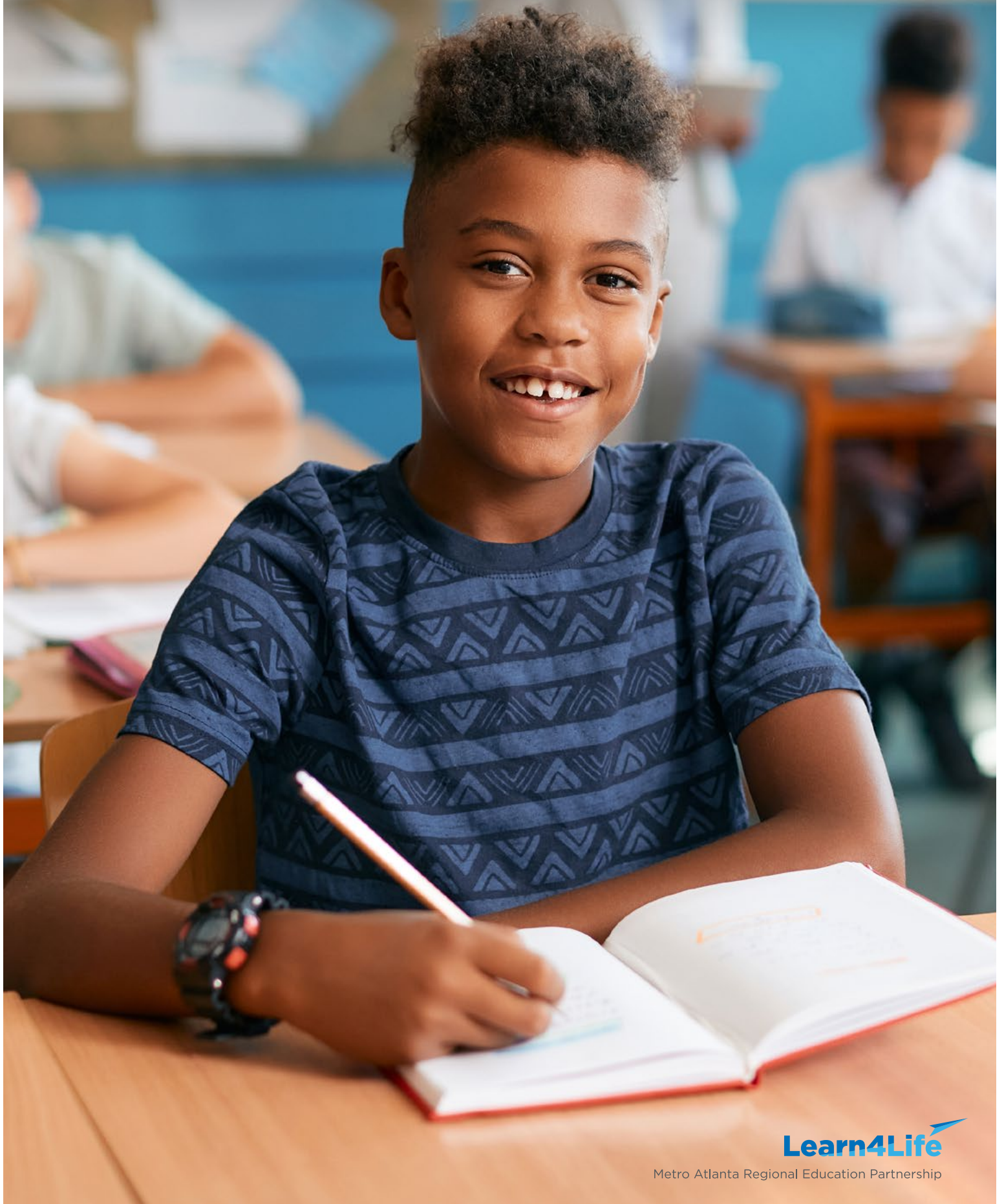


State of Education in Metro Atlanta Annual Report 2023



Executive Summary

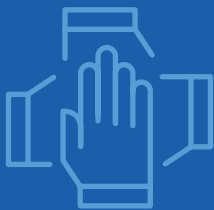
Learn4Life's Mission: To improve meaningful life outcomes across the cradle to career continuum for students historically underserved by education systems in metro Atlanta.

To achieve our aim: We identify opportunity gaps, and illuminate the impact of systemic inequities on educational outcomes, especially for low-income and Black and Brown students. By identifying and accelerating “Bright Spots” across metro Atlanta, we inform and inspire stakeholders to create opportunities for all students in our region to achieve their true potential.

This past year, L4L lived out this mission through collaborative partnerships that yielded meaningful change for our students. Specifically, we helped scale the science of reading beyond the classroom, provided critical support for students as they enroll in postsecondary education, and trained principals in building supportive cultures to reduce teacher attrition.

In all cases, L4L's Theory of Action guides our work:

Engage partners



Create shared understanding (of data)



Amplify Bright Spots



Learn4Life Executive Committee Members

Ann W. Cramer

Consultant,
Coxe Curry & Associates

Frank Fernandez

President & CEO,
Community Foundation
for Greater Atlanta

Katie Kirkpatrick

President & CEO,
Metro Atlanta Chamber

Milton J. Little

President & CEO,
United Way of Greater Atlanta

Anna Roach

Executive Director,
Atlanta Regional Commission

Ken Zeff, Ed.D.

Executive Director,
Learn4Life



Understanding the Metro Atlanta Region

Metro Atlanta's demographics are changing. An increasing number of our students experience the adverse impacts of growing up in poverty. They come from diverse backgrounds and are more likely than before to speak different languages at home. To improve results, we must focus on strategies that have proven to be successful. This requires an approach marked by an emphasis on equity, data-informed decision making, and strategic collaboration.



**Total
Enrollment
2022**
576,088

The metro area includes these school districts:

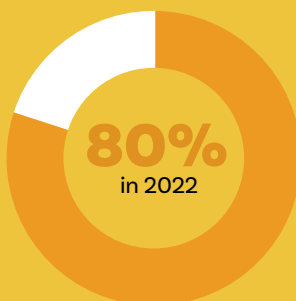
Atlanta Public Schools
Clayton County Public Schools
Cobb County School District
City Schools of Decatur
DeKalb County School District
Fulton County Schools
Gwinnett County Public Schools
Marietta City Schools



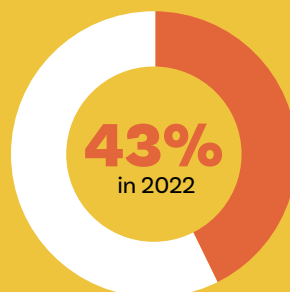
DID YOU KNOW?

