

State of Education in Metro Atlanta Annual Report 2024



Executive Summary

As the direct impacts of the pandemic recede and we reflect on the undeniable progress in 2024, we know that education in metro Atlanta is still not meeting the needs of enough of our students. The Learn4Life partnership has identified three persistent challenges that guide our work:

Stubborn Literacy Gaps

Only 41% of students in the region are proficient in reading, despite 95% having the potential to read at grade level.

Depleted Teacher Morale

Low teacher morale and high turnover are driven by inadequate support and challenging school cultures. Nearly half of Georgia's educators want to leave the classroom within five years.

Limited Access to Support for Students

Students require additional support beyond academic instruction at each step of the cradle to career continuum.

Fortunately, our region's educators and students are resilient. This report identifies Bright Spots of success that share a few common themes:



Centering Interventions on Student Needs

Students benefit from interventions that address their unique challenges and meet them where they are in their journeys. Providing teachers with best-in-class literacy training is making a difference for students, as is ensuring all children have vision care and a free pair of glasses.

Strong Levels of Support for Educators

Efforts to support teachers through professional development and improved school culture are crucial for addressing burnout and turnover. Specifically, focused investments in school leadership significantly improve school culture.

Expanding Circles of Education Champions

Meaningful community partnerships address barriers to learning and postsecondary access. For instance, supporting high school seniors with FAFSA completion helps improve seamless enrollment by making postsecondary more affordable.

At L4L, our collective is focused on amplifying these successes to build the foundation for improved and more equitable educational outcomes across the region.

Learn4Life Executive Committee Members

Ann W. Cramer
IBM Corporation,
Retired

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



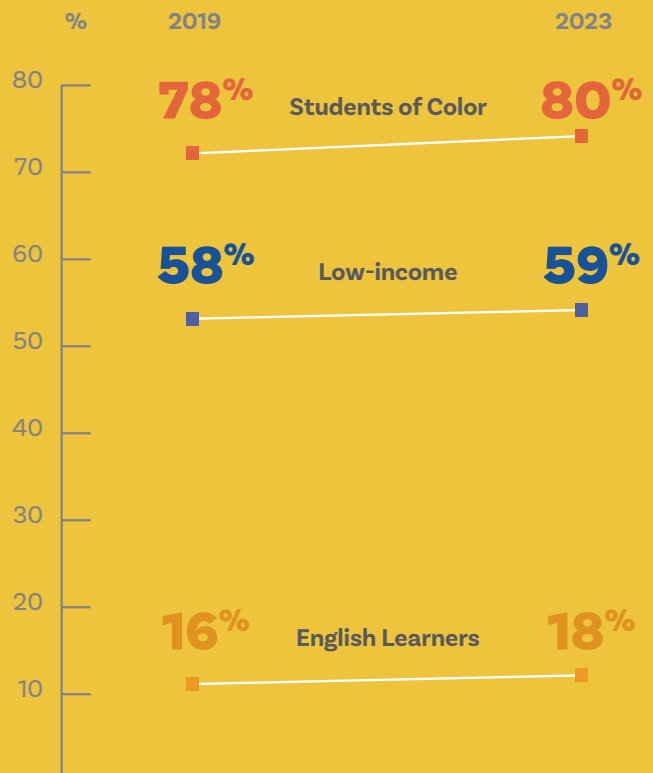
Meeting the Needs of an Evolving Student Population in Metro Atlanta

Metro Atlanta’s education landscape is evolving alongside its demographic shifts, marked by growing diversity and increasing needs for intentional student support. The region’s schools are now serving a larger population of students from low-income families, with a rise in English language learners. These trends call for a 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.



- 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

Total Enrollment in 2023
574,322



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

Key Educational Outcomes in Metro Atlanta

The L4L Leadership Council identified these six key indicators to continuously measure our students' progress along the cradle to career continuum. These outcomes are the bellwethers of education, with research confirming their importance at each stage, as well as being most predictive of future success.

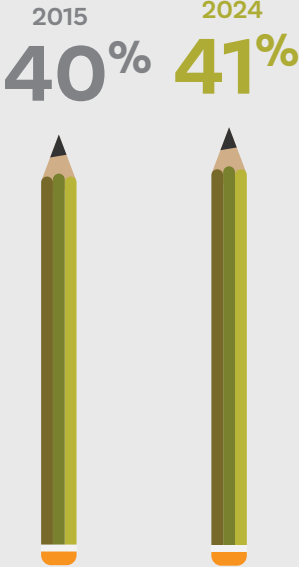
Quality Rated early childhood education capacity



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.

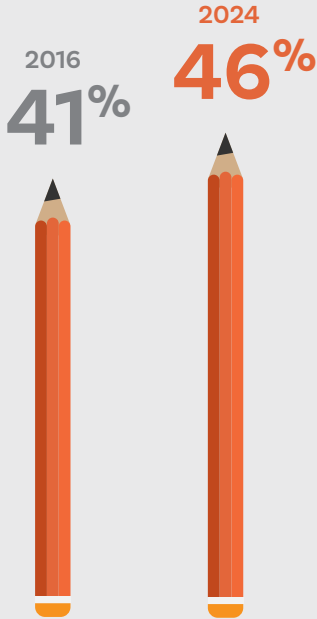
3rd graders proficient or above in English Language Arts



3rd Grade Reading

Children who read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are more likely to graduate high school, complete postsecondary, and have better life outcomes in many areas.

