

# **Early Literacy Outcomes, Strategies & Action Steps for Moving Forward**

## **Community Data Walk Summary**

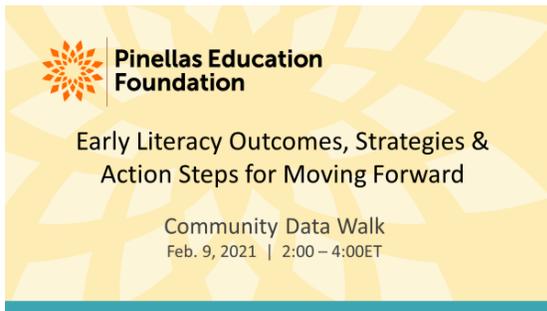
**April 2021**



**Pinellas Education  
Foundation**

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## Early Literacy Outcomes, Strategies & Action Steps for Moving Forward



In late 2019, the Pinellas Education Foundation (PEF) convened an Early Literacy Steering Committee consisting of key community players to address how to better prepare youngsters entering kindergarten for success in early grades and beyond. The Steering Committee included the Juvenile Welfare Board, Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Pinellas County School District, and supporter the Foundation of a Healthy St. Petersburg. A landscape scan of programs

in Pinellas County was undertaken to level set and researcher Shelley Robertson of Robertson Consulting Group was retained. Key indicators, research questions, and data were identified. Partners provided data to Robertson who compiled an initial report. The partners then engaged the community through a Zoom virtual data walk to obtain their thoughts, reactions, and involve them in the conversation and work to improve early literacy outcomes in Pinellas county.

### The Data Walk Event

In an effort to engage the larger Pinellas County community in the early literacy conversation and to plan for the work ahead, PEF hosted a virtual event, “Early Literacy Outcomes, Strategies & Action Steps for Moving Forward” on February 9, 2021. This event had three main objectives:

1. Share Pinellas specific early literacy data.
2. Obtain community input on the data, engage attendees in discussions about the implications, and potential actions to address deficiencies.
3. Discuss “Where do we go from here?”.

The data walk is a method of interacting with the data through which participants make sense of and react to the information together. Introductory comments were made from Susan Johnson, General Counsel, Echelon Real Estate and Secretary, Pinellas Education Foundation and board member with the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County. Stacy Baier, PEF President & CEO and Shelley Robertson, President Robertson Consulting Group presented positioning data and comments. During the data walk itself, data were featured at virtual stations presented and discussed during virtual breakout rooms. Attendees reviewed and reacted to the data in teams based on guiding questions such as:

- ✓ What stands out? What are the data telling us about education in our community?
- ✓ What more do you want to know? What additional context do you need?

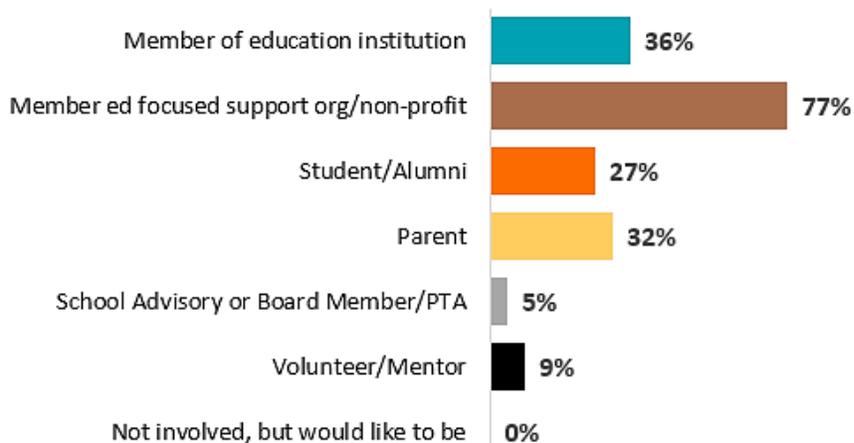
After the data walk, groups reported back based on the guiding questions:

- ✓ Did the data change your understanding of early literacy outcomes in Pinellas?
- ✓ What do the data reveal about our community strengths?
- ✓ What does it reveal about opportunities for improvement?

### Data Walk Attendees

Approximately 45 community members representing various sectors of the community participated in the data walk. Attendees were asked to identify themselves as belonging to various community segments (including multiple segments if applicable). One hundred percent of the attendees currently have some level of involvement in education. Being a “member of an education focused support organization or non-profit” was the most prevalent involvement with 77% attendees selecting this.

