Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Georgia Council on Literacy Strategic Planning Meeting
Heart of Georgia RESA
January 22, 2024, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Minutes

In-Person Attendance

Jackie Lundberg	Amy Denty	Jaillene Hunter
Irene Munn	Yancy Ford	Andri Pilgrim
Noris Price	Caitlin Dooley	Jeanne Seaver
Scott Johnson	Bubba Longgrear	Susan Adams
Malcolm Mitchell	Gary Bingham	
Connie Howell	Arianne Weldon	
June Lewis	Stephanie Westhafer	
Amanda Craff	Carlett Fulcher	
April Howard	Katie Bennett	
Wes Cooke	Lindee Morgan	

Virtual Attendance

Meredith MacKenzie	Stan Dejarnett	GEEARS/PAACT
Julie Walker	Sanjuana Rodriguez	Tina Engberg
Beth Haynes	Katie Bennett	Ashley Evans
Josh Stephens	Kimberly Hart	Beth?
Hanah Goldberg	Bill Rice	Miranda Williams
Meagan ?	Carol Williams	
Lisa Liedke	Kelly McKay	
Ellen Wiley	Lisa ?	
Megan Mercer	Beth ¿	
Ann Rosenthal	Andrew Allison	
Joy Hawkins	Beth?	

I.   Review and approve agenda   10 a.m.
   a. Chairman Johnson asked for approval of the agenda. The Council voted unanimously to approve the Jan. 22 agenda.

II.   SB 211 and HB 538 Implementation   10:15

Working Group framework based on SB 211 (see handout)

III.	Causes of low literacy – Data and asset review and discussion	10:45
	Garry McGiboney, Executive Director of Government and Education	
	Strategies, Sharecare and COO for Health Security Dynamics	
	Arriane Weldon, Get Georgia Reading	
	Working lunch; continued discussion about causes of low literacy	**11:45**
IV.	2024 Working Group considerations: goals, initiatives and recommendations	12:15 p.m.
V.	Supporting Group reports	1:30
	○ Literacy Coach Design Team (Amy Denty)	
	○ Community Engagement (Caitlin Dooley)	
	○ Communications – Georgia Reads (Joy Hawkins)	
VI.	Next steps and closing	2:45
	Scott Johnson, Chair	
VII.	Adjourn	3:00

Next Council Meetings: April 22, August 26, November 18

Literacy Council Meeting
January 22, 2024

COUNCIL FEEDBACK

Working Group Charge based on SB 211 requirements.

All Working Groups must include the following review of conditions, needs, issues, and problems related to literacy outcomes:

- Evaluate and consider best practices, experience, and results of legislation in other states.
- Research literacy rates for low-income students.
- Research literacy rates for minority and ESOL students.
- Research literacy rates for students with characteristics of dyslexia.

SB 211 and HB 538 requirements assigned to specific Working Groups:

Birth–Age 5 Working Group Charge:

- Review and make recommendations for professional development needed by current teachers in pre-K.
- Review state-wide birth to age 5 initiatives and suggest policy and appropriations changes.
- Develop goals, initiatives, and recommendations.

Birth to Age 5

- Provide greater support for families in understanding the critical importance of birth to age 5 development.
- The school systems should partner/collaborate with child care centers; health department is supporting the identification of all child care providers including "mom and pop" providers. Involve them in preparing for those children's foundational learning. Identification and collaboration with specific entities who can have a significant impact is a priority.
- Provide high quality childcare access for all children. Align the Georgia learning standards to ensure that high quality childcare can provide the foundation for success as children transition to school.
- Consider HOPE scholarship for early care and learning -childcare subsidy.
- Increase the access to high quality childcare; increase the community understanding of the importance of high-quality childcare. Helping parents understand the importance.
- Align DECAL work with Georgia Standards for Excellence curriculum and assessments. Work with Babies Can't Wait to help children and families early on.
- Find a means to support families to develop tools and support their children's language development.
- Consider ways to bolster CAPS.

K-3rd Grade Working Group Charge:

- Implement requirements of the Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB 538).
- Monitor literacy goals and measures set by SBOE – make conclusions as it relates to the status and effectiveness of current policies and initiatives.
- Review changes or updates to QBE funding to enhance literacy instruction.
- Review professional development needed by current teachers in K-3rd grade.
- Develop goals, initiatives, and recommendations.

Grades K-3rd

- DECAL handoff to the Georgia Department of Education-How can these two groups work together to effectively transition children and ensure kindergarten readiness.
- The professional development needs to be job embedded and teachers need ongoing coaching. To do something well, teachers need a specific person designated to the job of effective literacy coaching.
- Increase capacity for peer mentorship. Support efforts for QBE to support capital outlay for Pre-K.
- Teachers need ongoing professional learning support. The most important aspect of PD is to ensure ongoing support for teachers. Focus on solid PD with ongoing support.
- We want the teachers to understand the WHY behind the science of teaching reading. Strong motivator for implementing the law will be clarity of understanding and value.
- Look at QBE support for professional learning so that it is specific to each teacher's needs. Not a whole group approach.
- Look at K-3 scheduling, policy, and funding-it shows absolute commitment to Literacy as the priority.
- Make certain that all students have access to high quality deep content rich vocabulary. Make certain that science and social studies topics of interest are embedded in the vocabulary and reading.
- The reading interventionist must be passionate and constantly watching the needle-how will they make it move.

Teacher Professional Development Working Group Charge:

- Review alignment of teacher certifications to include evidence-based literacy instruction and education.
- Review current teacher professional development needed in pre-k–3rd grade.
- Develop goals, initiatives, and recommendations.

Teacher Professional Development

- Get the Science of Literacy Standards within the GACE, it will motivate the pre-service community to look carefully at the requirements. Develop a pre-assessment that allows for personalized PD for teachers.

- Let's think of accountability measures (GaPSC and USG) that get us to the proficiency level that we expect.
- Look at GACE pass rate and beyond. ALSO, ask USG to look at success rates of the students taught by their graduates. How can we acquire more data to inform our decisions about how to help new and veteran teachers?
- Expand professional learning to include para professionals and provisional teachers. There is an ongoing need to build teachers and potential teachers.
- Put the best educators in the state in our K-3 grade classrooms. Continue to raise the bar for salaries for teachers to retain the best.
- Spend money to provide appropriate professional learning for the teachers dependent upon the specific needs of the teachers. Train teachers in the science of reading but keep it focused on outcomes for the teachers.
- Strengthen the pipeline of support for new teachers and aspiring teachers. Support pathways for provisional teachers and Para pros. Evaluate and provide ongoing support for teachers.
- Empower the RESA's to truly lead the work of training teachers to be successful in the science of reading.
- Evaluate whether we should require ALL teachers to be trained in the science of reading. (LETRS for art, music, PE)-teachers should be true specialists. Specials teachers can teach vocabulary and integrate, but may not need to be engaged in the direct instruction of the science of reading.

Community Engagement Working Group Charge:

- Review best practices for community-based literacy programs.
- Develop goals, initiatives, and recommendations.

Community Engagement

- Inventory the community and identify the specific resources for support.
- Work with post-secondary schools (technical colleges) to encourage adult ed programs and early childhood programs promote coordination-incorporate a badging program within.
- Culturally connect to the community so the message can be received. It requires trusted community members to be the people who communicate the message of valuing literacy.
- Consider the two-prong approach-make communities aware of the barriers and then start the grass roots efforts to engage them to achieve what they want for their communities.
- How do we make the state aware of what we are doing? Provide public comment time at the Literacy Council Meetings-try to get some feedback from the community at large.
- Make sure that the underserved are aware of the opportunities that exist at their local colleges and technical schools. How do we promote this?

- State needs to find a way (framework) to solicit an "RFP" process for small grants that encourage/motivate communities to prioritize how they will support literacy. Encourage through local community leaders and leadership organizations.
- Community collaboration especially through the local organizations-provide local communities with the resources, knowledge and tools to mobilize efforts around literacy.
- Identify key literacy skills for each grade/development level and ensure the teachers know how to look for those very specific skills. Based upon the data shared at the council meeting, there are some specific signs and skill benchmarks everyone should be very informed about how to identify and respond.
- Capitalize on social equity-embrace the tools that communities like and value. If the right person says the right thing, you get movement. How do we use the social capital in our communities to be literacy influencers? Social media is a powerful tool for promotion; how can the right people influence others to value a literate community?
- Strengthen the parent's knowledge of Babies Can't Wait.

Suggested Meeting Framework – 2024

Quarter 1, January-March

January 22, 2024 – Full Council Strategic Planning Meeting

Working Groups

1) Identification of root causes of illiteracy and low literacy for additional research and analysis in 2024.
2) Discuss frameworks for goals, initiatives and possible recommendations.

Quarter 2, April-June

April 22, 2024 – Full Council Meeting – Goal Setting/Cross Agency Alignment

Working Groups – cross agency collaboration and work on goals and focus areas for research and analysis.

Quarter 3, July-September

August 26, 2024 – Full Council Meeting – Working Group proposals (legislation and appropriations)

Working Groups – report on recommendations.

Quarter 4, October-December

November 18 – Full Council Meeting – Approval of Council's November 30 final report for 2024

Working Groups – Strategic Planning for 2025

Result of work: Recommendations for legislation and appropriations (by September) to support improving such outcomes. Submit final report by Nov. 30.

SEE-KS

Social Engagement Ladder

Location: _____   Date: _____

Activity: _____   Time of Day: _____

Educator(s): _____   Data Collector(s): _____

Fully Engaged (4)
Frequent spontaneous initiation, consistent independent engagement with materials, frequent expression of positive emotional investment

Mostly Engaged (3)
Occasional spontaneous initiation, occasional independent engagement with materials, occasional expression of positive emotional investment

Partially Engaged (2)
Responsive or non-spontaneous initiation, compliant with directions, seldom shares expression of positive emotional investment

Emerging/Fleeting (1)
Intermittently responsive without initiation, dependent on direction, minimal expression of positive emotional investment

No Focus (0)
Non-responsive, not engaging with targeted materials, and not sharing any emotion or expression, possibly out of the room

Learners	Multiplied by	Equals	
	4's		Total # of Learners
	3's		Total Engagement Divided by Total # Above
	2's		
	1's		Equals Average Level of Engagement
	0's		

Learning Environment Sketch Space

Literacy Coach Design Team

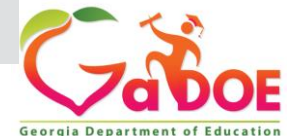## Georgia's Tiered Plan for Literacy Coaching

Aims and Objectives

Meeting Aims:

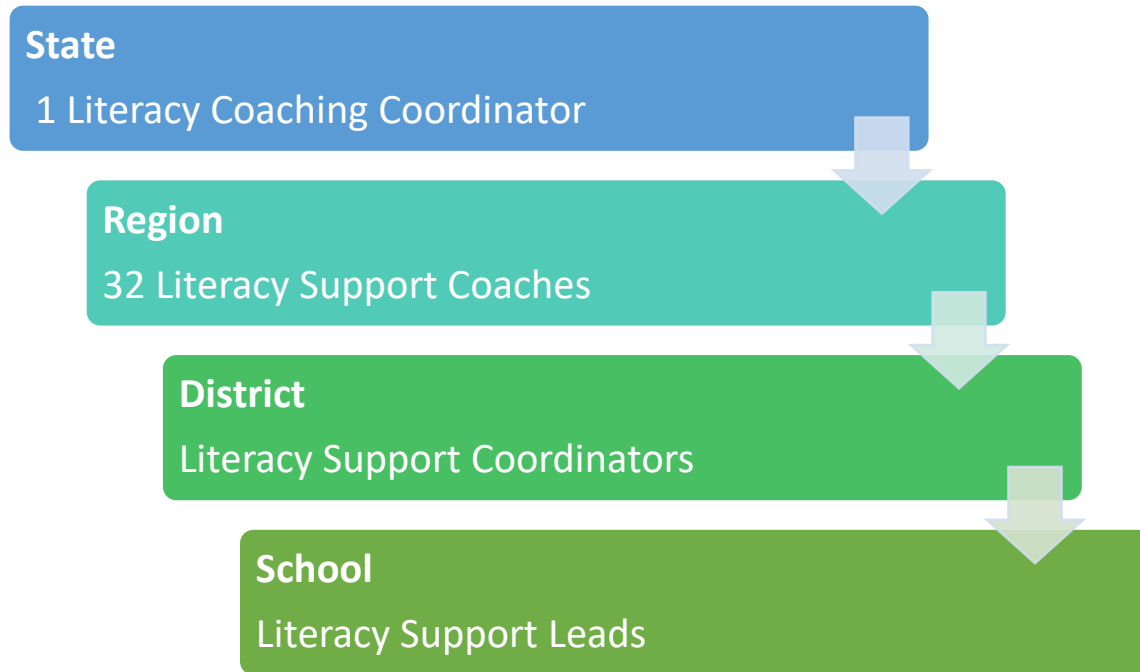- Co-create shared cross-agency commitment to a plan to scale literacy coaching statewide

Our Agreements

- Center needs of educators and students
- Be more curious than certain
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Say it and embrace discomfort
- Assume best intentions and goodwill
- Lean into disagreement/misalignment
- Approach from "yes, if…" rather than "no because…"
- Seek solutions
- Vegas

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GaDOE
Georgia Department of Education

Georgia's Tiered Coaching Proposal

State
1 Literacy Coaching Coordinator

Region
32 Literacy Support Coaches

District
Literacy Support Coordinators

School
Literacy Support Leads

NOTICE Language Indicators of Well-Being

	BEFORE WORDS			EMERGING LANGUAGE	
	Children are building their attachment to the social world and communicating primarily through body language, gestures, and facial expressions.			Children are beginning to use single words, brief phrases, and simple sentences with either speech, pictures, sign language, or technology.	
The Why	Responding to a familiar caregiver's voice, gestures, touch, and facial expressions	Communicating for different purposes including: sharing attention, requesting, and sharing emotion	Communicating for many reasons including starting social games, sharing, protesting, and requesting actions	Communicating frequently within back and forth exchanges with others	Communicating to request assistance, share emotion, and request information (e.g., where's___?)
The How	Vocalizing or babbling in a back and forth manner	Using gestures, facial expressions, imitated actions, or vocalizations to gain attention	Pairing gestures with sounds, routinized or imitated words (either speech, pictures, signs, or other)	Using of single words for object labels, people's names, action words, modifiers, and relational words (e.g., up, down, in)	Using and understanding of combinations of words with people's names and verbs
Coping With Others	Showing interest and soothing in response to a familiar caregiver	Soothing in response to others' facial expressions, actions, and emotion/energy states	Seeking comfort and engagement from familiar caregivers	Seeking comfort from others by asking for attention and comfort items	Requesting soothing activities when distressed
Coping On One's Own	Using familiar routines and materials as a source of comfort	Using objects familiar to natural routines to soothe during transitions	Imitating simple play actions to rehearse real-life activities	Using play actions with objects to rehearse real-life activities.	Using simple self-regulatory language or symbols ("first…then") to maintain engagement in activities.

"Symbols" refers to spoken words, written words, picture symbols, sign language, etc.

This table was developed by Rubin, Weldon, McGiboney, Thomas & Pileggi (2023); Reference: Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent & Rydell (2006); Updated September 2023

SANDRA DUNAGAN DEAL CENTER FOR EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

NOTICE Language Indicators of Well-Being

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE COMPETENCE			CONVERSATIONAL
Children are using simple and complex sentences, while still developing their use and understanding of language in unfamiliar situations, for a range of communicative functions (expressing emotion, asking for help, sharing remorse), and for the use of inner self-talk to guide their behavior.			Children are consistently using complex sentences, conversational level discourse, and "inner dialogue" for executive functioning. They are likely developing their use of language in a range of social contexts.
The Why	Communicating to share emotion and describe the emotions of others	Communicating to share simple stories and past events	Initiating and maintaining conversation by both commenting and requesting information	Communicating for many purposes including negotiating, collaborating, and expressing remorse or empathy with others
The How	Using simple sentences, including those with people's names, verbs and nouns (either speech, pictures or symbols)	Using a range of sentences, including complex (either speech, pictures or symbols)	Providing essential background information based upon listener's perspective	Understanding and using complex sentences as well as a range of gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice as a means to interpret figurative language (e.g., metaphors), humor and sarcasm
Coping With Others	Requesting soothing items when distressed	Repairing breakdowns in communication and sharing causes of emotion	Requesting a break, assistance, and regulating activities to soothe when distressed	Responding to assistance offered by others to either engage or soothe in new and challenging activities
Coping On One's Own	Using self-regulatory language or symbols to anticipate transitions between activities	Using self-regulatory language or symbols to anticipate the steps of extended activities	Using self-regulatory language by telling stories and enacting social sequences to prepare for future events	Using language or symbols to problem-solve and self-monitor in current or future events (i.e., executive functioning)

"Symbols" refers to spoken words, written words, picture symbols, sign language, etc.

This table was developed by Rubin, Weldon, McGiboney, Thomas & Pileggi (2023); Reference: Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent & Rydell (2006); Updated September 2023

SANDRA DUNAGAN DEAL CENTER FOR EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA): Findings from the 2021-2022 Year

Gary E. Bingham, Charles K. Fortner, Rihana S. Mason, and Rebecca Rohloff

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The **Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA) Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD)** program was implemented during the 2021-2022 school year. L4GA Implementation for the 2019 cohort impacted 39 LEAs and 230 schools. Although available data varied across LEAs, as a group, LEAs engaged in a variety of intervention activities including participating in professional learning activities, engaging in literacy instructional activities, assessing students' literacy skills at mandated timepoints, engaging parents in literacy activities, and collaborating with community partners.

What was the purpose of the evaluation?

We focused on two broad evaluation questions related to student achievement and L4GA implementation to better understand the general achievement of children and which LEAs were being particularly successful with implementation. We undertook both quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to better understand what LEAs were doing to support student literacy learning and achievement.

What were our evaluation data sources?

A variety of data sources were utilized to examine L4GA program implementation and to examine student literacy growth across the PreK to 11th grade bands. Student achievement data, teacher surveys, teacher attendance at GADOE provided professional learning opportunities, interviews with LEA implementation leads provided the bulk of information presented in this report.

What did we learn?

Our evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach to understand L4GA literacy implementation from the perspectives of student growth on standardized assessments and implementation at the level of the local education agency (LEA). Findings from multiple data sources from this external evaluation point to areas of success and challenge. In particular we highlight areas of commonalities across LEAs who were particularly successful in promoting student literacy outcomes during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Project Overview & Evaluation Areas of Focus

Decades of education reform initiatives have led to varying models of Continuous Improvement suggested by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The state of Georgia was granted funding from the US Department of Education's Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) program to provide support for local education agencies (LEAs) to implement interventions aimed at supporting the literacy achievement of prekindergarten to 12th grade students. Georgia developed a literacy plan that focuses on five pillars: (1) family and community partnerships, (2) effective leadership, (3) coherent instructional system, (4) supportive learning environment, and (5) professional capacity. Our external evaluation was

designed to examine LEA implementation of this initiative with attention to the coherence of the instructional system, characteristics of the learning environment, and professional capacity.

We adapted the *Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI) Conceptual Framework* (Meir et al., 2022) to guide our evaluation. Even though this framework was designed from implementation science research from early education settings, we utilized its applicability across grade levels. Two sets of inputs (I.e., macro-level contextual drivers and intervention focused on the whole-child or a specific domain) feed outputs that represent the activities delivered (e.g., curricula, professional learning, technical assistance, etc.). These outputs in turn influence both short-term (I.e., teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs and co-teacher collaboration) and longer-term student outcomes (i.e., academic competencies).

We replicated the multi-tiered approach that was used with the 2017 Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) cohort (Bingham et al., 2021) with the 2019 Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Cohorts 1 & 2. We employed a sequential mixed methods approach in order to answer our evaluation questions. This approach allowed us to examine students' literacy achievement and examine characteristics of successful LEA implementation. Evaluation questions that guided this study are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Evaluation Questions

- **EQ1** — How are students within L4GA LEAs performing on standardized literacy assessments from PreK to 11th grade?
- **EQ2** — How do L4GA LEAs describe how they are supporting student learning through professional learning activities?
- **EQ3** — Which LEAs are being particularly effective at promoting student literacy outcomes?
- **EQ4** — Are there particular practices related to curriculum, instructional practice, and professional learning that LEAs are engaged in that are supporting student literacy gains?

Implementation Timeline

This report summarizes the Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA) program 2019 Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Cohorts 1 & 2. This group included 39 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the state of Georgia who received competitive scores on their applications for L4GA funding submitted in 2018. This report describes information gathered from multiple data sources including child-level assessment data, professional learning attendance sponsored by Georgia's Department of Education (GADOE), teacher survey responses, and LEA administrator interviews. Table 1 illustrates the timeline associated with each data source.

Table 1. L4GA Implementation & Data Implementation Timeline

Data Source	Implementation & Data Collection Time Period			
	Fall 2021	Winter 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022
Child Level Literacy Assessments	◆	◆	◆	
GADOE Professional Learning Attendance	◆	◆	◆	
Teacher Survey			◆	
LEA Administrative Staff Interviews			◆	◆

EQ 1: How are students within L4GA LEAs performing on standardized literacy assessments?

Data Sources

Early childhood measures included the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-4: Dunn & Dunn, 2008) and the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS-PreK: Invernizzi, Justice, Landrum, & Booker, 2004). Reading achievement in the early elementary grades (Kindergarten through 3rd grade) was assessed with Acadience Reading K-6 (Good & Kaminski, 2011) while students in grades third through eleventh grades were assessed with the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Growth Measure (Leas formerly used HMH Reading Inventory). Students were assessed on both measures at three timepoints during the year (fall, winter, spring).

Standardized Assessments

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4th Edition (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn 2007)

The PPVT-4 was used as a measure of receptive vocabulary and was administered to students enrolled in birth to five programs (i.e., pre-kindergarten students). Form A was administered in the fall and Form B was administered in the spring. Children are assessed one-on-one by being asked to point to one of four pictures after hearing a verbal prompt. Designated personnel with appropriate credentials administered the PPVT either in classrooms or in designated areas within the school. After hearing a word, children were asked to point to the corresponding picture out of a grid of four pictures. Raw scores were converted into standard scores for all analyses. An average score of the PPVT is 100. A standard deviation is equivalent to 15 standard score points.

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS-PreK; Invernizzi, Juel, Swank, & Meir, 2004)

The PALS-PreK was used as a measure of fundamental early literacy skills for students enrolled in birth to five programs, who were primarily pre-kindergarten students. Fundamental skills included: phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, knowledge of letter sounds, the concept of a word, name writing. PALS-PreK includes seven subtests which are listed in Table 2. Subtests were administered either one-on-one or in small groups by LEAs. Raw subtest scores were categorized into benchmark or spring expected scores based upon PALS-PreK recommendations. We spotlight three subtests (Upper Case Letters, Letter-Sounds, and Name Writing) due to their predictive validity with learning outcomes in later grades (January & Kingbell, 2020). Children were administered assessments individually by trained facilitators or their teacher. Scoring for subtests are referenced to expectations for Spring benchmarks which are indicative of Kindergarten readiness.

