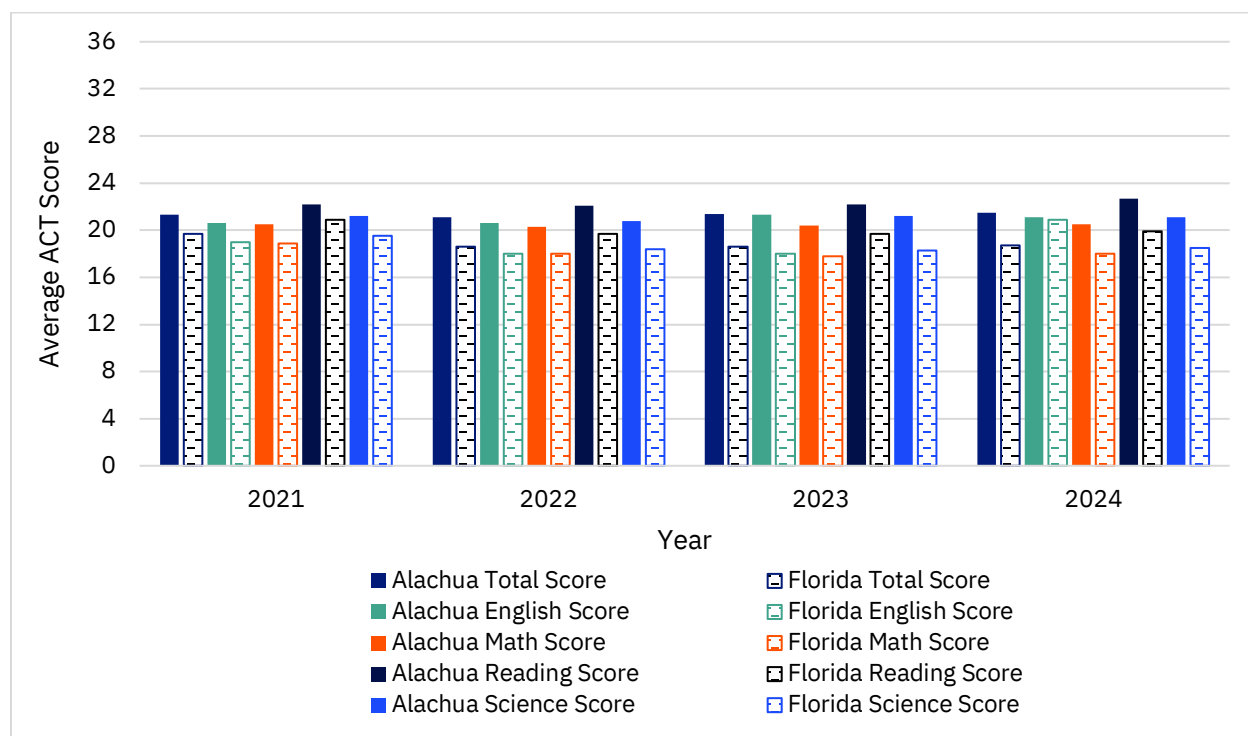
Note: Data in this chart reflects the highest ACT score of all students who took the ACT in the given year, including high school graduates. Data provided on request by Florida Department of Education. Max section score = 36. Max total score = 36, or the rounded average of the four section scores.

SAT and ACT composite scores were examined in further detail by student subgroups (see Figures 20–23). Black students on averaged score below the district average and below the average reported for Black students across the state. Hispanic/Latino students in Alachua performed just under the district average but higher than the state average. Economically disadvantaged students in Alachua scored lower than their statewide counterparts. English language learners performed better in Alachua County compared to the rest of the state.

Figure 20. *High School Graduate Average SAT Total Score by Race/Ethnicity, Alachua and Florida, 2019-2020 through 2022-2023*
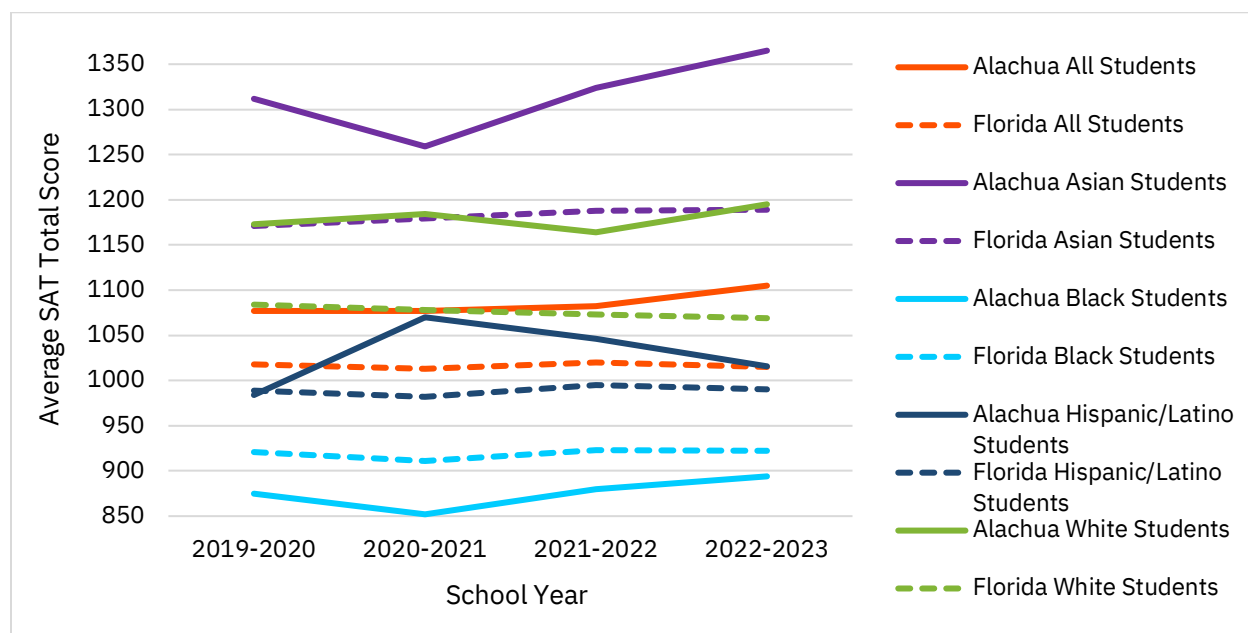
Source: Alachua School District Report Card; Note: Max total score = 1600.

Figure 21. *High School Graduate Average SAT Composite Score by Student English Learner, Economic Disadvantage, and Disability Status, Alachua and Florida, 2019-2020 through 2022-2023*
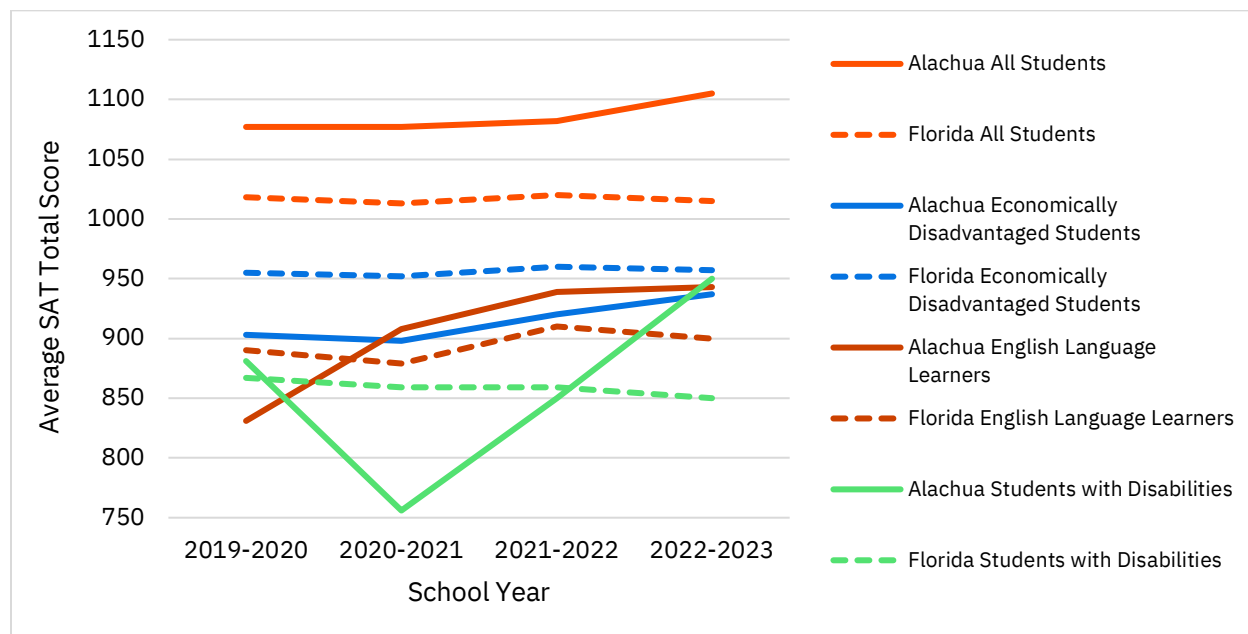
Source: Alachua School District Report Card; Note: Max total score = 1600.

Figure 22. *High School Graduate Average ACT Total Score by Race/Ethnicity, Alachua and Florida, 2019-2020 through 2022-2023*
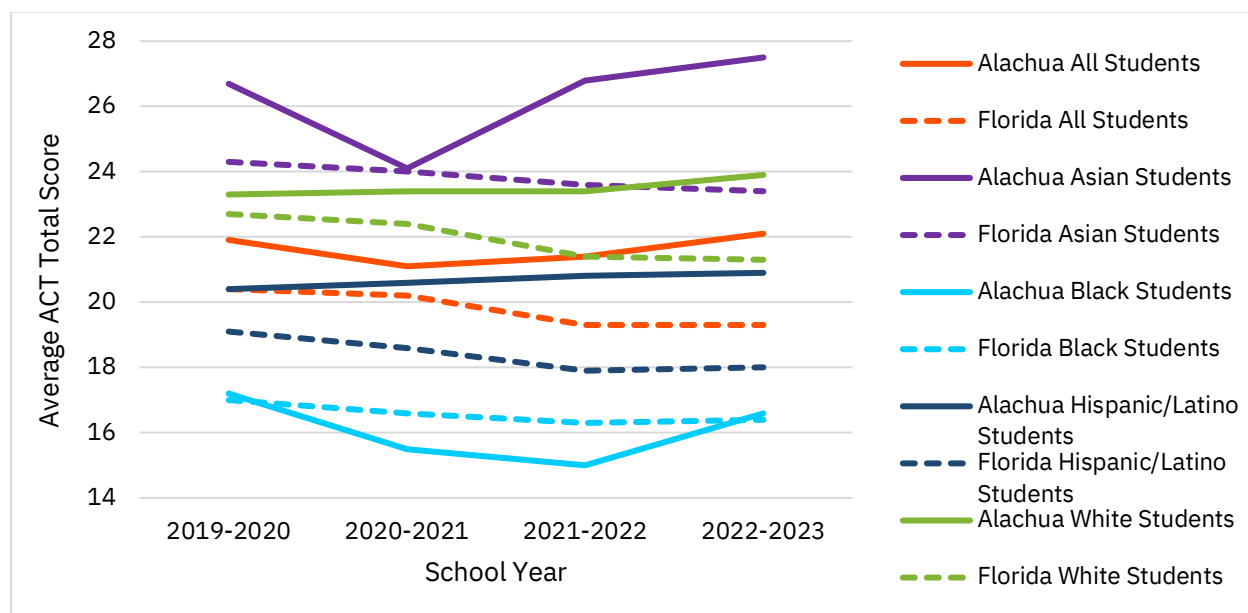

Source: Alachua School District Report Card; Note: Max total score = 36.

Figure 23. *High School Graduate Average ACT Total Score by Student English Learner, Economic Disadvantage, and Disability Status, Alachua and Florida, 2019-2020 through 2022-2023*
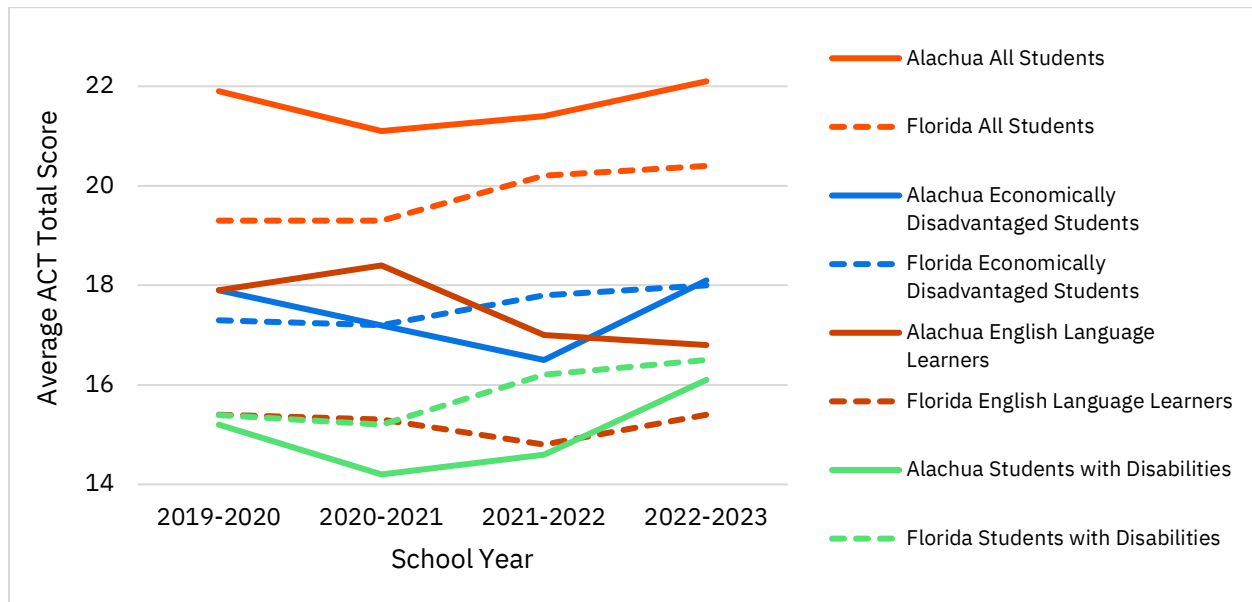

Source: Alachua School District Report Card; Note: Max total score = 36.

Adult Education

Adult learners are individuals aged 16 and older who did not complete their K-12 education, or who possess a high school diploma or equivalent but nevertheless have gaps in basic skills such as reading, math, or spoken English. Nearly 20 million U.S. adults have limited English proficiency, and English instruction is an essential part of adult education (National Coalition for Literacy, n.d.).

Most adult learners (64%) are employed and are parents or primary caregivers of school-aged children. Many adults are motivated to return to school because they want to help their children succeed in school. Most adults who lack high school diplomas or have gaps in basic academic skills earn low wages and lack the preparation to succeed in postsecondary education and most training programs (National Coalition for Literacy, n.d.).

For adults, literacy plays a critical role in determining professional and economic mobility. Adults with literacy competencies can pursue a broad range of career opportunities that may contribute to both their financial well-being and overall workforce productivity. However, those lacking literacy skills often experience severe employment limitations, which often reinforce cycles of poverty and underemployment.

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Beyond personal outcomes, adult literacy is a critical factor in shaping labor market outcomes and overall economic resilience. Programs designed to improve literacy skills provide individuals with better employment prospects, enhance business performance, and stimulate economic progress at all levels of society. Allocating resources toward literacy development ensures long-term social and financial benefits.

A growing number of adults in the United States are struggling with literacy. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024) reveals a troubling rise in the percentage of adults in the United States scoring at the lowest levels of literacy proficiency (Level 1 or below). Between 2017 and 2023, this figure climbed from 19% to 28%. This trend presents challenges for workforce development and economic growth and underscores the urgency of implementing policies and programs aimed at improving adult literacy rates nationwide.

In Florida, estimates from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) suggest that between 24% and 26% of adults experience difficulties with literacy tasks (Lunardini, 2024). According to data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), approximately 19% of adults in Alachua County are functionally illiterate. This figure is slightly below the statewide rate of 24% and the national rate of 20% (Lunardini, 2024; NCES, 2024). These figures highlight the urgent need for continued literacy interventions and accessible learning opportunities.

Organizations Serving Adults in Alachua County

In response to this challenge, various educational institutions and community organizations are working collaboratively to improve adult literacy through adult education programs. These efforts focus on equipping individuals with the necessary skills for personal, academic, and professional advancement, while also fostering civic engagement and social mobility.

Adult education serves as a vital component of workforce and community development. For many, it is a pathway for continued skill, knowledge, and competency development beyond what is offered through traditional primary and secondary schooling. The programs range from literacy and vocational training to

continuing education and lifelong learning initiatives. With flexible learning formats (e.g., in-person instruction, online courses, and self-directed study) and a focus on real-world application, adult education caters to the needs of learners, enhances workforce readiness, and strengthens economic mobility.

In Alachua County, community colleges, universities, training centers, nonprofit organizations, and Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS) play a key role in delivering accessible and impactful adult education programs. Programs target different demographics, including adult English language learners, GED candidates, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and out-of-school youth.

At the state level, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) is a statewide initiative that enhances literacy development efforts, including those in Alachua County. The organization plays a critical role in promoting, supporting, and advocating for the effective delivery of adult and family literacy services across Florida. By working with over 300 literacy and adult education providers, the FLC strengthens the capacity of organizations engaged in improving literacy. As part of its outreach efforts, the FLC provides free, structured learning opportunities for Florida residents. One of its key initiatives includes intermediate-level English classes, which help learners enhance their language proficiency while gaining insights into life in the United States. The eight-week Zoom courses offer a flexible and accessible learning environment for adult participants seeking to develop their English skills.

At the county level, a key institution supporting adult literacy is the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), which offers a broad range of free literacy services. Through its Adult Literacy Program, ACLD provides one-on-one tutoring, small group instruction, access to English conversation clubs, General Educational Development (GED) preparation, and job skills workshops (Alachua County Library District, n.d.). These services are designed to meet the diverse learning needs of the community. In 2024, ACLD services included the following:
- One-on-one and small group tutoring for both basic education and English language instruction: 88 unique learners
- GED preparation: 40 unique learners
- Digital literacy assistance (Northstar Digital Literacy): 57 unique learners
- Virtual and in-person English conversation opportunities: averaged 36 participants per week

In addition to the library system, the Adult Education Program provided by ACPS plays a significant role in supporting adult learners. The program offers Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED) preparation, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, all of which aim to enhance foundational academic skills and English proficiency among adults (Alachua County Public Schools, n.d.). ACPS also provides GED tests, adult high school, adult basic education, literacy training, and Division of Blind services classes. Populations served include adults, young adults, seniors, people in jail, people with disabilities, people who did not complete high school, and people with limited English. Classes are provided at various times and locations throughout the county.

At the university level, UF's English Language Institute (ELI) offers structured English as a Second Language (ESL) education for individuals preparing for academic study in the US. The Intensive English Program (IEP) serves F1 and J1 visa holders, as well as tourists and prospective students, through a rigorous curriculum that includes Reading/Writing, Grammar, and Listening/Speaking courses across six proficiency levels. This full-time program provides 23 hours of instruction per week and equips learners with the advanced English skills necessary for academic success.

At the college level, Santa Fe College's Blount Center contributes to adult education efforts by providing ABE (people whose entry skills are below the 9th grade level but who often wish to pass their GED test) and GED preparation programs (people whose entry skills are above the 9th grade level and who are trying to pass their GED test), along with ESOL instruction (people who are non-native English speakers).

Student Access and INclusion Together (Project SAINT) is a comprehensive post-secondary transition program for students with intellectual disabilities. Project SAINT is tailored to students' skills and interests. Students can enter two specialized programs: Horticulture Agriculture Pathway (HAP) or Artist Entrepreneur Pathway (AEP). Project SAINT students receive the part-time support of Santa Fe student mentors whether in classes, on internships, or participating in campus activities. Santa Fe College Adult Education assists adults with developing basic skills to obtain employment and enable success in college, the community, and the workplace. Santa Fe College Adult Education provides the following programs (see Table 13).

Table 13. *Santa Fe College Adult Education Program Enrollment and Outcomes, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024*

2022-2023		2023-2024	
Program	Enrollment Numbers	Program	Enrollment Numbers
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	294	Adult Basic Education (ABE)	307
ABE participants who entered without a high school diploma	244	ABE participants who entered without a high school diploma	156
GED Preparation	1	GED Preparation	3
ESOL	370	ESOL	460
Project SAINT	15	Project SAINT	15
Total Enrollment	680	Total Enrollment	785
Outcomes	Outcome Numbers	Outcomes	Outcome Numbers
Learning Gains	242	Learning Gains	261
GED's Earned	80	GED's Earned	72
Not Employed at Entry	261	Not Employed at Entry	191
Employed 2nd Quarter After Exit	N/A	Employed 2nd Quarter After Exit	207
Applied or enrolled in Santa Fe College during program or after exit (2022 and 2023)	150	Applied or enrolled in Santa Fe College during program or after exit (2024; more to enroll Fall 2025)	51
Total Outcomes	472	Total Outcomes	591

Sources: Enrollment, Learning Gains, GED's Earned: Santa Fe Adult Education Data. Employed 2nd Quarter After Exit: National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) data (note: not available for 2022-2023 Report). Applied or enrolled in Santa Fe College: Santa Fe College Transition Report.

Santa Fe College uses testing benchmarks to help match students with appropriately leveled courses. Many Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ESOL students are placed according to their Florida Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) scores. The benchmarks to enroll in college-level courses based on PERT are a Reading score of 106 or higher and a Writing score of 103 or higher (Santa Fe College, n.d.). On average, adult students from Alachua County scored below the college-level benchmark in PERT Reading and slightly above the benchmark in PERT Writing (see Figures 24 and 25, with benchmarks indicated by the horizontal orange lines). Black students from Alachua County averaged the lowest scores on both tests.

Figure 24. *Average Santa Fe College PERT Reading Test Scores for Alachua County Residents for Academic Years 2020-2021 through 2023-2024 by Race and Ethnicity*
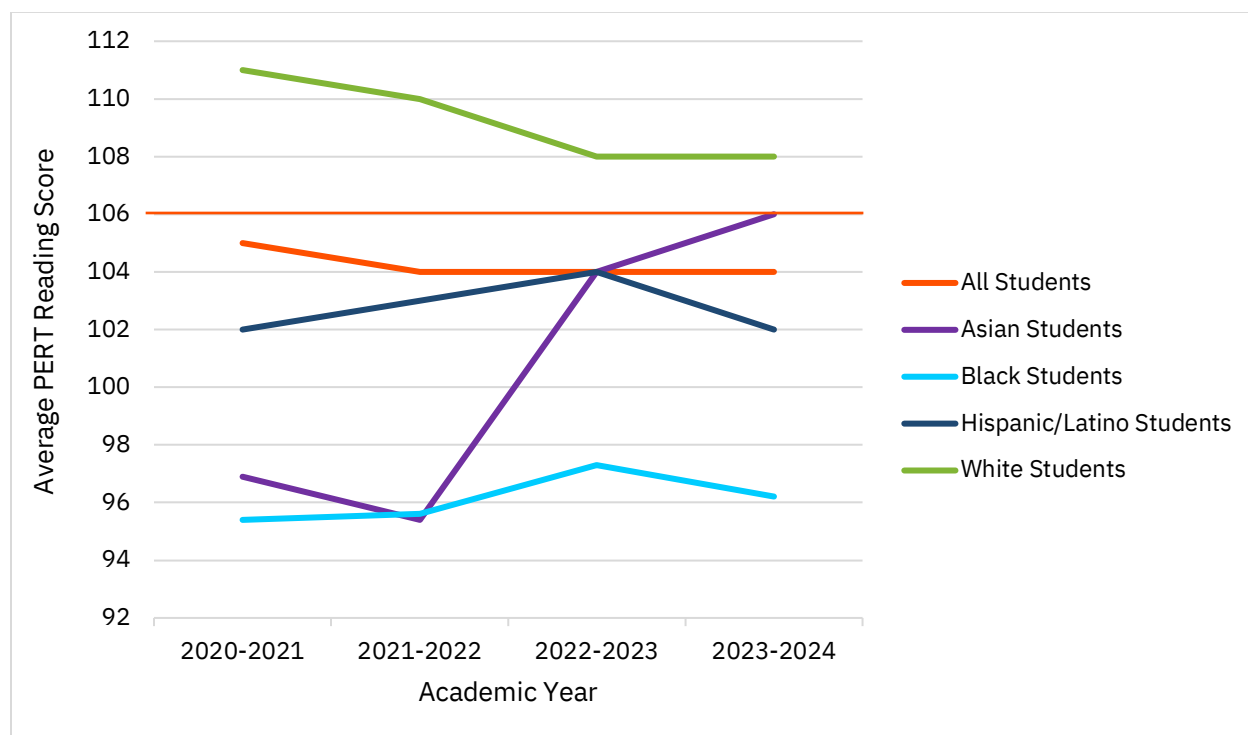
Source: Data request to Santa Fe Office of Institutional Research.
All Students (*N* 2020 = 454, *N* 2021 = 524, *N* 2022 = 542, *N* 2023 = 606)
Asian Students (*N* 2020 = 23, *N* 2021 = 18, *N* 2022 = 30, *N* 2023 = 34)
Black Students (*N* 2020 = 96, *N* 2021 = 120, *N* 2022 = 148, *N* 2023 = 145)
Hispanic/Latino Students (*N* 2020 = 96, *N* 2021 = 110, *N* 2022 = 120, *N* 2023 = 116)
White Students (*N* 2020 = 196, *N* 2021 = 215, *N* 2022 = 202, *N* 2023 = 244)

Figure 25. *Average Santa Fe College PERT Writing Test Scores for Alachua County Residents for Academic Years 2020-2021 through 2023-2024 by Race and Ethnicity*

Source: Data request to Santa Fe Office of Institutional Research.
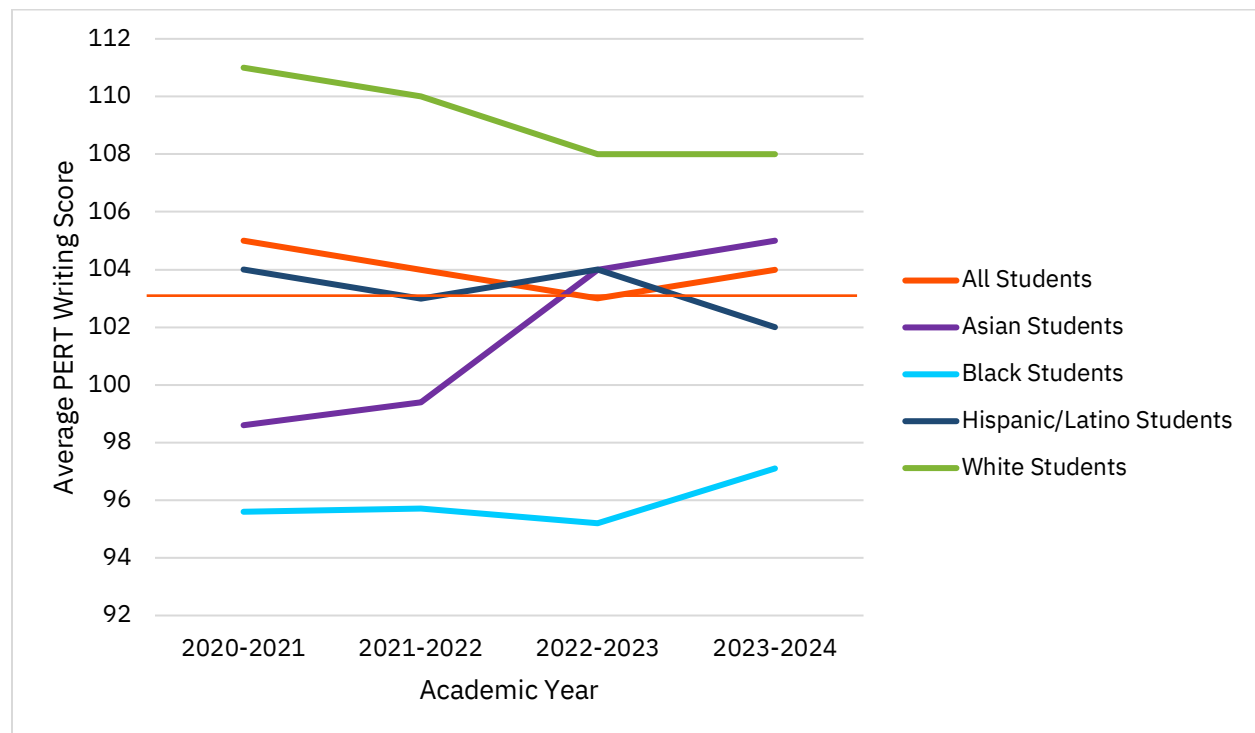All Students (*N* 2020 = 445, *N* 2021 = 504, *N* 2022 = 530, *N* 2023 = 580)
Asian Students (*N* 2020 = 24, *N* 2021 = 18, *N* 2022 = 29, *N* 2023 = 32)
Black Students (*N* 2020 = 94, *N* 2021 = 116, *N* 2022 = 150, *N* 2023 = 146)
Hispanic/Latino Students (*N* 2020 = 90, *N* 2021 = 106, *N* 2022 = 121, *N* 2023 = 107)
White Students (*N* 2020 = 194, *N* 2021 = 208, *N* 2022 = 187, *N* 2023 = 227)

Santa Fe College students go on to be successful in their ABE and ESOL courses, with an over 80% passing rate in all courses offered between 2020 and 2024. Additionally, the increasing number of students taking the PERT test over time supports the narrative that many adult education service providers said about adults in Alachua County are actively seeking out and utilizing ESOL and ABE programs.

Faith-based organizations play a significant role in addressing literacy gaps by offering accessible language education and support services to non-native English speakers. These programs provide essential resources, such as English instruction, citizenship education, and cultural integration assistance, and help individuals navigate their communities more effectively. One such initiative is the International Learning Center

at Parkview Baptist Church, which offers ESOL classes, citizenship education, and childcare services to support linguistic and cultural adaptation.

Several religious-based organizations facilitate literacy development programs that are tailored to the diverse learning needs of local communities. For example, Catholic Charities operates the English Language Literacy Program which features small, personalized classrooms and certified ESL instructors. Similarly, the Emmanuel Mennonite Church provides free weekend ESL courses and serves Spanish speakers, Haitian-Creole speakers, and community members who speak additional languages.

Other organizations focus on individualized learning support. For instance, the University City Church of Christ's English Partners Program offers free one-on-one tutoring and customized study materials based on participants' language proficiency, academic goals, or job-related needs. The Williams Temple Church of God in Christ provides an English language outreach initiative that focuses on conversational English practice in a relaxed environment, including free intermediate and advanced ESOL classes via Zoom. Similarly, UF's Christian Campus House provides literacy support through their English Corner program, a student-led initiative that provides an informal space for individuals of all ages to practice spoken English.

Several community-based organizations integrate literacy development into broader educational, career, and health equity initiatives, ensuring that language barriers do not hinder access to essential services. The Community Health Equity Institute addresses disparities in education and healthcare by providing English language instruction for underserved communities. By offering tailored resources, the program helps individuals improve their communication skills and ultimately reduces obstacles to healthcare access and educational opportunities.

Other programs embed literacy education within comprehensive workforce and academic development frameworks. Education Equalizer and Project Youth Build incorporate language learning into career training and educational advancement initiatives, making literacy resources more accessible to diverse populations. Additionally, the Impacto Program, a recently launched initiative in Alachua County, focuses on English language instruction for adult learners. Staffed primarily by UF student volunteers, the program responds to the increasing demand for accessible and

effective ESL education, with a particular focus on supporting Hispanic/Latino immigrant communities as they integrate into the United States.

CareerSource North Florida also contributes to literacy advancement by acting as a referral and funding agency and linking job seekers with literacy training and workforce development programs. Through literacy readiness assessments and resource facilitation, CareerSource ensures that individuals receive the support necessary for successful workforce entry and career progression.

Through advocacy and programmatic support, these programs collectively contribute to enhancing literacy, expanding educational and career opportunities, and fostering community integration. By leveraging institutional and volunteer-driven resources, these initiatives help bridge language gaps and support more equitable access to literacy education for diverse populations.

However, despite the availability of these educational resources, adult literacy challenges persist. Alachua County's current adult literacy landscape is shaped by the collaborative efforts of libraries, public schools, higher education institutions, and community organizations. And while considerable progress has been made, continued investment in adult education remains essential to ensure literacy accessibility and workforce readiness for all residents.

Findings: Results from Data Collected During the Literacy Needs Assessment

This section details results from data collected during the literacy needs assessment. These findings are organized into the following sections: Survey Results and Open-Ended Survey Responses, Focus Groups, and Interviews.

Results from Surveys

Family members, community members, and Alachua County Public School (ACPS) educators (but not students, who received a shorter survey) were asked to respond to items about how much they agreed that the following statements were true for children and youth in Alachua County:

1. **Children** have the early literacy skills they need to be **ready for kindergarten**.
2. **Children** can read age-appropriate and grade-level texts by the **end of third grade**.
3. **Children** can read-age-appropriate and grade-level texts, including non-fiction text, by the **end of eighth grade**.
4. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed academically in **college**.
5. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
6. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.

Across all respondents, ACPS educators (*N* = 198) expressed less confidence than family and community members on these items (see Figure 26). Overall, educators were not confident that students were ready for kindergarten (only 12% agreed), could read grade-level texts at the end of third grade (12% agreed) or eighth grade (10% agreed). Family members (*N* = 965) expressed the most confidence across all items, ranging from 29% to 47%. All respondents (*N* = 1,334) were most likely to agree with the item about having necessary literacy skills to succeed in daily life, ranging from 35% of community members who agreed to 47% of family members who agreed.

Figure 26. *Percent of Respondents, by Respondent Type, Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" About **Children and Youth** Having Necessary Literacy Skills To:*
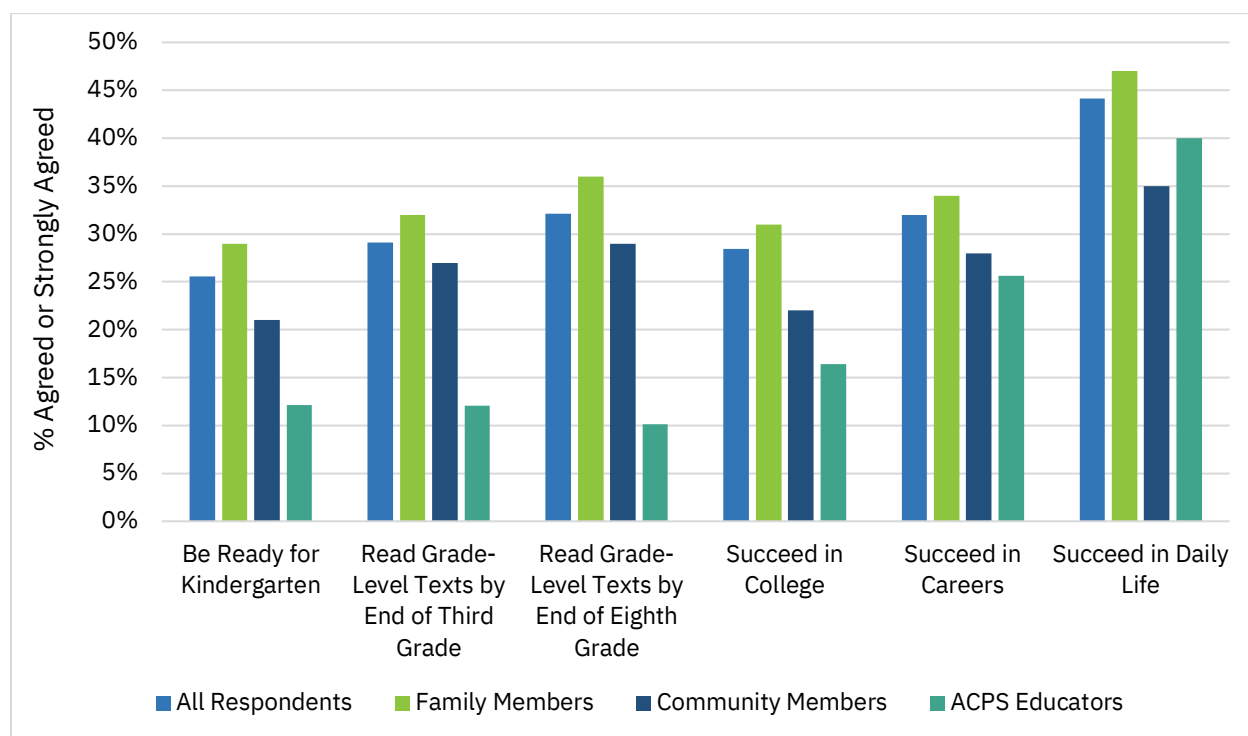
Note: Numbers reported for "Be Ready for Kindergarten" item; N's dropped by approximately 6% across items. *N* All Respondents = 1,334; *N* Family Members = 965; *N* Community Members = 228; *N* ACPS Educators = 198.

Respondents were also asked to respond to similar questions, but about adults in the county:

1. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
2. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.

