

# Accelerated Literacy

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**One District. One Goal. Every Child.**



# A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS GETTING BACK TO BASICS

## **Our Strength is Our Team**

**Atlanta's students will have effective and engaged teachers, leaders, and staff.**

- Increase concentration of highly-effective teachers and leaders
- Prioritize engagement and retention for staff
- Grow and promote strong teachers, leaders, and staff

## **Our Responsibility Is Shared**

**Atlanta's students will have supportive families, communities, and partners.**

- Build meaningful partnerships
- Expand Atlanta Partners for Education (APFE) impact
- Increase access and engagement for families and communities

## **Our System Is Efficient & Effective**

**Atlanta's students will have the schools and resources they need to succeed.**

- Maximize facility usage for the student and community good
- Leverage data to drive strategic financial investments
- Implement sustainability initiatives

## **We Are Strengthening Our Instructional Core**

**Atlanta's students will have high-quality instruction, materials, and targeted support.**

- Implement high-quality, relevant, and engaging instructional materials and professional learning in all core content areas
- Target resources towards subgroups (eg. exceptional education, English learners, economically-disadvantaged)
- Accelerate early learning

## **We Are Caring For Every Child**

**Atlanta's students will have trusted, supportive adults meeting their unique needs.**

- Expand strategies that reduce chronic absenteeism and disproportionate discipline
- Implement systematic culture and climate strategies
- Increase student access to trusted and reliable adults (eg. mentors, coaches, counselors)

## **We Are Sparking Student Curiosity**

**Atlanta's students will have access to explore and expand their passions and interests.**

- Promote robust arts, athletics, world language, and enrichment offerings
- Expand access to high-interest and workforce-ready offerings (e.g. career programs and pathways, advanced coursework)
- Explore specialized and innovative school models (eg. School of the Arts)

# Historical Outlook

# Our Current Reality

Housing Crisis Disproportionately Burdens Black Residents in Atlanta

46%

Black Atlantans remain cost-burdened spending almost half of their income on housing.

Growing Income Gap Between Black and White Households

\$38,854 vs \$114,195

Black Households

White Households

\$75,341

Despite income gains for both groups, the income gap between White and Black households widened by an additional \$3,529.

Employment Gaps Have Narrowed Significantly

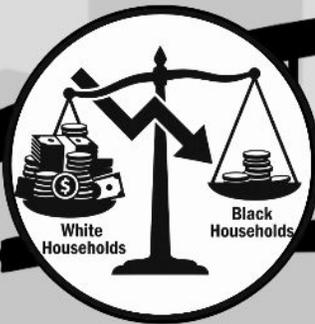
↑ 12%

The employment rate for Black residents grew by 12 percentage points since 2013.

Atlanta Public Schools graduation rate tops 90% for first time in 2025

90%

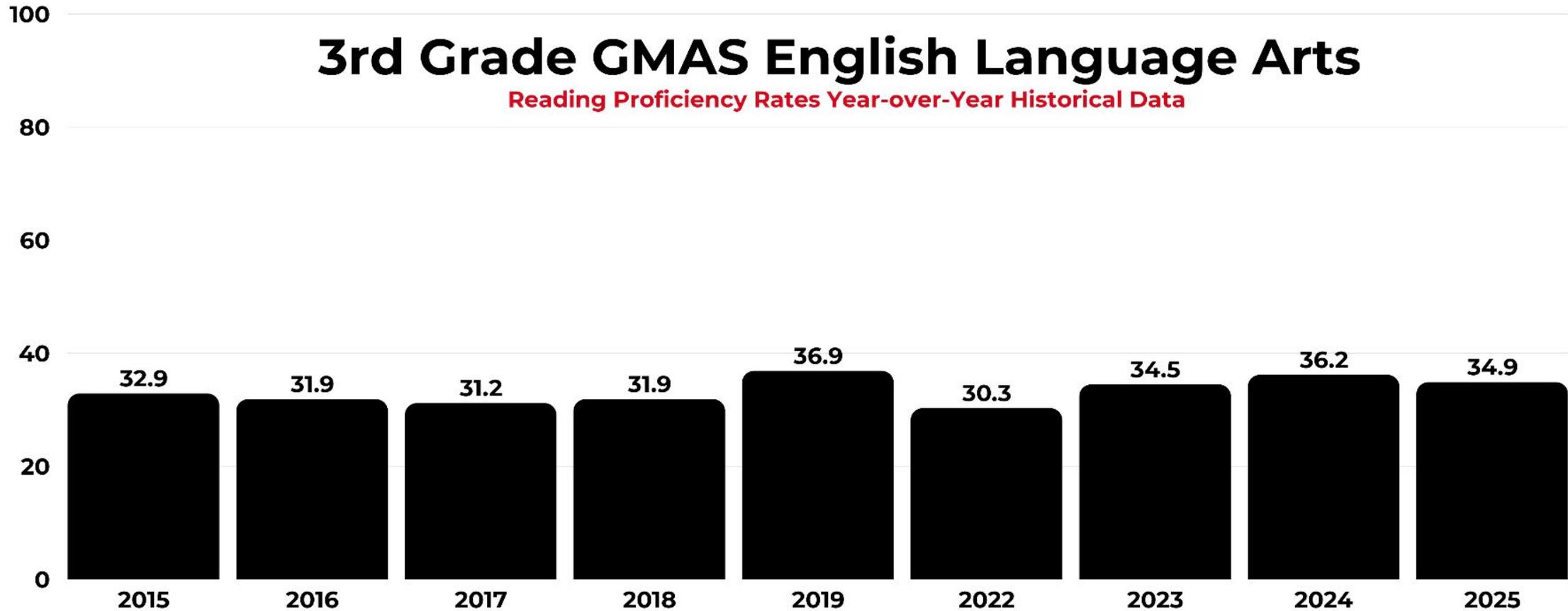
On-time graduation rate climbed from 59% in 2014 to 87% in 2023, the highest on record. Most student groups now graduate at 80–97%, narrowing long-standing gaps.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimates (2009-2013, 2013-2017, 2017-2021).

