

## Every Child Reads, Year 2

Completed July 2023

### Background

In 2021, Fulton County Schools (FCS) implemented Every Child Reads (ECR) as a new campaign to "recover" literacy learning in response to educational challenges and disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. ECR focuses on improving literacy instruction in FCS through evidence-based instructional practices and materials and concentrates on the National Reading Panel's "Five Pillars of Reading," which includes phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

At the elementary level, the ECR initiative focuses on intentional instruction based on the five pillars of reading. LETRS professional learning efforts, textbook and program adoptions, and district curricular documents support these. At the secondary level, the emphasis is on standards-based ELA instruction and explicit vocabulary and comprehension instruction.

This evaluation aimed to gain insight into teachers' interactions with different elements of the initiative. The evaluation also focused on support and the obstacles encountered in delivering high-quality reading instruction to all students. Furthermore, the district wanted to have information about RELA teachers' understanding of the requirements of the initiative's components and their confidence in effectively utilizing resources provided by the district. By exploring these inquiries, district leaders can precisely understand critical areas that require attention to drive educational improvements in literacy district-wide.

The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) contracted Gibson Consulting to conduct this evaluation. The findings in this brief were abbreviated from their Evaluation Report.

### Evaluation Questions

- 1) What relationships, structures, and processes are in place to support the implementation of the ECR campaign?
- 2) What are RELA teachers' beliefs and priorities regarding the relationships, structures, and processes in place to support the implementation of the ECR campaign?
- 3) How do RELA teachers understand the expectations around the elements of the ECR campaign?
- 4) How do RELA teachers rate their self-efficacy in implementing District-provided literacy resources?

### Methodology and Data

#### Methodology

The team conducted a series of qualitative and quantitative data collection activities to answer the research questions. Gibson developed a series of six longitudinal RELA focus groups (Literacy Advisory Boards (LABS)) to learn more about how reading instruction unfolded periodically throughout the year from elementary and secondary teachers and literacy leaders across the district and zones. The meetings were held six times for one hour throughout the year.

In January of 2023, the Gibson research team contacted a random sample of K-12 RELA teachers to participate in a survey. The team contacted 1,278 FCS employees and received 439 responses by the date of the survey close. This represented a response rate of 34.4%.

Throughout March of 2023 Gibson also conducted five single instance focus groups with elementary and secondary teachers to bolster the credibility of inferences from the LABS and survey data.

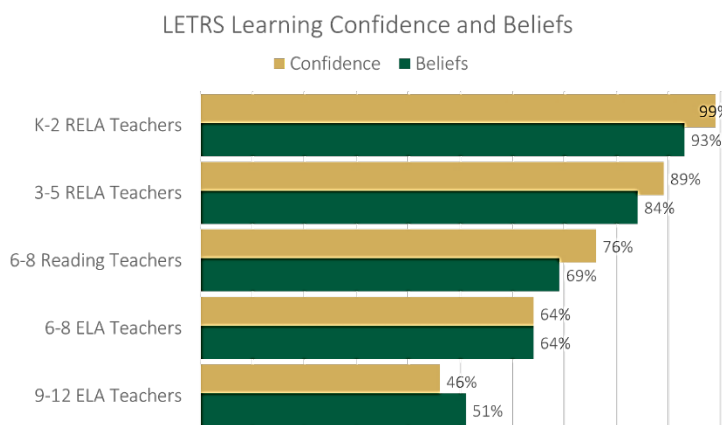
## Results

### RELA Teachers' Experiences and Beliefs About LETRS

The LETRS investment aims to ensure that all Fulton reading educators understand the explicit and systematic approach to instruction grounded in the Science of Reading. It was found that teachers' confidence in their ability to apply what was learned in LETRS training to their instructional practice varied across school levels. Self-reported data on teachers' confidence in implementing LETRS practices were collected. RELA K-5 teachers averaged 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can implement their professional learning from LETRS into their classroom instruction. In contrast, grades 6-8 Reading and ELA teachers averaged 70%, and grades 9-12 ELA teachers averaged 46%. See Figure 1 below.

