

Advancing Literacy in DeKalb Together: Summary of October 30, 2025 Convening

This document synthesizes the outcomes, key findings, and next steps from the "Setting the Table: Advancing Literacy in DeKalb Together" event on October 30, 2025, drawing from participant discussions and the commitment survey.

Topline Results & Support

- **Attendance and Response:** 94 people attended, with a 44% response rate to the Commitment survey, providing reliable information.
- **Strong Support:** There is strong, county-wide support for a structured, birth through adulthood approach to advancing literacy.
- **Structure & Commitment:** 60% of respondents desire either a **Facilitated Coalition** and/or a **Literacy Council**. 86% committed to attending 75% of meetings, and the majority (47%) prefer to meet **quarterly** (four times a year).
- **Hosts & Stakeholder Engagement:** Five organizations (United Way of Greater Atlanta, GA Piedmont Technical College, Georgia State, Emory Healthcare, and DeKalb Initiative for Children and Families) volunteered to host/convene meetings, in addition to the DeKalb County School District (DCSD). Strong support was evident from DCSD leadership, including the Acting Superintendent and three Board of Education members.

Identified Assets and Strengths

The community possesses numerous assets across multiple domains:

- **Community and Family Support:** Organizations like La Amistad, Corner's Outreach, Los Ninos Primeros, Faith-based partners, United Way, Family Connections, and services like Babies Can't Wait and Talk with Me Baby at hospitals.
- **Educational Institutions and Programs:** Teachers and schools, Pre-K and services for 3-year-olds, Early Childhood Centers, Technical Colleges (including Georgia State University-Clarkston Campus), Georgia State birth to 5 program, Adult Ed Classes, and Family Literacy Programs.
- **Libraries and Literacy Organizations:** Libraries, Library Story Time, Summer Reading Challenge, Children Read Atlanta, First Readers, Literacy and Justice for All consortium, and the DeKalb Library Foundation.
- **Training and Professional Development:** Training from DECAL (Dept. of Early Care and Learning) including free SoR (Science of Reading) trainings, Rollins Center, Leap CCR&R, QCC (Quality Care for Children), and state literacy coaches.
- **Career and Technical Assets:** Career Exploration, 17 CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education) pathways offered by Technical Colleges, Career Academy, Work Source, and Career Ready programs.
- **Healthcare Integration:** Pediatric providers administering books and guidance (Reach Out and Read, 26 sites in DeKalb); Emory Healthcare exploring literacy with prenatal patients.

Opportunities, Needs, and Barriers

The following key needs and barriers were consistently identified across groups:

- **Access to Resources and Information:** Need for more literacy resources for parents in public settings, promotion of programs like Ferst, and providing **translated texts** for students and parents acquiring English.
- **Early Childhood and Childcare:** High cost of childcare, shortage of scholarships, low percentage of Quality-Rated providers, lack of early childhood teachers, and the need for **literacy coaches in childcare** settings.
- **Systemic Barriers: Transportation** is a frequently mentioned need/barrier. The issue of **concentrated poverty** requires community effort, as schools cannot solve poverty alone.
- **Educational and Workforce Needs:** Need for **parent education**, integrating **soft skills** into language, prioritizing **adult education**, and ensuring educators understand **how to teach reading effectively**.
- **Collaboration and Systemic Issues:** Barriers include **fragmented providers** and a need for a comprehensive approach and synergy among district departments.

Alignment, Next Steps, and Commitments

Efforts can be aligned through:

- **Convening and Collaboration:** Developing coalitions to implement programs or support to address shared issues.
- **Partnerships and Workforce Alignment:** Collaborating with industry and community partners to teach workforce-ready skills and offering high-demand pathways.
- **Inclusion and Awareness:** Including families and employers in the discussion, creating a **resource database and referral system**, and building awareness of existing resources.