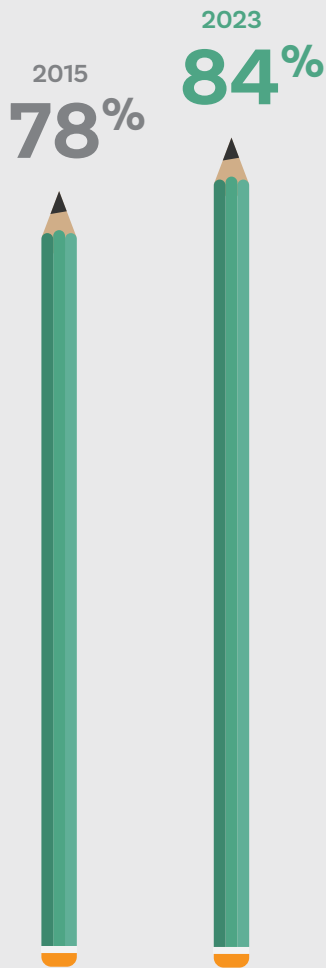
8th graders proficient or above in math



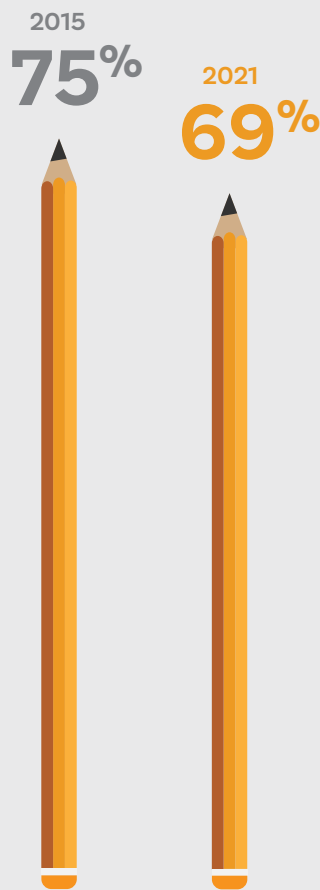
8th Grade Math

Proficiency in 8th grade pre-algebra is correlated with advanced high school course placement, college completion, and higher lifetime earnings.

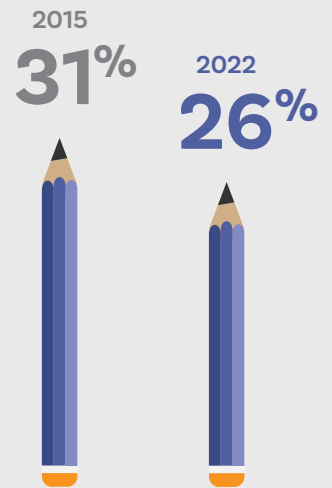
High school graduation rate



High school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution



High school graduates who earned a degree or credential within 5 years



High School Graduation Rate

High school dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed compared to those who have a diploma.

Postsecondary Enrollment

By 2031, 85% of good jobs will go to workers with some form of postsecondary education.

Postsecondary Completion

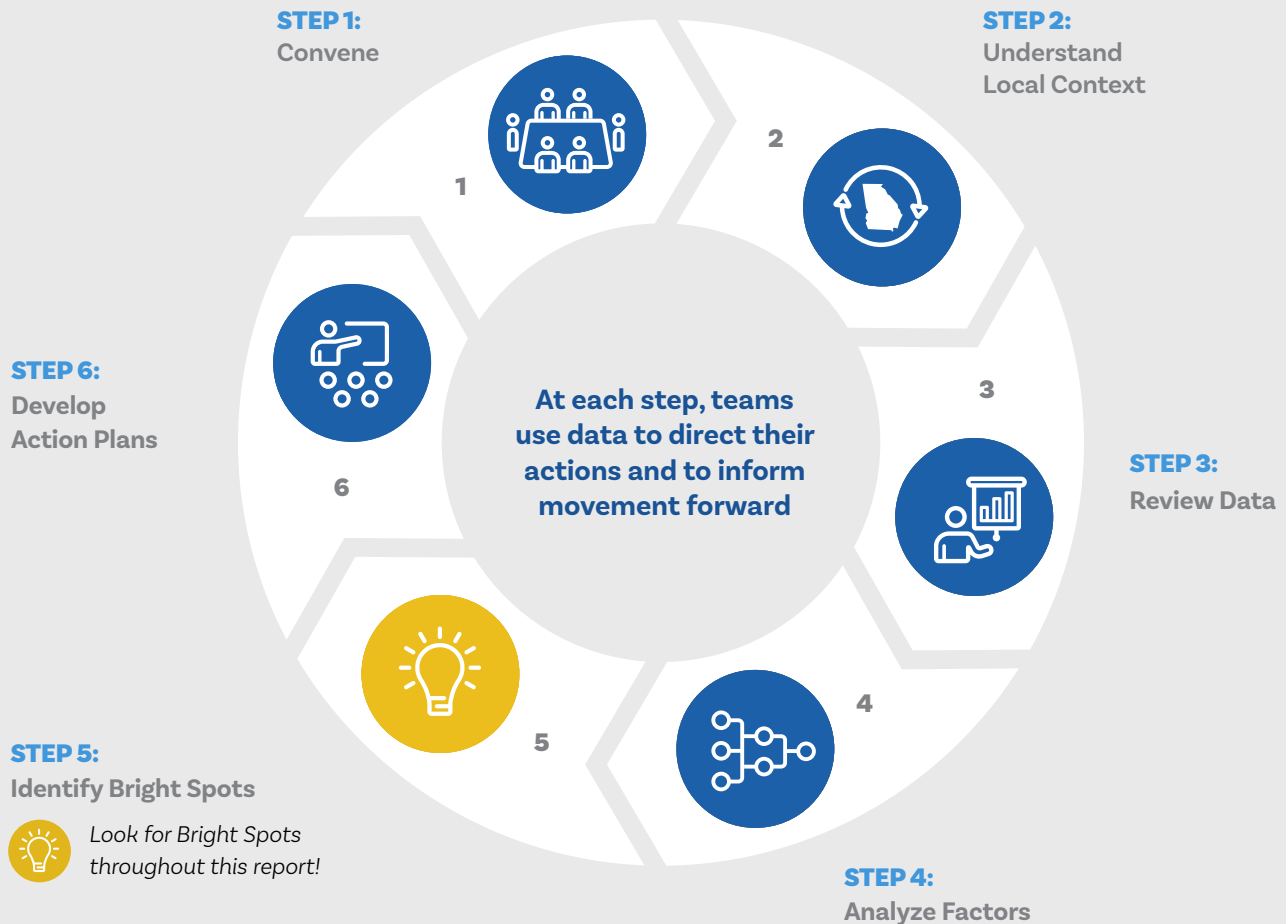
Postsecondary completers earn 2.5 times more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.

