

Education

Alachua County Reads kicks off workgroup to enhance local literacy efforts



Nick Anschultz

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1 Comment



The Alachua County Reads Community Literacy Collaborative held its kickoff workgroup meeting on July 15.
Photo by Nick Anschultz

The Alachua County Reads (ACR) Community Literacy Collaborative held its kickoff workgroup meeting on Wednesday at the Children's Trust of Alachua County (CTAC), where staff, partners and experts came together to discuss the ongoing collaborative effort to improve literacy in Alachua County.

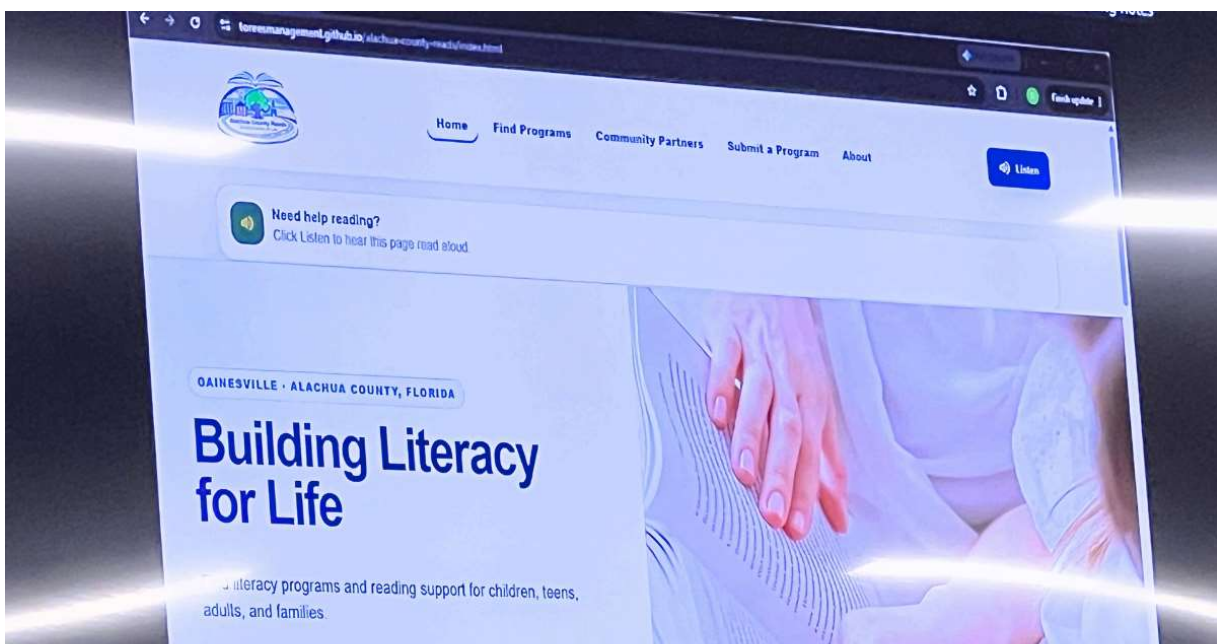
The literacy collaborative initiative dates to April of last year, when the CTAC and the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) [held a joint meeting](#). At that meeting, board members heard about the first phase of a four-part plan to improve literacy rates in schools and the community.

The first phase, the [Alachua County Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment \(ACCLNA\)](#), compiled by the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning in conjunction with the CTAC, Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS), involved surveying ACPS educators and district staff, along with families and community members.

The report revealed that over the course of four years (2020-2021 to 2023-2024), only 50-55% of students in Alachua County were reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

The ACCLNA outlined three big issues to address with literacy:

- Enhanced awareness and communication
- Focused support
- Expanded professional learning



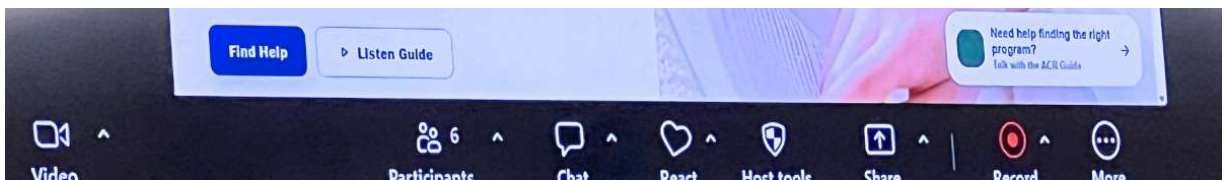


Photo by Nick Anschutz

Attendees at Wednesday's meeting were given a sneak peek at the virtual literacy hub, which is expected to go live on Aug. 1.

During the joint meeting with the CTAC, the BOCC voted to allocate \$250,000 for literacy improvement, directing staff to work with the CTAC and Center for Nonprofit Excellence (CNE), under the Community Foundation of North Central Florida, to coordinate a plan.

According to backup documents included with the agenda for a March 9 joint meeting of the BOCC and the city of Gainesville, the BOCC approved \$250,000 for literacy activities on Aug. 14, 2025. The CNE received \$50,000 "towards program planning and development," while PEAK Literacy received \$200,000 "to fund implementation."