# 10-Year Trend: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency

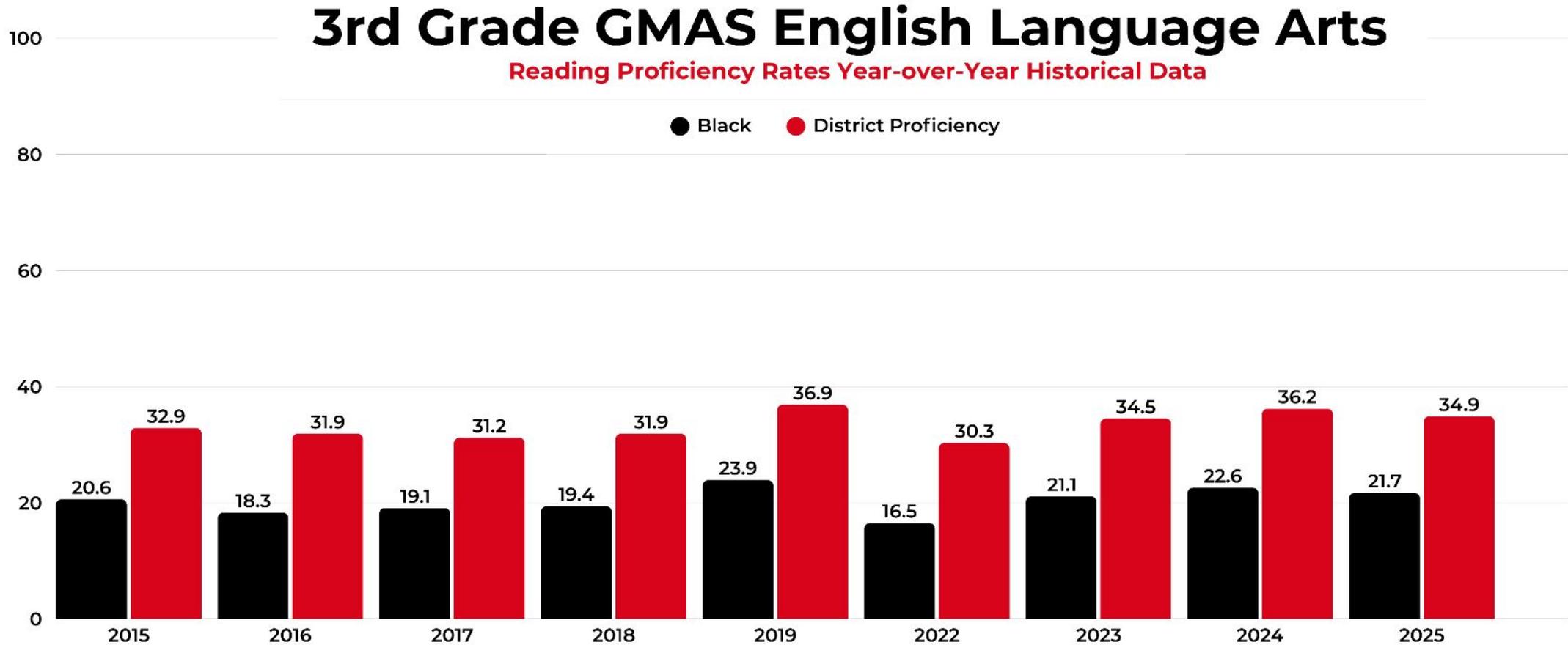
For a decade, 3rd grade proficiency scores have remained stagnant; we have an early literacy problem.



\* GMAS ELA proficiency is the % of students demonstrating readiness in reading and writing as measured by the Georgia Milestones ELA assessment.

# The Proficiency Gap: A Ten-Year View

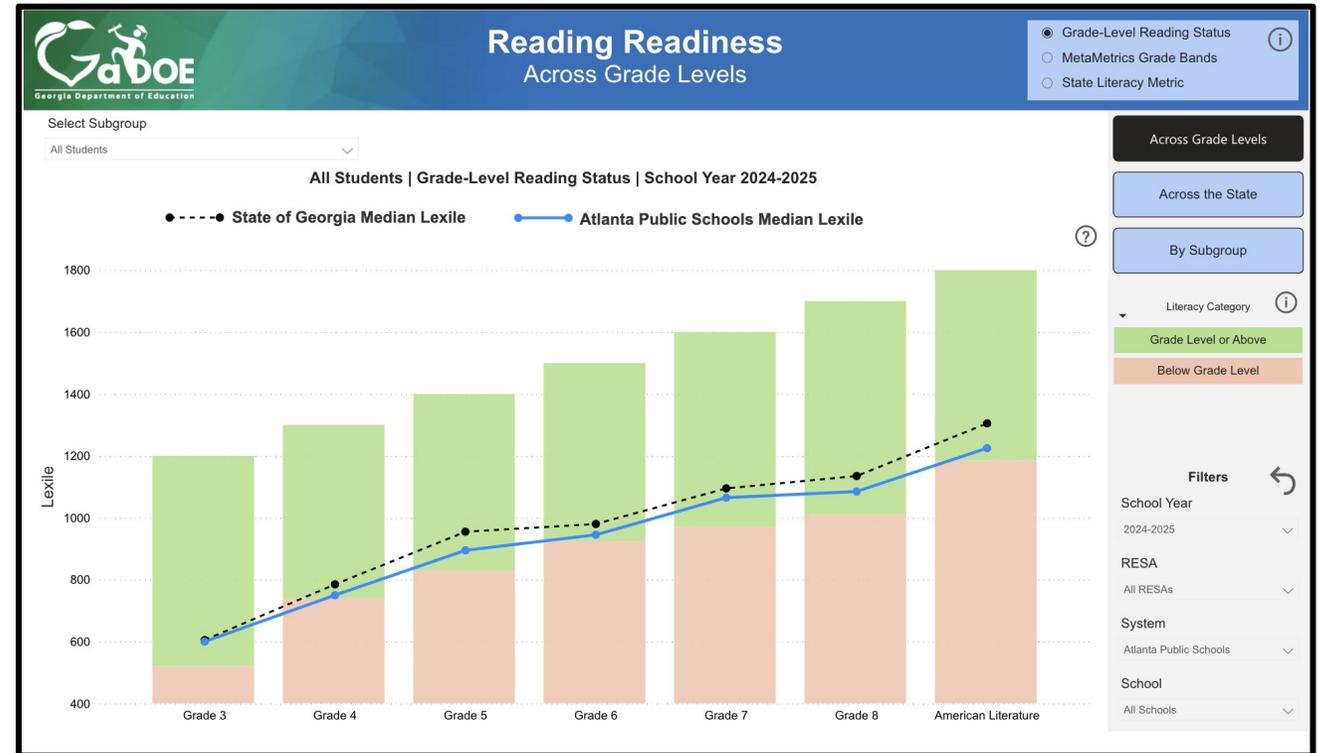
Black students make up nearly 70% of the student population and are performing at alarmingly low levels of proficiency.