Metro Atlanta comprises about 1/3 of the students in Georgia

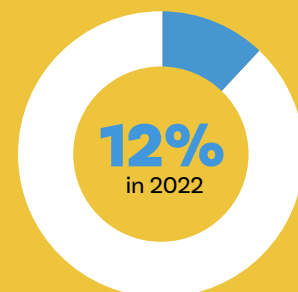
Students of Color



Low-income



English Learners



Sources for this report can be found [here](#).

Key Indicators for Collective Impact in the Metro Atlanta Region

The Learn4Life Leadership Council identified these six key indicators to continuously measure our students' progress along the cradle to career continuum. The COVID pandemic reversed the steady gains we saw leading up to 2020. While our region is working to return to pre-pandemic progress, we also aim to rebuild a more equitable "new normal."

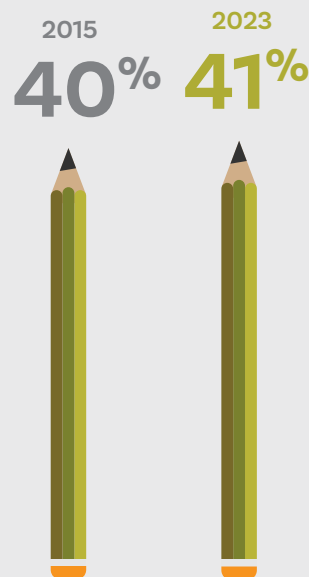
Quality-rated early
childhood education capacity



Kindergarten Readiness

40% of the maximum estimated demand for child care and early learning for children under 5 is accounted for in the capacity of either Quality Rated child care programs or school-based Pre-K.

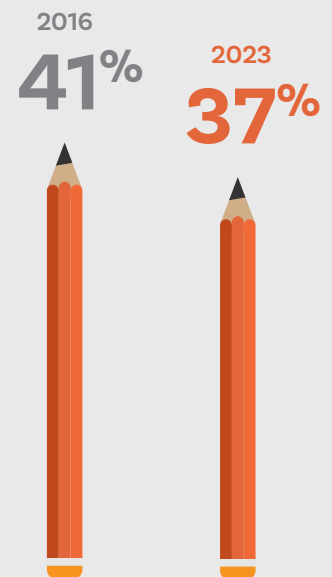
3rd graders
proficient in reading



3rd Grade Reading

Children who have not developed reading skills by 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

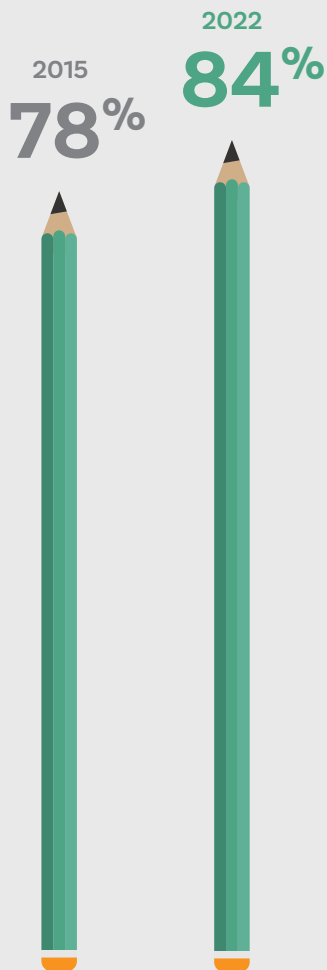
8th graders
proficient in math



8th Grade Math Proficiency

Mastery of 8th grade pre-algebra predicts success in 9th grade algebra, which is the gatekeeper to high school graduation, college readiness and postsecondary completion.

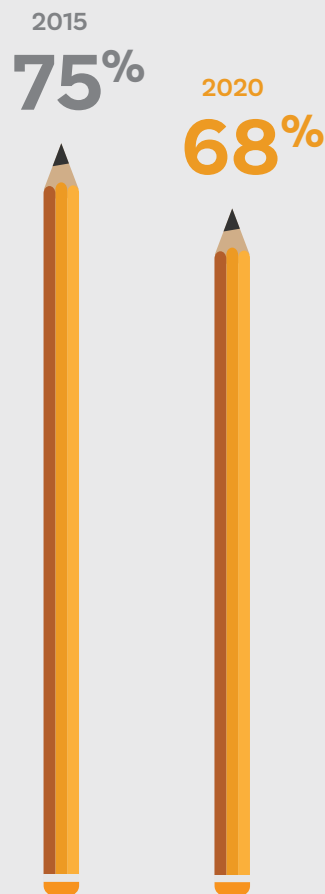
High school graduation rate



High School Graduation Rate

High school dropouts have higher unemployment rates than high school graduates and are less likely to participate in the workforce.

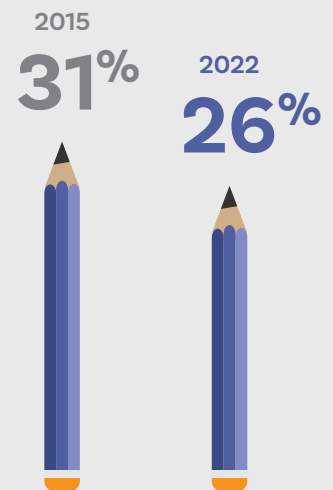
High school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution



Postsecondary Enrollment

By 2025, more than 60 percent of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.