Table 2. PALS Subtests By Skill Assessed

PALS Subtest	Basic Early Literacy Skill	Maximum Score	Spring Expected Ranges
*Upper Case Alphabet	Alphabet Knowledge	26	12-21
Lower case Alphabet	Alphabet Knowledge	26	9-17
*Letter-Sound Awareness	Letter Sound Knowledge	26	4–8
Rhyme Awareness	Phonological Awareness	10	5-7
Nursery Rhyme Awareness	Phonological Awareness		
Beginning Sound Awareness	Phoneme Awareness	10	5-8
Name Writing	Familiarity with Writing	7	5-7
Print and Word Awareness	Concept of a Word, Word Recognition in Isolation	10	7-9

*We report growth on these measures only

Acadience Reading (Good et al. 2013-2019; formerly known as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills)

Acadience Reading was used as a measure of early literacy and reading skills in kindergarten through third-grade students. The basic early literacy and reading skills assessed by the measure include: phonemic awareness, phonics, accurate and fluent reading, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Table 3 shows the list of subtests that were used as part of the L4GA Evaluation, subtests that were given to children at different grade bands, and the basic early literacy and/or reading skills it represents. Since the assessments vary by grade level and season, fewer assessment results are reported for the Oral Reading Fluency and Correct Words Per Minute portions of the Acadience Reading Assessment. In addition, some spring results for this assessment were not provided to the evaluation team for inclusion in this report. We processed over 18,100 student assessments on the Acadience composite measure in the fall and winter time periods and about 6,200 spring scores on this measure. Scores for subtests have benchmarks that differ for each time point of administration.

Table 3. Acadience Reading Subtests By Grade Level and Skill Assessed

Acadience Reading Subtest	Grade Assessed	Early Literacy/ Reading Skill	Fall Benchmark Score Range	Winter Benchmark Score Range	Spring Benchmark Score Range
*First Sound Fluency (FWF)	Kindergarten	Phonemic Awareness	10-15	30-42	
*Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	Kindergarten	Phonemic Awareness		20-43	40-55
*Letter naming Fluency	Kindergarten	N/A			
*Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	Kindergarten	Phonics-Alphabetic Principle		17-47	28-39
	First Grade		27-33	43-58	58-80
	Second Grade		54-71		
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)-Correct Words Per Minute (ORFA)	First Grade	Advanced Phonics Word Attack Skills Accurate and Fluent Reading of Connected Text		78%-85%	90%-96%
	Second Grade			96%-98%	97%-98%
	Third Grade			96%-98%	97%-98%

*These measures were included in the Acadience Composite Score for their respected age ranges

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Growth Measure (HMH-Growth, Houghton Mifflin, 2020)

GADOE switched reading comprehension assessment products from the HMH Reading Inventory to HMH Growth measure. The reading comprehension subtest of the HMH-Growth measure is a computer adaptive test that assesses skills aligned with common core standards for English Language Arts. The two content area domains within English Language arts are Reading comprehension and language. HMH-Growth was administered to students in grades 3-11 and the test vendor reports a Lexile score range for students based on the assessment in the fall, winter, and spring time periods. Using the average of the specified score ranges, we computed a single Lexile score for each student and utilized these scores in reported results. Models estimating the effect of LEAs on students HMH-Growth outcomes included 5,330 student observations in elementary grades (3-5), 6,925 student observations in middle grades (6-8), and 8,610 student observations in high school grades (9-11). Students needed to have scores in both the fall and spring time periods to be included in models. Scoring for subtests are referenced to expectations for Spring benchmarks.

Data Analytic Approaches

We addressed **EQ1** by utilizing the student records with sufficient data for analysis, we regressed a student's end of year score (PPVT, PALS, Acadience and HMH Growth measure, separately) on their beginning time period score, grade (using a series of indicator variables),

and the school or district's percentage of students in the following categories (direct certification portion (a measure of student income)), the portion of students with disabilities, the portion of students identified as gifted, the portion of students served in English as a second language programs, the portion of students in the following race or ethnic category designations (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and multiracial), and the portion of female students. For students in pre-K settings, district level controls were used as not all control variables are available for students in non-public school settings. These district and school-level controls were obtained from the Office of Student Achievement's (GOSA) publicly available data and merged to data provided by GA DOE to the evaluation team. We utilized a hierarchical linear regression model (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) using the mixed command in Stata/MP 15.1 to account for the clustered nature of this data and recovered estimates of the LEA contribution to student outcomes for reporting. Since only students participating in L4GA are assessed on these instruments, we are limited to generating estimates of the relative performance of LEAs on our measures. To provide additional information that does not rely on comparisons only among treated students, we report on the proportion of students meeting benchmark thresholds for performance established by developers of these assessments. For the PPVT, we report on the proportion of students whose standardized PPVT scores increased by four points or more between the fall and spring assessment periods.

Strategy 1: Our initial approach to data reporting provides a standardized measure of student performance that can contextualize where students in the participating districts are scoring across measures relative to established benchmarks based on the full population of children of a given age or grade level. This benchmark is typically established by utilizing the assessment instrument with a normative sample of students. A normative sample is a group of students selected to provide an accurate representation of a specified population of students. For example, a normative sample might be a smaller group of hundreds or thousands of students whose characteristics are weighted to reflect the sample of all third-grade students attending schools in the United States in 2021-2022. A test developer can use assessment data from this normative sample of students to make inferences about the 'average' or typical performance level of students from the specified population on an assessment. These samples are used to establish benchmark performance levels that allow comparisons between individual students or a local population of students to determine how these students perform relative to the overall population.

The PALS subtests, Acadience Reading subtests, and HMH-Growth assessments provided benchmark performance cut-off scores or ranges that allowed us to calculate the proportion of assessed students within an LEA that were performing at or above the specified cut-off level on each assessment or assessment subtest. The PALS and Acadience Reading benchmark cut-offs consider student's maturation over the course of the time periods assessed (fall, winter, and spring) and alter the expected performance level based on the date of the assessment (the expected performance of students is higher in the spring of the school year compared to the winter). This means that in order to increase the proportion of students meeting a specific benchmark level, students must be improving their skills at a rate that is faster than the expected average change in student skills over the time period. An apt

comparison might be canoeing down a river. The river's current is helping all the canoes move downstream at an expected rate. Increasing proportions of students meeting one of these benchmarks means that the movement downstream is faster than the level obtained just by letting the current carry canoes further down the river.

The PPVT assessment does not provide a specific benchmark performance level for students but does adjust standard scores for student age -- meaning that a standard score of 100 for two students, one age five years and two months and one age six years and seven months, indicates that their vocabulary knowledge is at the average level for persons of their precise age. For PPVT comparisons, we calculated whether a given student's standardized PPVT score was one standard deviation unit below average or higher than the average standardized PPVT score (e.g., scores 85 or above). Using this standard, a random sample of individuals would have about 66 percent of students meeting this performance level.

For the HMH-Growth assessments, the expected performance level is fixed by grade over the course of the academic year and we should expect that a higher proportion of students will meet the benchmark performance level over the course of the year, regardless of whether or not students in a district are gaining literacy skills at rates less than the average expected for a nationally representative sample. The midpoint of Lexile ranges were compared to the 2021-2022 academic year benchmark Lexile level as assessed by HMH-Growth Measure. Tables 1 and 2 in the Data Sources section provides detailed information on the benchmarks for each of the assessments and subtests utilized in this analysis. Figures 2-11 report information using the strategy 1 approach.

Strategy 2: As an alternative, the evaluation team conducted a regression analysis which predicts student's spring (or winter due to data availability) outcome controlling for their individual fall assessment and a set of control variables to adjust for differences in the population of students served in specific schools and districts. Separate models were executed for each of the student outcomes collected within the participating LEAs described above (PALS subtests, PPVT, Acadience Reading subtests, and HMH-Growth), but we utilized winter outcomes for the Acadience Reading assessments to include as many students in our models as possible. This resulted in LEA effect estimates for each distinct outcome (PALS subscales & the PPVT, Acadience subscales, and 3 HMH-Growth grade level estimates (grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-11).

After recovering the LEA effects from our models, we standardized the results by measure to make them comparable across assessment type. We then generated an average effect for each LEA which equally weights the assessments from the pooled pre-K assessments, the Acadience Reading assessments, and the pooled HMH-Growth Measure assessments.

LEAs with at least 25 student assessments reported were included in our models. Utilizing aggregated data allowed us to adjust district estimates for differences in student populations served by schools and LEAs, but preclude us of making comparisons about the relative progress of students in different subgroups as defined by program enrolment, language status, or demographic characteristics. The values presented in this report reflect the average effect of LEA membership on student's outcomes adjusted for school or LEA characteristics. The capture the change in student scores between the fall of 2021 and the spring/winter of

2022. Of note, an LEA effect of zero represents an LEA where student achievement gains on a particular measure are at the *average* of all LEAs reporting results on this measure, controlling for our included LEA covariates, the student's grade level, and the student's initial fall outcome score. LEAs with positive effects had greater test score gains, on average, compared to the other districts participating in L4GA. LEAs with 'negative' effects had lower test score gains, on average, compared to the other districts participating in L4GA. It does not mean that students were not improving their skills on these measures of students' achievement. Rather, it means districts were having a smaller average impact on students' literacy achievement when compared to other LEAs participating in the L4GA grant *and* reporting data on the outcome.

Note:	★ Data is from 2nd year of implementation.
	★ Since, different scales are used for assessments and they each have different score types, the proportion of students meeting benchmark is used as a common metric.
	★ LEAs are identified by arbitrary values to mask their identity

LEAs are identified by arbitrary values to mask their identity

Finding 1: Most LEAs evidenced growth in PreK children's vocabulary development.

As illustrated in Figure 2, students generally performed in the typically developing range on the PPVT-4 in the fall and spring of the academic year. This figure also demonstrates that many LEAs scores increased from the fall to spring time point. Only 1 LEA for whom we have data decreased across the school year and this LEA (LEA 25) had the highest performing students in the fall of the year.

Figure 2. Standard Score Change on the PPVT 2021-2022 Academic Year

Benchmark criteria changes across test period
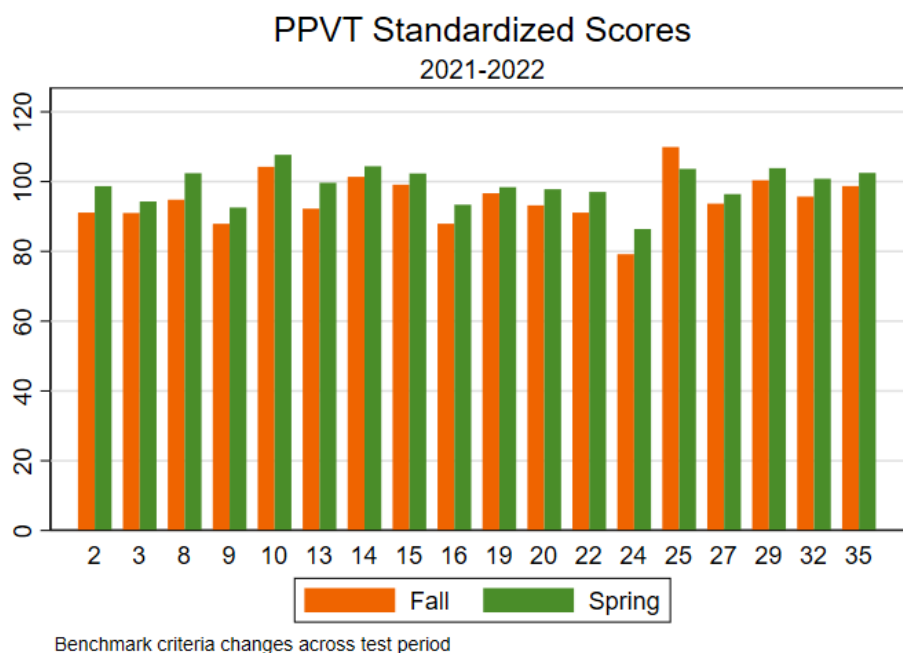
The majority of LEAs demonstrated growth on the PPVT-4 from Fall to Spring, with many evidencing considerable change in standard scores. On average, LEAs reporting data increased students' standardized performance on the PPVT-4 from 93.8 points in fall to 98.4 points in spring. This end of year result is very near the expected mean for a nationally representative sample of 100 points and represents gains that are greater than those expected just due to the maturation of students expected over the time period. A total of 8 LEAs ended the year with scores at or above 100, which is the average for a the nationally representative sample on the PPVT-4 assessment. Figure 3 presents the proportion of students, by LEA, that experienced standardized PPVT-4 gains of four standard score points or more. Previous evaluations of the impacts of state preschool programs established gains of four standard score points or more as an indicator of substantial growth (Barnett et. al, 2005).

Figure 3. LEAs with 4 Standard Score Point Gains on PPVT 2021-2022 Academic Year
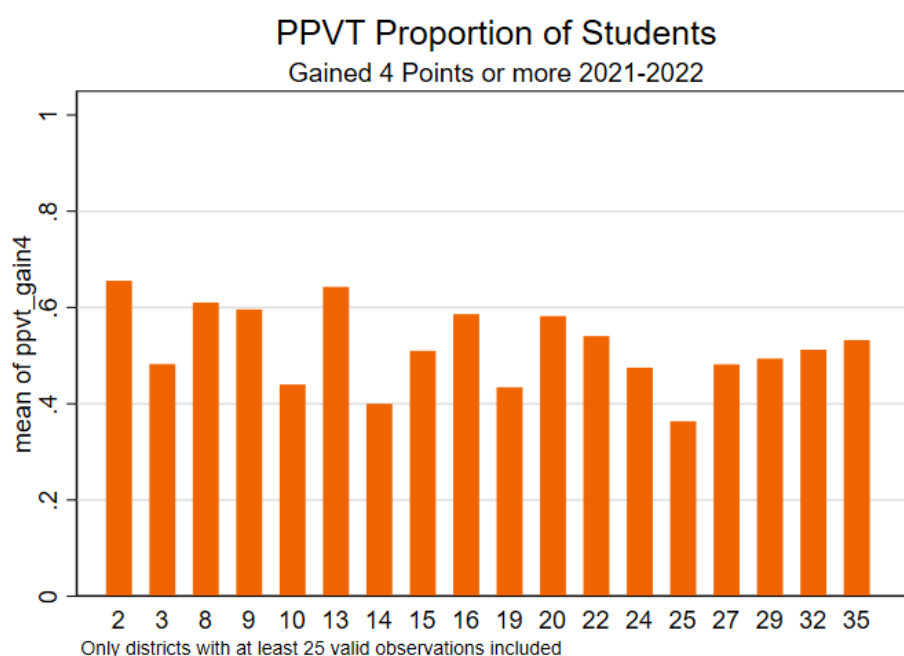
As the PPVT-4 is a standardized measure that takes into account a child's age, changes in scores of greater than three scale points are considered to be meaningfully advancing students' vocabulary at a pace that can overcome existing deficits in vocabulary. Scores across LEAs suggest that, the majority of LEAs for whom we have data grew at least 3 standard points across the school year, with a few evidencing 6 standard point changes. Overall, about 53 percent of students experienced growth in scores of at least four points over the time period. Three LEAs showed growth such that 60% of students grew by at least 4 standard score points throughout the school year.

Finding 2: The majority of PreK children showed growth on upper case alphabet knowledge and letter sound awareness across the academic year.

As evidenced by Figure 4, of the 20 LEAs for whom we have PALS-PreK data, all evidenced considerable gains from Fall to Spring time points on both upper-case alphabet knowledge and letter sound awareness subtests. As shown in this figure, growth varied somewhat by LEA, with 12 of the 20 LEAs having more than 80 percent of students ending the year having met the alphabet knowledge benchmark. On average, 77 percent of students met the PALS-PreK benchmark for uppercase alphabet knowledge during the spring PALS-PreK assessment.

Figure 4. Proportion of students meeting benchmark on PALS upper case alphabet knowledge 2021-2022 Academic Year

Proportion of Students Meeting Benchmark
PALS Uppercase 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
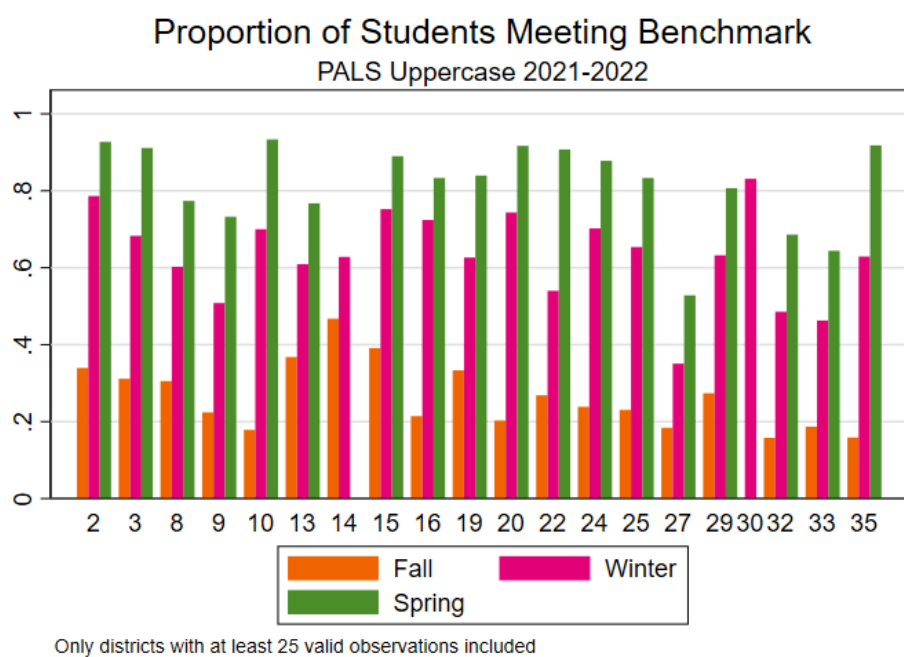
Across all LEAs, PreK students evidenced considerable growth in their letter sound knowledge across the PreK year (see Figure 5). Although the rate of growth varied somewhat across LEAs, top performing LEAs (i.e., the 11 who ended the year with over 80% of students meeting the benchmark) generally evidenced the greatest amount of growth from the fall to winter timepoint. LEA 33 was the lowest performing on this indicator, with only 54% of students meeting the benchmark at the end of PreK. 78 percent of students across all LEAs met the spring PALS-PreK benchmark for the letter sounds subscale.

Figure 5. Proportion of Students meeting benchmark on PALS Letter Sounds

Proportion of Students Meeting Benchmark
PALS Letter Sound 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
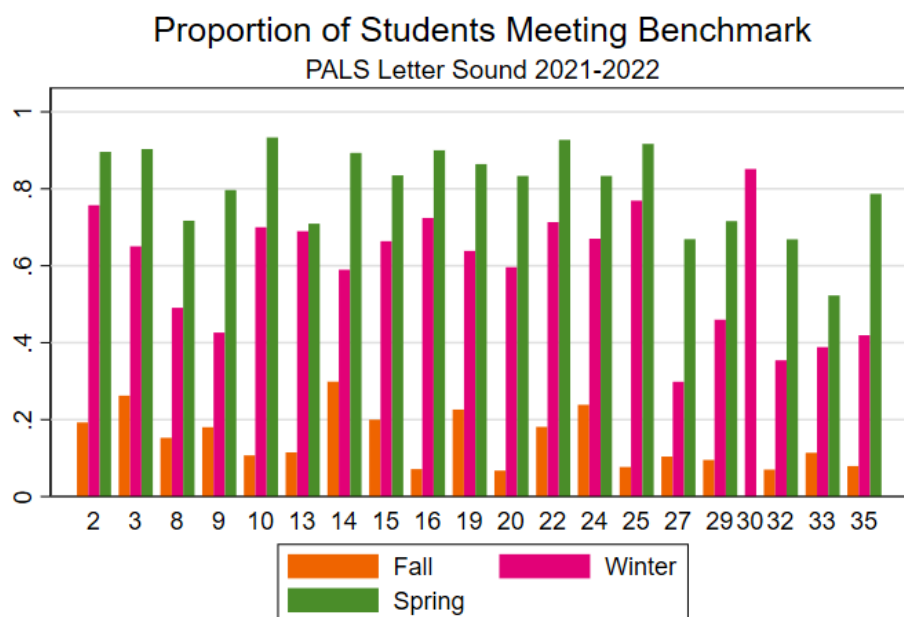
Finding 3: Approximately 50% of students from K-3 met bench mark on the Acadience Reading Assessment in spring.

As shown in Figure 6, students in grades K through 3 had Acadience Composite assessment scores where about 46.3 percent of students were performing at or above benchmark in the fall of the academic year. Among LEAs reporting results, about 45.7 percent of students met the performance benchmark in the spring time period. For the winter time period, results indicate a decrease in the overall proportion of student meeting the benchmark standard (about 42.3 percent). Substantial variability exists across LEAs on this indicator of student literacy. For students performing below these benchmarks, Acadience Learning predicts that only about one-half of these students will meet subsequent expectations for early literacy / reading performance.

Figure 6. Proportion of Students meeting benchmark on Acadience Composite

Proportion of Students Meeting Benchmark
Acadience Composite 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
Empty bars reflect district not reporting, not no students in category
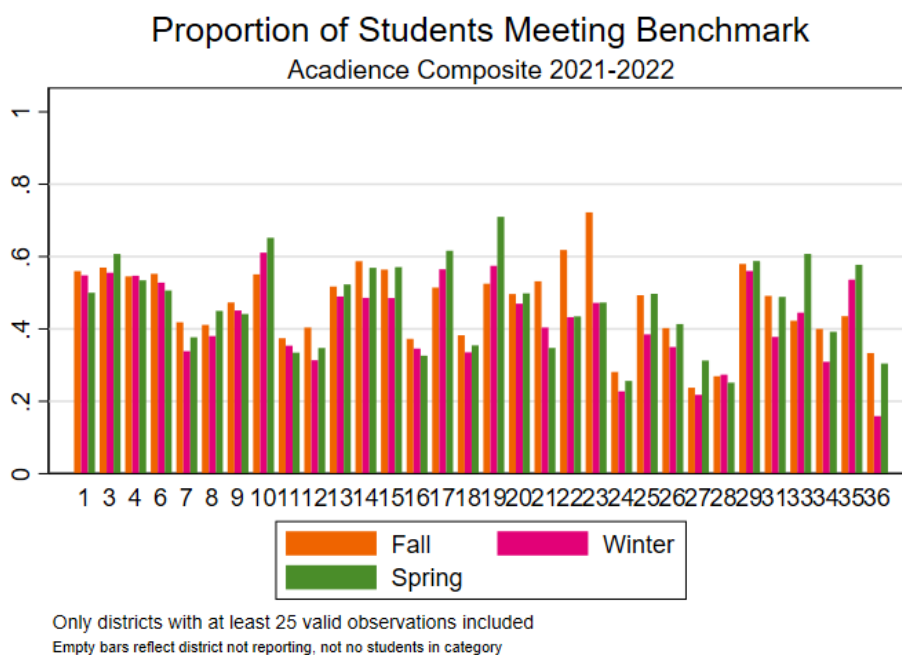
Student progress related to students' Oral Reading Fluency was more consistently positive (see Figure 7). From the fall to the winter reporting period, the percentage of students meeting the Oral Reading Fluency benchmark increased from 39.9 percent to 43.8 percent. 43.6 percent of students with spring scores met the benchmark standard. On this measure, students progressed at rates that were higher than expected due to average maturation alone.