About 50% of respondents (*N* = 1,239) agreed or strongly agreed that adults in Alachua County have the literacy skills needed to succeed in daily life, but less than 40% from all respondent types agreed or strongly agreed that adults are adequately prepared for careers (see Figure 27).

Figure 27. *Percent of Respondents, by Respondent Type, Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" About **Adults** Having Necessary Literacy Skills To:*
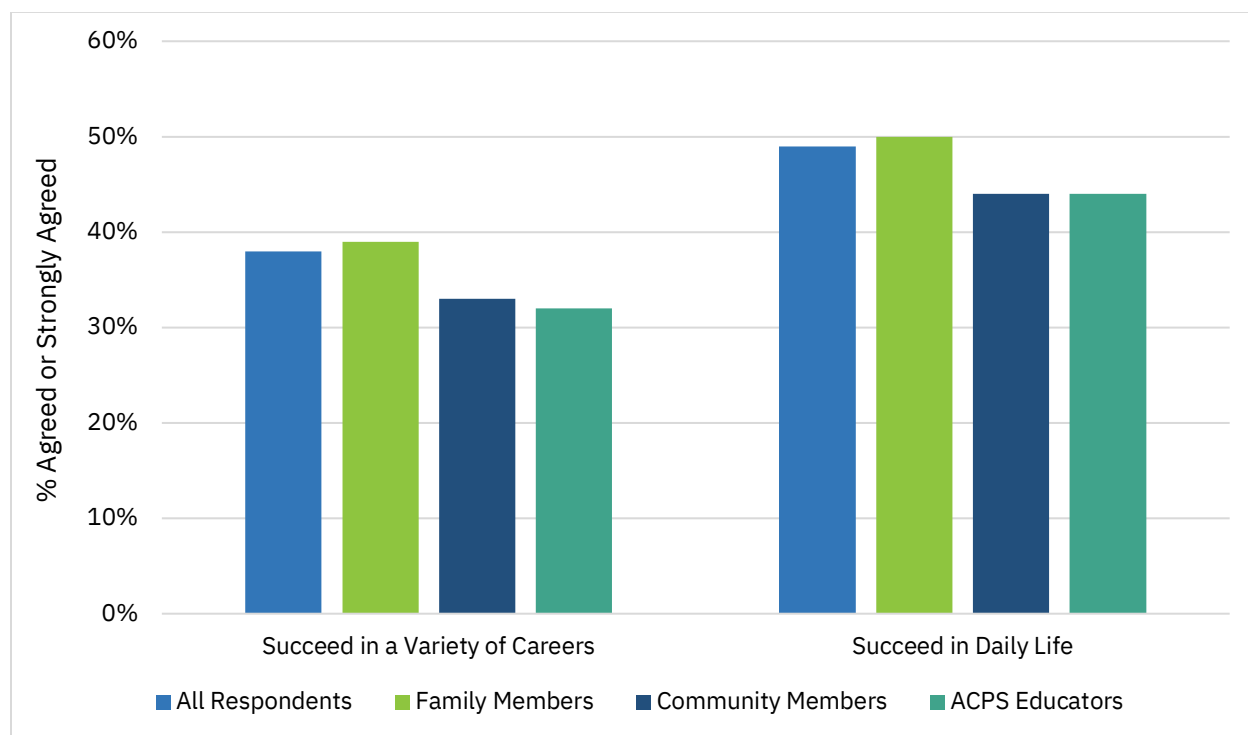

Note: N's were equal for both items (variety of careers and daily life). *N* All Respondents = 1,239; *N* Family Members = 887; *N* Community Members = 214; *N* ACPS Educators = 192.

Family and Community Members

Differences in survey responses based on family and community members' identified race/ethnicity were examined (see Figure 28). Asian respondents (N = 39) more often agreed that children and youth in Alachua County have necessary literacy skills from kindergarten through adulthood (44-55%, depending on category) whereas White respondents (N = 453) agreed the least often (24-46%). Black respondents (N = 199) and Hispanic/Latino respondents (N = 118) had similar agreement about students' readiness (32-48%). Overall, regardless of race and ethnicity, respondents had the least confidence that children were ready for kindergarten (22-44%). The largest agreement on any item was only 55%, indicating that Alachua respondents were not confident that children and youth have the literacy skills they need to succeed.

Figure 28. *Percent of Family and Community Members, by Race/Ethnicity of Respondents, Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" That Children and Youth in Alachua County Have Necessary Literacy Skills To:*
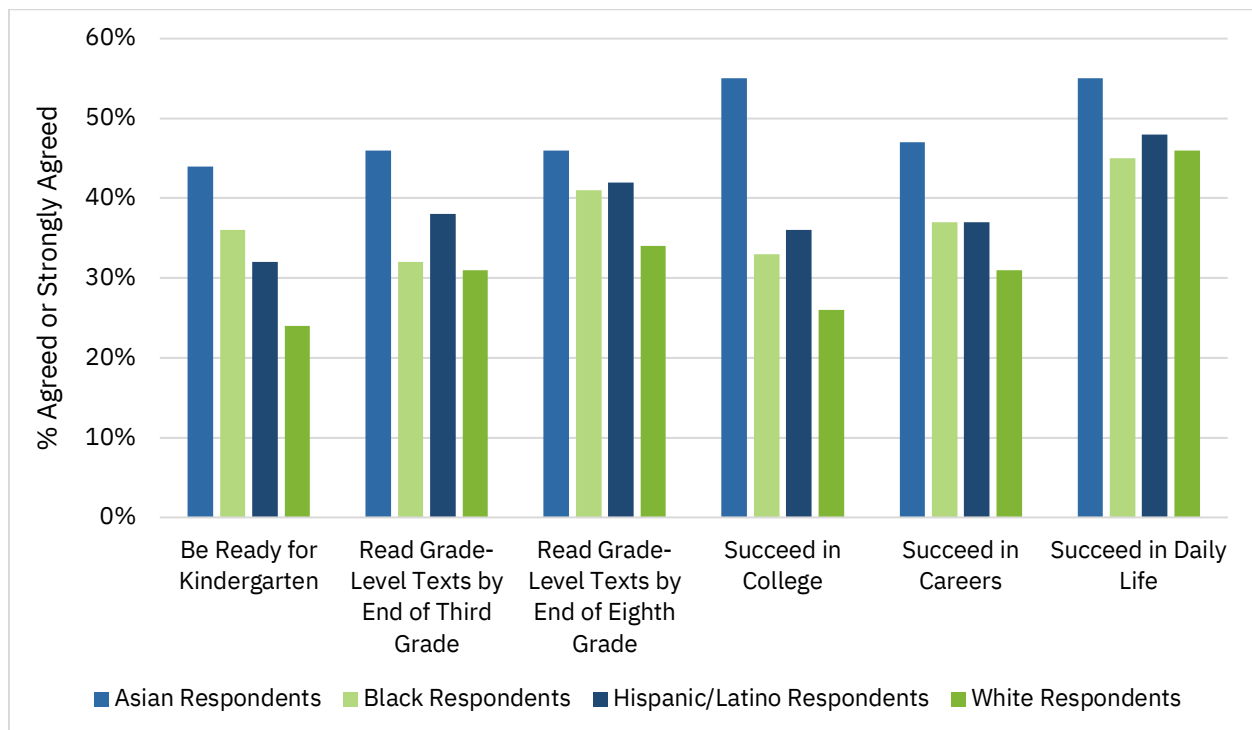
Note: *N* Asian = 39; *N* Black = 199; *N* Hispanic/Latino = 118; *N* White = 453.

The same items were examined by differences by respondents' income level (see Figure 29). Family and community members with higher reported incomes (above $75,000, *N* = 402) were generally the least likely to agree that children and youth in Alachua County have the literacy skills they need to succeed, except on the item about success in daily life. Across all income levels and on all items, less than 50% of respondents agreed that children had the necessary literacy skills. This indicates a low level of confidence in literacy learning in the county.

Figure 29. *Percent of Family and Community Members, by Income of Respondents Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" That Children and Youth in Alachua County Have Necessary Literacy Skills To:*

Note: *N* <$25,000 = 86; *N* $25,000-$75,000 = 229; *N* >$75,000 = 402.

An additional set of survey questions asked about whether respondents agreed or disagreed that in Alachua County these groups of children have access to education that helps them gain literacy skills (language, reading, writing):

1. Children with disabilities
2. Children learning English
3. American Indian and Alaska Native children
4. Asian children

5. Black or African American children
6. Hispanic or Latino children
7. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children
8. White children

Additional analyses examined how respondents reported on educational access for students of their same race/ethnicity (see Figure 30). That is, Asian respondents reported about Asian students, Black respondents reported about Black students, Hispanic/Latino respondents reported about Hispanic/Latino students, and White respondents reported about White students. Black respondents (N = 193) and Hispanic/Latino respondents (N = 110) expressed low levels of confidence, with just over 20% of respondents in each group agreeing that Black and Hispanic/Latino students are accessing the education they need to successfully read and write.

Figure 30. *Percent of Family and Community Members Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that Students of their Race/Ethnicity Have Access to Education in Alachua County that Helps Them Gain Literacy Skills*

Note: *N* Asian = 38; *N* Black = 193; *N* Hispanic/Latino = 110; *N* White = 416.

Alachua County Public School (ACPS) Educators and District Staff

Alachua County Public School (ACPS) educators answered many of the same questions as family and community members. When looking at what was reported just by ACPS educators, of all items, they were most likely to agree that children and youth had the skills they needed to succeed in daily life (40%) (see Figure 31).

Figure 31. *Percent of ACPS Educators Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" That Children and Youth in Alachua County Have Necessary Literacy Skills To:*
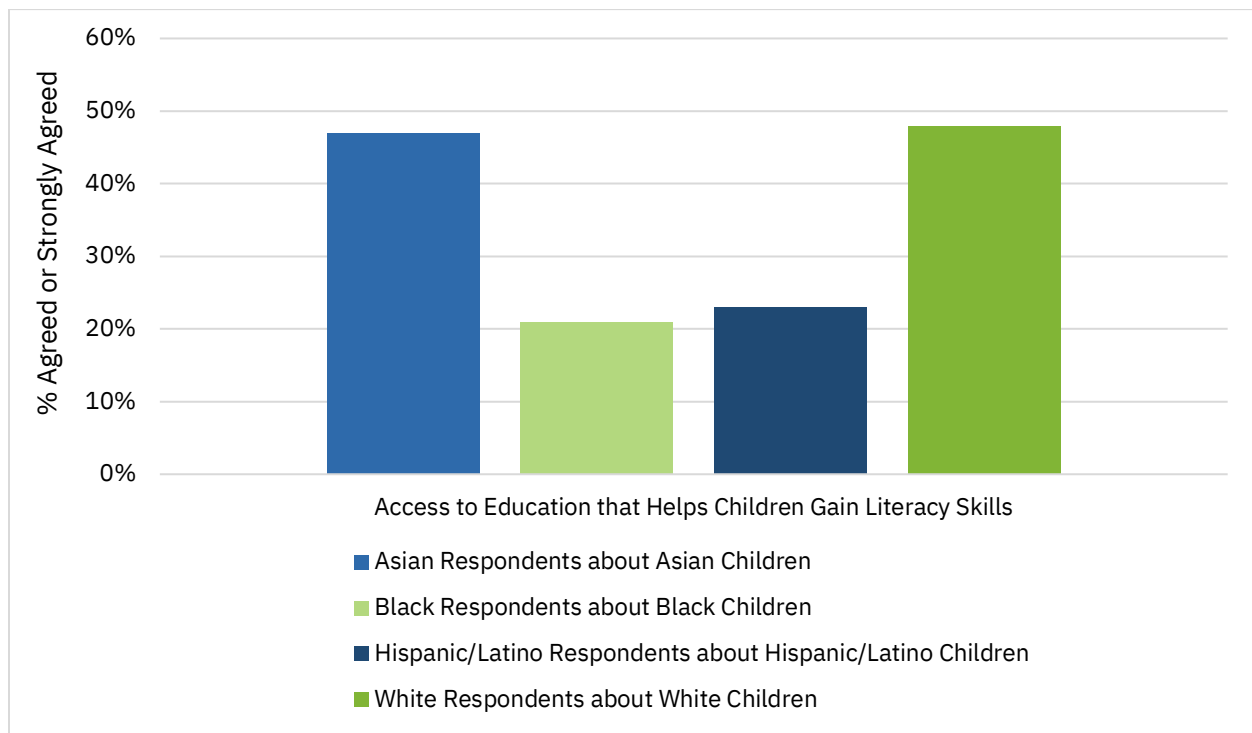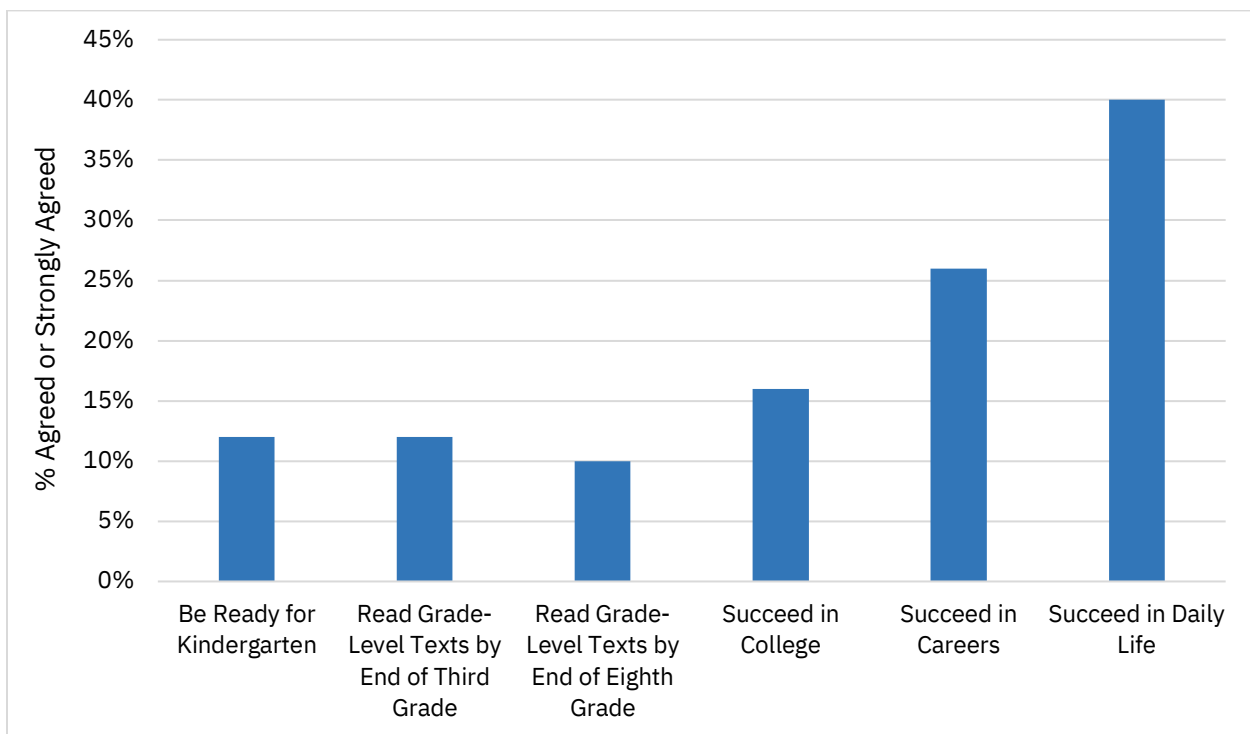

Note: *N* ACPS Educators = 195.

ACPS educators who responded to the survey (N = 188) were also not confident that different groups of students had access to education that benefits literacy skills (see Figure 32). ACPS educators were most likely to agree that White students had strongest access to educational opportunities (50%), followed by Asian students (47%), Hispanic/Latino students (36%), and Black students (36%). ACPS educators were most concerned that students with disabilities had limited access to educational opportunities (30%), along with English learners (30%).

Figure 32. *Percent of ACPS Educators Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that Students in Alachua County Have Access to Education that Helps Them Gain Literacy Skills, by Student Race/Ethnicity, Disability Status, and English Learner Status*
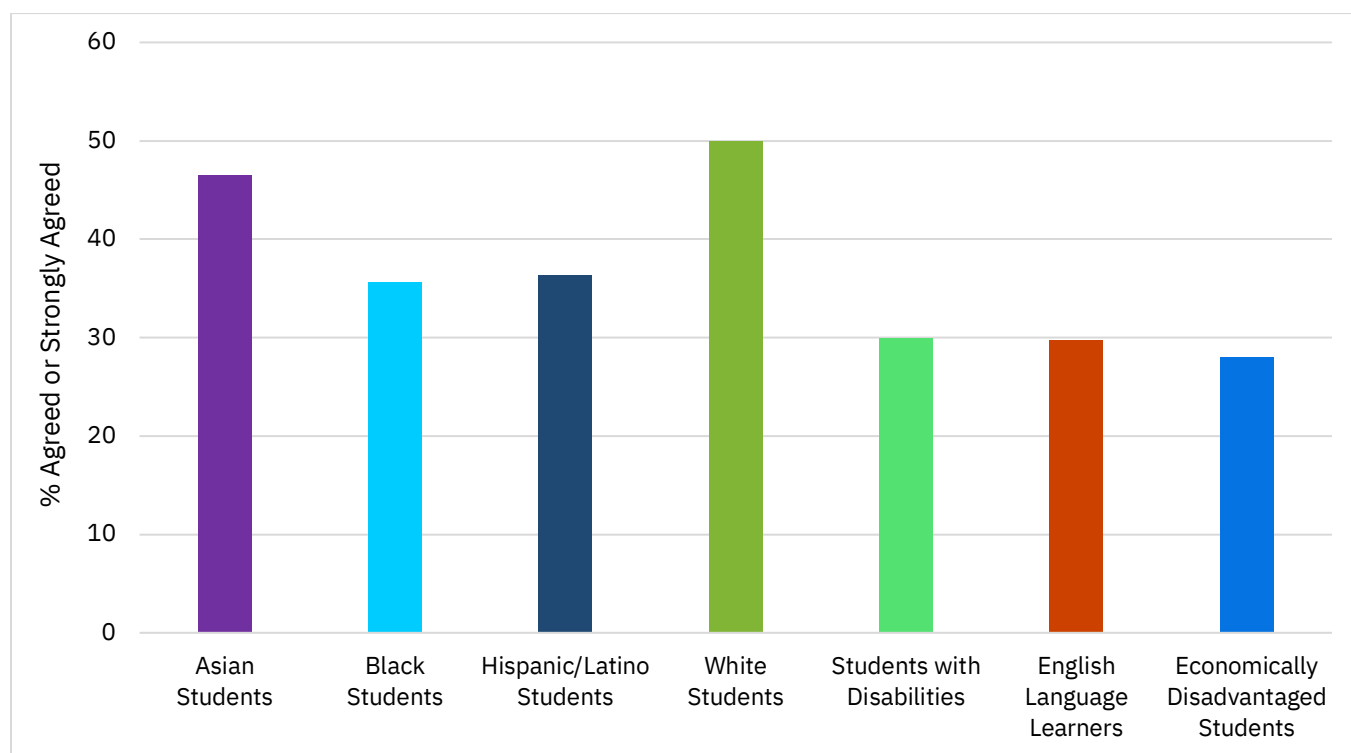
Note: N ACPS Educators = 188.

High-quality reading instruction, delivered through effective implementation of evidence-based programs, can greatly improve children's reading outcomes. ACPS elementary educators (N = 91) described how programs they use help children read and write (see Figure 33). They expressed the most confidence that the phonics program they use (primarily UFLI), helps children learn how to read (77% agreed, see also p. 76 for more information from educators about UFLI). They indicated the least

confidence that the curriculum they use, Benchmark Advance (Benchmark Education, 2022), helps children learn how to read (41% agreed, see also pp. 80-81 for more information from educators about Benchmark Advance). However, educators were not confident that the curriculum, phonics program, or intervention programs helped children learn how to write (24%, 47%, 26% agreement in the effectiveness of these programs, respectively).

Figure 33. *Percent of ACPS Elementary Educators Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" That Their School's Literacy Programs Helps Students Learn How to Read or Write*
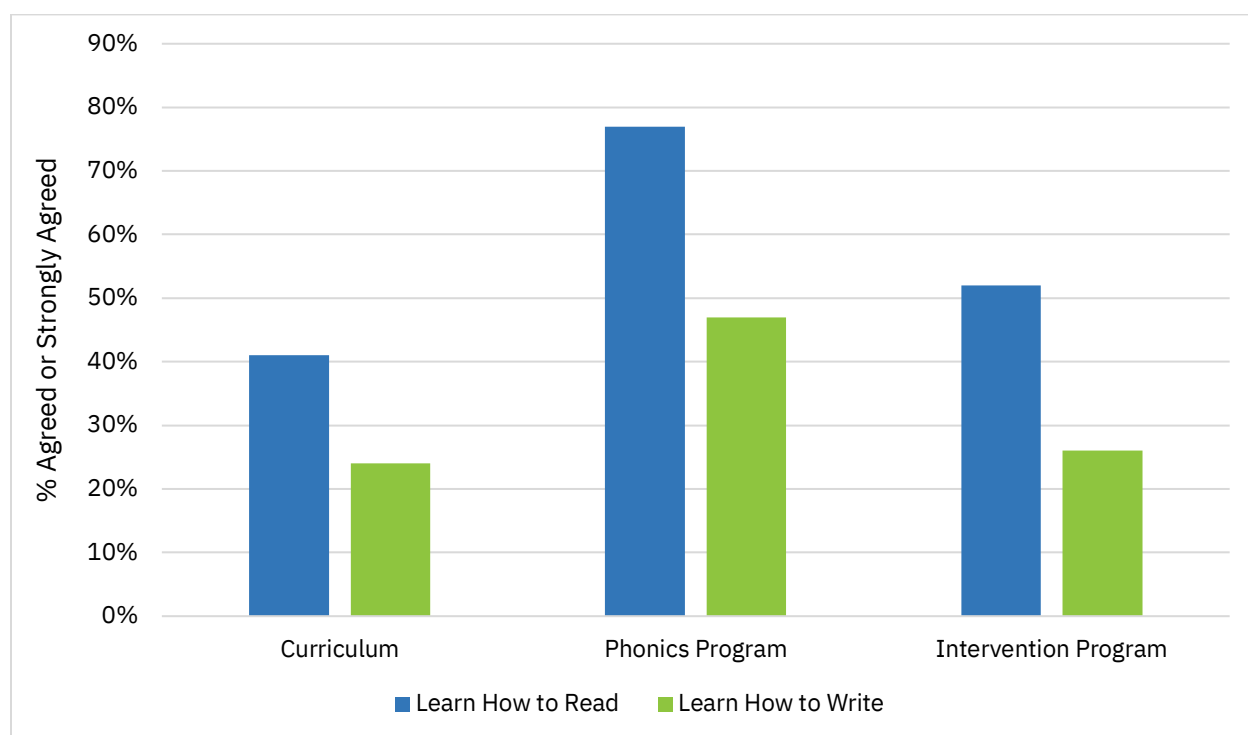
Note: *N* ACPS Elementary Educators = 91.

Community Organizations

The UF Lastinger Center interviewed and/or surveyed one or more staff members at over 50 organizations in Alachua County. Appendix A provides a list of organizations by age group served and alphabetical order. Additional information about these organizations will be shared with Children's Trust and the entities engaging in the next steps following this report.

Results from Open-Ended Survey Items, Focus Groups, and Interviews

This section presents findings drawn from open-ended survey responses, focus groups, and interviews conducted across Alachua County. The analysis is organized by the following groups: families and community members, ACPS educators, community organizations, K-12 students, and elected officials. The thoughts shared by each group of participants include current practices that support literacy development and potential challenges that prevent efforts to improve literacy.

Family and Community Members

What's Working

The findings highlight a range of effective literacy initiatives, resources, and support systems that benefit families in fostering children's literacy development. Home literacy practices, such as reading routines and interactive learning, serve as foundational elements in strengthening reading and writing skills. Families also rely on educational tools to personalize learning and sustain engagement. School-based programs play a vital role in identifying literacy challenges and providing targeted interventions, whereas community literacy resources offer additional learning opportunities through workshops and programs. Together, these approaches show the

positive impact and importance of a multi-faceted support system that integrates home, school, and community efforts to enhance literacy development.

Home Literacy Practices. Family and community members described how consistent home literacy practices significantly boost their children's interest in reading and writing, help children develop comprehension skills, and provide a supportive learning environment outside of school. These efforts included reading regularly, reading aloud, using educational materials, discussing books, practicing writing, incorporating literacy into daily routines, and using educational games to make learning more engaging.

> "We read signs while we're driving, and we try to implement reading throughout the day, whether it's reading things like menus or even putting the TV on with closed captions."
>
> – Focus Group Member

> "Reading together daily, identifying letters and sounds in titles early on, and having books with a variety of topics helps...We also use journals, workbooks, and interactive writing exercises."
>
> – Focus Group Member

Home Educational Tools and Resources. Families also found educational tools and resources to be highly effective in keeping their children engaged in learning, providing additional practice opportunities, and helping to address specific literacy issues. These tools included activity and reading books, flash cards, interactive digital apps, learning games, and book delivery services. Many families indicated that they regularly seek and use such resources because they are or can be tailored to meet the individual needs of their children.

> "We use phonics-based flashcards and workbooks to strengthen reading skills at home."
>
> – Focus Group Member

> "Audiobooks have been a fantastic tool to help my child follow along with text and build comprehension."
>
> – Focus Group Member

School-Based Programs and Support. Families further emphasized the importance of school-based support in accurately identifying and addressing literacy challenges, providing necessary interventions, and reinforcing literacy skills through structured programs. Families mentioned utilizing resources and services assessments when available, such as specialized support for children with learning disabilities and access to evidence-based curricula and trained educators to develop essential reading and writing skills.

> *"Our school's guided reading program has significantly improved my child's comprehension."*
>
> – Focus Group Member

> *"The school's literacy intervention program has been beneficial for my child."*
>
> – Focus Group Member

Community Literacy Resources. In discussions about community resources, families indicated they frequently attend workshops and literacy programs offered by schools, libraries, and other community organizations to gain better insights, resources, and tools for supporting their children's literacy development. Participants noted that community literacy initiatives supplement their own efforts to improve their family's literacy skills by providing additional resources, creating opportunities for social learning, and fostering a supportive environment that values literacy development.

> *"Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has provided my child with books that we otherwise couldn't afford."*
>
> – Focus Group Member

> *"Library tutoring programs have given my child the extra support they need to improve literacy skills."*
>
> – Focus Group Member

Challenges and Needed Improvements

Families face multiple challenges with accessing and utilizing literacy resources. Limited awareness of available programs due to fragmented communication systems prevents families from fully engaging with literacy resources. Financial and logistical constraints further restrict access to essential educational materials and interventions. Additionally, many parents feel unequipped to provide home-based literacy support, pointing to a need for better instructional guidance. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing communication, expanding resource accessibility, and equipping families with the necessary tools to actively support their children's literacy growth.

Communications and Resource Visibility. Focus group participants frequently reported the lack of a coordinated communication system that provides greater access to and understanding of available literacy resources and programs. Limited availability of clear, up-to-date, and consistent communication about existing resources prevents families from taking advantage of all that Alachua County and the state of Florida has to offer.

> "It's essential that teachers and parents are continually made aware of the resources at their disposal."
>
> – Focus Group Member

Accessible Literacy Resources. Participants often spoke of limited access to literacy resources. Families talked about a shortage of age-appropriate books, educational tools, technology, and updated learning materials that reflect current literacy practices. More importantly, families and community members said they lacked financial resources to access literacy programs and materials. Financial constraints limit their ability to access high-quality educational materials and effective literacy interventions. The cost of assessments, transportation, and participation fees put resources out of reach for many families, particularly those experiencing poverty. Families also regularly mentioned more practical issues associated with work schedules and limited transportation options, which make it hard to participate in community programs, even those available through Alachua County Public School (ACPS).

"Language barriers prevent some families from accessing resources."

– Focus Group Member

"Access to reading materials is a challenge, especially in rural communities."

– Focus Group Member

"We have great library programs, but I meet parents who struggle to even catch the bus to attend them."

– Focus Group Member

Parental Guidance on Home Instruction and Supplementary Materials. Many family members also expressed frustration over inadequate knowledge or guidance on how to effectively support their children's literacy at home. They described feeling unprepared to help with reading and writing activities, resulting in missed opportunities for their children to reinforce important skills outside the classroom.

""I didn't grow up with strong literacy skills myself, so teaching reading feels overwhelming."

– Focus Group Member

"Parents want to help, but they need accessible and practical guidance on supporting their children's reading development."

– Focus Group Member

ACPS Educators and District Staff

ACPS educators and district staff provided input through surveys and focus groups. Their perception of effective literacy support, drawn from open-ended survey responses, are disaggregated by grade level to reflect instructional differences. However, their open-ended survey and focus group responses regarding literacy challenges are consolidated across all grade levels and summarized in the following section.

What's Working

The following information summarizes the input of ACPS educators and district staff in response to survey items and focus group questions about what they believe is working well for them and their students. This information should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the practices as evidence-based for all populations of students.

Educators from elementary, middle, and high schools emphasized the effectiveness of structured literacy interventions, digital tools, and interactive teaching strategies in improving student reading and writing outcomes. Elementary educators highlighted the impact of phonics-based curricula, literacy assessments, and small-group interventions, whereas secondary educators advocated for student-centered literacy activities, writing exercises, and vocabulary-building techniques. Additionally, educators stressed the role of community engagement and parental involvement in reinforcing literacy skills outside the classroom. These findings demonstrate the importance of a well-integrated approach that combines direct instruction, technology, and external support systems to enhance literacy development at all grade levels.

Elementary Educators

In focus groups and on surveys, elementary educators noted several reading curricula, programs, and technology tools as being useful to help improve student literacy outcomes.

Phonics Program. One of the most frequently mentioned and positively reviewed curriculum resources was the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI)

Foundations program (Lane & Contessa, 2022). Educators across multiple focus groups praised its systematic approach to phonics, its consistency in instruction, and its effectiveness in improving decoding skills for early readers. Many experienced noteworthy progress in their students' abilities to recognize letter sounds, blend phonemes, and read fluently. Unlike other curricula, UFLI provides a structured, research-based approach to phonics that has shown measurable improvement in foundational literacy skills.

> "UFLI has been a game-changer for at-risk students. I see real benefits in encoding and decoding, especially for students who have had little literacy exposure."
>
> – ACPS Educator

Digital Literacy Tools. Opinions regarding the effectiveness of digital literacy tools among educators were mixed. Some educators expressed positive views on various technology-based tools, highlighting their adaptability, engagement, and capacity to personalize learning experiences for students. These tools were particularly praised for their ability to cater to students with diverse learning needs and to promote student-centered instruction. However, other educators voiced concerns about the over-reliance on digital tools, as well as the lack of adequate district-level support and professional development for their effective implementation.

Among the most frequently mentioned digital tools were iReady (Curriculum Associates, 2025), Amira (Amira Learning, 2025), and Reading Plus (Dreambox Learning, 2023). Educators identified these platforms as effective in tracking student progress and supporting literacy development. Educators noted that these tools facilitated differentiated instruction which enabled them to better address the individual needs of students while reinforcing foundational literacy skills.

Assessment Systems. Elementary educators recognized the value of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS, University of Oregon, 2025) as an effective tool for identifying readers needing foundational support and monitoring their responses to intervention, which has research support (Paleologos & Brabham, 2011). Effective assessments provide valuable insights into students' reading progress and allow for accurate and timely decision making.

> "The combination of DIBELS assessment and structured interventions ensures we're addressing literacy gaps early."
>
> – ACPS Educator

Intervention Programs. The value of instructional tools such as Great Leaps (n.d.), Systematic, Explicit Decoding Instruction (SIPPS, Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2025), and UFLI Foundations (Lane & Contessa, 2022) were widely recognized by educators as essential in intervening with struggling readers at the elementary school level. These programs were particularly praised for their capacity to offer targeted, small-group instruction tailored to the needs of individual learners. Educators emphasized that small-group instruction, coupled with structured phonics-based interventions, is critical for addressing literacy challenges and promoting reading success among struggling students.

Classroom-Based Strategies. Educators shared a variety of literacy strategies that have been particularly effective for building engagement. These include close reading techniques, student choice in reading materials, and books aligned with student interest to boost engagement and literacy development.

> "Graphic novels and real-world texts have been particularly useful in helping struggling readers develop a stronger interest in literacy."
>
> – ACPS Educator

Community and Family Involvement. Many educators emphasized the importance of community partnerships and parent/caregiver involvement in supporting literacy outside the classroom. Programs that provide structured resources to families have been beneficial in reinforcing reading skills at home.

> "Library partnerships offering free books and reading events have been great for encouraging literacy beyond the classroom."
>
> — ACPS Educator

"Structured literacy nights involving both parents and students have had strong attendance and impact."

— ACPS Educator

Middle and High School Educators

Literacy Development Activities. Several educators at middle and high schools noted that children actively engage in literacy activities that enhance their reading and comprehension skills. Survey respondents reported several effective ways that students can build vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities:

- "Students who journal regularly improve their writing and comprehension."
- "Encouraging children to create their own stories develops creativity and literacy."
- "Word-based games help reinforce spelling and vocabulary skills."
- "Students who keep a reading log develop stronger accountability in literacy habits."
- "Graphic novels and comics have been effective in encouraging reluctant readers."
- "Allowing students to choose their books fosters a deeper interest in reading."
- "Storytelling activities help children develop sequencing and communication skills."

Teacher-Guided Instruction. Educators described their contributions to literacy development through structured interventions and curriculum planning. Respondents cited teacher-led read alouds, phonics instruction, and interactive classroom strategies as impactful techniques in improving literacy outcomes. Many also noted the

importance of scaffolding and differentiated instruction for diverse learning needs, including the following:

- "Read-aloud sessions help students understand complex texts and develop comprehension."
- "Phonics-based instruction is crucial for struggling readers in early grades."
- "Differentiated instruction ensures that all students receive the help they need."
- "Interactive literacy activities make reading more engaging for students."
- "Explicit vocabulary instruction improves reading comprehension significantly."
- "Incorporating literacy skills across subjects helps students reinforce their learning."

Home Literacy Practices. Many educators of older students noted the importance and impact of families engaging in regular literacy activities such as reading aloud with children, setting daily reading routines, and having regular discussions about books. The following actions were frequently noted as foundational for early literacy development and long-term academic success:

- "I encourage parents to read with their children every night and discuss the stories."
- "Families that establish consistent bedtime reading routines see better literacy growth."
- "I recommend parents ask open-ended questions about books to engage their children."
- "A family reading challenge keeps everyone motivated to read more."
- "Encouraging children to read aloud to their parents builds their confidence."

Community Resources and Involvement. Community-driven initiatives and family engagement programs were commonly mentioned as essential for literacy success. Respondents discussed mentorship programs, volunteer-led reading sessions, and local literacy events as some of the impactful ways to foster literacy skills:

- "Our community reading group provides a space for children to develop literacy skills."
- "Local volunteers host reading sessions for children who need extra support."
- "Community literacy programs make reading a social and engaging activity."
- "Public storytelling events help children develop listening and comprehension skills."
- "Community book drives provide books to families who may not afford them."

Digital Literacy Tools and Resources. Educators also frequently mentioned technology-based tools as valuable resources for literacy development. Educators cited the use of digital reading programs, educational apps, and interactive software that help children improve their reading and comprehension skills by providing personalized learning experiences, making reading more engaging and accessible:

- "Children enjoy reading apps that turn stories into interactive experiences."
- "Online literacy programs have been a great supplement to schoolwork."
- "We use digital storybooks to make reading more fun and accessible."
- "Interactive educational software helps reinforce literacy skills at home."
- "Technology has allowed [students] to practice reading at their own pace."
- "Using audiobooks alongside print books has improved … comprehension skills."
- "Adaptive learning platforms provide personalized literacy instruction."

The literacy programs, tools, and strategies outlined above were deemed most effective among the educators participating in the literacy needs assessment. From their perspective, consistent phonics instruction, adaptive digital resources, targeted interventions, engaging classroom strategies, and strong community support have led to measurable improvements in student literacy outcomes. Continued investment in these areas, along with professional development for educators, may be critical in sustaining literacy growth in Alachua County.

Challenges and Needed Improvements

The focus group discussions with educators revealed several recurring themes that highlight challenges in curriculum implementation, student literacy development, assessment practices, and professional support. These themes reflect common experiences and concerns across different grade levels and schools, providing valuable insights for improving educational practices and outcomes.

Curriculum Effectiveness and Challenges. One of the most frequently discussed topics was the usability of, and support for, the district's curricula, particularly Benchmark Advance (Benchmark Education, 2022). Educators noted that while the curriculum provides structure, it often lacks alignment with students' developmental needs and does not contain sufficient guidance on how to provide the necessary scaffolds for struggling readers. Further, a consensus among participants is that they did not have access to the necessary training and ongoing support to effectively implement Benchmark Advance. Additionally, educators found several challenges with the writing component of the program, notably the lack of alignment between the reading and writing components. Educators' key concerns included the following:
- Lack of guidance or scaffolds for accessing complex text for students with reading difficulties.
- Lack of access to training and implementation support for teachers.