High school graduates who earned a credential or degree



Postsecondary Completion

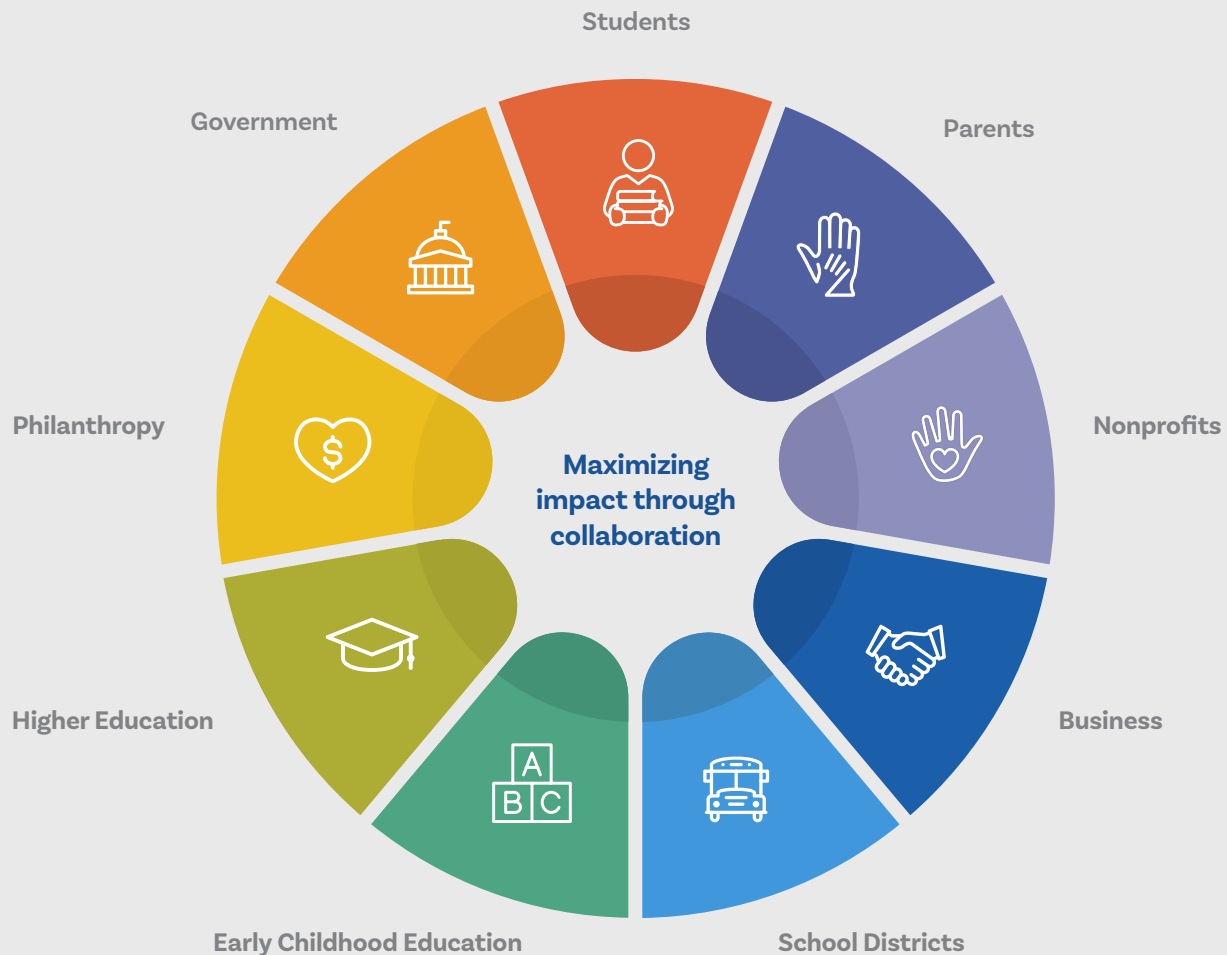
Postsecondary completers earn 2.5 times more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.

Data and research for this report can be found [here](#).

What is Collective Impact?

Collective impact is a collaborative approach to addressing complex social issues—like low literacy rates—by bringing together stakeholders across sectors to work toward a common goal. At Learn4Life, we emphasize shared outcomes, continuous improvement, and data-guided decision-making to achieve meaningful and sustainable change. Collective impact promotes relationships, coordination, and the pooling of resources among participants to maximize impact on our shared cradle to career outcomes.

PARTNERS AT THE TABLE



“Participating in the network allows us to learn from subject matter experts and join hearts and hands with others who have a passion for building strong readers, resilient children and thriving school communities.”

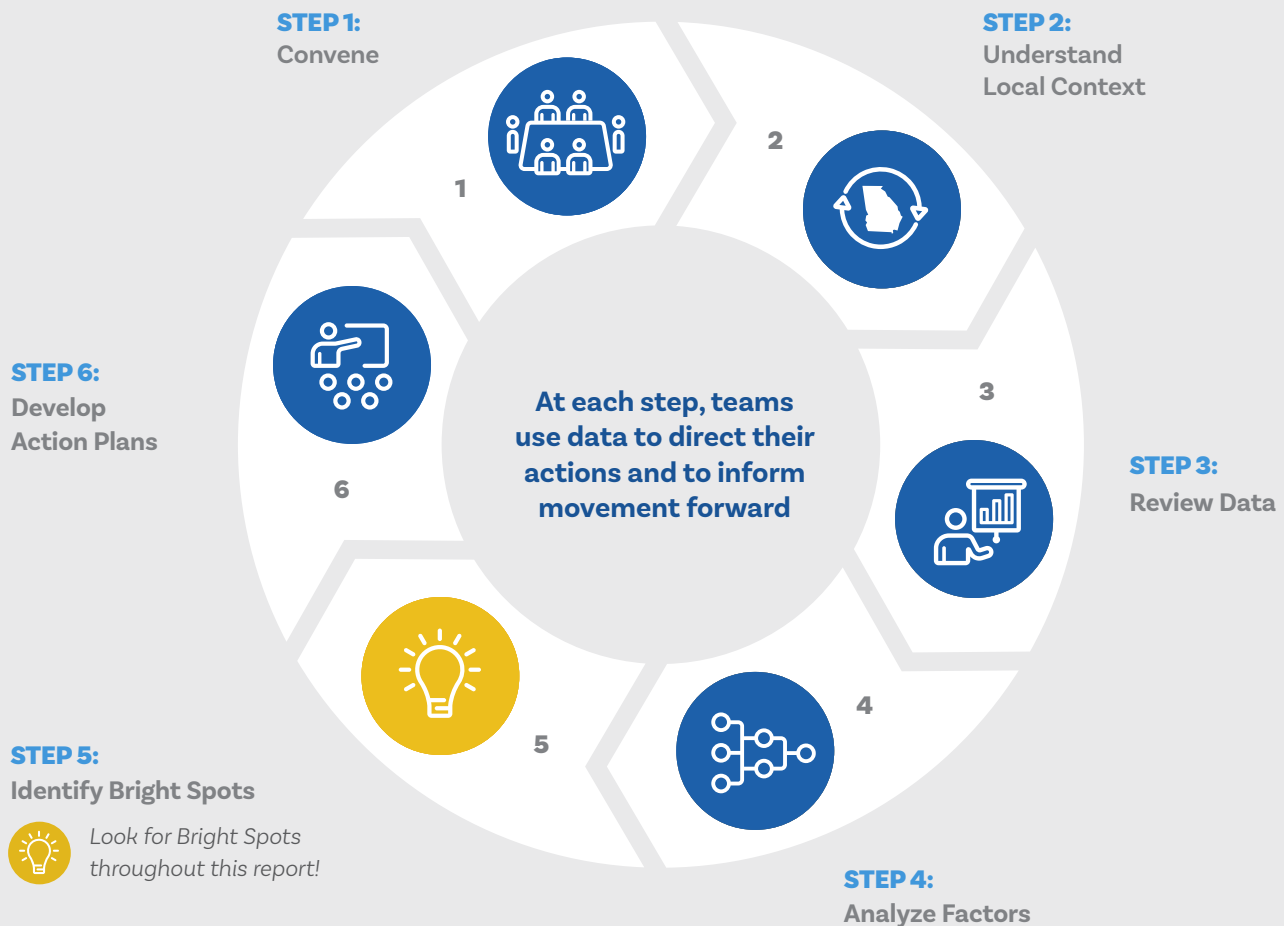
Irene Barton, Executive Director, Cobb Collaborative



