

2018 Challenges Ahead

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REGIONAL ISSUE

Improving Third-Grade Reading Skills

BACKGROUND

For many of us, there were crucial moments – when a parent revealed the wonders of a library or a teacher opened the door to a bigger world – that set us on the course to literacy and vital careers.

Researchers find that most students need to read proficiently by the end of third grade to be successful in their future studies and careers. Metro Atlanta falls short in this area, risking the long-term economic viability of the region.

In the Atlanta region, only 40% of third-graders are hitting the mark. That matters, because students with weak reading abilities are four times more likely to drop out of high school later on. Students who are behind the curve at third grade are also less likely to someday take college aptitude tests, or they get lower scores, hurting their chances to get a good post-secondary education.

“The third grade is a critical threshold for our children,” said Dr. R. Stephen Green, superintendent of DeKalb County Schools. “The research is very clear that’s the transition from learning to read, to reading to learn.” For students who don’t make that jump, “the future is significantly compromised,” he said.

And while that outcome is consistent among all groups, researchers found that students with disabilities, economic disadvantages or limited English language proficiency struggled the most with making the leap to strong reading skills.

REGIONAL PLAYERS

Learn4Life

10-County WorkSource Metro Atlanta

Georgia Department of Labor

Technical College System of Georgia

Local school districts

INSIGHTS & INNOVATION

In many metro regions across the country, school districts, community organizations, volunteers and philanthropists have banded together and successfully tackled educational challenges that put their economies at risk.

In metro Atlanta, eight school districts and four non-profit organizations, including the Atlanta Regional Commission, have formed the “Learn4Life” initiative to target six key educational goals, including improving eighth-grade math skills, high school graduation rates, college enrollment totals and completion rates for post-secondary education. Improving third-grade reading levels is the project’s first goal.

The focus is “cradle to career” learning, said Ann Cramer, senior consultant with Coxe Curry & Associates, and a member of Learn4Life’s executive committee. “Learn4Life is one of the regional approaches that will yield for us a prosperous, vital Metropolitan Atlanta region.”

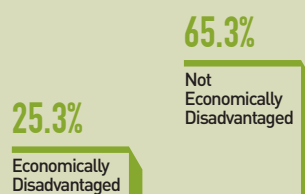
This “collective impact” model is being used in about 70 communities across the country and has proved successful. For example, metro Cincinnati has been at this work for about a decade and has seen consistent improvement in outcomes.

3rd Grade Reading Level

40% of children were reading proficiently by the end of third grade in 2014–2015



Percent of students Proficient & Above Grade Level on 3rd grade reading by economic subgroup



Atlanta Regional Commission