Reading and Writing Struggles. A major challenge highlighted by educators was the proportion of students with literacy difficulties in many classes. Educators expressed frustration with associated trends such as declining reading habits, limited student engagement with books, and hesitance to engage with writing assignments. Many students, including those in secondary grades, reportedly lack fundamental skills in understanding sentence structure, using punctuation and other writing conventions, decoding, and comprehension monitoring, making it difficult for them to succeed in higher-level coursework. Educators' key concerns included the following:
- Declining independent reading and writing habits.
- Insufficient emphasis on explicit writing instruction in the early grades, leading to foundational writing difficulties later.
- Students struggle with foundational reading skills, including decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Student Engagement and Motivation. Educators consistently reported that student engagement in literacy was a challenge. Educators indicated that many students consider reading and writing as tedious tasks rather than enjoyable learning experiences. Educators highlighted the importance of integrating student choice into reading assignments, incorporating interactive materials, and finding creative ways to make literacy instruction engaging. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- Educators feel they must compete with students' phones for their attention and engagement.
- Instructional materials are perceived as dry or uninteresting.
- Early literacy difficulties tend to compound over time as students disengage with reading and writing causing difficulties with complex text.

"We need more choice in what they read to keep them engaged."

– ACPS Educator

Professional Support and Training. Another recurring theme was the need for stronger professional development, ongoing training, and access to effective literacy coaching for educators across the grade levels. Many educators felt ill-equipped to navigate new curricula, digital tools, and assessment methods due to a lack of structured training and implementation support. The absence of ongoing professional learning opportunities made it challenging for educators to effectively implement literacy programs. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- Inadequate training on new curriculum tools and assessment platforms, especially for new teachers.
- Lack of professional development on effective teaching practices, curricula, and practical tools teachers are expected to implement.
- Need for mentorship and peer collaboration.

"Many teachers are left to figure out instructional strategies on their own, which isn't sustainable."

– ACPS Educator

Family Involvement in Literacy Development. Educators emphasized the key role of parent/caregiver involvement in students' literacy success. However, many educators noted a decline in family engagement, with family members struggling to support their children's reading and writing at home. The lack of structured resources for parents and caregivers further amplified this issue. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- Parents and caregivers feel overwhelmed and unsure how to help.
- More structured resources for families are needed.
- Community partnerships could provide additional literacy support.

> "If we provided parents with parent-friendly literacy resources, we could make a difference."
> – ACPS Educator

Testing and Assessment Challenges. The use of standardized testing as a measure of student literacy was another area of concern. Elementary educators reported that computerized assessments often failed to accurately reflect young students' abilities. In the older grades, there is often a disconnect between the content that students are taught and the passages in the beginning, middle, and end of year benchmark assessments. An emphasis on high-stakes outcome assessments can cause schools to focus on teaching skills that many students lack the prerequisite knowledge for. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- Computer-based assessments do not always reflect actual learning.
- Students struggle with digital test formats.
- Misalignment between instruction and standardized testing.

> "High-stakes testing puts undue pressure on students and doesn't capture their full learning potential. We need better alignment between instruction and assessment methods."
> – ACPS Educator

Staffing and Resource Limitations. Many educators cited staffing shortages and resource constraints as major challenges to providing effective literacy instruction. Educators need additional staffing and instructional support in classrooms. The loss of interventionists, limited access to instructional support, and funding cuts have made it increasingly difficult to meet the wide-ranging needs of students. Many educators reported that there were fewer than necessary assistants, interventionists, special education teachers, and other personnel to provide the targeted interventions that large groups of struggling students require. Educators also highlighted the lack of adequate time to meet students' differing literacy needs, citing the heavy workload and limited instructional hours. Educators also identified the need for more planning time, reduced administrative burdens, and access to high-quality, literacy-focused professional development. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- The loss of interventionists has reduced individualized support.
- Lack of compensation for before and after-hours professional learning.
- Class sizes are too large to provide targeted literacy interventions.
- More funding is needed for additional instructional staff.

> "We need staffing. The district always says they want to see gains, but without proper staffing, that's never going to happen."
> – ACPS Educator

> "Small groups are crucial, but time constraints mean we barely see one group a day. More staff would change that."
> – ACPS Educator

> "We are expected to do more with fewer resources, and it's not sustainable."
> – ACPS Educator

Technology and Learning Tools. Technology has the potential to enhance and supplement literacy instruction, but some educators expressed concerns about its limitations. Many students lack digital literacy skills, and frequent technical issues can disrupt learning. Educators emphasized the need for structured training on how to effectively integrate technology into literacy instruction without supplanting the role of the teacher. Educators' key concerns included the following:

- Digital assessments are challenging for younger learners.
- Students lack basic digital literacy skills.
- Training is needed to effectively integrate technology in instruction without supplanting the role of the teacher.

> "Technology should be a support tool, not a replacement for direct instruction. Many students struggle to navigate digital reading tools effectively."
>
> – ACPS Educator

The educator focus group discussions underscored the urgent need for targeted improvements in literacy instruction, curriculum alignment, professional support, and student engagement strategies. Addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive approach that strengthens curriculum alignment, expands teacher training, and enhances resource allocation to ensure literacy success for students across all grade levels.

Community Organizations

What's Working

Discussions with community organizations revealed a network of community-driven solutions that support literacy improvement. Organizations integrate one-on-one tutoring, accessible literacy tools, and staff development to create responsive and inclusive literacy environments. These efforts are enhanced through strategic partnerships that extend programming into families and neighborhoods and increase awareness and participation. However, the sustainability and growth of these strategies continue to depend heavily on access to stable funding.

One-on-One Tutoring & Mentorship. One-on-one tutoring and mentorship emerged as a critical strategy for improving literacy outcomes. Respondents highlighted the effectiveness of personalized instruction, which allows tutors and mentors to address specific learning challenges faced by individuals. This approach fosters strong relationships between learners and mentors and creates a supportive environment that builds confidence and motivation. Tailoring instruction to individual needs ensures that learners receive targeted interventions and makes literacy development more effective.

> "One-on-one tutoring has proved successful. Tailoring it to the specific needs of the learner is really important."
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

"Pairing a struggling reader with a trained mentor has shown consistent improvement in reading levels."
– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Literacy Tools and Resources. Many organizations and programs utilize specific literacy-related tools and resources to support reading and writing development. These include access to a variety of books, educational software, interactive e-books, digital apps, and multimedia resources that cater to different learning styles. Organization staff who were interviewed highlighted the importance of having varied current instructional materials and technology in keeping students engaged and

providing tailored learning experiences. Even when organizations indicated that they do not have dedicated literacy programs, they find ways to integrate literacy activities within their existing programs.

> "Interactive educational software fosters literacy growth in early learners."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

> "Audiobooks have helped reluctant readers engage with literature in new ways."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Training and Staff Development. The organizations who participated in the literacy needs assessment emphasized the importance of training for staff and volunteers to improve their ability to identify and address literacy issues among students. Most reported providing internal training for full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff whenever possible. This typically includes workshops, certification courses, and on-the-job training sessions designed to enhance their skills and knowledge.

> "Staff development is crucial, continuing education helps ensure that literacy instruction remains impactful."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

> "Providing access to professional learning helps staff feel better equipped to address literacy challenges."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Community Partnerships. Organization staff members further reported that they often collaborate with community partners and find ways to involve parents, caregivers, and family members. Participants noted that collaboration fosters a supportive network, enhances resource availability, and promotes the sharing of best practices and effective instructional methods. Their staff and student development collaborations include joint training sessions, collaborative projects, and shared access to educational materials. Their broader community engagement initiatives have involved organizing public reading events, literacy fairs, community/family workshops,

and volunteer programs aimed at promoting literacy both within and outside the school environment.

> "Our partnerships with community centers help us expand access to literacy programming."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

"When the entire community is involved in literacy efforts, we see much stronger outcomes."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Financial Resources and Support. Organizations noted that financial support is critical for sustaining high-quality literacy programs and ensuring that necessary resources are available to both educators and students. To limit costs for public participation, many organizations regularly employ cost-cutting and cost-sharing strategies and seek financial support to fund their literacy programs. This includes securing grants, budgeting for educational materials, and streamlining funds for staffing and professional development.

> "We benefit from grants and funding which allow us to purchase high-quality literacy programs and materials."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

"We all work closely with who's funding who and working to see if there is overlap, and how can we work together."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

> "We fund all different types of nonprofits in our community... many provide one-on-one literacy support."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Challenges and Needed Improvements

Interviews with community organizations uncovered clear opportunities for improvement. Limited financial resources, a lack of dedicated literacy programming, and insufficient tools for early screening were frequently cited as challenges. Many organizations also reported that staffing limitations and underdeveloped parental engagement strategies further constrain the reach and impact of literacy efforts. However, the findings also revealed that organizations are eager to expand their capacity and that strengthening partnerships, professional development, and targeted support systems could lead to measurable improvements in literacy outcomes.

Limited Financial Resources. Staff from community organizations reported that the lack of financial resources restricts the scope and scale of literacy initiatives and limits the ability to purchase educational materials, hire specialized staff, and implement targeted literacy interventions. Among the challenges is the limited availability of essential educational resources such as books, digital tools, and other instructional materials. This scarcity of resources means that many organizations struggle to provide students with the necessary tools to enhance their reading and writing skills. A lack of technology, in particular, was described as hindering their ability to incorporate interactive and engaging methods of literacy instruction.

> "More funding would allow us to expand our literacy initiatives and offer high-quality resources to our students."
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

> "Better resource allocation can help us address the specific literacy needs of our students more effectively."
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Literacy-Specific Programming. Many of the literacy-oriented community organizations in Alachua County face challenges due to the lack of a specific focus on providing evidence-based literacy instruction and related supports. Although literacy may be a part of broader educational programs, it is not always targeted directly, which dilutes the impact of literacy initiatives. Many programs are designed to develop a range of skills, with literacy being an incidental benefit rather than a primary focus.

This lack of dedicated literacy initiatives means that literacy leaders cannot allocate sufficient resources or create specialized strategies to tackle literacy issues directly. As a result, students may not receive the consistent, targeted support they need to develop essential literacy skills effectively.

> "Our organization focuses on holistic development, but without a targeted literacy agenda, some students fall through the cracks."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Early Screenings and Intervention. Several staff members at community organizations emphasized the importance of early screening and evaluation to identify children at risk of falling behind. Early identification and assessment of literacy challenges are critical for timely intervention, yet many organizations trying to effectively serve children need stronger screening and identification of children's needs. Without early and accurate identification, students with learning disabilities or those at risk of falling behind in literacy may not receive the necessary support early enough to make a significant difference.

> "Recognizing literacy problems at an early stage can dramatically change outcomes, but it's something we currently struggle with…"
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Staffing and Training and Development. Staff members at Alachua County community organizations commented that the effectiveness of literacy programs is highly dependent on the availability, skills and knowledge of the staff they employ. Insufficient training and professional development opportunities for their staff remain a significant challenge. Continuous training is necessary to familiarize staff with the latest literacy teaching strategies and tools. Without ongoing professional development, staff may be ill-equipped to handle diverse literacy challenges, which can hinder the overall effectiveness of literacy initiatives.

> "Our staff requires more frequent and updated training to keep up with the evolving challenges in literacy education."
>
> – Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

"We need more staff and volunteers to meet the demand for literacy support."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

Parental Engagement. Staff members at Alachua County community organizations highlighted the difficulty in engaging the parents and caregivers, which is crucial for reinforcing literacy development outside structured school or literacy program events. They highlighted the importance of building partnerships with local entities and ensuring sufficient resources to sustain literacy initiatives. Organizations often faced challenges in garnering sufficient backing from local stakeholders, including parents/caregivers, businesses, and government agencies. Additionally, they mentioned the lack of necessary resources, such as books, technology, and funding, to support comprehensive literacy efforts.

Community Engagement and Partnerships. Building strong community partnerships and securing adequate resources are essential to overcoming challenges and ensuring that literacy programs can operate effectively. Respondents noted that effective literacy programs actively engage families and encourage parents and caregivers to take an active role in their children's learning. Community events, outreach programs, and collaborations with local organizations help raise awareness about literacy resources.

"Community engagement is essential, but without enough funding, it's hard to maintain effective literacy initiatives."

– Staff at an Alachua Community Organization

K-12 Students

Because youth participants were asked a separate set of questions, their feedback is structured differently from that of other groups. This analysis describes two sections of student feedback: (1) the activities and strategies that educators and schools can implement to improve literacy skills and (2) how families can support literacy. The student data is derived solely from survey responses, as students did not participate in focus groups or interviews. The recommendations are disaggregated by student grade level. Some student responses were based on feedback from less than 10 students, and therefore, findings are not representative of all K-12 students.

Combined, the student survey responses revealed a strong collective emphasis on the importance of reading, writing, family involvement, and engaging literacy activities. These themes highlighted their belief that literacy development requires a collaborative effort between schools and families, integrating both structured and informal methods to support student success. By implementing these insights, educators and families can work together to create a more effective and enjoyable literacy learning experience.

How Educators and Schools Can Support Literacy

Students across different grade levels identified key areas where educators can better support literacy development. Young learners perceived benefits from increased reading opportunities and individualized teacher support, whereas upper elementary students reported thriving from interactive learning and structured writing practice. Middle school students emphasized the importance of consistent literacy exercises, and high school students advocate for analytical writing assignments and tutoring support. These findings highlight the necessity of grade-specific developmentally appropriate literacy strategies that equip students with the skills needed for academic achievement and lifelong learning.

Early Elementary (Grades 1-3)

Increased Reading Time and Access to Books. Students in early elementary grades suggested that having more time to read books at school and having access to books they find engaging—such as graphic novels and illustrated books—would help improve their reading skills. This is aligned with research that indicates that greater exposure to

books promotes early literacy development, comprehension, and engagement. Student choice in reading materials also fosters a lifelong love of reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

> "Have more books I like to read like graphic novels. They are engaging because of the pictures."
>
> – Third Grade Student

One-on-One Support from Teachers. Students expressed the need for more individualized attention to help them improve reading and writing skills. Individualized reading instruction is linked to improved literacy outcomes and is particularly beneficial for readers who need to build foundational skills (Connor et al., 2007).

Upper Elementary (Grades 4-5)

Interactive and Engaging Literacy Activities. Students suggested incorporating fun and engaging literacy activities, such as phonics games, group discussions, and storytelling. Interactive literacy activities support phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary development (National Reading Panel, 2000).

> "Practicar la fonética con actividades divertidas. Invitar a los niños a imaginar 'películas mentales' para facilitar que recordemos la historia. La lectura tiene que ser divertida." [Practice phonics with fun activities. Invite children to imagine 'mental movies' to help us remember the story. Reading should be fun.]
>
> – Fifth Grade Student

Structured Writing Support. Some students mentioned that writing practice should be included more regularly in the classroom, with clear guidance on new vocabulary words and structured writing exercises. Regular writing practice strengthens literacy fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking skills (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Middle School (Grades 6-8)

Consistent Practice and Reading Logs. Students in middle school highlighted the importance of consistent practice in reading and writing, with structured assignments such as reading logs and summaries. Tracking reading progress and summarizing content improves comprehension, retention, and critical analysis skills (Graham & Hebert, 2011).

> "Provide small daily/weekly reading logs where children read an amount of chapters in their desired novel and write a paragraph-long summary on what they've read."
>
> – Eighth Grade Student

High School (Grades 9-12)

Writing Assignments and Analytical Skills Development. High school students suggested that teachers should assign more structured writing exercises, including in-class writing, take-home assignments, and exams with open-ended questions. Regular writing improves literacy proficiency, academic performance, and college readiness (Graham & Perin, 2007).

> "Regularly assign brief writing exercises in your classes. Some mixture of in-class writing, outside writing assignments, and exams with open-ended questions will give students the practice they need to improve their skills."
>
> – Twelfth Grade Student

Additional Tutoring and English Language Support. Students in higher grade levels highlighted the need for tutoring services and improved English language programs, particularly for those who struggle with reading and writing in English. Personalized literacy instruction through tutoring and small-group interventions has been shown to be highly effective for struggling readers (August & Shanahan, 2006).

How Families Can Support Literacy

Students identified various ways families can contribute to literacy development, including direct support, structured reading routines, and interactive learning experiences. Early elementary students expressed benefits from shared reading and encouragement, whereas upper elementary students suggested expanding literacy beyond the home to museum visits and library trips. Middle and high school students emphasized the need for dedicated reading spaces, daily literacy engagement, and parental involvement in academic tasks. These findings underscore the need for families to foster a literacy-friendly environment that reinforces reading and writing skills through consistent engagement and meaningful literacy activities.

Early Elementary (Grades 1-3)

One-on-One Support at Home. Young students highlighted the importance of direct support from their families when learning to read and write. They expressed the need for individual attention, encouragement, and structured help with literacy activities at home. Research suggests that family involvement in literacy activities improves reading fluency, comprehension, and language development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

Reading Together and Using Literacy Games. Students in early elementary grades mentioned that reading with their families and engaging in literacy-related games makes reading fun and engaging. Interactive reading activities help build vocabulary, comprehension, and early literacy skills (Mol et al., 2008).

Upper Elementary (Grades 4-5)

Encouragement of Daily Reading Habits. Students recognized the importance of regular reading routines at home to improve literacy skills. Some noted that their parent or caregivers assign reading time or encourage consistent reading habits. Regular exposure to reading improves comprehension, fluency, and academic success (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

> *"Keep reading with me and making me write."*
> *– Fifth Grade Student*

Expansion of Literacy Beyond the Home. Some students suggested that family visits to museums, historical sites, or other literacy-rich environments would support reading comprehension and engagement. Exposure to literacy-rich environments enhances vocabulary, critical thinking, and contextual understanding of language (Neuman & Celano, 2012).

> "Going with family to museums or historical places and read the briefs about everything."
> – Fifth Grade Student

Middle School (Grades 6-8)

Dedicated Reading Space at Home. Some students suggested that having a quiet, comfortable space for reading at home would help improve focus and literacy engagement. A structured reading environment fosters better concentration and motivation for independent reading (Gambrell, 2011).

Daily Reading and Writing Practice. Students suggested that parents or caregivers should encourage daily reading and writing habits, such as reading a set number of chapters or making lists. Daily literacy engagement strengthens comprehension, writing fluency, and vocabulary retention (Graham & Hebert, 2011).

High School (Grades 9-12)

Assistance with Studying and Literacy-Related Tasks. High school students indicated that family support with studying, reviewing reading materials, and helping with writing assignments would enhance their literacy skills. Involvement of parents or caregivers in academic support correlates with higher academic achievement and improved literacy outcomes (Patall et al., 2008).

Family Literacy Activities and Library Visits. Students suggested that making library visits part of a family routine and integrating literacy into daily activities—such as grocery lists and note-writing—would strengthen literacy skills. Family literacy activities increase reading frequency, engagement, and real-world literacy application (Morrow, 2015).

Feedback from Alachua County Elected Officials

Insights from Elected Officials on What Works

Elected officials were asked to identify strategies that are making a measurable impact on literacy improvement in the county, and they indicated early childhood literacy programs, community and school partnerships, and targeted literacy interventions for high-need students. Their perspectives underscore the importance of early exposure to literacy-rich environments, collaborative efforts across institutions, and data-driven interventions.

Early Childhood Education

Elected officials consistently identified emergent literacy development as a key factor in improving overall literacy rates. Community-supported early literacy programs deliver interventions that help build student skills prior to school entry. These programs also provide literacy-rich environments that enhance vocabulary and reading readiness, reducing gaps among students starting school. Elected officials stressed the importance of ensuring children enter kindergarten with foundational literacy skills.

"The things we can do for our community from zero to five will have the greatest impact so that children are ready for kindergarten."

– Alachua County Elected Official

"If we don't address literacy early, we'll be playing catch-up for years."

– Alachua County Elected Official

Community and School Partnerships

Collaboration between schools, local governments, and community organizations has proven to be an effective strategy for improving literacy rates. Elected officials emphasized continuing to leverage community-based resources to support literacy initiatives. Community organizations provide mentorship and supplemental reading programs. Libraries, businesses, and nonprofit groups serve as literacy hubs.

- "The Children's Trust has been a game-changer in coordinating literacy resources."
- "Partnerships with UF and Santa Fe College could bring in much-needed research-backed literacy practices."
- "After-school programs supported by the city and county provide valuable literacy interventions."
- "Churches, nonprofits, and businesses have stepped up to support literacy efforts."

Targeted Literacy Interventions for High-Needs Students

Elected officials often said that implementation of targeted literacy interventions was needed for students who struggle the most. Specialized programs tailored to students' needs and tiered intervention strategies help close literacy gaps, including for students with disabilities. Schools that use student data to provide targeted one-on-one or small-group reading instruction see significant improvement. Some of the elected officials' comments highlight other workable solutions:

- "We need a system-wide approach to track and support struggling readers."
- "A data-driven approach helps us identify students who need additional reading support."
- "High-quality tutoring and intervention programs can turn literacy trajectories around."

Efforts to improve literacy in Alachua County must be sustained, expanded, and coordinated more effectively to achieve lasting impact. Investing in early childhood literacy, strengthening community partnerships, increasing parent/caregiver engagement, improving teacher training, and expanding targeted interventions will help address literacy challenges and create a brighter future for all students.

Challenges and Needed Improvements from the Perspective of Elected Officials

Close Literacy Gaps During Early Childhood

Alachua County elected officials agreed that early childhood literacy gaps are increased by limited access to structured early learning programs, limited family awareness about literacy development, and disparities in pre-kindergarten educational opportunities. Elected officials agreed that reading proficiency by third grade is a crucial benchmark, as students who are not reading at grade level by this point are more likely to struggle throughout their academic careers. Addressing this challenge requires targeted interventions, community-supported early learning initiatives, and enhanced parent/caregiver engagement to foster early literacy habits at home.

> "Investing in early literacy will ultimately save money by reducing the need for later remediation."
>
> – Alachua County Elected Official

Reduce the Impact of Poverty

Elected officials recognized the stark divide in literacy outcomes between children from higher-income and lower-income backgrounds. The cycle of generational poverty contributes to this issue. Without intervention, income-based disparities persist and widen over time, leading to lower academic achievement and limited career opportunities. Interviewed elected officials stressed the importance of directing literacy funding and resources toward communities with lower incomes to reduce disparities and provide all children with an equal opportunity to succeed.

"The cycle of generational poverty is fueled by lack of access to literacy resources."

– Alachua County Elected Official

Provide Family Support and Education

Parent/caregiver involvement is a critical factor in a child's literacy development. Parents and caregivers need more time, resources, and literacy skills to effectively support their children. Elected officials highlighted the challenge of parents or caregivers who may have dropped out of school themselves or who work multiple jobs, leaving limited knowledge or time to assist their children with reading and homework.

Elected officials highlighted that parents and caregivers may be unaware that their children are reading below grade level and may not know how to access intervention programs. Schools must improve communication with parents and caregivers, provide accessible literacy workshops, and offer structured guidance on how to create a literacy-rich home environment. Expanding parent/caregiver education initiatives would empower families to play a more active role in their children's academic success.

"Teaching parents to support literacy at home is just as important as teaching students."

– Alachua County Elected Official

Increase Teacher Training and Retention

Several elected officials cited a shortage of trained literacy educators as a major impediment to literacy improvement. Schools often rely on teachers with temporary or alternative certifications who may not have the specialized training needed to teach literacy effectively. High turnover rates and inadequate professional development further compound this issue.

Experts recommended stronger teacher training programs focused on evidence-based literacy instruction, particularly for new teachers. Additionally, offering incentives to retain experienced teachers in schools with large numbers of students lacking

foundational reading skills would help ensure continuity in literacy instruction and improve student outcomes.

> "We need more investment in training teachers in evidence-based literacy instruction."
>
> – Alachua County Elected Official

Implement High-Quality Literacy Programs and Strategies

A lack of uniformity in literacy instruction across schools was another key challenge identified in the interviews with elected officials. Some schools effectively use evidence-based literacy programs, while others do not, leading to disparities in student outcomes. Without a comprehensive, district-wide literacy strategy, individual schools and teachers are left to determine their own approaches, resulting in inconsistent implementation of best practices.

Elected officials stressed the need for clear guidance, accountability, and a standardized literacy curriculum to ensure all students receive high-quality literacy instruction. Schools that have successfully implemented programs such as UFLI should serve as models for other institutions.

> "A lack of accountability means that some schools do not fully implement literacy initiatives."
>
> – Alachua County Elected Official

"We need a standardized approach to literacy instruction to ensure all students receive adequate support."

– Alachua County Elected Official

The findings from the interviews with elected officials indicate that literacy challenges in Alachua County are complex, stemming from early childhood education gaps, limited parent/caregiver involvement due to generational poverty, teacher shortages, and inconsistent literacy strategies.

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Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The findings above support a multifaceted approach to improve literacy in Alachua County. Expanding early childhood literacy initiatives, strengthening community partnerships, enhancing teacher training, implementing targeted interventions, and increasing parent/caregiver engagement are all critical steps in addressing literacy challenges. Addressing these challenges will require a collaborative effort involving schools, parents/caregivers, policymakers, and community organizations to ensure that Alachua County can make significant progress in improving literacy outcomes for all residents.

The open-ended responses on surveys and feedback from interviews and focus groups were analyzed to create recommendations. Three overarching themes emerged during the analysis process: (1) Enhanced Awareness and Communication, (2) Focused Support, and (3) Expanded Professional Learning. Each larger theme is comprised of additional subthemes, which indicate possible next steps for an action plan that would benefit Alachua County children, youth, and adults. UF Lastinger Center, Children's Trust, and the committee supporting this work had multiple opportunities to review and refine the recommendations. Recommendations were prioritized based on their evidence base or research support, perceived importance, and practicality.
It is not expected that all recommendations will be completed during the next stages of literacy improvement efforts.

Following the literacy needs assessment, the recommendations listed below should be further investigated for feasibility and then prioritized by importance into an action plan. Resources will need to be allocated to engage in the prioritization process and then to support the action plan.

1. Enhanced Awareness and Communication

The first category of recommendations, Enhanced Awareness and Communication, refers to the need to coordinate existing resources, engage in efforts to widely advertise those resources, and promote additional literacy engagement strategies (see Figure 34). This could be done by understanding how existing organizations meet the needs of Alachua County residents, identifying where gaps still exist, and recommending how resources could be even better allocated. Given the large number of existing resources, this category also includes recommendations about how to help Alachua County residents learn about existing resources so they could be better utilized. Finally, this category includes several suggestions for engaging the community and families in literacy enrichment experiences.

Figure 34. *Enhanced Awareness and Communication*

1 Enhanced Awareness and Communication

- Increase Inter-Organization Alignment
- Create a Centralized Resource Hub
- Strengthen Community Engagement
- Promote Reading Engagement

A. **Increase Inter-Organization Alignment**
   a. **Map how the organizations listed in [Appendix A](#) serve Alachua County:** As shown in Appendix A, dozens of organizations currently serve children, youth, and adults in Alachua County. Yet, these efforts should be intentionally coordinated by a centralized organization (most likely the Children's Trust) to (1) understand which communities within Alachua County need the highest concentration of resources and (2) use coordinated strategies to meet those needs. The coordination effort would also help current organizations develop an awareness of each other's services so that if organizations serve an Alachua County resident but can't meet a particular need, they can recommend other possible resources.
   b. **Allocate existing resources effectively:** Require organizations and initiatives that receive funding from publicly-sourced dollars to provide evidence of impact (e.g., participant literacy gains). Require every organization that receives funding to have a well-developed logic model, which visually represents key program components. On an annual basis, each organization should be able to describe the tools it uses to measure who was served, how participants were served, and the outcomes that were attained.
   c. **Create or identify Community Advisory Boards:** Establish or identify existing advisory boards comprised of representatives from local businesses and organizations. Advisory boards should work with the centralized coordinating organization to provide insights and support for literacy initiatives, fostering community investment.

B. **Create a Centralized Resource Hub**
   a. **Develop a website and corresponding physical resource guide:** A centralized resource hub should be created to help Alachua County residents understand the resources provided in the county. The hub would contain information about available literacy programs, workshops, resources, and events. Examples of information that should be shared include book distribution programs (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, New Worlds Reading); free book and audiobook resources (Libby, Hoopla offered through Alachua County School District); and the organizations serving children, youth, and adults in Alachua County. Both online and physical versions of the resource guide should be easily accessible to Alachua County residents with

variation in literacy skills and technology access. Ensure the hub is accessible to families who speak languages other than English (at minimum, offer resources in Spanish).

b. **Develop an awareness campaign by promoting the hub through multiple channels:** Many websites like the proposed hub already exist in Alachua County (e.g., calendar of events on county, city, ACPS, and Chamber of Commerce websites). However, these sources were not frequently reported to be utilized by participants in the literacy needs assessment. The hub can provide a centralized location for information, which would be strengthened by an awareness campaign utilizing healthcare professionals, home-based and center-based childcare programs, school communication channels (such as emails, texts, and newsletters), afterschool programs, libraries, community events, social media, public transportation (RTS), and local news outlets.

c. **Promote and expand access to existing literacy resources, such as mobile libraries and book delivery programs:** Expand access to books and resources in various areas through mobile library services. Library services highlighted the need for more funding to expand outreach to rural areas. In addition, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (administered by Gainesville Thrives) and New Worlds Reading (administered by UF Lastinger Center) are two free book delivery programs, but not all families know about these valuable resources.

C. **Strengthen Community Engagement**

a. **Establish collaborations with local businesses:** Engage businesses, such as bookstores and others, in sponsoring literacy events for various age groups. One elected official suggested, "More collaboration between schools and local businesses could help fund literacy initiatives."

b. **Strengthen relationships with libraries:** Partner with libraries to offer joint programs, share resources, and promote literacy initiatives.

c. **Collaborate with community centers:** Work with community centers to provide literacy programs, access to resources, and support for families. One of the interviewed elected officials said, "Libraries, after-school programs, and community centers should be better integrated into the literacy strategy."

d. **Connect with faith-based organizations:** Partner with churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based organizations to reach families and provide literacy support. Encourage churches to maintain a lending library in their public space, supplemented by donations from other organizations when possible.

e. **Promote intergenerational literacy:** Host events where grandparents can read to children or share their personal stories. Create additional opportunities for older adults to volunteer in schools or community programs.

D. Promote Reading Engagement

a. **Organize public reading events:** Focus group participants discussed how they enjoy many of the free and engaging events in Alachua County. However, most expressed a desire for more education-focused events so that they and their children can learn *and* play. For example, host reading festivals, book fairs, or author visits to promote literacy and create a love of reading. Bring together authors, illustrators, storytellers, musicians, and other artists to celebrate the power of language and literature.

b. **Promote reading in public spaces:** Create "Reading Corners" or "Literacy Walls" in libraries, community centers, and public parks. Books can be distributed to offices through book drives. Books can also be purchased cheaply at Friends of the Library sales.

c. **Host family literacy nights at schools, faith-based organizations, and community organizations:** Organize events where families can participate in literacy activities together, such as reading aloud, storytelling, and craft activities.

d. **Hold book awards or reading contests:** Numerous people who participated in focus groups fondly remembered the Book It! program from when they were in school. People spoke about the need to incentivize reading and make it more fun for children and youth. School- or community-based book awards or reading contests would recognize students and community members who have achieved reading milestones.

2. Focused Support

The second recommendation, Focused Support, provides recommendations for specific groups of Alachua County residents (see Figure 35). These groups (children ages 0-5; English language learners; Black children, youth, and families; and adult learners) were included in this section based on the data presented and collected during the literacy needs assessment. This category also includes tutoring and family workshops as possible effective ways to meet existing needs.

Figure 35. *Focused Support*

2 **Focused Support**

- Support Early Learning and Intervention
- Support English Language Learners
- Support Black Students
- Support Adult Learners
- Support Access to Free or Low-Cost Tutoring
- Support Families through Workshops
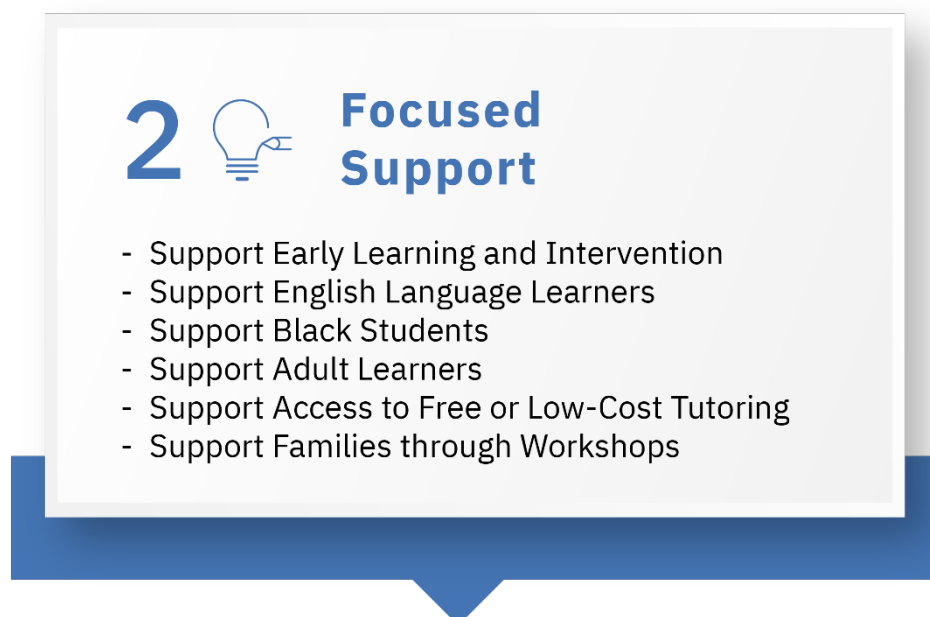
A. **Support Early Learning and Intervention**

a. **Invest more resources in early childhood literacy:** Early intervention before age six substantially reduces reading difficulties and improves long-term reading success (Snowling & Hume, 2011). Families need increased access to early childhood literacy assessments, speech and language screenings, and specialized interventions for children at risk for reading difficulties. New and existing programs, such as Help Me Grow, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY; Payne et al., 2020), North Central Florida Healthy Start, and NewboRN Home Visiting provide evidence-based and research-supported literacy strategies to support

parents and caregivers of young children in their homes. However, most programs have limited funding. Providing increased funding to these programs could support additional families and would have long-term impacts for Alachua County families and promote school readiness.

b. **Increase educator and parent/caregiver knowledge about early screening:** Early screening is vital to identify if children need additional support to gain needed language and literacy skills. Programs like Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) and the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County (ELCAC) provide much-needed screening for young children. Coordinated efforts by the health department, FDLRS, ELCAC, pediatrician offices, and ACPS could improve the number of children who are screened and are identified as eligible to receive early intervention. Organizations that provide early screening should communicate clearly with families the purpose of the screening, review the results, and discuss collaborative action steps to connect families to needed resources.

c. **Develop additional resources for families:** Resources, like UF's North Central Early Steps program, are needed to help families navigate early intervention programs and therapeutic services, including how families can request referrals from pediatricians, find in-network providers, submit claims to insurance, and develop the skills to serve as an advocate for their child or children.

B. **Support English Language Learners**

a. **Build proactive, asset-based relationships with families of English language learners:** Educators and staff in public and community organizations should use an assets-based approach to collaborating with families that values students' backgrounds and languages (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2021).

b. **Develop materials and resources in multiple languages:** Make sure resources, learning materials, assessments, and communication tools are available in multiple languages.

c. **Provide ongoing training on second language acquisition:** Ensure that educators and staff in public and community organizations understand the unique needs and challenges of English language learners.

C. **Support Black Students**

   a. **Allocate resources to provide systematic and explicit reading instruction and support to Black students:** In Alachua County, Black students would benefit from rigorous support to improve their reading success. Research over the past several decades indicates that nearly all children, no matter their race or other demographic factors, can meet grade-level reading expectations through systematic and explicit reading instruction during school and in outside-of-school programs, such as afterschool tutoring (Foorman et al., 2016; National Reading Panel, 2000). Aspects of explicit instruction that are beneficial using a gradual release of responsibility model and direct instruction of core literacy skills such as reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary, decoding, and sentence structure.

   b. **Provide ongoing training in asset-based and strength-based approaches:** Professionals in healthcare, education, and community organizations serving Black children and families should receive ongoing training that centers strengths-based perspectives, fosters high expectations, and recognizes the need to build strong relationships with and provide wrap-around supports for Black children and youth (Gatlin-Nash et al., 2021; Washington, 2021; Washington & Seidenberg, 2021).

   c. **Use materials that represent the lived experiences of Black children, youth, and adults:** Instructional materials, assignments, and books that reflect Black students' backgrounds and experiences are critical to engagement and motivation for reading (Tatum, 2006). Using materials that enable students to see themselves and developing and incorporating a deep understanding of students' background into instruction are just two suggestions (Washington, 2021).

   d. **Focus on meaningful efforts to improve school attendance for Black children and youth:** Engage in a listening tour with Black students and families to understand impediments to school attendance. Create a multifaceted plan to improve attendance based on the expressed needs of families and students (Freeman et al., 2018; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024).