How We Work

Learn4Life assembles Change Action Networks that focus on improving specific outcomes and key indicators. These networks work together to leverage existing resources within our local communities to engage in collective action around a very specific outcome. They use data to communicate progress and hold each other accountable, direct action to specific areas of need, and highlight areas of achievement on a wide, metropolitan scale.

THE WORK OF CHANGE ACTION NETWORKS

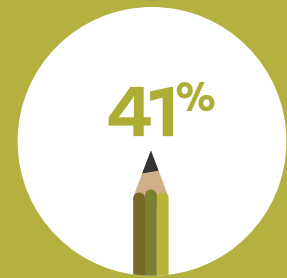


“The data analysis process used with the network provided deep insight into the practices and programs that increase mathematics achievement. This experience has contributed to positive outcomes for students in my district by guiding our decision-making process.”

Dr. Tonya Clarke, Coordinator of Secondary Mathematics, Clayton County Public Schools

Early Literacy

Early literacy is critical in laying the foundation for a life of self-determination and economic mobility. Children who have not developed reading skills by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. According to Georgia Milestones, *Metro Atlanta's 3rd grade reading proficiency was 41% in 2023.*

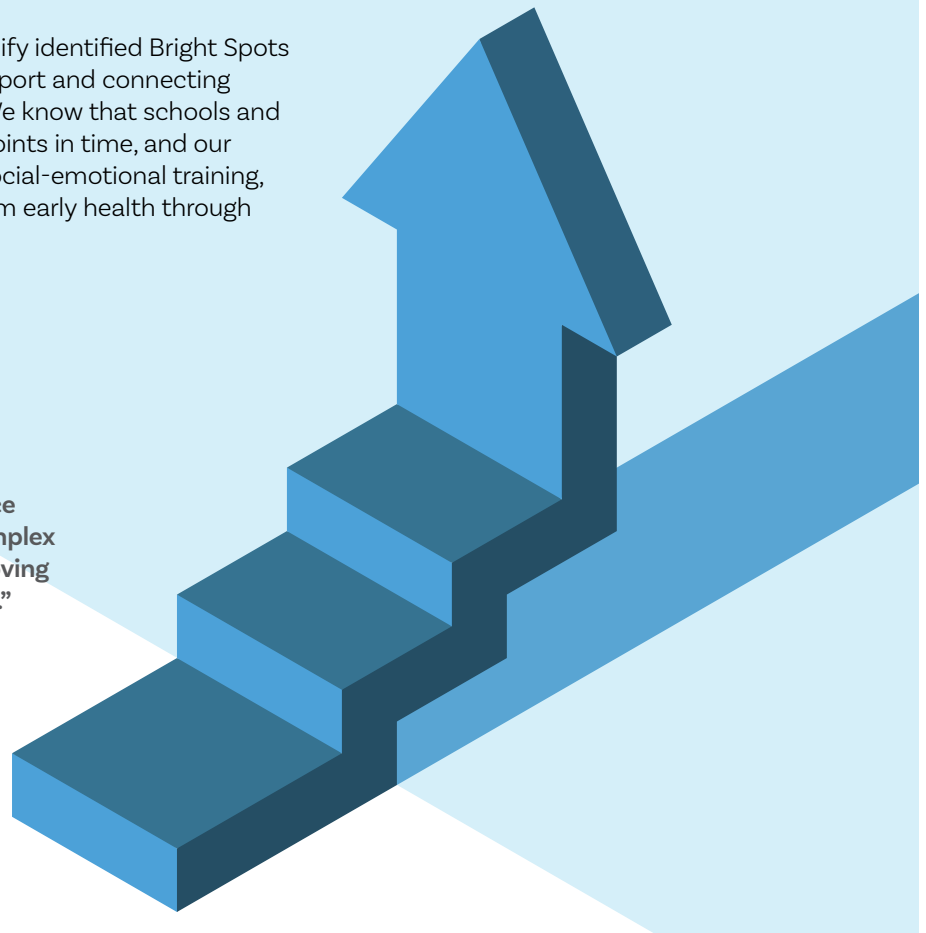


Learn4Life's Scaling Impact

L4L's Change Action Networks work to amplify identified Bright Spots through both continuous improvement support and connecting Bright Spots to new schools and districts. We know that schools and districts have different needs at different points in time, and our Bright Spots fill needs from vision care to social-emotional training, to the science of reading, and span care from early health through school districts.

"Learn4Life serves as convener and project manager for our work in Literacy and Justice For All. L4L has created a space for this complex partnership to stay laser-focused on improving reading instruction throughout our district."

*Dr. Grant Rivera, Superintendent,
Marietta City Schools*



Early Literacy Factor Analysis

Research from the Get Georgia Reading Campaign identified 11 factors that indicate a student's ability to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. L4L's Change Action Network identified successful strategies that address three of those factors. During the pandemic, the network conducted a second round of factor analysis and added 'student engagement' and 'children's mental health' as critical factors.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT STUDENT SUCCESS

Children's Mental Health
Early Childhood Education
Physical Health
Student Engagement

Teacher Preparation
Adult Literacy
Attendance
Birth Outcomes

Language Development
School & Classroom Climate
Social-emotional Competence
Summer Learning Loss

Change Action Network focus areas highlighted

Bright Spots

Bright Spots are strategies that have proven success in raising children's outcomes in metro Atlanta. L4L's cross-sector networks analyze student data to identify schools with uncommon success and learn what strategies they're implementing. These learnings result in Bright Spots, which we then work to amplify and scale across the region.



