

Community Literacy Collaborative: Town Hall Summary and January 2026 Update

Executive Summary

Community members from across Alachua County met at two town halls to discuss challenges and opportunities for improving literacy. Key findings include:

- **Barriers to Literacy:** Families face challenges tied to early childhood development, inconsistent diagnostic access, poverty, food insecurity, and mental health. Screen time and limited parental engagement were also cited as barriers.
- **Gaps in Resources:** The community needs more early childhood programs, faster and more equitable screening processes, culturally relevant learning opportunities, and clearer communication about available services.
- **Family Engagement:** Participants emphasized the importance of centralized information, streamlined support, and stronger partnerships across schools, libraries, clinics, and nonprofits.
- **Adult Literacy:** Many parents struggle with reading themselves, making it difficult to support their children's education.
- **Community Vision:** Literacy must be treated as a community responsibility—beginning at birth, supported across generations, and integrated with broader efforts to meet families' basic needs.

Overview: Alachua County has many strong programs and committed organizations, but families need easier access, coordination, and encouragement to use the resources already available.

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Eastside High School (Oct. 29, 2025) & Santa Fe High School (Oct. 30, 2025)

1. Barriers to Literacy

Participants identified multiple, interconnected barriers to literacy for both children and adults:

- **Early Foundations & Home Environment**

- Many children enter school without basic pre-reading or language skills.
- Families often lack time, resources, or knowledge to support literacy at home.
- Parents need guidance on how to talk with children, integrate learning into play, and establish early reading routines.

- **Access & Equity**

- Students in rural communities and families with disabilities face unequal access to literacy programs and testing.
- Early screening and diagnostic processes are slow and inconsistent, creating barriers to interventions.
- Testing, IEP, and 504 processes are confusing and unevenly communicated to parents.

- **Socioeconomic & Basic Needs**

- Food insecurity, housing instability, and other economic challenges compete with literacy as priorities.
- Families under stress find it difficult to advocate for or support their children's education.
- Attendance, sleep, and general well-being were highlighted as core needs linked to literacy success.

- **Motivation, Shame, and Mental Health**

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- Shame, low confidence, and mental health challenges discourage struggling readers.
- Students and adults often feel disconnected or embarrassed about their reading levels.
- Stress, trauma, and lack of motivation are major barriers, especially among teens.

- **Technology and Culture**

- Increased screen time and social media use compete with reading.
- Literacy must be made relevant and engaging, integrating student interests and real-life applications.

2. Needs and Resource Gaps

Participants identified opportunities for new or expanded resources:

- **Early and Accessible Support**

- More early childhood parenting classes and pre-literacy skill development.
- Streamlined, accessible diagnostic tools and quicker pathways to intervention.

- **Community-Based and Culturally Relevant Programs**

- Literacy efforts must expand beyond university-centered hubs to rural and under-resourced areas.
- Programs should include play, arts, music, and hands-on learning to build engagement and sensory skills.
- Opportunities for creative expression (e.g., poetry, writing contests) help reduce fear of reading.

- **Information and Resource Navigation**

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- Families need a clear, centralized roadmap to find literacy programs and testing options.
- Materials should use plain language, visual aids, and video supplements to improve accessibility.
- Consistent communication between schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations is needed.

3. Helping Families Engage with Literacy Resources

Suggestions focused on improving awareness, accessibility, and family involvement:

- **Centralized Information**

- Create a single, community-wide database or hub to list local literacy resources.
- Update and unify existing tools (e.g., 211) rather than duplicating efforts.

- **Streamlined Support**

- Reduce paperwork and ensure that families don't have to repeatedly provide information.
- Assign dedicated advocates or "navigators" to follow students and families through systems (education, healthcare, social services).

- **Community Partnerships**

- Strengthen collaboration among schools, clinics, libraries, churches, and nonprofits.
- Explore data-sharing and joint programming to better coordinate literacy and wellness services.

- **Incentives and Engagement**

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- Provide incentives (e.g., “literacy bucks,” free books, family events) to encourage participation.
- Use familiar community spaces and activities like “Books and Cooks” or home-based learning with cookbooks, manuals, and hobbies.
- Leverage social media, local TV, and public access channels to share reading lessons and raise awareness.

● **Adult Literacy**

- Recognize that many parents struggle with reading themselves and may lack high school diplomas or GEDs.
- Build adult literacy programs that help families learn together and equip parents to support their children.

4. Overarching Themes

- Literacy is **intergenerational** — it begins at birth and is sustained through family and community involvement.
- Solutions require **wraparound services** addressing mental health, nutrition, and economic stability.
- Programs must be **inclusive, locally relevant, and accessible** across all communities — not just those near large institutions.
- A coordinated approach is essential: **“Don’t reinvent the wheel — get everyone on the same page.”**

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Next Steps and January Updates

- Since securing its 501(c)(3) status, CNE has made significant progress in advancing this initiative. The organization has hired two team members with expertise in community engagement, education, and literacy to help lead the work. The team has already begun developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with subject matter experts and prospective Literacy Hub locations across the county.
- CNE is also partnering with a media and marketing vendor to develop a dedicated landing page for the initiative.
- In addition, CNE has compiled a preliminary list of potential community partners (Team 2) eligible for funding under this initiative by reviewing CTAC and CAPP funding lists. This list has been shared with the Advisory Committee for feedback and review.
- CNE continues to engage with the community to promote collective impact, its organizational mission, and the Community Literacy Collaborative. The team is scheduled to present to the Safety Net Collaborative on March 27.
- Immediate next steps include finalizing MOUs, confirming the community partner application invitation list, and convening with the Advisory Committee.