*How are you involved in education in Pinellas county?*



*NOTE: Totals greater than 100% since could select multiple categories*

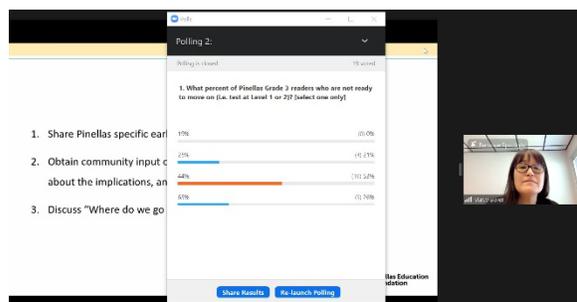
## Key Community Takeaways

The interactive format of the data walk with multiple opportunities to react to the data allowed the collection of considerable input from community participants. This input is summarized below and incorporated into the final early literacy data report which is forthcoming.

### 1. We have work to do in getting all students to read on level by grade 3.

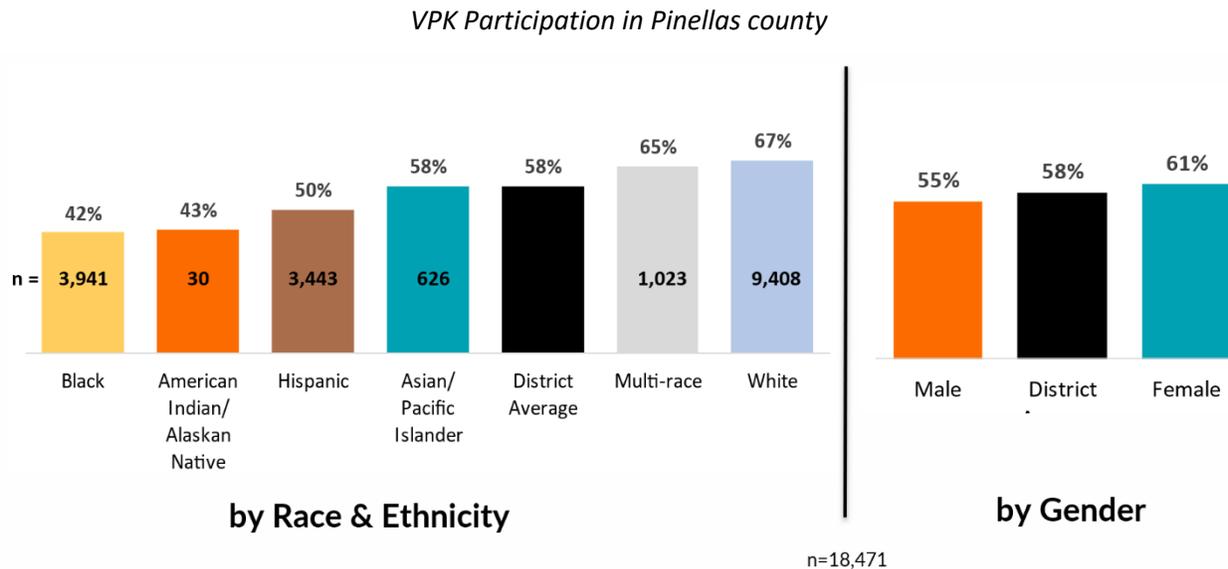
Participants learned that currently only 56% of Pinellas 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are reading on level (scoring 3 or above on Florida Standards Assessment, 2019). Half of the passing students score the minimum passing level (“3”) which means they may need additional support in the next grade.

The long-term implications of students not reading on level by grade 3 are disturbing. Florida Dept. of Education data indicate that for students who are not on grade level in Gr. 3, only 14% are brought up to grade level by the time they get to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. This underscores the critical role early literacy has in the long-term literacy prospects for students.



### 2. VPK participation helps prepare students, but not enough students participate, particularly children of color.

Participants reacted to data which indicate that participation in VPK increases Kindergarten readiness by a factor of 13%. Looking at VPK participation by race and ethnicity indicates that all minority groups are less likely to participate in VPK than white students. Black children have the lowest participation rates. These trends are reflected in dramatically lower percent of students with passing FLKRS (Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener) scores (500 or above) for Black and Hispanic students. Additionally, girls are participating more than boys.



### 3. Greater student success comes from experienced, degreed and credentialed teachers using approved curricula.

Participants shared thoughts on data stations addressing VPK teacher qualifications (degrees & credentials) and experience levels as well percent of classrooms using approved curricula. Many comments on teacher qualifications were summarized by sharing the economic challenges, i.e., VPK teachers with more education expect to be paid accordingly and this is usually not the case due to state reimbursement levels.