Early Literacy Bright Spots

Cox Campus



Cox Campus turns to science to learn what actions adults can take to help develop a child's reading brain. The science of reading is grounded in language-rich and healthy environments, positive experiences, and explicit and systematic reading instruction. Recognizing that every child has the right to literacy, the Cox Campus offers free, online courses for teachers, families, school leaders, and healthcare workers in the science of reading – so every child can learn to read.



ArtsNOW Learning



ArtsNOW is the leading professional learning organization for resourceful and innovative approaches which engage students, equip educators, and grow school communities for meaningful impact on the future.



SEE-KS



Social Emotional Knowledge and Skills (SEE-KS) is a professional learning approach designed to empower all who support children to create environments where social connection is the fuel for learning.



Reach Out & Read Georgia



Reach Out and Read gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. They work to improve emergent literacy and social-emotional health during the span of rapid brain growth and development between birth and age five, particularly in economically disadvantaged families who are at risk for adverse outcomes.



Vision To Learn



Vision To Learn (VTL) provides eye exams and glasses to kids in underserved communities to help them succeed in school and life. Receiving glasses provides the equivalent of 2-6 months of additional learning and can help prevent dropout and juvenile delinquency. Since their launch, VTL has provided over 25,000 glasses to metro Atlanta students free of charge.



Literacy and Justice for All

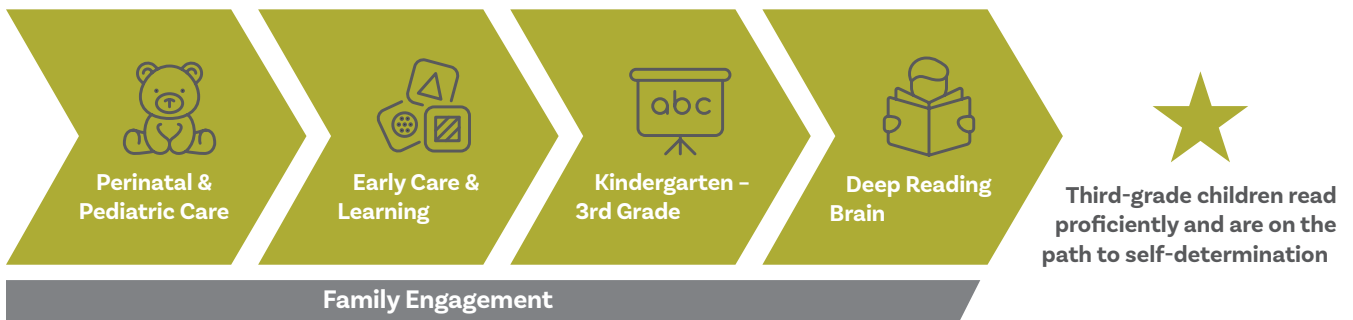
Literacy and Justice for All (LJFA) is an initiative to bring the science of reading to children in our community, prenatal through third grade, through the adults who serve them.



PARTNERS

Atlanta Public Schools, Cobb Collaborative, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Children, Georgia State University, Grady Hospital, Kennesaw State University, KIPP Metro Atlanta, Marietta City Schools, Promise All Children Thrive, Quality Care for Children, The Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, Sheltering Arms, United Way for Greater Atlanta, Wellstar Kennestone, Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, and the YMCA of Metro Atlanta.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT



Nonprofit staff and volunteers from these organizations participated in an inaugural learning cohort:

Agape Youth and Family Center
Alliance Theatre
Children's Museum of Atlanta
Cobb Collaborative
Cobb County Public Library

Everybody Wins! Atlanta
LaAmistad
The Literacy Lab
SKIP Georgia Chapter Inc.

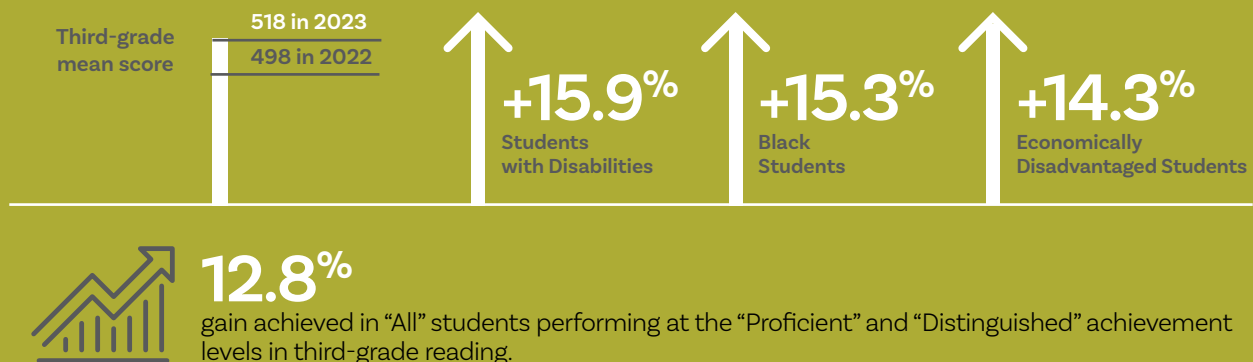
1,500+

adults trained
through LJFA



Marietta City Schools Shows Strong Literacy Growth

On the Georgia Milestones, MCS's third-grade mean score, soaring 20 points from 498 in 2022 to 518 in 2023. Although gains were made across every subgroup, the most impressive gains were made by the Students with Disabilities (15.9%), Black (15.3%), and Economically Disadvantaged (14.3%) subgroups.



WELLSTAR-KENNESTONE HOSPITAL

96%

of pediatric staff and

86%

of hospital unit staff have been trained on embedding language nutrition into their every day practice.



~29,000

patients received content and resources related to language nutrition.



ATLANTA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

90%

of partners participate in monthly convenings to drive continuous collaboration and engagement.



100%

of educators are making progress on Joint Action Plan goals.



Literacy and Justice for All Locations

HOSPITALS

Wellstar-Kennestone has implemented pediatric literacy program with advice from Grady Hospital.

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Implementing the science of reading in eight schools.

KIPP METRO ATLANTA SCHOOLS

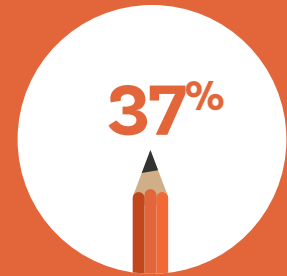
Implementing the science of reading in grades K-4 in all their elementary schools.

MARIETTA CITY SCHOOLS

Implementing the science of reading in its early learning center in grades K-3 and in collaboration with community partners.