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

Change Action Networks

L4L convenes Change Action Networks that focus on improving outcomes along the cradle to career continuum. These networks partner to leverage existing resources within our communities to engage in collective action. Networks use data to communicate progress and hold each other accountable, direct action to specific areas of need, and highlight areas of achievement on a regional scale.

THE WORK OF CHANGE ACTION NETWORKS



“Attending Learn4Life Change Action Network meetings is always a valuable experience. These meetings have been a great way to learn more about the positive work going on in metro Atlanta. I leave with relevant learnings to my work and I appreciate the relationships formed or deepened through these meetings.”

Julius Cave, Regional Director, South | Leading Men Fellowship, The Literacy Lab

Learn4Life’s Role in the Education Ecosystem

L4L convenes school systems, nonprofits, philanthropy, business, and the community to improve academic outcomes for students. L4L works with this unique cross-section of leaders to facilitate data analysis to identify and scale Bright Spots – strategies that are working to raise outcomes for traditionally underserved students.

IN ALL CASES, L4L’S THEORY OF ACTION GUIDES OUR WORK:



Engage partners



Create shared understanding
(through data)



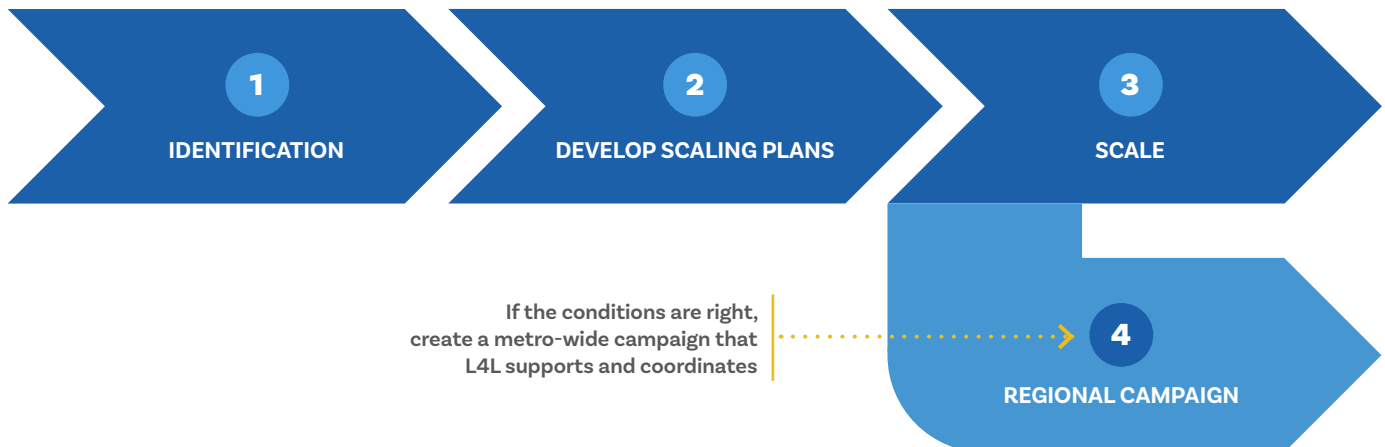
Amplify Bright Spots



“The collaboration within CAN meetings allows us to learn from each other and drive actionable strategies that address educational disparities—ensuring students are equipped for postsecondary success and the workforce.”

*Korynn Schooley, Vice President,
College Access, Achieve Atlanta*

THE LIFECYCLE OF A BRIGHT SPOT



Kindergarten Readiness

L4L measures the estimated demand and estimated supply of Quality Rated early learning programs and school-based Pre-K. This indicator was selected in the absence of a state-wide assessment for kindergarten readiness. According to this proxy, *Metro Atlanta's kindergarten readiness was 40% in 2022.*



The Challenge

In Georgia, there is no common way to measure student outcomes before 3rd grade Milestones assessments.

Landscape Analysis

This year, L4L conducted a [landscape analysis](#) to understand how school districts are assessing children entering Kindergarten.

Findings

- Interest in collaboration, but significant concerns about practicability of a shared measure
- L4L and GEEARS are building a crosswalk between current district assessments to inform readiness

“Understanding children’s strengths and needs at kindergarten entry can inform the K-12 and early learning systems and provide a helpful snapshot of community needs, allowing stakeholders to work together to ensure that children are prepared to succeed when they enter kindergarten—and that schools are prepared to help them do so.”

Mindy Binderman, Executive Director, GEEARS:
Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students

GEEARS Framework for School Readiness

The GEEARS Framework for School Readiness is multifaceted and includes:

- Physical development
- Social-emotional development
- Cognition and general knowledge
- Language and literacy development
- Approaches to learning

Understanding “Kindergarten Readiness” is the critical first step on the cradle to career continuum