# What is Reading Readiness?

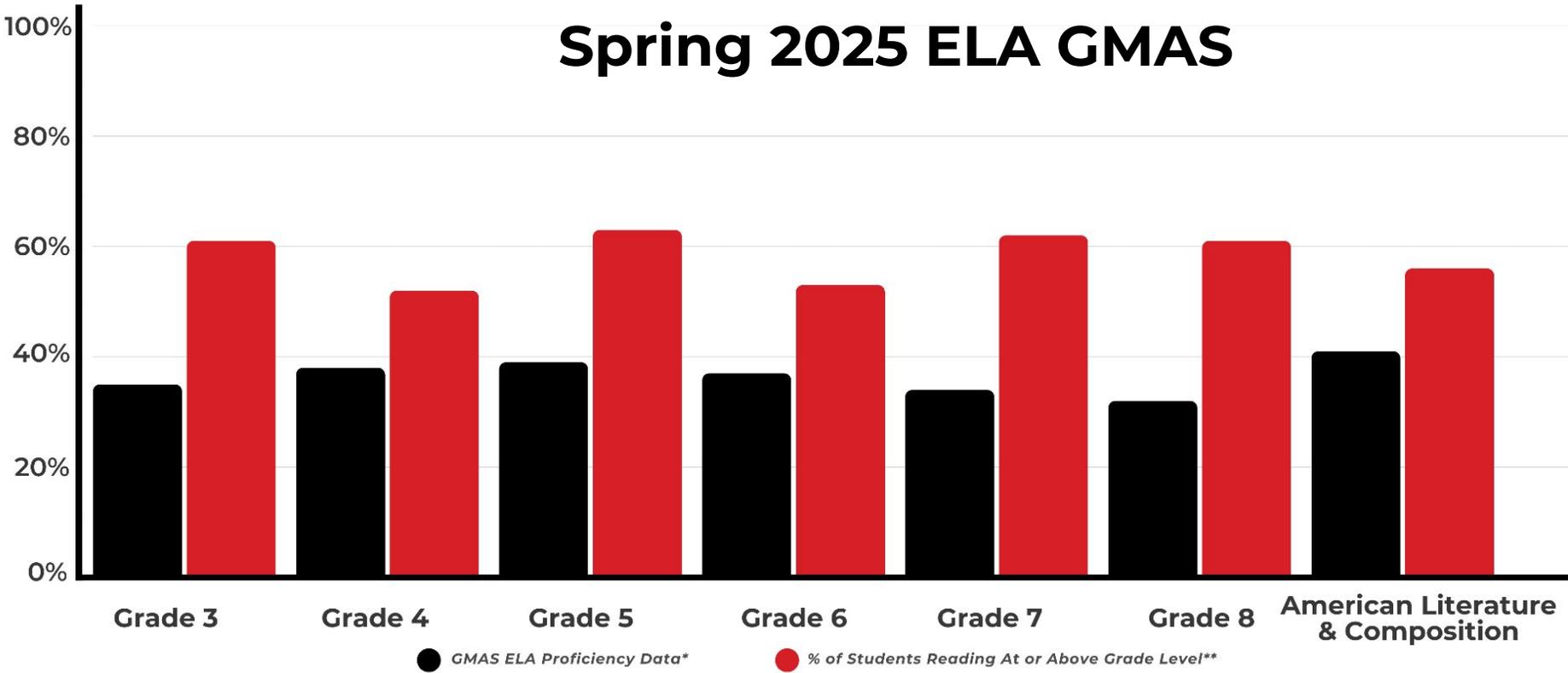
A metric used to identify students reading below, at, or above grade level.

Students who participate in the Georgia Milestones ELA assessments receive a Lexile measure and a reading status of below grade level or grade level or above based on their achievement in the Interpreting Texts domain of the assessment. A student receives a reading status of grade level or above if their Lexile measure is at or above the minimum Lexile score for the college and career range.



# APS Reading Data: A Comparative View of GMAS ELA Proficiency & Reading Readiness

There is a noticeable gap between GMAS ELA proficiency and Reading Readiness.

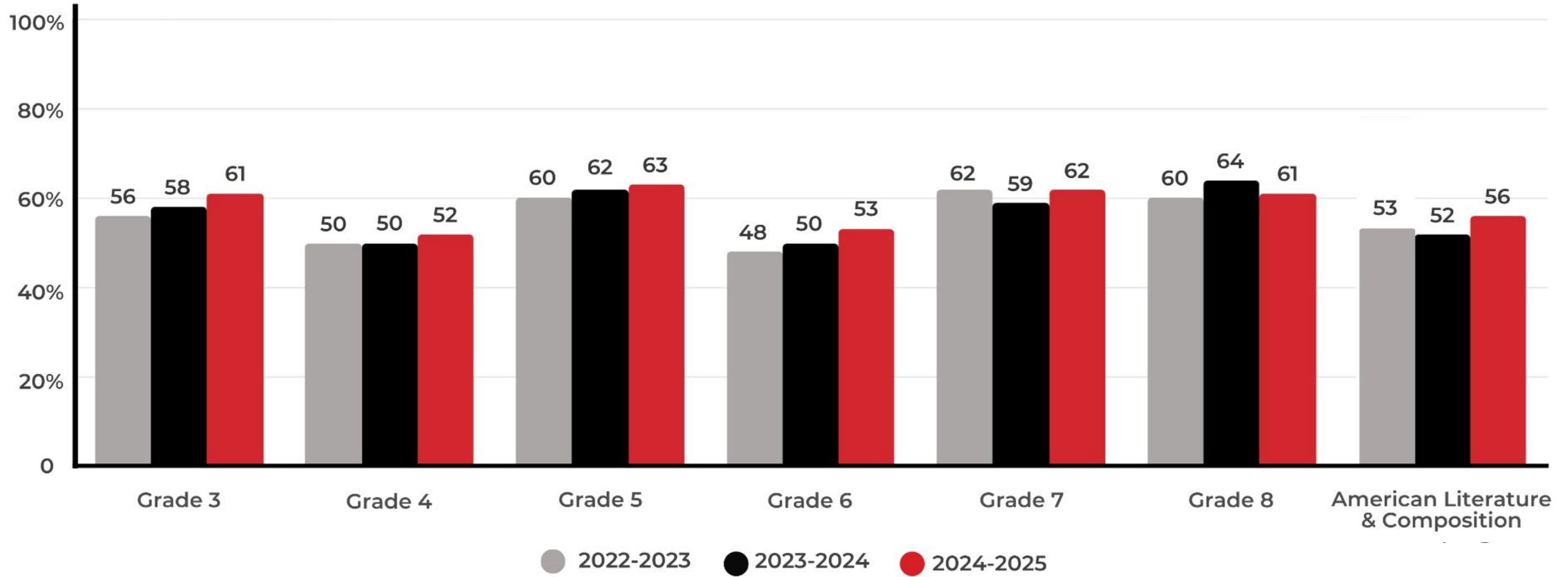


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# APS Reading Readiness: Percentage of Students at or Above Grade Level (3-Year Trend)