Eighth Grade Math

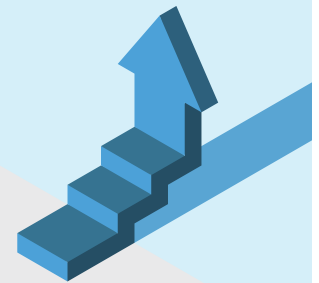
Mastery of 8th grade pre-algebra predicts success in 9th grade algebra, which is the gatekeeper to high school graduation, college readiness and postsecondary completion. *Metro Atlanta's 8th grade math proficiency was 37% in 2023.*



Learn4Life's Scaling Role

L4L's network has focused on two, crucial areas:

- 1] STEM supports, which are proven to raise student outcomes, through helping schools in the certification process build external STEM partnerships, including with STE(A)M Truck, and
- 2] building supportive school cultures to retain strong teachers through our inaugural RETAIN cohort.



STE(A)M Truck



STE(A)M Truck immerses students in grades 3-8 with hands-on STEAM content through high tech and low tech tools, unleashing their creativity to ensure that they can design the lives and future communities of their dreams.

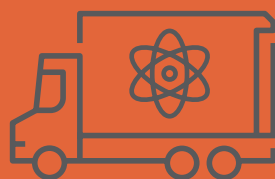
STEM/STEAM Certification



STEM/STEAM certification is the final step of a process in which schools meet rigorous science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Education. These schools use project or problem-based learning, have strong community partnerships, engage in cross-disciplinary instruction, and guide students in conducting investigative research.

5,500+

youth served in metro Atlanta this year



12%

average increase in 8th grade math scores when middle schools become STEM certified



Eighth Grade Math

L4L's middle school math partners have selected three key factors to focus their work: school culture, interventions for struggling students and teacher effectiveness – all while maintaining the critical lens of racial expectations.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT STUDENT SUCCESS

Interventions for Struggling Learners
School Culture
Racial Expectations
Teacher Effectiveness

Academic Preparation
Access to Appropriate Technology
Access to Rigorous Courses
Gender Expectations

Language & Literacy Skills
Math Anxiety
Relevant Curriculum
Use of Assessment Data

Change Action Network focus areas highlighted

Teacher Retention

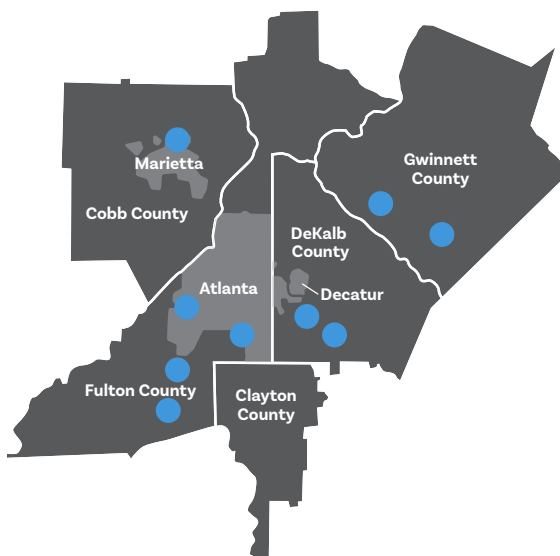
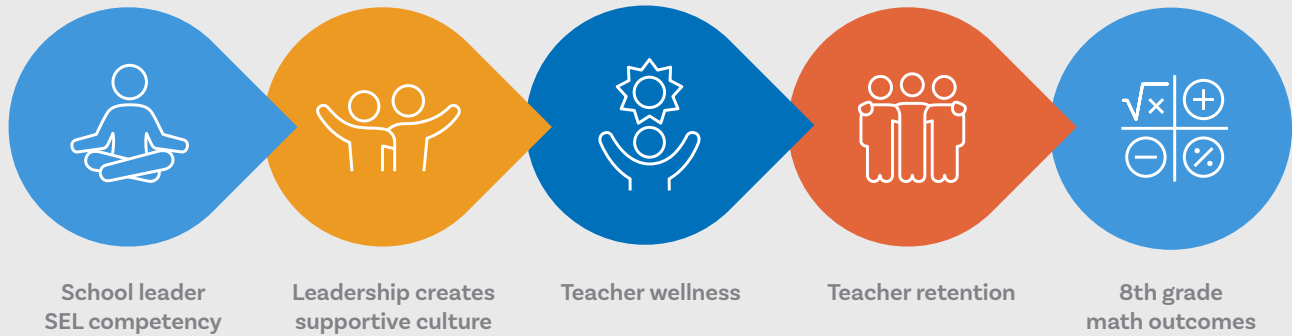
The Math network recognizes the importance of having a highly-qualified, supported teacher in every classroom. Yet, teachers are leaving the profession at high rates, entering at low rates, and many metro Atlanta school districts are struggling to fill open positions. Teachers have the single largest in-school effect on students' academic outcomes, and play a significant role in students' development in other areas, such as growth mindset.

Learn4Life's Response



Strong school leaders, equipped with the social-emotional competencies to build positive school cultures, are positioned to attract and retain the best teachers. L4L's first cohort

of Restoring Teacher Aspiration and Innovation (RETAIN) school leaders, led by the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), includes group learning experiences and monthly, individual coaching sessions.



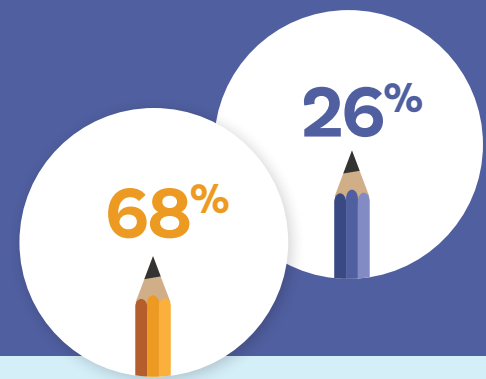
2022-2023: Middle Schools Cohort

Marietta Middle School, Bunche Middle School, Woodland Middle School, Bear Creek Middle School, McNair Middle School, Chapel Hill Middle School, Columbia Middle School, Lilburn Middle School, Snellville Middle School

By the end of the year, we expect to see gains in teachers reporting strong principal support; steady or increased rates of teacher intent to stay; and steady or decreased rates of voluntary teacher attrition.

