



From Gaps to Growth

How the Implementation of NYC Reads is Improving Literacy



Introduction

In 2023, more than half of New York City’s public school students were reading below grade level. Against the backdrop of this citywide literacy crisis, the nation’s largest school district set its sights on a sweeping transformation: bringing the science of reading and evidence-based literacy instruction to students in public schools across New York City.

NYC Reads emerged as a response to uneven literacy outcomes and a call to action, unifying the entire community around a coherent approach to teaching students how to read and write.

This historic shift is giving students access to a high-quality curriculum, empowering teachers to double down on effective instruction, and challenging leaders to drive coherence across the system. Although curriculum, instruction,

and coherence are essential factors in driving student growth, effective implementation is the key to sustained academic gains.

This case study explores how the implementation of NYC Reads — shaped by high-quality instructional materials, curriculum-embedded professional learning, instructional coherence, and citywide collaboration — is contributing to encouraging signs of improved literacy outcomes for students across New York City’s public schools.

NYC Reads on the Science of Reading

The NYC Reads initiative refers to the science of reading as “... a broad collection of research that is focused on helping children become better readers and writers through evidence-based practice. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach, nor is it tied to a specific program or curriculum. While phonics is an important part of literacy instruction, it is not the only important part of the science of reading, which suggests that there are five key concepts for students to learn to be effective readers and writers: understanding letter sounds; decoding words; building vocabulary; reading fluently; and comprehending what you read.”¹

1. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/subjects/literacy/nyc-reads>

Key outcomes: From classrooms to citywide impact

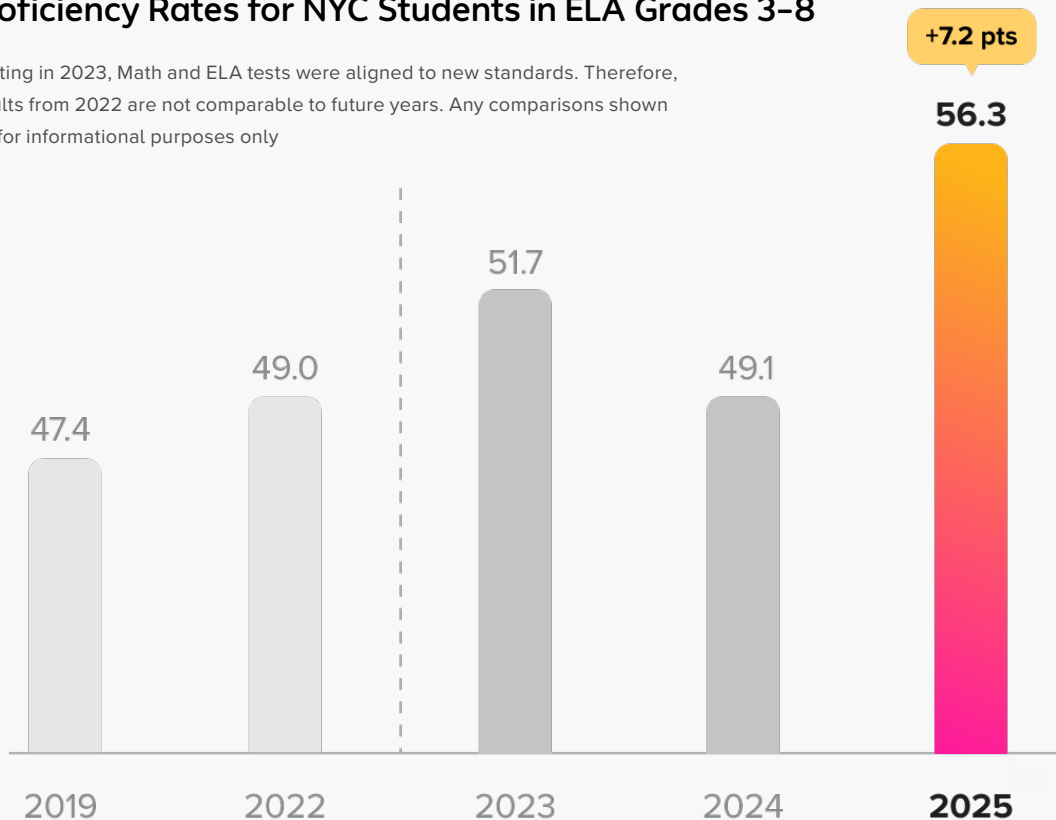
“These results show that when we set high expectations for our students and give our educators the right tools, our kids rise to the occasion [...] This is what happens when we stay focused on evidence-based instruction and never lose sight of what’s possible for our young people.”²

