

# Bright Spots In Los Angeles

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School Districts Leading the Charge to  
Solve the Literacy Crisis



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**Once you learn to  
read, you will be  
forever free.**

Frederick Douglass

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# FOREWORD

The literacy crisis affecting students across Los Angeles County — and California at large — has reached a critical juncture. With millions of students struggling to read at grade level, the implications for their academic success and future opportunities are profound. Despite significant financial investments in education, too many of California's schools are failing to deliver the results necessary to ensure all students become proficient readers. The urgency of this issue cannot be overstated, as literacy is foundational to success in all other areas of education.

This report, *Bright Spots in Los Angeles: School Districts Leading the Charge to Solve the Literacy Crisis*, seeks to shed light on both the magnitude of the problem and the innovative solutions that are emerging in response. As California continues to grapple with this challenge, it is critical to recognize that progress will not come without a shift in state policy. Currently, the state continues to allocate significant resources to education, yet these investments often fall short because they are not aligned with evidence-based practices that are proven to foster literacy success. There is a vast body of research — from California to the other side of the globe — that clearly outlines the essential practices for teaching reading. Without explicit alignment between state policies and these proven practices, we risk squandering resources and, more importantly, denying children their right to learn how to read.

In this context, *Bright Spots in Los Angeles* highlights four districts within Los Angeles County that are boldly stepping up to address the crisis. These districts, which we call Bright Spots and Districts to Watch, are leading the way by adopting literacy policies and practices that are grounded in research. Their efforts serve as a powerful reminder that progress is possible and that change is within reach. These districts are showing us what is possible when leaders are committed to prioritizing literacy and when policies are designed with the best interests of students in mind.

We hope this report will inspire other districts across California and beyond to take bold action in addressing the literacy crisis. Every child deserves the right to read, and through collaboration, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to evidence-based practices, we can ensure that all students — no matter their background — are given the tools they need to succeed.

Sincerely,



Yolie Flores, President & CEO  
Families In Schools



# Introduction

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Reading<sup>1</sup> fluently by the end of third grade is often referred to as a critical milestone in a student's educational journey, and a fundamental civil right – because it is the foundation upon which success is built, in school and beyond. The consequences of not achieving this milestone are significant on key indicators of success, such as broader academic outcomes, high school graduation, and achieving financial security in adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

**This time, we widen the view locally to share the stories of districts across Los Angeles County that are making significant strides in the literacy realm to offer a roadmap for implementing policies and practices that significantly change students' literacy trajectories.**

Still, the majority of students in Los Angeles County and across California are not achieving this milestone, with Black and Latino students, English learners, and other underserved student groups even further behind. These inequities are the reason Families In Schools has committed its attention and resources to improving literacy outcomes and uplifting reading as a fundamental civil right.

In February 2024, Families In Schools launched the ReadLA! campaign and released its first landscape literacy report, *[The Literacy Crisis in Los Angeles and Beyond: A Problem We Can and Must Collectively Solve](#)*. There, we made the case that far too few students in Los Angeles and across California – especially our most underserved students – are meeting reading standards, and that

proper implementation of evidence-based instruction grounded in the science of reading can play a key role in reversing these trends. We also shared how Los Angeles Unified, the largest district in the state, is significantly shifting its literacy instruction policies and practices to achieve stronger literacy outcomes. The report concluded with a comprehensive set of recommendations for educational partners across the field of education to help put an end to the early literacy crisis.

In our ongoing effort to build a movement that calls for all California students to be reading on grade level by the end of third grade, we are now releasing this second literacy report. This time, we widen the view locally to share the stories of districts across Los Angeles County that are making significant strides in the literacy realm to offer a roadmap for implementing policies and practices that significantly change students' literacy trajectories. We also highlight a set of recommended resources for practitioners to help identify tools that are aligned with evidence-based reading practices. With this report, we aim to show policymakers, practitioners, and other key partners that we can, and must, solve the literacy crisis – a critical education equity issue that for too long has compromised the futures of children locally and across California.

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<sup>1</sup> When we say "reading," we include the broader concepts of literacy such as fluency, comprehension, and writing.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resource/doc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>.

# State Policy Updates Since Last Year's Report

A year after our first report, California still has not passed comprehensive legislation to ensure early literacy instruction is aligned to the **science of reading**.<sup>3</sup> However, since last year, the following developments have occurred:

- Implementation of a universal screening for reading difficulties is on track to start in the 2025–26 school year. The California Department of Education (CDE) announced the list of approved screeners in December 2024.<sup>4</sup>
- Thanks to SB 488 (2021), teacher preparation programs must, starting in July 2025, reflect evidence-based literacy standards, as measured by candidate passage of an aligned performance assessment. While this effort is still moving forward, questions remain about whether institutions of higher education will be held accountable for ensuring the new standards drive instruction in credentialing programs.<sup>5</sup>
- A new assessment is slated to replace the Reading Instruction Competence Test (RICA)<sup>6</sup> by July 1, 2025. A pilot test was launched in spring 2024, though it is unclear whether this replacement assessment will be online by the scheduled time.
- Governor Gavin Newsom's 2025–26 budget proposal included significant literacy investments<sup>7</sup>:
  - \$500 million in one-time funding for TK–12 literacy and math coaches (building on the existing Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Grant Program) to train and hire literacy and reading specialists in high-poverty schools to support educators using evidence-based practices;

## What is the science of reading?

As we shared in last year's report, the science of reading (SOR) is an evidence-based body of research about how students best learn to read. The term "structured literacy" is often used to refer to SOR in practice because it emphasizes the importance of explicitly and systematically teaching all the important components of literacy (such as phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language development, and writing). The Reading League defines SOR as "...a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach, and therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention and intervention of reading difficulties."<sup>8</sup>

3 The first attempt to pass statewide, comprehensive reading reform legislation in California, AB 2222, did not move forward during the 2024 legislative session.

4 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr24/yr24rel53.asp>

5 For example, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing's Committee on Accreditation voted to reaffirm Mills College at Northeastern's accreditation despite concerns that the college has not implemented the new standards (<https://edsource.org/2024/sharp-divisions-over-how-californias-aspiring-teachers-will-learn-how-to-teach-reading/710309>).

6 Passage of the RICA has generally been a requirement for the last 25 years for candidates completing a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential or special education credential through an accredited California college or university or a district intern program, in order to ensure candidates have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach reading. See [https://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=GEN\\_AboutRica.html](https://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=GEN_AboutRica.html) for more information.

7 <https://ebudget.ca.gov/FullBudgetSummary.pdf>

8 <https://www.thereadingleague.org/what-is-the-science-of-reading/defining-guide-ebook/>

**These state-level literacy investments should be applauded; but without explicit policies that align literacy instruction to practices that a vast amount of reading research in this country and around the world shows are essential for children to become proficient readers, California will continue to be a state with high levels of investment but too little to show for it when it comes to results.**

- \$40 million in one-time funding to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in purchasing screening materials and providing training for educators to administer literacy screenings, in accordance with the new universal screening requirements;
- \$5 million in annual funding (through 2029–30) to launch a literacy network within the Statewide System of Support that serves as a clearinghouse for literacy resources, best practices in high-performing districts, and supports for select LEAs with persistent performance challenges;

- \$1.8 billion for a Student Support and Discretionary Block Grant to fund rising district costs as well as state priorities, including professional development (PD) for teachers on the ELA/ELD Framework and the Literacy Roadmap.<sup>9</sup>

While the Governor’s proposed budget and trailer bill also reference an intent to support the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) on a follow-up ELA/ELD instructional materials adoption, the exact allocation and process are currently unclear. We look forward to tracking these proposed investments during this year’s budget cycle and advocating for their inclusion in the final 2025–26 budget.

These state-level literacy investments should be applauded; but without explicit policies that align literacy instruction to practices that a vast amount of reading research shows are essential for children to become proficient readers, California will continue to be a state with high levels of investment but too little to show for it when it comes to results.