Figure 7. Proportion of Students meeting benchmark on Acadience Oral Reading Fluency

Proportion of Students Meeting Benchmark
Acadience Oral Reading Fluency 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
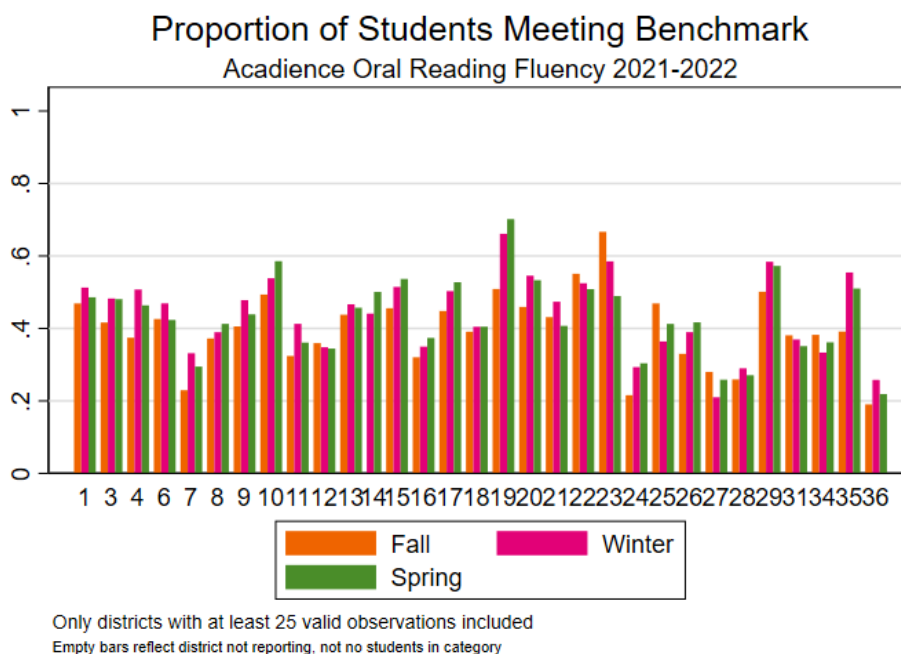Empty bars reflect district not reporting, not no students in category

Figure 8 presents the results of students' performance on the Acadience Oral Reading Fluency (Accuracy) measure related to the benchmark expected for students in the same grade and time of year. Student performance here is similar to their performance on the composite measure where about one-half of students met the benchmark standard in the fall (49.1 percent) and winter (47.2 percent) time periods. With few exceptions, findings illustrate that LEAs are struggling to advance students' performance on the Acadience Reading measures at a pace that will advance children's literacy skills in ways that advance their skills in relation to established benchmarks. In the spring assessment period, 52.1 percent of students met the benchmark standard.
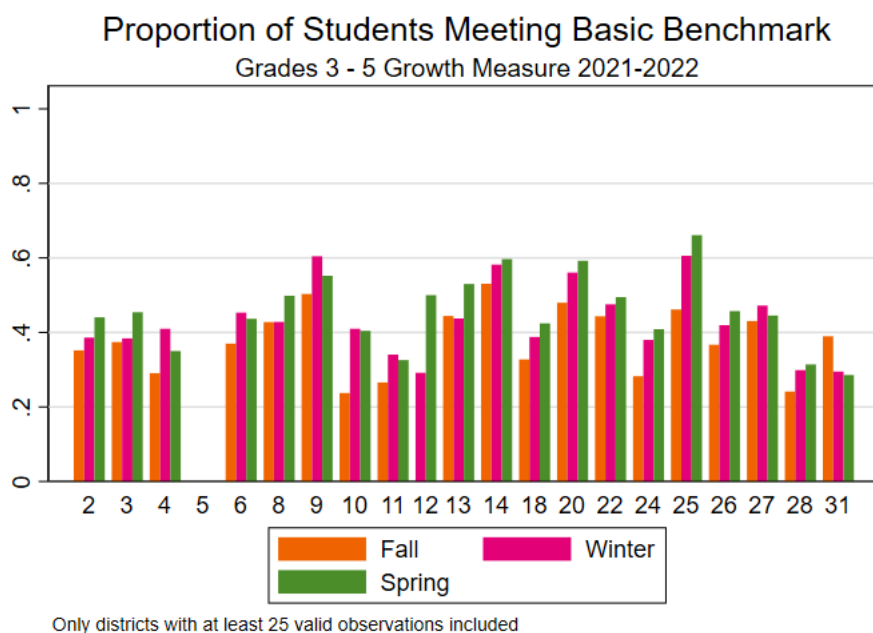
Figure 8. Proportion of Students meeting benchmark on Acadience Oral Reading Fluency (Accuracy)
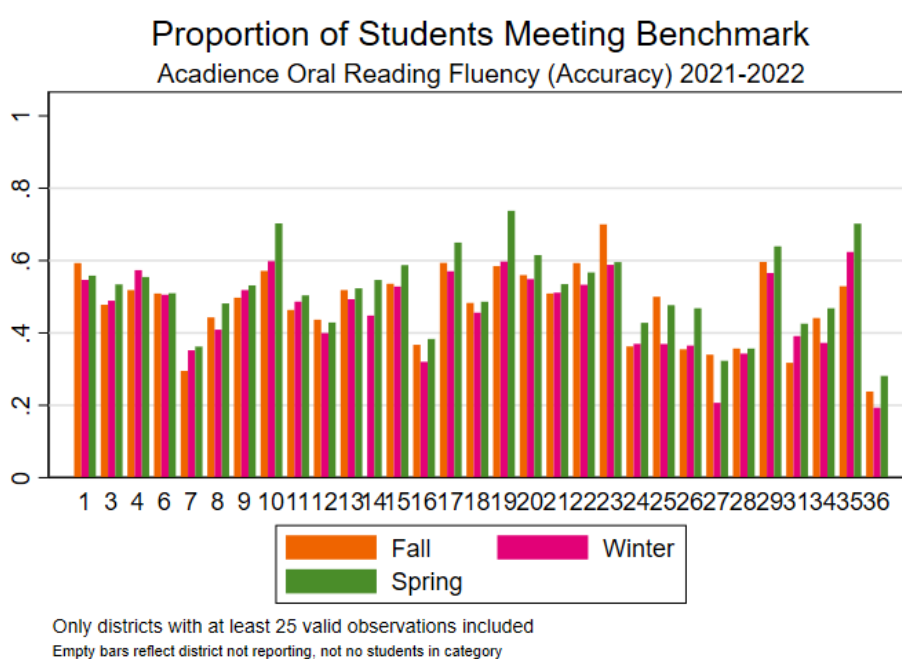
Finding 4: On average, half of elementary, middle, and high students evidenced growth on HMH Growth Measure from the fall to spring timepoints

Figure 9 displays data for all LEAs for reporting data for the HMH-Growth Measure assessment for student in grades 3 – 5. LEAs vary widely in the proportion of students meeting this benchmark standard and, on average, the total population of students assessed increases from about 37 percent of students meeting the benchmark in fall to 45.2 percent of students in spring. It is important to note that since the benchmark for HMH does not change over the academic year, improvements in the number of students meeting benchmark is to be expected. Findings may point to the fact that children in schools have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as students, on average, appear to still be developing their foundational literacy skills in grades 1-2.

Figure 9. Proportion of Elementary Students meeting benchmark on HMH Growth Measure

Proportion of Students Meeting Basic Benchmark
Grades 3 - 5 Growth Measure 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included

For students in grades 6 – 8, a higher proportion were achieving the HMH-Growth Measure Lexile benchmark in all time periods compared to students in the earlier grades (Figure 10). About 50.1 percent of students are achieving the benchmark standard in spring compared to 54.6 percent of students in the fall assessment period. Again, the entering performance level of students in LEAs varies widely.

Figure 10. Proportion of Middle School Students meeting benchmark on HMH Growth Measure

Proportion of Students Meeting Basic Benchmark
Grades 6 - 8 Growth Measure 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
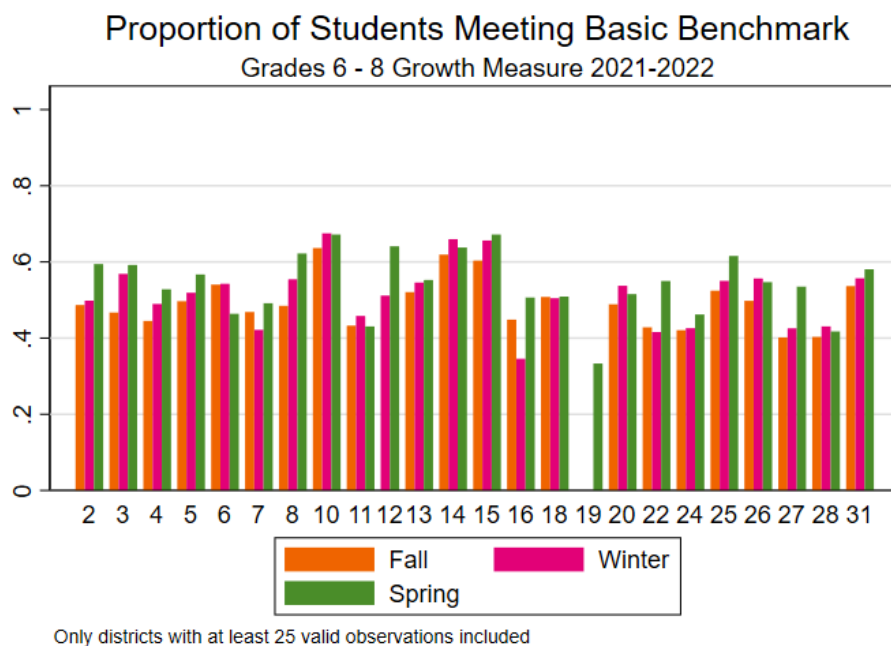
Figure 11 presents the proportion of students meeting the benchmark standard for reading Lexile for students in grades 9 – 11. The nominal rate of achieving this benchmark is higher for students in this grade band – about 60 percent, but less progress occurs over the time period. On average, 59 percent of students meet the benchmark standard in fall compared to 61.5 percent in spring. While some districts scores seem to be somewhat stagnated or represent minimal gains, a number of districts show meaningful growth in the proportion of students meeting the benchmark standard. This age group of students is the most likely to be impacted by differences in the composition of students participating in the assessment between fall and spring.

Figure 11. Proportion of High School Students meeting benchmark on HMH Growth Measure

Proportion of Students Meeting Basic Benchmark
### Grades 9 - 11 Growth Measure 2021-2022

Only districts with at least 25 valid observations included
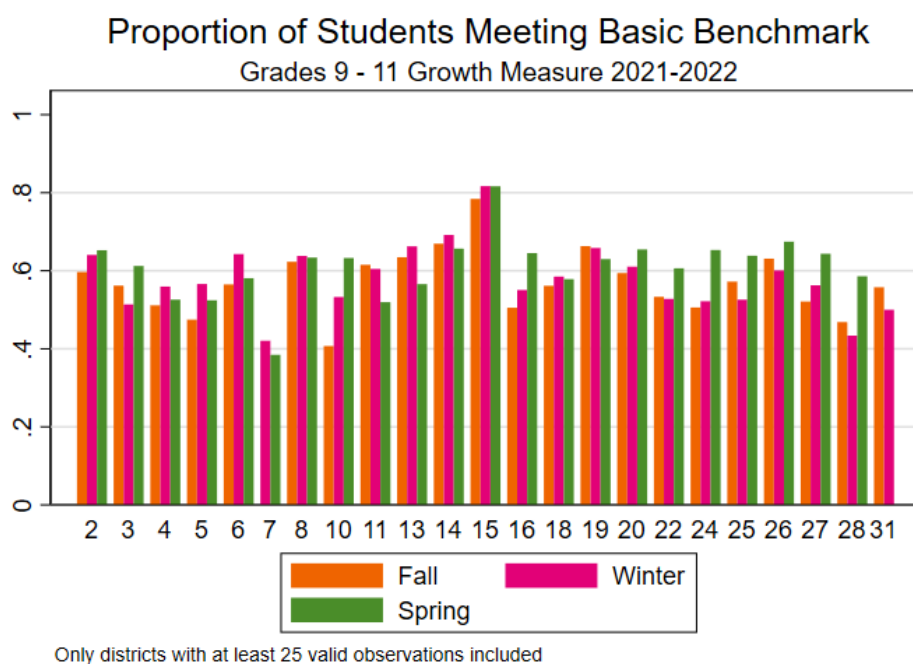
EQ 3: Which LEAs are being particularly effective at promoting students' literacy outcomes?

We built on work undertaken to address EQ1 in order to undertake data analysis to answer **EQ3.** First, we looked at the growth in student achievement (fall-spring) that was demonstrated during the 2021-2022 academic year on all the outcome measures. Our beating the odds approach in phase 1 consisted of the usage of the combined estimated effects for each measure across the various grades. LEAs were assigned arbitrary numeric identifiers to mask their LEA code and maintain the confidentiality of each LEA identity. We identified five top performing LEAs and five bottom performing LEAs. See Appendix A for a description of these LEAs population estimates, curricula or intervention materials reported in their interviews and the professional learning types that were supported in each LEA.

Finding 5: There are detectable differences across LEAs in students' literacy progress

Figure 12 presents the average modelled LEA effect estimated in the Strategy 2 section described above. These estimates of growth in student literacy assessment scores are adjusted for the population of students served in each district and combine estimates across grade band and individual assessments. These estimates identified LEAs that were outperforming their peers in terms of their average impact on student literacy skills (numbered here as LEA 2, 7, 10, 29, and 32) and LEAs where performance lagged their peers (numbered here as LEA 5, 6, 13, 14, 17). Identifying these LEAs permitted a closer examination of qualitative data for LEAs whose relative performance was outside the typical range for LEAs participating in the L4GA intervention. An important note is that these comparisons are within the group of LEAs participating in the intervention, reporting data, and mean estimates here exclude data points were insufficient sample size prevented an inclusion of estimates for specific LEAs. Given that performance estimates are relative, we do not have good information on whether the *average* participating LEAs are increasing student performance at a rate that is greater than a comparable non-participating LEA in the state. These relative comparisons do allow us to identify possible instructional or operational differences between LEAs that are systematic and helpful in identifying approaches which might be related to the observed differences in LEA performance.

Figure 12. Mean Estimated Effects by LEA across L4GA Assessments
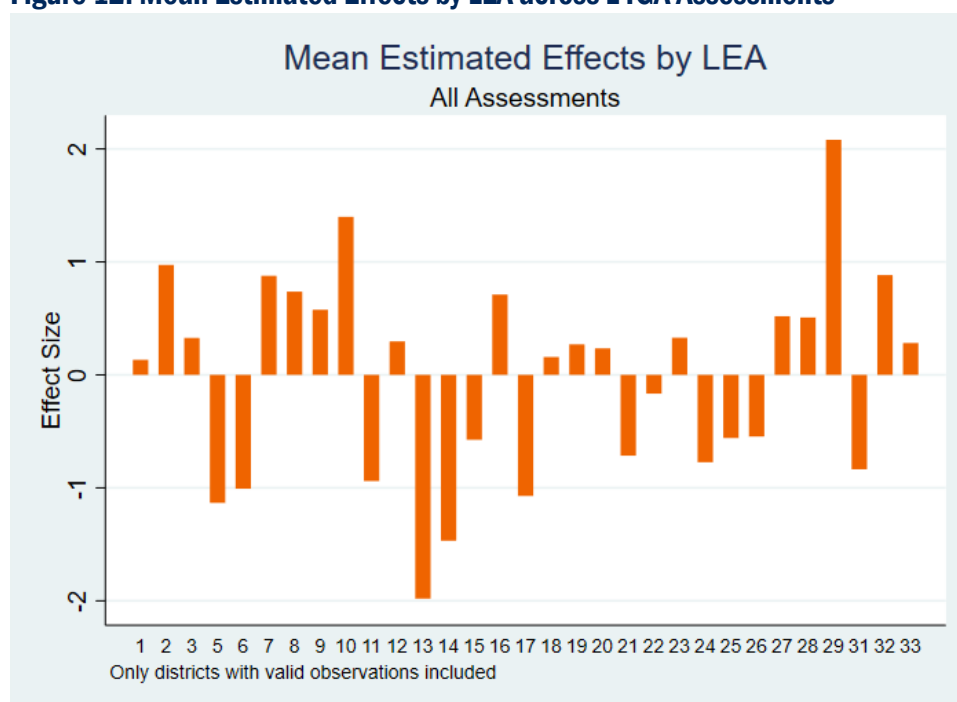
EQ 2: How do L4GA LEAs describe how they are supporting student learning through professional learning activities?

We addressed **EQ2** by examining two data sources (1) attendance/sign-in records for Georgia's Department of Education (GADOE) offered professional learning (PL) opportunities from July 2021- July 2022 and (2) self-reported responses from a teacher survey.

Georgia's Department of Education (GADOE) offered professional learning (PL) opportunities

We used email addresses to identify the LEA that an attendee was affiliated with on the sign-in sheets. We tallied the total number of PL sessions that were attended by at least one representative from each LEA. We illustrate the total number attended below in Figure 13. GADOE offered a total of 78 sessions across all of the grade levels. The average number of PL opportunities that were attended was equivalent to 11.18 sessions (*SD*=10.96). The range included attending a minimum of zero sessions to a maximum of 44 sessions.

Figure 13. Total Number of PL Sessions attended in 2021-2022 Academic Year

GADOE PL Attendance
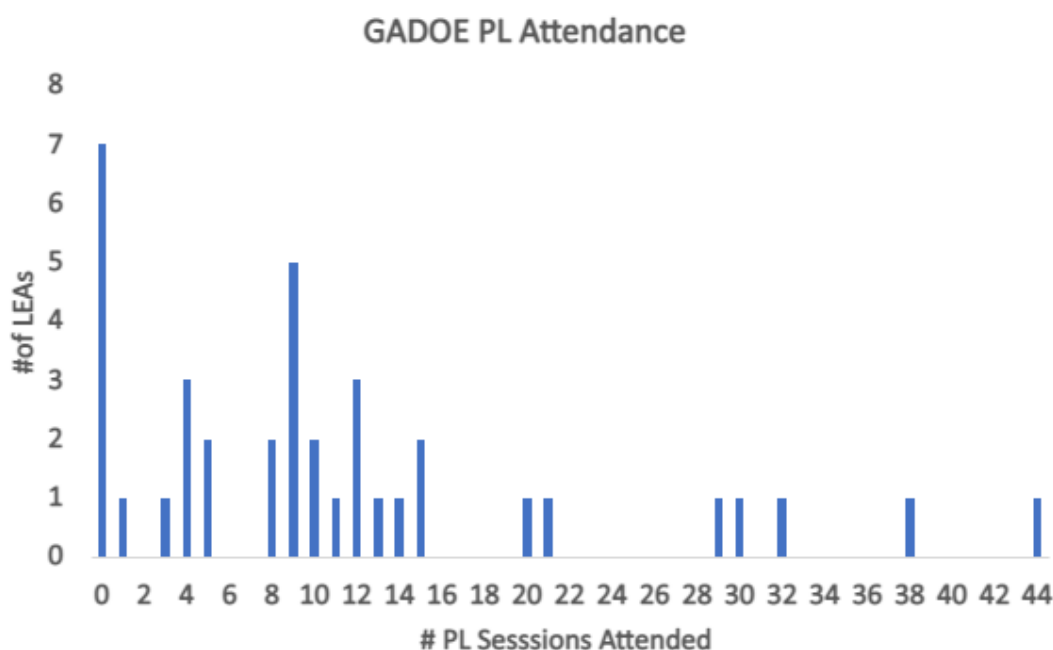
Teacher Survey self-reported professional learning (PL) opportunities

Teachers (*n=806*) provided responses to the survey during April 2022-July 2022. Although a sizable percentage of respondents did not supply demographic data, teachers that did respond represented a variety of racial/ethnic categories including American Indian/Alaska Native (0.12%), Asian (0.25%), Black (8.19%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.12%), and White (46.15%). Most teachers reported that they were not Hispanic (99.63%). Most teachers were female (52.36%) with others identifying as male (3.97%) or non-binary (0.18%). Other teacher demographics reported include grade level, years of teaching

experience, and highest level of education obtained. Teachers participated from each grade level: B-5 (3.35%), elementary (35.24%), middle (18.49%), and high school (17.87%). Participating teachers had a variety of educational training backgrounds: HS Diploma or Associates Degree (0.74%), Bachelor's (15.88%), Master's (25.06%), Specialist (17.49%), and Doctorate (1.61%). Teachers had various years of teaching experience ranging from shorter lengths [0-5 years (13.15%), 6-11 years (15.76%)] to longer lengths [12-15 (9.93%) ,16-20 (18.24%), >20 years (32.0%).]

The survey was administered through the platform, Qualtrics, hosted by the external evaluation team's host institution. The external evaluation team corresponded with LEA leadership (e.g., superintendents, assistant superintendents, L4GA district coordinators) to recruit teachers to complete the survey. LEA leadership sent the survey link to teachers in their LEA. Teachers opted into participation after reading the survey overview and a brief consent statement. To make sure that responses were collected from teachers associated with L4GA funded schools, a survey logic was designed to check to see if teachers confirmed that they were currently providing instruction in a L4GA funded school. If they were not the survey logic triggered survey termination.

Respondents were offered five categories of professional learning opportunities. For each PL opportunity they were asked to indicate their attendance and the corresponding categories of sponsors that provided the PL. PL categories and sponsor categories are listed in Table 5. below.

Teachers responded to the questions: "What types of professional learning activities have you participated in during the 2021-2022 school year? Who provided this professional learning?" (Select all that apply).

Table 5. Professional Learning Opportunity and Sponsor Categories from the Teacher Survey

Professional Learning Opportunity Category	Sponsor Category
Professional Learning Community Workshops Professional Organization Conferences Webinars Online Professional Learning Networks	LEA/School Staff Vendor Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) Georgia Department of Education

PL Finding: Teachers across grade levels indicated that they participated in PL opportunities (I.e., professional coaching, workshops, and PLCs) that were sponsored by their LEA or school the most.

Figure 14. Top 4 Categories of Professional Learning Opportunity Attendance
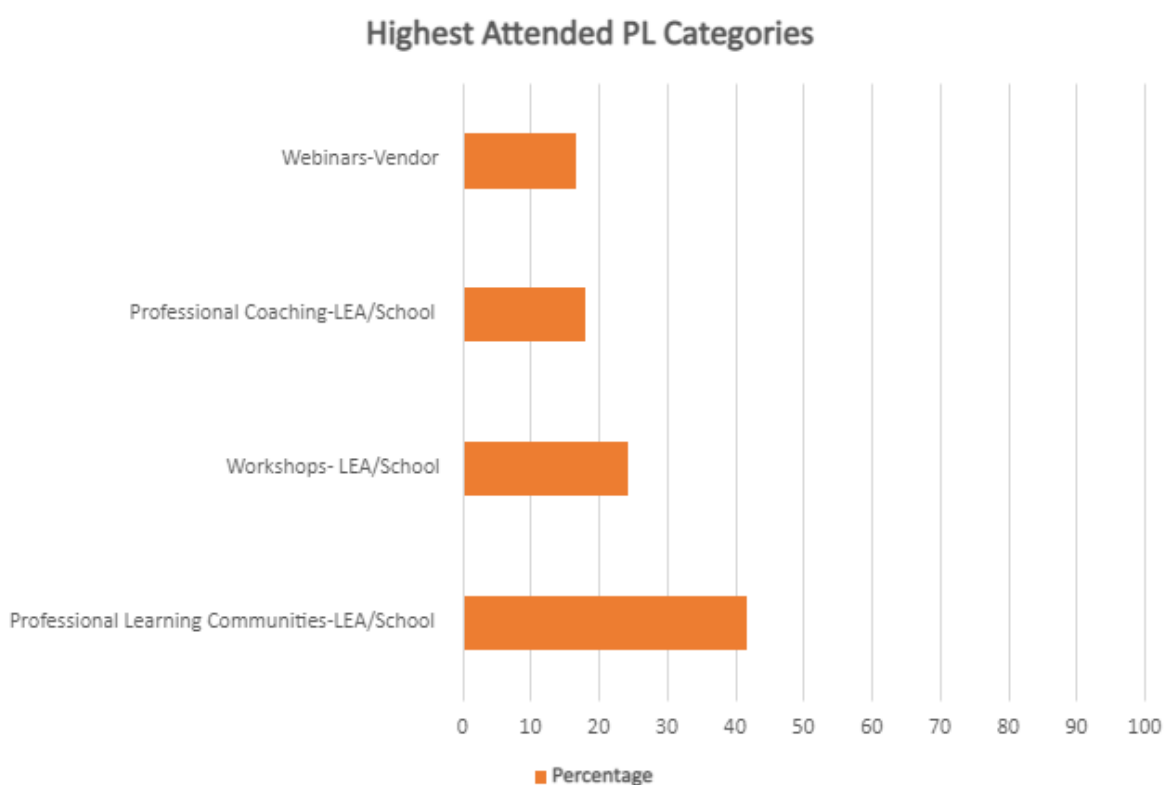
Highest Attended PL Categories

EQ4: Are there particular practices related to curriculum, instructional practice, and professional learning that LEAs are engaged in that are supporting student literacy gains?