Over the course of 2025, the CNE brought together a workgroup of partners identified in the ACCLNA "to create a project outline, set goals, and build a timeline," according to the CNE's website. Two **town hall meetings** were also held in October 2025, and feedback was requested "from groups already working to promote literacy" in the community "to build priorities for the project." Those groups included the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), ACPS, the Alachua County Campaign for Grade Level Reading project, the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI), the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) and the UF College of Education (COE).

"Now we're launching this project under the Alachua County Reads logo and identity to make sure that the community knows we're working from zero to 99 to ensure that that economic driver that literacy is the best that it can be for our community," Dr. Theresa Beachy, chief organizational strategist at the CNE, said in an interview with Mainstreet on Wednesday.

According to its purpose statement, provided in a slideshow at Wednesday's meeting, ACR "is a comprehensive, evidence-based community literacy initiative designed to transform literacy outcomes across Alachua County." The initiative operates through two integrated arms – Programming and Coordination – "working together to achieve measurable gains in readiness, instructional support and intervention/remediation."

The Programming arm is led by PEAK Literacy and the UFLI, while the Coordination arm is headed by the ACR team, according to the purpose statement. The two arms

organize four core functions, according to the CNE's website.

Programming arm

Design, Training, & Evaluation

- Evidence-based programming, professional learning and evaluation planning

Implementation & Partnership Support

- Readiness, instructional support, intervention/remediation

Coordination arm

Community Advisory Council

- Community input, representation, outreach, family engagement

Coordination of Services & Strategic Communication

- Hubs, awareness, reporting, provider capacity, shared accountability

According to Beachy, \$50,000 of the BOCC's \$250,000 – the CTAC is also contributing \$550,000 toward the project – has gone toward building a virtual literacy hub intended to eliminate barriers and make it easier for community members to access literacy resources.

“One of the things that the [literacy] needs assessment identified is that we needed a way to bring together all of these scattered literacy programs that are operating,” Beachy said.

Beachy noted that they've been working “dually” with David Torres, of the American Innovation Institute, to build the virtual hub. During Wednesday's meeting, attendees were provided with a sneak peek at the hub (www.alachuacountyreads.org), which is expected to go live on Aug. 1, according to Beachy.

In addition to the virtual space, Beachy said they've been collaborating with the ACLD, ACPS, Partnership for Strong Families and Elite Training Center to coordinate physical literacy hubs for community members to access resources. She added that they're hoping to have some of these physical hubs set up by September.

Along with the launch of the literacy hubs, Beachy said the next steps in the project will include “more media and awareness.” ensuring that folks know what is happening in

include more media and awareness, ensuring that folks know what is happening in the community and how the county is investing in the initiative. In addition to this, she noted that they'll also be working on getting the Community Advisory Council established.

ACR is seeking volunteers who would like to serve on the advisory council. Those who are interested can apply by scanning the QR code on the flyer below.



The flyer is for the Alachua County Reads Community Advisory Council. It features a teal background with a white wavy line separating the top header from the main text. The header includes the Alachua County Reads logo, which depicts a stylized landscape with a tree, a building, and a bridge, all under a sun and moon. The logo text reads "Alachua County Reads" and "Building Literacy for Life". To the right of the logo is a photograph of three people (two adults and one child) looking at a book together in a library setting. Below the header, the text "COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL" is written in large, bold, black capital letters. The main text block states: "Alachua County Reads needs your help to 'Build Literacy for Life' in our community! We are looking for volunteers interested in serving on our Advisory Council to promote the project and encourage community-wide participation. We need neighbors who represent caregivers, students, business, education, healthcare, churches, and community leaders like you. Join this team and make a difference!". To the right of this text is a QR code with the instruction "Complete this survey to apply". At the bottom, there are five icons with corresponding labels: "Build Connections" (two people), "Promote Readiness" (a person climbing a ladder), "Encourage Reading" (a lightbulb and a book), "Support Learners" (a graduation cap and a book), and "Make an Impact" (a gear with an upward arrow).

Alachua County Reads
Building Literacy for Life

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

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Join this team and make a difference!

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Make an Impact

Alachua County Reads seeks volunteers interested in serving on its Community Advisory Council.

Toward the end of Wednesday's meeting, Dr. Amanda Shrink, of ACPS, left the partners

with the following quote.

“Change takes time,” she said.

Heidi Keegan, the coordinator for ACR, added to Shrink’s comment.

“Every improvement for every child or youth or adult matters,” Keegan said. “And it is progress toward our goal, and it matters to them and their life outcomes. We appreciate all of the work that you [all] do, and we look forward to sharing those wins – big and small.”

*Nick Anschultz is a Report for America corps member and writes about education for Mainstreet Daily News. This position is supported by **local donations through the Community Catalyst for Local Journalism Fund** at the Community Foundation of North Central Florida.*



Nick Anschultz

Before joining Mainstreet Daily News to cover K-12 and higher education, Nick spent three and a half years at the Levy Citizen, where he served as the newspaper’s editor/reporter. In that role, Nick covered everything from government and education to sports and local events. He discovered his passion for journalism while attending the University of Florida, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism in May 2021. When he is not typing words on his keyboard, you can usually find Anschultz watching sports – especially his Florida Gators – fishing, or spending time with friends and family. Nick is also a Report for America corps member.

✉ Reporter