<sup>9</sup> [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202520260SB65](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260SB65)

# Literacy Performance Trends in California and Across Los Angeles County

While test scores only tell part of the story, they are an important indicator of whether we are moving in the right direction. In last year's report, state assessment data from 2022-23 demonstrated that too few students across California and LAUSD are reading proficiently at the key milestones of third, eighth, and 11th grade. A year later, it is evident that scores have not improved significantly across the state – overall scores for third and eighth graders were unchanged from 2022-23 to 2023-24 (43% and 46%, respectively) and increased less than one percentage point (up to 56%) in 11th grade – and stubborn gaps persist for underserved student groups.

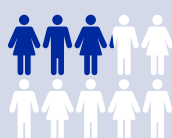
**Figure 1: Despite small improvements since last year, too few students across Los Angeles County have strong reading skills**

3rd graders meeting reading standards:



All students

(→) **45%**



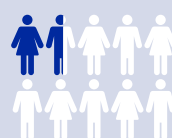
Black students

(↑3) **31%**



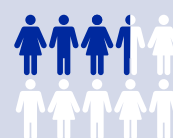
Latino students

(↑1) **37%**



English learners<sup>10</sup>

(↑1) **17%**



Low-income students<sup>11</sup>

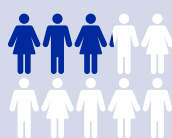
(↑1) **36%**

8th graders meeting reading standards:



All students

(↑1) **47%**



Black students

(→) **31%**



Latino students

(↑2) **40%**



English learners

(→) **5%**



Low-income students

(↑2) **39%**

11th graders meeting reading standards:



All students

(↑1) **57%**



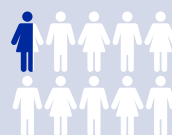
Black students

(↑2) **41%**



Latino students

(↑1) **51%**



English learners

(↑1) **8%**



Low-income students

(↑1) **50%**

Notes: Based on analysis of 2022-23 and 2023-24 CAASPP data from the California Department of Education.

<sup>10</sup> Proficiency rates for English learners are typically lower because they have not yet met reclassification criteria, which include demonstrations of basic skills in English. It is expected that English learners will take four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency.

<sup>11</sup> Here and throughout the report, the term "low-income" refers to the student group reported by CDE as "socioeconomically disadvantaged" (SED). The SED group includes students meeting one or more of a variety of criteria, such as: free- or reduced-price meal program eligibility; foster program eligibility; and neither parent having received a high school diploma. While SED includes a broader group of students than just those who are low income, it serves as the closest approximation of the concept based on what is reported by CDE.

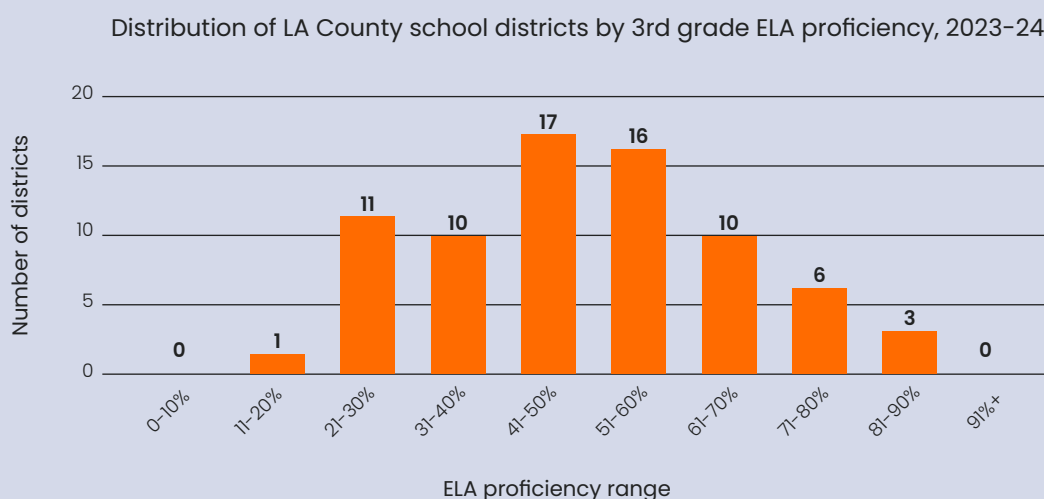
In this second literacy landscape report, we broaden the scope beyond LAUSD to understand how all 80 school districts across Los Angeles County are performing in early literacy. In LA County, scores either remained flat or increased by one to three percentage points for all student groups from 2022–23 to 2023–24. And, sizable gaps still exist between student groups in 2023–24, with a 14-point gap between Black students and students overall in third grade, and a 28-point gap between English learner students and students overall in third grade.

Looking at literacy performance trends across districts in Los Angeles County over the last six years also offers valuable insights about the literacy crisis in the region. In Figure 2 below, we see that third grade reading proficiency rates in 2023–24 vary significantly across the 80 school districts.<sup>12</sup> However, in half of Los Angeles County school districts, fewer than 50% of third graders were proficient in reading, and just nine districts demonstrated proficiency levels above 70%.

Figure 3 shows that significant disparities in reading proficiency exist between districts serving the most and the fewest low-income students.<sup>13</sup> While two-thirds of third graders in the districts with the lowest share of low-income students were proficient in ELA in 2023–24, just one-third were proficient in the districts with the highest share of low-income students. These trends demonstrate that the literacy crisis is all too real for almost 49,000 students who were not proficient readers by the end of third grade across Los Angeles County last year, with significant equity gaps between higher- and lower-income students.

Despite these trends, several districts in Los Angeles County are performing at or above the statewide average in third grade reading (see Appendix A), including a number of districts that serve at least the statewide average of low-income students (see Appendix B).

**Figure 2: In half of LA County school districts, fewer than 50% of third graders are proficient in reading**



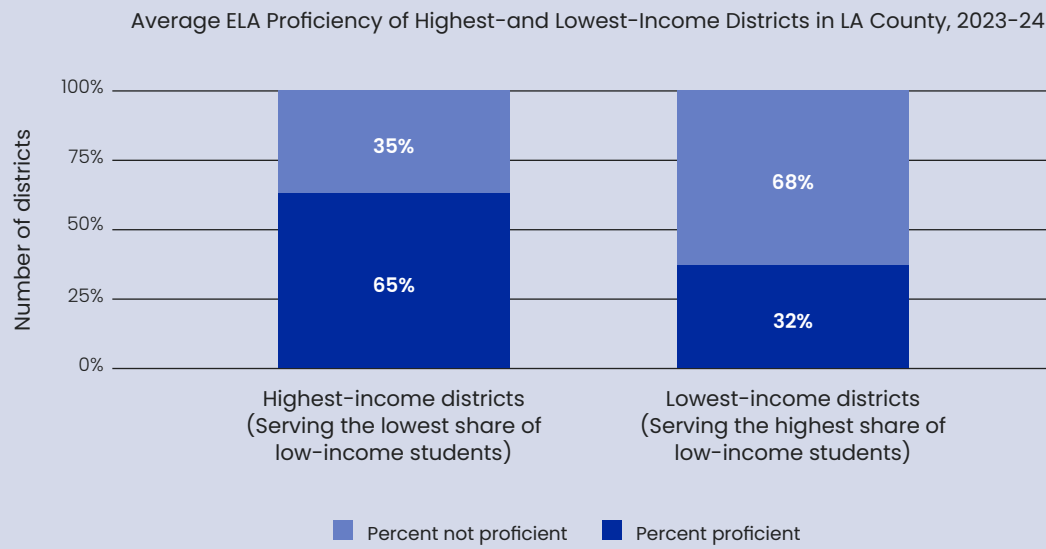
*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 CAASPP data from the California Department of Education. No third grade data available for Antelope Valley Union High, Centinela Valley Union High, El Monte Union High, Lowell Joint, Whittier Union High, and William S. Hart Union High districts.*

<sup>12</sup> In fact, 85% of third graders were proficient in the highest-performing district and 19% of third graders were proficient in the lowest-performing district.