— Melissa Aviles-Ramos, Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education

Literacy outcomes for students across New York City are showing signs of progress. In 2025, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency in Grades 3–8 English Language Arts rose by 7.2 percentage points from the previous year.³

Proficiency Rates for NYC Students in ELA Grades 3–8

Starting in 2023, Math and ELA tests were aligned to new standards. Therefore, results from 2022 are not comparable to future years. Any comparisons shown are for informational purposes only



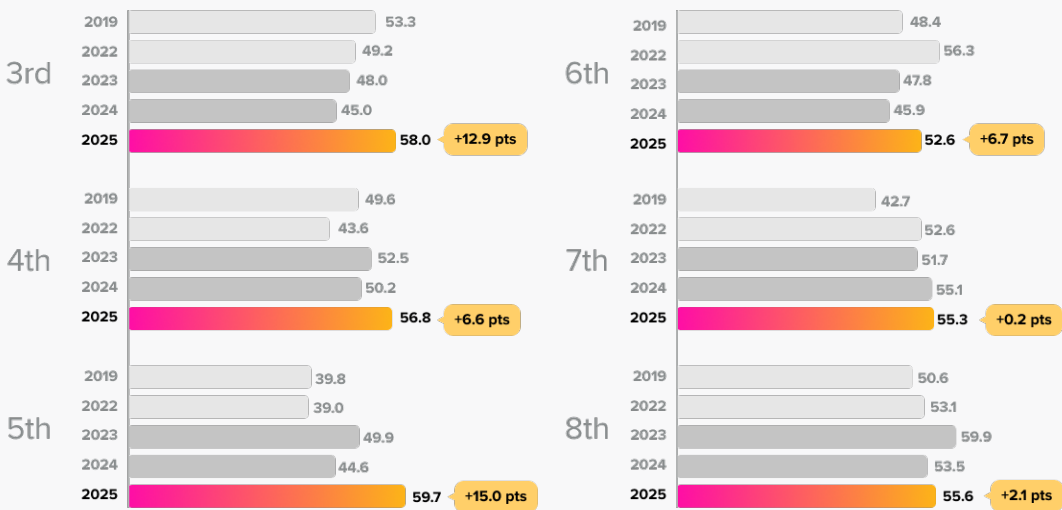
2. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/subjects/literacy/nyc-reads>

3. <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2025-math-ela---web-deck.pdf>

These gains signal positive momentum and reflect the effect of citywide investments in high-quality curriculum, aligned professional learning, and system-wide coherence.

Proficiency Rates for NYC Students in ELA Grades 3–8 by Grade

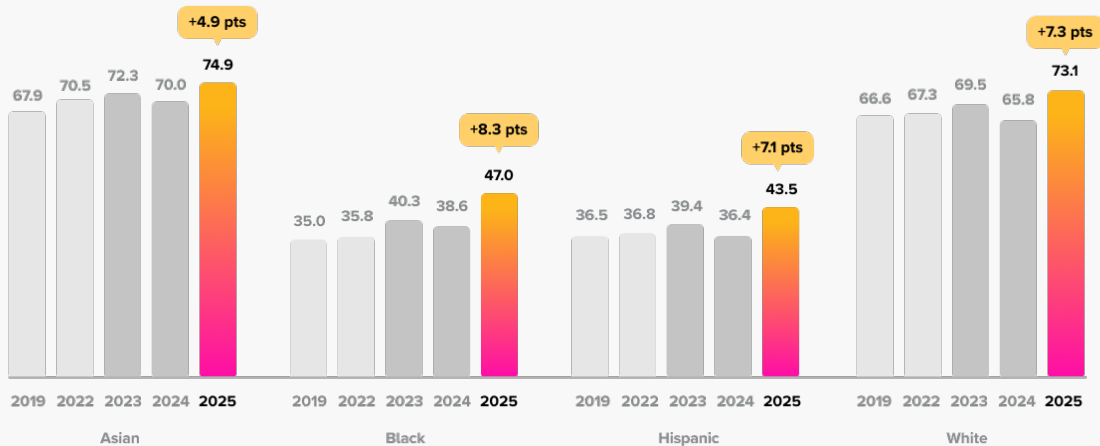
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Still, there remains room for improvement – especially within historically underserved student groups – emphasizing the importance of sustaining NYC Reads so that progress reaches every student, in every classroom, in every community.