LEA Interviews

We addressed EQ4 by conducting Interviews with LEA leadership (e.g., superintendents, curricula coordinators) in virtual settings for each district. In some cases, a sole LEA representative participated in the interview with the researcher, while in other cases, two or three district representatives participated in tandem. Interviews provided the opportunity to explore topics addressed in LEA plans and surveys and elicit follow-up information from LEAs.

Research Methodology

LEAs participated in a virtual semi-structured interview at the end of the 2022 academic year. During this interview, LEAs were asked to describe their L4GA approach, share how they were implementing L4GA activities, and identify their goals based upon the student and teacher level data they were collecting. The interview protocol asked LEAs to specifically address their

L4GA implementation with attention to the following areas: (a) curricula, (b) instruction, (c) assessment, (d) professional learning, and (e) student learning.

LEA responses to interview prompts varied across the districts, likely due to the varied nature of the roles (e.g., superintendents, curriculum coordinators) of the district representatives who participated in the interviews and also their level of involvement in the day-to-day implementation of L4GA initiatives.

Analytic Plan

Interviews were transcribed and loaded into Dedoose, an online qualitative software coding program, for data analysis. LEA interviews were subjected to qualitative analyses (Charmaz, 2014; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Saldaña, 2016). We approached LEA interview data with the broad goal of identifying how LEAs spoke about L4GA implementation and how it supported student literacy. We refer to LEAs by the arbitrary numeric identifiers (in parentheses) used above in the beating the odds approach to maintain the confidentiality of the LEA identity.

For the first phase (see Figure 15), the research team developed a codebook through a consensus process for a priori coding. Once developed, the interviews were double-coded by researchers using the codebook and differences were resolved via consensus. Frequency and co-occurrence analysis was conducted to identify trends across the data set, for the five top-performing districts, and the five bottom-performing districts based on child outcomes (see the characteristics related to top-performing and bottom-performing districts in Appendix A).

For the second phase (see Figure 15), coded excerpts from LEA interviews were selected based on notable findings from the frequency and co-occurrence analysis. These excerpts were subjected to further qualitative analysis using an iterative process that included open-coding, categorization, and theme development, leaning toward an interpretative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to generate more nuanced understanding about our research questions. For this phase, coding questions were also resolved through consensus.

Figure 15. An illustration of the analytic process applied to interview data
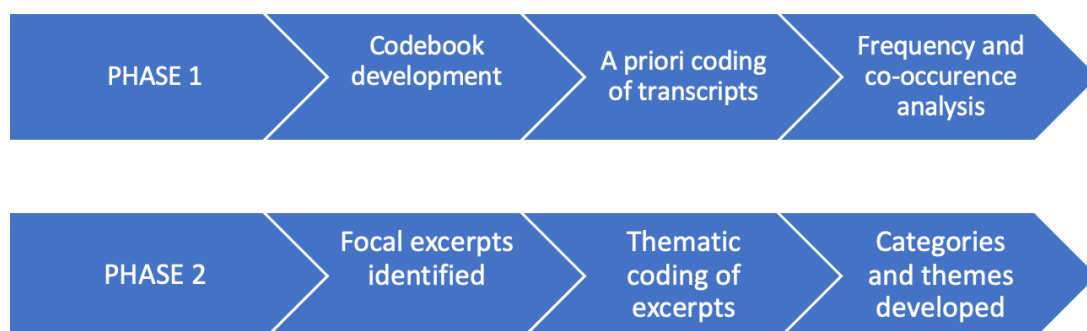
In each section below, we describe findings related to various areas of L4GA implementation across the 39 LEAs based on frequency analysis. This description is followed by attention to unique patterns expressed by top performing (*n*=5) districts on student achievement measures as compared to bottom-performers (*n*=4) and/or overall patterns (*n*=39). In

addition, we provide example quotations from interviews and consider possible contextual factors.

Although the sample size for top- and bottom-performers (determined by student outcome data) is small, we conducted this closer analysis to determine if any interesting differences emerged between the groups. These differences may provide nuanced insights into the successes and challenges faced by various districts. These insights may be considered for further research and support for districts in Georgia.

The data from the LEA interviews reflect the lens of the district representative interviewed. For example, some LEAs interviewed were more involved in day-to-day operations of the grant implementation and some LEAs demonstrated stronger levels of expertise in literacy (than say, math) across the P-12 age bands. In addition, LEAs represented districts across Georgia that differ in their characteristics. In addition, differences between top- and bottom-performing districts may be well reflected in the findings below, but might also be attributed to other factors unknown to us.

LEA codes are provided in parentheses next to illustrative quotes below to demonstrate which LEA is attributed to which quote.

Note: The presence or absence of codes applied to the top- and bottom-performing districts do not represent praise or criticism, but instead observations worth future consideration for analysis and policy making.

Finding 1: LEAs described multiple factors related to curriculum, but top-performing LEAs more often addressed reading skills, learning standards, and the curriculum as adopted and/or mandated.

Across the 39 LEAs, LEAs described curriculum used as part of L4GA initiatives and its roll-out and addressed a multitude of factors, with the top four cited factors including reading skills (*n*=20), learning standards or *GA Milestones* (*n*=15), vendor resources (*n*=15), and school/classroom libraries or books (*n*=16). In addition, in line with our expectations, 95% of all LEAs named one or more specific programs, curriculum packages, or assessments (e.g., *Acadience, iReady*, *Foundations, Heggerty*) when describing their L4GA implementation. All LEAs cumulatively named in interviews 67 different programs, curriculum packages, and/or assessments used in the past year. How LEAs addressed these factors varied across districts.

Districts chose curriculum for various reasons, including as one LEA stated, to address academic "holes" (104) or areas that student data reflected as weaknesses, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and writing. One LEA (43) identified how they identified a new curriculum program focused on specific reading skills identified as weakness

through data analysis. In addition, she tethered the selection of the program to professional learning:

> *"[W]e saw that our students were struggling with letter name fluency or first-time fluency, blends and diagraphs... [O]ur curriculum director searched and she found the 95 Percent Phonics program. So, what it includes is it has an entire program, but it also has specifics within it for those children who are struggling in a specific phonics area. So, the teachers, they were provided with PL on it and then we had hands-on intervention people who went in and assisted them with it if they were not sure of it" (43).*

In one case, a top-performing LEA (66) addressed the use of Fountas & Pinnell in their district, detailing the use of assessments and levelled texts, but also placed an emphasis on skill-building towards the outcome of comprehension, an unconstrained skill, rather than for success in more isolated skills such as fluency rate and sight word automaticity:

> *"It's not about how fast and how many sight words you can recall, but it's--can you read and can you talk about and understand what you've read?" (66).*

This same LEA (66) described how their district brought focus to the reading process itself over a focus on the standards or curriculum:

> *"... We talk about how the reading process relates to the standards, not how our curriculum relates to the standards. So, standards are going to be changing in two years. That reading process is still the same" (66).*

Through frequency analysis, notable differences emerged between top-performing (*n*=5) and bottom-performing districts (*n*=5) as defined by student outcomes. LEAs from top-performing districts more often explicitly referenced reading skills (80%), learning standards or *Georgia milestones* (80%), curriculum as mandated/adopted (80%), and the need to engage in planning and further work (60%) than districts as a whole or bottom-performing districts.

In order to more fully address EQ3, we conducted a closer analysis of excerpts that top-performing districts addressed more often.

Figure 16: Aspects of Curriculum and Roll-Out

Curriculum and Roll-Out
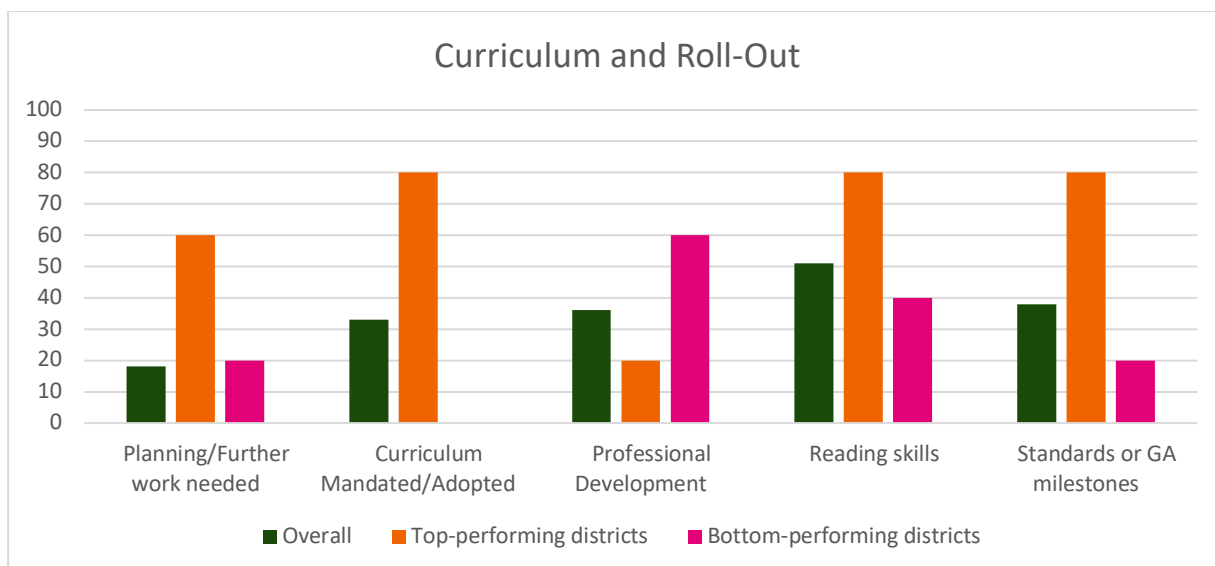
While 38% of all districts addressed connections between the curriculum and learning standards or *Georgia Milestones*, 80% of top-performing LEAs acknowledged these connections. For example, one LEA from a top-performing district chose a writing curriculum that "mirrors milestones" and addressed their upcoming goal to adjust to a "standards-specific instead of program-specific" ELA curriculum mapping (47). This LEA also cited the "intertwined" nature of literacy skills, including "multisensory approaches" (47) to teaching skills, and also addressed reading skills in tandem with small groups and "intervention groups" (47).

Another LEA from a top-performing district indicated that the selected curriculum did not address all learning standards so they therefore utilized additional resources (74) to create a comprehensive learning experience for students. Below this LEA justified a decision to drop a former curriculum (Cindy Cupps) due to concerns with how it addressed phonics and the impact on student learning:

> *"Cindy Cupps, was heavy in sight words. The kids could not use sound out words outside of context. So we went to something else, and it was one that was chosen because of the way it teaches phonics" (74).*

A third LEA from a top-performing district also echoed a lack of alignment between some curriculum packages and the GA standards. In this case, the LEA indicate that although the program was not aligned well with the GA standards, "it's just good reading practices" (52). As a result, they utilized consultants to assist with alignment:

> *"...Some of the consultants that have come in with us have helped us to align those things to Georgia standards, to see where we can make it fit, where we can still teach our standards, but teach the students those skills that they need to be successful as well, in a way that makes sense developmentally" (52).*

These above excerpts demonstrate how the five top-performing LEAs were more likely to

move beyond identifying publishers of curriculum to describing the content of curriculum and materials, and perhaps more importantly, identifying dis-alignments between curriculum and standards. Moreover, these districts also were more likely to point to remedies for these dis-alignments in order to preserve "good" practices.

Finding 2: LEAs most often identified PL content focused on instructional strategies, using curriculum/resources, reading skills, and writing. More top-performing districts addressed reading skills and writing than overall, and they were also more likely to address differentiation.

All LEAs addressed professional learning (PL) content, and across the 39 districts, more than half of the LEAs addressed instructional strategies (*n*=26), using curriculum or resources (*n*=26), reading skills (*n*=21), and writing (*n*=24).

LEAs discussed PL related to the usage of curriculum and resources, often by naming products (e.g., *Reading Horizons, From Phonics to Reading, Write Score, Bookworms*) and with a focus on fidelity. Because LEAs often linked the usage of curriculum and resources to fidelity, we conducted a closer analysis of relevant excerpts for a more nuanced understanding.

LEAs described the use of consultants to train teachers on fidelity for particular products, which included adherence to multiple curriculum components such as lesson planning, literacy skills, instructional strategies, data usage, and student grouping. For example, one LEA (82) discussed the use of a consultant to ensure teachers were using the components of Jan Richardson's *Guided Reading* program (e.g., lesson planning, grouping, using data) exactly as designed:

> *"Last year we had – we've used Jan Richardson's* Guided Reading *before, but last year was a clean-up trying to make sure that we're using all the components exactly like we're supposed to, the lesson planning, grouping, and using data, that we're using that as efficiently as possible" (82).*

LEAs also described supports to improve fidelity, including trainings, coaching, and PLCs. Some LEAs described use of "walk-throughs" by administrators to determine adherence and also addressed training for administrators or evaluators, such as the LEA below from a top-performing district:

> *"[W]e were all thinking oh my gosh, this is a great lesson. This is amazing. And we walked out, and the first thing the consultant said was, she did nothing by the script. It was like oh, well, it looked good to us. So, the first thing we had to do was make sure the administrators knew what they needed to be looking for. ….*
>
> *[W]e had a consultant from Coastal Plains RESA... she did some walk throughs in our kindergarten and first and second grade classrooms, and said this is not being done correctly. And she worked with our teachers" (45).*
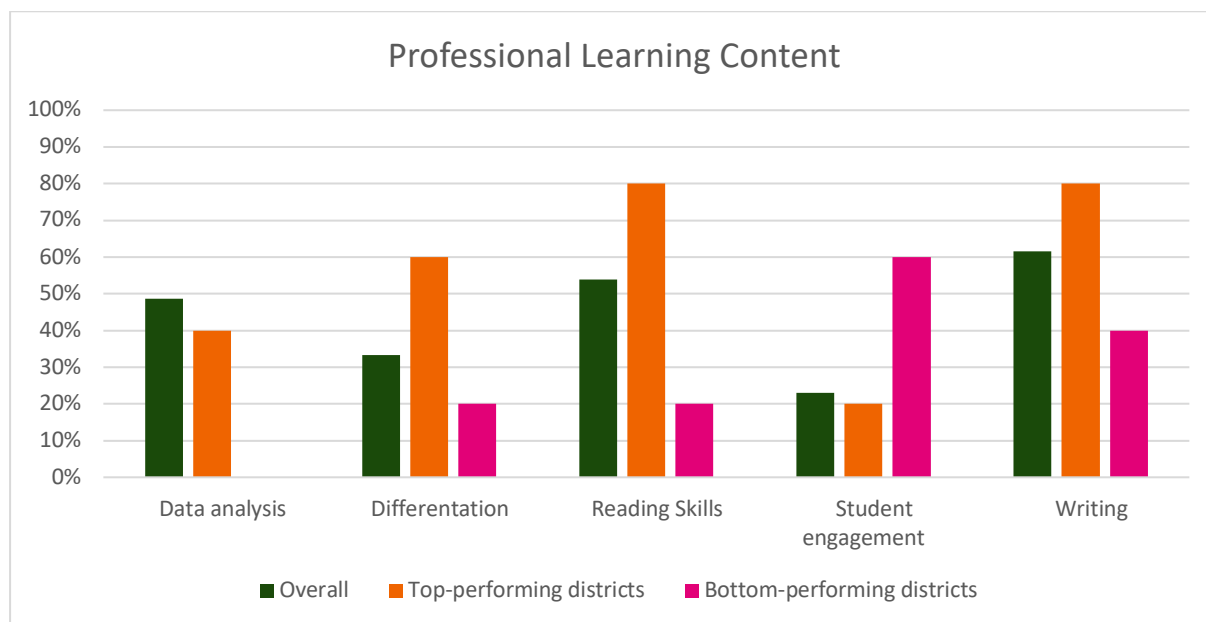
An LEA from a top-performing district also described the RESA consulting resources, in which a consultant helped with planning lessons and understanding the standards in greater depth (74). An ELA from another top-performing district described the use of consultant-created "rubrics and checklists... that mirror the rubrics and checklists from My Milestones" (47) that also included accompanying professional learning.

Although the use of consultants is not new in terms of state-wide educational approaches (Ball, 2010), the quotes above illustrate how consultants can assist educators with the use of educational products.

LEAs rarely addressed student engagement, however, the LEA below from a top-performing district not only addressed the need to engage students, but also addressed the need to attune to the self-efficacy of struggling students, suggesting an asset-based approach to engagement:

> *"...Because some of the best ideas come from kids whose process hasn't caught up with their ideas yet. So, those kids sometimes feel defeated if we're not careful, because their structure and the organization and their conventions and all don't look like what they should for their grade level" (47).*

While LEAs addressed PL for instructional strategies, using curriculum or resources, reading skills, and writing skills, notable differences emerged between the top-performing and bottom-performing districts (*n*=5) as defined by student outcomes. LEAs from top-performing districts more often than their bottom-performing peers addressed PL content focused on differentiation, reading skills, and writing.

Figure 17: Content of Professional Learning Utilized by LEAs

Top-performing districts more often addressed reading skills (80%) than bottom-performing districts (20%) and districts overall (54%). One LEA from a top-performing district (52) identified the benefit of PL in reading and dyslexia for understanding data better. In addition, another LEA identified the positive impact of consultant trainings for a new reading curriculum, noting student growth in specific skills: "We're seeing some progress in our kids with being able to read and phonemic awareness" (74). An LEA from another top-performing district (47) also spoke about specific reading skills (e.g., word recognition skills) addressed in PL content and that the analysis could be used for interventions:

> *"So, what is the word-level issue? Look closely at the student's errors and figure out is it vowel diagraphs or what have you, so you can then provide an intervention specific to that" (47).*

This same LEA (47) continued on to describe training in other specific literacy content and skills, such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and vowel digraphs.

Writing was another PL content foci that top-performing districts (80%) were more likely to address than bottom-performing districts (40%). Like other districts, LEAs from top-performing districts that addressed writing often did so in broad terms, as opposed to addressing specific component skills, or addressed writing as a future focus. For example, an LEA from a top-performing district described consultant-led trainings on "writing" (52). Another LEA addressed projected future improvements in writing as a result of new curriculum and training, but also addressed writing in broad terms and as an area of challenge: "... the writing wasn't quite where they wanted it to be" (45).

However, this same LEA did address PL on the usage of writing data for differentiation and in this case, articulated a more specific writing skill (introduction structures):

> *"After we got back their first WriteScore data last year, we had a session where the first day we went over the overall data. And I kind of showed the teacher how to look at your own data. How you can group your students based on the information that you've gotten back from WriteScore? And then the second day we kind of went into, okay, so you've got all these kids that were weak in introductions" (45).*

Top-performing districts also addressed differentiation in less specific ways, though they were more likely to address PL content for differentiation at all. For example, one LEA stated broadly, "we work strategically with the teachers, helping them prepare and develop and deliver instructional interventions" (47) in addition to additional supports beyond Tier 1 supports.

Finding 3: The PL types most often addressed across districts by LEAs include coaches and mentors, "training", consultants, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and vendor PD; top-performing districts more often cited PD for coaches and social media platforms.

Across the 39 districts, LEAs described the types of professional learning (PL) that teachers, and in some cases administrators and coaches, received as a part of L4GA initiatives. Nearly all LEAs addressed coaches and mentors (*n*=37) and trainings (*n*=37) as a type of PL utilized. Two additional PL types addressed by many LEAs include professional learning communities (PLCs; *n*=23), consultants (*n*=24), and vendor PD (*n*=24).

Nearly every LEA addressed coaching, but in varied ways. Coaches providing support might be internal or external to the school or district. In addition, coaching might be required of all teachers when adopting new materials, but in other cases, coaching might be used on a case-by-case basis (126):

> *"I can think of one school in particular where if they're rolling out something new, everyone in the grade level might go through a coaching cycle as part of that learning. In some schools coaching cycles are used more on an as-needed basis" (126).*

Sometimes coaching was not mandated, but was instead requested by the teacher (43). For example, this LEA (43) described how coaching was teacher-initiated or "bottom-up":

> *"So if a teacher has a need,… she'll email and say, "Hey, I taught this lesson, but I don't think I taught it as well as I should have. Can you schedule a time to come over and assist me with this?" And we will literally go in and teach the lesson and model the lesson for them to shore them up in the area of weakness that they're having" (43).*

LEAs at times described coaching or mentoring in a generalized manner, but closer examination of relevant excerpts illuminate how the coach-teacher relationship could be framed as cooperative or framed as correction.

An LEA from one district described the coach-teacher relationship as "a partnership" (66), which was echoed by another LEA (104), who in this case described the positive coach-teacher relationship as one that moved beyond formal coaching structures and into informal, but helpful interactions. This LEA also described those informal interactions as teacher-initiated:

> *"Even though there's formal ways [coaching], there's a lot of informal stuff that happens where the teacher goes to a coach and says, "Hey, the instructional coach is in my building. Hey, I need help with this." And those are the at-the-moment things that happen. I feel like a lot of our teachers and our instructional coaches have really good relationships" (104).*

LEAs across often noted the positive value of vendor-provided professional learning, including having access to resources and support for programs used in the district. However, some vendor PL experiences posed challenges. One LEA (57) described a PL experience as a rote process focused on logistics: schools requested support in "exactly how to use the program," and the virtual PL entailed a teacher sharing their screen while the facilitator would "tell them where they needed to go to maneuverer through the platform and how to use the platform." Another LEA (119) from a bottom-performing district also described the challenges teachers found with a particular PL experience:

> *"...we didn't get very good feedback from the teachers. They felt like most of what they heard, they knew and had tried, you know, that kind of thing. So we're trying to be sure we're getting feedback and following up that it's being implemented"* (119).

Through frequency analysis, notable differences emerged between top-performing (*n*=5) and bottom-performing districts (*n*=5) as defined by student outcomes. Compared to bottom-performers and districts overall, more top-performing districts addressed consultants (100%), PD for coaches (60%), relationships (40%), and social media (60%).