<sup>13</sup> The highest-income quartile reflects those districts in the bottom 25th percentile of low-income student enrollment, i.e., those with the lowest percentage of low-income students, while the lowest-income quartile reflects those districts in the top 25th percentile of low-income student enrollment.



**Figure 3: Significant disparities in third grade reading proficiency exist between the highest- and lowest-income districts across LA County**



*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 CAASPP data from the California Department of Education. Districts were placed into income quartiles, with only the top and bottom quartiles displayed here. Percentages reflect average third grade literacy proficiency, weighted by the number of third graders tested. The term “low-income” refers to “socioeconomically disadvantaged” students as reported by CDE (see footnote 11).*



# Learning from High-Performing Districts in Los Angeles

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Despite these bleak trends, we know it does not have to be this way. Several districts across the county are showing that we can, and must, do better.

To identify districts that can offer valuable lessons about what it takes to create the systems and structures necessary to better support students on their literacy journeys, we utilized a mixed methods research approach that yielded several districts of interest. (See Appendix C for more details on our methodology.) We placed these districts into two categories – Bright Spots and Districts to Watch – to make sense of where they are on their journey to improved literacy outcomes. Those featured here offer a window into the work of a select set of districts. Data can only tell part of the story, and there are certainly other districts across the county that are engaging in strong literacy efforts whose stories we hope to learn and share in the future.

## Bright Spots

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Bright Spots are districts that are already demonstrating stronger literacy outcomes for their students. To help us identify potential bright spots, we applied a rigorous quantitative approach to analyzing literacy proficiency and other student outcome data that elicited a set of districts with stronger literacy results across the board and another set of districts with stronger literacy and other outcomes for English learners. From there, we engaged with leaders from a subset of those districts to learn about their literacy efforts and the structures and processes they believe are contributing to their improved outcomes, ultimately selecting two districts to feature for this report.<sup>14</sup>

To be clear, while these districts are well on their way to reversing troubling literacy trends, their student outcomes demonstrate that they still have work to do, and a continuous improvement approach will be critical to making that happen. However, the stories we share below offer insights into their approach from which others can learn.



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<sup>14</sup> For each Bright Spot vignette, we share a particularly compelling data point to help illuminate why we have chosen to feature a given district. For Bonita Unified, we share data on third grade ELA proficiency across student groups. For Garvey Elementary, we share data on third through fifth grade ELA proficiency with a focus on English learners.



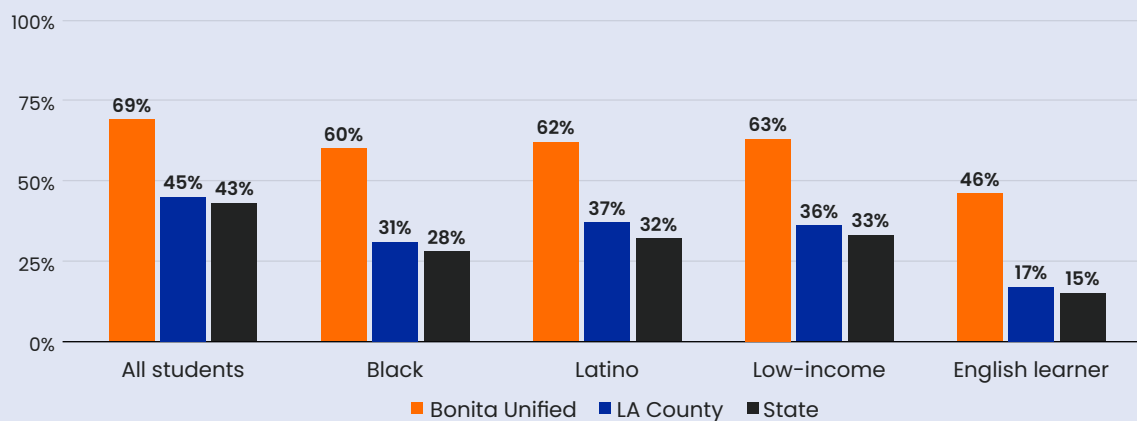
## BONITA UNIFIED

*Making literacy a long-term district priority through supportive structures*

### Overview:

- **Size:** 9,957 students
- **Demographics:** 35% low-income; 5% English learner; 57% Latino; 21% White; 9% Asian; 6% Two or More Races; 3% Filipino; 2% Black

### 3rd Grade English Language Arts Proficiency, 2023–24



*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education.*

In 2009, under the leadership of Superintendent Gary Rapkin, Bonita Unified set a district goal of ensuring 90% of its students reach proficiency as part of its District Reading Project. Since then, Bonita has developed a strong culture of literacy – prioritizing reading improvement, refreshing school libraries at every site, creating student incentives for reading, and engaging parents and families through reading nights and library nights. This culture is supported by broader systems and structures – described below – that bolster Bonita Unified’s literacy success under current Superintendent Matt Wien.

### Structured literacy and Tier I instruction

The district utilizes a structured literacy approach, building on a strong phonics tradition that has allowed it to also focus on other key areas of literacy, such as oral language, morphology (understanding

parts of words), and writing. Teachers and leaders prioritize strong Tier I instruction, with reteaching as needed for particular students (through Tier II support from classroom teachers and reading intervention teachers that are at every elementary site), as well as Tier III interventions for students who need even more supports.

### Training and professional development

District leaders believe the greatest factor contributing to their strong reading outcomes is teacher and leader professional knowledge development. Training and support needs are driven by student assessment results and the needs teachers and administrators identify, which significantly increases engagement during training and implementation. Teacher training is delivered through a professional learning community (PLC) model, and new teachers in particular are supported through



coaching cycles, peer observations, and conversations with teachers from other teams and schools. Within-district resources are utilized for these trainings and supports whenever possible, though occasionally outside resources are used, such as the Orton-Gillingham training and the Getting Reading Right curriculum through the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Bonita Unified has developed a culture of respecting teachers and building their professional knowledge that has supported strong teacher retention, reducing the need to train large numbers of new teachers each year.

### High-quality curriculum and materials with teacher autonomy

Bonita Unified adopted Benchmark Advance K-5 and SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness) in grades K-3 to support foundational skills development. (SIPPs was chosen to supplement Benchmark in the early grades because Benchmark's foundational pieces were not as well developed at the time.) However, leaders work hard to reinforce that the Essential Standards (a subset of the Common Core state standards) must drive instructional choices. Teachers are free to investigate other resources in search of the best tools to support student mastery of the Essential Standards, guided by curriculum maps that help identify what aspects of the curriculum best support particular standards and which ones might be better supported by other materials (such as SIPPs, UFLI, Heggerty, Secret Stories, and Read Naturally for intervention support).

Jaymi Abusham, Senior Director of Elementary Curriculum, encourages teachers to have an action research mindset, stating, "The non-negotiable is mastery, but the negotiable is the how. We expect teachers to look at what's critical to learn at each grade level and select the highest-leverage instructional resources from the materials available on our digital

dashboard or other supplemental materials to meet student needs as reflected in their data. It's important for teachers to know their curriculum deeply and then select tools accordingly. We pair high expectations with high support."

### Student outcome data drives decisions

At least once per trimester, teachers track DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) to monitor foundational skills development and STAR Early Literacy and STAR Reading results to monitor reading comprehension. Teachers use these results to adjust instruction accordingly, and they track and adjust more frequently for at-risk students or those working with intervention teachers. For example, teachers meet monthly (and administrators join bi-monthly) to set goals for struggling students, and for students who continue to struggle, a student study team meeting is held to identify additional supports that are needed.

District staff and site leaders also track DIBELS and STAR assessments along with district-created benchmarks to ensure students are progressing in their mastery of essential standards. And, district staff have been coaching principals to have data conversations with teachers that will support teachers to identify data-driven action steps based on assessment results.