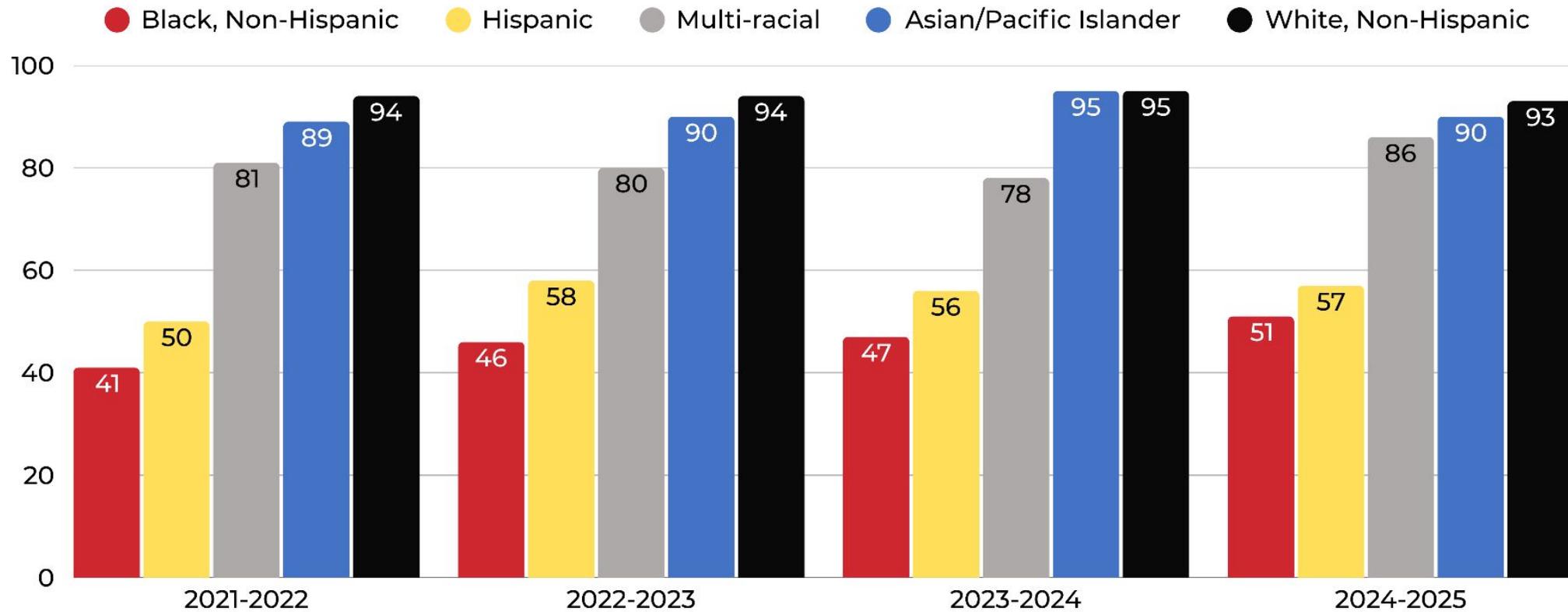
3rd-grade readiness reflects incremental gains year-over-year.



# APS Reading Readiness

Percentage of 3rd Grade Students at or Above Grade Level **(Four-Year Trend by Student Groups)**

**Despite incremental gains, significant disparities persist among student groups when disaggregated by ethnicity.**



# APS Reading Readiness

Percentage of Students at or Above Grade Level **(Regional)**

In 3rd grade, APS is performing within the median range of metro Atlanta districts and above comparable districts.

GRADE/COURSE		CLAYTON COUNTY	COBB COUNTY	DECATUR CITY	DEKALB COUNTY	DOUGLAS COUNTY	FULTON COUNTY	GWINNETT COUNTY	MARIETTA CITY
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	61%	46%	70%	88%	53%	60%	75%	67%	70%
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	52%	41%	63%	84%	44%	53%	70%	61%	62%
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American Literature	56%	54%	78%	88%	62%	61%	75%	70%	70%

Investments have begun  
to yield **positive** trends

# Our Literacy Commitment to All

Investments have begun to yield **positive** trends.

## The Current Landscape

- **High-Quality Instructional Materials**
  - Foundations,
  - Flyleaf
  - Heggerty
- **Personnel & Coaching**
  - Readers are Leaders Coaches
  - Cox Campus Incentives
  - Training in the Science of Reading
- **Professional Learning**
  - Teaching & Learning Thursdays
  - Instructional Coaches Academy
  - Just in Time Training
- **Specialized Cohorts**
  - Dyslexia
  - Orton Gillingham,
  - Reading Endorsement,

## The Strategic Shift

- **Strategic Recruitment:**
  - Hiring for fidelity to evidence-based practices.
- **Intensive PL:**
  - Ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction.

