

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



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UF | Lastinger Center for Learning
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Preliminary Focus Group Results

Preliminary Findings from Focus Group Data

Challenges Faced by 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.

- *"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."*
- *"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."*
- *"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."*
- *"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."*

Preliminary Findings from Focus Group Data, Cont'd

Parental Involvement and Advocacy

Parental involvement and advocacy are essential for children's success, especially those with special needs. However, parents often struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, which limits their ability to provide consistent support, especially in academic settings.

- *"I help him with all of his homework, which includes the reading... I'm doing my best to help him learn to understand what he's reading."*
- *"A lot of parents don't go to open houses where they explain things, so many miss out on the resources shared there."*
- *"I make reading fun at home, using games and acting out books to make my kids want to engage with reading."*
- *"I was very curious about how they were learning and what they were learning, which made me part of that adventure with them."*
- *"If we need to initiate any other type of therapies to help him, whether at school or outside of school, then that's what we've done and what we'll continue to do."*
- *"Parents need to advocate for our children. If we don't feel they're getting the skills they need, we need to ask, 'What can we do?'"*

Preliminary Findings from Focus Group Data, Cont'd

Resource Accessibility and Communication

Parents reported difficulties in accessing information and understanding how to use available resources effectively. 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.

- *"I'm sure the resources are out there, so maybe just making it easier to find out about said resources."*
- *"I don't always find out anything through the school... I learned about you guys from one of our little community centers..."*
- *"They send homework, but no additional resources on how to help my child with literacy at home."*
- *"It'd be nice if parents got a list of all the online resources their children could use for extra learning."*
- *"We assume people have access to the internet, but if your community is your house, it's hard to get information."*
- *"Even though the district pays for some helpful subscriptions, parents often don't know how to access them or use them."*

Preliminary Findings from Focus Group Data, Cont'd

Disparities in Educational Support and Literacy Programs

Participants noted disparities in the availability and quality of educational resources across different schools and communities. While some schools offer strong literacy programs and access to tutors, others lack sufficient support, particularly for children with learning disabilities. This variation in resources exacerbates educational inequalities, particularly for families in underserved or low-income communities.

- *"We have students graduating who are illiterate because they didn't get the proper interventions in time."*
- *"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."*
- *"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."*
- *"The inequity in resources is apparent between different schools, like the number of books available and access to reading materials."*
- *"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."*

Preliminary Findings from Focus Group Data, Cont'd

Need for Community and School Collaboration

Stronger collaboration between schools, community organizations, and families is needed to improve literacy outcomes, including integrating support from libraries, after-school programs, providing bilingual resources, and addressing socioeconomic barriers through community-based literacy events.

- *"You can go to Bo Diddley Park and have something going on there... But it doesn't always have to be music, games, and beer. Why can't we have educational events for kids?"*
- *"More community spaces on the east side of town, with better transportation, would make it easier for students to access learning opportunities."*
- *"Workshops for parents and kids would be a great idea, offering hands-on activities to engage them with literacy."*
- *"Providing free community resources, such as tutoring and educational support, is necessary for families that can't afford private help."*
- *"It's important for schools and libraries to work together to support literacy, especially by offering programs outside of school hours."*



Preliminary Survey Open-Ended Results

Survey Recommendations to Improve Literacy

Increase Access to Equitable, High-Quality Resources and Services

- There is a strong call for more equitable distribution of high-quality educational resources across all communities, particularly underserved areas. This includes free or affordable tutoring programs, access to books, literacy materials, and targeted support for children with special needs or those struggling with learning disabilities.
- Schools, libraries, and community organizations need to collaborate to centralize available resources, making them easily accessible to all families, especially those in low-income or disadvantaged areas.

Strengthen Early Literacy Interventions

- Focusing on early childhood literacy is critical. Recommendations include starting literacy education earlier (before VPK), ensuring access to pre-kindergarten education, and promoting systematic phonics instruction.
- Early identification of learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, is also essential, along with providing adequate support to help children overcome learning challenges before they fall too far behind.

Survey Recommendations to Improve Literacy, Cont'd

Enhance Teacher Training and Support

- Teachers need more training in evidence-based literacy methods, such as phonics and multisensory approaches, to effectively teach reading and writing. Professional development should focus on building educators' capacity to address diverse learning needs and support students with literacy challenges.
- Providing teachers with the necessary resources, smaller class sizes, and additional support staff is also a key recommendation, as teachers are currently stretched too thin.

Survey Recommendations to Improve Literacy, Cont'd

Develop Targeted, Inclusive Literacy Programs

- Literacy programs should be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students, including non-native English speakers, children with special needs, and those from different cultural backgrounds. This includes providing materials in multiple languages and creating inclusive programs that engage children with varying abilities and learning styles.
- Expanding literacy outreach through creative programs like mobile libraries, reading contests, and literacy-themed events in the community is also recommended to make literacy more engaging and accessible for all children.

Survey Recommendations to Improve Literacy, Cont'd

Expand Family and Community Involvement

- Family engagement in literacy development should be expanded through workshops, community events, and resources that help parents support their children's learning at home. Families should be educated about the importance of reading from an early age and provided with the tools to make reading a fun and consistent part of their daily routines.
- Collaboration between schools, parents, and the broader community is vital to creating a supportive literacy environment both inside and outside of school.

Breakout Rooms: Data Review

- Do these findings resonate with you?
- What are you not seeing (yet)?
- Who do we need to include in conversations about recommendations *before* writing the report?
- What roadblocks should we anticipate as we conceptualize possible recommendations?
- What solutions are already occurring?
- What are the first 3-5 steps?