## Next steps to support ongoing progress

While underscoring the importance of “staying the course” in their literacy efforts amid competing responsibilities and priorities, Bonita leaders identified several opportunities for growth and forward progress:

- 1 Build staff members’ knowledge about the district’s programmatic efforts and foster a culture of continuous improvement** to ensure program quality and success. Part of this work involves consciously letting go of less effective practices, rather than simply adding on more, in order to stay focused and make the work sustainable.
- 2 Build parents’ and families’ knowledge about the importance of reading at home** to strengthen home-school connections and reinforce the district’s literacy efforts at home. Staff members have a role to play in echoing the message that literacy is essential for success in all academic areas and in life.
- 3 Identify new supports for multilingual learners** by further studying the needs of this diverse group and developing new programmatic supports as needed. While leaders

**While leaders feel strongly that structured literacy has effectively supported their multilingual learner students to be successful in literacy – emphasizing the importance of systematic, explicit instruction to support with vocabulary development and other skills – they also acknowledged the need to further identify differences in morphology through Spanish and English, to help teachers better understand when and why students are struggling.**

feel strongly that structured literacy has effectively supported their multilingual learner students to be successful in literacy – emphasizing the importance of systematic, explicit instruction to support with vocabulary development and other skills – they also acknowledged the need to further identify differences in morphology through Spanish and English, to help teachers better understand when and why students are struggling. Related to morphology – in the next school year, Bonita leaders are looking more closely at the needs of students in later grades and doing morphology training with upper grade teachers.







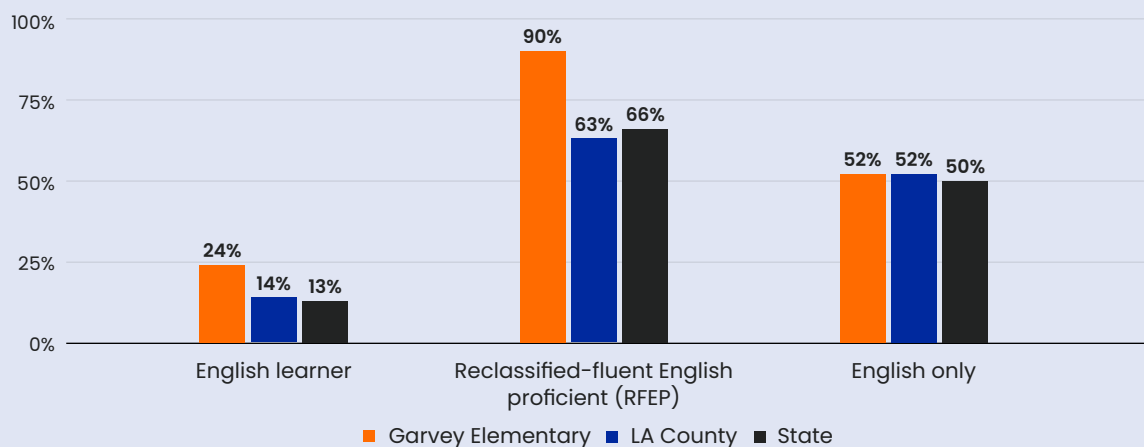
## GARVEY ELEMENTARY

*Aligning targeted priorities for student success*

### Overview:

- **Size:** 4,266 students
- **Demographics:** 68% low-income students; 38% English learner; 58% Asian; 37% Latino; 2% Two or More Races; 1% Filipino; 1% White
- **Top languages spoken by English learners:** Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese

### 3rd–5th Grade English Language Arts Proficiency, 2023–24



*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education.*

Anita Chu, Superintendent of Garvey Elementary School District, communicates a clear vision to district and site leaders: It's all about growth, not perfection, in the journey to servicing all students. As part of that vision, Chu has identified a few high-leverage district priorities – including literacy and whole-child development – to ensure laser focus and strong alignment across efforts. Dr. Kitty Louie, who serves as both the district's Learning Support Services Lead and the principal of Willard Elementary, says that alignment across the district and site level is very clear: "The superintendent has charged us with looking at the alignment between SPSA [the School Plan for Student Achievement] and other initiatives to make it very seamless for our principals to have focused, targeted areas. It all comes back to the LCAP [Local Control

and Accountability Plan] and the direction she's giving us to focus on those key priorities."

### Literacy approach

Garvey Elementary leaders describe the long-standing application of structured literacy principles as key to their approach. The district's adopted core curricula, Benchmark Advance (K–6) and Collections (Grades 7–8), provide a strong focus on systematic development of literacy skills and use formative assessments to guide instruction and determine levels of support. Additionally, research-based supplemental curricular materials are utilized to provide differentiated, targeted support for students. For example, the SIPP program (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness,

Phonics, and Sight Words) is used for students struggling with foundational skills, and Imagine Learning and Rosetta Stone target the needs of English learners in the various language domains.

## Prioritizing multilingual learners

With almost four in 10 students designated as English learners and over 80% of students with a home language other than English,<sup>15</sup> Garvey educators and administrators value the language and cultural assets students bring to school and are committed to building on those assets to ensure students' success.



To further this commitment, the district works to cultivate an asset mindset among its staff and build a culture that fosters multicultural and multilingual proficiency. The Dual Language Plus program, launched in 2018-19, is designed to develop biliteracy skills (in English/Spanish or English/Chinese Mandarin) with a third language enrichment experience (either Spanish or Chinese) to “promote cultural exposure and appreciation.”<sup>16</sup> This program reflects high concentrations of English learners, including newcomers, and has demonstrated strong academic and linguistic results among participants. According to Chu, students

in the Dual Language Plus program, particularly in the upper grades, consistently outperform their peers in the English Only program in English language arts and mathematics in both the state and district assessments.

To support the simultaneous academic and language learning of ELs, Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies are incorporated into Tier I instruction. Initially adopted more than two decades ago and reinvigorated in the past four years, classrooms across the district apply the use of consistent strategies designed for high student engagement that provide plentiful opportunities to practice language. This year, Garvey Elementary also started incorporating Thinking Maps (visual learning supports designed to help students organize their thinking and improve comprehension across grades and subject areas) in all classrooms as another tool that supports all students, particularly multilingual learners.

Garvey is intentional about providing both Integrated and Designated English Language Development (D-ELD) opportunities. To ensure D-ELD is tailored to English learners' specific language needs, most schools group students by ELD level and provide small-group differentiated instruction in self-contained classrooms or through team teaching. For example, one second grade teacher provides targeted ELD instruction to the lower-level ELs; another second grade teacher works with the higher-level ELs; and the third teacher works with English Only and reclassified-fluent English proficient (RFEP) students. The district's two middle schools have a D-ELD period to support the language development needs of older English learners, where bilingual instructional assistants also offer native language supports. In addition to receiving D-ELD instruction from classroom teachers,

<sup>15</sup> Data on students with home languages other than English was shared directly by district leadership.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.garvey.k12.ca.us/apps/pages/dual-language-plus-program>

newcomer students receive additional ELD support from site-based intervention teachers and additional opportunities to practice and develop language in the afterschool program.

## Data-driven instruction and intervention

Garvey Elementary's data-driven culture is evident in the district's approach to planning for instruction and intervention. Since 2018-19, iReady has been the primary assessment tool across all grades, along with district-developed benchmark assessments similar to DIBELS in the primary grades. Teachers utilize assessment results to plan their Tier I instruction and to determine Tier II instructional groups (small groups formed based on iReady results that indicate where students may need additional supports and on which specific standards they need support). The frequent use of small-group instruction, with the support of targeted resources from iReady and other research-based materials, provides timely, differentiated instruction to address the identified needs of individual students.

Tier II intervention supports, guided by assessment results, are provided by classroom teachers, with intervention teachers supporting high-priority students based on needs. Every school has a full-time intervention team that supports 50-65 students per school through small-group instruction, pulling students out of classrooms across grade levels. Research-based intervention programs, including SIPP and Kate Kinsella's Academic Vocabulary Toolkit, are used to address students' identified needs. Pre- and post-tests administered at least three times per year identify students' levels, with students moving groups as needed based on their progress. District leaders share that having consistency and alignment across schools in this area has been very effective.