D. **Support Adult Learners**
   a. **Advertise programs for adults with low literacy:** Local organizations currently provide literacy workshops, classes, and resources specifically designed for adults who need to improve their reading and writing skills. Examples include Alachua County Library District Literacy Program and Family Literacy Program, Santa Fe College, Community Health Equity Institute English Classes, Impact Program, Alachua County Adult Education (offered by ACPS), and Catholic Charities.
   b. **Use evidence-based instruction for adults with reading difficulties:** Adult reading education courses should be aware of, and adopt, evidence-based instructional strategies. Key considerations include the following: Conducting pre-instruction assessments to create profiles of learners' reading strengths and weaknesses; providing instruction in basic reading skills, such as phonemic awareness and decoding, when appropriate based on assessment results; and incorporating targeted instruction in fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies to address learners' specific needs (Kruidenier, 2002).
   c. **Provide and advertise computer skills programs for adults:** Adults need basic computer skills to complete internet searches, fill out forms online, and upload documents, among other necessary daily tasks. Computer skills and digital literacy are important for families who want to help children complete online homework or use digital literacy resources at home.
   d. **Offer additional English language support for adults:** Provide classes, tutoring, and resources to help English language learners improve their literacy skills. These classes should be focused on practical skills and communication, such job interviews, health appointments, and talking to their child's teacher.

E. **Support Access to Free or Low-Cost Tutoring**
   a. **Offer additional tutoring options:** High-dosage tutoring that is provided on school campuses before, during, or after the school day by well-trained staff has been shown to be the most effective form of tutoring (Nickow et al., 2024). Tutoring services can be offered at schools by trained paraprofessionals or certified teachers earning stipends. ACPS can utilize external funding sources, including Florida Tutoring Advantage, Titles I-IV,

AmeriCorps, or other community partners, to enhance existing tutoring services.

b. **Support existing organizations providing tutoring:** Identify organizations that are already providing tutoring but need extra resources. Recruit and train volunteers to provide literacy support to students. Volunteers can be effective in teaching foundational literacy skills, correcting reading errors, and fostering deep discussions about books when they are provided with high-quality training and structured lesson plans (Vadasy et al., 1997; Vadasy & Sanders, 2010). Additional volunteers may be recruited from student populations at the University of Florida or Santa Fe College.

F. **Support Families through Workshops**

a. **Build families' knowledge about supporting literacy learning at home:** Provide families with information and resources on how to support their child's literacy development at home. Healthcare providers can share resources with parents and caregivers and include early literacy in the programming for any prenatal and/or parenting groups they host. Early learning organizations and programs can host literacy workshops, offer at-home reading incentives, and provide access to literacy resources in multiple languages. ACPS can provide accurate examples of grade-level reading and writing goals at the beginning of each school year and host at least two workshops per school year to teach families about the literacy curriculum at each school and how they can help their child at home (e.g., teach parents/caregivers about UFLI so that when they help their children with homework, it is consistent with the methods learned at school).

3. Expanded Professional Learning

The third recommendation, Expanded Professional Learning, includes numerous recommendations for enhancing teaching experiences for and data-based decision making by early learning providers, community organization staff, and ACPS educators (see Figure 36).

Figure 36. *Expanded Professional Learning*
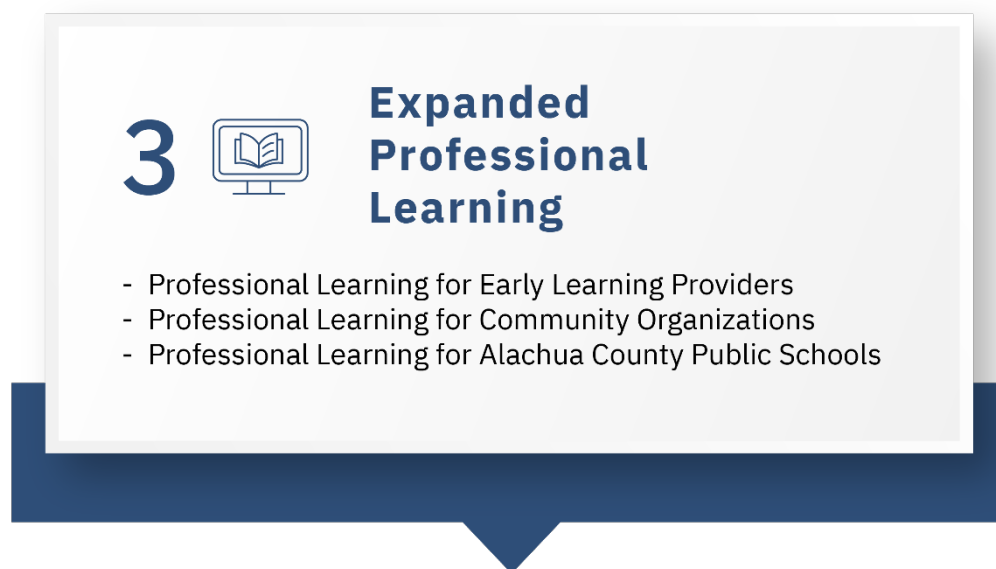
Professional Learning for Early Learning Providers

    A. Expand Professional Learning for Early Learning Educators
        a. Increase access to evidence-based professional learning opportunities: Provide more opportunities to ongoing professional learning opportunities on how to use effective practices to support emergent literacy development for children ages birth to five.
        b. Increase access to coaching: Provide increased opportunities for early learning educators to receive literacy coaching and mentoring to support curriculum implementation and effective practices. High-quality professional learning with coaching support improves teacher effectiveness, leading to stronger reading outcomes (Piasta et al., 2009).

    c. Increase access to job-embedded professional learning: Provide job-embedded literacy workshops with opportunities to plan, implement, and reflect on language and literacy support provided to young children (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

B. Develop a Culture of Data-Driven Decision Making

    a. Create a coordinated vision for using early learning data: Create and clearly articulate a vision for data use across Alachua County early learning providers and set goals based on developmentally appropriate practices that will lead to kindergarten readiness. Collaborate with ACPS in setting kindergarten readiness goals.

    b. Use data to improve VPK enrollment: VPK students appear to enter kindergarten with higher school readiness skills as compared to students who were not in VPK (see Figure 8), but VPK enrollment numbers remain low in Alachua County (see Figure 6). Examine existing data to create targeted strategies to increase availability and enrollment of VPK.

Professional Learning for Community Organizations

A. Provide Professional Learning for Community Providers

    a. Increase access to evidence-based professional learning opportunities: Train staff and volunteers of literacy resource organizations (including library staff) in how to use effective and relevant strategies for teaching reading or providing literacy-related support.

    b. Increase knowledge about how to measure impacts: Provide training for staff and volunteers of literacy resource organizations in how to measure outcomes, use assessment results to inform their programming, and tailor their approach to individual needs of the people they serve.

B. Develop a Culture of Data-Driven Decision Making

    a. Create a coordinated vision for using organization data: Create and clearly articulate a vision for data use for organizations across Alachua County. Collaborate with early learning providers and ACPS in setting up short and long-term literacy achievement goals.

Professional Learning for Alachua County Public Schools

A. Develop a Culture of Data-Driven Decision Making

  a. Create a coordinated vision for using student data: Clearly articulate a vision for data use across ACPS. Provide funding and procedures for reporting literacy outcome data by schools and student subgroups. Use the data for improvement efforts.

  b. Promote cross-departmental collaboration: Create a culture of collaboration between ACPS departments that are responsible for professional learning, curriculum implementation, and student data analysis.

B. Improve Professional Learning Opportunities for School and District Leaders

  a. Encourage school leaders to be reading instructional leaders: Ensure school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant principals) at all grade bands have the necessary knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices to provide support and technical assistance to teachers. Provide ongoing professional learning in a variety of modalities to support school leaders' busy schedules.

  b. Promote district use of data-based decision making: Educators, school leaders, and district leaders indicated there were gaps in district support for data-based decision making and sustaining a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Provide ongoing professional learning on MTSS and implementation science for district and school leaders. Collaborate with entities like the Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project to engage in professional learning and provide technical assistance to schools.

C. Improve Professional Learning Opportunities for K-5 Educators

  a. Improve small group instruction: Elementary students need increased exposure to reading connected text, not just word-level activities, during small group instruction (Foorman et al., 2016). Engage in available professional learning opportunities that enhance teachers' delivery of small group instruction using high-impact activities that build multiple domains of students' literacy knowledge, including fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

  b. Improve implementation of UFLI Foundations: Provide regular, ongoing centralized professional learning for new teachers and those requiring

additional implementation support in how to best use UFLI Foundations (Lane & Contessa, 2022). Incentivize attendance of professional learning sessions. Identify schools and classrooms with high proportions of students with foundational skill difficulties and use literacy coaches and implementation specialists to improve the quality and consistency of UFLI Foundations implementation. Model lessons for teachers and provide ongoing coaching cycles. Create and/or use cross-district pacing and alignment guides to ensure that students at early grade levels have exposure to UFLI Foundations lessons that are appropriate for their grade and not repeated across grade levels.

c. **Improve implementation of Benchmark Advance:** A lack of professional learning opportunities on the structure and implementation of Benchmark Advance (Benchmark Education, 2022) is contributing to perception and implementation difficulties for this core curriculum. Provide regular, ongoing centralized professional learning and job-embedded coaching for new teachers and those requiring additional implementation support. Emphasize key levers including the use of high-quality complex text, the importance of connecting reading with writing, differentiated instruction, and explicit and systematic teaching.

d. **Clarify the role of intervention coaches:** Participating educators indicated a variety of experiences with Instructional Intervention Coaches, ranging from helpful coaching cycles to an absence of direct support for teachers. District leadership should emphasize to school leaders that the role of the Instructional Intervention Coach is primarily providing direct coaching cycles with teachers.

e. **Employ additional certified reading specialists:** Low literacy rates among K-12 students indicate a need for more certified reading specialists to address high literacy needs.

D. **Improve Professional Learning Opportunities for 6-12 Educators**

a. **Improve implementation of English Language Arts curricula and programs:** Prioritize consistent district-wide professional learning in evidence-based instructional strategies for English Language Arts and content area teachers. Create and execute a comprehensive professional learning plan that emphasizes evidence-based systems for improving literacy instruction for all teachers (e.g., Strategic Instructional Model). Ensure all teachers across the district participate in both professional

learning sessions and follow up and incentivize participation in professional learning. Provide job-embedded coaching and implementation support. Finally, ensure that explicit vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction is integrated regularly into content area teaching.

E. Promote Collaboration and Peer Learning
   a. **Provide ongoing support for effective grade level and departmental planning:** Participating educators and school leaders felt that they lacked district support for implementing consistent and effective grade level and departmental planning meetings. Although any single planning and data-based problem-solving protocol has not been established as the most effective, it would be beneficial for schools to have access to centralized training, ongoing support, and evidence-based resources for structured planning.
   b. **Ensure consistency of new teacher mentor activities:** Participating educators reported a variety of mentorship experiences, ranging from absent mentors to high-quality experiences. ACPS offers a Beginning Teacher Program, but mentor/mentee experiences appear to vary depending on the school. Through initial training, communicate that the role of the mentor should entail: Establishing relationships with mentees using student data, conducting observations, and providing feedback to establish mentee's areas of growth (Hudson, 2016). Develop mentees' content knowledge and pedagogical skills.
   c. **Ensure that educators have access to a combination of online and in-person literacy professional learning opportunities:** Provide training options that accommodate their schedules and preferences. Utilize resources offered by the state of Florida**.**
   d. **Provide incentives for participation:** Offer stipends, release time, or other incentives to encourage educators to participate in professional development opportunities.
   e. **Create partnerships with experts:** Collaborate with universities and literacy experts to provide advanced training and consultation. Bringing in external expertise can enhance the quality of professional development and keep staff updated on the latest evidence-based practices.

f. **Develop a system for collecting and sharing feedback:** Gather input from teachers to identify areas for improvement and adjust professional development offerings accordingly.

F. **Train Educators in Effective Strategies for Supporting Students with Disabilities**
   a. **Provide professional learning on evidence-based practices for teaching students with differing needs:** Participating ESE teachers and service providers expressed the lack of dedicated professional learning offerings about specially designed instruction, IEP goal setting and monitoring, targeting curriculum/instruction to identified areas of weakness, grouping of students, and caseload management. The ESE department should ensure that ESE teachers have access to ongoing professional learning in these key topics. Include principles of explicit instruction, data-informed individualization, and selection of appropriate interventions in professional learning.
   c. **Attract ESE teachers:** Offer financial incentives to incoming teachers who are certified to instruct students with disabilities. Incentives can also be provided for existing teachers to become ESE certified.
   d. **Retain current ESE teachers:** The Alachua County Department of Exceptional Student Education, in conjunction with other departments, should collect data on teacher caseloads, schedules, and working conditions to develop a comprehensive long-term plan to address teacher retention. This plan should include initial intensive, job-embedded supports for new teachers and professional learning opportunities that encourage general education and exceptional student education teachers to work collaboratively to design and implement a continuum of instruction.

Conclusions and Next Steps

This literacy needs assessment provides a data-informed, community-centered analysis of literacy challenges and opportunities across Alachua County. With quantitative data from standardized assessments, attendance records, and survey responses; qualitative insights from focus groups, interviews, and community engagements; and a review of evidence-based and research-supported practices, this literacy needs assessment presents a holistic picture of literacy development from early childhood to adulthood.

Findings reveal both strengths and persistent disparities. Despite significant community engagement and the presence of evidence-based instructional practices, literacy proficiency remains below desired levels, particularly among Black students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged learners. Although targeted interventions have demonstrated promise, challenges such as curriculum misalignment and teacher professional development gaps hinder progress.

The key challenges that were identified include limited access to high-quality literacy resources, financial constraints, teacher retention issues, and inadequate instructional support for learners below grade level. Additionally, chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects certain student populations, magnifying literacy disparities. These findings align with existing research on disparities in literacy achievement.

This study underscores the importance of integrating qualitative insights with quantitative measures to inform targeted, community-centered literacy initiatives. The recommendations emphasize a three-pronged approach:
1. **Enhancing awareness and communication** through improved collaboration among stakeholders and a centralized literacy resource hub.
2. **Providing focused support** via increased funding for early literacy programs, expanded tutoring interventions, and targeted literacy efforts for ALL groups.
3. **Expanding professional learning opportunities** for educators, particularly in areas of differentiated instruction and literacy intervention strategies.

Moving forward, a multi-sector approach involving schools, community organizations, policymakers, and families will be crucial to ensuring long-term literacy improvements. The next steps include developing a comprehensive plan, securing funding, supporting high fidelity implementation of evidence-based literacy programs, and continually evaluating progress through data-informed decision-making (see Figure 37). By building stronger early literacy foundations, ensuring equal access to quality instruction, expanding adult learning opportunities, and advocating for policy-driven change, Alachua County can significantly improve literacy rates and educational success for all residents.

Figure 37. *Next Steps for Alachua County Literacy Improvements*

Develop comprehensive plan

Secure funding

Support high-fidelity implementation of evidence-based programming

Evaluate progress through data-informed decision making
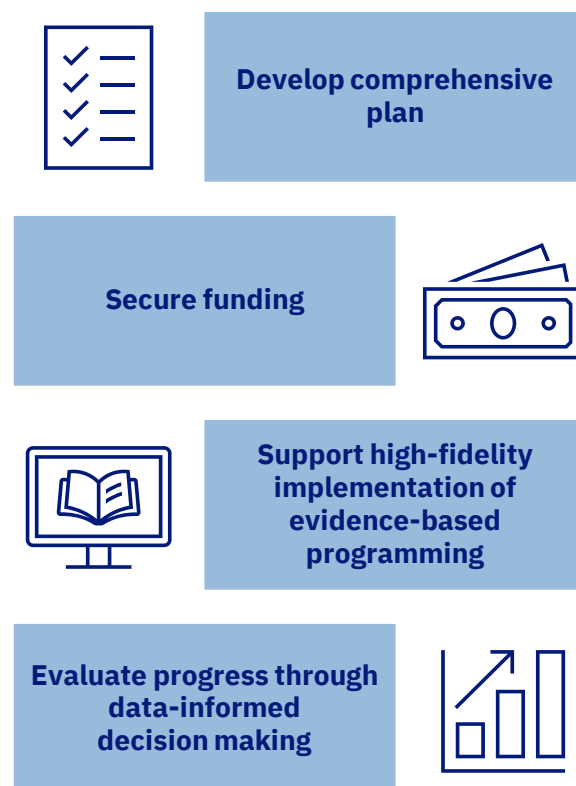
Appendix A

Organization List by Age Group

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Alachua County Public Schools HIPPY	ACPS Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an international evidence-based home visiting early childhood intervention program focused on parent-involved learning for preschoolers. The HIPPY model includes 3 years of home-based curriculum 30 weeks (about 7 months) a year, professional coordinator, staff of home visitors, role play instructional technique and home visits and group meetings. The curriculum includes letter knowledge, rhyming, phonemic awareness, comprehension skills and vocabulary development.	Early Learning
Alachua County Public Schools VPK	ACPS VPK provides early childhood education to students that live in Alachua County and are 4 years old.	Early Learning
Cade Museum	Cade Museum in Gainesville has a mission to transform communities by inspiring and equipping future inventors, entrepreneurs, and visionaries. For literacy education, the museum offers Little Sparks Program on site and has outreach classes at Episcopal Community Services (ECS) Head Start in Alachua County.	Early Learning

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County	The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County (ELCAC) serves as a resource to families and childcare providers.	Early Learning
Episcopal Children's Services (ECS4Kids)	ECS4Kids helps children in Northeast and Central Florida succeed in school and beyond. Through early childhood education programs like VPK, Head Start, and School Readiness, ECS4Kids offers crucial support and guidance to families seeking high-quality care and educational opportunities. For over 50 years, the mission of ECS4Kids has been to build a strong foundation for each child, ensuring they are prepared for lifelong learning and success.	Early Learning
Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS)	The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) serves Marion, Alachua, Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, and UF Lab School. FDLRS provides diagnostic, instructional, and technology support services to district exceptional education programs and families of students with disabilities.	Early Learning
Florida Healthy Start Parents as Teachers	The Florida Healthy Start program provides education, support and proven interventions to expecting and new families who are at risk of a poor birth outcome or delay in development.	Early Learning

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Gainesville Thrives	Gainesville Thrives works to promote tutoring and mentoring for kindergarten through high school students, as well as other services for expectant parents, parents and their infants, toddlers, and preschool children.	Early Learning
NewboRN Home Visiting	NewboRN Home Visiting is a free program offered to all Alachua County women who give birth in the county. Within a week after baby is born, a registered nurse visits the family at home to see how they are doing, share information and connect them to services and resources.	Early Learning
University of Florida North Central Early Steps	UF North Central Early Steps provides early intervention services for families of children ages birth to three years old who have or are at risk for a developmental delay. No income requirement is necessary to qualify for the program. Participation is voluntary.	Early Learning
United Way of North Central Florida – Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading	The Campaign for Grade Level Reading collaborates with schools, libraries, non-profits, and other community organizations to create a network of support for literacy. This includes working with local educators to align efforts and share resources aimed at improving literacy rates.	Early Learning, K-2

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Alachua County Library District Story Time, Summer Reading	The Alachua County Library District offers a range of literacy programs and services, including preliteracy programming (Baby Time, Story Time, and Music and Movement) to help young children develop early reading skills through reading, writing, singing, talking, and playing. Summer Reading Program for all ages promotes lifelong learning and combats summer slide.	Early Learning, K-12
Healthy Families Florida – Healthy Families Alachua	Healthy Families Florida is a nationally accredited home visiting program for expectant parents and parents of newborns experiencing stressful life situations. The program improves childhood outcomes and increases family self-sufficiency by empowering parents through education and community support.	Early Learning, Adults
AskMeno	AskMeno is a supplement to core curriculum (ELA, Social Studies) that reinforces learning and provides engaging practice and application in various skills.	PK-2
University of Florida Lastinger Center – New Worlds Reading	New Worlds Reading is Florida's free at-home literacy program designed to help eligible VPK through 5th grade students in Florida bolster literacy skills, build reading confidence, and foster a lifelong love of reading. Each month, eligible kids receive a free book tailored to their interests with resources and activities for caregivers and	PK-5

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	children to use together. New Worlds Reading was created by the Florida Legislature and is administered by the UF Lastinger Center for Learning. Book titles are selected in partnership with the Florida Department of Education and Scholastic. Books and materials are available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and braille.	
United Way of North Central Florida – Reading Pals Program	ReadingPals is a volunteer-based literacy mentorship program that provides early intervention for children in low- to moderate-income communities. The program pairs trained volunteers with young students to build foundational literacy skills, foster a love of reading, and promote social-emotional development through one-on-one mentorship.	PK-3
Kids Count – Afterschool Program	Kids Count supports foundational literacy skills by offering over 48 hours of 1-on-1 literacy tutoring using the UFLI curriculum, delivered by trained volunteers or staff. Text-rich learning environments, class libraries, and take-home books encourage students to read and build home libraries.	K-5
Rotary Club Reading Safari	The Rotary Club provides funding for the Santa Fe College Zoo's Reading Safari program.	K-5

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
University of Florida IFAS, Lastinger Center – Books and Cooks	Books and Cooks is a free literacy and nutrition program that is a partnership with the New Worlds Reading Initiative. Parents and children learn alongside other families in 7 weekly sessions. Families are supported through the learning of simple, at-home strategies that can be easily added to daily routines.	K-5
University of Florida Lastinger Center – Florida Tutoring Advantage	Florida Tutoring Advantage will provide Science of Reading and math tutoring best practices to school districts developing school-based K-5 tutoring services, offer free consultation, and distribute funding to augment tutoring programs. During the inaugural year of implementation, UF Lastinger Center will adopt a Plan, Prepare, Pilot model to inform the scaling up of the program.	K-5
North Central FL YMCA – Youth and Teen Enrichment Center	The Youth & Teen Center is a collaboration of youth-serving agencies (Motiv8U and the City of Gainesville) providing students with educational, cultural, and recreational activities. The Center is a special space at the Y dedicated to youth and teens' comfort and interests. It acts as a place for students to get homework done, hang out with friends, work on community service projects, engage in STEM-related activities, and more.	G5-11

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Dream On Purpose	Dream on Purpose is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering youth with a specific focus on young ladies between the ages of 11 to 18 to dream and to actualize their dreams.	G4-12
Education Equalizer Workshops	Education Equalizer works with middle through high school students and their families to demystify the college admittance process and provide scholars with the necessary tools to graduate. They provide ACT/SAT prep, college admission advice, FAFSA clinics, and more.	G6-12
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alachua County	Big Brothers Big Sisters is the nation's largest donor- and volunteer-supported mentoring network. The organization makes meaningful, monitored matches between adult volunteers ("Bigs") and children ("Littles"), ages 5 through young adulthood in communities across the country.	K-12
Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center	The Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center aims to provide free camp experiences that encourage the academic and physical health of children at no cost to them. Their emphasis is on providing opportunities for low income, youth in Alachua County to attend camp.	K-12
IGB Education	IGB Education provides mentoring programming for students in 5th-12th grade and	K-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	Enrichment programming for students K-5th grade.	
MOTIV8U of North Central Florida	MOTIV8U is a nonprofit training organization. provide life skills and social-emotional skills to agencies throughout the county and state that work with youth.	K-12
New Tech Now – Mobile MakerSpace STE2AM Engine	New Tech Now provides access to 3D equipment and training necessary to acquire new emerging tech skills in STEM fields emphasizing literacy and art.	K-12
Peak Literacy	Over the past five years, PEAK Literacy has built a successful model that identifies children who are behind in their reading development and pairs them with trained, nurturing volunteer tutors for one-to-one reading lessons that are short, focused, and effective. These high dosage tutoring lessons take place virtually or in person for 15 minutes a day, 3-5 days a week. Using the digital Great Leaps literacy software, attendance and progress are tracked to ensure fidelity and reading fluency growth.	K-12
The Education Foundation of Alachua County – Catalyst for Change Teacher Grant Program	Through Catalyst for Change, teachers are encouraged to apply for literacy grants that promote improving teaching instruction and access to resources to increase reading achievement scores and overall improve the learning experience for students.	K-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
University of Florida Multi-disciplinary Diagnostic & Training Program (MDTP)	UF MDTP serves K-12 children and youth who are at-risk for or identified as having complex medical, educational, socioemotional, and/or behavioral problems and are struggling academically.	K-12
William A. Stokes Community Center	The William A. Stokes Community Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit social service agency providing services to Micanopy, Alachua County, and surrounding areas.	K-12
Career Source	CareerSource North Central Florida provides career and business services with hundreds of employment opportunities.	K-12, Adults
Hands on Gainesville – Science Outreach Programs	Hands On Gainesville encourages a student as apprentice approach to learning, with the belief that learning by doing leads to better understanding. Students are encouraged to see science everywhere in the world and especially in their community.	K-12, Adults
University of Florida, Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences – UF Reading Program	The UF Reading Program provides evaluation services to diagnose reading disabilities throughout the year. During the summer, the program also provides reading intervention for students who have dyslexia.	K-12, Adults
Alachua County Library District	Alachua County Library District is an independent special district and the sole provider of public library services to citizens in Alachua County, serving urban and rural communities through 12 branch locations, two	Lifespan

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	bookmobiles, and multiple deposit collections.	
Alachua County Library District Library Partnership Branch	The Library Partnership Branch offers literacy programs for all ages, including weekly Preschool Story Time, bi-monthly Music and Movement Story Time, and passive activities like puzzles for elementary students. Early learning stations with touchscreen computers support preschool to 3rd-grade learners. STEAM programs for middle schoolers and teens integrate literacy, while the branch also serves as a tutoring center.	Lifespan
One Community Family Resource Center	A resource center in East Gainesville provides wrap-around services to meet the needs of those in the community.	Lifespan
Rural Women's Health Project	This program provides health education through community health workers; in-house referral line; community ID provision; case management. All services are provided to the Spanish speaking population.	Lifespan
SW Advocacy Group (SWAG)	SWAG's mission is to address the needs of the community by connecting individuals and families to services and resources through partnerships with agencies and community partners. SWAG serves eight neighborhoods in SW Gainesville: Majestic Oaks, Holly Heights, Harbor Cove, Pine Meadows, Hidden Oaks Mobile	Lifespan

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	Home Park, Gordon Manor, Tower Oaks/Tower Oaks Glen, and Linton Oaks. Literacy-related services include the following: early care and education; homework help for elementary and middle/high school students; and daily computer & Internet access.	
Alachua County Library District Adult Literacy Program	The Adult Literacy Program offers one-on-one tutoring for basic education learners as well as English Language Learners. The program is volunteer driven and offers other programming when available.	Adults
Catholic Charities	Catholic Charities offers an English Language Literacy Program designed to help anyone who is looking to learn or improve their skills in English comprehension and usage. The small and personal classroom environment is designed to meet multi-level needs and understanding of the English language. The twice weekly classes are taught by Certified ESL instructors with over twelve years of experience.	Adults
Community Health Equity Institute	Community Health Equity Institute provides English classes to help bridge the disparities that exist in the community and health sector. The organization aims to achieve this goal by providing resources that help reduce barriers to health and education in underserved communities.	Adults

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Emmanuel Mennonite Church	Emmanuel Mennonite Church offers free ESL courses on Saturday afternoon, serving member shows up Spanish speakers Haitian, Creole speakers, and speakers of other languages.	Adults
Impacto UF	Impacto UF is a student-led organization that seeks to recruit and train Spanish-speaking UF students to teach basic English to the non-English-speaking Hispanic/Latino community in Gainesville.	Adults
Santa Fe College Adult Basic Education	Santa Fe College provides Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED preparation, and ESOL.	Adults
University City Church of Christ	The University City Church of Christ English Partners program helps immigrants in developing effective communication skills in English. It offers free one-on-one English tutoring and free English study materials for individual language and reading levels, study, or job interests.	Adults
University of Florida Christian Campus House	UF's Christian Campus House's English Corner program is organized by a student group that welcomes people of all ages who want to practice speaking English.	Adults
University of Florida English Language Institute	UF's English Language Institute program primarily serves F1 and J1 and tourists and students who intend to study at US universities or colleges.	Adults

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
University of Florida Lastinger Center – Adult Professional Learning Programs	The University of Florida Lastinger Center is an innovation hub designed to equip educators of children birth through twelfth grade with evidence-based, practical support and professional development resources to enhance reading instruction; connect school districts to customized professional development, coaching, and instructional support; and engage students with innovative programs and initiatives that promote reading proficiency.	Adults
Williams Temple Church of God in Christ	Williams Temple COGIC - Offers an English language program to fulfill a practical community need. The lessons are designed to teach conversational English and provide opportunities for learners to practice speaking English in a relaxed environment. The program offers free intermediate/ advanced English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for adults on Zoom	Adults
Community Foundation of North Central Florida	The mission of Community Foundation of North Central Florida is to promote community transformation through the power of philanthropy.	Not Specified
Gainesville Chamber of Commerce	The activities of the Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce are executed around the vision to be a global hub of talent, innovation, and	Not Specified

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	opportunity in the Greater Gainesville Region.	
University of Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities	UF Center for Autism and Related Disabilities focuses on building the capacity of families and professionals to support individuals with autism and related disabilities, including literacy programming.	Not Specified

Organization List by Alphabetical Name

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Alachua County Library District	Alachua County Library District is an independent special district and the sole provider of public library services to citizens in Alachua County, serving urban and rural communities through 12 branch locations, two bookmobiles, and multiple deposit collections.	Lifespan
Alachua County Library District Story Time, Summer Reading	The Alachua County Library District offers a range of literacy programs and services, including preliteracy programming (Baby Time, Story Time, and Music and Movement) to help young children develop early reading skills through reading, writing, singing, talking, and playing. Summer Reading Program for all ages promotes lifelong learning and combats summer slide.	Early Learning, K-12
Alachua County Library District Adult Literacy Program	The Adult Literacy Program offers one-on-one tutoring for basic education learners as well as English Language Learners. The program is volunteer driven and offers other programming when available.	Adults
Alachua County Library District Library Partnership Branch	The Library Partnership Branch offers literacy programs for all ages, including weekly Preschool Story Time, bi-monthly Music and Movement Story Time, and passive activities like puzzles for elementary students. Early	Lifespan

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	learning stations with touchscreen computers support preschool to 3rd-grade learners. STEAM programs for middle schoolers and teens integrate literacy, while the branch also serves as a tutoring center.	
Alachua County Public Schools HIPPY	ACPS Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an international evidence-based home visiting early childhood intervention program focused on parent-involved learning for preschoolers. The HIPPY model includes 3 years of home-based curriculum 30 weeks (about 7 months) a year, professional coordinator, staff of home visitors, role play instructional technique and home visits and group meetings. The curriculum includes letter knowledge, rhyming, phonemic awareness, comprehension skills and vocabulary development.	Early Learning
Alachua County Public Schools VPK	ACPS VPK provides early childhood education to students that live in Alachua County and are 4 years old.	Early Learning
AskMeno	AskMeno is a supplement to core curriculum (ELA, Social Studies) that reinforces learning and provides engaging practice and application in various skills.	PK-2
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alachua County	Big Brothers Big Sisters is the nation's largest donor- and volunteer-supported mentoring network. The organization makes meaningful, monitored	K-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	matches between adult volunteers ("Bigs") and children ("Littles"), ages 5 through young adulthood in communities across the country.	
Cade Museum	Cade Museum in Gainesville has a mission to transform communities by inspiring and equipping future inventors, entrepreneurs, and visionaries. For literacy education, the museum offers Little Sparks Program on site and has outreach classes at Episcopal Community Services (ECS) Head Start in Alachua County.	Early Learning
Career Source	CareerSource North Central Florida provides career and business services with hundreds of employment opportunities.	K-12, Adults
Catholic Charities	Catholic Charities offers an English Language Literacy Program designed to help anyone who is looking to learn or improve their skills in English comprehension and usage. The small and personal classroom environment is designed to meet multi-level needs and understanding of the English language. The twice weekly classes are taught by Certified ESL instructors with over twelve years of experience.	Adults
Community Foundation of North Central Florida	The mission of Community Foundation of North Central Florida is to promote community transformation through the power of philanthropy.	Not Specified

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Community Health Equity Institute	Community Health Equity Institute provides English classes to help bridge the disparities that exist in the community and health sector. The organization aims to achieve this goal by providing resources that help reduce barriers to health and education in underserved communities.	Adults
Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center	The Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center aims to provide free camp experiences that encourage the academic and physical health of children at no cost to them. Their emphasis is on providing opportunities for low income, diverse youth in Alachua County to attend camp.	K-12
Dream On Purpose	Dream on Purpose is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering youth with a specific focus on young ladies between the ages of 11 to 18 to dream and to actualize their dreams.	G4-12
Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County	The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County (ELCAC) serves as a resource to families and childcare providers.	Early Learning
Education Equalizer Workshops	Education Equalizer works with middle through high school students and their families to demystify the college admittance process and provide scholars with the necessary tools to graduate. They provide ACT/SAT prep, college admission advice, FAFSA clinics, and more.	G6-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Emmanuel Mennonite Church	Emmanuel Mennonite Church offers free ESL courses on Saturday afternoon, serving member shows up Spanish speakers Haitian, Creole speakers, and speakers of other languages.	Adults
Episcopal Children's Services (ECS4Kids)	ECS4Kids helps children in Northeast and Central Florida succeed in school and beyond. Through early childhood education programs like VPK, Head Start, and School Readiness, ECS4Kids offers crucial support and guidance to families seeking high-quality care and educational opportunities. For over 50 years, the mission of ECS4Kids has been to build a strong foundation for each child, ensuring they are prepared for lifelong learning and success.	Early Learning
Florida Healthy Start Parents as Teachers	The Florida Healthy Start program provides education, support and proven interventions to expecting and new families who are at risk of a poor birth outcome or delay in development.	Early Learning
Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS)	The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) serves Marion, Alachua, Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, and UF Lab School. FDLRS provides diagnostic, instructional, and technology support services to district exceptional education programs and families of students with disabilities.	Early Learning

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Gainesville Chamber of Commerce	The activities of the Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce are executed around the vision to be a global hub of talent, innovation, and opportunity in the Greater Gainesville Region.	Not Specified
Gainesville Thrives	Gainesville Thrives works to promote tutoring and mentoring for kindergarten through high school students, as well as other services for expectant parents, parents and their infants, toddlers, and preschool children.	Early Learning
Hands on Gainesville – Science Outreach Programs	Hands On Gainesville encourages a student as apprentice approach to learning, with the belief that learning by doing leads to better understanding. Students are encouraged to see science everywhere in the world and especially in their community.	K-12, Adults
Healthy Families Florida – Healthy Families Alachua	Healthy Families Florida is a nationally accredited home visiting program for expectant parents and parents of newborns experiencing stressful life situations. The program improves childhood outcomes and increases family self-sufficiency by empowering parents through education and community support.	Early Learning, Adults
IGB Education	IGB Education provides mentoring programming for students in 5th-12th grade and Enrichment programming for students K-5th grade.	K-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Impacto UF	Impacto UF is a student-led organization that seeks to recruit and train Spanish-speaking UF students to teach basic English to the non-English-speaking Hispanic/Latino community in Gainesville.	Adults
Kids Count – Afterschool Program	Kids Count supports foundational literacy skills by offering over 48 hours of 1-on-1 literacy tutoring using the UFLI curriculum, delivered by trained volunteers or staff. Text-rich learning environments, class libraries, and take-home books encourage students to read and build home libraries.	K-5
MOTIV8U of North Central Florida	MOTIV8U is a nonprofit training organization. provide life skills and social-emotional skills to agencies throughout the county and state that work with youth.	G5-11
NewboRN Home Visiting	NewboRN Home Visiting is a free program offered to all Alachua County women who give birth in the county. Within a week after baby is born, a registered nurse visits the family at home to see how they are doing, share information and connect them to services and resources.	Early Learning
New Tech Now – Mobile MakerSpace STE2AM Engine	New Tech Now provides access to 3D equipment and training necessary to acquire new emerging tech skills in STEM fields emphasizing literacy and art.	K-12

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Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
North Central FL YMCA – Youth and Teen Enrichment Center	The Youth & Teen Center is a collaboration of youth-serving agencies (Motiv8U and the City of Gainesville) providing students with educational, cultural, and recreational activities. The Center is a special space at the Y dedicated to youth and teens' comfort and interests. It acts as a place for students to get homework done, hang out with friends, work on community service projects, engage in STEM-related activities, and more.	G5-11
One Community Family Resource Center	A resource center in East Gainesville provides wrap-around services to meet the needs of those in the community.	Lifespan
Peak Literacy	Over the past five years, PEAK Literacy has built a successful model that identifies children who are behind in their reading development and pairs them with trained, nurturing volunteer tutors for one-to-one reading lessons that are short, focused, and effective. These high dosage tutoring lessons take place virtually or in person for 15 minutes a day, 3-5 days a week. Using the digital Great Leaps literacy software, attendance and progress are tracked to ensure fidelity and reading fluency growth.	K-12
Rotary Club Reading Safari	The Rotary Club provides funding for the Santa Fe College Zoo's Reading Safari program.	K-5

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
Rural Women's Health Project	This program provides health education through community health workers; in-house referral line; community ID provision; case management. All services are provided to the Spanish speaking population.	Lifespan
Santa Fe College Adult Basic Education	Santa Fe College provides Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED preparation, and ESOL.	Adults
SW Advocacy Group (SWAG)	SWAG's mission is to address the needs of the community by connecting individuals and families to services and resources through partnerships with agencies and community partners. SWAG serves eight neighborhoods in SW Gainesville: Majestic Oaks, Holly Heights, Harbor Cove, Pine Meadows, Hidden Oaks Mobile Home Park, Gordon Manor, Tower Oaks/Tower Oaks Glen, and Linton Oaks. Literacy-related services include the following: early care and education; homework help for elementary and middle/high school students; and daily computer & Internet access.	Lifespan
The Education Foundation of Alachua County – Catalyst for Change Teacher Grant Program	Through Catalyst for Change, teachers are encouraged to apply for literacy grants that promote improving teaching instruction and access to resources to increase reading achievement scores and overall improve the learning experience for students.	K-12

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS)	The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) serves Marion, Alachua, Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, and UF Lab School. FDLRS provides diagnostic, instructional, and technology support services to district exceptional education programs and families of students with disabilities.	Early Learning
United Way of North Central Florida – Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading	The Campaign for Grade Level Reading collaborates with schools, libraries, non-profits, and other community organizations to create a network of support for literacy. This includes working with local educators to align efforts and share resources aimed at improving literacy rates.	Early Learning, K-2
United Way of North Central Florida – Reading Pals Program	Reading Pals partners with local schools and afterschool programs to provide weekly mentorship, literacy resources, and instruction, fostering students' love for reading and social-emotional skills. Volunteers, including community members and university students, dedicate over 16 hours annually to connect with students, share books, and explore new topics, building a strong foundation for literacy and educational growth.	PK-12
University City Church of Christ	The University City Church of Christ English Partners program helps immigrants in developing effective communication skills in English. It offers free one-on-	Adults

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	one English tutoring and free English study materials for individual language and reading levels, study, or job interests.	
University of Florida Christian Campus House	UF's Christian Campus House's English Corner program is organized by a student group that welcomes people of all ages who want to practice speaking English.	Adults
University of Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities	UF Center for Autism and Related Disabilities focuses on building the capacity of families and professionals to support individuals with autism and related disabilities, including literacy programming.	Not Specified
University of Florida, Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences – UF Reading Program	The UF Reading Program provides evaluation services to diagnose reading disabilities throughout the year. During the summer, the program also provides reading intervention for students who have dyslexia.	K-12, Adults
University of Florida English Language Institute	UF's English Language Institute program primarily serves F1 and J1 and tourists and students who intend to study at US universities or colleges.	Adults
University of Florida IFAS, Lastinger Center – Books and Cooks	Books and Cooks is a free literacy and nutrition program that is a partnership with the New Worlds Reading Initiative. Parents and children learn alongside other families in 7 weekly sessions. Families are supported through the learning of simple, at-home strategies that can be easily added to daily routines.	K-5

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
University of Florida Lastinger Center – Adult Professional Learning Programs	The University of Florida Lastinger Center is an innovation hub designed to equip educators of children birth through twelfth grade with evidence-based, practical support and professional development resources to enhance reading instruction; connect school districts to customized professional development, coaching, and instructional support; and engage students with innovative programs and initiatives that promote reading proficiency.	Adults
University of Florida Lastinger Center – Florida Tutoring Advantage	Florida Tutoring Advantage will provide Science of Reading and math tutoring best practices to school districts developing school-based K-5 tutoring services, offer free consultation, and distribute funding to augment tutoring programs. During the inaugural year of implementation, UF Lastinger Center will adopt a Plan, Prepare, Pilot model to inform the scaling up of the program.	K-5
University of Florida Lastinger Center – New Worlds Reading	New Worlds Reading is Florida's free at-home literacy program designed to help eligible VPK through 5th grade students in Florida bolster literacy skills, build reading confidence, and foster a lifelong love of reading. Each month, eligible kids receive a free book tailored to their interests with resources and activities for caregivers and	PK-5

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	children to use together. New Worlds Reading was created by the Florida Legislature and is administered by the UF Lastinger Center for Learning. Book titles are selected in partnership with the Florida Department of Education and Scholastic. Books and materials are available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and braille.	
University of Florida North Central Early Steps	UF North Central Early Steps provides early intervention services for families of children ages birth to three years old who have or are at risk for a developmental delay. No income requirement is necessary to qualify for the program. Participation is voluntary.	Early Learning
University of Florida Multi-disciplinary Diagnostic & Training Program (MDTP)	UF MDTP serves K-12 children and youth who are at-risk for or identified as having complex medical, educational, socioemotional, and/or behavioral problems and are struggling academically.	K-12
William A. Stokes Community Center	The William A. Stokes Community Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit social service agency providing services to Micanopy, Alachua County, and surrounding areas.	K-12
Williams Temple Church of God in Christ	Williams Temple COGIC - Offers an English language program to fulfill a practical community need. The lessons are designed to teach conversational English and provide opportunities for	Adults

Organization Name	Program Description	Age Groups
	learners to practice speaking English in a relaxed environment. The program offers free intermediate/ advanced English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for adults on Zoom	

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Alachua County Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment

Supplemental materials compiled by the

University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning

in conjunction with

**Children's Trust of Alachua County,
Alachua County Board of County Commissioners,
Alachua County Public Schools, and
Citizens of Alachua County**

CHILDREN'S TRUST
OF ALACHUA COUNTY

UF | **Lastinger Center for Learning**
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

Contents

Supplemental Materials

The following materials were assembled to provide critical supporting data, research, and contextual information to inform decision-making in literacy improvement efforts in Alachua County. These materials were compiled in collaboration with key local stakeholders and include committee meeting summaries; relevant web-based resources; early learning and K-12 literacy data; survey, focus group and interview protocols; and expanded findings and recommendations. In addition, supplemental spreadsheets were created that include school-level data from Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS) and survey data from local organizations that provide literacy-related services.