Figure 18: Types of Professional Learning Opportunities Utilized by LEAs
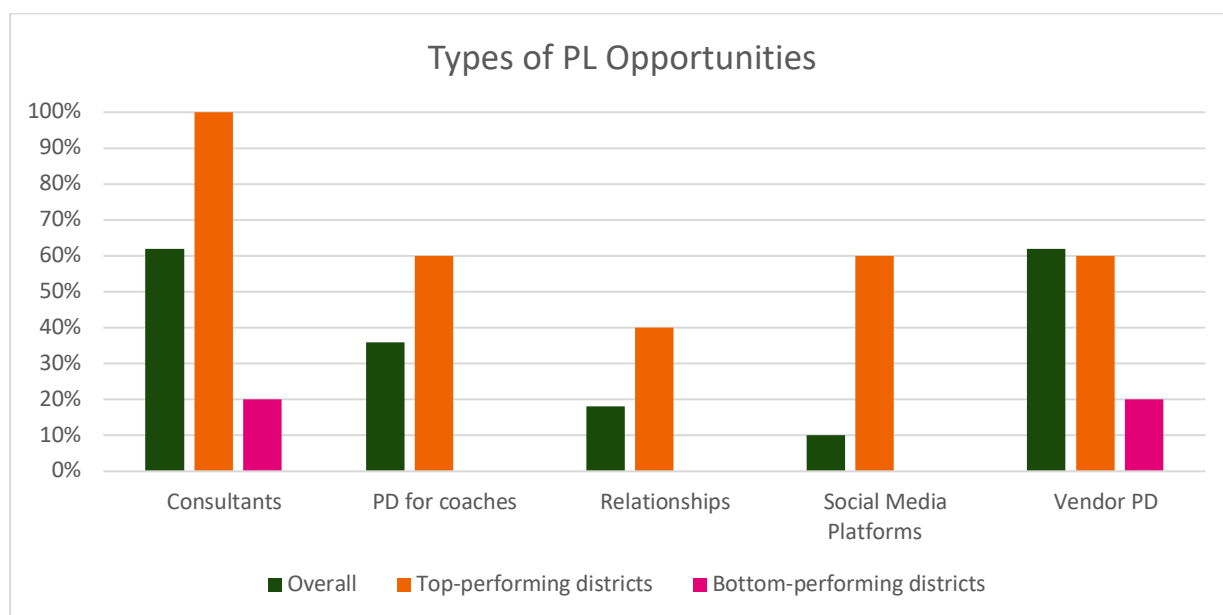
Like most LEAs, LEAs from top-performing districts frequently addressed the use of consultants. For these districts, consultancies at times overlapped with other PL types, such as coaching. The quote below illustrates how one top-performing district's external coach served multiple roles:

> *"Then we have consultants who come, like I said, at least monthly. There's somebody here doing coaching and providing feedback, and then planning professional development for workdays and whatnot based on what they've seen during those visits" (52).*

One top-performing district identified the use of consultants for supporting teachers and implementation of programs with fidelity, but also for administrator support as well. For example, the LEA (45) stated that principals and other leaders would accompany the consultant on classroom walk-throughs, and as a result gained better understanding of adopted curriculum:

> *" A lot of it was just exposure to the administrators, so that they could kind of figure out what they were looking for" (45).*

The focus on professional learning for leaders is further echoed in top-performing districts with their focus on PL for coaches. The LEA above continued to explain that their coaches were furthering their knowledge though both the pursuit of endorsements and also vendor training:

> *"The system's paying for that, for them to get their coaching endorsement through one of the RESAs. They want to do their reading endorsement. And we also are going to send them through the mentorship program for Acadience, so that they can really get a good*

> *understanding of that platform and the reports that we get when we administer the DIBELS assessment" (45).*

While few districts addressed social media in their interviews, one top-performing district (92) highlighted the benefit of vendor Facebook groups due to both the networking opportunities and information exchange.

In sum, LEAs described varied PL types that were not necessarily distinct (e.g., consultant provided by the vendor might conduct trainings and also provide coaching), but top-performing districts tended to place an emphasis not only on PL for teachers but also PL for leaders that levered information sharing. These LEAs appeared to prioritize these experiences for supporting L4GA implementation.

Finding 4: LEAs described various instructional strategies, including groupings (e.g., small group/pairs, whole group, independent), strategies for reading and writing skills, and differentiation as a strategy.

LEAs addressed 29 distinct practices across the interviews. Across the 39 districts, the most cited aspects of instructional practice were the use of small groups (*n*=32); independent work (*n*=17); and whole group (*n*=16). In addition, LEAs addressed instructional strategies for reading skills (*n*=20), either generally (e.g., "reading") or specifically (e.g., phonics), and writing (*n*=17). In addition, LEAs addressed differentiation (*n*=19) as an instructional strategy. Less commonly addressed practices included more specific activities and routines including such things as gallery walks, read-alouds, shared writing, and anchor charts.

Whole group instruction was described by LEAs as spaces for "teacher modelling" (126), "direct instruction" (126), and mini-lessons on a "grade-level standard learning target" (32). Small groups, however, were described by LEAs as spaces for "intentional instruction" (43), "flexible" (8), and "skills-based" (126), echoing possible considerations for differentiation.

Some LEAs also addressed guided reading, a small group activity. In the instance below, the LEA (52) discusses small group guided reading for working on specific reading skills, including phonemic awareness and phonics, as well as a means for exposure to varied texts:

> *"We know our guided reading groups are where the magic is happening for us. We know that that's where we're moving readers and equipping them with the skills that they need to become proficient readers. We also know that building that early phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge is helping our readers and setting them up for success later. We know that exposing students to a variety of text is also making a difference for kids" (52).*

LEAs addressed small groups, whole group, and independent work, and small groups were described by many LEAs in connection with differentiated instruction. Because we were interested in better understanding how LEAs described differentiation, we more closely examined relevant excerpts.

In the quotation below, the LEA described how differentiation moved from small groups into independent learning formats at well.

> *"...we spent a lot of time working on differentiating instruction in small groups... they would do the group lessons but then the kids would have their independent work that was differentiated" (53).*

LEAs also at times described an intentional move away from whole-group based formats where lecture dominates to small and flexible grouping, suggesting the grouping change as a strategy to increase differentiation. An LEA (67) describes groupings:

> *"We have some teachers who do really well with flexible groupings and other teachers who need some significant support on moving away from that lecture style, that whole group style" (67).*

For one LEA (104), conferences serve as a space for assessing and improving skills, such as comprehension, but also as a space for relationship building:

> *"... putting in reading conferencing when teachers—we do this, you know, with the idea of improving instruction and checking comprehension and this kind of thing. We do that as a manifest benefit, but the latent benefit in all of that is that we also see the development of relationships" (104).*

Through frequency analysis, notable differences emerged between top-performing (*n*=5) and bottom-performing districts (*n*=5) as defined by student outcomes. Compared to the bottom-performers, top-performing districts more often addressed differentiation (80%) as an instructional strategy as well as strategies for reading skills (80%), and writing skills (60%). Bottom-performing districts, however, more often cited small group instruction (100%) as an instructional strategy than top-performers.

Figure 19: Instructional Strategies Addressed by Districts

Instructional Strategies
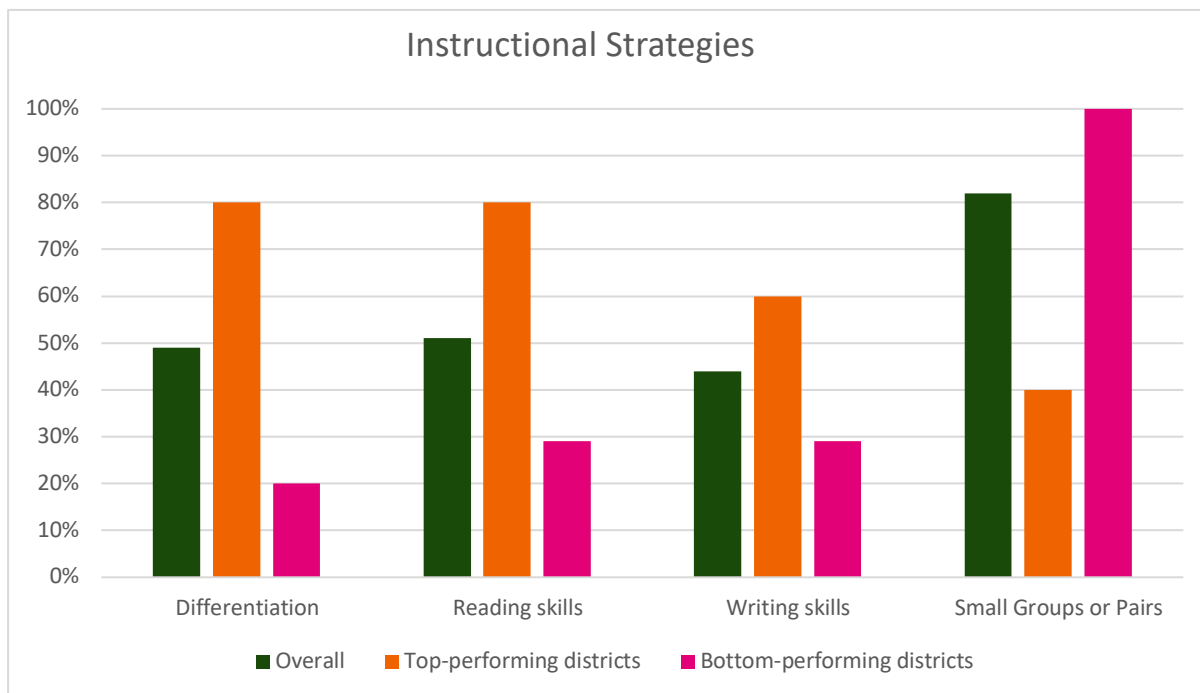
LEAs from top-performing districts addressed differentiation through the use of consultants, curriculum, and instructional routines, including guided reading and other small group formats.

One LEA pointed out differentiation as part of the curriculum script (45), as well as the use of a consultant to improve quality. Another LEA addressed differentiation as part of instructional routes. For example, the LEA indicated the use of "guided reading groups every day in every reading class" (52) at the elementary level. In addition, LEAs addressed the use of small groups for differentiation. For example, one LEA from a top-performing district addressed that their district has been working on improving small group instruction, stating, "That's a perfect opportunity for differentiation" (74).

One LEA from a top-performing district also addressed differentiation in terms of individual children, and the fact that all children are capable of growth. She indicated the need to help children regardless of labels, as well as the importance of focusing on both top and bottom achieving students:

> *"... Everybody's best is different.... irrelevant of black, white, yellow, green, ELL, or SPED, it's a child. They started here. Help them grow. So when we start with, 'Okay, well, they're just SPED. They're not growing,' that infuriates me. Or 'They're just EIP or whatever.' That's irrelevant. 'Or they're the top group.' It doesn't matter if they're the top. They still can grow (74).*

LEAs from top-performing districts were also more likely than their bottom-performing counterparts to address reading and writing skills when talking about instructional strategies. An LEA from a top-performing district identified the use of writing workshop as an instructional strategy, which incorporated opportunities for "varied writing" (52) and

highlighted the benefits of this approach to writing for students that moved beyond skills to affective states:

> *"We know that the writing is making a difference, and we hope very much that we are building kids who love writing, like really great writers, not just people that can write on demand, but can see the writing and see the value in it" (52).*

In addition, this same LEA also addressed "reading workshop" (52) as an instruction strategy to support reading. Moreover, this approach incorporated opportunities for "books of their choice" and strategies to support phonics skills.

While many LEAs across districts address the use of small group instruction, they did not always explicitly address the skills taught in groups. An LEA from a top-performing district provided insight into the particular foundational reading components focused on during small group instruction:

> *"And in the upper grades, when we're breaking into smaller groups, if they already have those phonics skills in place, then they're working more on comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. So if you walked into an upper grade classroom and you're watching them, you might see a group who is doing a writing. They don't have time to finish writing. There's never enough time for writing. But they'll take part of that group time and work on writing, and they you'll see the teacher with a small group, and they are working on comprehension, on their levels, on their instructional levels" (92).*

Like other districts, this LEA found writing to be a continue challenge in terms of instructional time and instructional priority.

Finding 5: LEAs reported a variety of uses for student data, such as informing instruction and professional learning, as well as challenges with data. Top-performers more often reported reviewing data, while bottom-performers more often reported using assessment or data.

LEAs were asked to describe how their district uses student data. Across the 39 districts, LEAs most often described teachers' understanding of student data and assessments (*n*=33), using student data (*n*=31), and specifically using data or assessments to inform instruction (*n*=29).

When describing how districts used data to inform instruction, LEAs addressed using data to determine areas of student strengths and weaknesses and inform choices in student groupings. This was often for the purpose of differentiation. Sometimes LEAs specified a particular assessment used to inform instruction in broad terms, but did not elaborate on how the data was analysed or how the data may have guided instruction. Other reported uses of student data included such things as informing professional learning opportunities and purchasing curriculum.

Nearly half of all districts experienced some challenges with data (e.g., platform issues, inconsistent administration (10), inconsistent training (45), or time consuming (55). For example, one LEA (57) described platform challenges:

> *"HMH this year has been a struggle... And it's just because of the new platform and all of the things that have happened with that... even though we've had inconsistencies and issues with HMH this year, we still use that data to help us guide our instruction. It's not that we're just giving assessments set to check off a box that we've given it. We actually look at the data and we use it to plan for that instruction"* (57).

In the quote above, the district's intentions to use data to guide instruction is evident, but what is not clear is if the data challenges described produced incomplete, inaccurate, or untimely data. In other words, the quality of the data used to inform instruction or other uses is not clear. Another LEA (64) expressed similar challenges:

> *"I don't mean to beat a dead horse. But HMH has really been a topic that's just recurring.... And it's very difficult to just tell these teachers, you must implement this, yet it doesn't work to its capacity either. And we do a lot of, 'well do the best you can,' 'test the ones you can,' 'you're doing great,' but we don't want them to lose faith in it. We want it to be a useful tool, yet it doesn't seem to be fully developed to be able to be a useful tool. I would say HMH has been our biggest or my biggest challenge just trying to understand it and help the teachers with it"* (64).

The LEA's comment above also illustrates how platform challenges impact assessment implementation and data collection, as well as the ability to understand the data collected.

Through frequency analysis, notable differences emerged between top-performing (n=5) and bottom-performing districts (n=5) as defined by student outcomes. Top-performing districts more often addressed reviewing data (sense-making), while bottom-performing districts more often mentioned only using assessments or data (See Figure 20).

Figure 20: Student Data across Districts

Use of Student Data
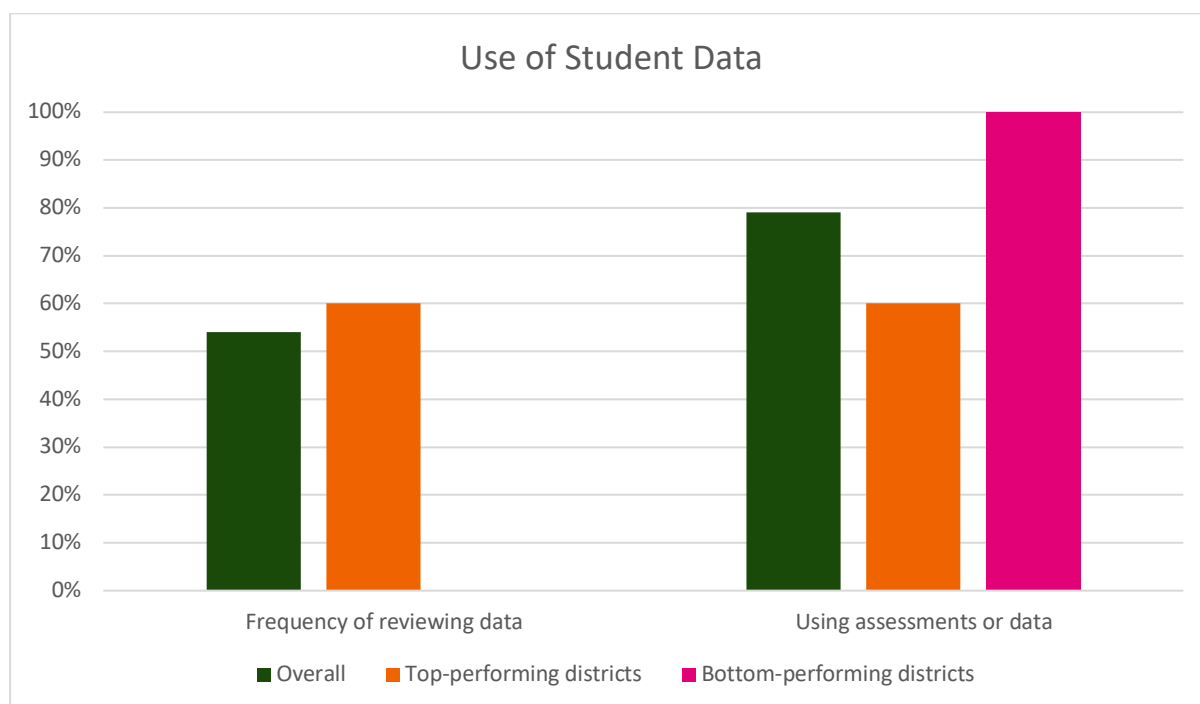
Most LEAs from top-performing and bottom-performing districts addressed challenges with data, but top-performing districts more often addressed the frequency of reviewing data as well as practices to make sense of data. An LEA from a top-performing district addressed the need to regularly review data, and this case, identified data analysis as part of routine collaborative planning:

> *"That has become a part of our collaborative planning, so in our schools that have multiple teachers in each grade band, they have had collaborative planning time. So, looking at their data to inform the work that they're doing has become part of that process" (47).*

An LEA from a top-performing district also emphasized the need to frequently review data, but also the need to help teachers make sense of the data and purposefully use it to support instruction.

> *"The biggest thing is not assuming that teachers know what to do with data. We have always been very data rich in this system, because it feels like we give every assessment known to mankind... And so the administrators and our department, the curriculum department, we have really been intentional on when we know that a common assessment is being given in our respective content area, that we get that data from the administrator or whomever it is that has access to it... But then we go and we sit down with the teachers. And say okay, so this is what we noticed. And really kind of guide them through it. So, it's making sure that administrators or coaches if you have them, really understand what it means to look at the data and then do something with it." (45).*

In sum, LEAs across all 39 districts reported a need to understand data and assessment tools as well as a variety of uses for student data, including informing instruction and professional learning.

Finding 6: LEAs reported a variety of challenges including some directly connected to COVID-19 and the data platform. The data platform challenges created areas of concerns related to data quality and data usage. Top-performing districts more often addressed buy-in as a challenge to overcome.

LEAs were asked to describe L4GA implementation challenges. Across the 39 districts, LEAs described a variety of challenges, such as COVID-19 (*n*=26), virtual learning platforms (*n*=12) and staffing challenges (*n*=13), both of which were likely connected to COVID-19. In addition, nearly half (*n*=18) of all LEAs identified data platforms (e.g., HMH Growth) as a challenge. This last finding is consistent with Finding 5, challenges related to use of student data, described above.

LEAs, including those from top- and bottom-performing districts, addressed the platform's complicated user-interface and how it impaired district leaders' ability to assist teachers. A quote from an LEA (74) below demonstrates their struggles:

> *"Growth measures has been a struggle. I'm going to be honest with you. That's been one – 'Honey, I can't really help you with that because I can't hardly understand it myself.' That's been a struggle. And I think that's hindered that part of that data" (74).*

In addition, LEAs also reported how technological challenges resulted in concern about the quality of the data. The quotes below illustrate how these concerns resulted in perfunctory implementation and lack of follow-through:

> *"[T}he data that we get from it does not correlate with our data that we have. And the HMH Growth Measure does not correspond to that at all. So, we give it because we have to, but we do not look at it" (52).*
>
> *"And it's at a point where it's like, 'Guys, I know you don't want to give it, but we have to give it. Please just give the test.' And then that's another day or two of lost instruction for data that we can't do much with. So, it's a hard thing to encourage people to do" (112).*

In another case, an LEA (22) described technical issues, not related to the platform itself but instead related to how the socio-economic conditions of their district during COVID-19 impacted student learning:

> *"Because we're rural and poor, all those things, the internet capability put us at a horrible place, particularly K-5 and all, but K-2 was almost impossible and-- try to do pre-k virtually with kids who didn't even have internet at home. We just suffered from it. Everybody has.*

We're not alone, but you had parents who aren't computer savvy. The only thing they had at home was a phone who couldn't – had no data to use all these lessons and things we try. We tried everything" (22).

Through frequency analysis, a notable difference emerged between top-performing (*n*=5) and bottom-performing districts (*n*=5) as defined by student outcomes. Top-performing districts more often addressed buy-in as a challenge to overcome, as well as how they addressed the challenge (See Figure 21).

Figure 21: L4GA Implementation Challenges
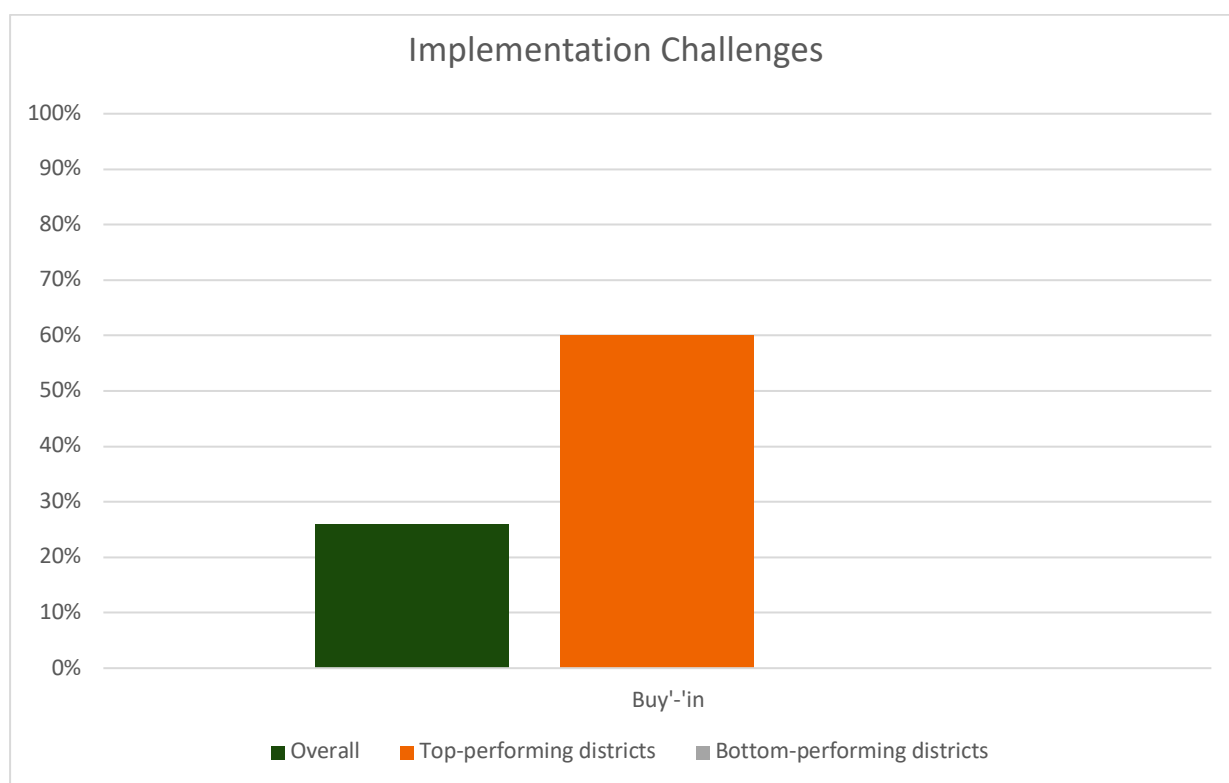
One LEA from a top-performing district addressed differences in Pre-K experiences for children in their district, and how the Head Start leadership did not buy into a new curriculum package. The LEA not only addressed the challenge, but also addressed how they responded to the challenge by providing additional supports for the Head Start programs that they did accept:

> *"The Heggerty phonemic awareness, our PreK okayed it for them to do it in PreK, so they have been doing it, but Head Start, their person did not okay it. So we were not able to do that.*
>
> *...That's been a tough one. But we bought them a lot of literacy supplies for Head Start, a lot of books, puzzles, things to support kids in play, because they are – they were able to accept things that they could put out for kids to use during play or whatnot. So that was good"* (52).

Another LEA addressed how time is a factor in getting teacher buy-in for professional learning opportunities, and how the challenge required the district to respond with more intention:

> *"I think the biggest challenge is time. That's always going to be our challenge... They want to participate in professional learning, but they don't want to be out of their classrooms.*
>
> *I totally respect that, because that's where the rubber meets the road. That's where they're really helping kids. So, it's difficult to take people out of the classroom to participate in professional learning, so one of the biggest challenges is being certain that the professional learning is high quality PL that people can take back and immediately implement.*
>
> *Because we don't want to pull them from the classroom, put them in a learning situation, and it not be a valuable moment in time, and then them go back to class feeling like they wasted that time, because that's frustrating to people"* (47).

In sum, across the 39 districts, LEAs described varied challenges, some directly connect to COVID-19 and data platform challenges. Data platform challenges created other areas of concerns, such data quality and data usage.