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Moreover, participants also looked at Kindergarten teacher education, qualifications, experience levels, and compassion. The value of experience and credentials (e.g., reading endorsement) was noted. Due to this emphasis, questions were posed to increase success, such as:

- ✓ Are more incentives needed to retain teachers for longer periods of time?
- ✓ What other opportunities do teachers have for professional development?
- ✓ Do teachers have time to get additional education with their classroom demands?
- ✓ How is turnover which causes a less stable workforce having an impact?

#### 4. Florida early learning standards do not meet national research based best practices.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified 10 quality benchmarks shown to impact school readiness outcomes of children. According to the NIEER, Florida meets 2 of these 10 benchmarks: class size and adoption of early learning standards. Participants reflected on the remaining benchmarks and commented that many programs follow recommended practices regardless of the state not meeting the recommended benchmarks. Pinellas County Schools with the Early Learning Coalition have committed to working toward these standards. While programs voluntarily exceeding state requirements is good, the lack of structured requirements means that there is inconsistent implementation among programs not meeting those benchmarks which impacts student performance.

NIEER Research-based Benchmark	Florida's Requirements
Early learning and development standards	Checkmark
A well-implemented, emergent curriculum	Red X
Class teachers in every classroom should have a bachelor's degree	Red X
Specialized training for teachers	Red X
Assistant teachers have a CDA or equivalent	Red X
15 hours of training per year, individual professional development plans	Red X
20 students or less in a classroom	Checkmark
Ratio of 1:10 or better	Red X
Vision, hearing, and health screenings and referrals	Red X
Structural classroom observations with data used for program improvement	Red X

#### 5. Pinellas county has a preponderance of programs which increase awareness of early literacy and needs more programs which focus on developing skills and modifying behavior.

Participants reacted to the results of recent work done by the Lectio Institute in Pinellas. The Lectio Institute guides participants through a comprehensive analysis of their programs and services focusing on their goals, design, outcomes and resource allocation. JWB hosted two Lectio training cohorts of early literacy providers in Pinellas. Providers completed a guided self-analysis to determine where they are on the landscape between “Raising Awareness” (an example may be book distribution) of early literacy and “Changing Individuals’ Behaviors & Skills” (an example may be an early learning childcare using approved curriculum.). A summary of how programs identified themselves was shared which indicated twice as many programs in the “Raising Awareness” end of the spectrum. Participants noted that it is easier and usually less expensive to raise awareness than to impact behavior change. Additionally, participants noted that the community needs a “full toolbox” of raising awareness and changing behaviors programming. There is a great need to elevate programming focused on changing behaviors and skills. Specific recommendations were made, including:

- ✓ Need to demystify issues for the average parent. Parents don’t feel comfortable/confident in their ability and knowledge to support literacy.
- ✓ Need to reduce jargon.
- ✓ Ages 0-2 are so critical. Need to engage parents and caregivers for this age.
- ✓ We need a consistent metric system and report the outcomes.

## Conclusion

The data walk event captured community input on the issues impacting early literacy for the future success of students in Pinellas County. At the conclusion of breakout room sessions, each group reflected on what they learned and reported back to the whole group. Overall themes included:

- ✓ Achieving equitable educational opportunities for all Pinellas students, regardless of race, zip code or socio-economic status should drive community investment.
- ✓ Addressing teacher instructional quality should be inclusive of experience, credentials and compassion.

- ✓ Tackling the multi-faceted challenges impacting early literacy requires strong partnerships and collaboration.
- ✓ Increasing access to resources and technology is critical for equity.
- ✓ Growing access to more robust data systems with feedback to providers to support data-driven improvements allows for better, informed decisions.

Partner organizations, the Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB), the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County (ELC), and the Pinellas County School District (PCS), shared their reflections on what they heard during the data walk. Judith Warren, JWB shared that seeing the challenges of equity underscores the need for funders to better support equity. She shared that the JWB will be seeking ways to promote teacher quality programs and better standardization of curriculum. The JWB will consider funding more direct intervention. Lindsay Carson, ELC, reflected that we are fortunate to have the partners that we do and to be able to dig more deeply into the data. She emphasized that zip code maps are invaluable; we need invest more heavily in target communities and we need to continue to disaggregate data and talk to families. Kevin Hendrick, PCS, stated that collaboration among partners is key to making the next leap forward as a community. He gave kudos to us as a community for having made progress that we have but would like even more partnerships to make even more progress.

Stacy Baier concluded the session by thanking all participants for their time, input, and thoughtfulness. Results of the data walk will be incorporated into an early literacy report as well as a summary going out to all attendees. This will serve as a basis for future work by the Pinellas Education Foundation and partner organizations.