These supplemental materials were also provided to enhance the transparency, depth, and applicability of the findings from the literacy needs assessment conducted by UF Lastinger Center. The data and analysis of early learning and K-12 literacy outcomes provide a foundation for understanding current literacy trends, whereas committee meeting documentation offers insights into stakeholder discussions and strategic planning efforts. The survey, interview, and focus group protocols in this document were used to support broad community engagement and to capture diverse perspectives from educators, organizations, local officials, parents, and students.

Collectively, these materials were designed to further ensure that literacy stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, and community organizations—have access to comprehensive, data-driven insights to guide targeted interventions and improve literacy outcomes across Alachua County.

UF LASTINGER/CTAC/COMMITTEE MEETINGS

As noted in the full report, the Children's Trust and UF Lastinger Center collaborated on a comprehensive literacy needs assessment to improve literacy in Alachua County from birth through adulthood. Key partners who engaged in the literacy needs assessment included the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, School Board of Alachua County (SBAC), and Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS). Several community organizations provided guidance on this project, serving on the literacy needs assessment committee, including Alachua County Library District, AskMeno, Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center, the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Episcopal Children's Services, Florida Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Gainesville Thrives, Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, One Community Health and Wellness Center, Peak Literacy, Sunshine Moss, UF Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, UF College of Education, UF Literacy Institute, and the United Way of North Central Florida.

Monthly meetings were held with representatives and staff members from the organizations listed above. UF Lastinger Center provided updates using the same format each month: presentation detailing the literacy needs assessment progress to date and break out rooms to have small group discussions about key topics. The slide decks are linked below.

August Committee (small group discussion was to review open-ended survey feedback): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/19Lrzngvumi6QT0ZTaYnKD3nBeGpfe9qRiPNHWZ4x0UU/edit?usp=sharing

September Committee (small group discussion was to provide feedback on focus group protocol): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1KVwV1I6jAiuQ5ZLq1KoR99wDZEku6t0e-zaqnzclpEE/edit?usp=sharing

October Committee (small group discussion was to review focus group and survey data): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-1XISfR8DcM4gJTwV7Tdl8hq34Emk4V6Wu7HWOOYFU4/edit?usp=sharing

November Committee (small group discussion was to review a draft appendix detailing community organizations): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1qep4nx_gxtkMRAyT6aNco9QzirxvOZ_TCsMIKv4IAfI/edit?usp=sharing

November Slide Deck for Local Officials (this meeting was to share information with local elected officials):
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1_HuXXroBDQcZkwNyqaxYwu3i2zMoI1i0gPzhO4axEkU/edit?usp=sharing

December Committee (small group discussion was to review draft recommendations):
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10BbNKtDR-B3-RPRCfPTHPN--nCMIWsTN0T9S3fM8FH4/edit?usp=sharing

January Committee (small group discussion was to prioritize draft recommendations, review draft report, and review district data):
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-tUEsEKvvX7pocIDXU1vXv4EzI4O_kehuEQNep5sN6s/edit?usp=sharing

USEFUL WEBSITES

Publicly-available data are excellent sources of information to build the story of how Alachua County educational entities, organizations, and city/county resources serve residents of the county. The following data sources were accessed by UF Lastinger Center members of the literacy needs assessment. Where possible, data were compiled for the report. However, not all of the possible data were presented in the report because it was not intended to be a lengthy report (and thus hard to read/understand). The following websites should be reviewed at least annually to understand change over time in educational achievement and school characteristics.

Public Sources of Data:
- Florida Department of Education Advanced Reports, Description of VPK Assessments, Kindergarten Readiness, FAST Star Early Literacy, Assessment and Standards Alignment, Assessment Cut Scores
- Florida Department of Health Charts
- School Board of Alachua County BoardDocs
- City of Alachua Education Taskforce Report
- U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection and National Assessment of Educational Progress
- U.S. Census Bureau Alachua County Profile and 2023 Estimates
- Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Book
- Florida Department of Children and Families Childcare Provider Search
- Head Start CLASS Scores and CLASS Requirements
- Fun 4 Gator Kids
- Previous Alachua Literacy Work Conducted by Dr. Sunshine Moss, Lectio Institute

When starting the project, UF Lastinger Center wished to include a definition of literacy that was accessible to anyone participating in the project or reading the report. As mentioned in the full report, the definition of literacy was as follows: the ability to read, write, speak, and listen to fully participate in an information-rich society. This definition was gleaned from reviewing several of the websites below that offered perspectives on the concept:
- UNESCO
- NCES
- OECD
- National Council of Teachers of English
- Vermont Department of Education
- Beecher Multiple Perspectives on Literacy

Comprehensive literacy initiatives have occurred across the United States. Studying these initiatives may be useful as part of the next phase of literacy improvement:

- Guilford County, NC: Ready for School, Ready for Life
- Mecklenburg County, NC: Read Charlotte
    - A recent post was written by Read Charlotte's Executive Director, Munro Richardson, about developing unconstrained skills to reduce the opportunity gap
- Sacramento County, CA: Early Literacy Support Block (ELSB) Grant

Website offering suggestions for multi-sector resources to help build literacy:

- Excel in Ed: Early Literacy Matters
- U.S. Department of Education: Comprehensive Literacy State Development
- State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) and the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN): Implementation Science Hub

Websites offering reviews of materials or programs:

- EdReports: Review of K-12 ELA instructional materials
- Evidence for ESSA: Evidence-based PK-12 programs
- Proven Tutoring: Clearinghouse for evidence-based tutoring programs

UF Lastinger Center offers numerous programs to support literacy achievement, educator, professional learning, and district-based tutoring:

- Early learning
- K-12 literacy
- Book delivery
- Tutoring

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING DATA

In the full report, existing data was analyzed and added as tables and figures to help "tell the story" about the need to improve literacy skills in Alachua County, and to create some ideas about how this might be possible. Below, as in the full report, we present data on early learning (children ages 0-5) and K-12. In some cases, these data were presented in the full report as figures to aid interpretation and ease of viewing. Below, these data are presented as tables, which tend to include more information than the figures in the full report.

Early Learning Data

The tables below are largely represented in the full report but are included here to inform how to make improvements in language and literacy for early learning educators and their students.

Table 1. *Child Participation in VPK, Alachua and Florida, 2020 through 2024*

	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Alachua	723	25.4%	177	6.3%	288	10.1%	328	12.2%	379	N/A
Florida	65,570	27.8%	50,403	21.5%	59,045	25.9%	63,304	28.0%	65,729	N/A

Source: Florida Department of Health

Table 2. *School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry, All Students, Alachua County and Florida*

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Alachua	56.9%	58.4%	54.8%	48.6%	52.5%
Florida	53.4%	56.9%	50.0%	49.2%	51.0%

Source: Florida Department of Health

Table 3. *School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry, including by VPK, Alachua County, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023*

		Fall 2022		Fall 2023	
		# Test Takers	% "Ready for Kindergarten"	# Test Takers	% "Ready for Kindergarten"
Alachua	Kindergarten Results from BOY FAST	2,047	49%	1,934	53%
	VPK Completers (Attended =>70% VPK)	854	60%	947	63%
	Kindergarten Students Who Did Not Attend VPK/ Unmatched to a VPK Record[1]	977	42%	686	46%
Florida	Kindergarten Results from BOY FAST	188,511	49%	186,417	51%
	VPK Completers (Attended =>70% VPK)	92,794	62%	101,348	64%
	Kindergarten Students Who Did Not Attend VPK/ Unmatched to a VPK Record	79,325	37%	65,520	36%

Source: BOY = beginning of year. [FAST 2022, 2023 data](#). [1] Children who were not in VPK may have experienced other forms of childcare.

Table 4. *% of Students "Ready for Kindergarten" Based on FAST Scores at Kindergarten Entry, including by VPK, Alachua County, Fall 2022 and Fall 2023*

		Fall 2022	Fall 2023
		% "Ready for Kindergarten"	% "Ready for Kindergarten"
Alachua	All Students	49%	53%
	VPK Completers	60%	63%
	VPK Non-Attenders	42%	46%
Florida	All Students	49%	51%
	VPK Completers	62%	64%
	VPK Non-Attenders	37%	36%

Source: BOY = beginning of year. [FAST 2022, 2023 data](#).

Note: "All Students" refers to all children who took beginning of year (BOY) FAST assessment at the beginning of kindergarten. "VPK Completers" refers to children who attended =>70% of VPK the year before kindergarten. "VPK Non-Attenders" refers to children in kindergarten who did not attend VPK or were unmatched to a VPK record; these children may have experienced home care or other forms of childcare.

Table 5. *Quality by Provider Type, Alachua, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022*

Provider Type	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
Child Care Facility	5.65	5.77	3.67	5.53	5.62	3.75
Family Child Care Home	5.17	5.23	3.30	5.35	5.81	3.46
Public School	5.88	6.00	4.71	5.17	5.58	3.63

Source: Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County

Table 6. *Quality by Provider Type, Alachua, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024*

Provider Type	2022-2023			2023-2024		
	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support	Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
Child Care Facility	6.01	5.78	3.75	5.80	5.70	3.66
Family Child Care Home	5.81	5.54	2.67	5.82	5.61	3.47
Public School	5.96	5.88	4.10	6.15	5.95	4.11

Source: Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County

K-12 Data from Alachua County Public Schools

As with early learning data, the K-12 data presented below are more detailed than what is in the full report. Please also see the spreadsheet of ACPS data aggregated to the school level.

Table 7. *Percent of Students At or Above Grade-Level Reading Proficiency Rates (score 3 or higher), Alachua and Florida, 2020-21 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua
3rd grade	54%	52%	53%	50%	51%	50%	55%	56%
4th grade	52%	51%	57%	55%	52%	49%	53%	51%
5th grade	54%	50%	55%	51%	50%	51%	55%	51%
6th grade	52%	51%	52%	51%	50%	49%	54%	52%
7th grade	48%	50%	48%	51%	47%	46%	50%	52%
8th grade	52%	58%	49%	52%	48%	48%	51%	50%
9th grade	50%	56%	51%	57%	48%	51%	53%	54%
10th grade	51%	59%	48%	51%	47%	50%	53%	52%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Table 8. *Third Grade Reading (At or Above Grade Level) by Student Subgroups, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua
Total % of students	54%	52%	53%	50%	51%	50%	55%	56%
Race/ethnicity								
American Indian	52%	*	49%	*	47%	*	53%	*
Asian	75%	76%	75%	75%	74%	77%	76%	78%
Black	37%	29%	37%	27%	37%	26%	42%	33%
Hispanic/Latino	51%	54%	49%	49%	47%	50%	50%	58%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	52%	-	55%	-	49%	-	59%	*
White	67%	70%	65%	67%	63%	65%	67%	74%
Two or more races	59%	51%	58%	51%	59%	63%	62%	62%
Not reported race	33%	23%	24 %	*	25%	21%	26%	37%
Economically disadvantaged	44%	34%	43%	32%	42%	35%	47%	42%
Students with disabilities	29%	23%	29%	21%	28%	26%	32%	27%
Current English Language Learner	22%	21%	24%	23%	21%	19%	24%	30%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Note: When the number of students is less than 10, data are suppressed and noted by an asterisk (*).
When the number of students is not provided, data are noted by a minus sign (-).

Table 9. *Student Enrollment and Attendance, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua
Total Enrollment	3,140,340	32,244	3,212,177	32,639	3,235,479	32,781	3,153,549	31,516
% Students Absent =>21 Days	17%	16%	21%	19%	19%	19%	20%	20%
% Students Absent =>10%	25%	24%	32%	30%	31%	30%	31%	32%

Source: [Florida Department of Education](#)

Table 10. *On-Time Twelfth Grade High School Graduation Rates, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Alachua	87%	86%	84%	84%
Florida	90%	87%	88%	90%

Source: [Florida Department of Health](#)

Table 11. *On-Time Twelfth Grade High School Graduation Rates by Student Subgroups, Alachua and Florida, 2020-2021 through 2023-2024*

	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua	Florida	Alachua
Total % of students	90%	87%	87%	86%	88%	84%	89.7%	84%
Race/ethnicity								
American Indian	89%	*	86%	*	85%	*	87%	*
Asian	98%	97%	96%	99%	97%	98%	97%	98%
Black	87%	83%	82%	77%	83%	74%	85%	76%
Hispanic/Latino/a	89%	84%	86%	84%	87%	84%	89%	86%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	90%	*	87%	*	87%	*	92%	*
White	92%	89%	91%	90%	91%	90%	92%	88%
Two or more races	90%	84%	88%	88%	88%	86%	90%	82%
Economically disadvantaged	87%	81%	83%	78%	84%	75%	86%	76%
Students with disabilities	82%	77%	84%	75%	86%	79%	87%	76%
Current English Language Learner	86%	85%	73%	74%	76%	74%	81%	79%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Note: When the number of students is less than 10, data are suppressed and noted by an asterisk (*).

When the number of students is not provided, data are noted by a minus sign (-).

FOCUS GROUP, INTERVIEW & OPEN-ENDED SURVEY DATA

The following data has been systematically compiled, analyzed, and categorized to offer a more comprehensive understanding of literacy needs and opportunities in Alachua County. While it is not a complete representation of the entire needs assessment data set, it provides a meaningful overview of the county-wide literacy landscape and highlights key challenges, growth opportunities, and potential strategies for improvement.

Data Analyses

The data analysis for this project involved a systematic examination of qualitative data collected from various stakeholders, including community participants, organizations, educators, and students. Open-ended survey responses were compiled into Excel spreadsheets, while detailed notes and transcripts were generated from virtual and in-person focus groups and interviews. To facilitate a structured and comprehensive analysis, generative AI tools provided by the University of Florida (UF), specifically UF's GPT-4 model, were utilized to identify patterns, categorize responses, and generate thematic summaries.

The analysis process began with the de-identification of transcripts and survey data to ensure participant confidentiality. These datasets were then organized by data type (open-ended survey responses, focus groups, and interviews) and by respondent group, which included families and community members, ACPS teachers and district staff, students, committee and community organization staff members, and elected officials. Files were uploaded into the AI tools in their respective categories, and tailored prompts were used to extract key insights. The prompts directed the AI to analyze responses, identify strengths and challenges, and summarize recommendations for improving literacy skills. The following text is an example of a prompt used in the analysis:

"The attached files contain interview [or 'focus group'] transcripts [or 'a spreadsheet of survey responses']. Analyze the text of each file, categorize and summarize what is working, what challenges exist, and what solutions are recommended to improve literacy. The analysis should focus exclusively on the provided transcripts [or 'responses']. For each category, list direct quotes from respondents separately. The analysis should be based on a cross-examination of all transcripts [or 'responses']."

Using this approach, the AI tool generated reports that categorized the data into key themes based on recurring patterns. The reports included direct quotes from survey responses, interviews, and focus groups to substantiate the themes that were identified.

What's Working to Improve Literacy

What Works for Families and Community Members

Children's Independent Literacy Activities – Children's independent engagement with literacy is another key factor in literacy development. Survey participants highlighted activities such as independent reading, creative writing, storytelling, and educational games. These activities help strengthen comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"My child enjoys writing their own short stories and sharing them with us."*
2. *"My son does the UFLI pages. He reads a passage on one side, and on the other side, it asks him to tell about the beginning of the story, the middle of the story, or the end of the story."*
3. *"They play word games that reinforce spelling and vocabulary skills."*
4. *"Independent reading has helped my child build confidence in literacy."*
5. *"Journaling every day has improved my child's ability to express thoughts clearly."*
6. *"My child enjoys using reading apps that turn stories into interactive experiences."*
7. *"We encourage book discussions where they summarize what they read."*
8. *"He has little notebooks where he can trace the letters to learn how to write them correctly. He also has dry-erase boards."*
9. *"Using apps that turn reading into interactive activities keeps my child engaged."*
10. *"Storytelling with their siblings has enhanced their imagination and language skills."*
11. *"Reading graphic novels has made reading more enjoyable for my child."*

Community Library Support – Community libraries provide essential support for literacy development by offering structured learning opportunities, access to reading materials, and community engagement. Participants identified public library programs and events as critical resources that enhance children's reading skills and cultivate a culture of literacy by offering free book access, organizing reading initiatives, and fostering reading habits among children.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Library reading programs have been instrumental in my child's literacy growth."*
2. *"The Literacy Department at Millhopper Library has volunteers team up with adults who need literacy help for one-on-one tutoring appointments."*
3. *"Our local library offers free books and interactive reading sessions for young readers."*
4. *"The library has different challenges that kids can do. Before my six-year-old started kindergarten, she completed the 'A Thousand Books Before Kindergarten' challenge. I'm working on my four-year-old to complete that."*
5. *"We visit the library weekly to borrow books and participate in reading events."*

6. *"Our local library's story time sessions have helped my child develop an interest in books."*
7. *"Being able to borrow books for free from the library has been a game-changer."*
8. *"Access to diverse reading materials through the library has expanded my child's vocabulary."*
9. *"My child enjoys picking out their own books at the library, which encourages independence in reading."*
10. *"Summer reading programs at the library help keep children engaged in literacy activities."*
11. *"The library has resources like story-time programs and book-loaning services."*
12. *"Public libraries offer events and initiatives to support literacy."*
13. *"The library partnership had a summer reading program."*
14. *"Library tutoring programs have given my child the extra support they need to improve literacy skills."*
15. *"The Alachua Library District..."I've seen an offering of a virtual tutor to help your child with reading, math, science, history, and it has time blocks."*

Community-Based Literacy Programs and Support – Participants also reported that programs such as HIPPY and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library contributed to children's early literacy development by providing free books and interactive Storytime sessions that engage young readers. In addition, community-based literacy initiatives—including public reading events, literacy workshops, and school-supported programs—were highlighted as valuable tools for parents seeking to support their children's literacy development. Participants expressed that these initiatives not only provide critical resources but also reinforce the importance of reading and writing in daily life.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Community reading groups make literacy a fun and social experience."*
2. *"Mentorship programs help struggling readers get the support they need."*
3. *"Free book distribution programs ensure every child has access to books."*
4. *"Volunteers reading with children in after-school programs makes a big impact."*
5. *"Public storytelling events help children develop listening and comprehension skills."*
6. *"Summer slide camps, free of charge or summer school, and early testing for dyslexia and gifted students."*
7. *"My child attends a literacy-focused tutoring program twice a week, and we've seen major improvements."*
8. *"Extra tutoring support outside of school has made a noticeable difference in my child's reading confidence."*
9. *"Family reading nights help reinforce literacy as a shared activity."*
10. *"Local volunteers host reading sessions for children who need extra support."*
11. *"Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has provided my child with books that we otherwise couldn't afford."*

12. *"Community book drives provide books to families who may not afford them."*
13. *"We participate in library reading challenges that keep my child motivated to read more."*
14. *"Community book drives and free literacy events have been instrumental in encouraging reading at home."*
15. *"Aces in Motion provides students with structured academic support."*
16. *"Peak Literacy provides 20-minute sessions 3-5 days a week to help students improve their reading levels."*
17. *"Healthy Families provided resources for families to support literacy development."*
18. *"Big Brothers Big Sisters provides mentorship and support."*
19. *"Peak Literacy offers digital tutoring sessions."*
20. *"The New World Reading program involves my six-year-old, and my four-year-old uses the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Both of these programs encourage them to read because they get something in the mail, and they're excited to see what it is about."*
21. *"Girls Place after school. It's a specialized aftercare program that Children's Trust funds. They provide a reading mentor who meets with her for 30 minutes every week to read."*
22. *"The Books and Cooks program that just started."*
23. *"SWAG Resource Center... they help with everything, from after-school programs for the children to food assistance, rental and utility assistance, and they have a clothing closet."*
24. *"Beyond the Bell tutoring was probably the best support I saw so far."*
25. *"Social Security has better resources. For instance, next Thursday, he has speech therapy outside of school."*
26. *"My 2-year-old is enrolled in the HIPPY program through the school board, which involves activities and books."*
27. *"[Naming community programs and organizations they used] Take Stock in Children, which I started in 7th grade, Kids Count program, and Girls Who Code club at Eastside."*
28. *"My son goes to the Boys and Girls Club after Terwilliger, and there's tutoring available there too."*
29. *"The community center offers programs, homework help, and a library where I have access to books for free."*
30. *"New World's Reading program sends out a shipment of 4 or 5 books for free every school year."*
31. *"Dolly Parton's Imagination Library sends books for kids monthly."*
32. *"Read with the Dog program at the library helps create a stress-free environment for kids to learn how to read."*
33. *"United Way's Reading Pals program teams up adults and kids to be reading buddies."*
34. *"We use the New Worlds Reading program where they send books and items through the mail."*
35. *"Humana provided tutoring over the phone, which didn't help. Phone calls are not effective for a kid."*

Digital and Online Literacy Tools – Technology-based tools were frequently mentioned as valuable resources for literacy development. Parents and educators cited the use of digital reading programs, educational apps, and interactive software that help children improve their reading and comprehension skills. Participants noted that such resources are critical in sustaining their children's motivation and in reinforcing literacy skills outside of school settings. These tools provide personalized learning experiences which make reading more engaging and accessible.

Representative Quotes:

1. *"We also use ABC Mouse, which helps with sight words for my six-year-old and with my four-year-old learning letters and sounds."*
2. *"I also signed him up for ABC Mouse to try and make learning more engaging."*
3. *"We started with Hooked on Phonics before he started school."*
4. *"We used ABC Mouse and Starfall, doing lots of alphabet and learning games and starting off with Bob Books."*
5. *"My son does the UFLI pages. He reads a passage on one side, and on the other side, it asks him to tell about the beginning of the story, the middle of the story, or the end of the story."*
6. *"They've also used some reading apps, such as iReady."*
7. *"His teacher pushes for them to get on a program, I think it's called Reading Excel or iExcel. He's able to do reading comprehensions and lessons, and he gets points and awards through that with the computer that the school provides."*
8. *"Subscription to ABC Mouse and I station for language arts and reading activities."*
9. *"Fun 4 Gator Kids provides social media updates on activities and resources for younger children."*
10. *"He loves words and uses ABC Mouse fairly regularly. A lot of the stuff he watches on YouTube involves words, numbers, and number blocks."*
11. *"We use the ClassDojo app to send messages and ask about her progress and any issues."*
12. *"Utilize school resources like the school-issued Chromebooks with learning apps."*
13. *"My child enjoys using reading apps that turn stories into interactive experiences."*
14. *"Online literacy programs have been a great supplement to schoolwork."*
15. *"We use digital storybooks to make reading more fun and accessible."*
16. *"Technology has allowed my child to practice reading at their own pace."*
17. *"Using audiobooks alongside print books has improved my child's comprehension skills."*
18. *"We use an online phonics program that has significantly helped with decoding words."*

Parental Engagement and Home Literacy Practices – Families and educators employ everyday interactions as opportunities for literacy development. Respondents highlighted that interactive and context-based literacy activities encourage children to develop strong and lasting reading and writing habits. They indicated how reading aloud and structured writing activities—such as composing thank-you notes and creating shopping lists—were beneficial literacy practices.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We also read signs while we're driving, and we try to implement reading throughout the day, whether it's reading different things like menus or even putting the TV on with closed captions."*
2. *"Writing thank-you notes, grocery lists, and letters to pen pals naturally builds literacy skills."*
3. *"Sight words, encourage reading time, use learning apps, and encourage writing assignments."*
4. *"Reading books and playing word games together make learning fun."*
5. *"Allowing him to pick what he wants to read keeps him interested in reading."*
6. *"We have reading time and mock quizzes and tests. I make things fun."*
7. *"My kids do mini scavenger hunts at home with sight words."*
8. *"We do positive reinforcements, such as 30 minutes of free laptop time if tasks are completed."*
9. *"During Hurricane Irma, there were no phones because we didn't have power. So, we did reading, sight words, comprehension, and context activities."*
10. *"Well, we read, especially the books that he has received. I make sure to help him with all his homework, which includes reading."*
11. *"We read together and I help him understand what he's reading.*
12. *"I read and point at the words, helping her with homework. I go over the words one by one, the spelling words, and everything like that."*
13. *"We read all the Harry Potter books together."*
14. *"I ask them questions about what they read to ensure comprehension."*
15. *"I always try to make it as fun as possible because I think that's where they're going to learn—by enjoying it."*
16. *"I read to my kids a lot, and I try to act out the books I read, or sometimes I'll sing them—just anything to make it fun."*
17. *"I read with him, and I also have him read to me and my husband."*
18. *"We read at bedtime every night. We've been doing that since they were really young babies... I pick something that they choose to read and something they're interested in so they're more engaged with it."*

Home Literacy Resources – Participants underscored the value of consistent book exposure and reading-related discussions in reinforcing school-based learning. Digital tools, including reading applications, were also acknowledged as effective literacy supplements. Many parents utilized educational workshops, instructional guides, and curated literacy materials to further strengthen their children's reading and writing skills.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Audiobooks have been a fantastic tool to help my child follow along with text and build comprehension."*
2. *"We use phonics-based flashcards and workbooks to strengthen reading skills at home."*
3. *"Educational reading apps have been an engaging way for my child to practice reading skills independently."*
4. *"Having access to a variety of books at home has helped foster a love for reading in our family."*
5. *"...having books with a variety of topics helps develop literacy. We also use journals, workbooks, and interactive writing exercises."*
6. *"Writing is done authentically—thank-you notes, shopping lists, pen pals, any chance to write."*
7. *"Having a variety of books at home has made my child more eager to read."*
8. *"We made flashcards for sight words and practice them."*
9. *He also grew up surrounded by educated family/friends who talked a lot.*

School Resources and Strategies – Educational institutions play a fundamental role in literacy development by implementing structured programs and evidence-based interventions. Respondents highlighted teacher-led reading sessions, phonics-centered instruction, and targeted literacy support as essential components of effective literacy education. Schools employ structured phonics programs, small group reading interventions, and guided reading sessions to enhance students' reading proficiency.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Our school's guided reading program has significantly improved my child's comprehension."*
2. *"The school's literacy intervention program has been beneficial for my child."*
3. *"The implementation of structured reading programs has been beneficial in improving reading comprehension."*
4. *"Having a dedicated literacy coach in our school has made a noticeable difference in student progress."*
5. *"Our school uses a structured curriculum with phonemic awareness activities to improve literacy outcomes."*
6. *"Tutoring after school offered at Buchholz and Fort Clarke."*

7. *"He takes speech therapy in school, and for a while, he was doing it outside of school too."*
8. *"The UFLI program being used at Norton seems to have helped my twins a lot."*
9. *"Utilize school resources like the school-issued Chromebooks with learning apps."*
10. *"The ClassDojo app to send messages and ask about her progress and any issues."*
11. *"She is getting tutoring at the school, and they are very helpful."*
12. *"The school provides access to digital books through student portals."*
13. *"The structured literacy intervention program provided by our district has helped struggling readers progress."*

Classroom Strategies – Participants underscored the significance of classroom libraries, intervention programs for struggling readers, and the presence of literacy specialists in fostering student progress. Additionally, schools offer specialized literacy support for children with learning disabilities, ensuring that instructional strategies align with their specific needs. Parents emphasized the critical role of school-based programs in identifying literacy challenges early and providing tailored interventions through trained educators and research-backed curricula.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Teachers incorporate daily read-aloud sessions to engage students."*
2. *"Guided reading groups help students improve at their own pace."*
3. *"Classroom literacy stations provide hands-on learning experiences."*
4. *"We integrate literacy across subjects to ensure students build comprehension skills."*
5. *"Educators use visual storytelling to make reading more engaging for students."*
6. *"Reading buddies in the classroom create a supportive literacy environment."*
7. *"Teachers provide extra reading materials to help struggling readers."*
8. *"Classroom libraries offer students easy access to books during school hours."*
9. *"Small reading groups led by teachers have boosted students' confidence in reading."*
10. *"Phonics-based instruction in school has helped early readers develop strong skills."*
11. *"Our school provides small-group literacy interventions to help struggling readers catch up."*
12. *"Phonics-based reading instruction in early grades has helped my child develop stronger literacy skills."*

What Works for Educators

Classroom-Based Strategies – Teachers shared a variety of classroom-based literacy strategies that have been particularly effective. These include independent reading time, close reading techniques, and student choice in reading materials to boost engagement and literacy development.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Allowing students to choose their own books during independent reading has led to increased engagement and motivation."*
2. *"Close reading activities have helped students learn how to analyze texts and find supporting evidence, which is crucial for comprehension."*
3. *"Graphic novels and real-world texts have been particularly useful in helping struggling readers develop a stronger interest in literacy."*
4. *"Using pop culture references and relatable texts has helped struggling readers develop a stronger interest in literacy."*
5. *"Reading pop culture texts and using song lyrics has been effective in engaging reluctant readers."*
6. *"Providing students with book choice during independent reading has led to greater engagement."*
7. *Using pop song lyrics for fluency practice has been effective for my students."*
8. *"Implementing structured independent reading time every week has had a noticeable impact on student attitudes toward books."*

Community and Parental Involvement – Many educators emphasized the importance of community partnerships and parental involvement in supporting literacy outside the classroom. Programs that provide structured resources to families have been beneficial in reinforcing reading skills at home.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Library partnerships offering free books and reading events have been great for encouraging literacy beyond the classroom."*
2. *"Providing parents with simple literacy resources, like magnetic letters and dry-erase boards, has helped reinforce skills at home."*
3. *"Reading incentive programs with local businesses have encouraged students to read more outside of school."*
4. *"Structured literacy nights involving both parents and students have had strong attendance and impact."*
5. *"Community-based book distributions have been instrumental in ensuring students have access to reading materials at home."*

Digital Literacy Tools – Several technology-based tools received positive feedback for their adaptability, engagement, and ability to personalize learning for students. iReady, Amira, and Reading Plus were among the most frequently cited as effective digital resources that track progress and support literacy growth. Educators found IXL and Reading Plus particularly useful in helping students build skills at their own pace. Teachers appreciated these programs' ability to provide differentiated instruction and reinforce core literacy skills.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"iReady meets students where they are and allows them to work at their own level while reinforcing skills with instant feedback."*
2. *"Amira has been effective in improving fluency and vocabulary, and I can track student progress over time."*
3. *"Reading Plus helped improve comprehension, and my students seemed more engaged with the content."*
4. *"One of the best things about iReady is that it supports writing by covering grammar, sentence structure, and organizing thoughts."*
5. *"These programs allow me to target specific literacy gaps in students, making it easier to adjust my instruction accordingly."*
6. *"IXL allows students to work at their own level, reinforcing skills while providing instant feedback."*
7. *"Reading Plus improved student comprehension and engagement, [and made] reading more interactive."*
8. *"Students enjoy the gamification aspect of IXL, which keeps them motivated to practice reading skills."*
9. *"The adaptive nature of Reading Plus ensures that students are reading at their level, helping with gradual improvement."*
10. *"We saw measurable gains in reading fluency and comprehension when using these digital tools consistently."*

Literacy Interventions and Assessment Tools – Educators often referenced intervention programs as effective tools for improving literacy, with many responses underscoring their importance in addressing specific literacy challenges. Respondents widely recognized the value of DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and Great Leaps as effective tools for identifying and intervening with struggling readers. These assessments and interventions provide valuable insights into students' reading progress and allow for targeted instruction in small groups. Educators emphasized the importance of small-group instruction and structured phonics-based interventions for literacy improvement.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Supportive after-school intervention programs help bridge learning gaps."*
2. *"Early interventions tailored to student needs."*

3. *"Benchmark intervention strategies are essential for progress tracking."*
4. *"Intervention programs like SIPPS target foundational reading skills."*
5. *"Ability grouping, Intervention Programs delivered in small groups."*
6. *"Reading Plus, working in small groups on specific concepts."*
7. *"Extra intervention in small groups or one-on-one."*
8. *"SIPPS used in small groups with time for repetition."*
9. *"Small group direct instruction with UFLI and SIPPS."*
10. *"Guided reading groups are integral, allowing me to meet students at their individual reading levels."*
11. *"DIBELS helps pinpoint specific reading challenges, allowing for tailored interventions that actually work."*
12. *"Great Leaps is excellent for fluency building and provides structured reading practice that benefits struggling students."*
13. *"We use DIBELS data to create effective small-group instruction that meets students at their exact reading level."*
14. *"Phonics-based intervention is crucial for students in primary grades, and Great Leaps has been useful for improving reading rate and accuracy."*
15. *"The data from these assessments help us track student growth and ensure they're receiving the right interventions."*
16. *"The combination of DIBELS assessment and structured interventions ensures we're addressing literacy gaps early."*
17. *"Using diagnostic tools like DIBELS helps us track growth and adjust instruction as needed."*

UF Literacy Instruction – One of the most frequently mentioned and positively reviewed programs was the UFLI (University of Florida Literacy Institute) Foundations program. Educators across multiple focus groups praised its systematic approach to phonics, its consistency in instruction, and its effectiveness in improving decoding skills for early readers. Many noted significant progress in students' ability to recognize letter sounds, blend phonemes, and read fluently. Unlike other curricula, UFLI provides a structured, research-based approach that has shown measurable improvement in foundational literacy skills.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"UFLI has been a game-changer for at-risk students. I see real benefits in encoding and decoding, especially for students who have had little literacy exposure."*
2. *"The structured routine of UFLI ensures that students know what to expect each day, and I've seen huge growth between the beginning of the year and now."*
3. *"We use UFLI as an intervention tool for struggling readers, and I can see a stark difference in those who consistently receive the instruction."*
4. *"When used consistently, UFLI provides clear progress in phonemic awareness and phonics application."*

5. *"UFLI's multisensory approach has made a big difference for students with learning difficulties."*
6. *"I see UFLI has been really helpful, especially in the early grades."*
7. *"Close reading strategies and UFLI have been effective, though long-term benefits are still being assessed."*
8. *"Consistency and repetition of UFLI help students build confidence."*
9. *"Using UFLI in conjunction with guided reading has shown improvement."*
10. *"UFLI, when used consistently, has been instrumental in improving literacy levels."*

Teacher-Guided Instruction – Teachers also favored teacher-guided instruction and highlighted the critical role of educators in providing direct, personalized support. Their responses indicate teachers use scaffolding, modeling, and differentiated strategies to meet diverse student needs.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Direct instruction based on a teacher-created curriculum."*
2. *"Guided reading groups are integral to my instruction."*
3. *"Explicit vocabulary instruction paired with close reading strategies."*
4. *"Teachers use scaffolded assignments to improve student confidence."*
5. *"Teacher-created strategies often outperform district-provided programs."*

Vocabulary Development – Teachers frequently emphasized the role of vocabulary in literacy development. Explicit vocabulary instruction helps students understand complex texts and improves comprehension by building a robust foundation of word knowledge.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Explicit vocabulary instruction is a priority, where subject-specific terms can be challenging."*
2. *"Read aloud, chunking, vocabulary, and higher-order questioning."*
3. *"Specific vocabulary instruction focusing on word roots, prefixes, and suffixes."*
4. *"Repetition, writing out vocabulary, counting spelling."*
5. *"Students teaching students, focusing on morphology and vocabulary skills."*
6. *"Reading Plus encourages discussion of words used in broader educational contexts."*
7. *"Flocabulary to introduce and reinforce key vocabulary through engaging, interactive videos and activities."*

What Works for Organizations

Collaborative Community Partnerships in Literacy – Organizations further reported that they often collaborate with community partners and also find ways to involve parents and families. Participants noted that collaboration fosters a supportive network, enhances resource availability, and promotes the sharing of best practices and effective instructional methods. Their staff and student development collaborations include joint training sessions, collaborative projects, and shared access to educational materials. Their broader community engagement initiatives have involved organizing public reading events, literacy fairs, community/parent workshops, and volunteer programs aimed at promoting literacy both within and outside the school environment.