Specific Suggested Actions and Commitments:

- Promote businesses allocating their tax dollars, receiving a dollar for dollar tax credit, to the [Atlanta Vision Project](#), providing 10,000 students in the 67 DeKalb Title 1 Schools in need a free pair of glasses by 2028
- Encourage reading volunteers to complete the [Impactful Read Alouds in Early Literacy Microcredential](#) to prepare them to appropriately deliver a storytime experience with young children in a way that contributes to a solid foundation for later literacy learning.
- Follow up with the Dekalb team and partners, and seek investments.
- Explore business literacy/tutoring programs (like Creature Comforts in Athens, GA) and community tutoring (like renewing AARP Senior Corps in DeKalb lowest literacy schools).
- Work to bring back "books for babies" programs or bring "Talk with Me Baby" to Emory Decatur Hospital

- Facilitate connections between DCSD Early Care & Learning Center and child care training providers (Leap, QCC) and child care providers to build trust and partnerships.
- Provide subsidies and scholarships to address childcare affordability.
- Secure more State money to address district needs.
- Address the feeling of **disconnect** between available resources and what families receive.

Potential Partners and Missing Stakeholders

Potential Partners:

Businesses and Industry Professionals, Libraries (with Reach Out and Read), CHOA, Junior League, DeKalb Community College, Retired Community, and Recent Graduates.

Missing Stakeholders (Becky's Perspective):

- **The Business Community:** Representatives from CERM and GA Power attended but did not respond to the survey. A business or business organization (e.g., Decide DeKalb, DeKalb Chamber) is needed as a host/convener.
- **The Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy:** They are interested in participating and offer Community Coalition Grants, potentially a \$10,000 grant in March 2026.
- **DeKalb Mayors:** Several mayors participate in "Mayor's Reading Clubs" and could be petitioned for a DeKalb city to be one of five pilot literacy coalition partnerships with the Georgia Municipal Association in 2026.
- **Refugee Serving, Language Diverse non-profits:** Such as Galeo and Latin American Association.
- **Goodwill**
- **AARP:** They sponsored a tutoring program in DeKalb from 2019–2024.

Proposed Next Steps:

- **The DSEF and DCSD approves sending out this summary**, along with a link to the slides, a list of all attendees, with organization, title and email address, to all attendees as well as those originally invited who couldn't attend
- **Proposal One: DCSD convenes their key staff** (Chief Academic Officer, Director of Literacy, Director of Partnerships, Grant Writer, Director of Early Care and Learning, Director of CTAE) to work with Becky, Kymberlee and Deb Page to discuss findings and agree on the format, date, and goals of next meeting. Key Question - Does DCSD want to work towards being a Literacy and Justice for All school district?
- **Proposal Two: Becky invites nine partner/host/convener contacts/organizations** (DSEF, DCSD, United Way, GA State, GA Piedmont Tech College, Emory Healthcare, DECAL and DeKalb Initiative for Children and Families, DeKalb Co Human Services) to **schedule a 60 - 90 minute virtual meeting in early January** to discuss the findings and agree on the format, date and goals of the next large group meeting in late January or early February.
 - We will review a draft of a proposed DeKalb Literacy Council as well as a

Wireframe for a DeKalb Literacy Collaborative for discussion and decide if we do both and how that would work, or if we do one or the other

- Decide on the groupings: Birth - PreK, K - 8th, Adolescent and Adult, Non-Native English speakers? High School/Tech?, Community
- in Jan/Feb is for a 3 hour meeting where we break into facilitated groups and spend time with the data and decide on 3 priorities per grouping. We could focus on the Lexile Scores Heat Map and create a
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- The DeKalb Literacy Initiative participates in a meaningful way in the DeKalb Chamber Education and Workforce week March 23-27
- The DeKalb Literacy Initiative (through DCSD grant writer) applies for a Community Coalition Grant for \$10,000 from the Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy in March 2026

Addendum:

Assets & Strengths, Opportunities/Needs/Barriers from October 30th, 2025 By Group
Setting the Table: Advancing Literacy in DeKalb Together

Groups: I. Birth - Pre-K, II. K- 8th, III. High School/Career, IV. Community

- I. **Birth - Pre-K: (3 tables, under Facilitators Gary Bingham from Georgia State, Ellyn Cochran from QCC, Quality Care for Children, and Regina Little from DECAL, Dept. of Early Care and Learning)**

Assets and Strengths in Birth - Pre-K:**Existing Library Resources/Support:**

- Learning Spaces and offerings for families 0 to 5 at the public library
- Summer Reading Challenge from the library (includes adults!)
- Library Story Time