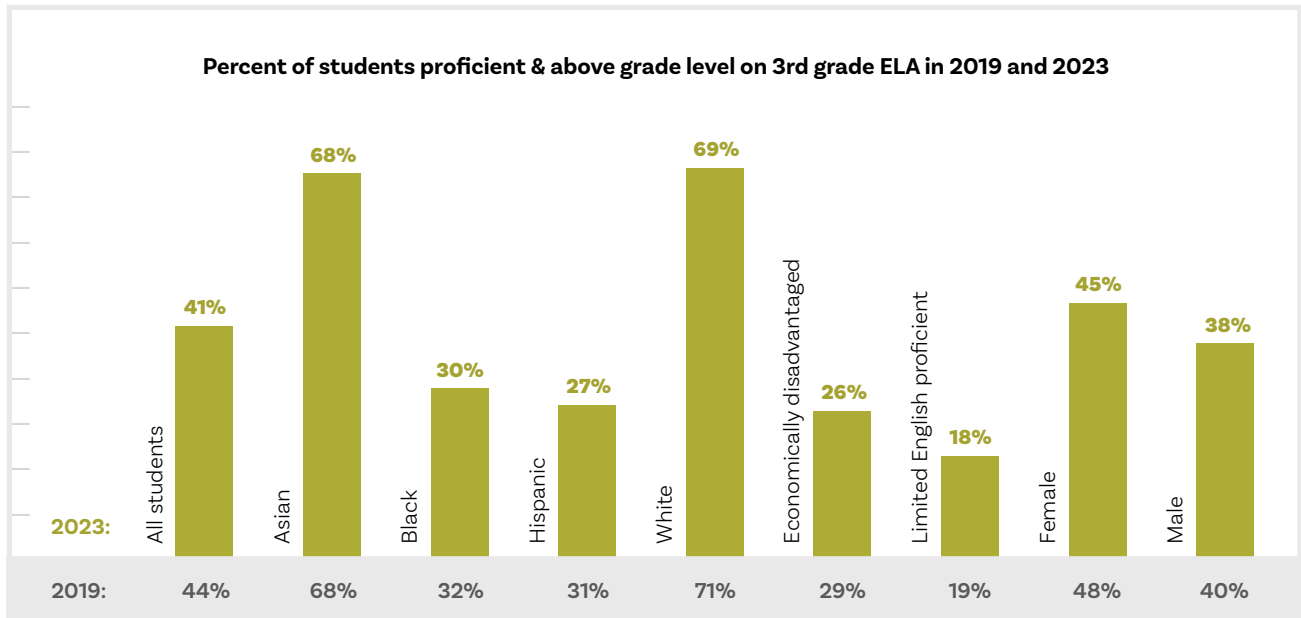
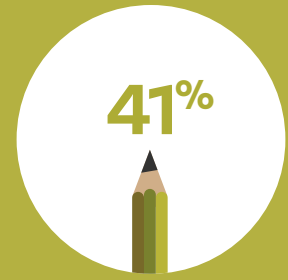
L4L has two goals:

- 1 Accurately describe the state of the region
- 2 Use the data to identify and scale Bright Spots



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 English Language Arts proficiency was 41% in 2024.



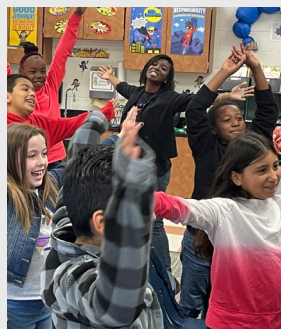
Reach Out & Read Georgia

Reach Out and Read supports young children’s success by integrating books into pediatric care and promoting family reading. They enhance literacy and social-emotional health during critical early development, focusing on economically disadvantaged families at risk for negative outcomes.



ArtsNOW Learning

ArtsNOW is a leading professional learning organization for integrating the arts—visual arts, dance, theatre, music, and digital media—into academic content. ArtsNOW creates an engaging learning environment that promotes teacher confidence and improves student engagement.



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
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Change Action Network focus areas highlighted

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.



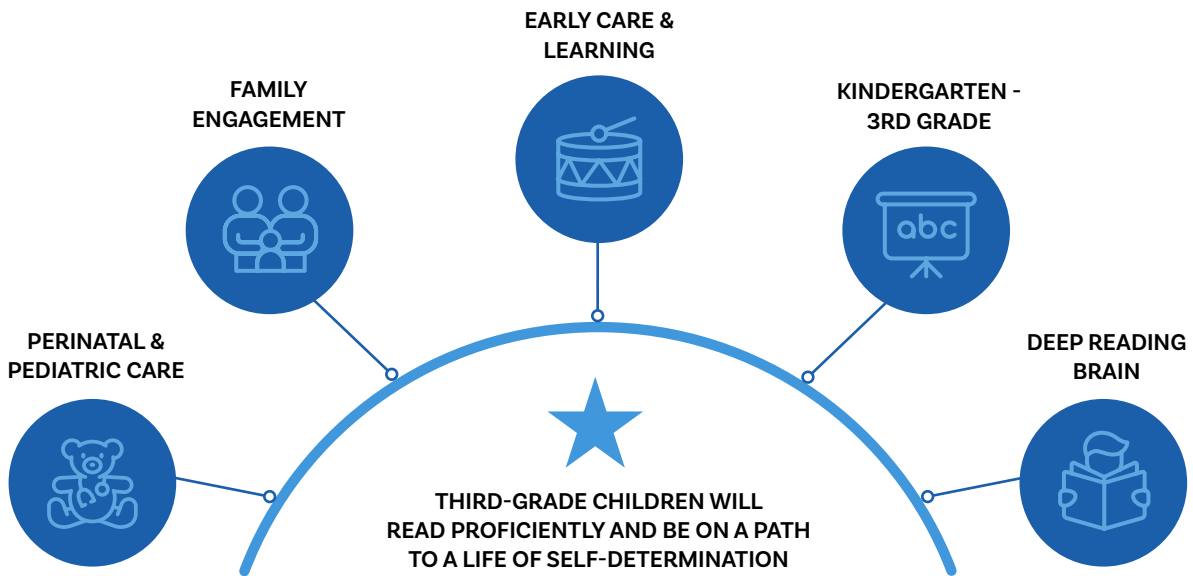
PARTNERS

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, PAACT: Promise All Atlanta 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.