Funding and Resource Optimization for Literacy Initiatives – Organizations noted that financial support is critical for sustaining high-quality literacy programs and ensuring that necessary resources are available to both educators and students. To limit costs for public participation, many organizations regularly employ cost-cutting and cost-sharing strategies and seek financial support to fund their literacy programs. This includes securing grants, budgeting for educational materials, and streamlining funds for staffing and professional development.

Leveraging Available Literacy Tools for Learning – Many organizations and programs utilize specific literacy-related tools and resources to support reading and writing development. These include access to a variety of books, educational software, interactive e-books, digital apps, and multimedia resources that cater to different learning styles. Participants highlighted the importance of having diverse and current instructional materials and technology in keeping students engaged and providing tailored learning experiences. Even when organizations indicate that they do not have dedicated literacy programs, they find ways to integrate literacy activities within their existing programs.

Staff and Volunteer Development Initiatives -The organizations we spoke with emphasized the importance of training for staff and volunteers to improve their ability to identify and address literacy issues among students. Most reported providing internal training for full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff whenever possible. This typically includes workshops, certification courses, and on-the-job training sessions designed to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Elected Officials' Perceptions of What Works

Community and School Partnerships – Collaboration between schools, local governments, and community organizations has proven to be an effective strategy for improving literacy rates. Interviewees emphasized the importance of continuing to leverage external resources to support literacy initiatives. Community organizations provide mentorship and supplemental reading programs. Libraries, businesses, and nonprofit groups serve as literacy hubs; and schools benefit from additional funding, volunteers, and literacy-focused programs.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"The Children's Trust has been a game-changer in coordinating literacy resources."*
2. *"Partnerships with local universities help bring in research-based literacy practices."*
3. *"After-school programs supported by the city and county provide valuable literacy interventions."*
4. *"Churches, nonprofits, and businesses have stepped up to support literacy efforts."*
5. *"We need to coordinate better among all these groups to maximize impact."*

Early Childhood Literacy Programs – Early literacy development was consistently identified as a key factor in improving overall literacy rates. Because community-supported early literacy programs deliver interventions that help close achievement gaps before they begin to widen and provide literacy-rich environments that enhance vocabulary and reading readiness in pre-kindergarten settings, they essentially reduce disparities among students entering elementary school. Respondents stressed the importance of ensuring children enter kindergarten with foundational literacy skills, as gaps at this stage can lead to long-term struggles.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Reading by age three or grade three. I really believe we need to focus our efforts right there."*
2. *"The things we can do for our community from zero to five will have the greatest impact so that children are ready for kindergarten."*
3. *"Providing books and literacy activities in daycare centers and preschools can make a huge difference."*
4. *"Early exposure to books and reading helps children develop stronger vocabulary and comprehension skills."*
5. *"If we don't address literacy early, we'll be playing catch-up for years."*
6. *"High-quality early childhood education is critical to ensuring long-term academic success."*

Targeted Literacy Interventions for High-Need Students – One of the most frequently mentioned efforts was the implementation of targeted literacy interventions for students who struggle the most. Many respondents emphasized that specialized programs tailored to students' needs help close literacy gaps. Tiered intervention strategies help students who are behind in literacy catch up. Schools that provide one-on-one or small group tutoring see significant improvement. Data-driven instruction ensures resources are directed where they are needed most.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Small-group reading interventions have been effective in helping struggling readers catch up to their peers."*
2. *"Providing structured, one-on-one literacy intervention has made a measurable difference in student outcomes."*
3. *"Students who receive targeted literacy interventions show marked improvements in reading comprehension and fluency."*
4. *"Our intervention efforts are particularly important for low-income students who may not have literacy support at home."*
5. *"A data-driven approach helps us identify students who need additional reading support."*

Opportunities for Improvement

Challenges, Barriers, and Needs of Families and Community Members

Resource Accessibility – Limited access to age-appropriate books, educational tools, and updated learning materials poses a significant barrier to literacy development. Respondents emphasized that without sufficient resources, children have fewer opportunities to refine their reading and writing skills, both in school and at home. Many participants also highlighted the financial and logistical constraints of obtaining books and educational materials. While public libraries provide some support, restricted hours and limited book selections may not adequately meet the literacy needs of all learners. These challenges underscore the need for more accessible and diverse literacy resources to support both students and parents in fostering literacy growth.

- **Financial and Logistical Limitations** - One of the most frequently cited challenges is the lack of sufficient financial resources to access literacy programs. This financial constraint limits the ability to access high-quality educational materials, effective literacy interventions, and adequately trained staff. The cost of assessments, transportation, participation fees, etc. sets resources out of reach for many families, particularly those in marginalized communities. Families also regularly mentioned more practical issues associated with work and programming schedules and challenges with limited transportation options to participate in community programs—even those available through public libraries.

    Representative Quotes:
    1. *"Parental involvement is crucial, but many families do not engage due to various barriers."*
    2. *"Accessibility issues, such as transportation or location, can hinder resource use."*
    3. *"Busy schedules and time constraints limit participation in literacy programs."*
    4. *"Financial challenges may restrict access to certain resources."*
    5. *"Technological constraints can make digital resources inaccessible."*
    6. *"We have great library programs, but I meet parents who struggle to even catch the bus to attend them."*
    7. *"We don't have enough books at home, and buying them regularly is too expensive."*
    8. *"Our library has limited resources, and it's hard to find books that engage my child."*
    9. *"Access to reading materials is a challenge, especially in rural communities."*
    10. *"My child's school doesn't have a strong library, making it difficult to encourage reading."*

11. *"Class sizes are too large, making it difficult to provide the necessary support for struggling students."*
12. *"Many families don't have the transportation to reach local libraries regularly."*

- **Resource Visibility and Communications Limitations** – Focus group participants frequently reported the lack of a coordinated communication system that allows greater access to and understanding of available literacy resources, how to use them, and participation in support programs. The lack of clear, up-to-date, and consistent communication on existing resources limits and delays access to much needed literacy resources. This points to the need for better communication between schools, community organizations, and parents to bridge the gap and ensure that families are fully informed about opportunities that can support their children's education.

  Representative Quotes:
  1. *"Awareness of available resources is often lacking."*
  2. *"It's essential that teachers and parents are continually made aware of the resources at their disposal."*
  3. *"Properly curated and up-to-date resources are crucial for literacy programs."*
  4. *"Language barriers prevent some families from accessing resources."*
  5. *"Families might lack the literacy skills to effectively utilize available resources."*
  6. *"I'm sure the resources are out there, so maybe just making it easier to find out about said resources."*
  7. *"I don't always find out anything through the school... I learned about you guys from one of our little community centers..."*
  8. *"They send homework, but no additional resources on how to help my child with literacy at home."*
  9. *"It'd be nice if parents got a list of all the online resources their children could use for extra learning."*
  10. *"We assume people have access to the internet, but if your community is your house, it's hard to get information."*
  11. *"Even though the district pays for some helpful subscriptions, parents often don't know how to access them or use them."*
  12. *"Many parents want to help their kids but don't know where to find literacy resources."*
  13. *"Many families lack knowledge of the importance of early reading and how to support it at home."*

Early Identification and Support – Early identification and support for literacy challenges are critical for timely intervention. However, many families and educators report difficulties in recognizing literacy issues early on, leading to delayed support and intervention. Without early identification, children with learning disabilities, underserved, or most at risk of falling behind may not receive the necessary assistance promptly, impacting their long-term literacy development. A contributing factor in this is inadequate training and support for teachers in implementing literacy programs. Teachers need ongoing professional development and support to stay updated with evidence-based practices and to handle diverse student needs effectively.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Identification of literacy issues early on is crucial, but it remains a significant challenge."*
2. *"As a parent, you always have a hunch, but teachers can really pinpoint it with their training."*
3. *"We need more targeted support to identify and address literacy issues early."*
4. *"Early assessment tools are outdated or not precise enough to spot specific literacy issues."*
5. *"Recognizing literacy problems at an early stage can dramatically change outcomes."*
6. *"Parents often lack the knowledge to identify literacy issues, relying heavily on schools."*
7. *"Without early identification, some students don't receive the necessary support quickly enough."*
8. *"We have students graduating who are illiterate because they didn't get the proper interventions in time."*

Families of Children with Special Needs – Families with children who have special needs face multiple challenges in accessing resources and consistent support. Parents must navigate medical treatments, educational support, therapies, and diligently advocate for their child's needs. This highlights the gap in accessible, consistent services that align with children's unique learning and developmental needs.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"I asked for her to be screened for dyslexia last year, but the public school didn't screen for it, so I had to go and pay for a private screening."*
2. *"My younger one hates to read and write. She's super smart but struggles with motivation, and the type of reading they do in class doesn't help—it's all teaching to the test."*
3. *"He ended up with some hearing loss, so that has affected his ability to read because we caught it later."*
4. *"It's hard with autistic kids because sometimes their days can be so different, and having a set schedule for tests really puts a damper on things."*

5. *"He's got some behavioral issues coupled with everything else. So, it's been a little hard for us trying to find a learning process that works best for him."*

Limited Parental Involvement and Guidance – Parental involvement plays a vital role in children's literacy development, yet many parents face challenges in providing consistent support. Balancing work and family responsibilities often limits their ability to engage in academic activities, particularly for children who require additional reinforcement. Respondents frequently expressed frustration over the lack of accessible guidance on how to support literacy at home, leading to missed opportunities for skill development outside the classroom. Some parents also struggle due to their own educational background or uncertainty in teaching reading skills. Others find it difficult to maintain a literacy-rich environment when their children show little interest in reading. Participants highlighted the need for practical, family-friendly literacy resources to help parents navigate these challenges and effectively support their children's literacy growth.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Parents want to help, but they need accessible and practical guidance on supporting their children's reading development."*
2. *"Not all families have the resources or education to provide literacy support at home."*
3. *"I want to help my child with reading, but I don't always know the best approach."*
4. *"Getting my kids interested in books is difficult when they prefer digital entertainment."*
5. *"My child prefers playing video games over reading, and it's hard to change that habit."*
6. *"I didn't grow up with strong literacy skills myself, so teaching reading feels overwhelming."*
7. *"Encouraging literacy habits is tough when children resist structured reading time."*
8. *"Some parents struggle with literacy themselves, making it harder to help their children."*
9. *"Finding books that my child enjoys reading has been a challenge."*
10. *"I feel like people don't know where to find resources outside of school. We have great library programs, but many families struggle to access them due to transportation issues."*
11. *"A lot of parents don't go to open houses where they explain things, so many miss out on the resources shared there."*

Insufficient Educational Support – Participants noted disparities in the availability and quality of educational resources and support across different schools and communities. For example, while some schools offer strong literacy programs and access to tutors, others lack sufficient support, particularly for children with learning disabilities like dyslexia. This deficiency delays critical interventions necessary for effective literacy development. Participants noted that without proper support, children with learning difficulties fall behind their peers, leading to further academic challenges and decreased confidence in their reading

and writing abilities. This variation in resources exacerbates educational inequalities, particularly for families in underserved or low-income communities.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"I was in the gifted program and had extra support, but other mainstream classes didn't get nearly the same level of attention from teachers."*
2. *"The tutoring for me and other people, including my sister...was amazing, but they took that away, and now we don't have accessible tutoring options."*
3. *"The inequity in resources is apparent between different schools, like the number of books available and access to reading materials."*
4. *"There's not a lot of great resources coming out of Alachua County school district... It's a lot of tear-out workbooks and stuff like that."*
5. *"The school doesn't provide enough individualized reading support for struggling students."*
6. *"Teachers are stretched too thin to focus on literacy development in depth."*
7. *"My child is behind in reading, but the school doesn't have enough resources to help."*

Limitations Of Existing Literacy Programs – Existing literacy programs often face limitations in terms of scope, reach, and effectiveness. Many programs are not specifically focused on literacy or lack the comprehensive structure needed to address all aspects of literacy development. Effective literacy outcomes are hampered by inconsistent curriculum implementation and a lack of evidence-based practices. Additionally, large class sizes and a one-size-fits-all approach make it challenging to provide the individualized attention that many students require.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We have no literacy-specific program, but the skills we cover help indirectly."*
2. *"Many programs lack the focus or structure needed for effective literacy development."*
3. *"Large class sizes make it hard to provide individualized attention and support."*
4. *"Standardized curriculum doesn't always address students' individual literacy needs."*
5. *"Our current programs are stretched thin and can't cater to the unique needs of every student."*
6. *"We need more targeted literacy initiatives that address specific learning challenges."*
7. *"Existing programs provide limited scope, often missing comprehensive literacy strategies."*
8. *"We need more literacy programs in schools that focus on comprehension skills."*
9. *"Without dedicated literacy programs, progress remains inconsistent.*
10. *"Implementing a standardized literacy framework can help."*

Limited Community, School, and Parent Collaboration– Engaging the community, school, and parents in collaborative literacy initiatives is vital but challenging. Many families report encountering obstacles such as lack of awareness, language barriers, or simply not knowing how to support their children's literacy development effectively. Community engagement is crucial for reinforcing literacy skills outside formal educational settings, yet consistency and active participation are often limited.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Community engagement is a significant challenge; involving parents in their children's literacy development is difficult."*
2. *"We need more support from the community to sustain our literacy programs."*
3. *"Parental involvement is crucial, but many families do not engage due to various barriers."*
4. *"Without strong community and parental engagement, it's tough to create a lasting impact on literacy development."*

School and Organizational Funding and Resource Limitations – One of the most frequently cited challenges is the lack of sufficient funding and resources to support comprehensive literacy programs. The financial constraint limits the ability to provide high-quality educational materials, effective literacy interventions, and adequately trained staff. Insufficient funding also hinders the development and expansion of literacy initiatives needed to cater to diverse learning needs.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Insufficient funding limits our ability to provide comprehensive literacy programs."*
2. *"Resource limitations, like the availability of books and technology, hinder literacy instruction."*
3. *"Community engagement is essential, but it's challenging to secure consistent financial support."*
4. *"More funding would allow us to expand our literacy initiatives and offer high-quality resources to our students."*
5. *"Funding shortages restrict access to the latest teaching tools and materials."*
6. *"Limited budget impacts our ability to run extensive literacy workshops and training for educators."*
7. *"We often struggle with resource limitations, including essential learning materials."*
8. *"Resource limitations severely impact what we can achieve in literacy development."*

Time Constraints and Work Schedules – Many families struggle to find the time for literacy activities due to busy schedules and competing priorities. Parents often juggle work, household responsibilities, and school commitments, leaving little room for reading with their children. Respondents expressed frustration that structured reading time often falls by the wayside, making consistent literacy improvement difficult.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Work schedules and work hours make it difficult to set aside daily reading time."*
2. *"Between work and chores, I barely have time to sit down and read with my child."*
3. *"We try to make time for reading, but homework and other activities take priority."*
4. *"Finding a balance between screen time and reading is a daily challenge."*
5. *"By the end of the day, everyone is too tired to focus on books."*
6. *"There just aren't enough hours in the day to dedicate to reading as much as we'd like."*
7. *"Working late shifts makes it difficult to establish a consistent reading routine."*
8. *"Extracurricular activities take up a lot of after-school time, leaving little for reading."*

Challenges, Barriers, and Needs of Educators

The focus group discussions with educators revealed several recurring themes that highlight systemic challenges in curriculum implementation, student literacy development, assessment practices, and professional support. These themes reflect common experiences and concerns across different grade levels and schools, providing valuable insights for improving educational practices and outcomes.

Behavioral and Attendance Barriers – Behavioral issues and inconsistent attendance disrupt learning environments and create obstacles for student progress.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Attendance issues—if they are not here, they cannot learn."*
2. *"Unaddressed behavior issues prevent learning."*
3. *"Students act out when the work is too hard."*
4. *"Behaviors impede learning in the classroom."*
5. *"Disruptive behavior from some students takes away from the learning environment."*
6. *"...behavior issues create significant barriers to academic progress."*
7. *"Behavioral challenges often stem from unmet academic and social-emotional needs."*

Curriculum Effectiveness and Challenges – One of the most frequently discussed topics was the effectiveness of the district's curriculum, particularly *Benchmark Advance*. Educators noted that while the curriculum provides structure, it often lacks alignment with students' developmental needs. Many teachers felt that the reading materials were too complex for younger students, requiring substantial modifications to be effective in daily instruction. Additionally, teachers found that the writing components were beyond students' skill levels, making it challenging to develop foundational literacy skills.

Key Concerns:
- The curriculum is not developmentally appropriate for younger students.
- Teachers must supplement additional resources to meet students' needs.
- The writing component is particularly challenging for early-grade learners.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Benchmark has been a struggle to teach because I don't feel like it's the best use of time. The reading assessments don't align with what we've actually taught."*
2. *"I just think that, as a second-grade teacher, the benchmark curriculum is so over their heads that we set them up for failure."*
3. *"The writing component of the benchmark was so over their heads. They were asking them to write a three- or four-paragraph essay, and some kids couldn't even write a complete sentence."*

4. *"The reading assessments don't align with the skills we've taught, making it difficult for students to succeed."*
5. *"The texts in the curriculum are complex and beyond the students' comprehension level, making reading a chore rather than an engaging learning experience."*
6. *"Benchmark doesn't provide enough pencil-to-paper activities, which are crucial in elementary school. Everything is done verbally, and it just doesn't sink in for the students."*
7. *"We are constantly supplementing because the curriculum alone is not enough to help students grasp fundamental reading and writing skills."*

Limited Foundational Literacy Skills – Educators observed that a substantial number of students struggle with foundational literacy skills, often performing below grade level in reading fluency, comprehension, and decoding. These difficulties hinder their ability to engage with grade-level content and progress academically. Teachers also pointed to systemic challenges, such as poverty and high student mobility, as factors exacerbating literacy gaps. Many educators voiced frustration over declining student engagement with reading and writing. In upper grades, a lack of fundamental writing skills—such as sentence structure, punctuation, and comprehension—was identified as a key barrier to academic success in more advanced coursework.

Key Concerns:
- Declining independent reading habits.
- Insufficient emphasis on writing instruction.
- Students struggle with comprehension and fluency

Representative Responses:
1. *"Difficulty in reading (vocabulary and comprehension), writing, cognitive (ADHD and Dyslexia), and environmental factors such as mobility and poverty are common challenges."*
2. *"A curriculum that moves too fast with little time for real remediation; once they are behind/below grade level, it seems impossible for them to catch up."*
3. *"Basic phonological awareness deficits."*
4. *"Core curriculum tests passages are at lexiles beyond that of what is grade level appropriate."*
5. *"I get students every single day who don't put periods at the end of their sentences or write full sentences."*
6. *"Not enough direct literacy instruction for struggling readers and students with exceptionalities."*
7. *Lack of background knowledge and foundational skills."*
8. *"Children are reading below grade level, content is written above grade level and students are not able to access the reading curriculum with ease."*
9. *"Being behind since elementary school and reading below grade level."*

10. *"Many of my 12th graders still don't put periods at the end of their sentences. Writing is the hardest thing to teach, and it often gets neglected because of the focus on comprehension."*
11. *"Even in high school, comprehension is a big issue, but I think a lot of it has to do with exposure."*
12. *"Writing is the hardest thing to teach, and it's often neglected due to the strong focus on comprehension."*
13. *"Students should be exposed to more engaging and developmentally appropriate reading materials."*

Limited Support at Home – Limited home support remains a critical factor affecting students' academic success. Educators identified key challenges, including low parental literacy, limited literacy exposure, unstable home environments, and socioeconomic hardships, all of which contribute to difficulties in reading and writing development. Educators stressed the importance of parental involvement but observed a decline in engagement and expressed that parents feel unprepared to assist with literacy activities, and the absence of structured resources further limits their ability to provide meaningful support.

Key Concerns:
- Parents feel overwhelmed and unsure how to help.
- More structured resources for families are needed.
- Community partnerships could provide additional literacy support.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Lack of resources/exposure to academic skills prior to beginning kindergarten."*
2. *"Parents are overwhelmed because they keep getting reports that their child is struggling, but they don't know how to help."*
3. *"Home life/support, apathy, attendance."*
4. *"Lack of support from home, lack of interest and respect for education in general."*
5. *"Not reading outside of school or having parents read to them when young."*
6. *"Limited language exposure prior to entering PK/Kindergarten impacts grade-level comprehension."*
7. *"Many students lack respect for education at home."*
8. *"The lack of home reinforcement significantly affects academic outcomes."*
9. *"Some parents are very involved, but many struggle due to time constraints."*
10. *"Some families lack the time or knowledge to support their child's literacy development."*

Professional Support and Training – Another recurring theme was the need for stronger professional development and ongoing training for educators. Many teachers felt ill-equipped to navigate new curricula, digital tools, and assessment methods due to a lack of structured training. The absence of ongoing professional learning opportunities made it challenging for educators to effectively implement literacy programs.

Key Concerns:
- Inadequate training on new curriculum tools and assessment platforms.
- Lack of professional development on teaching writing effectively.
- Need for mentorship and peer collaboration.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"I haven't had any training on ClearSight, even though we're supposed to start using it this week. Teachers are left to figure things out on their own, which isn't sustainable."*
2. *"We had training on the curriculum at the beginning of the year, but after that, there was no follow-up."*
3. *"There's a huge gap in professional development. We're expected to use these programs, but no one trains us on how to do it effectively."*
4. *"I wish we had more structured professional learning opportunities tailored to our needs."*
5. *"DIBELS gives us great data, but we're not always trained on how to interpret it for targeted interventions."*
6. *"Many teachers are left to figure out instructional strategies on their own, which isn't sustainable."*
7. *"The district needs to provide more practical workshops on teaching writing skills effectively."*
8. *"There was no follow-up training after the initial Benchmark curriculum rollout."*
9. *"We need to go back to the old ways of professional development days on Wednesdays, where we could actually collaborate and learn from each other."*
10. *"We need ongoing training, not just a one-time session. There's no follow-up on how to actually implement what we learn."*

Staffing and Resource Constraints – Teachers cited staffing shortages and resource constraints as major obstacles to delivering effective literacy instruction. The reduction of interventionists and instructional support, coupled with funding limitations, has made it increasingly difficult to address the needs of struggling students. Educators stressed the importance of additional staffing to facilitate small-group instruction and targeted interventions. Many also noted that limited instructional time, heavy workloads, and administrative demands further restrict their ability to support students' literacy development. To improve instructional effectiveness, teachers advocated for increased planning time, reduced administrative tasks, and access to high-quality professional development.

Key Concerns:
- Loss of interventionists has reduced individualized support.
- Class sizes are too large to provide targeted literacy interventions.
- More funding is needed for additional instructional staff.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"The loss of Covid-related funding means we no longer have interventionists, which were crucial in helping students who need additional support."*
2. *"There are not enough trained teachers to give interventions to every student who needs them."*
3. *"Schools are understaffed, making it difficult to provide adequate interventions."*
4. *"The loss of interventionists has hurt students who need extra support."*
5. *Funding cuts have made it harder to access necessary literacy resources."*
6. *"We are expected to do more with fewer resources, and it's not sustainable."*
7. *"We need staffing. The district always says they want to see gains, but without proper staffing, that's never going to happen."*
8. *"Some sort of interventionist who comes in just for the really low kids would be ideal, so I could focus on the Tier 2 kids and fill those gaps."*
9. *"We chuckle about needing an assistant, but the end of COVID funding has had a drastic effect. We lost so much instructional support."*
10. *"Small groups are crucial, but time constraints mean we barely see one group a day. More staff would change that."*
11. *"We desperately need interventionists back in our schools. Without them, struggling students are not getting the help they need."*
12. *"Small groups are critical for early literacy, but with limited staff, it's nearly impossible to reach every student who needs it."*

Student Engagement and Motivation – Educators routinely identified student disengagement as a significant obstacle to literacy development. From their perspective, many students perceive reading and writing as tedious tasks, which reduces their motivation to engage and develop literacy skills. Teachers emphasized the importance of incorporating student choice, interactive learning materials, and innovative instructional strategies to enhance engagement and interest. Additionally, systemic factors and a lack of perceived relevance in literacy skills further contribute to student disinterest.

Key Concerns:
- Lack of intrinsic motivation for reading and writing.
- Students need more choice in reading materials.
- Creative instructional strategies are necessary to sustain engagement.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Students do not want to practice, and the skills are lackluster."*
2. *"Students lack interest and motivation to read."*

3. *"They are not motivated to think critically or to learn."*
4. *"Stamina of attention span for reading longer excerpts."*
5. *"The tools provided do not interest students and do not encourage them to want to learn."*
6. *"The lack of interest and respect for education in general has led to a generation of non-committed students."*
7. *"Cultural shifts mean students do not value reading outside the classroom."*
8. *"Many students dislike reading, often due to early negative experiences."*
9. *"Students are disengaged because the material feels irrelevant to their interests."*
10. *"Reading should be fun, but students see it as another school task."*
11. *"Students just don't read. Phones have replaced books, and reading has become a lost habit."*

Systemic Issues (Curriculum and Resources) – Systemic issues like large class sizes and inequitable resource distribution, curriculum pacing, and inappropriate testing frameworks create barriers for achievement and students struggle to catch up and thrive academically. Students and teachers alike encounter difficulties with curricula that move too fast or are not developmentally appropriate. Limited tools and resources and large class sizes exacerbate these issues.

Representative Responses:
1. *"The core curriculum does not meet the needs of our students."*
2. *"A curriculum that moves too fast with little time for real remediation."*
3. *"There are not enough trained teachers to give interventions to every student who needs them."*
4. *"Students are behind their whole educational career and will never catch up."*
5. *"Systemic inequities in resource allocation create challenges for schools and students."*
6. *"Teaching to the test. The pacing guide is way too fast."*
7. *"Schools are understaffed, making it difficult to provide adequate interventions."*
8. *"Many systemic issues in education disproportionately affect struggling students."*

Technology and Learning Tools – While technology has the potential to enhance literacy instruction, educators expressed concerns about its limitations. Many students lacked digital literacy skills, and frequent technical issues disrupted learning. Teachers emphasized the need for structured training on how to effectively integrate technology into literacy instruction.

Key Concerns:
- Digital assessments are challenging for younger learners.
- Students lack basic digital literacy skills.
- Training is needed to effectively integrate technology in instruction.

Representative Quotes:

1. *"Technology should be a support tool, not a replacement for direct instruction. Many students struggle to navigate digital reading tools effectively."*
2. *"The transition to digital testing has been difficult for students who are used to paper-based assessments."*
3. *"Many students lack the technical skills to effectively navigate digital learning tools."*
4. *"The loss of IXL and other learning platforms has made it harder for us to provide supplemental practice."*
5. *"Digital tools should be used as a support, not a replacement for traditional literacy instruction."*
6. *"We need more structured technology training for both teachers and students to maximize learning outcomes."*
7. *"Students struggle with digital assessments due to technical issues."*
8. *"The transition to online testing has been difficult for younger learners."*
9. *"Many students lack the digital literacy skills needed to navigate online reading tools."*

Testing and Assessment Challenges – The use of standardized testing as a measure of student literacy was another area of concern. Teachers reported that assessments often failed to accurately reflect students' abilities, particularly when administered digitally. Many students struggled with test-taking strategies, and there was a perceived disconnect between classroom learning and assessment outcomes.

Key Concerns:

- Computer-based assessments do not always reflect actual learning.
- Students struggle with digital test formats.
- Misalignment between instruction and standardized testing.

Representative Quotes:

1. *"High-stakes testing puts undue pressure on students and doesn't capture their full learning potential. We need better alignment between instruction and assessment methods."*
2. *"Computer-based assessments don't always reflect what students actually know."*
3. *"The tests are set up in a way that overwhelms students, making it hard to gauge their true understanding."*
4. *"Students often guess on digital assessments rather than engage with the content."*
5. *"Even if they master skills in small groups, the knowledge doesn't always transfer to the standardized test setting."*
6. *"Students struggle with the format of the test, especially when transitioning from paper-based to digital assessments."*
7. *"We need better alignment between instruction and assessment methods."*

Challenges, Barriers, and Needs of Organizations

Early Identification and Assessment – Interviewees stressed the importance of early literacy assessments in identifying students at risk of falling behind. While timely intervention can significantly improve outcomes, many organizations face challenges in implementing effective screening measures. Without accurate early identification, students with learning disabilities or literacy difficulties may not receive the support they need. Training educators to recognize literacy challenges enables targeted interventions, ensuring students receive appropriate assistance before gaps widen.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Identification [and] assessment early on of possible reading challenges is crucial. Being more informed in that area is important."*
2. *"Recognizing literacy problems at an early stage can dramatically change outcomes, but it's something we currently struggle with."*
3. *"Early assessment tools are either outdated or not precise enough to spot specific literacy issues promptly."*
4. *"Teachers need more support in identifying literacy challenges early, as this can make a huge difference in [students'] learning trajectory."*
5. *"We lack the necessary tools to assess literacy challenges among early learners accurately, which delays crucial interventions."*

Insufficient Funding and Resources – The lack of adequate funding remains a significant barrier to the successful implementation of literacy programs. Many organizations struggle to secure financial resources necessary for purchasing instructional materials, hiring specialized educators, and delivering targeted literacy interventions. Limited access to books, digital tools, and other essential resources further constrains literacy development efforts. The absence of interactive technology restricts student engagement, reducing the effectiveness of literacy instruction. Moreover, the lack of sustainable funding models creates financial instability, making long-term program planning difficult. Without reliable funding, literacy initiatives risk inconsistent implementation and diminished long-term impact.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Insufficient funding limits our ability to provide comprehensive literacy programs."*
2. *"Community engagement is essential, but without enough funding, it's hard to maintain effective literacy initiatives."*
3. *"We often struggle with resource limitations, including books and technology needed for literacy instruction."*
4. *"More funding would allow us to expand our literacy initiatives and offer high-quality resources to our students."*
5. *"Better resource allocation can help us address the specific literacy needs of our students more effectively."*

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Parental, Community, and Resource Support – Securing community support and resources is vital for the sustainability and success of literacy programs. Several interviews highlighted the importance of building partnerships with local entities and ensuring sufficient resources to sustain literacy initiatives. Organizations often face challenges in garnering sufficient backing from local stakeholders, including parents, businesses, and government agencies. Additionally, there is frequently a lack of necessary resources, such as books, technology, and funding, to support comprehensive literacy efforts.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Community engagement is a significant challenge; involving parents in their children's literacy development is difficult."*
2. *"We need more support from the community to sustain our literacy programs. Parental involvement is crucial but hard to achieve."*
3. *"We need to develop more effective strategies to engage parents and make them active participants in their children's literacy education."*
4. *"Securing community support has been difficult, yet it is critical for the success of our literacy programs."*
5. *"Families need to partner with schools to support learning."*
6. *"Resource limitations, whether it's books or funding, severely limit what we can achieve in literacy development."*
7. *"Partnership with local entities is essential, but we often struggle to get the necessary support."*
8. *"Building a network of supportive stakeholders is key, but it's a significant challenge we face."*

Student Engagement and Participation – Engaging students sufficiently and ensuring their active participation are critical for literacy success. However, many organizations report difficulties in maintaining high levels of engagement, which is essential for meaningful learning. Lack of engagement can result from various factors, including outdated teaching methods, lack of interest, or external distractions. Encouraging active participation requires innovative approaches that incorporate motivational strategies, interactive learning experiences, engaging content, and materials that capture students' interest and make literacy learning enjoyable and relevant to their lives.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Ensuring participant engagement and comprehension is a significant challenge."*
2. *"Keeping students motivated and interested in literacy activities is something we continually work on."*
3. *"Engagement is critical, but many students find traditional literacy exercises boring."*
4. *"Participation drops when students don't see the immediate relevance of literacy activities."*
5. *"Reading is not fun for kids when they're younger, and as they grow older, they associate reading with being boring or uninteresting...but it's difficult to change that perception."*

Targeted Literacy Programs –The absence of dedicated literacy programs remains a significant challenge for many organizations. Respondents emphasized that while some initiatives incorporate literacy development, it is often a secondary outcome rather than a primary objective. This lack of focus prevents literacy leaders from directing resources toward specialized interventions and limits their ability to address literacy challenges effectively.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We have no literacy-specific program... But many of the skills we talk about in our program can help students with their literacy."*
2. *"While we do support a range of educational skills, there isn't a dedicated program just for literacy improvement, which we desperately need."*
3. *"Our organization focuses on holistic development, but without a targeted literacy agenda, some students fall through the cracks."*
4. *"Developing literacy needs a specialized approach, which we currently lack in our existing programs."*
5. *"Our organization does a lot of different things, but literacy isn't our main focus. It's just one of the skills we hope to improve incidentally."*
6. *"Specialized literacy programs are essential for consistent improvement in literacy skills...We see improvement in general education, but without literacy-specific initiatives, progress in reading and comprehension is slow."*

Training and Professional Development – The effectiveness of literacy programs is highly dependent on the skills and knowledge of educators. Insufficient training and professional development opportunities for teachers in literacy education remain a significant barrier. Continuous training is necessary to familiarize educators with the latest literacy teaching strategies and tools. Without ongoing professional development, educators may be ill-equipped to handle diverse literacy challenges, which can hinder the overall effectiveness of literacy initiatives.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Teachers in our community aren't adequately supported in their growth areas, especially concerning literacy instruction."*
2. *"Our staff requires more frequent and updated training to keep up with the evolving challenges in literacy education."*
3. *"Professional development opportunities are scarce, leaving our educators underprepared for literacy teaching."*
4. *"Our staff would benefit greatly from more professional development opportunities in literacy education."*
5. *"Without adequate training, our staff cannot implement the most effective literacy strategies."*

