

# UNDERSTANDING LITERACY IN DUVAL COUNTY

Brief 1 of a Series

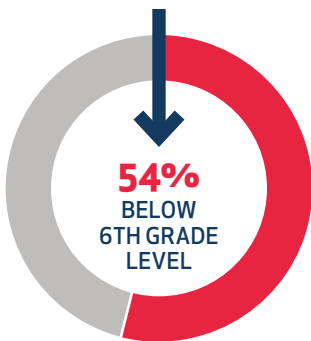


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ADULT LITERACY RATES  
IN THE U.S.



**Literacy in the United States has been a highly discussed and studied topic for decades as it is key to student success and well-being. Yet, according to the U.S. Department of Education, 54% of adults in this country have literacy rates below a 6th grade level (NCES, 2019).**

Various strategies for improving literacy, such as reducing inequitable access to resources and increasing family engagement, have been proposed to bolster literacy rates across the states. In Duval County, where literacy rates mirror national trends, there have been several large-scale efforts in the past, including but not limited to, “Read It Forward Jax”, “Mayor Peyton’s Book Club”, and “SAIL Into Reading.” While each of these campaigns have moved the needle, even slightly, towards increased literacy for our youth in Duval County, the need and energy exists for a more strategic and collaborative approach to addressing disparate literacy rates in our community; thus the Jacksonville Public Education Fund is engaged in efforts to implement the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, a national campaign, in Duval County.

In 2021, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund convened with Kids Hope Alliance, Duval County Public Schools, READ USA, WJCT, Jacksonville Public Library, and others along with Lectio Consulting to plan out the initial stages of the “READJAX” Campaign, with the goal of improving 3rd grade literacy in Duval County. This brief summarizes available background literature, literacy data, and community data that has informed this campaign. We will continue to track the progress and impact of the campaign.

This brief describes how Duval parents, across all demographic categories (such as race, zipcode, and education), share similar beliefs about the importance of early literacy to later success but some are likely facing complicated barriers to being as involved as they want to be. In combination with Duval County student population trends over the past three years becoming increasingly diverse and in economic need, all the data included suggest collective efforts are needed to improve literacy rates across Duval County through systemic change and culturally responsive engagement of students, teachers, and families.





# LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on a literature review conducted by the JPEF research team, many contributing factors surfaced that impact and explain literacy rates across the nation. Some initial themes that surfaced were:



Duval County is not experiencing uncommon challenges with literacy among young children.

Across the United States, roughly **1/3 of students are not reading on grade level by 3rd grade.**

Longitudinal studies have shown that 3rd grade literacy can be an indicator of high school graduation as well as college attendance.<sup>1</sup>

1. Bornfreund, et al., 2015; Gwynne, et al., 2010



A systemic and community-wide approach is necessary and must engage students, teachers, and families.<sup>2</sup> In particular, **parental awareness, involvement, and access of resources** are all factors that have been linked to improved student literacy.<sup>3</sup>

2. Enochty, et al., 2015; Jones, 2018.  
3. Crosby, Yildirim, Rasinski, Padak, 2015; Rochelle Dali & Payne, 2010



A coordinated effort of literacy interventions and programming **that seamlessly spans birth to 3rd grade** is much more likely to be effective than one that does not fully incorporate early learning services.<sup>4</sup>

4. Lesaux & Nine, 2013; Regenstein, 2019

These themes raise concern and hope; particularly in that many of the core tenants from **READJAX** are already incorporating and addressing these emerging themes from the literature. READJAX has specifically taken a systems wide approach to address literacy challenges through a community engaged lens.

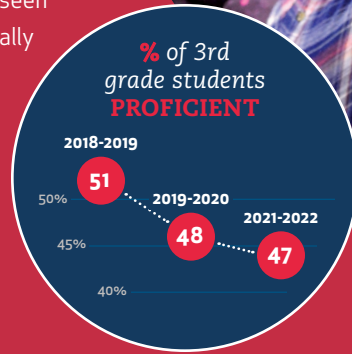


Early Learning Partners, such as the **Early Learning Coalition**, are at the table to ensure a coordinated effort that explicitly includes birth to kindergarten. Data from families has also been incorporated to the learning agenda attached to the campaign that will provide insights to community engagement across the campaign.