## Focused teacher training

The district is committed to teacher and leader empowerment and professional growth. Teacher training is provided in alignment with district-wide goals and priorities through both in-house and external support through two district-wide PD days per year (one in August and one in January). This year's PD focused on Thinking Maps and Write from the Beginning...and Beyond with the support of consultants to help teachers and administrators dig deeply into content.

Several other training opportunities are also offered in the summer to meet the differentiated needs of teachers and instructional staff. For example, three cohorts of teachers have now received formal GLAD training during the summer, and many of those teachers now serve as teacher-leaders to share the strategies they have learned with other teachers and administrators.

Administrators, as part of weekly meetings, participate in ongoing training provided by district leaders and County Office of Education support providers in identified areas of need, including ELPAC and ELD strategies, iReady, data-driven practices, social-emotional learning, and tiered intervention and supports. With the knowledge and skills acquired, principals at the site level facilitate grade-level and department professional learning communities (PLCs) and staff training to support the continuous growth of all staff and improvement of practices.





## Next steps to support ongoing progress

Garvey Elementary plans to continue refining implementation of the focus initiatives described to maintain consistency in priorities and achieve the district's vision of educational excellence and whole-child wellness for all students. Chu shared several next steps to support all educational partners to deepen knowledge and skills specific to their roles:

**1 District administrators:** Provide social-emotional supports for all staff; develop at-home learning resources and strategies for parents; and provide frequent opportunities for coordination and collaboration across partners to build understanding and momentum toward achieving the district's shared vision.

**2 Site administrators:** Strengthen administrators' skills to facilitate data-driven, student-focused PLCs; continue training teachers in iReady and encourage them to use the toolkits embedded therein to provide targeted student supports.

**3 Teachers:** Ensure daily integration of Thinking Maps and iReady in lesson design and delivery; support students with goal-setting and development of self-regulation skills.

**4 Parent support staff:** Utilize effective outreach strategies to engage hard-to-reach families, including home visits, high-interest family engagement activities, and parent focus groups.



# Districts to Watch

In addition to analyzing student outcome data trends to identify Bright Spots, we also spoke with experts in the field who offered insights into the work of several districts that are currently implementing significant shifts in their literacy approach, even though their data does not yet demonstrate evidence of significantly improved outcomes for their students. (It often takes several years for gains to show up in standardized assessments after programmatic changes are implemented, though these districts are beginning to see growth based on internal data.) We call these Districts to Watch because their efforts are laying the foundation for improved outcomes in the near future, and others can learn from their stories.



**LONG BEACH**  
UNIFIED • SCHOOL • DISTRICT

## LONG BEACH UNIFIED

*Shifting away from balanced literacy through intentional planning and implementation*

### Overview (2023–24):

- **Size:** 64,267 students
- **Demographics:** 61% Low-income , 17% English learner ; 59% Latino, 12% Black, 12% White, 7% Asian, 5% Two or More Races, 3% Filipino, 1% Pacific Islander

*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education.*

The last four years have marked a period of significant change in Long Beach Unified’s approach to literacy instruction. In 2021, Lisa Worsham’s first year as Program Administrator of Literacy Initiatives, school sites were using a variety of approaches to literacy instruction – including Fountas and Pinnell’s Leveled Literacy Intervention at several sites – and relied heavily on intervention supports through “literacy teachers” over a focus on quality Tier I instruction. A small group of district leaders decided to research the effectiveness of their approach and found it was leaving too many students, particularly younger ones, with gaps in their literacy skills. Below, we outline how Long Beach has been working to change its approach to support student success in the long term.

### Intentional planning and communication

District leaders recognized early on the value of having clear guidance documents that provide a roadmap for teachers and administrators to work toward the same goals and speak the same language. Lisa and her team solicited the support of researchers from Student Achievement Partners, who audited Wonders – the district’s literacy curriculum – and offered recommendations for how to adapt the curriculum to increase alignment to the district’s “literacy accelerators” (phonics, fluency, building knowledge and language, comprehension, and writing). Ghodly Muhammad, professor and author of *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive*



*Literacy*, also audited the district's curricular resources for cultural responsiveness. The district's core curriculum is now based on its own guidance documents (loosely aligned to the topics and essential questions in Wonders) that reflect recommendations from these audits and include weekly unit guides calling out the complex texts all students should be accessing and what is needed to support that access. After updating these district curriculum documents, district leaders developed a plan to communicate changes through the team of principal supervisors, who communicated with principals. Then, principals communicated these shifts to teachers and other site-level staff members.

The district also decided to pull away from its intervention-centered model and instead prioritize strong Tier I instruction at the K-2 level. To support this shift, leaders developed a goal of reaching 85% proficiency on the in-house Foundational Reading Skills Assessment by the end of each year. This is now a goal across all the district's elementary schools.

### **Data-driven training and support**

Recognizing that significant training needs are required to make these shifts, Long Beach decided to contract with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to access its Getting Reading Right curriculum that trains teachers on structured literacy practices. This work began two years ago with intervention teachers. After some adjustments were made based on learnings, the district had all TK-2 teachers participate in the training the following summer and fall. Now, any new-to-grade-level teachers are required to participate in the same training. And, recently, all K-2 teachers were trained on the unit guides included in the district's guidance documents so they know how to utilize all the resources at their disposal. Teacher training is responsive to the needs identified by the data. For example, this

year, teachers are receiving three additional days of training to address the gaps seen in the data and to work with site coaches on implementation.

**The district also decided to pull away from its intervention-centered model and instead prioritize strong Tier I instruction at the K-2 level. To support this shift, leaders developed a goal of reaching 85% proficiency on the in-house Foundational Reading Skills Assessment by the end of each year. This is now a goal across all the district's elementary schools.**

Ongoing support for teachers is provided through coaching. Every site has an instructional coordinator and a literacy lead who coach teachers and meet monthly with central office ELA coaches to increase their knowledge, build their coaching capacity, and engage in data analysis before going back to school sites for "Plan Do Study Act" (PDSA) cycles with teachers. Training for coaches has helped develop a common language and approach that is supported through the use of an observational "look-for" tool used by literacy leads. This tool has led to actionable findings, including the trend that direct instruction is strong, but small-group instruction and independent student practice are not robust enough, which will help guide the content of future trainings. The tool has also created district-level learning opportunities. Recently, district leaders identified seven "outlier" school sites based on their analysis of student outcomes and organized principal walk-throughs to look for the practices in the observational tool and work toward calibrating what implementation looks like.

Student-level data is also utilized to guide decision making. For example based on the finding that decoding skills have improved significantly in recent years but that fluency skills need further development, the district made an intentional effort this year in second grade to focus on fluency. To support that effort, all teachers are being trained on a fluency routine and practice, with coaches co-planning, teaching, and monitoring the data, which is already demonstrating improved results.

### Interventions as a secondary support

All schools have an intervention coordinator who participates in monthly district trainings and, through collaboration with site administration, ensures interventions are happening as intended. Several of the larger Title I schools still have dedicated intervention teachers who are funded with Title I dollars, though the goal is to solidify a model that prioritizes strong Tier I instruction, with literacy leads supporting K-2 teachers to reach the district's 85% proficiency goal through Tier II supports within the classroom.



Student-level data through iReady and other district assessments supports intervention decisions. Teachers identify necessary in-classroom supports as part of Tier I instruction and planning, but students

who are at least two years below grade level take a fluency assessment that can trigger deeper phonics-based interventions depending on assessment results. Long Beach Unified utilizes the Sonday intervention system (similar to Orton-Gillingham) to administer interventions at the site level for students who meet the criteria.

With the focus on strong Tier I instruction and the district's 85% proficiency goal, district and site leaders have begun looking more closely at teacher-specific data to understand which teachers are experiencing the greatest success and which teachers are struggling more based on their students' performance trends. Doing so has helped to determine if student struggles are likely the result of weak Tier I implementation or if particular students actually require additional intervention supports. If the former, literacy leads engage in six-week coaching cycles with specific teachers, guided by strategies (including co-teaching and observing peer teachers) from *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* by Diane Sweeney and Leanna S. Harris, to set specific goals and identify practices that will better support students to achieve them.