Elected Officials' Perceptions of Current Challenges, Barriers, and Needs

Early Childhood Literacy Gaps – One of the most frequently mentioned challenges in the interviews was the gap in literacy skills among young children before they enter formal education. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of early literacy development, particularly in the critical years between birth and age five. Without adequate support during these formative years, children often begin kindergarten already behind, which leads to long-term struggles with reading and writing proficiency. Early childhood literacy gaps are exacerbated by limited access to structured early learning programs, a lack of parental awareness about literacy development, and disparities in pre-kindergarten educational opportunities. Many stakeholders agreed that reading proficiency by third grade is a crucial benchmark, as students who are not reading at grade level by this point are more likely to struggle throughout their academic careers. Addressing this challenge requires targeted interventions, community-supported early learning initiatives, and enhanced parental engagement to foster early literacy habits at home.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Students who don't develop literacy skills early are at risk of falling behind in every subject."*
2. *"Our students need to be reading on grade level by the time they get to 3rd grade."*
3. *"Children are finishing elementary school not reading competently, and by middle school or high school, it's really too late."*
4. *"We have students progressing through elementary school with gaps in their skill sets."*
5. *"Some enter kindergarten without the necessary prerequisite skills and struggle throughout school."*

Impact of Socioeconomic Disparities – Literacy development is closely linked to socioeconomic status. Families with higher incomes benefit from greater access to books, tutoring, and educational resources that support literacy growth, while children from low-income households often face early disadvantages due to resource limitations. Generational poverty further contributes to these disparities, as parents with lower literacy proficiency may be less equipped to support their children's reading development. Without strategic intervention, these gaps persist, leading to long-term academic and economic challenges. Interviewees emphasized the necessity of directing literacy funding and educational support to low-income communities to ensure all children receive equitable opportunities for success.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"If you are wealthy in America, you get the tutoring and the skills where you are weak."*
2. *"In poor communities, they don't have those opportunities because of the wealth gap."*
3. *"Children from low-income families enter school already behind and struggle to catch up."*

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4. *"The cycle of generational poverty is fueled by lack of access to literacy resources."*
5. *"Schools in affluent neighborhoods often have better-funded literacy programs."*

Inconsistent Literacy Programs and Strategies –Interviews revealed significant inconsistencies in literacy instruction across schools. While some effectively use evidence-based programs, others lack structured approaches, leading to disparities in student achievement. Without a cohesive district-wide literacy strategy, schools implement varied instructional methods, resulting in uneven application of best practices. Participants stressed the importance of standardized literacy curricula, clear instructional guidelines, and accountability measures to ensure consistent, high-quality literacy education.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"There is no comprehensive strategy for addressing literacy gaps across our district."*
2. *"Instruction is not being differentiated appropriately for struggling readers."*
3. *"Principals and teachers are left to determine their own literacy interventions, leading to inconsistency."*
4. *"Some schools are effectively using evidence-based reading programs, while others are not."*
5. *"A lack of accountability means that some schools do not fully implement literacy initiatives."*
6. *"We need a standardized approach to literacy instruction to ensure all students receive adequate support."*

Enhance Parental Support and Education – Parental involvement is a key factor in literacy development, yet many parents face obstacles that hinder their ability to support their children effectively. Interviews highlighted challenges such as limited literacy proficiency, demanding work schedules, and lack of awareness regarding their child's reading progress. Some parents, particularly those with limited formal education or multiple job commitments, struggle to provide academic support at home. A significant concern is that many parents are unaware of literacy intervention programs or how to access them.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"If a parent can't read well or dropped out of high school, they can't help with homework."*
2. *"Parents who struggle with literacy themselves cannot fully support their children's reading development."*
3. *"Single parents juggling multiple jobs have little time to assist their children with reading."*
4. *"Without parental reinforcement, school-based literacy efforts have limited success."*
5. *"Teaching parents to support literacy at home is just as important as teaching students."*

Teacher Training and Retention Issues – A shortage of qualified literacy educators poses a significant challenge to literacy improvement, particularly in traditionally underserved areas. Many schools rely on teachers with alternative certifications who may lack the specialized training necessary for effective literacy instruction. High turnover rates and insufficient access to professional development further disrupt instructional continuity. There is a need for comprehensive teacher training programs that prioritize evidence-based literacy instruction, particularly for early-career educators.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We have a shortage of trained teachers who specialize in literacy instruction."*
2. *"Many of our teachers are on temporary certification and lack the necessary skills."*
3. *"High turnover rates in struggling schools make it difficult to establish consistent literacy instruction."*
4. *"Without proper training, teachers are unable to implement effective reading strategies."*

Recommendations

Recommendations of Families and Community Members

Community and Library Engagement – Community-based literacy initiatives were a common recommendation among survey participants. Many called for more library events, community reading groups, and mentorship programs to support children's literacy development. Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration between schools, libraries, and local organizations to create an environment where literacy is prioritized.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Community centers should offer free literacy workshops for families."*
2. *"Public libraries should host more interactive reading programs for children."*
3. *"Mentorship programs where older students read with younger children could be effective."*
4. *"Providing free community resources, such as tutoring and educational support, is necessary for families that can't afford private help."*
5. *"It's important for schools and libraries to work together to support literacy, especially by offering programs outside of school hours."*
6. *"Events to demonstrate valuable tips for reading together, such as interactive strategies, should be incorporated into school and community activities."*
7. *"Access to affordable tutoring services should be expanded so more children can benefit from additional literacy support."*
8. *"More volunteer-led reading programs in libraries and schools would be beneficial."*
9. *"Local businesses should sponsor literacy initiatives and book giveaways."*
10. *"More community spaces on the east side of town, with better transportation, would make it easier for students to access learning opportunities."*
11. *"Reading challenges [competitions] within communities would encourage children to read more."*
12. *"Community literacy programs need to expand, but they should also be accessible to families who may struggle with transportation and scheduling conflicts."*
13. *"Public spaces should have reading corners to make books more accessible."*
14. *"Collaboration between schools and libraries would strengthen literacy outreach efforts."*

Desired Literacy Resources and Tools – Respondents expressed a strong need for more accessible and engaging literacy resources. Many emphasized the importance of early exposure to books, interactive reading materials, and diverse literacy formats such as audiobooks, magazines, and digital resources. Additionally, several participants highlighted the role of book clubs and community-based reading initiatives in encouraging a love of reading. Suggestions included expanding library services, providing free or affordable books, and ensuring children have access to a diverse range of literature to encourage reading engagement.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Local book clubs, access to books at home, and providing audiobooks and magazines would make a huge difference."*
2. *"Schools should provide more take-home books so children can practice reading at home."*
3. *"We need more community book exchanges to make reading materials accessible to all families."*
4. *"Our local library needs better funding to expand its children's book collection."*
5. *"Book donation programs can help families who cannot afford to buy books regularly."*
6. *"Parents ... need easy, low-stakes ways to learn how to support literacy at home."*
7. *"We need more resources that are parent-friendly so families can reinforce learning at home."*
8. *"Workshops for parents and kids would be a great idea, offering hands-on activities to engage them with literacy."*
9. *"Public libraries should have extended hours so working parents can take their children."*
10. *"We need more engaging and interactive literacy tools to keep students involved."*
11. *"There should be more initiatives to distribute free books in underserved communities."*
12. *"Parental guidance on effective use of educational tools."*
13. *"Increasing parental involvement through interactive literacy activities."*
14. *"Properly curated and up-to-date resources are crucial for literacy programs."*
15. *"Affordable book fairs would encourage parents to buy more books for their kids."*
16. *"Enhanced support systems for educators to help guide parents."*
17. *"Increasing access to book clubs, library programs, and providing more teachers and resources in classrooms will improve literacy outcomes."*
18. *"School libraries should have more diverse books so children can relate to the stories."*

Digital and Technological Literacy Tools – Technology was frequently mentioned as a valuable tool for literacy development. Respondents recommended the integration of educational apps, digital storybooks, and interactive software to make literacy more engaging. Many suggested that schools and parents should have greater access to high-quality digital literacy tools to supplement traditional reading activities.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Schools should incorporate more interactive digital literacy tools in classrooms."*
2. *"Educational apps have made reading more engaging for my child."*
3. *"Online libraries should be expanded to provide free digital books for students."*
4. *"Interactive e-books can help struggling readers by providing audio support."*
5. *"Interactive educational software helps reinforce literacy skills at home."*
6. *"Adaptive learning platforms provide personalized literacy instruction."*
7. *"Free online literacy resources should be expanded to reach more children."*
8. *"Free online programs that give audiobooks that visually show kids the words help when parents work two jobs and don't have time to read with them."*
9. *"Digital story time sessions could help busy families integrate literacy into daily life."*
10. *"More free online literacy resources should be available for students and parents."*
11. *"Virtual reading mentors would provide additional literacy support."*
12. *"Schools should partner with tech companies to improve access to digital reading tools."*

Educational Programs and Support Services – Many participants highlighted the need for enhanced educational programs and support services, including smaller class sizes, one-on-one reading interventions, and teacher training to address diverse learning needs. There was also an emphasis on early childhood literacy screening and ensuring that struggling readers receive targeted support before falling behind.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Less students per classroom, more support in classrooms, and more individualized reading interventions would benefit struggling readers."*
2. *"As a former reading teacher, I saw firsthand how overcrowded classrooms make it difficult to close literacy gaps. We need more targeted support."*
3. *"Ensure that children are developmentally ready before pushing reading and writing instruction too early. Early literacy screenings and teacher training in learning disabilities are essential."*
4. *"Community literacy programs need to expand, but they should also be accessible to families who may struggle with transportation and scheduling conflicts."*
5. *"Increasing access to book clubs, library programs, and providing more teachers and resources in classrooms will improve literacy outcomes."*

Teacher Training and School-Based Literacy Programs – Many responses underscored the need for improved teacher training and structured school-based literacy programs. Participants mentioned that educators should be better equipped with literacy-focused teaching strategies and that schools should adopt more effective literacy interventions for struggling readers. Respondents also recommended incorporating literacy development across all subjects.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Teachers need better training to help struggling readers with personalized strategies."*
2. *"Additional training for educators would help in early identification of literacy challenges."*
3. *"Teachers are better equipped to handle student challenges with the right training."*
4. *"More training enables teachers to customize their teaching methods to suit various learning styles."*
5. *"Ongoing professional development is essential for teacher effectiveness."*
6. *"Continuous training on effective literacy instruction strategies is crucial for our educators."*
7. *"Schools should integrate reading comprehension exercises into all subjects, not just English."*
8. *"More reading intervention specialists in schools would help students falling behind."*
9. *"Literacy should be a priority across the curriculum, not an afterthought."*
10. *"One-on-one reading support for struggling students would make a significant impact."*
11. *"Professional development for teachers should include evidence-based literacy instruction."*
12. *"Teachers need access to more classroom literacy resources."*
13. *"Reading coaches in schools could provide additional support to teachers and students."*

Recommendations of Educators

Focus on Literacy and Writing Skills – Educators indicated that improving literacy and writing skills involves explicit vocabulary instruction, repeated practice, and opportunities to engage in writing tasks. The strategies focus on helping students master literacy through consistent practice, structured lessons, and opportunities to apply their skills in writing-based activities.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"Read-alouds and critical thinking questions develop vocabulary and comprehension."*
2. *"Repeated practice of skills that students struggle to master."*
3. *"Repetition and vocabulary-focused tasks build foundational skills."*
4. *"Specific vocabulary instruction focusing on word roots, prefixes, and suffixes."*
5. *"Students teaching students can reinforce morphology and vocabulary."*
6. *"Children need to be challenged with writing-based assessments."*
7. *"Incorporating competitions and real-world writing tasks enhances engagement."*
8. *"Encouraging creativity through writing workshops builds confidence."*

Parental, School, and Community Engagement – Educators frequently highlighted the critical role of parental involvement and broader community engagement in supporting literacy and in creating a collaborative environment where students benefit from consistent support both inside and outside the classroom. Strategies include empowering parents with skills and encouraging collaboration between families and schools. The responses underscore the importance and need for collaboration between schools and communities to create targeted support programs, smaller class sizes, and equitable learning environments.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Rezone schools to make individual classrooms more equitable for all learners."*
2. *"Engage local leaders to promote literacy through public campaigns."*
3. *"Parent involvement has declined, but structured literacy nights and take-home resources could help bridge that gap."*
4. *"Create community-wide reading initiatives to make literacy a shared priority."*
5. *"Encourage local businesses to sponsor literacy programs and book donations."*
6. *"Community-based reading initiatives, like partnerships with local libraries and bookstores, could encourage students to read outside of school."*
7. *"If we could provide families with literacy kits—magnetic letters, dry-erase boards, or simple phonics resources—it could really help support learning at home."*
8. *"Encourage partnerships between schools and libraries for after-school programs."*
9. *"Involve local organizations in sponsoring literacy events and resources."*
10. *"Offer transportation for students to stay after school for additional help."*
11. *"Encourage schools to collaborate with nonprofits to provide tutoring services."*
12. *"Emphasize the importance of reading by providing more free opportunities, especially in underserved areas."*

13. *"Offer community workshops to teach individuals how to use literacy resources effectively."*
14. *"Encourage parents to engage with their children's academics through events and resources."*
15. *"More at-home practice and increased parental involvement for lowest achievers."*

Promoting Reading Programs and Access to Books – Educator responses emphasize the importance of community initiatives to improve access to books and encourage reading habits. Libraries, book clubs, and reading challenges are frequently suggested strategies.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Emphasize the importance of reading by providing more free opportunities, especially in underserved areas."*
2. *"Community-wide reading initiatives: book clubs for all ages, little free libraries, and community reading challenges."*
3. *"Provide reading challenges with different businesses like 'read 20 books and get a free pizza.'"*
4. *"We need community-based reading incentives—programs like 'Read for Pizza' or bookstore rewards that encourage students to engage in literacy outside of school."*
5. *"Organize community book clubs for readers of all ages."*
6. *Set up free book-sharing programs, like Little Free Libraries, in neighborhoods."*
7. *"Create digital libraries for easier access to educational resources."*
8. *"Collaborate with public libraries to expand access to digital and physical books."*
9. *"Promote community-wide literacy challenges with accessible reading materials."*

Targeted Reading Programs and Interventions for Students – Teachers frequently indicated that students who fall behind require additional resources, such as early interventions, specialized programs, and classroom support, to bridge the achievement gap. Providing adequate resources ensures that struggling students receive the support necessary to catch up with their peers. This includes financial investment, early interventions, and classroom assistance. Educator responses frequently highlighted the need for specialized programs and strategies aimed at improving literacy and reading skills. These programs emphasize phonics, comprehension, and fluency, often using technology to supplement learning. They may include structured interventions, tools like UFLI, and efforts to make reading engaging and meaningful.

Representative Responses:
1. *"Animated reading programs engage students and improve their comprehension."*
2. *"Daily individual novel reading, weekly group novel study, instructional center-based reading and writing exercises."*
3. *"Intensive reading programs."*
4. *"UFLI, Achieve 3000, IXL, IREADY."*

5. *"Chunking and buddy reading strategies assist with reading complex passages."*
6. *Reading Plus has shown to improve literacy skills for some students."*
7. *"Daily novel reading combined with instructional center-based exercises supports literacy."*
8. *"Early interventions address skill deficits before they widen."*
9. *"Offer programs for individualized support to struggling students."*
10. *Provide specific, phonics-based instruction and regular comprehension interventions."*
11. *"Additional financial resources are necessary to support intervention programs."*

Recommendations of Organizations

Address and Support Literacy Through Experiential Engagement
- Incorporate arts, PE, and experiential activities like clay modeling or music: These types of activities can improve comprehension and vocabulary by connecting students' practical knowledge to concepts.
- Use STEM as a literacy bridge for low-level readers
- Leverage STEM subjects to help low-level readers grasp complex vocabulary through context-based, interactive learning.
- Promote hands-on, experiential learning: Many educators emphasized that STEM and literacy development benefit from hands-on, real-world applications, which improve understanding and engagement.
- Increase hands-on, multisensory learning opportunities
- Shift toward a student-led, inquiry-based learning model

Develop Targeted Literacy Programs
- Provide resources and capacity for GED and adult education programs: Many adults within the community require GED and literacy support. Expanding GED and adult education programs, along with offering flexible learning options (e.g., online and evening classes), could increase adult literacy rates.
- Target middle school and teen demographics with literacy programs: Addressing literacy needs for older children who may have been overlooked or lack confidence is seen as crucial.
- Expand early engagement: Starting student engagement in earlier grades, such as 8th grade, could help bridge knowledge gaps and prepare students more thoroughly.

Enhance Parent/Family Involvement and Community Engagement
- Engage families in literacy activities through incentives, partnerships, and community events can foster a supportive environment for both children and adults. Consider exploring outreach initiatives via faith-based organizations and creating shared family literacy activities to increase engagement.

Establish a Rural Community Alliance/Support Network
- Establish a coalition representing rural areas within Alachua County to present unified requests to funders and policymakers. This alliance could effectively advocate for equitable distribution of resources and better representation at decision-making tables.
- Expand Literacy Resources and Programs to Rural Communities: There is a need for mobile or community-based resources to reach underserved areas lacking transportation and program access.

Improve Access and Awareness of Literacy Resources
- Programs require access to effective literacy tools and resources, especially for students in grades five and up who struggle with reading. Securing appropriate

materials, such as curriculum-based tools and supplementary learning aids, can aid in closing literacy gaps.

- Provide access to diverse literacy tools and engagement strategies: Many organizations recommend expanding literacy programming to include engaging activities like music, arts, and interactive technology.
- Create a centralized literacy/youth program resource book, website, or calendar - This could improve access, participation, and outcomes. It could also improve communication among organizations hosting literacy and youth events.
- Expand literacy resources and access to physical books.

Professional Development for Staff and Volunteers
- Provide specialized training: Organizations expressed a need for specialized training in reading, literacy strategies, and trauma-informed care for both staff and volunteers.
- Target literacy and disability support: Provide targeted professional development for staff in teaching literacy, contextualized learning, and supporting students with disabilities.
- Highlight retention: Training should cover effective retention strategies, particularly for adult learners balancing multiple responsibilities.
- Show and model hands-on teaching methods: Teachers need guidance and resources to implement effective hands-on and experiential learning, particularly in STEM.
- Enhance ESL support and training: The need for ESL-specific training for staff was highlighted to better support the increasing number of non-native English speakers, particularly Spanish speakers and Haitian Creole learners.

Promote Collaboration Between Schools and Community Centers
- Enhance partnerships between Alachua County public schools, charter schools, and community centers: This could include sharing professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers, collaborating on literacy initiatives, and creating integrated pathways for students moving between programs.

Promote Public Support and Awareness of Literacy Gaps/Needs
- Raise public awareness around literacy issues, especially for ESL and minority students. This could attract more community support and resources for literacy and college-readiness initiatives
- Increase awareness of literacy gaps among community members: Raising awareness about the prevalence and impact of literacy issues, especially in underserved areas, is essential for mobilizing support and resources.

Strengthen Organizational Partnerships
- Bridge gaps through multisector collaboration & coordination: There is a need for greater partnership between organizations to effectively support literacy and youth programs.
- Utilize community round tables for resource sharing and networking: Regular round-table discussions among literacy providers, public school representatives, community

leaders, and service organizations can create a supportive network for sharing resources and coordinating efforts to meet the diverse literacy needs of the community.

Other Recommendations

- Provide individualized and trauma-informed support for literacy
- Foster literacy enrichment programs with local and cultural relevance
- Integrate emotional and social learning into literacy programs
- Increase funding and staffing: Many community and educational organizations express a critical need for additional funding and staff, particularly in rural areas. This additional support could reduce the strain on current employees, enable more consistent programming, and improve retention of qualified personnel.
- Address basic needs to improve educational outcomes: The pressing need for accessible food, medical care, and transportation was repeatedly highlighted, especially for rural areas. Addressing these basic needs is foundational to improving literacy and overall community well-being.
- Recognize and reward positive behavior and engagement in education: Implement community recognition programs to incentivize both students and families who actively engage in educational opportunities and literacy programs. Recognizing such efforts can reinforce positive behavior and engagement in education.
- Encourage consistency in educational programs: Addressing the issue of inconsistency in program availability and resources can lead to more reliable support for children and families.
- Develop and fund community-wide literacy initiatives: The community should establish literacy-focused roundtables and initiatives, including those from city and county leaders and other stakeholders.

Recommendations of Students

Emphasize Reading as a Key Literacy Skill – One of the dominant themes emerging from the students responses was the emphasis on reading as a foundational skill for students. Many participants highlighted the importance of incorporating reading into both school and home environments. Several responses suggested making reading a regular habit, like that of one participant who stated, *"Make visiting the library part of your family's weekly routine,"* and another that emphasized, *"Encourage children to read at least two chapters of a book every week."* Additionally, survey participants frequently mentioned the role of books in developing literacy, with one respondent recommending, *"Provide small daily/weekly reading logs where students track their progress."* This theme underscores a strong belief in the power of reading to improve student academic success.

Encourage Writing as a Means of Expression – Another common theme focused on writing as an essential literacy skill that should be fostered both at school and at home. Several responses suggested that students should engage in frequent writing exercises to enhance their skills. One respondent wrote, *"Regularly assign brief writing exercises in your classroom to help students articulate their thoughts."* A similar sentiment was echoed in another student's response, *"Keep reading with me and making me write,"* indicating that writing is most effective when practiced in conjunction with reading. There was also an emphasis on making writing enjoyable, with one suggestion advocating for *"using creative storytelling prompts to make writing more engaging for children."*

Interactive and Engaging Learning Approaches – A final theme emerging from student responses is the value of interactive and engaging learning methods. Many responses emphasized the need for schools and families to make literacy education enjoyable. For example, one participant recommended, *"Practicing phonetics with fun activities."* This aligns with other responses that suggested creative strategies such as roundtable discussions, book clubs, and hands-on activities to make learning more dynamic and engaging. The emphasis on interactive methods suggests that respondents see literacy as a skill best cultivated through enjoyable and meaningful experiences.

The Role of Families in Literacy Development – Several responses also highlighted the role of families in supporting literacy development outside of school. The feedback encouraged parents and guardians to actively participate in their children's learning process. Some responses suggested engaging in educational outings, such as, *"Going with family to museums or historical places to encourage discussion and writing about experiences."* Others recommended integrating literacy activities into daily life, with one participant stating, *"Make reading a habit."* These responses reflect a shared understanding that literacy development extends beyond the classroom and into everyday family interactions.

Recommendations of Elected Officials

Expand Early Childhood Literacy Initiatives – One of the most consistently mentioned recommendations was the need to invest more resources into early childhood literacy. Many respondents emphasized that intervention between birth and age five is crucial in setting children up for long-term success in reading and writing.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We need to ensure all children have access to high-quality early learning programs."*
2. *"Expanding literacy programs for toddlers and preschoolers will prevent the cycle of struggling readers."*
3. *"Investing in early literacy will ultimately save money by reducing the need for later remediation."*
4. *"We need more investment in training teachers in evidence-based literacy instruction."*

Implement Targeted Literacy Interventions for At-Risk Students – Respondents emphasized the importance of targeted interventions for students who are most at risk of falling behind in literacy. Providing additional support to address gaps early helps to ensure more balanced access to literacy education for all students. They highlighted the need for structured, data-driven approaches to support struggling readers.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We need a system-wide approach to track and support struggling readers."*
2. *"We need to ensure that students with disabilities receive the literacy support they require."*
3. *"A data-driven approach helps us identify students who need additional reading support."*
4. *"High-quality tutoring and intervention programs can turn literacy trajectories around."*
5. *"With the right interventions, we can close the achievement gap and ensure all students reach grade-level literacy."*

Increase Community and School Collaboration – Interviewees consistently highlighted the need for better partnerships between schools, local governments, and community organizations to improve literacy. They have the potential to provide additional resources, volunteers, and support programs to local schools, and allow us to leverage expertise from universities, businesses, and nonprofits to strengthen literacy education. Many pointed to successful collaborations that have already made a difference and emphasized the importance of expanding such initiatives.

Representative Quotes:
1. *"The Children's Trust has been a game-changer in coordinating literacy resources."*
2. *"We need to coordinate better among all groups to maximize literacy efforts."*
3. *"Partnerships with UF and Santa Fe College could bring in much-needed research-backed literacy practices."*
4. *"Libraries, after-school programs, and community centers should be better integrated into the literacy strategy."*
5. *"More collaboration between schools and local businesses could help fund literacy initiatives."*

Strengthen Parental Engagement and Home-Based Literacy Support – Respondents highlighted the importance of family involvement in literacy development. They frequently suggested that schools and community organizations need to do more to engage parents and equip them with the tools to help their children develop literacy skills. Such efforts would strengthen home-school partnerships, encourage parents to take an active role in their child's reading progress, and create a culture of literacy within families and communities

Representative Quotes:
1. *"We need programs to engage parents in supporting early literacy at home."*
2. *"We need better communication between schools and parents about literacy progress."*
3. *"Providing parents with literacy workshops can empower them to support their children's reading development."*
4. *"Home libraries and book distribution programs can help families create literacy-rich environments."*
5. *"We need to ensure parents understand the critical role they play in their child's literacy success."*
6. *"Building strong parent-teacher relationships will help families feel more confident in supporting literacy at home."*

EARLY VERSIONS OF UF LASTINGER CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhanced Communication and Collaboration
- **Create Centralized Resource Hub** –https://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/ and https://www.fldoe.org/academics/standards/just-read-fl/families/.]
- **Promote existing book delivery programs** – The New Worlds Literacy Initiative employs engagement specialists with whom school districts can work to increase awareness and uptake. Alachua County stakeholders should work closely with these specialists to promote knowledge of the program in schools and the school board's knowledge of the program. The New Worlds Reading Initiative and other book delivery programs should be focal points at family nights, open houses, and other community events.
- **Host a community summit on literacy –** This would bring together educators, parents, community leaders, and organizations to discuss challenges and solutions. Scheduling and logistics of these community summits should take into consideration the transportation and scheduling challenges of the rural sections of Alachua County. To the furthest extent possible, meetings should be held in locations that are easy to access for families with limited means of transportation.
- **Create literacy "campaigns" across various media** – Use social media, local newspapers, and other platforms to highlight best practices for language and literacy development for families.
- **Use social media and local media outlets** – Encourage news segments, articles, and community events that focus on literacy. Promote literacy initiatives, events, and resources through social media, local newspapers, and radio stations.

Targeted Support
- **English Language Learner Support** – The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs has published a comprehensive policy document that outlines best practices in relationship building: *Fostering Collaborative Partnerships with Families of English Learners Within a Mult-Tiered System of Supports* - *https://www.mtss4els.org/files/resource-files/Series2-Brief4.pdf*
- **Resources for Educators of English Language Learners** – Tap into existing resources, such as the following:
    1. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/PracticeGuide/19
    2. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/PracticeGuide/6
    3. https://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Lang%20and%20Rdng%20Interventions%20for%20ELLs%20and%20ELLs%20with%20Disabilities.pdf
    4. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED517791.pdf

5. https://www.asha.org/Practice/multicultural/Phono/
6. https://www.mtss4els.org/
7. https://www.colorincolorado.org/
8. https://www.cselcenter.org/

- **Resources for Students with Disabilities** – There are ample existing professional learning resources for teachers of students with disabilities: Council for Exceptional Children and the CEEDAR Center: High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities- https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/High-Leverage-Practices-for-Students-with-Disabilties-updated.pdf National Center on Intensive Intervention's course content: https://intensiveintervention.org/training/course-content

- **Attract and retain ESE teachers** – Recommendations are offered through the CEEDAR Center (2020). For additional information, please see the CEEDAR Center's policy brief (*Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short Term Strategies and Long Term Solutions): https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CEEDAR-GTL-Shortages-Brief.pdf*

- **Expanded Professional Learning (Alachua County Schools)**
    - ° **Data-Driven Decision Making** – The Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (https://floridarti.usf.edu/) is a project funded by the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services through the University of South Florida that supports school districts' use of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Alachua County Schools could work with the PS/RtI Project to improve all aspects of its data-based decision-making processes.
    - ° **Professional Learning Opportunities for Organizations** – Further guidance on tutor and volunteer training can be found here:
        1. https://studentsupportaccelerator.org/tutoring/tutors/training-support/pre-service-training-guidance
        2. Reading 101 from Reading Rockets: https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-101/reading-101-learning-modules
        3. Ohio Department of Education Literacy On-Demand Courses: https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Literacy/Literacy-Academy/Literacy-Academy-on-Demand

- **Training on Assessments** – Reading Rockets Reading Assessment 101 Module: https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-101/reading-101-learning-modules/course-modules/assessment

- **Support children's literacy development at home.** Examples include:
    - ° Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) and Institute of Educational Science's (IES) Family Involvement Guides:

- ○ Kindergarten: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2020016.pdf
- ○ 1st grade: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2021042.pdf
- ○ 2nd grade: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2021053.pdf
- ○ 3rd grade: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2021086.pdf

Enhance Community Engagement in Reading

- **Engage Families and Communities**
  - ○ **Create "Book Clubs" for Families** – Encourage families to read together and discuss books.
  - ○ **Organize intergenerational reading events** – Bring together grandparents, parents, and children to read aloud or share their favorite stories.
    1. Study to model from: https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=3bfefbd2-c1e7-453f-8f10-bd5280d7aa80%40redis
    2. This method is a great way to involve volunteers in the classroom or school community.
  - ○ **Offer incentives for reading** – Provide rewards or prizes for students who reach certain reading goals.
- **Parent and Family Support**
  - ○ **Create parent support groups** – Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and provide a space for parents to share their experiences and challenges.
  - ○ **Provide translation services** for parent communication – Ensure that parents from diverse linguistic backgrounds have access to information and support in their native language. The district can evaluate current translation services for ease of use, availability, and effectiveness and make changes if needed. The district can also develop a relationship with UF International Center to recruit English-proficient student volunteer translators to help parents at school events and parent-teacher meetings.
- **Community support**
  - ○ **Establish collaborations with local businesses** – Engage businesses in sponsoring literacy events, providing resources, or offering volunteer opportunities. Develop relationships with local bookstores [Barnes & Noble, Books-a-Million, Book Gallery West, The Lynx Books] to host literary events for various age groups.
  - ○ **Strengthen relationships with libraries** – Partner with libraries to offer joint programs, share resources, and promote literacy initiatives. Alachua County Schools and other community stakeholders can partner with Alachua County

Libraries to offer joint programs (i.e. "night at the library" events field trips, etc.), share resources, and promote literacy initiatives.

- ◦ **Collaborate with community centers** – Work with community centers to provide literacy programs, access to resources, and support for families. Connect literacy coalition with community centers like YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, O2B Kids, sports leagues, etc. to share literacy resources and host literacy focused events.
- ◦ **Connect with faith-based organizations** – Partner with churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based organizations to reach families and provide literacy support.
- ◦ **Administer Volunteer Recruitment Campaigns** – Launch campaigns to recruit volunteers from the community to support literacy programs. Volunteers can provide valuable manpower and expertise, reducing the burden on staff.
- ◦ **Implement Corporate Social Responsibility Programs** – Encourage local businesses to include literacy support in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. CSR programs often include financial contributions and volunteer efforts that benefit literacy programs.
- ◦ **Promote Intergenerational Literacy** – Host events where grandparents can read to children or share their personal stories. Create additional opportunities for older adults to volunteer in schools or community programs.
- ◦ **Develop a Unified Community Approach** – Develop a comprehensive community literacy plan to identify key areas of need, strategies for addressing needs and ways to track progress.
- ◦ **Promote Reading Engagement**
  1. Identify laundromat book programs and work to establish them in local businesses.
  2. Develop a relationship with Friends of the Library to establish and stock free libraries in public parks, stores, and restaurants. Work with other organizations to gather book donations as needed to replenish shelves. For example, include a shelf of borrow-able books in the waiting area of a restaurant.
  3. Encourage ALL healthcare providers to keep a variety of books in their waiting rooms. Many parents bring their children with them to appointments.
  4. Encourage faith-based organizations to maintain a lending library in their public space, supplemented by donations from other organizations when possible.
  5. Headquarters library has at least one large event each year.

6. Develop a relationship with The Lynx Books, a local bookstore, to identify children's and YA authors who would be willing to visit a few schools and read aloud from their books. Also work with the Lynx to share information about The Lynx Tails Story Time events with families.

SURVEY PROTOCOLS

Mini Survey (Events)

Description: The mini survey is used only at events where respondents complete the survey using Lastinger laptops. This survey is *not* provided on the Lastinger website or in email recruitment.

Mini Survey Welcome Block
Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with the University of Florida Lastinger Center and Children's Trust of Alachua County. This survey asks about how children, youth, and adults in Alachua County learn how to read and write. This survey is completely anonymous, which means your name will not be recorded with your answers. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Julie Banks (juliebanks@coe.ufl.edu).

This survey is available in English and Español. Select your preferred language using the menu at the top right corner.

Mini Survey Eligibility Block
1. Which of these applies to you? Select all that apply.
   a. I live in Alachua County.
   b. I work in Alachua County.
   c. I attend school in Alachua County.
   d. I graduated from school in Alachua County in the last five years.
   e. I have a child or children who currently attend school in Alachua County.
   f. I had a child or children attend school in Alachua County in the last five years.
   g. None of the above.

Mini Survey Literacy Block
The first set of questions asks for your thoughts about literacy (language, reading, writing) in Alachua County. How much do you agree or disagree that **in Alachua County**:

1. **Children** have the early literacy skills they need to be **ready for kindergarten**.
2. **Children** can read age-appropriate and grade-level texts by the **end of third grade**.
3. **Children** can read-age-appropriate and grade-level texts, including non-fiction text, by the **end of eighth grade**.
4. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed academically in **college**.
5. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
6. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.
7. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
8. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.

a. Strongly Disagree
b. Disagree
c. Neutral
d. Agree
e. Strongly Agree

The next question asks you to share your thoughts about how to improve literacy learning (language, reading, and writing) in Alachua County.

9. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?

Mini Survey Family Block

The next questions ask you to share your thoughts about literacy learning (language, reading, and writing) in your family.

1. What are the most important activities, if any, your family does to help your children with reading and writing?
2. What, if anything, prevents families such as yours from helping children with reading and writing?

Mini Survey Demographics Block

The next set of questions asks for your background information so we make sure we are hearing from people all over Alachua County.

1. What is the zip code where you live?
2. What schools have your child or children attended? This list includes most of the schools in Alachua County. Start typing a school name to select it more quickly. Select all that apply.
3. What is your highest level of formal education?
   a. No schooling completed
   b. Up to 8th grade
   c. Some high school, no diploma
   d. High school graduate, diploma or equivalent (such as GED)
   e. Some college credit, no degree
   f. Trade, technical, or vocational training
   g. Associate's degree
   h. Bachelor's degree
   i. Master's degree
   j. Professional degree
   k. Doctoral degree
4. What language or languages do you speak the most at home? Select all that apply.
   a. Albanian
   b. Arabic

c. Chinese
d. Dravidian (Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam)
e. Dutch
f. English
g. Filipino, Tagalog
h. French
i. German
j. Hebrew
k. Hindi or related
l. Italian
m. Korean
n. Persian, Iranian, Farsi
o. Portuguese
p. Russian
q. Spanish
r. Vietnamese
s. Not listed
5. What is your racial/ethnic group? Select all that apply.
a. American Indian or Alaska Native
b. Asian
c. Black or African American
d. Hispanic or Latino/a/x
e. Middle Eastern or North African
f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
g. White
h. Prefer not to say
i. Prefer to describe
6. What is your gender identity?
a. Female
b. Male
c. Prefer not to say
d. Prefer to describe
7. What is your total household annual income?
a. Less than $10,000
b. $10,000 to $24,999
c. $25,000 to $49,999
d. $50,000 to $74,999
e. $75,000 to $99,999
f. $100,000 to $149,999
g. $150,000 or more
h. Prefer not to answer
8. How old are you?
a. Less than 18
b. 18-24
c. 25-29

    d. 30-34
    e. 35-39
    f. 40-44
    g. 45-49
    h. 50-54
    i. 55-59
    j. 60-64
    k. 65 or over

Mini Survey Closing Block

Mini Survey Non-Alachua Respondents

You indicated that you do not live, work, study, or have a child attending school in Alachua County.

1. What is the zip code where you live?
2. What does your community do **really well** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?
3. What could your community **improve** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us!

Mini Survey Alachua Respondents

Are you interested in receiving $50 to further share your ideas in a focus group? If so, you will be sent to a brief survey after you click Submit.
1. Yes
2. No

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your feedback will help us create an action plan to help everyone in Alachua County be LIFELONG READERS.

To end the survey, please click the SUBMIT button at the bottom right corner of the page. Thank you!

Website Survey (Email/Social Media Recruitment)

Description: The website survey is linked on the Lastinger Center website. Postcard QR codes and social media recruitment will link to this survey.

Website Survey Welcome Block

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with the University of Florida Lastinger Center and Children's Trust of Alachua County. This survey asks about how children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write in Alachua County. This survey is completely anonymous, which means your name will not be recorded with your answers. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Julie Banks (juliebanks@coe.ufl.edu).

This survey is available in English and Español. Select your preferred language using the menu at the top right corner.