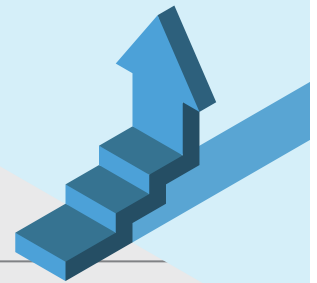
Postsecondary Success

Postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion are fundamental to establishing a skilled and educated workforce and a thriving local economy. *Metro Atlanta's postsecondary enrollment was 68% in 2020 and postsecondary completion was 26% in 2022.*



Learn4Life's Scaling Role

Learn4Life's network scales Bright Spots that have proven success in supporting students transition from high school to college with academic and financial support, and in understanding their natural aptitudes to choose the best majors and careers.



College Advising Corps (CAC)

College Advising Corps (CAC) is a national, nonprofit organization that works to increase college enrollment and completion among low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented high school students by training recent college graduates to be full-time college advisers in metro Atlanta schools.



OneGoal

OneGoal is a national, nonprofit organization that partners with schools in low-income communities to ensure postsecondary planning and preparation are integral components of the high school experience. Their three-year program starts with high school juniors and seniors and continues through the critical first year of their college or other postsecondary path.



The Scholarship Academy

The Scholarship Academy (TSA) is a nonprofit, scholarship preparatory program that seeks to demystify the financial aid process by teaching low-income and first-generation students in Georgia, New York, and Washington, D.C., tools to navigate the maze of financial aid and secure resources to fund their higher education.

92%

of CAC students in Atlanta Public Schools completed at least one college application in 2022-2023

81%

of OneGoal high school graduates enroll in a postsecondary institution and 73% of those persist one year after high school graduation

\$60M+

TSA has helped over 10K students secure more than \$60 million in private scholarships

Postsecondary Success

L4L's Change Action Network focuses on improving postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion. The network prioritized academic preparation, college-going culture, and financial preparation, and has identified Bright Spots that support young people in these areas.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT STUDENT SUCCESS

Academic Preparation
Career Exposure
College-going Culture
Financial Support
Academic Support

Appropriate Coursework
College Applications
College Enrollment
College Entrance Exams
College Orientation

Exposure to College
Good Fit and Match
Social and Academic Norms
Social Skills and
Family Support

Change Action Network focus areas highlighted

FAFSA Completion

Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is one of the leading predictors of postsecondary enrollment because it is a gateway to the Pell Grant and other financial aid, including the more than \$120 billion in government funds provided annually to pay for college.

In the 2022-23 school year, only 53% of Pell-eligible high school seniors completed the FAFSA, resulting in \$3.58 billion in unclaimed aid.

College Bound

To help overcome barriers to completion and increase postsecondary enrollment in the region, Learn4Life has joined forces with The Scholarship Academy (TSA) and United Way of Greater Atlanta to launch the College Bound FAFSA Initiative. College Bound partners with counselors in Title I schools across metro Atlanta and supports students and families with completing the FAFSA.

Programming

- Dedicated in-school FAFSA support
1x per week, October - May
- Free FAFSA training for staff & volunteers
- 2-Day FAFSA completion events
Day 1: Cost of College Workshop
Day 2: FAFSA Completion Workshop + Food Truck
- FAFSA Parent Nights
- Virtual 1:1 office hours
- Mid-Year Convening
- Programming for specialty groups



Resources

- Line-by-line FAFSA manual
- Marketing materials
- Access to TSA's Virtual Scholarship Center
- Incentives



College Bound FAFSA Initiative 2022-2023 Highlights

9

Title I
high schools

3

districts

27

events

1,217

students
engaged

873

FAFSAs
completed

71%

completion
rate

Why Students Leave College:

What Students Say About the Path to Graduation

As a follow up to an earlier quantitative study which found significant declines in FAFSA completion and postsecondary enrollment in metro Atlanta during the pandemic, Learn4Life launched a qualitative study to develop a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences. The study comprised 17 semi-structured interviews of college students from metro area high schools, and uncovered the factors that contributed to their enrollment and persistence in higher education in spite of the global crisis.

Four Key Findings:

Early college exposure is key

1

"... every summer we got to stay on a college campus and experience what it feels like to stay in a dorm, or how it feels like you know, going to classes in different buildings and stuff like that. So, it really helped me ... they're the reason I'm here at Morehouse."

The return on investment of college is critical

2

"...trying to get more knowledge about, you know, what I want to do as far as film and theater, and you know now that I'm on campus, I get to meet more people and make connections, network. So, ultimately, I want that to lead to getting a good job in my field and doing, you know, what I really want to do."

Mental health matters

3

"Our school prioritized mental health. They had this thing called Mental Health Mondays; they would do that. They would have Morning Pause... And they really just tried to encourage students to prioritize their mental health... there's certain professors where if it wasn't for them, I don't know how I would have gotten out of certain sticky situations...I don't know how I would have navigated certain hardships that I was experiencing on campus."

Intrusive advising works

4

"...they still check up on me. They still, you know, helped me with financial aid.... Like they, they've helped me with appeals and stuff like that...So, if I needed anything, they helped me. So, having that extra hand through high school, and then you know, after high school really, really does help you..."

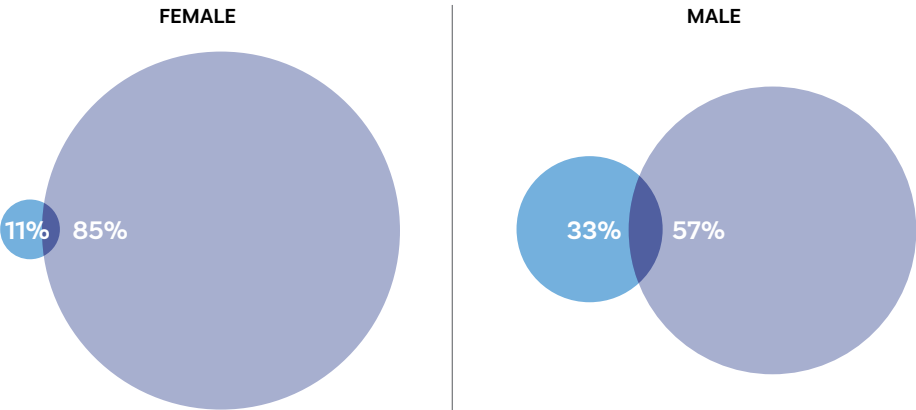
Read the full report [here](#).

Interest & Aptitude Matching

In response to the Metro Atlanta Chamber’s [Talent Pipeline report](#), Learn4Life sought to understand more about the aptitude and interest gap for metro Atlanta students. The report used results from YouScience, a talent discovery platform that uncovers students’ aptitudes and interests, and aligns them with best-fit, high-demand careers.