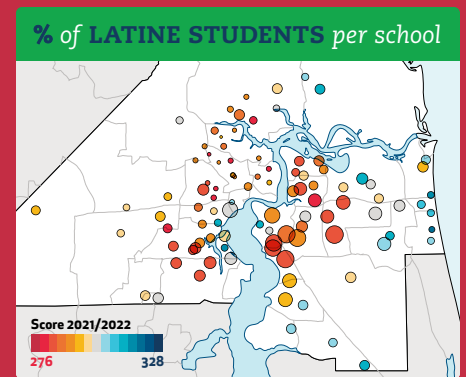
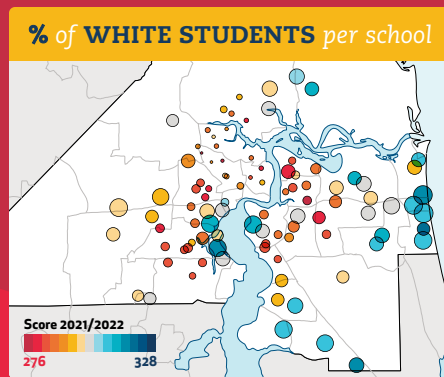
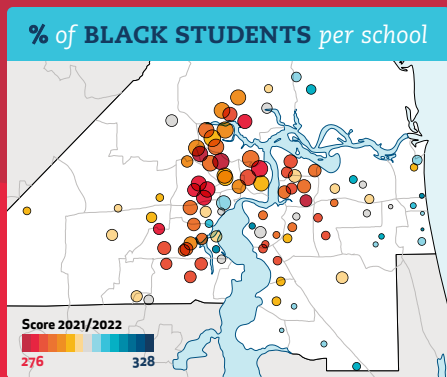


# LOCAL LITERACY

According to the most recent data, 3rd grade literacy in Duval County overall is at 47%, meaning that 47% of 3rd graders scored proficient on the most recent English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). This percentage has decreased by 4 percentage points since 2018, as can be seen to the right. Additionally, the JPEF team mapped out literacy rates geographically across the county utilizing publicly available data from 3rd grade DCPS students on the 2021-2022 ELA FSA. These visualizations make clear that student literacy is inequitable across the district. Schools with higher percentages of Black and Latine students were more likely to show lower scores on the assessment. In addition to the clear inequitable assessment outcomes, this also highlights the level of segregation in Duval County by school population. Below are examples of three of the maps.

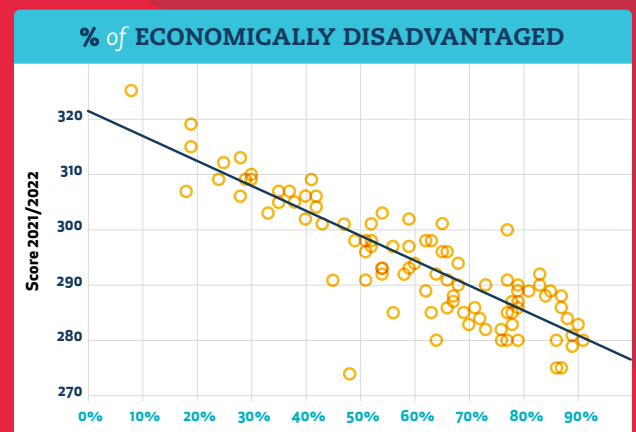


## 3rd Grade 2021/2022 FSA ELA Outcomes *(a score of 300 or above is considered satisfactory)*



**Further, the single strongest indicator found through a correlation analysis was that students experiencing poverty were less likely to demonstrate proficiency in 3rd grade literacy.**

This points to the essential nature of a community wide approach as it is clear that adverse societal conditions contribute to lower rates of literacy achievement among young students. The onus of responsibility for literacy does not rest on the child nor does it rest on the mythical "culture of poverty" but rather perhaps on what Martin Haberman calls a "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991) that impacts quality instruction and high expectations for youth experiencing poverty. Given that over half of the students enrolled in DCPS are identified as economically disadvantaged and students of color, a number that is only growing, this data underscores the essentiality of the READ JAX campaign.