Website Survey Eligibility Block

1. Which of these applies to you? Select all that apply.
    a. I live in Alachua County.
    b. I work in Alachua County.
    c. I attend school in Alachua County.
    d. I graduated from a school in Alachua County in the last five years.
    e. I have a child or children who currently attend school in Alachua County.
    f. I had a child or children attend school in Alachua County in the last five years.
    g. None of the above.

Website Survey Literacy Block

The first set of questions asks for your thoughts about literacy (language, reading, writing) in Alachua County. How much do you agree or disagree that **in Alachua County**:

1. **Children** have the early literacy skills they need to be **ready for kindergarten**.
2. **Children** can read age-appropriate and grade-level texts by the **end of third grade**.
3. **Children** can read-age-appropriate and grade-level texts, including non-fiction text, by the **end of eighth grade**.
4. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed academically in **college**.
5. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
6. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.
7. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
8. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree or disagree that **in Alachua County these groups of children have access to education** that helps them gain literacy skills (language, reading, writing)?

9. Children with disabilities
10. Children learning English
11. American Indian and Alaska Native children
12. Asian children
13. Black or African American children
14. Hispanic or Latino children
15. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children
16. White children
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

The next set of questions ask about what it was like for you to learn to read and write.

17. Please select the schools, if any, that you attended in Alachua County
18. What was it like for you to learn to **read**?
    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy
    e. Very easy
19. What was it like for you to learn to **write**?
    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy
    e. Very easy

The next question asks you to share your thoughts about how to improve literacy learning (language, reading, and writing) in Alachua County.

20. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?

Website Survey Family Block

The next questions ask you to share your thoughts about literacy learning (language, reading, and writing) in your family.

1. What are the most important activities, if any, your family does to help your children with reading and writing?

2. What, if anything, prevents families such as yours from helping children with reading and writing?

Website Survey Recent Graduate Block

The next set of questions asks about the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

1. I graduated with the literacy skills I needed to succeed academically in **college**
2. I graduated with the literacy skills I needed to succeed in the **workplace**
3. I graduated with the literacy skills I needed for **daily life**
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neutral
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree

The next items ask you to add your additional thoughts about your literacy learning.

4. What, if anything, could **schools in Alachua County** have done to help you learn to read and write better?
5. What, if anything, could **your family** have done to help you learn how to read and write better?

Website Survey Demographics Block

The next set of questions asks for your background information so we make sure we are hearing from people all over Alachua County.

1. What is the zip code where you live?
2. What schools have your child or children attended? Select all that apply.
3. What is your highest level of formal education?
   a. No schooling completed
   b. Up to 8th grade
   c. Some high school, no diploma
   d. High school graduate, diploma or equivalent (such as GED)
   e. Some college credit, no degree
   f. Trade, technical, or vocational training
   g. Associate's degree
   h. Bachelor's degree
   i. Master's degree
   j. Professional degree
   k. Doctoral degree
4. What language or languages do you speak the most at home? Select all that apply.
   a. Albanian
   b. Arabic

c. Chinese
　　　　d. Dravidian (Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam)
　　　　e. Dutch
　　　　f. English
　　　　g. Filipino, Tagalog
　　　　h. French
　　　　i. German
　　　　j. Hebrew
　　　　k. Hindi or related
　　　　l. Italian
　　　　m. Korean
　　　　n. Persian, Iranian, Farsi
　　　　o. Portuguese
　　　　p. Russian
　　　　q. Spanish
　　　　r. Vietnamese
　　　　s. Not listed
5. What is your racial/ethnic group? Select all that apply.
　　　　a. American Indian or Alaska Native
　　　　b. Asian
　　　　c. Black or African American
　　　　d. Hispanic or Latino/a/x
　　　　e. Middle Eastern or North African
　　　　f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
　　　　g. White
　　　　h. Prefer not to say
　　　　i. Prefer to describe
6. What is your gender identity?
　　　　a. Female
　　　　b. Male
　　　　c. Prefer not to say
　　　　d. Prefer to describe
7. What is your total household annual income?
　　　　a. Less than $10,000
　　　　b. $10,000 to $24,999
　　　　c. $25,000 to $49,999
　　　　d. $50,000 to $74,999
　　　　e. $75,000 to $99,999
　　　　f. $100,000 to $149,999
　　　　g. $150,000 or more
　　　　h. Prefer not to answer
8. How old are you?
　　　　a. Less than 18
　　　　b. 18-24
　　　　c. 25-29

d. 30-34
e. 35-39
f. 40-44
g. 45-49
h. 50-54
i. 55-59
j. 60-64
k. 65 or over

Website Survey Closing Block

Website Survey Non-Alachua Respondents

You indicated that you do not live, work, study, or have a child attending school in Alachua County.

1. What is the zip code where you live?
2. What does your community do **really well** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?
3. What could your community **improve** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us!

Website Survey Alachua Respondents

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your feedback will help us create an action plan to help everyone in Alachua County be LIFELONG READERS.

Are you interested in receiving $50 to further share your ideas in a focus group? If so, you will be sent to a brief survey after you click Submit.
1. Yes
2. No

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your feedback will help us create an action plan to help everyone in Alachua County be LIFELONG READERS.

To end the survey, please click the SUBMIT button at the bottom right corner of the page. Thank you!

Educator Survey

Description: The teacher survey is intended to be shared directly by education partners with teacher or education administrator constituents (e.g., Alachua County Public Schools, Early Learning Coalition, Episcopal Children's Services, Lastinger Center Flamingo Learning).

Educator Survey Welcome Block

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with the University of Florida Lastinger Center and Children's Trust of Alachua County. This survey asks about how children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write in Alachua County. This survey is completely anonymous, which means your name will not be recorded with your answers. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Julie Banks (juliebanks@coe.ufl.edu).

This survey is available in English and Español. Select your preferred language using the menu at the top right corner.

Educator Survey Eligibility Block
1. Which of these applies to you? Select all that apply.
    a. I live in Alachua County.
    b. I work in Alachua County.
    c. I have a child or children who currently attend school in Alachua County.
    d. I had a child or children attend school in Alachua County in the last five years.
    e. None of the above.

Educator Survey Qualifications and Demographics Block

The following questions ask about your workplace, role, and qualifications.

1. Which of the following best describes your role?
    a. Teacher
    b. Paraprofessional/Teacher Assistant
    c. Tutor/Volunteer
    d. Instructional Support/Coach
    e. Another teaching role
        i. Please describe:
    f. District Administrator
    g. School Administrator
    h. Center/Program Administrator
    i. Another administrative role
        i. Please describe:
2. Do you provide any amount of literacy instruction or learning support (language, reading, writing)?
    a. Yes
    b. No

3. Do you provide any amount of guidance for literacy instruction or learning support (language, reading, writing)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. What is the zip code for your school or program? <5-digit number only>
5. What is the name of the school or program where you currently work? (This survey is anonymous, and your answers will not be shared with anyone at your place of work.)
6. What student ages/grades do you work with?
    a. Early Learning Program or Center (ages 0-5)
    b. Elementary School (grades K–5)
    c. Middle School (grades 6–8)
    d. High School (grades 9–12)
7. At what type of school or program do you work?
    a. Early Learning Program or Center (ages 0-5)
    b. Elementary School (grades K–5)
    c. Middle School (grades 6–8)
    d. High School (grades 9–12)
    e. District Office
8. Which of the following credentials, if any, do you currently hold? Select all that apply.
    a. Director Credential from the Florida Department of Children and Families
    b. Staff Credential from Florida Department of Children and Families
    c. Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC)
    d. Emergent Literacy Micro-Credential
    e. Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) Endorsement
    f. Child Development Associate (CDA)
9. What type of teaching certificate, if any, do you currently hold in Florida?
    a. Professional Certificate
    b. Temporary Certificate
    c. Military Temporary Certificate
    d. Not Certified
10. How did you receive your certification?
    a. Bachelor's Degree plus Licensure
    b. Master's Degree plus Licensure
    c. Alternative Certification
11. How many years have you been in your current role/position?
    a. <1 year
    b. 1-3 years
    c. 4-6 years
    d. 7-9 years
    e. 10-12 years
    f. 13-15 years
    g. 16-18 years
    h. 19 years or more

Educator Survey Literacy Block

The next set of questions asks for your thoughts about literacy (language, reading, writing) in Alachua County. How much do you agree or disagree that **in Alachua County**:

1. **Children** have the early literacy skills they need to be **ready for kindergarten**.
2. **Children** can read age-appropriate and grade-level texts by the **end of third grade**.
3. **Children** can read-age-appropriate and grade-level texts, including non-fiction text, by the **end of eighth grade**.
4. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed academically in **college**.
5. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
6. **Students graduate** with the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.
7. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in a **variety of careers**.
8. **Adults** have the literacy skills they need to succeed in **daily life**.
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree or disagree that **in Alachua County these groups of children have access to education** that helps them gain literacy skills (language, reading, writing)?
9. Children with disabilities
10. Children learning English
11. American Indian and Alaska Native children
12. Asian children
13. Black or African American children
14. Hispanic or Latino children
15. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children
16. White children
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree

Educator Survey Professional Block

The next set of questions asks for your thoughts about literacy (language, reading, writing) **at your school or program**. How much do you agree or disagree that:

17. Children leave my program prepared for their next level of education.
18. My program's **curriculum** helps children gain language and emergent literacy skills.
19. My program's **approaches to teaching** helps children gain language and emergent literacy skills.

20. Students leave my school or program prepared for their next level of education.
21. My school or program's **core literacy curriculum** helps students learn how to **read**.
22. My school or program's **core literacy curriculum** helps students learn how to **write**.
23. My school or program's **phonics program** helps students learn how to **read**.
24. My school or program's **phonics program** helps students learn how to **write**.
25. My school or program's **intervention program** helps students learn how to **read**.
26. My school or program's **intervention program** helps students learn how to **write**.
27. Students leave my school or program prepared for their next level of education.
28. What are the most common literacy challenges your students face?
29. What strategies or programs have been most effective in improving literacy for your students?
30. Looking at the bigger picture, how can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
31. What are the most common literacy challenges students face?
32. What strategies or programs have been most effective in improving literacy for students?
33. Looking at the bigger picture, how can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly Agree
    f. Not applicable

The next set of questions asks about professional learning opportunities.

34. What mode of professional learning do you prefer?
    a. In-person synchronous
    b. Virtual synchronous
    c. Virtual asynchronous
    d. Mix of both in-person and virtual
35. What type of literacy-related professional learning opportunities would you like to access? Select all that apply.
    a. Coaching
    b. Competency-based credentials
    c. Conferences
    d. Courses
    e. Professional learning communities
    f. Webinars
    g. Workshops
    h. I'm not interested in literacy-related professional learning opportunities
36. What topics of literacy-related professional learning opportunities would you like to access? Select all that apply.
    a. Oral language development

b. Phonemic awareness
c. Phonics
d. Fluency
e. Vocabulary
f. Reading comprehension
g. Written language
h. Behavior management
i. Small group instruction
j. Whole group instruction
k. Curriculum implementation
l. Supplemental reading programs
m. Effective instruction for typically developing learners
n. Effective instruction for gifted learners
o. Effective instruction for students with disabilities
p. Effective instruction for English learners
q. I'm not interested in literacy-related professional learning opportunities

The next set of questions asks about professional learning opportunities.

37. What mode of professional learning do teachers prefer?
    a. In-person synchronous
    b. Virtual synchronous
    c. Virtual asynchronous
    d. Mix of both in-person and virtual
38. What type of literacy-related professional learning opportunities would you like teachers to access? Select all that apply.
    a. Coaching
    b. Competency-based credentials
    c. Conferences
    d. Courses
    e. Professional learning communities
    f. Webinars
    g. Workshops
    h. I'm not interested in literacy-related professional learning opportunities for teachers
39. What topics of literacy-related professional learning opportunities would you like teachers to access? Select all that apply.
    a. Oral language development
    b. Phonemic awareness
    c. Phonics
    d. Fluency
    e. Vocabulary
    f. Reading comprehension
    g. Written language
    h. Behavior management

      i.   Small group instruction
      j.   Whole group instruction
      k. Curriculum implementation
      l.   Supplemental reading programs
      m. Effective instruction for typically developing learners
      n. Effective instruction for gifted learners
      o. Effective instruction for students with disabilities
      p. Effective instruction for English learners
      q. I'm not interested in literacy-related professional learning opportunities for teachers.

Educator Survey Demographics Block

The next set of questions asks for your background information so we make sure we are hearing from people all over Alachua County.

1. What is your highest level of formal education?
   a. No schooling completed
   b. Up to 8th grade
   c. Some high school, no diploma
   d. High school graduate, diploma or equivalent (such as GED)
   e. Some college credit, no degree
   f. Trade, technical, or vocational training
   g. Associate's degree
   h. Bachelor's degree
   i. Master's degree
   j. Professional degree
   k. Doctoral degree
2. What language or languages do you speak the most at home? Select all that apply.
   a. Albanian
   b. Arabic
   c. Chinese
   d. Dravidian (Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam)
   e. Dutch
   f. English
   g. Filipino, Tagalog
   h. French
   i. German
   j. Hebrew
   k. Hindi or related
   l. Italian
   m. Korean
   n. Persian, Iranian, Farsi
   o. Portuguese
   p. Russian
   q. Spanish

  r. Vietnamese

  s. Not listed

3. What is your racial/ethnic group? Select all that apply.

  a. American Indian or Alaska Native

  b. Asian

  c. Black or African American

  d. Hispanic or Latino/a/x

  e. Middle Eastern or North African

  f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

  g. White

  h. Prefer not to say

  i. Prefer to describe

4. What is your gender identity?

  a. Female

  b. Male

  c. Prefer not to say

  d. Prefer to describe

5. What is your total household annual income?

  a. Less than $10,000

  b. $10,000 to $24,999

  c. $25,000 to $49,999

  d. $50,000 to $74,999

  e. $75,000 to $99,999

  f. $100,000 to $149,999

  g. $150,000 or more

  h. Prefer not to answer

6. How old are you?

  a. Less than 18

  b. 18-24

  c. 25-29

  d. 30-34

  e. 35-39

  f. 40-44

  g. 45-49

  h. 50-54

  i. 55-59

  j. 60-64

  k. 65 or over

Educator Survey Closing Block

Educator Survey Non-Alachua Respondents

You indicated that you do not live, work, study, or have a child attending school in Alachua County.

1. What is the zip code where you live?
2. What does your community do **really well** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?
3. What could your community **improve** to help children, youth, and adults learn how to read and write successfully?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us!

Educator Survey Alachua Respondents

We want to learn from you! We are conducting school and classroom visits this fall. Do you want to share what is exciting, innovative, or beneficial about how your students are reading, writing, and communicating? If you want us to visit you to see what is working well for you and your students, click Yes below, and you will be sent to a brief survey after you click Submit.

1. Yes
2. No

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your feedback will help us create an action plan to help everyone in Alachua County be LIFELONG READERS.

Thank you!

Student Survey

Description: The Student Survey is intended to be distributed via links shared on the website, by partnering organizations, and by parents.

Student Survey Welcome Block

This survey asks about how students learn how to read and write in Alachua County. This survey is anonymous, which means your name will not be included with your answers.

Student Survey Eligibility Block

1. Do you go to school in Alachua County (including homeschooling)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I already finished 12th grade

Student Survey Literacy Block

The first questions ask you about learning to read and write.

1. What grade are you in?
2. What school do you attend? <drop down>
3. What has it been like for you to learn to read?
   a. Very difficult
   b. Difficult
   c. Neutral
   d. Easy
   e. Very easy
4. What has it been like for you to learn to write?
   a. Very difficult
   b. Difficult
   c. Neutral
   d. Easy
   e. Very easy
5. What has it been like for your friends or peers at school to learn to read?
   a. Very difficult
   b. Difficult
   c. Neutral
   d. Easy
   e. Very easy
6. What has it been like for your friends or peers at school to learn to write?
   a. Very difficult
   b. Difficult
   c. Neutral
   d. Easy
   e. Very easy

The next items ask you to add your thoughts about literacy.

7. What, if anything, can **your school** do to help you learn to read and write better?
8. What, if anything, can **your family** do to help you learn how to read and write better?

Finally, we ask a few questions about your background so we make sure we are hearing from people across Alachua County.

9. What language or languages do you speak the most at home? Select all that apply.
    a. Albanian
    b. Arabic
    c. Chinese
    d. Dravidian (Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam)
    e. Dutch
    f. English
    g. Filipino, Tagalog
    h. French
    i. German
    j. Hebrew
    k. Hindi or related
    l. Italian
    m. Korean
    n. Persian, Iranian, Farsi
    o. Portuguese
    p. Russian
    q. Spanish
    r. Vietnamese
    s. Not listed
10. What is your racial/ethnic group? Select all that apply.
    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Hispanic or Latino/a/x
    e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    f. White
    g. Prefer not to say
    h. Prefer to describe

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us!

Focus Group Survey

Thank you for your interest in joining a focus group to share your ideas about literacy needs in Alachua County. You will receive $50 if you participate in a focus group.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your phone number?
3. What is your email address?
4. By checking "Yes", you agree to receive text messages from the UF Lastinger Center about participating in a focus group.
5. What is your preferred way to attend a focus group? Select all that apply.
   a. In-person
   b. Zoom
   c. Phone call
6. Do you need transportation to attend an in-person focus group?
7. Do you need childcare in order to attend an in-person focus group?
8. Which of the following describes you? Select all that apply.
   a. I currently live or work in Alachua County.
   b. I am a parent/caregiver of a student who attends or has attended an early learning program (ages 0-5) or K-12 school in Alachua County.
   c. I am a student who attends or recently attended school in Alachua County.
   d. I am a community or business leader, policy maker, or other elected government official in Alachua County.
   e. I am an early learning teacher or an employee of the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County.
   f. I am an early learning director or family childcare home provider in Alachua County.
   g. I am a K-12 teacher, teacher aide, or paraprofessional at a school or program in Alachua County.
   h. I am a K-12 school or district literacy or instructional coach at a school or program in Alachua County.
   i. I am a K-12 school administrator or other school leader at a school or program in Alachua County.
   j. I am a K-12 district administrator or other district leader at a school or program in Alachua County.
   k. I am a tutor or volunteer at a school or program in Alachua County.
   l. Something else not listed.
      i. Please describe:

We will contact you in the next few months if you are selected to participate in a focus group. To end the survey, please click the NEXT button at the bottom right corner of the page.

Thank you for your interest!

Classroom Visit Survey

Thank you for your interest in having us visit you to see what is working well for you and your students.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your phone number?
3. What is your email address?
4. What is the name of your school or program?
5. What age(s) or grade level(s) do you teach?
6. Tell us about what you are doing! What is exciting, innovative, or beneficial about how your students are reading, writing, and communicating?

We are hoping to visit a range of schools and age levels. We will contact you in the next couple of months if you are selected to participate in a school visit.

To end the survey, please click the NEXT button at the bottom right corner of the page. Thank you for your interest!

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Adult Focus Groups
Welcome/Introduction Prior to Recording (Adult Participants)
[*This protocol is meant for groups of up to 8 people for around 45 minutes*]

Welcome Message & Purpose
Hi everyone and thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to talk with us today. My name is [NAME], and I'm here with [INTRODUCE COLLEAGUE]. This project is being sponsored by the Children's Trust of Alachua County, the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, and the School Board of Alachua County. The UF Lastinger Center is collecting surveys and doing focus groups to better help children, youth, and adults gain literacy skills. By "literacy," we mean reading, writing, communication, and language.

Please don't feel like you have to answer every question. There are no right or wrong answers. We hope you feel comfortable sharing your point of view even if it's different from what other people share. Any follow-up questions we might ask are just for the purpose of ensuring that we clearly understand what has been said. We expect this session to take 45 to 60 minutes.

As a reminder, we will record this session for transcription purposes. No one outside of our team will have access to the recording. We will be on a first name basis, and we will not use any names in our reports. Everything you say here will be kept confidential.

There are several focus groups taking place. The notes from these sessions will be compiled and studied to identify what's working and what needs to be improved so everyone in Alachua County can be lifelong readers. Your feedback will be used to create a list of recommendations and an action plan.

Does anyone have any questions?

Media Release
We are asking you to review and sign a media release form, which will allow us to use your quotes directly, though without your name attached. [Share link in chat.] Now that you've had a chance to look over the form, do you have any questions?

If people have not already had a chance to read the media release form (digitally or in paper format), have them do that now. Make sure everyone who stays in the room/on Zoom has signed the media release before continuing.

Start Recording
We will now start recording, and I will begin with some basic questions about you and your background.

For general focus groups (i.e., not held with specific organizations or school district staff), start with the following explanation and question: We want to make sure to ask questions that are relevant to your experiences in Alachua County. How many of you have children or are in families with children who are attending or attended school in Alachua County?" If one or more people indicate YES, then go to the Family Focus Group Protocol. If no one indicates YES, then go to the Community Member Focus Group Protocol.

Ending the Focus Group

Final Opportunity to Share
Before we finish up today, is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Stop Recording & Thank Participants
Thank you so much for your time today.

District Leader Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move
1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
    a. Role
    b. Years in current role
    c. Grade(s)/course(s) previously taught, if any
    d. Total years teaching, if at all

Part II: Literacy Implementation
2. Please identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments schools and teachers use for reading instruction and intervention [differentiated by grade level].
    a. Of all the tools that have been used in the district, what has worked best to support children's reading and writing?
    b. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders support teachers in using these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
    c. Describe the professional learning opportunities teachers are provided to use these tools.
        i. What would make professional learning opportunities more effective for teachers?
1. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you wish administrators and teachers could access?
    a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
    b. On what topics?

2. Discuss your processes for implementing high-quality tier 1 instruction, as well as matching students to tier 2 and tier 3 intervention.
   a. What professional learning is provided, if any, that helps teachers differentiate tier 1 instruction when large numbers of students are reading below grade level?
   b. How prepared are schools/teachers in identifying students' underlying reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?
   c. How do you determine which intervention is most appropriate and how is that communicated to schools/teachers?
   d. What proportion of students in tier 2 or tier 3 make satisfactory or accelerated progress?
      i. How, if at all, do you track this?
      ii. Using what measures?
3. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for Alachua County Public Schools students?
4. Describe how, if at all, district and/or school leaders support collaborative grade-level planning.
   a. What does collaborative grade-level planning look like?
5. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders build the capacity of *all* staff to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?
6. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders promote teachers as leaders in the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction?
7. How, if at all, do district, school leaders, and/or teachers ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities? Can you describe the role of the family liaison?
8. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with early education providers in Alachua County?
9. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions
1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

School Leader Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
   a. Role
   b. Years in current role
   c. Grade(s)/course(s) previously taught, if any
   d. Total years teaching, if at all

Part II: Literacy Implementation

1. Identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments your school uses for reading instruction and intervention [differentiated by grade level].
   a. Of all the tools you've used, what has worked best to support children's reading and writing? How do you know that it worked?
   b. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders support teachers in using these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
   c. Describe the professional learning opportunities teachers are provided to use these tools.
       i. What would make professional learning opportunities more effective for teachers?
2. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you and/or your teachers could access?
   a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
   b. On what topics?
3. Discuss your processes for implementing high-quality tier 1 instruction, as well as matching students to tier 2 and tier 3 intervention.
   c. What professional learning is provided, if any, that helps teachers differentiate tier 1 instruction when large numbers of students are reading below grade level?
   d. How do you determine which intervention is most appropriate and how is that communicated to schools/teachers?
   e. What proportion of students in tier 2 or tier 3 make satisfactory or accelerated progress?
       i. How, if at all, do you track this?
       ii. Using what measures?
4. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for Alachua County Public Schools students?
5. How prepared are teachers in identifying students' underlying reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?
6. Describe how, if at all, district and/or school leaders support collaborative grade-level planning.
   f. What does collaborative grade-level planning look like?

7. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders build the capacity of *all* staff to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?
8. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders promote teachers as leaders in the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction?
9. How, if at all, do district, school leaders, and/or teachers ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities? Can you describe the role of the family liaison?
10. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with early education providers in Alachua County?
11. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?
12. As your building's instructional leader, do you feel like you're equipped with the necessary literacy content/background knowledge to guide your school?
13. What barriers do your school and students face in accessing resources that help them learn to read and write? How can those barriers be resolved?
14. Can we visit 1-2 classrooms at your school that are engaging in high-leverage and/or innovative literacy instruction?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions
1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move
1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
    a. School where you work
    b. Grade/learners/course(s) you currently teach
    c. Years in current role
    d. Total years teaching

Part II: Literacy Implementation
1. Of all the reading tools that have been used in the district, including curricula, supplemental programs, and assessments, what has worked best to support student's reading and writing? Or what hasn't worked? How do you know?
1. How, if at all, have district and/or school leaders supported how you use these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
2. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you need? Probes: On what topics? What type of professional learning do you prefer? (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)
3. How are you able to differentiate to meet student needs?
4. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for your students?
5. How, if at all, do you, your school, or the district ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities? Can you describe the role of the family liaison?
6. (Secondary teachers) To what extent should secondary content-area teachers be trained in, and implement reading strategies to help students access content?
7. Do you feel adequately prepared to teach your content to students with reading difficulties? Why or why not?
8. What barriers do your school and students face in accessing resources that help them learn to read and write? How can those barriers be resolved?

ASK PART II ONLY IF TIME – NOT A PRIORITY

Part II: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions
1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Teachers of Adult Learners Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move
1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
   a. Current role
   b. Years in current role
   c. Total years teaching

Part II: Literacy Implementation
1. Identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments you use for assisting adult learners.
   a. Of all the tools that you have used, what has worked best support their language and reading skills? How do you know?
   b. How, if at all, do you get support for using tools with fidelity, or as intended?
   c. Describe the professional learning you have received to use these tools.
      i. How helpful, if at all, has your professional learning been?
      ii. What would make your professional learning more effective?
2. What additional professional learning opportunities do you wish you could access to better serve adult learners?
   a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
   b. On what topics?
3. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for the adults you serve?

Part II: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions
1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Coach/Instructional Support Staff Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
   a. School where you work
   b. Current role
   c. Grade(s) supported
   d. Years in current role
   e. Total years teaching

Part II: Literacy Implementation

1. Identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments you use for supporting teachers' reading instruction and intervention.
   a. Of all the tools you've used, what has worked best to support children's reading and writing?
   b. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders support how you and/or teachers use these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
   c. Describe the professional learning you and/or teachers have received to use these tools.
      i. How helpful, if at all, has your professional learning been?
      ii. What would make your professional learning more effective?
      iii. Have you been provided with any additional professional learning above that which was provided to teachers?
2. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you wish you and/or teachers could access?
   a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
   b. On what topics?
3. Discuss your processes for supporting high-quality tier 1 instruction, as well as matching students to tier 2 and tier 3 intervention.
   a. What professional learning is provided, if any, that helps you differentiate tier 1 instruction, especially if large numbers of students are reading below grade level?
   b. How prepared do you feel in identifying students' underlying reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?
   c. How do you determine which intervention is most appropriate?
   d. What proportion of students in tier 2 or tier 3 make satisfactory or accelerated progress?
      i. How, if at all, do you track this?
      ii. Using what measures?
4. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for teachers and/or students?
5. How prepared do you feel in supporting teachers to identify students' underlying reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?

6. Describe how, if at all, district and/or school leaders support collaborative grade-level planning.
    a. What does collaborative grade-level planning look like?
7. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders build the capacity of all staff to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?
8. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders promote teachers as leaders in the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction?
9. How, if at all, do you, your school, or the district ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities? Can you describe the role of the family liaison?
10. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with early education providers in Alachua County?
11. How, if at all, do district and/or school leaders establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?
12. Do you feel like you have the professional autonomy to support teachers in ways that you know are effective?
13. What proportion of time do you engage in directly supporting teachers as opposed to other duties as assigned by school leader(s)?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions
1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Tutoring/Outside of School Time Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
    a. School or organization where you work
    b. Current role
    c. Grade(s) supported
    d. Years in current role
    e. Total years teaching, if any

Part II: Literacy Implementation

2. Identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments you use for reading instruction and intervention.
    a. Of all the tools you've used, what has worked best to support children's language and emergent literacy?
    b. How, if at all, do you receive support for how you use these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
    c. Describe the professional learning you have received to use these tools.
        i.   How helpful, if at all, has your professional learning been?
        ii. What would make your professional learning more effective?
3. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you wish you could access?
    a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
    b. On what topics?
4. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for your students?
5. How prepared do you feel in supporting teachers to identify students' underlying reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?
6. How, if at all, does your organization build the capacity of all staff to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?
7. How, if at all, does your organization promote staff in your role as leaders in the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction?
8. How, if at all, does your organization ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities?
9. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with early education providers in Alachua County?
10. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Early Learning Leaders/Teachers Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
    a. Program, school, or organization where you work
    b. Current role
    c. Age(s) supported
    d. Years in current role
    e. Total years teaching, if any

Part II: Literacy Implementation

1. Identify the (a) curricula, (b) programs, (c) strategies, and (d) assessments you use to support children's language and emergent literacy.
    a. Of all the tools you've used, what has worked best to support children's language and emergent literacy?
    b. How, if at all, do you receive support for how you use these tools with fidelity, or as intended?
    c. Describe the professional learning you have received to use these tools.
        i. How helpful, if at all, has your professional learning been?
        ii. What would make your professional learning more effective?
2. What additional literacy-related professional learning opportunities do you wish you could access?
    a. What type (e.g., coaching, competency-based credentials, conferences, courses, professional learning communities, webinars, workshops)?
    b. On what topics?
3. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for your students?
4. How prepared do you feel in identifying students' underlying emergent reading, writing, or language difficulties and implementing strategies that target them?
5. How, if at all, does your organization build the capacity of *all* staff to implement evidence-based language and emergent literacy support for children?
6. How, if at all, does your organization promote staff in your role as leaders in the implementation of evidence-based language and emergent literacy support for young children?
7. How, if at all, does your organization ensure family and community engagement in language and emergent literacy-related activities?
8. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with other education organizations such as the Early Learning Coalition and Alachua County Public Schools?
9. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Family Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
    a. Your interest in attending the focus group
    b. For participants with children, your child or children's grade(s) or age(s) and school(s) they attend or attended

Part II: Child-Focused Questions

1. How do you support your child or children's literacy development at home?
2. What do you feel families need most to better support children's success with reading and writing?

Part II: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Community Member Focus Group Protocol

This focus group protocol was used if NO focus group members said they had children. Otherwise, the Family Focus Group Protocol was used.

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your interest in attending the focus group

Part II: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Youth Focus Groups

Welcome Message & Purpose

Hi everyone! Thank you for taking time to talk with us today about reading and writing.

My name is [NAME] and I'm here with [INTRODUCE COLLEAGUE]. We will be asking you a few questions about what you think about learning to read and write. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, and any other questions we might ask you are just to make sure we understand what you are saying. I expect we will talk for about 45 minutes.

We really care about what you think about learning to read and write, and what you tell us will be helpful for knowing what things would be good to keep doing in school and what things might need to change. Let me stop here. Are there any questions?

Now that you've had a chance to look over the media release form (with your parent/guardian), are there any questions about what you are agreeing to by participating?

Start Recording

We will now start recording, and I will begin with some basic questions about you and your background.

Ending the Focus Group

Final Opportunity to Share

Before we finish up today, is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Stop Recording & Thank Participants

Thank you so much for your time today.

Student Focus Group Protocol

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce yourself and describe:
   a. What school you go to
   b. How old you are
   c. What do you want to be when you grow up / are an adult?

Part II: Student-Focused Questions

1. Why do you think it is important for you to learn to read and write?
2. What has it been like for you to learn how to read and write?
   a. What has been easy for you?
      i. What about for your friends or peers at school?

       b. What has been hard for you?
          i. What about for your friends or peers at school?
3. What are the most important things your school can do to help you learn how to read and write?
4. What are the most important things your family can do to help you learn how to read and write?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Organization Interview Protocol

Welcome/Introduction Prior to Recording

Welcome Message & Purpose

Hi everyone and thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to talk with us today. My name is [NAME], and I'm here with [INTRODUCE COLLEAGUE], and we will be asking you some questions about your hopes, dreams, challenges, and desires for improving reading and writing in Alachua County.

As a reminder, we will record this session for transcription purposes. No one outside of our team will have access to the recording. We will be on a first name basis, and we will not use any names in our reports. Everything you say here will be kept confidential by our team.

There are several interviews with organizations and focus groups with community members taking place. The notes from these sessions will be compiled and studied to identify what's working and what can be strengthened. Your feedback on the survey and in this interview will be used to create a list of recommendations and an action plan to improve literacy in Alachua County.

Does anyone have any questions?

Media Release

We would like you to sign a media release form, which will allow us to use your quotes directly, though without your name attached. [Share link/screen/form.] Now that you've had a chance to look over the form, do you have any questions?

If people have not already had a chance to read the media release form (digitally or in paper format), have them do that now. Make sure everyone who stays in the room/on Zoom has signed the media release before continuing.

Start Recording

We will now start recording, and I will begin with some basic questions about you and your background.

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce your organization and yourself and describe:
    a. Role
    b. Years in current role

Part II: Literacy Programming

1. Of the literacy-related tools (such as curricula, programs, strategies, or resources) that you have used at your organization, what has worked best to support learners' reading and writing development?
2. How, if at all, does your organization help staff/volunteers in using literacy-related tools with fidelity, or as intended?
3. What quality standards/best practices do you have in place?
    a. Can you provide some examples?
4. On what topics do you wish staff/volunteers could access additional professional learning?
5. What would make professional learning opportunities more effective for staff/volunteers?
6. What barriers does your program and the students served by your program face in accessing resources that help them learn to read and write? How can those barriers be resolved?
7. What is your greatest need in your role, which would yield the biggest improvement for children, youth, and/or adults in Alachua County?
8. How, if at all, does your organization build the capacity of *all* staff (and/or volunteers) to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?
9. How, if at all, does your organization ensure family and community engagement in literacy-related activities?
10. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and effective relationships with early education providers and/or Alachua County Public Schools?
11. How, if at all, does your organization establish and sustain positive and meaningful relationships with other community organizations that provide students with supplemental educational opportunities related to literacy?

Part III: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

1. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
2. What additional resources or support are needed?
3. Who is responsible for providing those resources?

Ending the Interview

Final Opportunity to Share
Before we finish up today, is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Stop Recording & Thank Participants
Thank you so much for your time today.

Request Participants to Assist with Needs Assessment

We would appreciate your organization's continued support of the Alachua County literacy needs assessment. I'm going to put the link to this project's website in the chat. The website includes links for people to complete our survey or sign up for a focus group.

- Ask #1: Would you be willing to share information about this project with the staff at your organization and the people your organization serves?
    - We can share our social media toolkit and email script, which makes sharing information really easy. Who should we email with that information?
    - We understand. Please feel free to fill out a survey yourself!
- Ask #2: We would like to conduct several focus groups across the county. Would your organization be willing to host a focus group? Hosting a focus group could include introducing us via email to people you think might be interested and we set it up from there. Or you could invite people and we could attend. Focus groups can be virtual or in person.
    - Great! How would you prefer to serve as host? What support do you need from us? Who would be our contact person for the focus group?
    - Ok, no problem!
- Ask #3: We are also attending in-person events across the county where we can ask people to fill out surveys. Do you know of any events that might be good for us to attend?
    - Awesome! What details do you have about the event? Is there someone we should contact about attending?
    - That's ok!
- Ask #4: Finally, do you know of other organizations that we should survey and interview?
    - What is their name and contact information?
    - Ok, thanks!

We really appreciate your time today. It was really wonderful talking with you!

Elected Officials Interview Protocol

Welcome/Introduction Prior to Recording

Welcome Message & Purpose

Hi everyone and thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to talk with us today. My name is [NAME], and I'm here with [INTRODUCE COLLEAGUE], and we will be asking you some questions about your hopes, dreams, challenges, and desires for improving reading and writing in Alachua County.

As a reminder, we will record this session for transcription purposes. No one outside of our team will have access to the recording. We will be on a first name basis, and we will not use any names in our reports. Everything you say here will be kept confidential by our team.

There are several interviews with organizations and focus groups with community members taking place. The notes from these sessions will be compiled and studied to identify what's working and what can be strengthened. Your feedback on the survey and in this interview will be used to create a list of recommendations and an action plan to improve literacy in Alachua County.

Do you have any questions?

Media Release

We would like you to sign a media release form, which will allow us to use your quotes directly, though without your name attached. [Share link/screen/form.] Now that you've had a chance to look over the form, do you have any questions?

Start Recording

We will now start recording, and I will begin with some basic questions about you and your background.

Part I: Background and Opening Move

1. Please introduce your organization and yourself and describe:
   a. Role
   b. Years in current position

Part II: Perceptions of Literacy Needs and Possible Solutions

2. What do you perceive as the "most pressing" literacy needs for students within the county?
3. Are there specific community demographics you believe require targeted literacy support, and how might these needs be addressed?

4. How can our community help children, youth, and adults achieve their full potential when it comes to reading and writing?
5. Who is responsible for providing those resources?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ending the Interview

Stop Recording & Thank Participants
Thank you so much for your time today. <Add additional comments as appropriate.>

Request Participants to Assist with Needs Assessment
We really appreciate your time today. It was really wonderful talking with you!