Summary

The findings from the multiple data sources included in this evaluation project illustrate that the 2019 Cohorts 1 &2 were supporting student literacy growth in expected ways across multiple age bands. Student language and literacy improvements were most notable in PreK settings compared to other grade bands. Although there was evidence of positive impacts on student reading achievement across multiple measures and age bands, considerable variation was noted across L4GA LEAs. This suggests that implementation of literacy practices designed to support student achievement were not consistently being enacted. Of particular

note was the fact that many students in elementary school were not making progress in a manner that helped them improve their standing on the Acadience Reading assessment against suggested performance benchmarks. Although learning opportunity loss associated with COVID-19 may still be having an impact on student scores, additional to strong core of highly explicit, systematic teaching of foundational skills would be productive (Spear-Swerling, 2019). LEAs may need additional program supports designed to provide evidenced based instruction in a manner that positively increases student's literacy achievement.

Looking across high and low performing LEAs, we found differences in how LEAs reported approaching L4GA implementation. Teachers self-reported that they participated in PL opportunities that were sponsored by their LEA or school staff the most. GADOE PL opportunities were not universally attended, as LEAs took advantage of less than ½ of the opportunities offered. Additional attention should be allocated to understanding LEA training needs and ways in which the GADOE can support L4GA implementation for LEAs that are particularly struggling. In addition, the GADOE might want to consider providing clear guidelines to LEAs about the types of vendor professional learning opportunities that should, and should not, be utilized. This could help LEAs with choosing approaches that would best support both teachers and leaders, a finding illustrated by top performers. As part of this work, the GADOE might also suggest evidenced based professional learning support structures that LEAs should utilize when implementing new curricular approaches. Given the variability across LEAs in implementing the L4GA grant, additional research should be undertaken to better understand high performing LEAs approach to supporting their teachers and students. In particular, more attention could be given to implementation of writing instruction and its connection to reading in addition to approaches for effectively differentiating instruction.

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Appendix A. Top and Bottom Performing LEA characteristics

LEA	Population Estimate	Curricula/ Intervention Materials Used	Non-Mandated Assessments	GADOE PL Participation # of sessions (topics)
T1 (LEA #092)	2,939	Bookworms, Heggerty, Reading Horizon, Lexia, HMH Journeys, Read 180, My Perspectives	MAP, DIAL 4, Access Tests	**2** (Fluency Course for K-2 & 3-5)
T2 (LEA #074)	26,837	iReady , Reading Mastery, Read 180, System 44, High Scope	ITBS, iReady	**14** (Pre-K administration of PALS; How to Navigate PALS; Sounds part I for Preschool, K-2; Fluency Course for K-2 & 3-5; Aligning Writing Instruction for B-12, K-2, 3-5, & 6-8)
T3 (LEA #052)	6,365	Fountains and Pinnell,	MAP	**1** (How to Navigate PALS; Data Digs for PPVT & PALS)
T4 (LEA #045)	45,561	Scholastic materials, Orton Gillingham, Flocabulary, CSET Writing	Write Score	**4** (Oral Language for B-5; Emergent literacy for B-5; Pre-K administration of PALS; How to Navigate PALS)
T5 (LEA #047)	12,781	PK: Saxon Phonics ES: Max Scholar, Orton Gillingham System 44, Read 180, HMH Journeys, iReady	Star , Write Score	----
B1 (LEA #075)	17,069	Leveled Readers, Remediation Kits, Journal subscriptions Educational magazines	Narrative Assessment Protocol	**8** (Phonological Awareness; Data Digs for PPVT & PALS; Sign Language I & II for Preschool, K-2 & 3rd Grade)
B2 (LEA #0119)	20.845	Foundations		**7** (PreK Administration of PALS; How to Navigate PALS)

B3 (LEA #050)	206,640	HMH Journeys, Read 180		**10** (PreK Administration of PALS; How to Navigate PAL; Data Digs for PPVT & PALS; Phonological Awareness Continuum; Phonological Awareness; Aligning Writing Instruction for grades 3-5 & 6-8)
B4 (LEA #085)	117,621	Star 360, Hasbrouck, KRA, Daily Five, Fast Bridge	Access for ELLs, CogAT, Star	**4** (Fostering Creativity without Breaking the Bank Preschool, K-2, & 3-5; Aligning Writing Instructions grades 9-12)
B5 (LEA #130)	31,337	Bookworms	Access for ELLs, Informal Decoding Inventory, MAP. Horizons Placement Test, Expressive Writing	**12** (Oral Language for B-5; Aligning Writing Instruction for B-12th grades; Building the Early Reading Brain for Preschool & K-2; Phonological Awareness Continuum; Sign Language I & II for Preschool, K-2, 3rd grade ; Fostering Creativity without Breaking the Bank Preschool, K-2, & 3-5

Note: Abbreviations (T=Top; B=Bottom) Note: Population Estimates were taken from the US. Census Bureau (July 1, 2022)

L4GA Community Partnerships

Caitlin McMunn Dooley, Ph.D.

Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA)

- Created in 2015-16

- Supported by the US Department of Education (Striving Readers grant, Comprehensive State Literacy Development grant) with over $240M

- Competitively awarded sub-grants to districts in "feeder" schools and centers:
  - 15% birth-five centers and providers
  - 40% elementary schools
  - 40% middle and secondary schools

- 5% is retained by the State Education Agency to administer the grant

L4GA Grant Recipients

- **66 Districts**
- **505 Schools and B5 Programs**
- **393,390 Georgia Students**

L4GA19 C2 Grantees (*pdf applications coming soon*): Baker County Schools, Barrow County Schools, Bartow County Schools, Ben Hill County Schools, Brooks County Schools, Clay County Schools, Clayton County Schools, Dooly County Schools, Jefferson County Schools, Lamar County Schools, Meriwether County Schools, Randolph County Schools, Richmond County Schools, Rockdale County Schools, Stewart County Schools, Taliaferro County Schools, Tattnall County Schools, Thomas County Schools, Troup County Schools
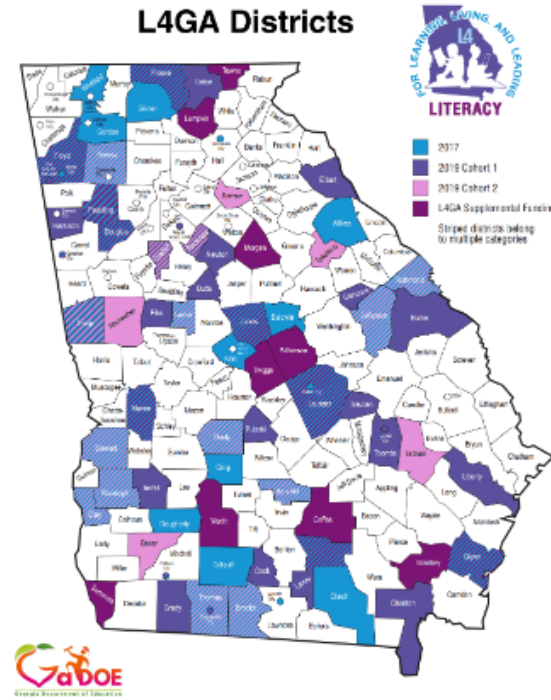
L4GA Districts

Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA)

GET GEORGIA READING IN THE COMMUNITY
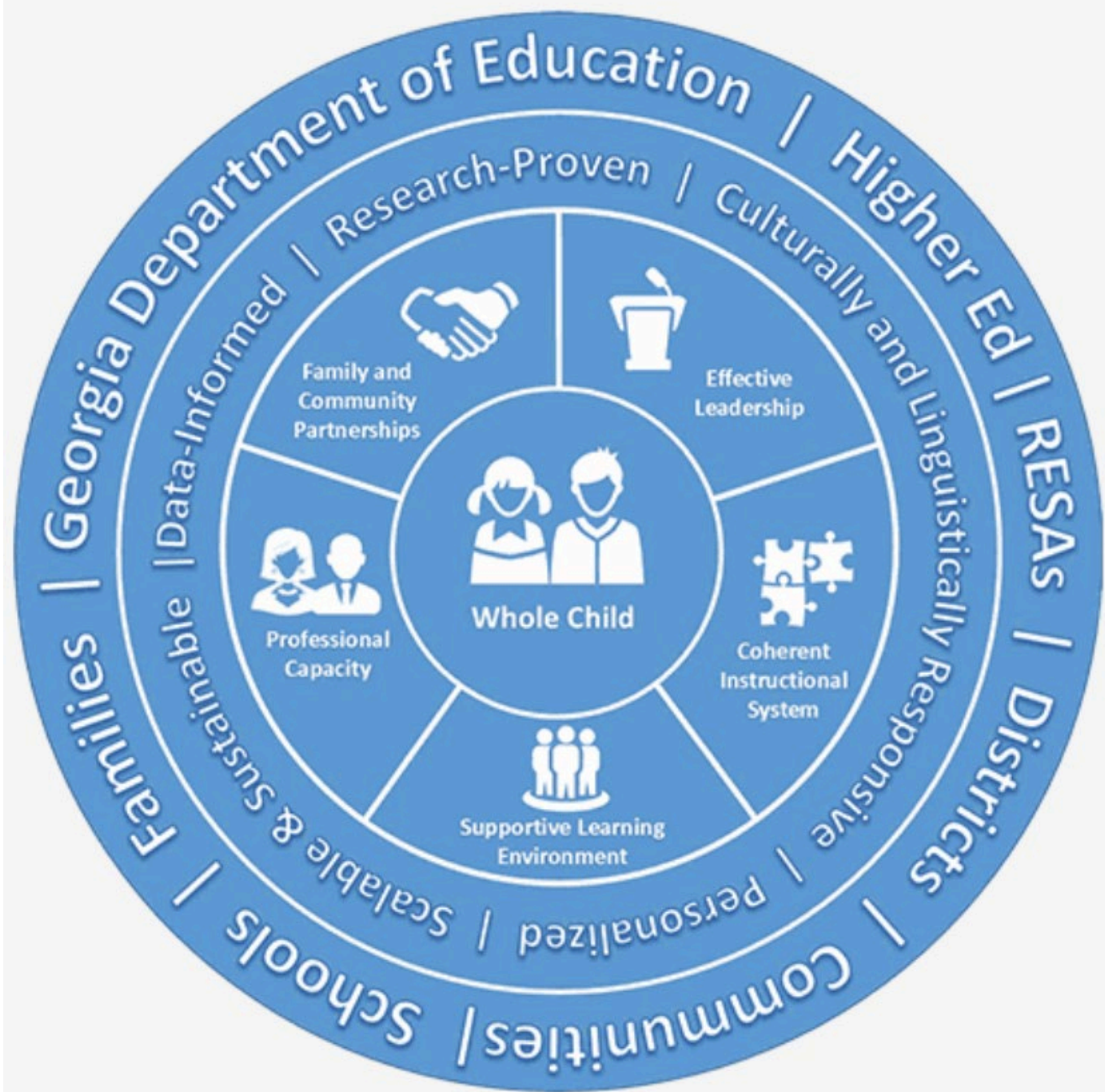
Types of Community Investments

- Literacy-focused events
- Book giveaways
- Birth-5 professional learning opportunities
- K-12 professional learning opportunities
- Afterschool/out-of-school learning opportunities
- College/university teacher education supports (e.g., dyslexia endorsement)
- Community resources (e.g., student health services)

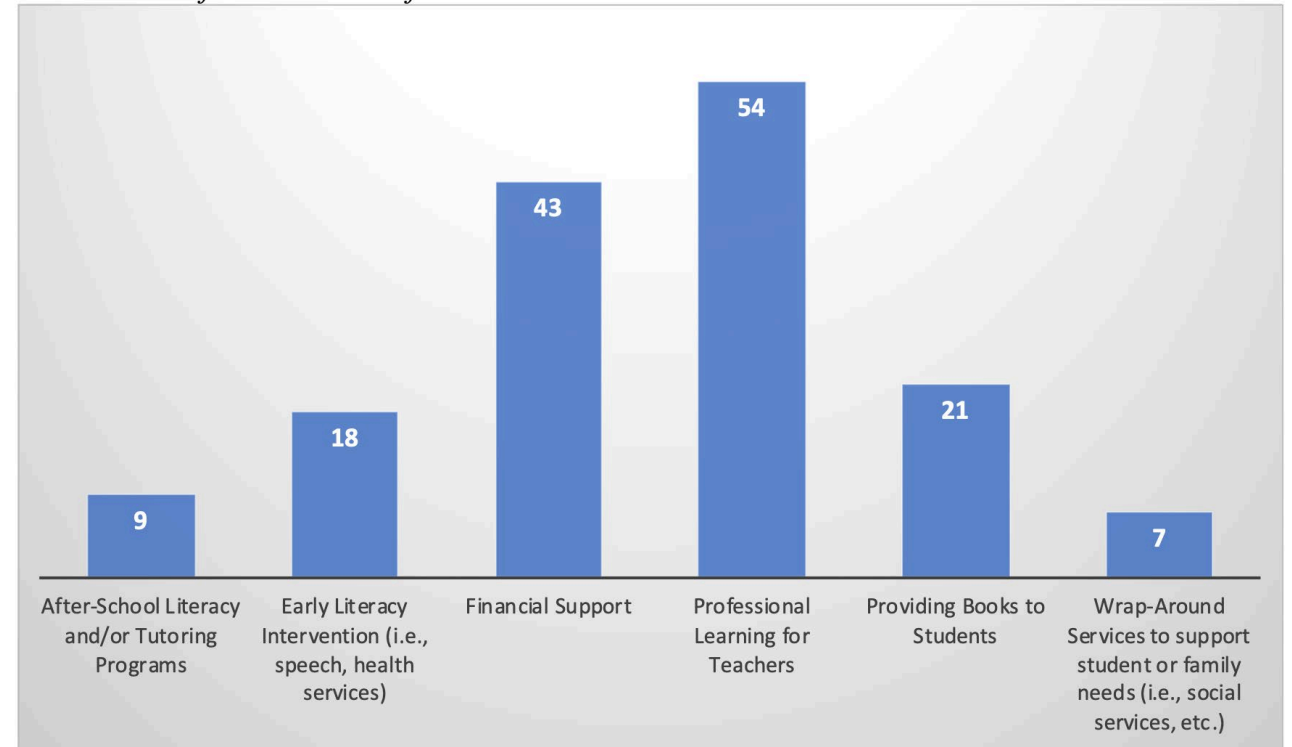**Randolph County Family Connection Seeks Out Unconventional Spaces to Reach At-Risk Children**

December 11, 2023

Types of Community Interventions

The Most Beneficial Resources for the 2023 Year 3 Districts

Category	Value
After-School Literacy and/or Tutoring Programs	9
Early Literacy Intervention (i.e., speech, health services)	18
Financial Support	43
Professional Learning for Teachers	54
Providing Books to Students	21
Wrap-Around Services to support student or family needs (i.e., social services, etc.)	7

Note. The total number of responses to this question is n = 152.

Partner Voices

"It has definitely been the snowball with that in our area that each you know much by us we get stronger with adding more people, adding more partners, adding more ideas."

Kim Haynes Johnson
October 30, 2023 ·

Our local Pike County Journal-Reporter newspaper is an L4GA community partner. The editor, who has a degree in creative writing, had a long-held dream of starting an outdoor-based writing group to build literacy in our community. She calls it Writing Wild! Thank you, L4GA, for helping make this happen. A dozen writers showed up for the kickoff on the National Day on Writing on the courthouse square, and today we are working together with a local storyteller to plan an event for November. We look forward to each next writing adventure!
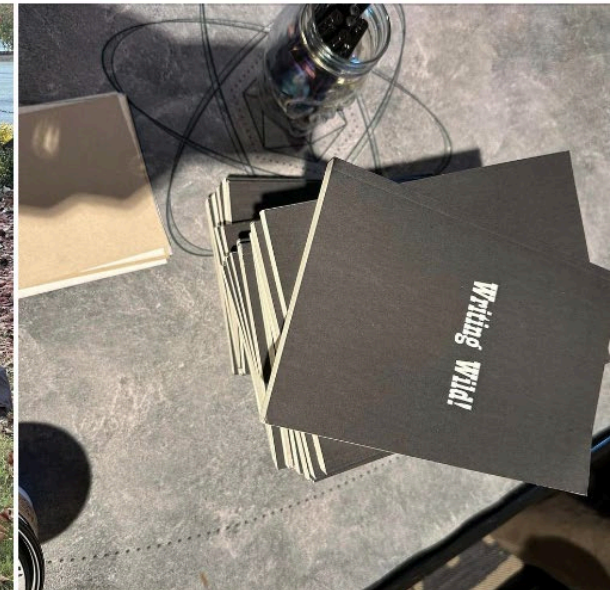
Sian Smith Lott

Admin · December 12, 2023 · 👥

Clay County celebrates the opening of on-site health services!

"Our partnerships have become stronger, and we appear to be working as one this year with some partners. We sat down and outlined our work and meshed our community outreach. This has been powerful and has helped us unify as we move forward."

Social Network Analysis

What factors influence a child's path to literacy?

? ? ? ?

? ? ? ?

? ? ? ?

What factors influence a child's path to literacy?

SCHOOL CLIMATE

MATERNAL EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY

ATTENDANCE

PRETERM & LOW BIRTHWEIGHT

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

QUALITY CHILD CARE

SUMMER LEARNING

HEALTH BARRIERS

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

PRESCHOOL & GRADE SCHOOL SUSPENSION

MATERNAL EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY

Maternal education levels significantly impact the cognitive and language development of their children and continue to affect their educational success for a lifetime.

Maternal level of education significantly predicts child literacy outcomes.

Maternal reading ability is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success.

Parents' educational levels positively influence their children's educational outcomes and educational and professional achievements into middle adulthood.

Sticht and McDonald 1990; Lyesmaya et al 2022; Sastry 2010; Dubow et al 2009

MATERNAL EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY

A review of 67 research studies found that when parents spend time in adult literacy programs that improve their reading skills their children attend school more regularly, perform better academically, and are more likely to graduate.

Children's reading ability correlate significantly with their father's and mother's reading ability well into the third and fourth grades.

A compendium of research shows parents' educational levels strongly influence their children's educational success and economic opportunities.

Padak and Rasinski 1997; Van Bergen et al 2015; Benner, Boyle, and Sadler 2016; Dubow et al 2009; Kalil et al 2013

Children born preterm have lower scores than children born at term on all measures related to academic outcomes—most notably their phonological awareness and language development.

Children born before 34 weeks gestation are more likely to have lower reading and math skills than those born at full term.

Children born preterm perform significantly lower on reading comprehension than their peers born at term.

Burke 2019; Odd 2016; Kovachy et al 2015; Borchers et al 2019

Compared to children born at term, children born preterm are at:

- 36 percent increased risk for developmental delay or disability

- 19 percent higher risk for suspension in kindergarten

- 10 to 13 percent increased risk for disability in prekindergarten, special education placement, and retention in kindergarten

Morse et al 2009

Every Week Counts

For Early Math and Literacy Outcomes.

Percent of children not achieving expected or above level in reading, writing, and math at age 7.

43% <32
31% 32-33
25% 34-36
21% 37-38
18% 39-41

Gestational Age

N = 6,031
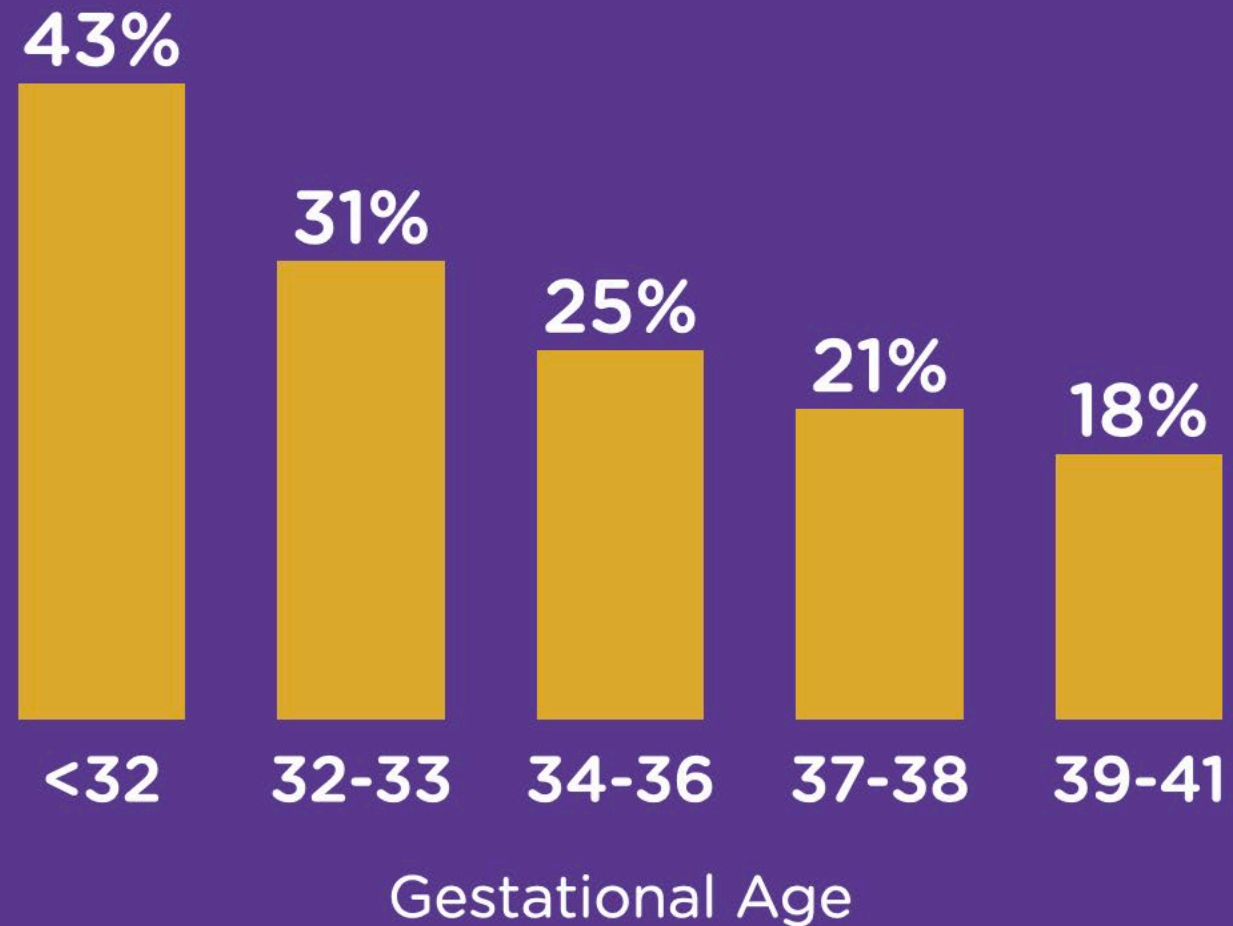
At 35 weeks, an infant's brain weighs **only two-thirds** of what it will weigh at 39 to 40 weeks.