# A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

The JPEF research team created a survey to gather baseline information of community perceptions and attitudes towards literacy in Duval County, particularly from the perspective of parents with young children. This survey will be administered annually and will be used as a point of measurement for improvement over time. The 2022 JPEF Literacy Survey was conducted by the Public Opinion Research Lab (PORN) at the

University of North Florida and sponsored by the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF). This study utilized a multi-modal design, incorporating both telephone and online surveys. The final sample consists of 304 parents of children under the age of 12. Parents were asked about their beliefs about literacy, reading behaviors, and ease of access to reading resources. Cross-tabulations of each question



response were conducted with respondents' demographics: race, gender, zip code, and level of education. Majority responses are presented under each question.



## Polling Sample Demographics

**304:** Total number of Duval County parents surveyed of children under the age of 12.

Of the parents surveyed:

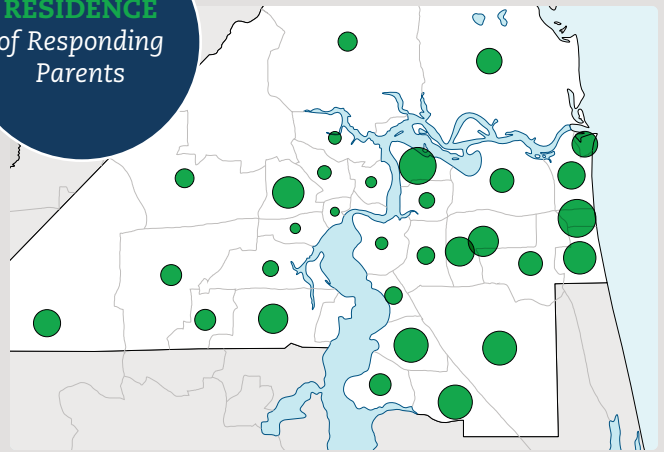


**64%**  
IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE

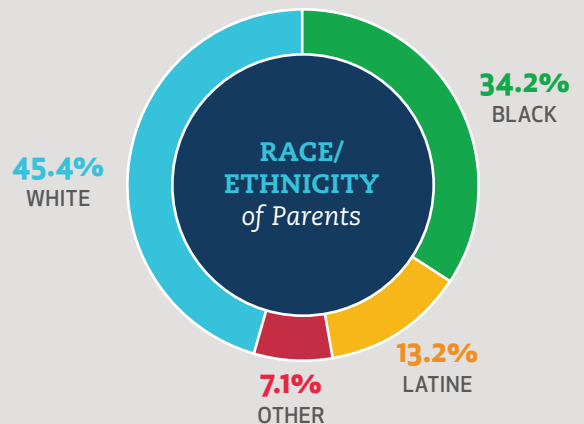
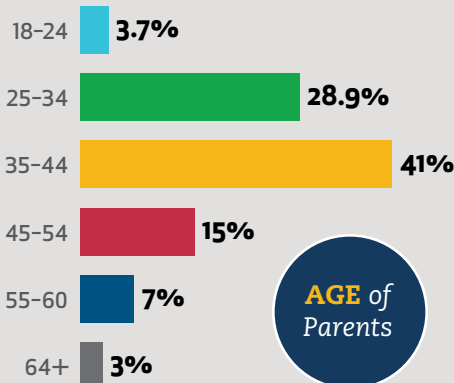


**44%**  
REPORTED COLLEGE AS THE HIGHEST EDUCATION

### RESIDENCE of Responding Parents



PARENTS







UNDERSTANDING LITERACY IN DUVAL COUNTY

# RESULTS



## AWARENESS

Parental awareness has been linked to improving student literacy (Yumas & Turan, 2021). The first section of the JPEF poll asked parents about their beliefs about literacy and if they had any concerns about how students were doing in Duval county.



*“How important do you think literacy is to key student success indicators: likelihood of graduation, overall achievement, social and emotional skills, and economic productivity?”*



**OVER 90% OF RESPONDING PARENTS IDENTIFIED LITERACY SKILLS AS IMPORTANT FOR KEY STUDENT SUCCESS INDICATORS**

- Black parents represented the highest percentage of parents who considered early literacy skills important to social and emotional skills and economic productivity
- Extremely high agreement (over 80% somewhat or very important) from parents of all age groups on the importance of literacy to key outcomes
- No statistically significant difference in responses across zip codes

The majority (71%) of parents surveyed expressed concern over literacy rates and the vast majority believe literacy is important for later student success. There was virtually no variance in responses among parents who attended college vs those who did not. Similarly, there was no meaningful variation in responses across zip codes in responses to these questions. These findings suggest high agreement across the community on why achieving early literacy is important, regardless of educational access or geographic location. While awareness and beliefs are important, the next section delves into family involvement.