### Next steps to support ongoing progress

Lisa Worsham, who continues to lead Long Beach Unified's literacy efforts in her role as Elementary Curriculum Program Administrator, has identified several priorities to keep the district moving in the right direction:

- 1 Ensure buy-in across the administrative team.** Many administrators are former teachers who, given their previous training in the balanced literacy approach, may need further opportunities to recognize effective implementation of structured literacy practices. Further, district staffing changes mean that new staff members need to

be educated about these shifts to help get them up to speed.

**2 Increase district-level parent/family engagement efforts in the context of literacy.** This includes building on the foundational and comprehension skills development resources already available on the district website that support families with literacy at home.<sup>17</sup> Parent University can also infuse more literacy topics into its work with parents and identify opportunities to increase parent attendance.

**3 Implement next year's plan to infuse more intentional literacy efforts in the upper elementary grades** by infusing concepts from Student Achievement Partners' Improving Reading for Older Students training into the district's in-house training. This training will focus on intervention strategies that support older students in accelerating their literacy skills through the use of grade-level complex text along with scaffolding to ensure access.

**4 Increase the focus on building knowledge as a key component of strong literacy instruction.** As Worsham shared: "Our data is showing us that we're further ahead with the foundational skills components, so we are starting a greater focus now on the 'building knowledge' pieces, which we call 'the other side of Scarborough's Rope.' To decrease the number of 'disfluent' students, we know they need comprehension and everything else."

**5 Seek to understand what is leading to particular outcomes.** Where the data looks good, utilize the district's observational tool to uncover what is actually happening and identify if particular practices are supporting those outcomes. Where data indicates that student achievement is not moving in the right direction, utilize the tool to identify practices that require the support of literacy leads and coaches.



<sup>17</sup> For example, the Foundational Reading Skills Guide for Parents outlines, by grade level, the skills students are expected to acquire, how those skills are assessed in school, and how parents and families can practice the skill at home. See <https://www.lbschools.net/departments/curriculum/curriculum-areas/english-language-arts/family-resources> for examples of these resources.

### Overview (2023–24):

- **Size:** 529,902 students
- **Demographics:** 81% Low-income, 20% English learner; 74% Latino, 7% Black, 10% White, 3% Asian, 2% Two or More Races, 2% Filipino

*Notes: Based on analysis of 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education.*

In last year’s report, we shared extensively about Los Angeles Unified’s (LAUSD) shifting approach to literacy and the significant investments the district is making to ensure the success of this new approach. We also identified the need for an even greater, longer term commitment to this work through sustained training and coaching; administrator supports; a multi-dimensional approach to family engagement; and clear communication across all educational partners. Below, we share how LAUSD’s work has continued to develop and evolve in the past year to support its long-term commitment to improving literacy across the district.

This evolution has coincided with the board’s passage of its Readers to Leaders resolution in December 2024 that underscores the district’s commitment to ensuring all students are proficient readers by third grade. The resolution aims to accelerate progress toward the district’s strategic plan goal of moving third grade students, on average, 30 points closer to proficiency on the CAASPP ELA assessment by 2026 through further implementing SOR, monitoring student progress, and strengthening teacher training and family engagement.

### Consistent curriculum and strategic student supports

The district’s goal of ensuring a common

foundation in structured literacy, with interventions provided through its Literacy and Numeracy Intervention Model,<sup>18</sup> has continued from last year to this year and is reflected in its ongoing efforts and investments. After piloting the SOR-aligned Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum across select schools, all elementary schools in the district transferred over to this curriculum in the 2024–25 school year. To support multilingual learners, Language Studio – a companion to CKLA – helps develop language proficiency through research-based strategies, engaging content, and targeted supports. Differentiated training is provided for schools that are newly adopting CKLA versus schools that are in their second and third years of implementation. Two CKLA ambassadors at each school site participate in monthly PD sessions and support implementation efforts at their school sites, and regional CKLA coaches further support implementation.

Ongoing use of assessment data (including DIBELS and iReady) continues to guide literacy instruction and support. District and regional leads are providing resources and guidance to principals and instructional leadership teams on how to utilize the data reports in their cycles of continuous improvement – also known as Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles – during which instructional teams and administrators use data to assess their efforts and make instructional adjustments over the course

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.lausd.org/Page/17822>



of three to six weeks. All priority elementary and middle schools have a literacy interventionist and literacy instructional aide to support intervention groups for struggling students, and plans are being developed to expand interventionist support to another 48 middle schools based on need.

### **Expanded professional development for teachers and administrators**

Several PD structures and resources are in place to support educators across levels to implement the district's structured literacy approach with fidelity, and mandatory PD modules have been implemented across all schools to ensure coherence in evidence-based literacy instruction across the district.

Before the start of the current school year, all elementary teachers who had not yet received structured literacy training participated in district-wide summer PD. Further, literacy instructional aides are receiving comprehensive training and support to help implement the intervention model collaboratively with classroom teachers and interventionists. And, interventionists in middle and high school participate in PD to support the development of foundational literacy and language comprehension skills, including a monthly regional academy to help implement the intervention model within the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. Additionally, all 10,000 elementary teachers and several out-of-classroom personnel have received University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI)'s SOR-aligned Foundations manual, and almost 8,000 of those teachers have attended the accompanying PD that offers guidance related to small-group instruction and targeted intervention to address foundational reading skill gaps.

Several optional PD opportunities exist, and to increase teacher participation in training, LAUSD provides training during contracted work hours as well as after school, on

weekends, and during breaks, with the ability to earn points on the salary scale that lead to salary increases. For example:

- K-2 teachers can access training on analyzing student data to differentiate instruction in the context of structured literacy.
- During winter break, over 400 teachers attended a two-day literacy symposium focused on SOR-aligned instructional practices within the core curriculum.
- The District is offering writing PD and ongoing support resources focused on integrating writing within the CKLA curriculum.
- Orton-Gillingham and LETRS training continues to be offered to support strong teaching of foundational literacy skills.
- Teachers can access a PD series on building background knowledge and vocabulary to support deep language comprehension.

**Several PD structures and resources are in place to support educators across levels to implement the district's structured literacy approach with fidelity, and mandatory PD modules have been implemented across all schools to ensure coherence in evidence-based literacy instruction across the district.**

Training for administrators is also core to the district's implementation efforts. Administrators have been participating in PD sessions to support CKLA implementation, including the use of foundational skills "look-for" documents to support classroom observations. This year, principals also



participated in a three-day Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) and continue to engage in monthly principal meetings to analyze data, identify areas of growth, share best practices, and identify solutions to implement going forward.

## Empowering families and strengthening engagement

Los Angeles Unified has been working on strengthening collaboration with families as a core strategy to improving literacy outcomes.

One primary avenue for doing this has been through a three-part family literacy module series. The Division of Instruction (DOI) created training resources and facilitator guides and worked with the Office of Students, Family, and Community Engagement (SFACE) and region leaders to train school staff on delivering these modules. The series content centered around how to access and analyze assessment data and discuss it with teachers, as well as how to support their children's reading and writing development at home. As one parent participant shared, "I learned how to help my child with reading. I will share the information about the SORA app so my child can read and enjoy books and audiobooks at home."<sup>19</sup> The DOI has also facilitated various webinars for SFACE's Family Academy that offer strategies for parents and families to support their children in literacy and other academic areas.

In alignment with the Readers to Leaders resolution, the district is deepening its efforts to ensure families understand the data on their child's reading proficiency levels, build parent/caregiver knowledge on how children (including children with disabilities and multilingual learners) learn to read, and help families understand how to support their children's literacy development at home. To support these

**Los Angeles Unified has been working on strengthening collaboration with families as a core strategy to improving literacy outcomes.**

goals, the district solicited parent feedback on the data reports sent home to families, which supported a redesign process to improve usability. The new version offers clear visuals showing student progress over time, distance from goals, and recommended resources to support learning at home.

