

DUVAL COUNTY CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

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Powering Potential



KIDS HOPE ALLIANCE
The Jacksonville Partnership
for Children, Youth & Families

Background

National, state, and local data reveals that many students are not reading on grade level by 3rd grade and students of color are disparately represented in that number; this trend is what many refer to as the “literacy gap.” In Duval County, data shows that both students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged are less likely to read on grade level by 3rd grade. Research shows that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers who are reading proficiently.[1] The Jacksonville Public Education Fund and Kids Hope Alliance have joined efforts in addressing the literacy gap in Duval County by means of implementing the Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

The 2020/2021 Florida State Assessment (FSA) results revealed that 46% of 3rd grade students in Florida did not score on grade level for literacy. Locally, the results of the 2020/2021 FSA show that 52% of 3rd grade students in Duval County did not score on grade level for literacy.

Among Duval County students, 3rd grade students of color and low-income students are less likely to be reading at grade level compared to white students of higher socio-economic status. This disparity in student performance does not point to innate skills but rather to systemic issues, such as food and housing insecurity, that must be addressed. Approximately 32% of children in Duval County experience food insecurity and approximately 2,746 children are without secure housing. These issues demonstrate the purpose of the Campaign for Grade Level Reading in Duval County.

We need a collective approach to address the systemic factors contributing to more than half of our students not reading on grade level by 3rd grade. This approach must include parents and early childhood providers as we know that literacy development begins at birth.

Solution

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund and Kids Hope Alliance are not addressing this effort alone. This is a local effort that is part of a national initiative for Grade Level Reading, and improving literacy for students is a key priority in the Duval County Public School 2021-2026 Strategic Plan.

Duval County is fortunate to have many programs addressing the issue of grade level reading; however, many of these programs operate in silos and, more importantly, do not share data. JPEF and KHA are committed to working as co-conveners to bring together these programs in order to collectively close the literacy gap in Duval County with the lens of advancing equitable outcomes for our community.

KHA is the lead organization on systems building, while JPEF has taken the lead on raising awareness and engaging the community and partners to promote data-driven solutions in Duval County.

Awareness

In conjunction with KHA, the initiative to raise awareness will kick off with a signature event to celebrate Reading Week, March 21-25. During Reading Week, JPEF will ask community partners – businesses, nonprofits, government agencies – to participate in events to encourage reading in Duval County, such as hosting reading events, book giveaways, and reading incentive programs.

Working with community partners, JPEF will launch both a broad-based awareness campaign in Duval County, and a targeted campaign in geographic areas identified to be in greater need. These efforts include developing a website with resources for parents, educators, and community members, and a marketing campaign to push audiences to the website.

Systems Building

The systems building work will center around the challenge to create a literacy-focused community-wide cross-sector system that results in every child reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

Some examples of the work KHA and our partners will tackle through this include:

- Identifying a set of structures that are needed to achieve the goal of every child reading on grade level by the end of third grade.
- Facilitating the uptake of evidenced-based practices within existing and new programs.
- Significantly increase access to high-quality literacy programs for children and families.

The guiding questions that will be answered by the committee and later put into action with the help of community partners, funders and businesses are:

- How can we improve existing programs to include literacy-focused initiatives?
- What are the essential elements we need in a community-wide system to effectively break down silos?
- What innovative supports do we need to pilot?
- How can we effectively measure our progress?

Through this work, KHA and JPEF will build bridges across existing systems to ensure that there is a unified voice around the literacy efforts in our City.

[1] <https://hunt-institute.org/resources/2012/10/the-importance-of-early-literacy-and-third-grade-retention/#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20students%20who,peers%20who%20are%20proficient%20readers.>