Survey participants were also asked whether participating in LETRS helps them be strong reading teachers. Like with confidence, it was found that elementary teachers are heavily invested in LETRS professional learning. See Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: LETRS Learning Confidence and Beliefs, 2022-23 School Year**



### RELA Teachers' LETRS Knowledge and Motivation

The RELA survey analysis concentrated on teachers' start-of-training pre-assessment of LETRS concepts and teachers' motivation to implement

LETRS. The survey was self-reported after teachers had already taken the LETRS pre-assessment. The analysis found that pre-training knowledge of LETRS concepts was positively correlated with teachers' self-reported motivation to implement the LETRS training. Though outliers existed, teachers with higher pre-training knowledge tended to self-report more elevated motivation to implement the LETRS training. In other words, teachers who came to LETRS PD with some understanding of the science of reading were more motivated to continue to learn and apply this learning to their instruction confidently.

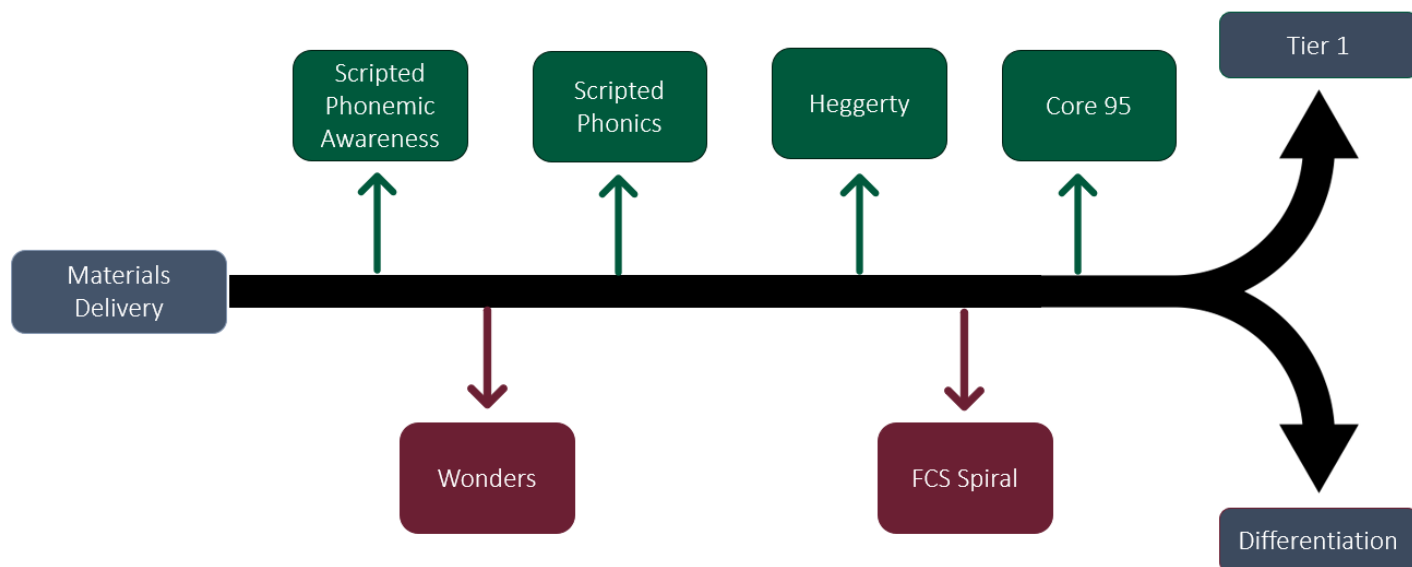
Unsurprisingly, K-2 teachers came to LETRS learning with the most background among all grade levels, with an average pre-test score of almost 61%. Despite having the most background knowledge, their strong motivation is a cause for celebration. This shows these teachers are highly motivated to learn and apply even more to their pedagogy.