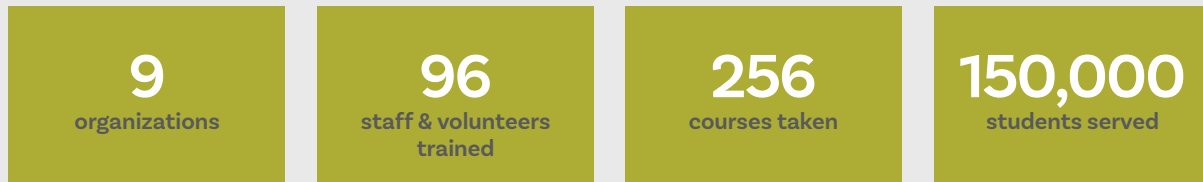
Cox Campus

Free online science of reading courses [here](#).



INAUGURAL (2023) LJFA NONPROFIT COHORT

The LJFA Nonprofit Cohort trains staff and volunteers who support children’s language and literacy development. This reinforces what’s happening in classrooms and builds the literacy ecosystem in metro Atlanta.

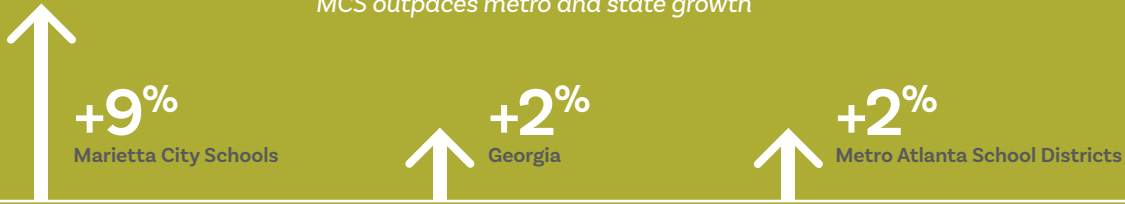


2024 LJFA NONPROFIT COHORT

Alliance Theatre, Books for Keeps, Cobb County Public Libraries, Each One Teach One For Life, Ferst Readers, Inc., GLISI, MENTOR Georgia, Reachback Inc., The Literacy Lab, The Study Hall, TREAD Academy

MARIETTA CITY SCHOOLS (MCS)

2022-2024 Milestones growth in 3rd grade English Language Arts: Proficient/Distinguished
 MCS outpaces metro and state growth



MCS 4th graders Proficient/Distinguished on ELA Milestones in 2024



KIPP ATLANTA SCHOOLS

The percent increase of students who met their Lexile targets from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024



GRADY HOSPITAL SYSTEM

8,598

Number of employees oriented in Talk With Me Baby program



PROMISE ALL ATLANTA CHILDREN THRIVE (PAACT)

90%

LJFA participating child care providers demonstrated increased understanding of language and literacy



The Early Care & Learning group is just one of the teams working with LJFA towards student success. LJFA's birth-through-five (B-5) partners across Marietta and Atlanta gathered for an LJFA B-5 collaborative meeting at Quality Care for Children. L4L, QCC, GEEARS and the PAACT team facilitated conversations centered around trending topics across the B-5 networks.



The Atlanta Vision Project

Vision care is an essential first step in teaching children to read. Yet, many children across metro Atlanta have not had access to this critical service. Since 2017, L4L has partnered with Bright Spot Vision To Learn to support their expansion throughout metro Atlanta. Vision To Learn has provided more than 38,000 pairs of glasses, and in the coming years we aim to add more vision partners and accelerate that pace to serve all elementary aged students in need.



Vision To Learn

Research tells us:

- 80% of children’s learning comes through vision.
- Vision impairment is strongly linked to anxiety and depression among children.
- Students who received glasses made gains, on average, equivalent to an additional 2-4 months of learning time.

The challenge:

There are approximately 138,000 elementary students in underserved communities across metro Atlanta.

Of those, approximately 40,000 require glasses but lack access to eye care.

L4L’s Regional Goal:

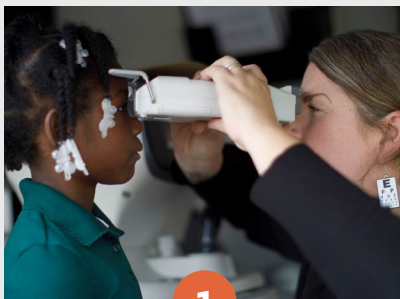
All elementary school students in need in metro Atlanta will receive a free pair of glasses by 2028.

How It Works

Step One: Vision Screening

Students receive a quick vision scan to determine whether an exam with a doctor is required.

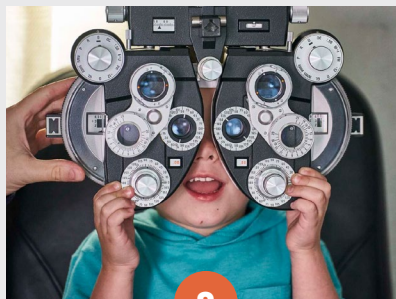
Historical failure rate: 40%



Step Two: Eye Exam

Students who fail the screening are examined by an optometrist in a mobile clinic.