## INVOLVEMENT & BEHAVIORS

Parental involvement is considered crucial for early literacy (Crosby, Yildirim, Rasinski, Padak, 2015; Dali & Payne, 2010). The second portion of the poll asked parents about their own reading behaviors and involvement. In terms of actual behaviors, a little over a third of parents responded that their children read on their own every day (33%), not including homework, and that they read with their child everyday (41%). Parents who reported attending college were more likely to report reading with their child everyday. Latine parents had the highest reports of their children reading every day (52%). More than half of parents (60%) in the youngest age group reported not knowing when their child reads on their own. With some variance among zip codes, 32233 had the highest proportional percentage (83%) of parents who reported they read with their child every day and 32206 (67%) that their child reads on their own, outside of school, every day.



*How often do you believe students should read outside of school on their own?*



**71% OF RESPONDING PARENTS BELIEVE STUDENTS SHOULD READ OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL EVERY DAY**

- Nearly a third of responding parents (26%) selected a few times a week
- Latine parents (77%) and parents ages 45-54 (82%) were the highest percentage to state that children should read every day
- With some level of variance among zip codes, 32209 had the highest proportional percentage of parents that indicated students should read outside of school every day

Three quarters of responding parents reported believing children should read every day outside of homework for school and yet less than half of the sample report their child reading on their own or with their support every day. Given the significant positive impact parental engagement has been found to have on student literacy and academic achievement (Crosby, Yildirim, Rasinski, Padak, 2015), it is imperative organizations looking to support family engagement in literacy create the culturally relevant environment and structures for parents to engage more frequently in reading with their children (Dali & Payne, 2010).





“ ”

*How would you rate the ease of access to reading and literacy resources in your community?*



**55% OF RESPONDING PARENTS REPORT THAT IT IS “VERY EASY” TO ACCESS RESOURCES**

- Multi-racial parents represented the majority (62%) that answered that it is “very easy” to access resources; Latine parents were the least likely (46%) to respond that it is “very easy” to access resources in the community and were the largest number of respondents (9%) that answered it is “very difficult” to access resources
- 100% of participants 65 years or older stated that resources were “very easy” to access and 75% of participants ages 18-24 also stated that resources were “very easy” to access
- With some level of variance among zip codes, 100% of parents in zip code 32258 indicated that it is “very easy” to access resources



## ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Research from the U.S. Department of Education found access to literacy resources, such as print reading materials in their native language, is tied to better student outcomes (2014). Parents were polled about the accessibility of different resources in their community.

Latine parents (20%) and multiracial parents (15%) were among the largest proportion of parents who agreed with difficulties accessing resources. Over 70% of the responding parents disagreed that they experienced challenges like time or where to find books for their children.








TOP RESPONSES



Which resources help support your child's reading and early literacy development in a typical week?



	 <b>COMMUNITY PUBLIC LIBRARY</b> Majority 30% less than once per week	 <b>ONLINE OR BRICK &amp; MORTAR STORE</b> Majority 22% a few times per week	 <b>FRIENDS &amp; FAMILY</b> Majority 30% a few times per week
RACE	Black parents (87%) were most likely to indicate that they access community public libraries on a weekly basis while Latine parents (62%) were least likely	Latine parents (80%) were most likely to indicate that they access bookstores on a weekly basis; Multi-racial parents (60%) were least likely	Latine parents (83%) were most likely to indicate that they utilize family and friends as a resource on a weekly basis
AGE	Parents ages 45-54 were most likely to indicate that they access community public libraries on a weekly basis	Parents ages 45-54 were most likely to indicate that they access bookstores on a weekly basis; parents ages 55-64 were least likely	Parents ages 55-64 were least likely to indicate that they utilize family and friends as a resource on a weekly basis
ZIP CODES	Parents in zip codes 32222 (50%) and 32256 (50%) were most likely to indicate that they accessed community public libraries on a weekly basis; 0% of parents in zip code 32216 indicated they accessed a library on a weekly basis	Parents in zip code 32233 were most likely (67%) to indicate that they accessed a bookstore either every day or a few times a week; parents in 32277 were least likely (63%) to visit a bookstore weekly	100% of parents in zip codes 32207 and 32233 indicated that they access their friends and family as literacy resources for their children on a weekly basis; parents in zip code 32218 were least likely (47%) to access friends and family as a resource

Not reported here: reading tutors, mentors, places of worship, and nonprofits all had low rates of utilization across parent groups.