### What This Means

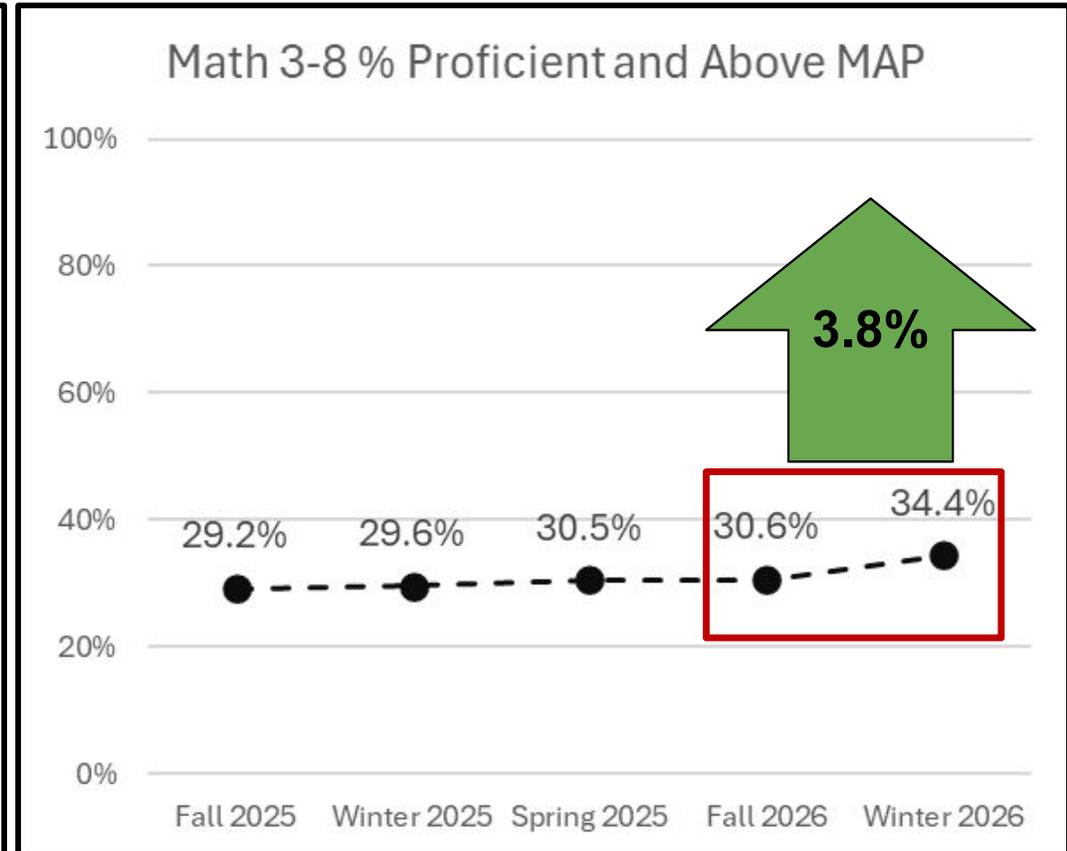
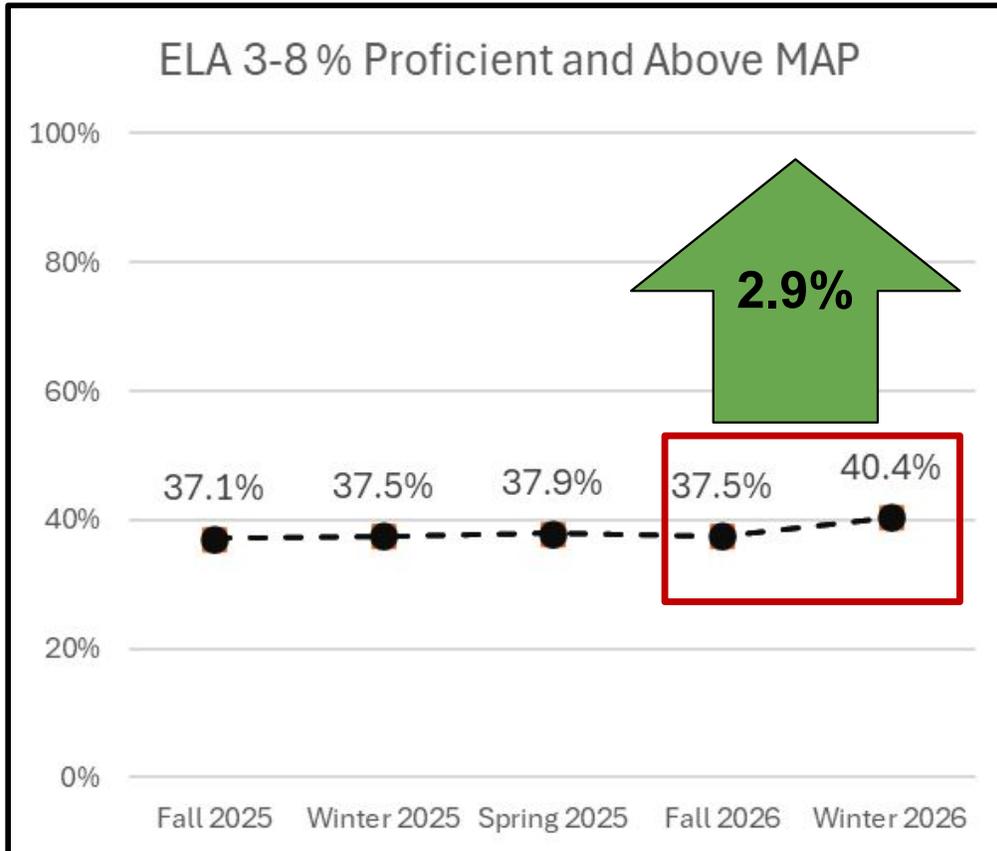
Our data tells a clear story: we're making progress, but it remains incremental. To accelerate student achievement, we need to build on our current back-to-basics approach in literacy instruction rooted in the Science of Reading.

## Standards of Service

- **Aligned Instruction:**
  - Mandatory use of high-quality instructional materials aligned to the Science of Reading.
- **Explicit Instruction:**
  - Continued implementation of the APS instructional framework.
  - District-wide professional learning plan on literacy practices
- **Professional Learning**
  - Ongoing Cox Campus/ GA Learns modules.
  - Training for literacy coaches
- **Mandatory OG:**
  - Orton-Gillingham training for all PreK-1 teachers

# Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Improvement by Testing Window

Fall-to-Winter comparisons show positive growth in both Math and English Language Arts



# Acceleration Will Require **Even Bolder Moves** and Investments

# WHAT IS THE APS LITERACY COUNCIL?

## ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS LITERACY COUNCIL

The purpose of the Atlanta Public Schools Literacy Council is to unite district leaders, educators, researchers, and community partners to address persistent literacy gaps by designing and advancing an innovative, research-based approach to accelerating early literacy outcomes. Through collaborative analysis of data, alignment to best practices, and shared accountability, the council works to strengthen instruction, inform decision-making, and ensure every APS student is positioned for long-term academic success

### THE COUNCIL A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

**01  
Community  
Leaders**  
Literacy  
organizations  
bringing expertise  
and lived  
experience

**02  
School  
Leaders**  
Thought  
leaders  
ensuring  
evidence-based  
practices

**03  
United  
Partners**  
Building on  
the work  
our city has  
already  
invested in

**04  
District  
Leaders**  
APS leadership  
committed to  
implementation  
& sustainability

### THE GUIDING QUESTION

How might we design a breakthrough PK-3 school model that ensures every APS student reads proficiently by third grade?

- **Build on existing literacy efforts** already underway across Atlanta
- **Examine promising practices** from successful local and national models
- **Identify essential components** of a high-quality early literacy ecosystem
- **Develop recommendations** grounded in the Science of Reading, structured literacy, and culturally responsive practices

### 3rd Grade GMAS English Language Arts Proficiency



**A DECADE OF DATA**  
For over a decade, Atlanta Public Schools has grappled with a persistent and deeply consequential challenge: early literacy achievement.

# What We Learned

On December 11th, the Atlanta Public Schools Literacy Council convened to strengthen early literacy outcomes. We studied school systems with improved literacy outcomes and identified common moves that show up consistently. In an effort to align strategy, evidence-based practices, and guide the design of an Accelerated Literacy Model focused on Pre-K through Grade 3.

## What We're Already Doing

- ✓ Investing in literacy coaching and professional learning
- ✓ Using multiple data sources to identify needs and gaps
- ✓ Implementing high-quality instructional materials
- ✓ Aligning time, staffing, and resources to early literacy priorities

## Innovative Opportunities

### Stability Through Expertise

Ensure students with the greatest early literacy need are taught by proven literacy experts and interventionists, and provide compensation aligned with expertise, expectations, to retention teachers and provide the stability students need.

### Professional Learning

Expand job embedded coaching cycles, collaborative walkthroughs, frequent modeling, and rapid feedback loops tied to high impact practices.