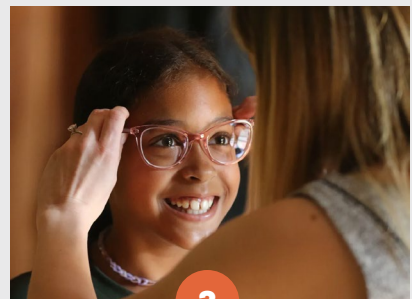
90% of children are prescribed glasses



A Few Weeks Later: Glasses

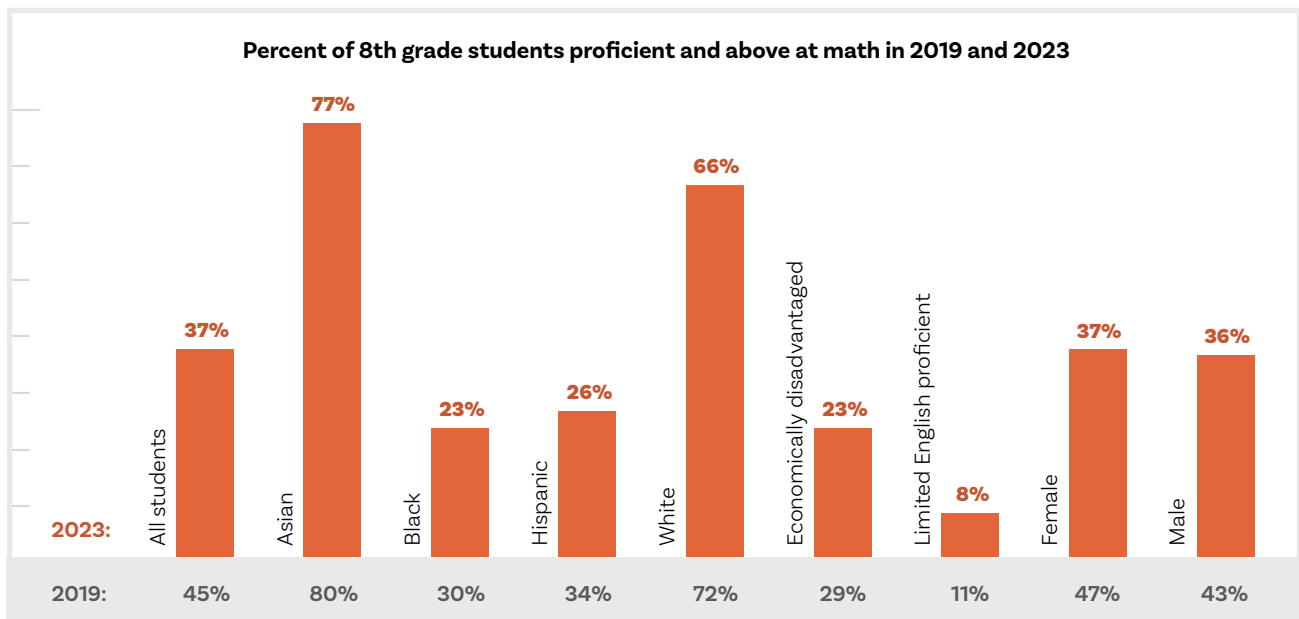
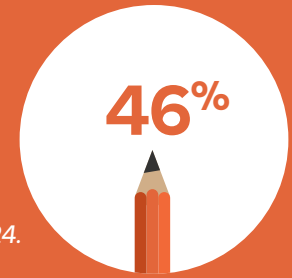
Students select frames from a wide choice of styles and receive glasses.

Lost or broken glasses are replaced free for one year



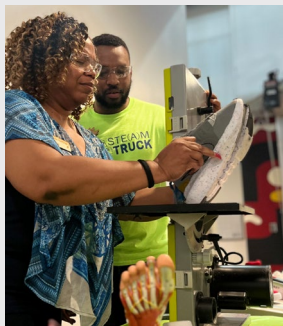
Eighth Grade Math

Mastery of 8th grade pre-algebra predicts success in 9th grade algebra, which is a gatekeeper to high school graduation, college readiness, and postsecondary completion. According to Georgia Milestones, *Metro Atlanta's 8th grade math proficiency was 46% in 2024.*



STE(A)M Truck

STE(A)M Truck ignites equitable STEAM learning through hands-on experiences. They empower Metro Atlanta youth and their educators as catalysts for change through partnerships that equip and empower educators with tools and confidence to transform abstract math into tangible, real-world adventures, fostering student engagement and achievement.



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Good to Great Metro Atlanta

The Math Network, in partnership with TNTP, is building a metro-wide cohort for math educators to enhance professional learning practices, using collaboration time to address student data and provide targeted support based on individual school needs.



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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

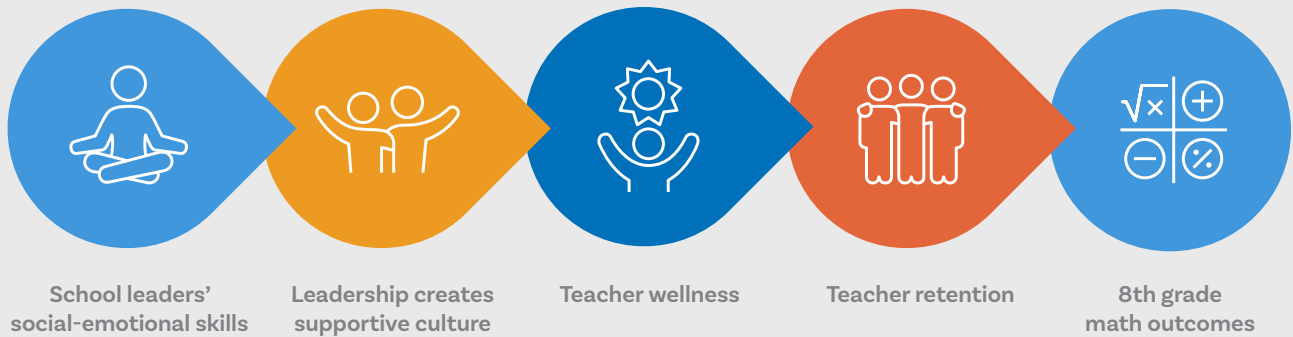
Teacher Retention

L4L's Math Network recognizes the importance of having a highly-qualified, supported teacher in every classroom. Teachers have the single largest in-school effect on students' academic outcomes. Yet, teachers are leaving the profession at high rates, entering at low rates, and metro Atlanta school districts are struggling to fill certain positions.

The Challenge

- Nearly half of Georgia's educators want to leave the classroom within the next five years.
- Teachers and principals experience frequent job-related stress at twice the rate of employees in other sectors.