See Figure 2: LETRS Knowledge and Motivation Alignment.

**Figure 2: LETRS Knowledge and Motivation Alignment**

Grade and Subject	LETRS Knowledge	Motivation
Grades K-2	60.6%	+0.30
Grades 3-5	54.6%	+0.04
Grades 6-8 (Rdg)	54.3%	-0.44
Grades 6-8 (ELA)	48.7%	-0.52
Grades 9-12	38.3%	-1.07

## Elementary Resources Implementation



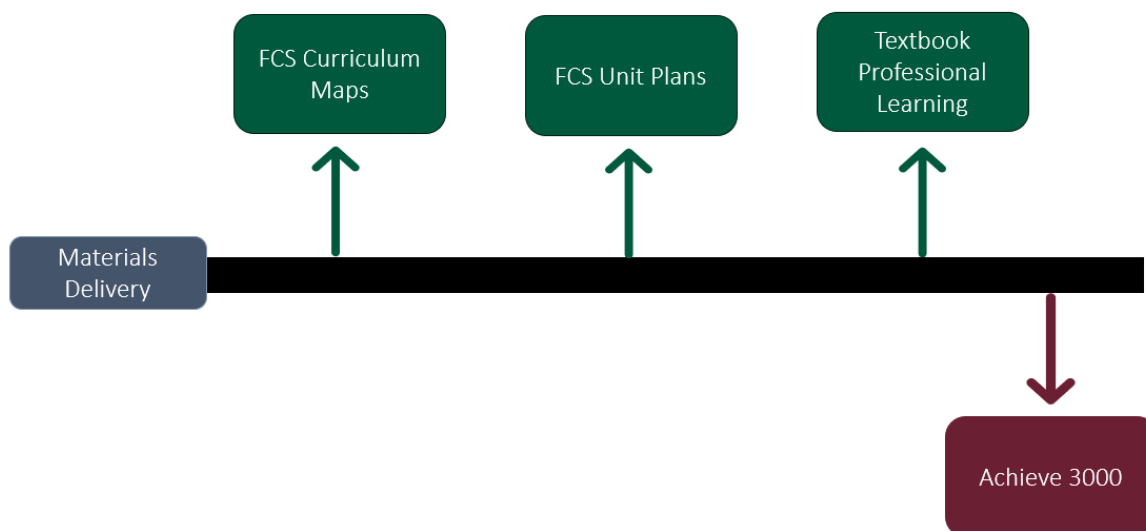
### Elementary Resources Implementation

In the second year of the ECR Initiative, the district made priorities and expectations of science of reading-aligned reading instruction increasingly clear by intentionally adopting new RELA instructional materials across elementary, middle, and high school levels. In elementary school, launching new materials was challenging for teachers. LAB participants noted that one of the most frustrating elements at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year was the inconsistent and unpredictable delivery of needed and newly adopted resources. The delay in access to materials and resources caused Literacy Leaders to feel they were failing the teachers they served. Most of these issues had been resolved by the late first semester, and teachers had settled into productive routines with the new materials. Much of this delay was likely due to supply chain issues. Despite early challenges, LAB members were looking forward to the future with optimism and anticipation that adjustments would be made to the programs to make them even better for their students.

Teachers came to appreciate the scripted instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics deeply. LAB participants overwhelmingly supported the use of Core95 and Heggerty, stating that students liked the routines provided, especially those found in Core95. In the Spring semester, LAB participants were asked to identify which resources they felt had the most significant impact on student learning. Core95 and Heggerty were mentioned most frequently.