Overall, around two thirds of responding parents do not report experiencing any difficulties accessing resources for supporting their child's reading. However, the majority of parents who reported difficulty also identified as Latine or multi-racial. This suggests that there may be additional barriers to improving literacy in the county related to language for a significant and fastest growing portion of the student population. Additionally, only a third of parents report utilizing any community resource more than a few times per week. A correlation between socio-economic status of the zipcode and frequency of utilization of libraries and bookstores is visible in the analyses above. It is imperative organizations looking to improve literacy understand when and why parents are accessing their resources. There is room for improvement in utilization of community resources.

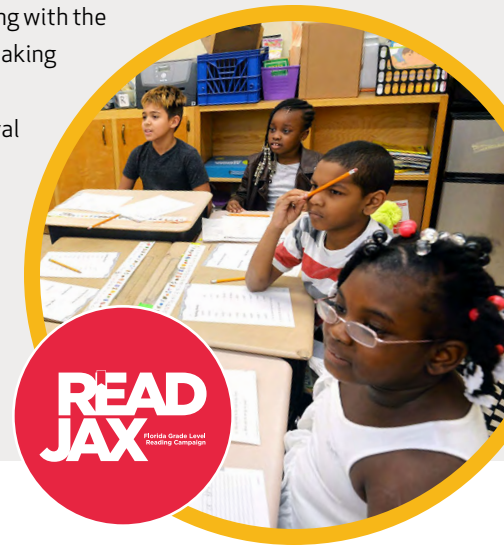




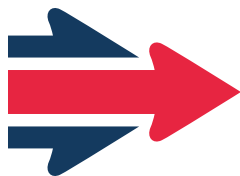
## CONCLUSION

The data suggests that **COLLECTIVE EFFORTS ARE NEEDED** to improve literacy rates across Duval County through systemic change and engagement of students, teachers, and families.

These findings in combination with Duval County population trends over the past three years becoming increasingly diverse suggest these efforts may also need to be culturally responsive. The Jacksonville Public Education Fund, Kids Hope Alliance, and Duval County Public Schools, along with the many extended partners involved in **READJAX**, are taking unprecedented steps in developing systems-wide approaches to addressing literacy disparities in Duval County. Through coordinated efforts of bridging literacy services from birth to 3rd grade, engaging community and family stakeholders, and modeling effective literacy instruction to implement at home, we believe that reading proficiency will rise for all students at every school in Duval County.



ACTION



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

- **JOIN READJAX**  
and spread awareness of the collective efforts to improve literacy in Duval!
- **SPREAD AWARENESS**  
of on-the-go approaches to reaching best practices like “20 minutes a day paves the way,” such as through reading road signs or recipes in addition to books.
- **REDUCE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING EXISTING COMMUNITY RESOURCES,**  
such as ensuring there is reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation to community resources as well as ensuring those spaces are welcoming and engaging for parents and children from all backgrounds.
- **IMPROVE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF RESOURCES,**  
such as providing written materials in multiple languages.
- **ADVOCATE FOR POLICY CHANGE**  
in conditions that support parents labeled as economically disadvantaged engaging in their children’s learning, such as a higher minimum wage since working multiple jobs is a common barrier to greater parental involvement in supporting students’ education.
- **CONTRIBUTE TO A CULTURE OF READING**  
by creating a reading space in your organization or business, contact **READJAX** for your toolkit and for more ideas!



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The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is **AN INDEPENDENT THINK-AND-DO TANK THAT BELIEVES IN THE POTENTIAL OF ALL STUDENTS**. We work tirelessly to close the opportunity gap for low-income students and students of color in Duval County. We convene educators, school system leaders, and the community to pilot and scale evidence-based solutions that advance school quality in Duval County.

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