### Use Data in Real Time

Collect actionable data early and use it to adjust instruction

### Strategic Design Priorities

Offer protected extended, uninterrupted literacy blocks in every Pre-K-3 classroom

### Make Literacy Joyful

Build instruction around engagement, interest, and relationships

### Start Early

Partner with parents, expand Pre-K, and intensify PreK-3 supports to accelerate literacy

# What is an Accelerated Literacy Model

## Accelerated Literacy Model (noun)

**Ac·cel·er·at·ed Lit·er·a·cy Mod·el** | \ ik-'se-lə-  
,rā-təd 'li-tə-rə-sē 'mä-dəl \

**1** : A high-intensity instructional model designed to fast-track foundational literacy skills in Pre-K through 3rd-grade students, prioritizing achievement and high-quality Tier 1 instruction grounded in the Science of Reading. **2** : A school design characterized by the rigorous alignment of specialized expertise, adaptive scheduling, intensive training, and caring culture.



# What Makes This Approach Different?

## Literacy Focused Staffing

Select and retain Pre-K-3 classroom teachers, IRR teachers, and EIP teachers who demonstrate advanced literacy practice, proven impact on student outcomes, and commitment to extended professional learning.

## Instructional Day & Week Redesign

Redesign the instructional day and week to protect literacy as the highest priority, including extended or multiple literacy blocks for structured, explicit, and systematic instruction.

## Intensive Professional Learning

Require a minimum of 200 hours of literacy training through summer institutes, job-embedded coaching, and ongoing development aligned to the Science of Reading.

## Expeditionary & Experiential Learning

Provide students with enriched exposure opportunities, including field experiences and early exploration of career pathways that build background knowledge, language, and motivation to read.

# Accelerated Literacy Model Summary

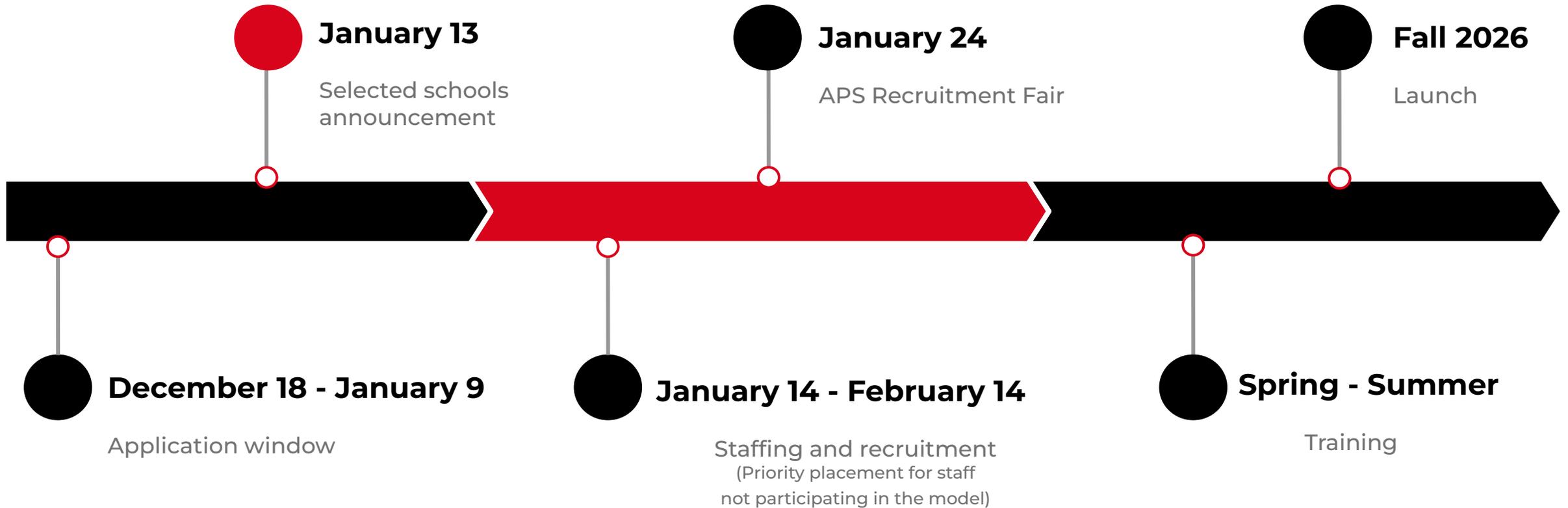
## What We're Launching

- The Accelerated Literacy Model in Fall 2026.
- A comprehensive instructional redesign (not a program).
- Built with defined expectations for staffing, training, instruction, and student outcomes.
- Grounded in the Science of Reading: structured literacy, explicit instruction, and deep reading development.