## Next steps to support ongoing progress

District leaders have identified key priorities to ensure LAUSD continues building on its existing efforts and successes:

- 1 Continue collaboration with region leadership and other departments** (such as the Educational Transformation Office, Black Student Achievement Program, Multilingual Multicultural Education Department, and Special Education Division) to ensure a comprehensive, SOR-aligned literacy approach that addresses the differentiated needs of students.
- 2 Seek to understand what is supporting effective implementation and strong student outcomes** by utilizing the look-for documents and "Plan-Do-Study-Act" continuous improvement cycles to guide PD. Doing so will help ensure coherence and fidelity of implementation across schools.
- 3 Provide ongoing training and resources for school leaders and educators that differentiates support** based on implementation progress at each school site and the needs of individual teachers.

<sup>19</sup> The SORA app allows students to access ebooks, audiobooks, and more free of charge. The following video shares more information about SORA: <https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/8cp6ullf4q>.

# Common Lessons from the Field

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As practitioners who have been engaged in these efforts for a long time know, making the types of shifts necessary to bring about lasting change is a long-term effort. Systemic, structural change requires time and intentionality – not silver bullets – and context matters.

The “Bright Spots” and “Districts to Watch” featured in this report share several common elements that align with other research on impactful literacy improvement efforts (and the literature on educational improvement efforts more broadly<sup>20</sup>).<sup>21</sup> These districts align their efforts to the structured literacy approach; intentionally develop and support their teachers in ways that build a positive staff culture (even supporting teacher retention in some cases); utilize data to guide instructional decisions; prioritize strong Tier I instruction; prioritize the needs of students who require additional supports; invest in high-quality curriculum and instructional resources; and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

While this report focuses on supporting early literacy in particular, practitioners must also be attentive to the upper elementary grades and beyond to address skill gaps and continue building literacy skills. Additionally, research underscores the importance of family engagement<sup>22</sup> – core to Families In Schools’ work. Even though family engagement has not been core to the literacy efforts of most of the districts featured in this report to date, several district leaders have acknowledged this as an important next step. Indeed, given over 50 years of research showing that family engagement is a powerful strategy for improving student outcomes, FIS applauds all four districts for recognizing this as a top priority moving forward.

School- and district-level change does not need to follow the same path, and there is no quick fix that promises successful outcomes. However, districts that are undertaking the difficult work of changing or bolstering their literacy efforts can offer valuable lessons from which others can learn to inform their future work.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Positive\\_Outliers\\_Qualitative\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Positive_Outliers_Qualitative_REPORT.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example:

- <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1286919.pdf>
- [https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdfs/District%20Capacity%20White%20Paper\\_2018.pdf](https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdfs/District%20Capacity%20White%20Paper_2018.pdf)
- <https://www.lexialearning.com/blog/how-district-leaders-can-identify-and-plan-for-science-of-reading-district-solutions-part-2>
- <https://publicconsultinggroup.com/media/1265/literacy-guidelines.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>.

# Recommended Resources for Practitioners

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The districts featured in this report identified several resources that have supported them in achieving successful reading outcomes or making the shift toward more effective approaches to teaching children how to read. Here, we share a brief description of some common resources and tools that are aligned to the science of reading. While we do not include a recommended curriculum list, we encourage readers to utilize The Reading League’s [evaluation guidelines](#) when selecting new literacy curricula.

Last year’s report included a set of extensive recommendations across the spectrum of education partners that remain relevant today.<sup>23</sup> We encourage readers to revisit those recommendations to consider further opportunities to support the movement toward improved literacy outcomes.

## Organizations

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- The [CA Statewide Administrators’ Reading Collaborative](#) is a collaborative administered by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) that shares resources and strategies to build administrator knowledge around the science of reading.
- The [Florida Center for Reading Research](#) is a research center housed at Florida State University that advances the science of reading by sharing evidence-based literacy research.
- [The Reading League](#) is a nonprofit organization with 38 state chapters (including one in California) that aims to “advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.” The organization released a [joint statement](#) in 2023 with the National Committee for Effective Literacy (NCEL) that articulates areas of alignment between reading science and English learner education experts. Additionally, their website includes several resources to support implementation of structured literacy.

## Trainings

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- [AIM Pathways](#) is an online teacher training platform aligned to the science of reading.
- [CORE’s Online Learning and Literacy Academy](#) is an asynchronous online course that guides teachers to support English learners and students with dyslexia in a structured literacy context.
- [Getting Reading Right](#) is a PD sequence offered by LACOE that is designed to support K-5 teachers to build their knowledge of structured literacy. This training consists of 10 two-hour modules that can be completed in person or virtually.
- [Getting Reading Right: Filling in the Gaps in the Secondary Classroom](#) is a PD sequence offered by LACOE that is designed to support teachers in grades 6-12 to build their knowledge of structured literacy. This training consists of 10 two-hour modules that can be completed in person or virtually.
- [LETRS \(Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling\)](#) is a training course to support teachers working with beginning readers that emphasizes foundational skills development.
- [Project Arise](#) is an online course led by three County Offices of Education that is free for California educators.

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to the recommendations in the [report](#), more detailed recommendations by audience can be found on the report landing page, below the report download button.

## Classroom resources<sup>24</sup>

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- **[University of Florida Literacy Institute \(UFLI\)](#)** is a website from the University of Florida that offers free teacher training and classroom resources.
- **[SIPPs](#)** is a supplemental instructional resource designed to support the development and mastery of foundational reading skills.
- **[Heggerty](#)** is a phonemic awareness curriculum that provides embedded PD, teacher guidance, and lessons in English and Spanish for the early grades.
- **[Orton-Gillingham](#)** is a structured, multisensory approach to learning foundational reading skills by breaking words into smaller parts and building on skills sequentially. This approach has been found to be particularly effective for students with dyslexia.

## Family engagement

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- **[The ABCs of Family Engagement](#)** is a resource created by [WIDA](#) that shares six essential considerations for strengthening family engagement practices and building relationships with families.
- **[Top Benefits of Family & Community Engagement](#)** is a blog by Hanover Research that shares an overview of how high-impact family engagement strategies play a role in promoting student academic achievement.
- **[Partnering with Families to Improve Literacy Skills](#)** is a resource put out by the Ohio Department of Education that shares strategies and resources to engage families in supporting their children's literacy development.
- The **[Community Engagement Best Practices Self-Assessment Toolkit](#)**, developed by California Community Engagement Initiative lead agency partners, categorizes meaningful family and community engagement into seven domains and includes subcategories of competencies that school and district leaders can use to self-reflect on their district or school-level community engagement efforts and drive continuous improvement along a continuum of growth.

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<sup>24</sup> Several of the organizations and trainings listed above also offer free resources.

# Conclusion

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Literacy progress in California is moving too slowly. While the state continues to make important investments in literacy programs, it has yet to advance literacy instructional policies that will produce results for students. The literacy crisis remains one of the most urgent civil rights issues of our time, with far too many children still struggling to read on grade level. This is not just an educational failure; it is a moral and societal one.

Fortunately, several districts in Los Angeles County have been implementing literacy improvement efforts that are supporting students to achieve at higher levels – evidence that this is a solvable problem and that we **CAN AND MUST** end the early literacy crisis to give all children the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

We hope the examples shared in this report offer inspiration and guidance to education leaders across Los Angeles County and beyond. Elevating early literacy as a top priority and aligning to practices that work – coupled with bold policies and ongoing investments at the state level – can help us realize a future where each child can read and be free.





# Acknowledgments

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We are deeply grateful for the generous support of our philanthropic partners, whose commitment has been instrumental in the development of this second literacy landscape report. Their unwavering support allows us to continue our programmatic and advocacy efforts to address the literacy crisis in Los Angeles and across California – an urgent priority expressed by the families we serve.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to **EDMG and LW Consulting** for their exceptional research support. Their thoughtful analysis and guidance has significantly enhanced the depth and impact of this report, for which we are truly grateful.