Proficiency Rates for NYC Students in ELA Grades 3–8 by Ethnicity

Starting in 2023, Math and ELA tests were aligned to new standards. Therefore, results from 2022 are not comparable to future years. Any comparisons shown are for informational purposes only



Insights from implementation: What's working and why

Evidence-based, high-quality curriculum

For decades, NYCPS embraced a “balanced literacy” approach to reading instruction. “It was a well-intentioned approach,” said former Chancellor David Banks. “... that approach relied heavily on the premise that kids will naturally take to that type of instruction and learn to love reading. Some did, many did not.”⁴

NYC Department of Education (DOE) leaders addressed these uneven literacy outcomes by aligning with research on what makes literacy instruction effective. NYC Reads put the science of reading at the heart of the initiative, bringing “structured literacy,” which emphasizes systematic, explicit, and responsive instruction, to classrooms citywide.

4. <https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2023/05/transcript-mayor-adams-makes-education-related-announcement-doe-chancellor-banks>



Evidence-based, high-quality curriculum is a significant driver of learning gains.⁵ To begin improving reading outcomes, NYCPS leaders pre-approved three literacy curricula for adoption. Each curriculum is grounded in the science of reading and vetted as high-quality by EdReports using the following criteria:⁶

- **Text Quality and Complexity and Alignment to Standards with Tasks and Questions:** Are quality anchor texts at grade-level text complexity? Do they represent the rigor and balance addressed in the standards? Are the tasks and questions in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language aligned to grade-level standards? Do they support student learning?
- **Building Knowledge with Texts, Vocabulary, and Tasks:** Do the materials build students' knowledge across topics and content areas? Do questions and tasks build to culminating tasks that demonstrate

students' ability to analyze components of texts and topics? Do the materials promote mastery of grade-level standards by the end of the year?

- **Usability:** Do the materials support teachers to fully utilize the curriculum, understand the skills and learning of their students, and support a range of learners?

While the central office provided three options, New York's superintendents worked with parents and educators to select materials that met their districts' unique needs.

In two phases, superintendents engaged with their communities and sought feedback from stakeholders to help decide which of the three high-quality curricula they would implement in schools across their districts. By the start of the 2024-25 school year, each of the 32 community school districts in NYCPS had adopted an evidence-based, high-quality reading curriculum, informed by the science of reading.

Key takeaways:

- Improving literacy outcomes starts by **aligning with research** on effective instruction and adopting evidence-based, high-quality curricula grounded in the science of reading.
- **Effective communication and collaboration** with administrators, educators, and families is crucial to successful curriculum implementation.

5. <https://learningfirst.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/1.-What-we-teach-matters.pdf>

6. https://cdn.edreports.org/reviewtools/ela/1.5/ELA-Grades-3-8-v1.5-Tools_Review-Criteria.pdf

Sustained, curriculum-based professional learning

Teacher-student relationships are the essential ingredient for learning, and effective support for educators has been central to the success of NYC Reads.

Although high-quality instructional materials are essential to student success, “... mounting evidence suggests that the adoption of new high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) is an insufficient tool for improving classroom teaching unless coupled with equally high-quality curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL),” according to a report from the Research Partnership for Professional Learning.⁷

What differentiates curriculum-based professional learning from more general professional development is its focus on equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge they need “... not only to understand the content deeply but also to provide instruction to students in ways that maximize student engagement and learning outcomes.”⁸

Research finds that when teachers receive curriculum-based professional learning, their students make much stronger academic gains. Without that same support, students improve, but not as much.⁹

NYC Reads proved its early commitment to sustained, curriculum-based professional learning by investing tens of millions of dollars in coaching and training for educators throughout the school system.¹⁰ In December 2024, NYCPs expanded curriculum-embedded professional learning to better help educators meet the needs of all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.¹¹ Foundation partners also helped fund these increased efforts.