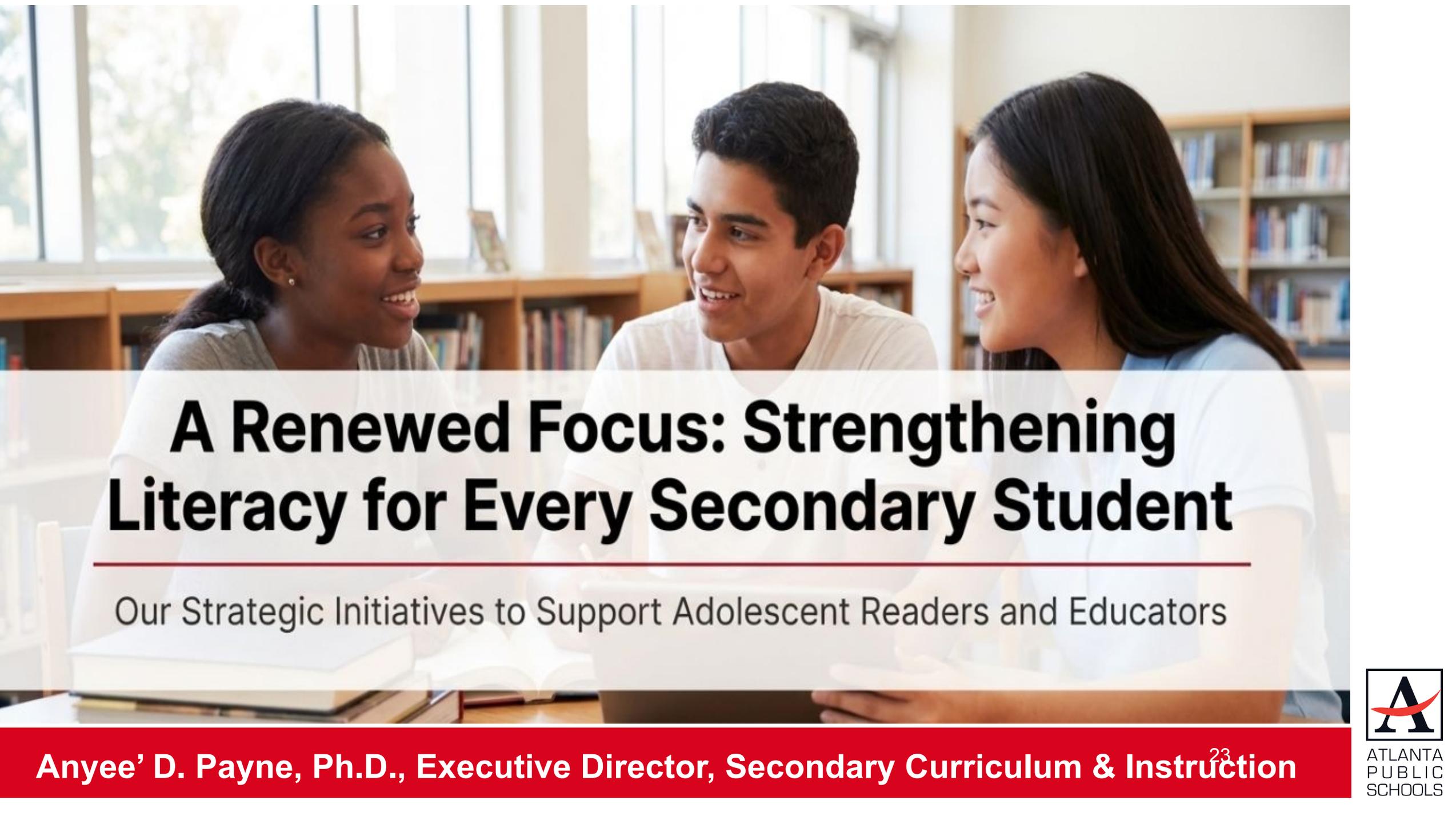
## What's Required

- Staffing changes may be required to meet literacy-expert expectations.
- A three-year commitment.
- Professional learning (200 hours/year).
- Clear performance expectations and ongoing monitoring
- Eligible staff receive \$20,000 above base pay tied to defined commitments.

# Next Steps



# Adolescent Literacy



# A Renewed Focus: Strengthening Literacy for Every Secondary Student

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Our Strategic Initiatives to Support Adolescent Readers and Educators

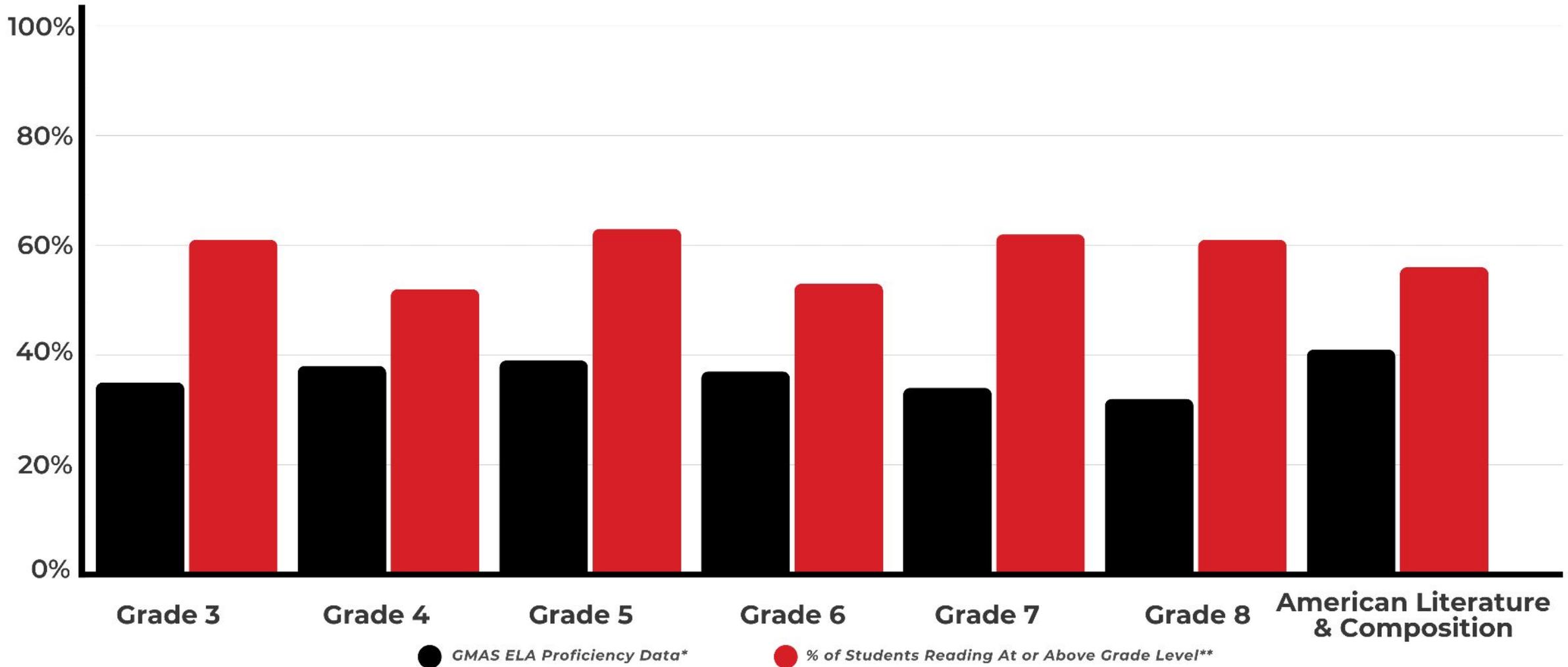
**Anyee' D. Payne, Ph.D., Executive Director, Secondary Curriculum & Instruction<sup>23</sup>**



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# APS Reading Data Comparison