Quality/Programmatic/Training Assets:

- QR providers that are addressing quality (both QR and NAEYC) programs
- Trained pediatricians through Reach Out and Read (26 sites in DeKalb)
- Pre-K and services for 3 year olds
- Literacy coaches from the state working with elementary schools
- Georgia State birth to 5 program to train educators (Certificate and preparation program)
- DECAL Community Coordinators (Birth to 8 virtual)
- Training: DECAL - Free SoR trainings - (parents, teachers, ALL) and literacy training required for all licensed programs
- Rollins
- Teacher Prep Students at Tech Schools & Universities
- Technical colleges in DEKALB
- Georgia State University-Clarkston Campus
- Technical colleges. TCSG Family Literacy
- Two generation (scottsdale early learning)
- Ready Schools
- Refugee Women's group and New Pathways (resettlement programs)
- QCC (Child care resources and referral LEEP)
- Leap CCR&R, QCC
- DeKalb County special education (Coralwood?)? Marcus center? Frazer Center supporting

- children with special needs
- Family Child care
- Reach out and Read
- Children Read Atlanta
- Ferst Readers

Community and System-Level Resources:

- 877 ALL GA Kids to help families find child care in their communities
- DeKalb Chamber of Commerce
- Family Connections?
- Churches
- Summer Reading Challenge from the library (includes adults!)
- Georgia State birth to 5 program to train educators (Certificate and preparation program)
- 877 ALL GA Kids to help families find child care in their communities

Opportunities and Needs (Barriers and Gaps)

Opportunities include leveraging churches, especially among immigrant and refugee communities.

Identified Needs/Gaps focus on:

- Literacy resources in multiple languages.
- Transportation assistance for accessing literacy events and resources.
- Support for the Early Childhood Workforce.
- Increased collaboration.
- More investment in evidence-based home visiting programs.
- Libraries needing more resources to support families not in formal care.
- More literacy coaches in childcare settings.(for example, see Quality Care for Children/Literacy and Justice For all - work being done in Marietta and APS)

Barriers include:

- The high cost of childcare and a lack of sufficient scholarships/subsidies.
- The threat of Head Start closure.
- Concentrated poverty requiring student reassignment across zones.
- Families struggling to access PreK due to needing English and technology skills for application forms.
- A shortage of licensed childcare providers and not enough providers being Quality Rated (only 65%).
- A lack of early childhood teachers.

Suggested actions to improve literacy and access include:

- Providing subsidies and scholarships to address childcare affordability.
- Promoting literacy resources like Ferst in public settings and childcare programs.
- Having library representatives at churches to sign up families for library cards and resources.

- Utilizing Rec Centers and sports leagues as distribution points for resources.
- Increasing non-profit presence at school-based literacy events.
- Using CCR&R (Child Care Resource & Referral) to distribute promotions in licensed childcare programs.
- Educating parents on the requirements for high-quality childcare.
- Implementing a system to use student IDs instead of library cards to streamline access.

How Can We Align Our Efforts?

Convening and collaborating and having conversations around needs, and development coalitions that implement programs or support to address a shared issue.

Themes from Participants:

- We have many resources and opportunities to connect services that can organize our efforts.
- Utilize present non-profits and business partners; business support for literacy in licensed CC, churches, clubs groups that serve young children; shared file of resources.
- There is a feeling of disconnect from what is available to families.
- Partnership between the early learning community and DeKalb schools is critical.
- There are a lot of great things, but not the resources to bring to scale

Potential Partners or Coalition Ideas:

- Businesses that exist in DeKalb and can be more involved in volunteering, supporting, and volunteering our initiatives.
- Support literacy efforts in DeKalb CC programs; promote Ferst in CC programs
- Libraries with Reach out And Read

Suggestions and Ideas:

- It would be helpful to send out a list of participants and their contact information. There wasn't time to get everyone connected. You may want to create separate taskforce members around shared topics.
- School system should bring together those who provide training to child care (Leap, QCC) in DeKalb along with child care providers, to build trust and create partnerships

II. Kindergarten - 8th: (2 large tables worked together as one group under Facilitator Stacey Wallen, Rollins Center for Language and Literacy)

Assets and Strengths:

- Community and Family Support:
 - La Amistad
 - Corner's Outreach
 - Los Ninos Primeros
 - Faith based partners
 - United Way
 - Colleges/Universities
- State Teacher/Coash Support:
 - Growing Readers
 - Let's Read Georgia

- RESA
- PK Programs - DECAL Summer Transition
- School Choice
- Rotary Club of Atlanta

Opportunities and Needs (Barriers and Gaps)

- Teaching students to develop a LOVE for reading to include opportunities for parents/guardians to understand this concept, especially when reading is not a component of their culture
- Teaching literature in totality not excerpts
- Ensure balance between classroom and media centers - collaboration between teachers and teacher librarians to ensure students have access to texts that they can read independently
- Ensure that students have access to educators who understand how to teach reading and use resources to improve the love of reading while learning how to read and reading to learn.
- Commitment of every educator and adult in a student's life to be a lifelong learner
- Providing translated texts as students and parents acquire English skills and language
- Parent Education
- Literacy Coaches in every building
- Developing a comprehensive approach. Develop synergy among departments at the district level.
- Acquiring literacy skills is a civil rights issue!!!
- Need tutoring from Community

III. High School and Career (Two Tables under Facilitators Mrs. Doryane Gunter and April Smith from DeKalb County School District and Mary Baxter, GA Piedmont Technical College)

Assets and Strengths:

- Career Exploration
- Enhancement of Technical Skills
- Preparation for the next transition, leading to College, Career, Military, Entrepreneurship
 - Technical Colleges Offer 17 CTAE pathways
 - Level 1 Class, Curriculum Diversity/Soft Skills
- Technical Colleges
- Libraries
- Career Academy
- Different HS Models
- Work Source
- Adult Ed Classes
- Career Ready
- Family Literacy Programs

Opportunities and Needs (Barriers and Gaps)

- Opportunities for CTAE (Career, Technical and Agricultural Education)courses/Advanced Classes/1B
- Skill Based Options
- ELH/CTAE Collaboration
- Work Based Learning Opportunities

- Incorporating Soft Skills into language
- Mentoring
- Wrap-around services
- Prioritizing Adult Education along with K-12
- Services for Low Literacy Adults
- Community Partnerships (faith based, etc) to address needs
- Employer Buy in/Apprenticeships with literacy components
- Soft Skills

How Can We Align Our Efforts?

- Collaborating with industry and community partnerships.
- Teaching students workforce-ready skills.
- Offering high-demand educational pathways.
- Involving families and employers in the discussion.
- Creating a resource database.
- Developing a referral system.
- Building awareness of existing resources.

Themes:

- Exposure is essential
- Life Skills
- Teaching employability skills

Potential Partners:

- Industry Professionals
- Recent Graduates
- Retirees

Suggestions And Ideas:

- Parent Engagement
- Community/Industry Engagement

IV. Community: (one table under Facilitator Beth Jansa from Emory Healthcare)

Assets and Strengths:

- Large group on 10/30/25 shows there is latent capacity in many areas
- DeKalb Literacy Foundation can become the "foundation" for DeKalb efforts
- Atlanta Speech School, Rollins, Cox Campus. Leverage this wonderful asset.
- Deal Center
- GA Literacy Council. A powerful group including State Legislators

Opportunities and Needs (Barriers and Gaps)

- Large populations of adults with low literacy (10-30% of GA Adults)
- Low literacy causes poverty, and student basic needs may not be met by family
- Fragmented providers. Difficulty navigating literacy, education, and basic needs. Better identification of local assets across the lifecycle: GOSA should own
- Transportation to providers
- Finish GA State Literacy Plan, GOA and Literacy Council

Themes:

- Greater relationships between schools and their neighborhoods. (See "Communities and Schools" for a template.)
- More prenatal care and literacy learning for mothers.
- Birthing Hospitals should be active.

Potential Partners or Coalition Ideas:

- CHOA
- GMA
- Junior League
- Business Community

Suggestions and Ideas:

- Business Literacy/Tutoring programs (e.g., Creature Comforts in Athens, GA)
- Lessons from Get Georgia Reading and GA Family Connection Partnership
- Continuity and Sustainability for programs that start but have leadership turnover
- Get more State money for district needs!