L4L's Approach: Support School Leaders' Well-Being



“RETAIN taught me that I have to take care of SELF first. It has given me access to resources to support my practice, to set my intentions, and to align my team so that together we can make an impact. I start now by taking stock of myself, refining my own practice as needed, then using that energy to pour into my team. I learned you don't just “do social-emotional leadership.” You practice it. You model it. And with that, you can sustain it.”

- Katise Taylor, Principal, Snellville Middle School, Gwinnett County Public Schools



RETAIN is facilitated by *GLISI* - the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement

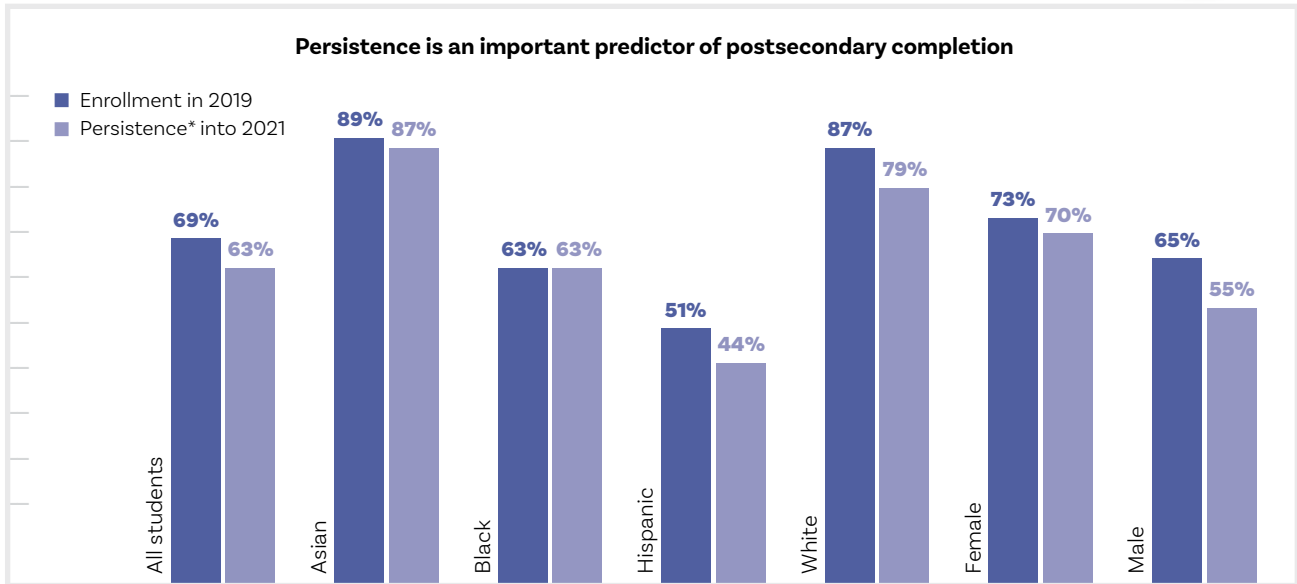
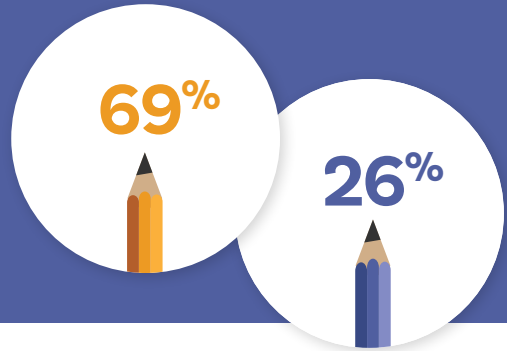
Results from RETAIN's First Cohort

- 55% decrease in teachers leaving participating schools.
- Teachers experienced a more robust sense of belonging.
- Teachers got focused 1:1 time with their leaders and felt more care from their leaders.
- Trust foundations were cultivated between teachers and leaders.



Postsecondary Success

Metro Atlanta's future workforce hinges on postsecondary success. Metro Atlanta's postsecondary enrollment was 69% in 2021 and postsecondary completion was 26% in 2022.



*Number of students enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of graduation who have completed at least one year of credits within the first two years of enrollment.



College Advising Corps (CAC)

College Advising Corps (CAC) is a national nonprofit focused on raising college enrollment and completion rates for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students. CAC places recent college graduates as full-time advisors in metro Atlanta high schools.



OneGoal

OneGoal is a national nonprofit that collaborates with schools in low-income areas to make postsecondary planning a core part of high school. Their three-year program supports students from junior year through their crucial first year in college or other postsecondary paths.



The Scholarship Academy

The Scholarship Academy (TSA) is a nonprofit program that helps low-income and first-generation students in Georgia, New York, and Washington, D.C. navigate financial aid and secure resources for affordable or even debt-free degrees.

89%

of APS students served by CAC completed at least one college application for the 2023-2024 school year



\$4M+

TSA has helped over 1,200 students secure more than \$4 million in federal aid in the 2023-2024 school year

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

Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is critical for postsecondary enrollment, unlocking more than \$120 billion in financial aid annually. In 2024, only 46% of high school seniors completed the FAFSA, down from 53% in 2023. Delays and glitches in the process disproportionately impacted disadvantaged students, increasing barriers to access and highlighting the urgent need for stronger support.

College Bound

To address barriers to completion and boost postsecondary enrollment, L4L continues to partner with The Scholarship Academy (TSA) and United Way of Greater Atlanta through the College Bound FAFSA Initiative. This initiative works with counselors in Title I schools across metro Atlanta to support students and families in completing the FAFSA.