35 weeks

39 – 40 weeks

Preterm Birth in Georgia
10-Year Trend

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
10.7	10.8	10.8	11.2	11.4	11.5	11.6	11.4	11.9	11.9
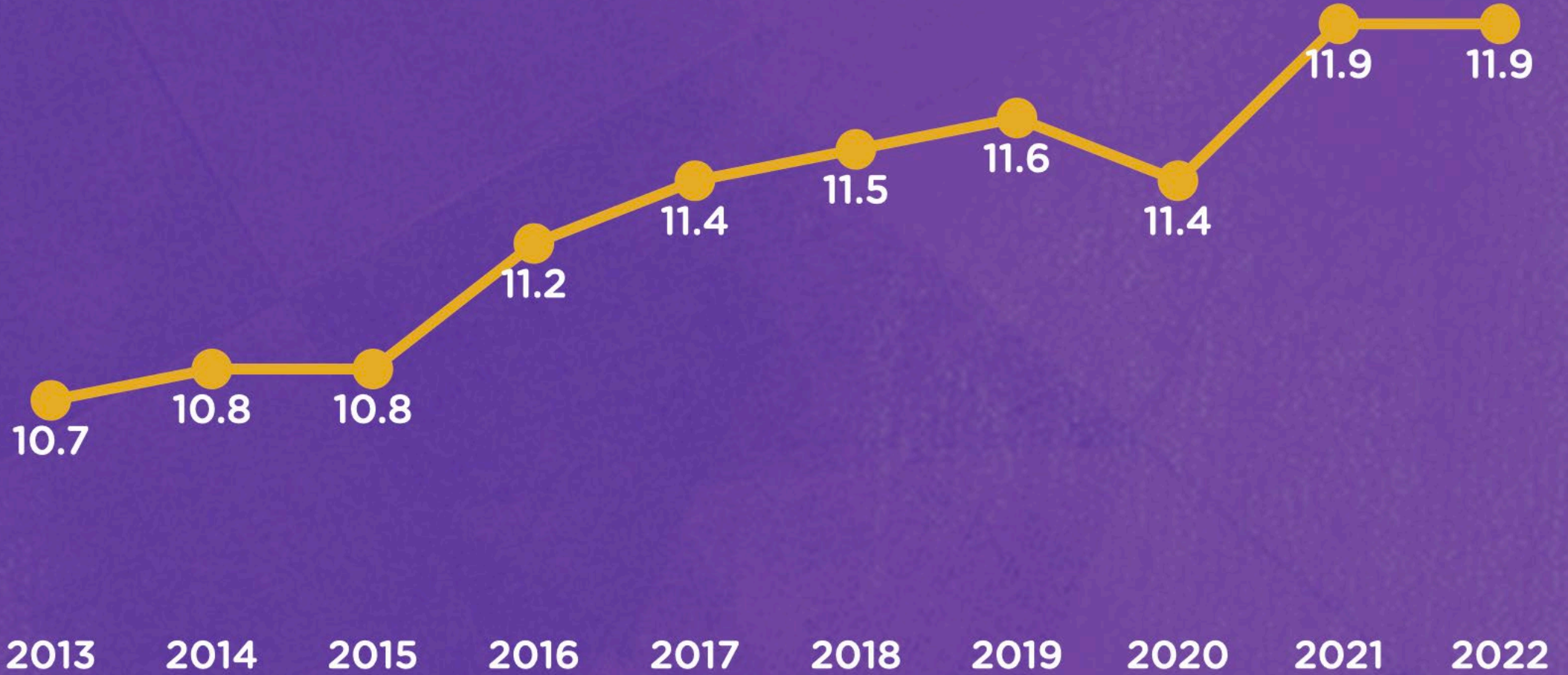
Language development is the foundation for literacy.

By the end of elementary school, 61% of children with typical language development achieve the expected standard in literacy compared to only 15% of those without typical language development.

Children who have difficulties with language development are 4 times more likely to have low literacy in adulthood.

Language development supports a child's ability to express and understand feelings, to learn in the social context of education settings, and relate to others.

Language development is vital to the use of one's "inner dialogue" required for self-regulation.

Law et al 2017; Bercow 2018; CDC 2020; Beresford and Coughlin 2016; Starr et al 2020; Lindquist et al 2015

Findings from a study of **265,000** five-year-old children reveal that children with effective use of language and communication were **19 times** more likely to have positive mental health than children without effective use of language and communication.

Goldfeld et al. 2017

NOTICE Language Indicators of Well-Being

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

	BEFORE WORDS			EMERGING LANGUAGE	
	Children are building their attachment to the social world and communicating primarily through body language, gestures, and facial expressions.			Children are beginning to use single words, brief phrases, and simple sentences with either speech, pictures, sign language, or technology.	
The Why	Responding to a familiar caregiver's voice, gestures, touch, and facial expressions	Communicating for different purposes including: sharing attention, requesting, and sharing emotion	Communicating for many reasons including starting social games, sharing, protesting, and requesting actions	Communicating frequently within back and forth exchanges with others	Communicating to request assistance, share emotion, and request information (e.g., where's__?)
The How	Vocalizing or babbling in a back and forth manner	Using gestures, facial expressions, imitated actions, or vocalizations to gain attention	Pairing gestures with sounds, routinized or imitated words (either speech, pictures, signs, or other)	Using of single words for object labels, people's names, action words, modifiers, and relational words (e.g., up, down, in)	Using and understanding of combinations of words with people's names and verbs
Coping With Others	Showing interest and soothing in response to a familiar caregiver	Soothing in response to others' facial expressions, actions, and emotion/energy states	Seeking comfort and engagement from familiar caregivers	Seeking comfort from others by asking for attention and comfort items	Requesting soothing activities when distressed
Coping On One's Own	Uses familiar routines and materials as a source of comfort	Using objects familiar to natural routines to soothe during transitions	Imitating simple play actions to rehearse real-life activities	Using play actions with objects to rehearse real-life activities.	Using simple self-regulatory language or symbols ("first…then") to maintain engagement in activities.

"Symbols" refers to spoken words, written words, picture symbols, sign language, etc.

This table was developed by Pileggi, Rubin, Farran & Weldon (2018) based on information from Gard, Gilman, & Gorman (1993), Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent & Rydell (2006), and Russell (2007). Updated: November 2023

● ● ● ● **SANDRA DUNAGAN DEAL CENTER FOR EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

NOTICE Language Indicators of Well-Being

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

	DEVELOPING LANGUAGE COMPETENCE			CONVERSATIONAL
	Children are using simple and complex sentences, while still developing their use and understanding of language in unfamiliar situations, for a range of communicative functions (expressing emotion, asking for help, sharing remorse), and for the use of inner self-talk to guide their behavior.			Children are consistently using complex sentences, conversational level discourse, and "inner dialogue" for executive functioning. They are likely developing their use of language in a range of social contexts.
The Why	Communicating to share emotion and describe the emotions of others	Communicating to share simple stories and past events	Initiating and maintaining conversation by both commenting and requesting information	Communicating for many purposes including negotiating, collaborating, and expressing remorse or empathy with others
The How	Using simple sentences, including those with people's names, verbs and nouns (either speech, pictures or symbols)	Using a range of sentences, including complex (either speech, pictures or symbols)	Providing essential background information based upon listener's perspective	Understanding and using complex sentences as well as a range of gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice as a means to interpret figurative language (e.g., metaphors), humor and sarcasm
Coping With Others	Requesting soothing items when distressed	Repairing breakdowns in communication and sharing causes of emotion	Requesting a break, assistance, and regulating activities to soothe when distressed	Responding to assistance offered by others to either engage or soothe in new and challenging activities
Coping On One's Own	Using self-regulatory language or symbols to anticipate transitions between activities	Using self-regulatory language or symbols to anticipate the steps of extended activities	Using self-regulatory language by telling stories and enacting social sequences to prepare for future events	Using language or symbols to problem-solve and self-monitor in current or future events (i.e., executive functioning)

"Symbols" refers to spoken words, written words, picture symbols, sign language, etc.

This table was developed by Pileggi, Rubin, Farran & Weldon (2018) based on information from Gard, Gilman, & Gorman (1993), Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent & Rydell (2006), and Russell (2007). Updated: November 2023

SANDRA DUNAGAN DEAL CENTER FOR EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

This freely accessible tool can be shared with individuals, practitioners, and policymakers to generate awareness of indicators of language development from infancy through adulthood.

These indicators relate to a child's capacity to communicate for different reasons (i.e., why a child is communicating), to communicate in different ways (i.e., how a child is communicating), to regulate emotions with the help of others (mutual regulation), and to regulate emotions on one's own (self regulation).

It is these aspects of language that determine well-being and set the stage for literacy, academic, and emotional resilience.

Engagement through frequent, social interactions with adults and peers is the fuel for language development.

Law et al 2017; GaPSC Rule 505-3-.03

The 3 I'S: ELEMENTS OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

INVESTMENT: Are children motivated to engage and stay connected?

INDEPENDENCE: Do children know what to do and what is being taught?

INITIATION: Are children sharing what they know?

When children display all "3 I's" of engagement, communication is frequent, functional, socially oriented, and fluid across all settings. This typically indicates a level of engagement which fuels language use and development.
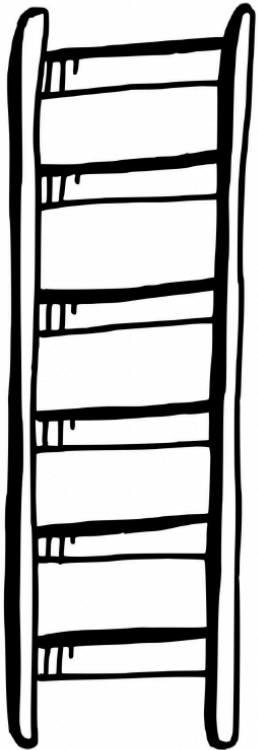
Rubin, Townsend, & Cardenas, SEE-KS, 2022; Language as a Missing Link Toolkit, 2023

Social Engagement Ladder

Location: _____ Date: _____

Activity: _____ Time of Day: _____

Educator(s): _____ Data Collector(s): _____

	Fully Engaged (4) Frequent spontaneous initiation, consistent independent engagement with materials, frequent expression of positive emotional investment
	Mostly Engaged (3) Occasional spontaneous initiation, occasional independent engagement with materials, occasional expression of positive emotional investment
	Partially Engaged (2) Responsive or non-spontaneous initiation, compliant with directions, seldom shares expression of positive emotional investment
	Emerging/Fleeting (1) Intermittently responsive without initiation, dependent on direction, minimal expression of positive emotional investment
	No Focus (0) Non-responsive, not engaging with targeted materials, and not sharing any emotion or expression, possibly out of the room

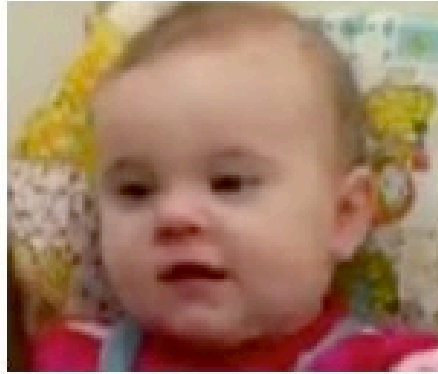SEE-KS (2022). Rubin, E., Townsend, J. & Cardenas, J.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

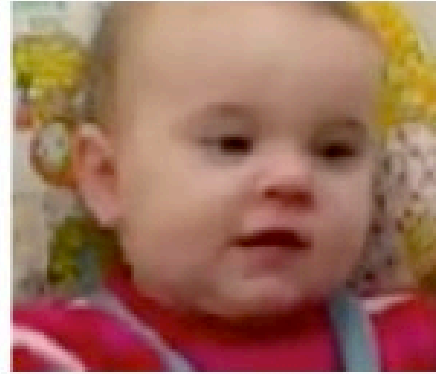Photo source: Tronick, E. Still Face Experiment, UMass Boston

0: No Focus
Child is not engaged, looking away

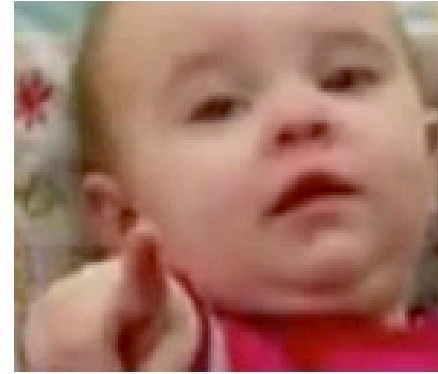**1: Emerging/ Fleeting**
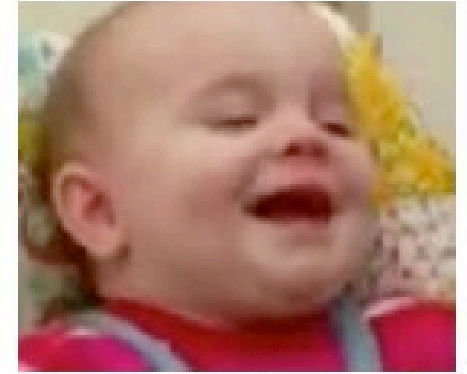Child engagement is not evident or consistent

2: Partially Engaged
Child is responsive and present

3: Mostly Engaged
Displaying positive emotion, participating in routines

4: Fully Engaged
Communicating thoughts and feelings in an effective and sustained manner

Language as a Missing Link Toolkit, 2023

QUALITY CHILD CARE

Quality childcare has a significant role in boosting reading achievement among children who live in poverty.

Poverty is less strongly predictive of underachievement for children who experienced higher quality childcare than for those who had not.

High-quality childcare has a significant long-term association with positive educational and life outcomes.

Very young learners, even a few months old, are already acquiring the skills and tools necessary for reading. In early education classrooms, this looks like children interacting with adults and other children through story-time, songs and rhymes, talking, and play.

Harvard 2010; Dearing, McCartney, and Taylor 2009; Bustamante et al 2024
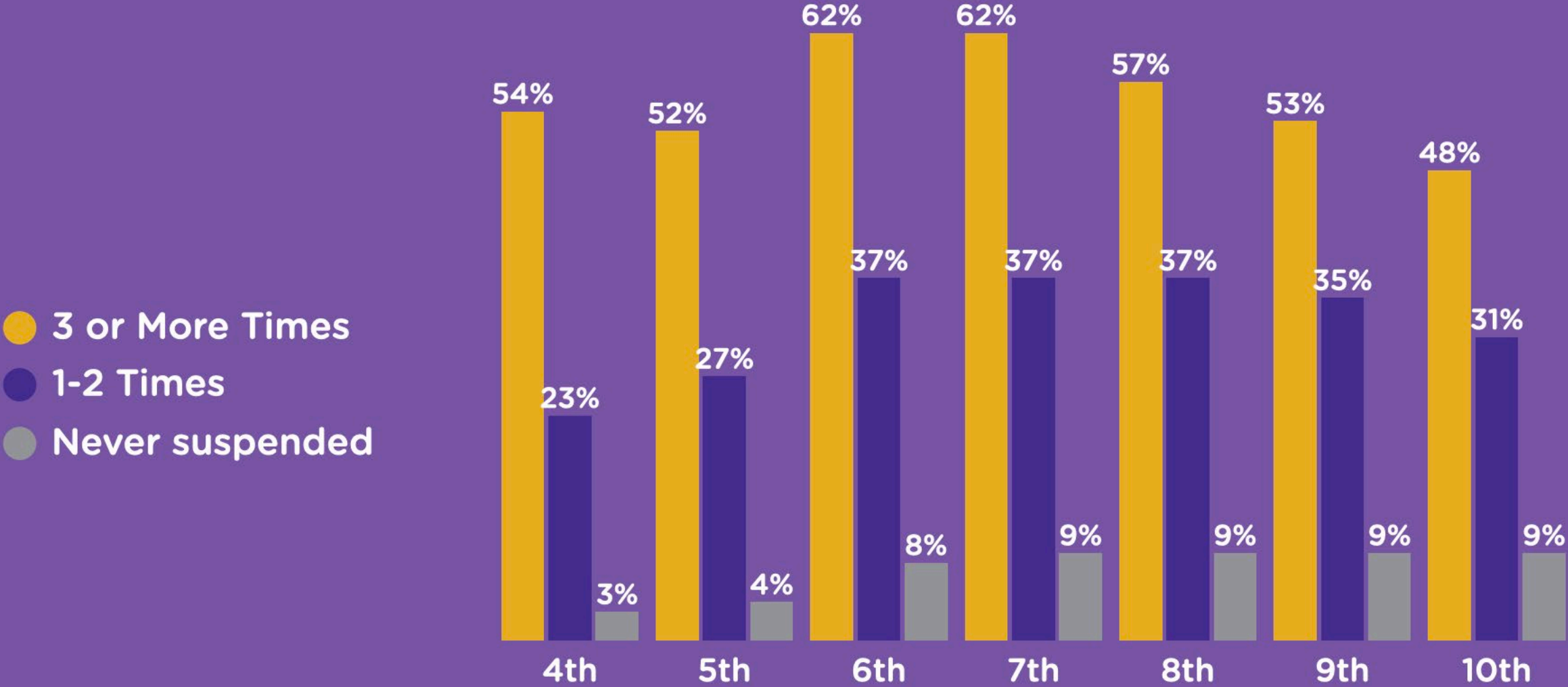
PRESCHOOL & GRADE SCHOOL SUSPENSION

*

Young children who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not.

Expulsion or suspension early in a child's education predicts expulsion or suspension in later school grades.

The use of suspensions for young children initiate or exacerbate a process of student disengagement, the end result of which is poor academic performance and higher long-term propensity to dropout out of school.

Stegelin 2018; Noltemeyer and Ward 2015;

Students suspended out of school in grades K – 3 are significantly more likely to be suspended out of school in grades 4 – 10.

*

- 3 or More Times
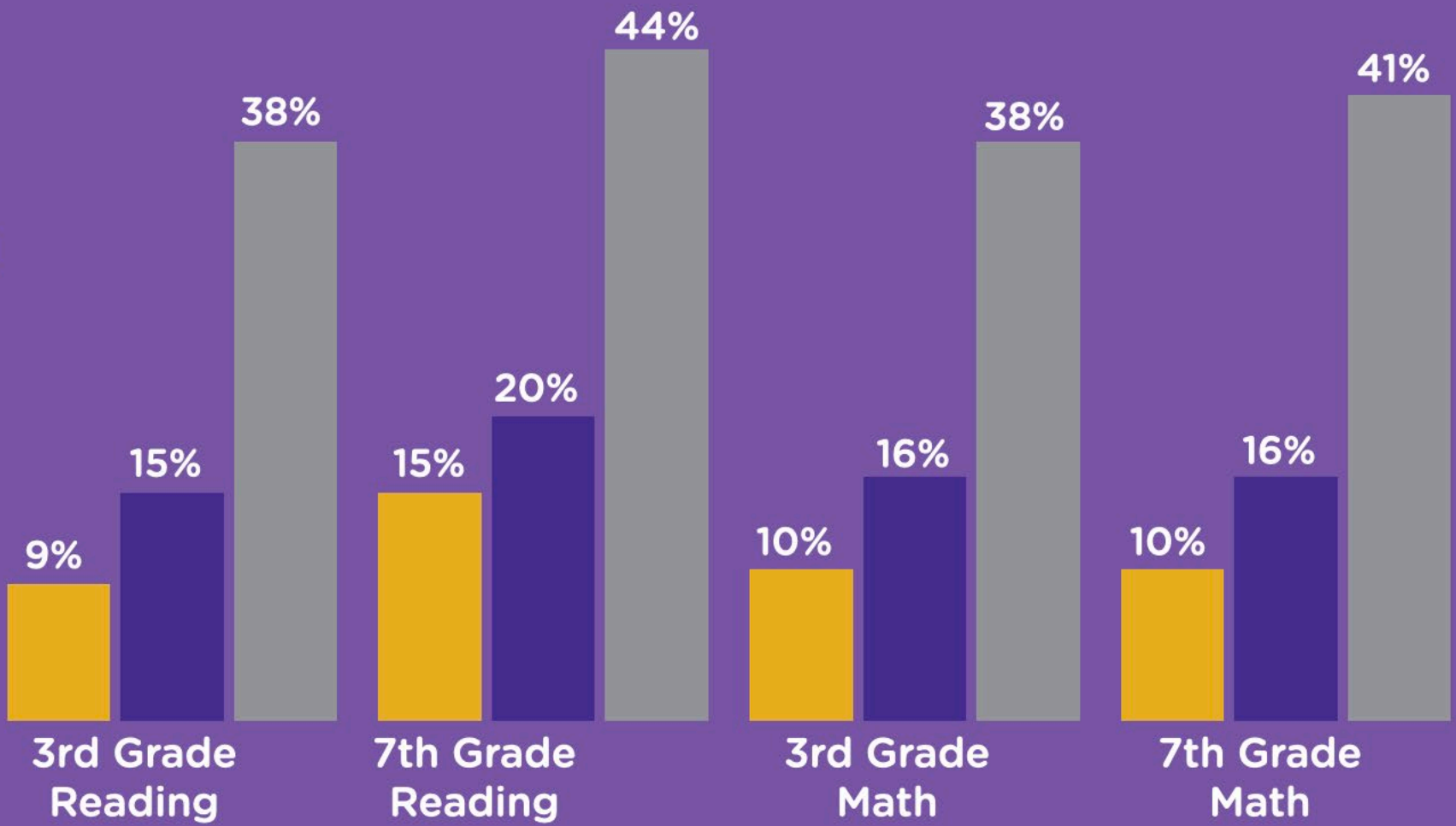- 1-2 Times
- Never suspended

K-3 Out-of-School Suspension

	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
3 or More Times	54%	52%	62%	62%	57%	53%	48%
1-2 Times	23%	27%	37%	37%	37%	35%	31%
Never suspended	3%	4%	8%	9%	9%	9%	9%

GOSA, 2018

K-3 out-of-school suspension and reading and math outcomes in grades 3 and 7.

Legend:
- 3 or More Times
- 1-2 Times
- Never suspended

3rd Grade Reading: 9%, 15%, 38%
7th Grade Reading: 15%, 20%, 44%
3rd Grade Math: 10%, 16%, 38%
7th Grade Math: 10%, 16%, 41%

*

GOSA, 2018

K-3 out-of-school suspension and outcomes in literature and algebra End of Course tests in grade 9.

*

Legend:
- 3 or More Times
- 1-2 Times
- Never suspended

9th Grade Literature
- 3 or More Times: 10%
- 1-2 Times: 17%
- Never suspended: 45%

Algebra I
- 3 or More Times: 10%
- 1-2 Times: 13%
- Never suspended: 32%

Coordinate Algebra
- 3 or More Times: 12%
- 1-2 Times: 17%
- Never suspended: 33%

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

*
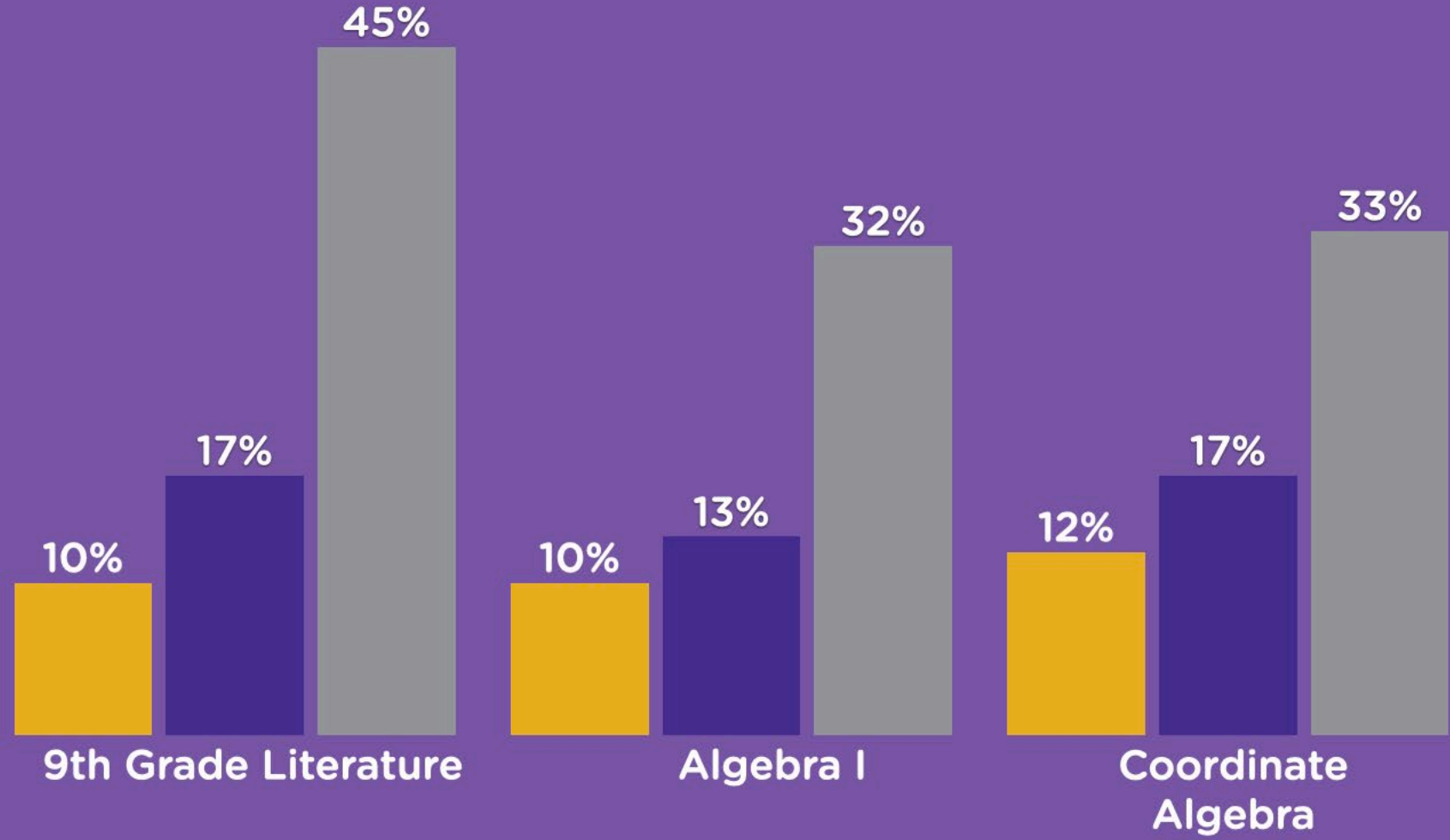
The greater the number of years in a positive classroom climate the more the gap closes between children who enter kindergarten with higher literacy skills and children who enter with lower literacy skills.