Difference Between Interest and Aptitude in High-Demand Careers in Metro Atlanta Students

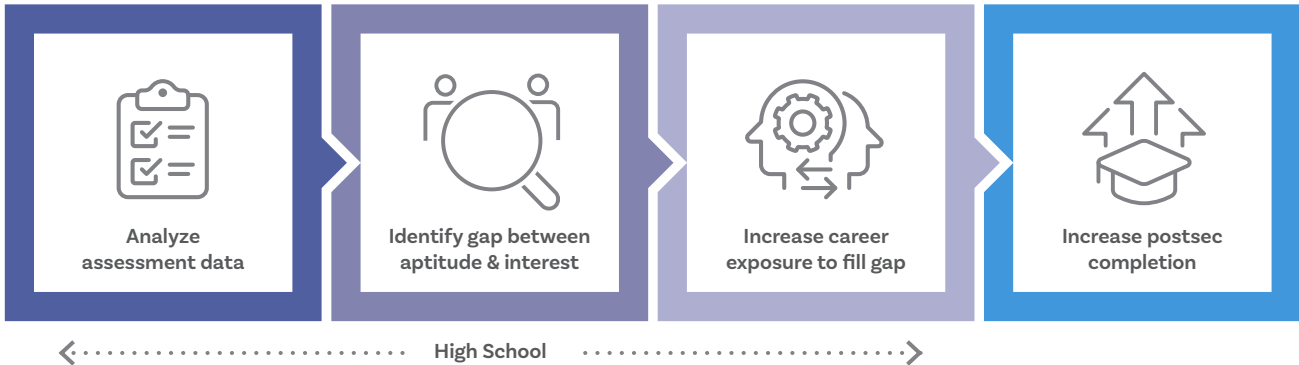
Interest Both Aptitude



View full report [here](#).

Increasing career awareness in high-demand fields is critical to filling Georgia’s jobs, but K-12 schools and businesses have a difficult time coordinating efforts to provide meaningful career-based learning experiences for students. If we help students understand their gaps in interest and aptitude, and provide them with tangible, career-related experiences aligned to their unique strengths, they will graduate high school with clearer postsecondary plans, and could fill critical job positions.

Theory of Change



Industry Focus

The Learn4Life aptitude matching workgroup decided to focus on three high-demand industries, as defined by Metro Atlanta Chamber:



Leadership Council

Community

Mindy Binderman, Executive Director, GEEARS
Milton Little, President and CEO*, United Way of Greater Atlanta
Dr. Dana Rickman, President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



Higher education

Dr. Glen Cannon, President, Gwinnett Technical College
Dr. Timothy Renick, Executive Director, National Institute for Student Success, Georgia State University
Dr. Victoria Seals, President, Atlanta Technical College
Dr. Kathy Shwaig, President, Kennesaw State University
Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President, Emerita, Spelman College
Dr. David Thomas, President, Morehouse College



Business

Dr. Kamau Bobb, Director, STEM Education Strategy, Google and Director, Constellations Center for Equity in Computing, Georgia Tech
Ann Cramer, Senior Consultant*, Coxe Curry & Associates
Raj Gazula, Head of Treasury Solutions, Truist
Kevin Greiner, President and CEO, Gas South
Katie Kirkpatrick, President and CEO*, Metro Atlanta Chamber
Keith Parker, President and CEO, Goodwill of North Georgia
Sylvia Russell, Former President†, AT&T Georgia
David Scheible, Former President and CEO†, Graphic Packaging International
Lisa Smith, Vice President of Community and Economic Development, Georgia Power



Pre-K – 12 education

Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools
Dr. Devon Horton, Superintendent, DeKalb County School District
Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent, Fulton County Schools
Chris Ragsdale, Superintendent, Cobb County District
Dr. Grant Rivera, Superintendent, Marietta City Schools
Dr. Anthony W. Smith, Superintendent, Clayton County Public Schools
Dr. Calvin Watts, Superintendent, Gwinnett County School District
Dr. Gyimah Whitaker, Superintendent, City Schools of Decatur



Philanthropic

Frank Fernandez, President & CEO*, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Dena Kimball, Executive Director, The Kendeda Fund
Atiba Mbiwan, Executive Director, Zeist Foundation
Teresa Rivero, Senior Program Officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Gabrielle Sheely, Executive Director, Tull Charitable Foundation
Dr. David D. Weitnauer, President, R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation



Government

Dennis Lockhart, Former President and CEO†, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
Anna Roach, Executive Director*, Atlanta Regional Commission



* Executive Committee members. The Committee is made up of established nonprofit organizations with a shared commitment to strengthening our region.

† Executive Champions. Champions are senior members of the metro Atlanta business community who bring their leadership and influence to support the Learn4Life vision.

Support for Learn4Life



Our supporters generously provide the resources we need to implement Learn4Life's collective impact model.

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Atlanta Regional Commission
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation
Betty and Davis Fitzgerald Foundation
BlackRock
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Gas South
Georgia Power
Graphic Packaging International
The Kendeda Fund
Metro Atlanta Chamber

R. Howard Dobbs Jr. Foundation
The Sartain Lanier Family Foundation, Inc.
Southern Education Foundation
State Farm
StriveTogether
Tegna Foundation
Truist
Tull Charitable Foundation
United Way of Greater Atlanta
WestRock
The Zeist Foundation, Inc.

How You Can Support Learn4Life



Join a Change Action Network
l4lmetroatlanta.org/#enroll



Sign up for our blog at
L4LMetroAtlanta.org



Follow us at
@L4LMetroAtlanta

Core Team Members

Cori Cain, Associate Vice President,
United Way of Greater Atlanta
Tim Cairl, Senior Director of Educated Workforce,
Metro Atlanta Chamber
Mike Carnathan, Manager of the Research
& Analytics Division, Atlanta Regional Commission
Ayana Gabriel, Vice President of Community Impact,
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Dr. Robert Gaines II, Director of External Affairs, GPEE
Dr. Hanah Goldberg, Director of Research & Policy,
GEEARS
Tommy Pearce, Executive Director, Neighborhood Nexus
Dr. Jennie Welch, Vice President of Strategy & Finance,
Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement



Meet the L4L Team!

(L-R) Dr. Ken Zeff, Executive Director; Yolanda Marroquin,
Project Manager; Tenicia Winston, Project Manager;
Dr. Rebecca Parshall, Director of Strategy; Damian Ramsey,
Community Engagement Manager

Sources for this report can be found [here](#).



Metro Atlanta Regional Education Partnership