# Appendix A:

## Los Angeles County school districts at or above the state rate\* for third grade English Language Arts proficiency, 2023–24

District	All Students	Black students	Latino students	English learners
South Pasadena Unified	85%	**	72%	40%
La Cañada Unified	84%	**	68%	73%
San Marino Unified	83%	**	**	47%
Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	80%	73%	71%	45%
Manhattan Beach Unified	78%	**	70%	**
Redondo Beach Unified	77%	64%	61%	25%
Arcadia Unified	73%	**	55%	31%
Beverly Hills Unified	72%	**	50%	**
Santa Monica–Malibu Unified	71%	49%	55%	44%
Walnut Valley Unified	70%	42%	45%	36%
Bonita Unified	69%	60%	62%	46%
El Segundo Unified	68%	**	46%	**
Hermosa Beach City Elementary	68%	**	61%	**
Las Virgenes Unified	66%	**	60%	45%
Valle Lindo Elementary	65%	**	61%	50%
Saugus Union	65%	59%	54%	10%
Temple City Unified	64%	**	47%	24%
Culver City Unified	64%	48%	51%	16%
Torrance Unified	63%	42%	53%	33%
Newhall	60%	**	46%	29%
Glendale Unified	57%	69%	50%	23%
Little Lake City Elementary	57%	**	55%	36%
East Whittier City Elementary	57%	**	52%	20%
ABC Unified	56%	49%	40%	19%
Wiseburn Unified	56%	60%	47%	22%

District	All Students	Black students	Latino students	English learners
Alhambra Unified	56%	**	41%	32%
Glendora Unified	55%	**	41%	30%
Burbank Unified	53%	36%	41%	21%
Garvey Elementary	53%	**	34%	30%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary	52%	**	**	**
Rosemead Elementary	52%	**	31%	24%
Charter Oak Unified	52%	**	48%	25%
Claremont Unified	52%	27%	44%	7%
West Covina Unified	52%	**	47%	16%
San Gabriel Unified	51%	**	36%	11%
Covina-Valley Unified	50%	19%	44%	20%
Pasadena Unified	49%	27%	39%	16%
Downey Unified	48%	55%	47%	27%
Hacienda La Puente Unified	48%	**	40%	16%
Long Beach Unified	48%	32%	40%	23%
Castaic Union	46%	**	36%	20%
Lawndale Elementary	46%	44%	42%	25%
Whittier City	46%	**	46%	18%
Sulphur Springs Union	45%	38%	38%	14%
Rowland Unified	44%	50%	33%	21%
Monrovia Unified	43%	47%	29%	14%
Compton Unified	43%	42%	43%	20%

*\*The statewide third grade proficiency rate in ELA in 2023-24 was 43%. Districts are sorted by highest third grade proficiency rate for all students*

*\*\*Proficiency rates are not reported for districts with fewer than 11 students in any group to protect student confidentiality*

## Appendix B:

### Los Angeles County school districts at or above the state rate\* for third grade English language arts proficiency and the percent of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, 2023–24

District	All students	Black students	Latino students	English learners	% Socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the district
Valle Lindo Elementary	65%	**	61%	50%	79%
Little Lake City Elementary	57%	**	55%	36%	80%
Garvey Elementary	53%	**	34%	30%	68%
Rosemead Elementary	52%	**	31%	24%	74%
Charter Oak Unified	52%	**	48%	25%	72%
West Covina Unified	52%	**	47%	16%	71%
San Gabriel Unified	51%	**	36%	11%	69%
Covina-Valley Unified	50%	19%	44%	20%	75%
Pasadena Unified	49%	27%	39%	16%	67%
Downey Unified	48%	55%	47%	27%	69%
Hacienda la Puente Unified	48%	**	40%	16%	76%
Lawndale Elementary	46%	44%	42%	25%	81%
Whittier City	46%	**	46%	18%	77%
Rowland Unified	44%	50%	33%	21%	80%
Monrovia Unified	43%	47%	29%	14%	63%
Compton Unified	43%	42%	43%	20%	94%

\*The statewide third grade proficiency rate in ELA 2023–24 was 43%. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students made up 63% of statewide enrollment. Districts are sorted by highest third grade proficiency rate for all students

\*\*Proficiency rates are not reported for districts with fewer than 11 students in any group to protect student confidentiality



# Appendix C:

## Methodology

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### ***Higher-performing districts for third grade literacy***

Our initial analysis aimed to identify higher-performing districts in third grade literacy across Los Angeles. We downloaded California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) English Language Arts (ELA) data files from 2016–17 to 2023–24 (excluding 2019–20 due to no data available and 2020–21 due to very limited data) and filtered for districts within the boundaries of Los Angeles County, which yielded 81 districts for further consideration. We then conducted various analyses based on the following criteria:

1. Performing one standard deviation above the statewide rate for all students in third grade for all six years; one standard deviation above the statewide rate for Black and/or Latino third-grade students for at least two of the last three years; or being in the top quartile statewide for third grade literacy with a percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students at or above the county average;
2. Maintaining high third-grade literacy performance in post-pandemic years (when many districts' performance declined); and
3. Sustaining high performance beyond third grade.

From there, we identified a short list of districts meeting one or more of the above criteria that also serve larger proportions of Black, Latino, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged students for further consideration.

### ***Higher-performing districts for English learners***

A second analysis aimed to identify high-performing districts for English learners. Exclusively considering third-grade ELA proficiency for ELs is more challenging given that, by definition, students who are still designated as ELs are less likely to be proficient in ELA. Given this challenge, a broader set of success indicators was considered to identify districts that are more successfully serving ELs and students who have been reclassified as fluent in English (RFEP).

We downloaded data files from the California Department of Education (Enrollment by ELAS, LTEL, and At-Risk by Grade; English Learners by Grade & Language; English Learner Progress Indicator Data Files; and CAASPP California Statewide ELA research files) from 2016–17 to 2023–24 (excluding 2019–20 due to no data available and 2020–21 due to very limited data) and filtered for districts within the boundaries of Los Angeles County. We then analyzed and compared district outcomes based on the following considerations:

1. Ranking districts by ELA proficiency in grades three through five for ELs, RFEPs, and Ever-ELs (ELs and RFEPs combined);

2. Restricting the list to districts where RFEP achievement was equal to or above English-only achievement;
3. Identifying districts with strong EL progress based on the percentage of ELs making yearly progress toward proficiency as measured by the English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI); and
4. Ranking districts by the percentage of long-term English learners (LTELs) in grades six through 12 and the percentage of at-risk LTELs in grades three through five (prioritizing districts with lower percentages on these indicators).

Reclassification data was not included because data on the reclassification rates has not been made publicly available in aggregate files since 2020–21, and our analysis prioritized recent performance. From there, we identified a short list of districts meeting one or more of the above criteria that also serve larger proportions of socioeconomically disadvantaged students and that serve ELs with a diversity of languages for further consideration.

### ***“Bright Spot” and “Districts to Watch” selection***

Based on insights gleaned from the above quantitative analyses, we identified several potential “Bright Spot” districts from which to learn about qualitatively, recognizing that quantitative data can only tell part of the story. We reached out to seven districts (including sending follow-up requests in several cases) to ask for an initial interview to learn more about their literacy efforts. Of these, four districts agreed to an initial interview to answer questions pertaining to literacy structures and systems; curriculum and instructional materials; teacher training and support; data-driven monitoring and planning; the role of parents and families in supporting literacy; supports for multilingual learners; supports for struggling students; and communication and other implementation considerations. We selected two districts to include in the report based on the extent to which their efforts aligned with what research and experts in the field identify as elements of systems that drive effective literacy instruction and broader improvement efforts within educational systems.

We also identified three potential “Districts to Watch”: districts whose data are not yet demonstrating significant improvements or outcomes in literacy, but that are engaged in a concerted effort to make positive changes in literacy. These districts were identified based on recommendations from technical assistance providers in Los Angeles County and/or our knowledge of literacy developments in the field. We interviewed leaders in all three districts utilizing similar questions that were asked of potential “Bright Spot” districts and selected two of these districts to feature in the report based on their commendable efforts thus far to lay the groundwork for significantly stronger literacy outcomes in the near future.