Instead of solely tasking teachers with the responsibility of becoming well-versed in the science of reading, NYC Reads offers educators a mix of ongoing in-person and asynchronous sessions to support the effective use of evidence-based reading curricula. Teachers and administrators can work “shoulder to shoulder” with high-quality, curriculum-aligned external professional learning partners who provide ongoing, grade-specific support.¹²

Additionally, coaching is available throughout the school year and in various forms, including observations with feedback, team meetings where teachers and administrators can “[unpack] lessons or units together,” and via the UFT Teacher Center.¹³

7. https://rpplpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/RPPL_PositionPaper_041025_FINAL.pdf

8. Ibid. p. 4

9. https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/92/cb/92cb54eb-b313-44e8-b251-32c6eae0c1/elements_report_november_2020.pdf?gl=1*1yurg6l*_gcl_au*MjAxNjU3Nzc4LjE3MzA4MzU2NjU_

10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3hF74zbHao>

11. <https://www.uft.org/news/news-stories/doe-releases-policy-updates-nyc-reads>

12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRnWu9WQlkg>

13. Ibid.

This investment in sustained, curriculum-based professional learning is yielding positive results. Nearly 4 in 5 teachers say they receive effective support in implementing the new, high-quality materials, according to a survey conducted by Educators for Excellence-New York. The vast majority, 78% of survey respondents, also agreed that the professional learning they receive is “well-aligned with the core reading curriculum material [they] use.”¹⁴

Together, this feedback and the early results of NYC Reads demonstrate what is possible when teachers are given the curriculum-embedded tools, knowledge, and support they need to help all learners reach their fullest potential. By centering consistent, curriculum-based professional learning as a cornerstone of this initiative, NYCPS is laying the groundwork for lasting literacy gains across the city.

By the numbers:¹⁵

14,000+
classroom coaching sessions

82%
of teachers say coaching
improved their ability to teach
the curriculum

94%
of school leaders agree

Key takeaways:

- Providing **sustained, curriculum-based professional learning** helps teachers effectively use high-quality instructional materials, leading to stronger academic gains for students.
- Ongoing professional learning can take a **variety of shapes**: in-person and asynchronous sessions, observations with feedback, team meetings, and individualized coaching.

14. <https://www.nyclearns.org/nyc-reads>

15. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1301665518667376&set=pcb.1301665645334030>

Instructional coherence

Instructional coherence is “more likely to advance student achievement than multiple, unrelated efforts.”¹⁶ For that reason, it is an essential key to unlocking literacy for every learner.

In a nationwide survey, RAND found that “more-coherent instructional systems supported teacher confidence while incoherence evoked frustration and anxiety.”¹⁷ Because teacher confidence is closely linked to both the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and student achievement, NYC Reads’ emphasis on coherence is a primary driver of improved outcomes.

The initiative aligns high-quality curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional learning with evidence-based practices that shape what students learn, how they are taught, how growth is measured, and how educators are supported. Every element of NYC Reads is working together in service of the same goals: empowering teachers and enabling students to become strong readers and writers.

Instead of curricula varying from school to school and even teacher to teacher, all classrooms are anchored in three high-quality, evidence-based options that create

16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3594132>

17. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA279-1.html



a consistent learning experience across the system. And rather than providing general professional learning, support for teachers is informed by the curriculum itself, ensuring training, coaching, and instruction are tightly connected and deeply embedded in the science of reading.

This emphasis on coherence is also reflected in the integration of high-quality supplemental learning solutions directly within the core curricula. When teachers have to seek out

supplemental materials from outside sources, it creates instructional inconsistency and can undermine the positive impact of a coherent, evidence-based curriculum.

By embedding these resources into high-quality instructional materials, NYC Reads is giving teachers the tools they need to address individual student needs and maximize the impact of the science of reading without sacrificing coherence across the system.