Positive classroom climate is significantly associated with higher student performance in reading comprehension and expressive language development.

Controlling for poverty, positive classroom climate significantly increases **engagement** which directly improves reading achievement.
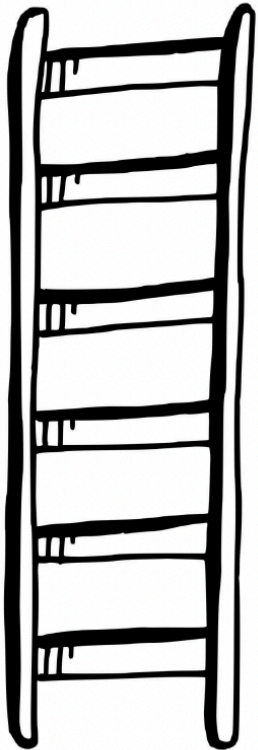
Vernon-Feagans 2019; McLean et al 2016; Gou et al 2011

Social Engagement Ladder

Location: _____   Date: _____

Activity: _____   Time of Day: _____

Educator(s): _____   Data Collector(s): _____

	Fully Engaged (4) Frequent spontaneous initiation, consistent independent engagement with materials, frequent expression of positive emotional investment
	Mostly Engaged (3) Occasional spontaneous initiation, occasional independent engagement with materials, occasional expression of positive emotional investment
	Partially Engaged (2) Responsive or non-spontaneous initiation, compliant with directions, seldom shares expression of positive emotional investment
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	No Focus (0) Non-responsive, not engaging with targeted materials, and not sharing any emotion or expression, possibly out of the room

SEE-KS (2022). Rubin, E., Townsend, J. & Cardenas, J.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

SCHOOL CLIMATE

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

*

Social engagement is a significant predictor of third grade reading achievement.

Even after controlling for poverty and quality instruction, children who experience a positive classroom climate from K-3rd grade achieve higher literacy scores in third grade.
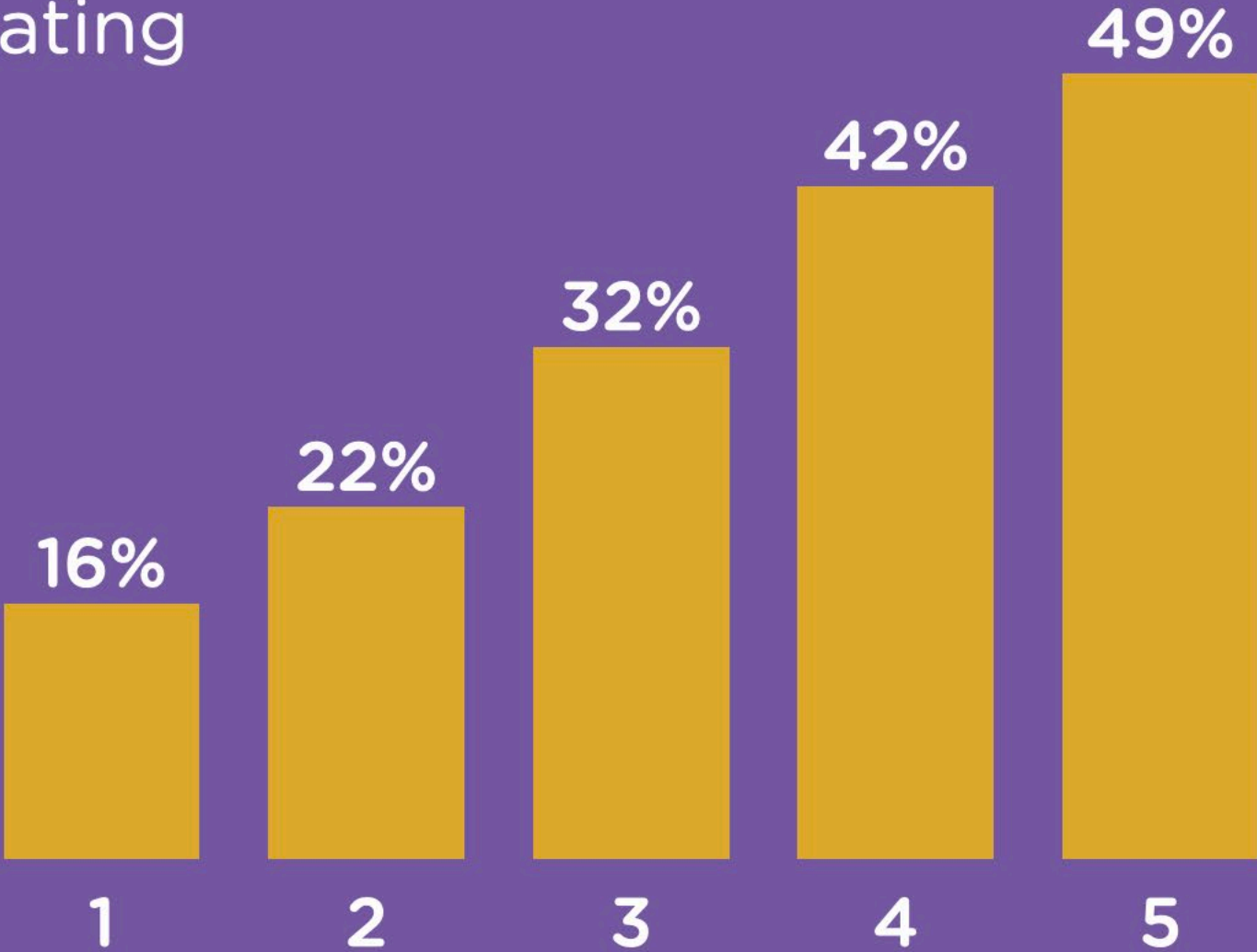
Students' perceptions of school climate relate significantly with reading outcomes.

A positive school climate is associated with higher achievement for all students at all levels in both math and reading, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency.

School climate plays a role in accounting for literacy scores, beyond students' and schools' SES. Further, a positive school climate narrows the literacy achievement gap between schools with high-poverty and more resourced communities, showing the importance of using a whole-school approach to improve and sustain positive school climate to improve literacy outcomes.
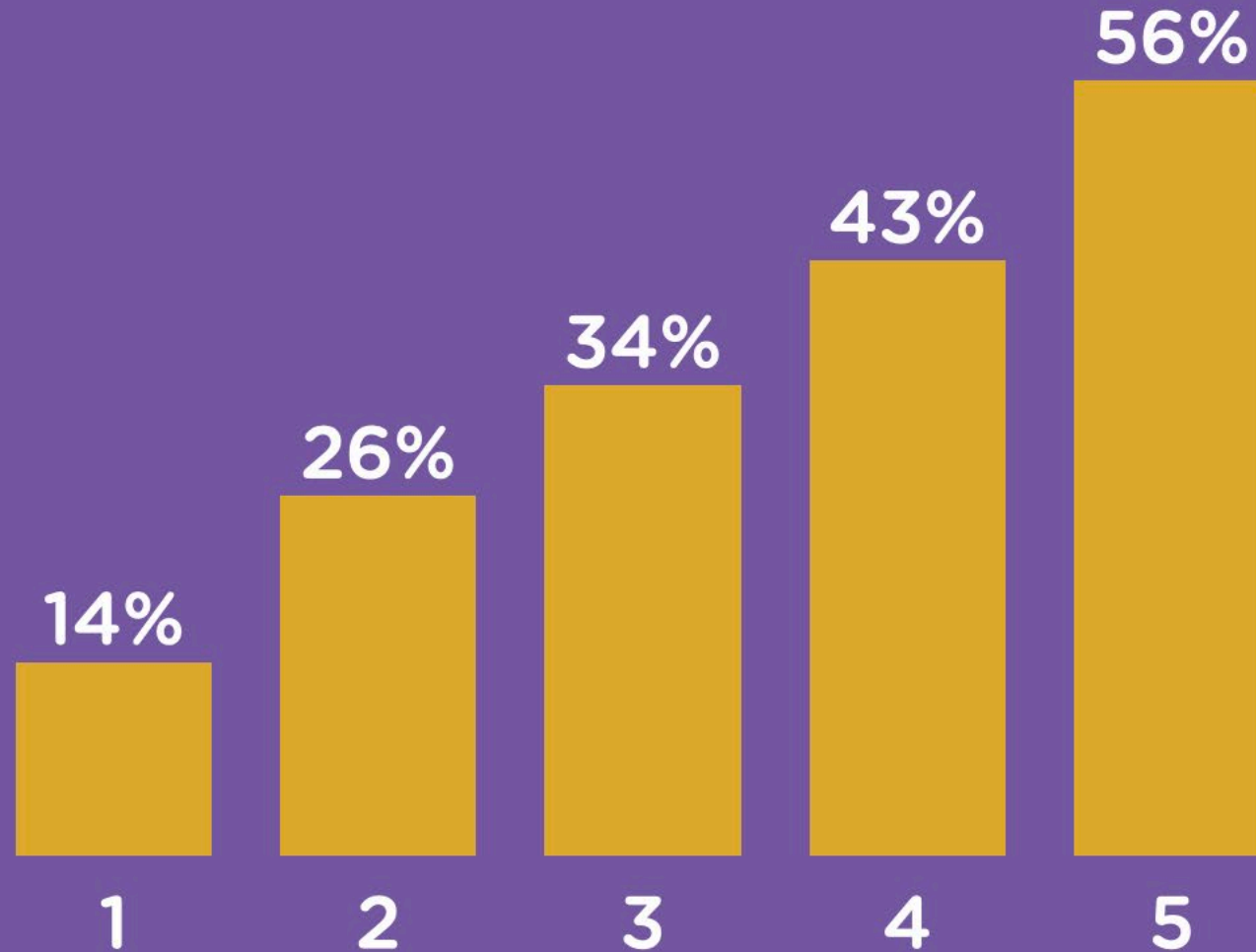
Gou et al 2011, Vernon-Feagans et al 2019, Fan and Williams 2018; Sanders et al 2018; Berkowitz 2021; McGiboney 2022

9th Grade Literature, 2019
Proficient and Above
By School Climate Rating *

1	2	3	4	5
24%	39%	52%	61%	77%

GaDOE, 2020

ATTENDANCE
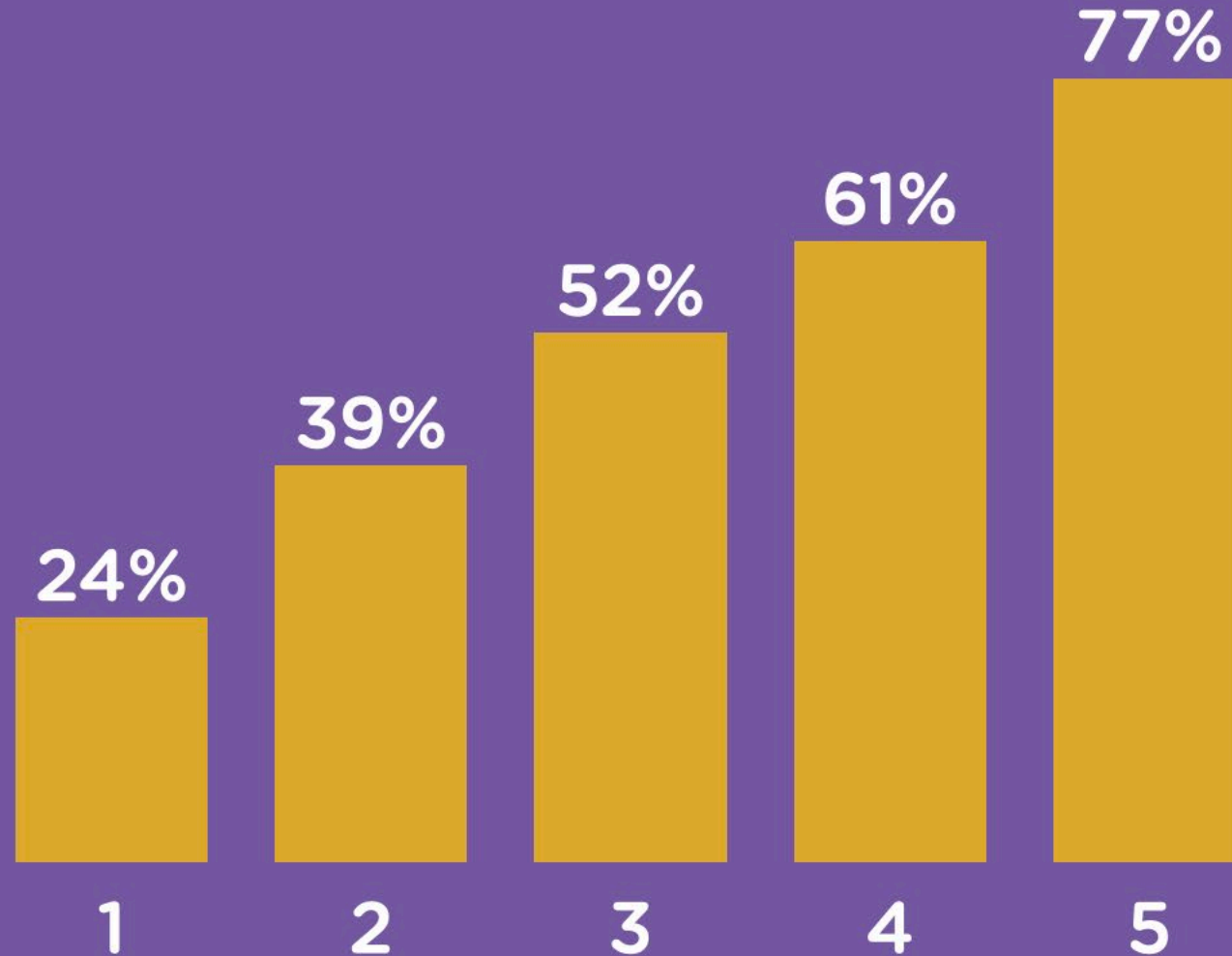
Absenteeism has a significant negative impact on student achievement beginning at the sixth day of absence – whether excused, unexcused, or suspension. *

Chronic absentees in kindergarten have the lowest academic performance in first grade.

Going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children from families living in poverty who are less likely to have the resources to help children make up for lost time in the classroom.

Chronic early absence is associated with declines in educational engagement, social-emotional development, and executive functioning.

Kramer and McGiboney 2016; Chang and Romero 2008; Bergin and Ferrara 2019
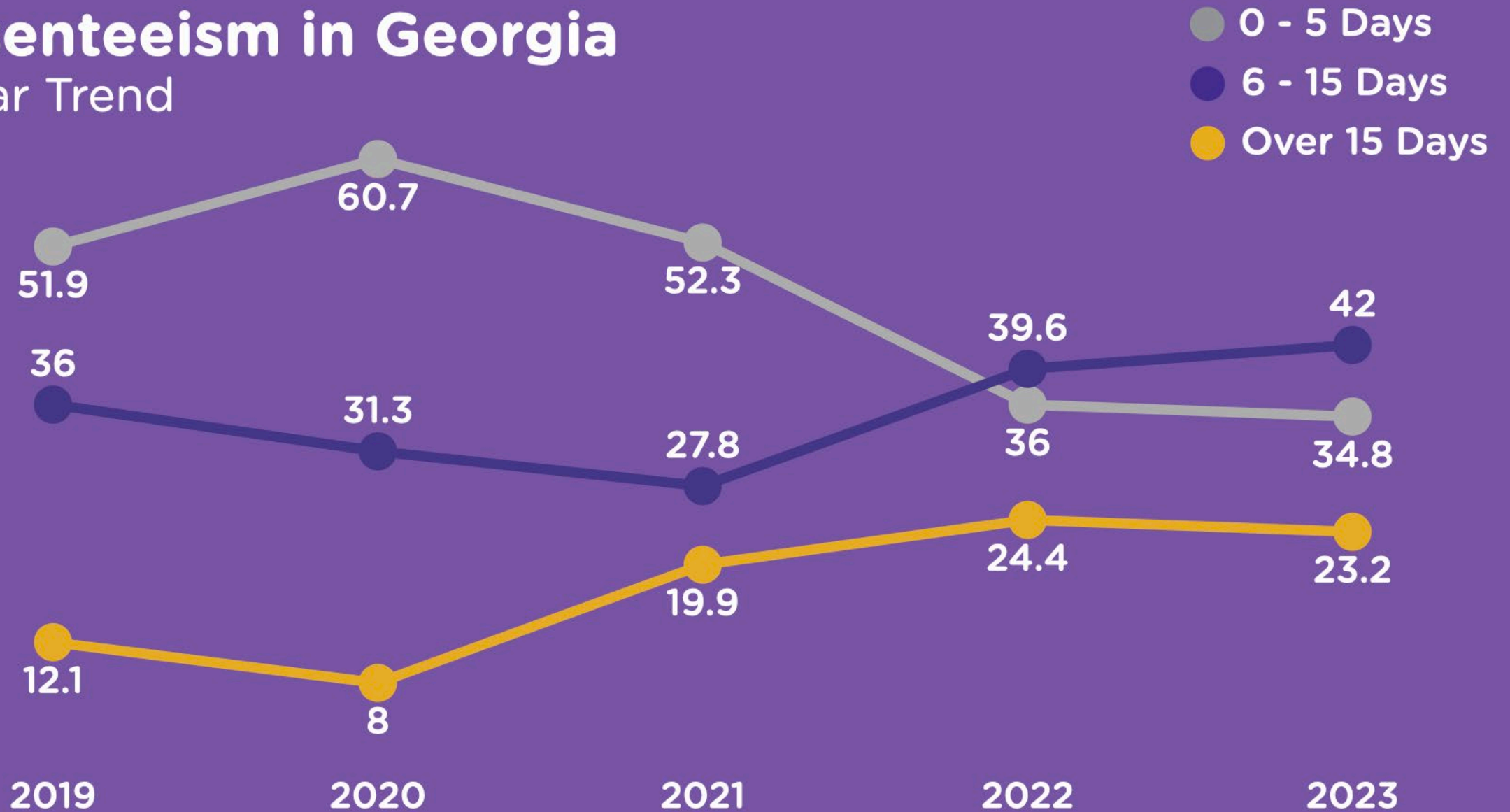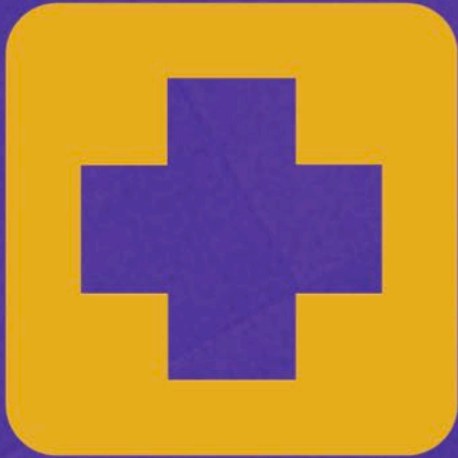
Health Barriers to Learning

- Vision problems
- Hearing problems
- Uncontrolled asthma
- Untreated dental problems
- Food insecurity

In many Georgia communities, prevalence of these conditions is upwards of **15% to 25%** — in some cases higher.

Educators who regularly see children come to school hungry describe seeing long list of associated effects, including an inability to concentrate, a lack of motivation, behavioral problems, illness, and poor academic performance.

In a pre-pandemic survey, nearly 60% of children from low-income communities said they had come to school hungry, and the majority of those children admit that it makes school difficult.

When a child arrives at school hungry, teachers say they lose one hour of learning time a day.

USDA 2015; No Kid Hungry 2023; Kellogg Foundation 2021

HEALTH BARRIERS

In education, vision is the dominant sensory system, as 80% of learning is done through the visual system. Deficits within this system often decrease a student's reading and learning abilities

An estimated 25% of students have undetected vision problems that may be impacting their reading success.

Visual issues can make it difficult for children to process and understand visually-presented information — all of these factors can cause children to become disinterested in reading.

American Academy of Pediatrics 2022; Lazarus 2021; OAN 2021

HEALTH BARRIERS

Untreated oral health issues can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing, and learning. Children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades.

More than 50% of 3rd grade students in Georgia have a history of tooth decay – nearly 20% are untreated and are 3 times more likely to miss school than their peers.

Children's oral health status is strongly linked to children's academic outcomes and emotional status with more feelings of unhappiness, worthlessness, and sadness.

A study from North Carolina showed that children with poor oral health had lower school grades and missed more school days due to dental pain and/or dental infection.

CDC 2023; Dye, Xianfen, and Beltran-Aguilar 2012

HEALTH BARRIERS

Children who struggle with reading are at higher risk for mental health challenges, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression and behavioral problems.

As early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain, they also lay the foundations of sound mental health. Disruptions to this developmental process can impair a child's capacities for learning and relating to others — with lifelong implications.

Neuroscientific research has confirmed the powerful role of emotions on children's cognitive mastery, indicating that emotions can either facilitate or impede children's learning process.

Children's inability to form healthy social relationships negatively impact their academic performance.

Koplewicz 2018; Harvard Center on the Developing Child 2020; Djambazova-Popordanoska 2018; Society of Neuroscience 2023

Children who do not read over the summer experience a loss of reading fluency and comprehension skills. Students who engage in summertime reading improve these skills.

Children without a summer reading routine can lose one to three months of the reading skills they spent the previous school year building. This loss is a long-term, cumulative loss—once students lose reading ability over the summer, they rarely catch back up.

By the end of Grade 5, summer learning loss can add up to over 3 years of lost reading skills, leaving students struggling to perform well in the classroom.

Boulay and McChesney 2021; Alexander, Boulay, and Pitcock 2016; Meckler and Natanson 2020

These factors are not barriers—they are opportunities.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

MATERNAL EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY

ATTENDANCE

PRETERM & LOW BIRTHWEIGHT

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

QUALITY CHILD CARE

SUMMER LEARNING

HEALTH BARRIERS

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

PRESCHOOL & GRADE SCHOOL SUSPENSION