In contrast, teachers and Literacy Leaders described experiencing substantial challenges in implementing Wonders due to alignment issues, text levels, and assessments. LAB teachers and Literacy Leaders expressed frustration about needing more alignment between Wonders and the state standards. Literacy Leaders explained that they typically trained teachers to use the standards to drive instructional planning and found it frustrating to be unable to apply this practice when implementing Wonders. Participants also expressed frustration because they believed the texts included in Wonders were long and required more teacher-led support. Because of this, participants felt that their students could not become independent readers. Finally, LAB teachers expressed concern that the Wonders assessments

## Secondary Resources Implementation



were complex and beyond many of their student's current knowledge and skill levels.

The last finding related to materials implementation concerns the time and resources needed to differentiate instruction effectively. As LAB participants came to appreciate the new resources for tier 1 instruction, they needed support for their highest and lowest-achieving students. Accustomed to providing additional differentiated support to students through small group instruction, LAB teachers felt that Wonders inhibited their ability to conduct these groups effectively when implemented with fidelity.

### Secondary Resources Implementation

The evaluation showed that it's common for both elementary and secondary educators to face challenges when implementing new materials after the textbook adoption process. Adapting to new resources can be a learning curve for teachers at all levels. Secondary RELA teachers recognized that the revised FCS Curriculum Maps and new unit plans were central to the ECR initiative. High

school teachers and secondary Literacy Leaders appreciated the robust and rich material provided by District curriculum leaders in the curriculum maps and new unit plans. In discussing the roll-out of materials, secondary RELA educators recognized the completeness of the materials, the accessibility of the instructional guidance, and the level of effort it took to make these documents reflect the newly adopted instructional materials. LAB participants highlighted more specific content elements, including vocabulary words, anchor texts, and explicit connections to relevant texts in Achieve3000.

In addition to the LETRS professional learning program, District Literacy Leaders developed and facilitated professional learning for teachers to support the adoption of the new materials and SOR-aligned instructional objectives. RELA teachers who participated in the survey indicated that they were aware of what professional learning opportunities were available to them through the Department of Learning and Teaching to help them use the new instructional materials as their curriculum during the 2022-23 school year.

Secondary RELA teachers regularly included Achieve3000 in their discussions of the ECR initiative. High school teachers, more than the middle school educators in the LAB groups, had concerns about the current implementation of Achieve3000. In contrast, most LAB participants noted that different schools, subject areas, and grade levels rigorously had varying commitments to using Achieve 3000.

## Limitations and Considerations

Limitations should be considered when reviewing the results. It is important to note that at the time of the survey, secondary teachers had just begun their LETRS learning while elementary teachers were halfway through LETRS learning. It is important to note that the confidence and motivation data reflects how far along different cohorts were in the LETRS training at the time of the survey administration. Therefore, we cannot be certain if secondary teachers' confidence in their ability to apply what was learned in LETRS training to their instructional practice will remain low as their LETRS learning continues.

At the secondary level, teachers have shared that their current goals for secondary students center around reading engagement and enjoyment, which is not a goal currently aligned with the initiative. When examining the instructional practices of secondary teachers, they continue to report heavy analysis work with novels, with room to grow in their abilities to directly teach and support students' use of explicit comprehension strategies aligned with the science of reading.

While some secondary schools have additional support, like literacy coaches and Curriculum Ambassadors, these were not referenced in LABs as essential support. Secondary teachers still have complex perceptions of their ability and motivations to implement Every Child Reads in their classrooms. While many of these teachers feel confident in their capacities as ELA teachers, they

do not report using practices such as small group instruction with frequency or fidelity.

## Conclusion

In summary:

- Elementary literacy coaches are seen as a vital form of support.
- Elementary teachers overwhelmingly expressed strong positive feelings about LETRS training.
- Literacy Leaders and teachers described Core95 as significantly impacting student learning this year.
- Secondary improvements and frequency of vocabulary instructional strategies have been identified.
- Teachers' confidence in their ability to apply what was learned in LETRS training to their instructional practice varied across school levels.