Key takeaways:

- **Aligning high-quality curriculum, instruction, assessment, supplemental materials, and professional learning** together with **evidence-based practices** is the key to improving teacher efficacy and student outcomes.
- Embedding high-quality materials and instructional supports within an **integrated, coherent system** empowers teachers and ensures consistent, effective learning experiences for all students.

The power of HMH's partnership and integrated platform

NYC Reads is built on an effort to ensure each lesson, activity, and tool works together seamlessly to drive student success. HMH has been an essential partner in that work, helping NYC Reads turn an ambitious vision into measurable student growth.

New York State test results from 2025 found that schools using HMH's *Into Reading* saw stronger literacy gains in grades 3-5 as compared to the other participating programs. Part of this progress is due to HMH's integrated platform that empowers teachers with a one-stop shop for planning, instruction, and assessment.



How HMH's integrated platform is making a difference:

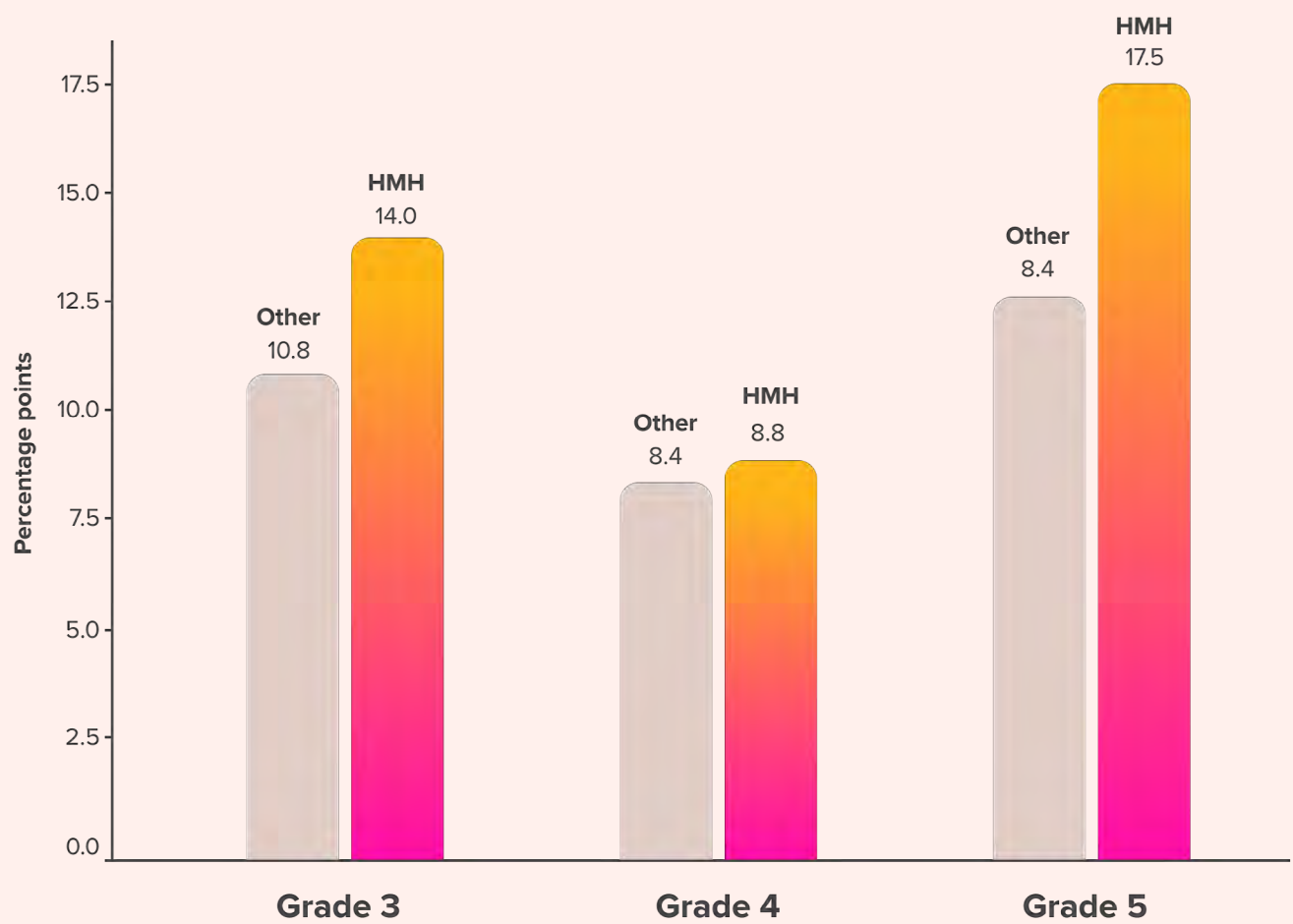
- **Real-time data insights and visibility:** Teachers and school leaders can see student progress as it happens, not months later. Dashboards identify strengths and gaps, allowing educators to adjust instruction immediately, from reteaching a skill to a small group to accelerating a student who is ready for more of a challenge.
- **Streamlined workflows and increased touchpoints:** Instead of juggling multiple systems, teachers access planning, instruction, and assessment tools in one place. They can move seamlessly from designing lessons to assigning targeted practice to analyzing results, which in turn reduces time spent on logistics so teachers can focus on what matters most: engaging with students.
- **Curriculum-connected AI that expands teacher capacity:** Tools like *Amira* act as a virtual assistant, listening to students read aloud, identifying errors, and providing tailored micro-interventions in real time. Every student has more opportunities for individualized feedback, and every teacher has more visibility into student growth.