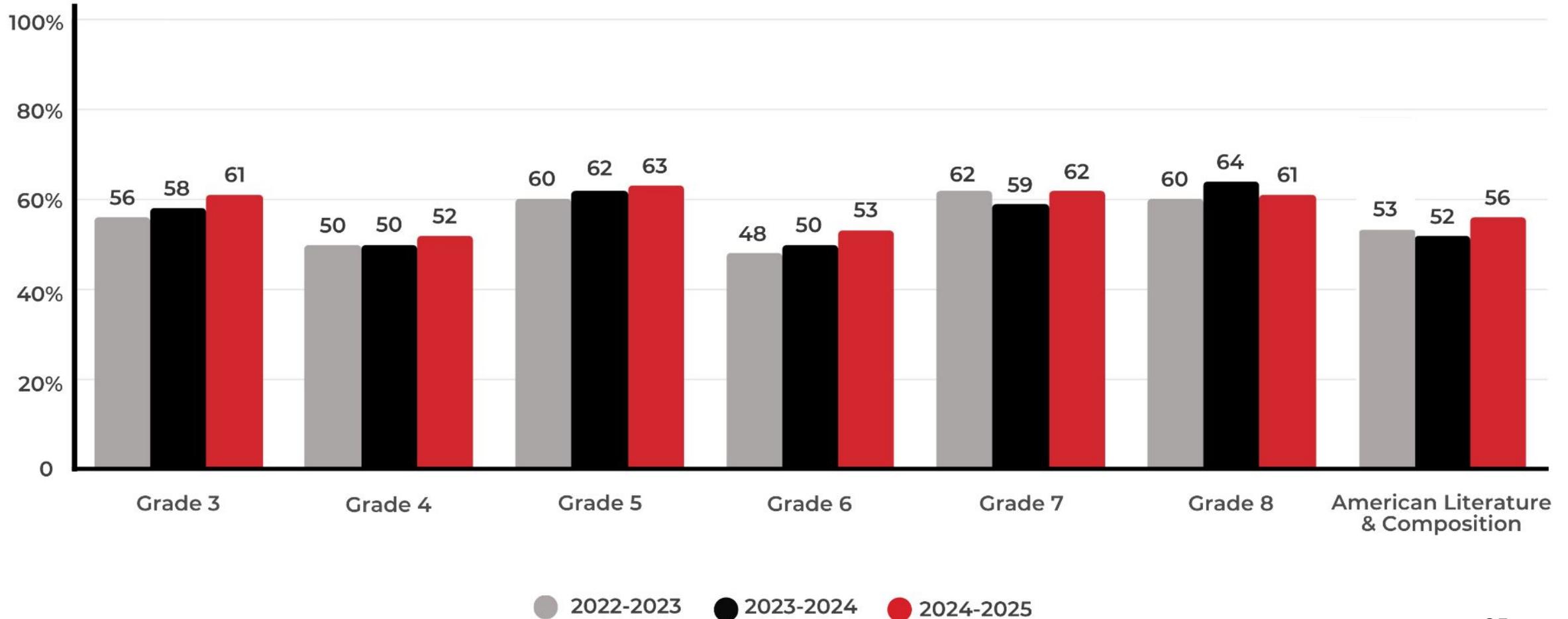
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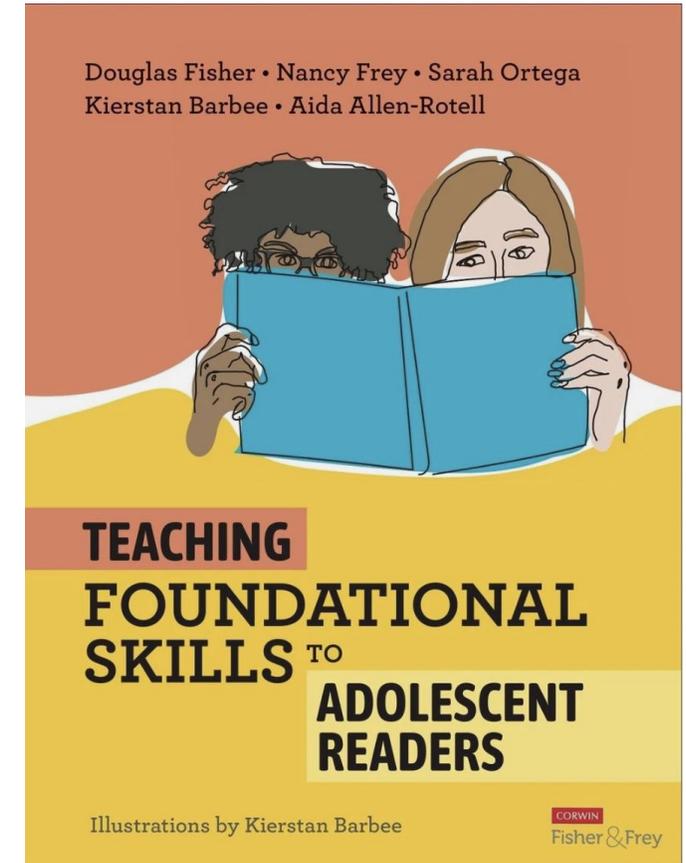
# The Challenge is Clear: Literacy Gaps Persist Beyond Elementary School

We fully recognize that literacy deficits persist in our middle and high schools, and that educators often **lack the time, space, and specialized training** required to address these gaps effectively.

# It's Never Too Late: We Must Adapt, Not Abandon, Foundational Skills for Older Students

“**Foundational reading instruction doesn't stop in elementary school. It must be adapted, not abandoned, for older students.**”

- National data suggests a strong need to reinforce the reading skills of adolescent readers.
- Reading struggles in adolescence are not rare; they're often just hidden in plain sight.



# Early Successes Show Our Strategy is Working

Targeted middle school efforts are already moving the needle.

## Our Actions

- ✓ Implemented High-Quality Instructional Materials (HMH Into Literature)
- ✓ Provided monthly training for instructional coaches
- ✓ Piloted targeted support programs like CourseMojo

## The Results

We have seen **decreases in the beginning categories of MAP** and **increases in proficient and distinguished** in the area of reading.

Invictus	↑	57% Beginning, -7.6% change	Bunche	↑	47% Beginning, -2.5% change
Young	↑	47% Beginning, -2.0% change	Sylvan	↑	45% Beginning, -10.5% change
Howard	↑	12% Beginning, -1.5% change	CSK	↑	21% Beginning, -3.9% change
Sutton	↑	19% Beginning, -2.2% change	BEST MS/HS	↑	27% Beginning, -7.6% change
Long	↑	47% Beginning, -4.2% change	H Russell	↑	46% Beginning, -6.5% change
Bunche	↑	47% Beginning, -2.5% change	King	↑	34% Beginning, -2.6% change

These results give us the confidence to be bolder in our approach and scale our efforts with intensive interventions like Reading Futures.

# A Synergistic Solution: APS's Tiered Literacy Support

## Tier 3: Reading Futures - Deep, Intensive Intervention

For students with significant difficulties who are multiple years below grade level.

Live, online instruction

Expert teachers

Specialized, evidence-based curriculum

## Tier 2: CourseMojo - Broad, Targeted Support

For students needing support within core instruction to reinforce grade-level skills.

AI-enhanced tools

Small-group tutoring

Integrated directly into the classroom

## Tier 1: Core Instruction

Universal, high-quality instruction for all students in the general education classroom.



# Sustainable & Data-Driven Path Forward



## A Commitment to What Works

We will continue to review student data closely to drive targeted responses and supports for schools. Our goal is to implement literacy solutions that are both **high-impact and practical** for educators to use.



## Fiscal Responsibility

We acknowledge the current budget constraints. Both of these pilot initiatives — CourseMojo and Reading Futures — are being fully supported through **philanthropic partnerships**. This ensures our schools and receive these critical resources without adding financial strain to the district.



# **Every Student Deserves a Reading Future.**

**Our commitment is to provide every secondary student with  
the literacy skills needed for success in school and in life.**



# Questions & Answers



# Thank You!

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