Programming

- In-school FAFSA support, weekly from October to May
- Free FAFSA training for staff & volunteers
- 2-Day FAFSA completion events
 - Day 1: Cost of College workshop
 - Day 2: FAFSA completion + food truck
- FAFSA parent nights
- Virtual 1:1 office hours
- Mid-Year convening
- Programming for specialty groups

Summer Support

- Extended FAFSA support via TSA College Access Hub (due to FAFSA delays)

Resources

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



College Bound FAFSA Initiative 2023-2024 Highlights

10
Title I
high schools

4
school
districts

1,137
students
engaged

843
FAFSAs
completed

74%
completion rate
versus a 47% national
complete rate

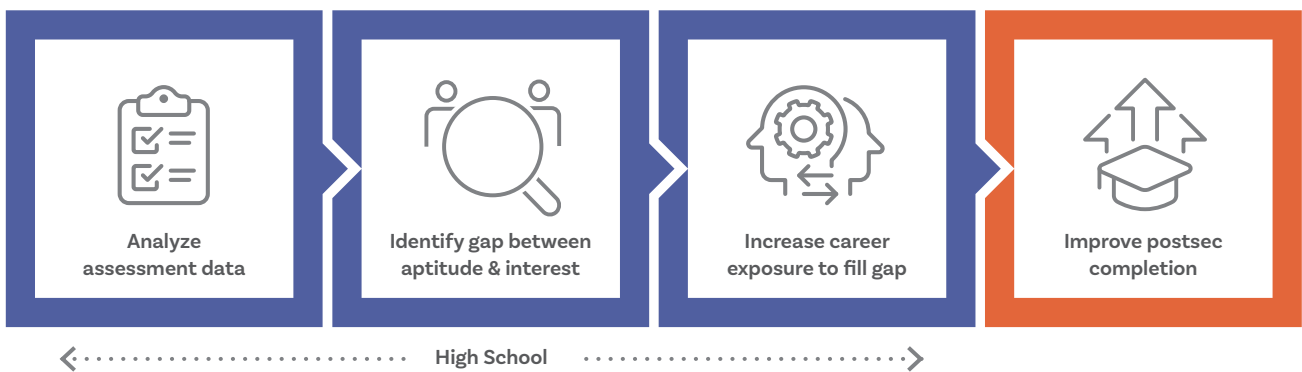
Interest & Aptitude Matching

Atlanta holds a wealth of untapped potential—students with aptitude for high-demand careers but limited interest due to lack of exposure. Unlocking this talent is key to Georgia’s future. Using insights from YouScience, a platform that uncovers students’ aptitudes and interests and aligns them with best-fit careers, L4L can help students explore their strengths and provide targeted career exposure, preparing them for clear postsecondary goals and critical roles after graduation.

Over the next five years, there will be 21,000 new jobs in healthcare and social services. Though students have aptitude for these roles, interest remains lower. The Interest and Aptitude Assessment* report provides more detail.

*Sources [here](#)

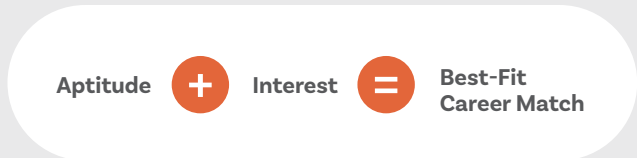
Theory of Change: Matching students with their aptitude will increase postsecondary completion



Grady Teen Experience and Leadership Program (TELP)

This summer, L4L partnered with Grady TELP, an 8-week program for high school students aged 14-19, offering 40+ hours of exposure to 70 healthcare careers through immersive experiences, workshops, and shadowing. L4L administered YouScience assessments to recommend tailored hospital rotations. The result: 95% of students reported increased interest in healthcare careers.

L4L sees this partnership as a potential blueprint for other industries to engage the region’s untapped potential and meet workforce needs in high-demand careers. By aligning student strengths with industry needs, we address career exposure gaps and support long-term workforce development and equity in our region.



Leadership Council

Community



Mindy Binderman, Executive Director, GEEARS
 Dr. Dana Rickman, President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
 Lauren Koontz, President and CEO, YMCA of Metro Atlanta
 Milton Little, President and CEO*, United Way of Greater Atlanta
 Santiago Marquez, CEO, Latin American Association
 Belisa M. Urbina, CEO, Ser Familia
 Dr. Janelle Williams, Co-Founder and CEO, Kindred Futures

Pre-K – 12 education



Dr. Devon Horton, Superintendent, DeKalb County School District
 Dr. Bryan Johnson, Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools
 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

Higher education



Dr. Kamau Bobb, Director, Constellations Center for Equity in Computing, Georgia Tech
 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. David Thomas, President, Morehouse College
 Dr. Georj L. Lewis, President, Clayton State University

Philanthropic



Frank Fernandez, President & CEO*, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
 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

Business



Ann Cramer, IBM Corporation, Retired*
 Raj Gazula, Head of Treasury Solutions, Truist
 Kevin Greiner, President and CEO, Gas South
 Katie Kirkpatrick, President and CEO*, Metro Atlanta Chamber
 Al McRae, President, Bank of America Atlanta
 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

Government



Dennis Lockhart, Former President and CEO†, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
 Anna Roach, Executive Director and CEO*, 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 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
College Football Playoff Foundation
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Gas South
Georgia Power
The Goizueta Foundation
Google
Graphic Packaging International
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

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; Tenicia Winston, Project Manager; Dr. Rebecca Parshall, Director of Strategy & Development; Yolanda Marroquin, Project Manager; Damian Ramsey, Community Engagement Manager

This report was made possible by a generous grant from The Goizueta Foundation.

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



Look for L4L Bright Spots throughout this report:

Early Literacy

- Reach Out & Read Georgia – p9
- ArtsNOW Learning – p9
- Cox Campus – p10
- Vision To Learn – p12

Eighth Grade Math

- STE(A)M Truck – p13
- Good to Great Metro Atlanta – p13
- RETAIN – p14

Postsecondary Success

- College Advising Corps – p15
- OneGoal – p15
- The Scholarship Academy – p15