In addition, HMM and NYCPS co-created health indicators, priority learning standards, and leadership monitoring tools, which allowed leaders to drive accountability, track record levels of usage of HMM’s solutions, and measure progress in real time.

With *Into Reading* and *Into Literature* available in 22 of the city’s 32 school districts, HMM is reaching more than 325,000 students and

33,000 teachers in 13,605 classrooms across all five boroughs. Together, HMM and NYCPS are demonstrating how an integrated platform, paired with effective implementation, amplifies teacher expertise, supercharges student learning, and supports coherent, evidence-based literacy instruction.

2024–2025: ELA Increase in % Level 3+4 by Curriculum and Grade



Citywide communication and collaboration

NYC Reads has served as a unifying call to action for the educators, families, community partners, and local government, emphasizing that literacy is a shared responsibility and a citywide priority.

Throughout the initiative's multi-phase implementation process, NYCPS leaders continuously gathered input from key stakeholders so NYC Reads would be shaped by those closest to the work. After superintendents helped choose which high-quality curricula to adopt systemwide, they sought feedback from families and community members to decide which curriculum met the unique needs of their districts.

The community was able to keep up to date on the initiative through a NYC Reads-focused newsletter, and robust support from City Hall catalyzed the momentum that is now resulting in academic gains. Along the way, NYCPS leaders explored areas for improvement.

NYCPS partnered with the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) to evaluate phase one of implementation. They talked to district personnel, school staff, and families to identify ways to strengthen NYC Reads: more time to engage with community stakeholders on which curriculum districts should adopt, more funding for professional learning, and updated instructional guidance for teachers.



Family partnerships also became a cornerstone of NYC Reads implementation. NYCPS provided schools with a toolkit to help foster family partnerships.¹⁶ As of August 2025, NYCPS has trained “over 3,000 NYC Reads Family Ambassadors to help families support their children as they learn to read.”¹⁷

Ongoing communication and collaboration have fueled community buy-in, creating

conditions for successful implementation and increased student achievement. Since strong family-school partnerships can increase student achievement, the success of NYC Reads depends on a shared belief among families, educators, and entire communities: that for every student, literacy is the foundation of lifelong learning.

16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3594132>

17. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA279-1.html

Key takeaways:

- Continuous collaboration and partnership across a **wide range of stakeholders** can foster the community buy-in needed to support successful curriculum implementation.
- **Evaluating** the effectiveness of implementation and **gathering feedback** are essential for guiding systemwide improvements and ensuring all students can reach their full potential.





In Conclusion

NYC Reads' effort to improve literacy outcomes is equipping students, regardless of which borough they live in or school they attend, with the skills needed to think critically, communicate effectively, and succeed across subjects and in a variety of settings.

This continuous work, however, is not self-executing. The bold vision of NYC Reads laid the groundwork for growth, but achieving and sustaining measurable impact requires effective, continuously improving implementation.



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