

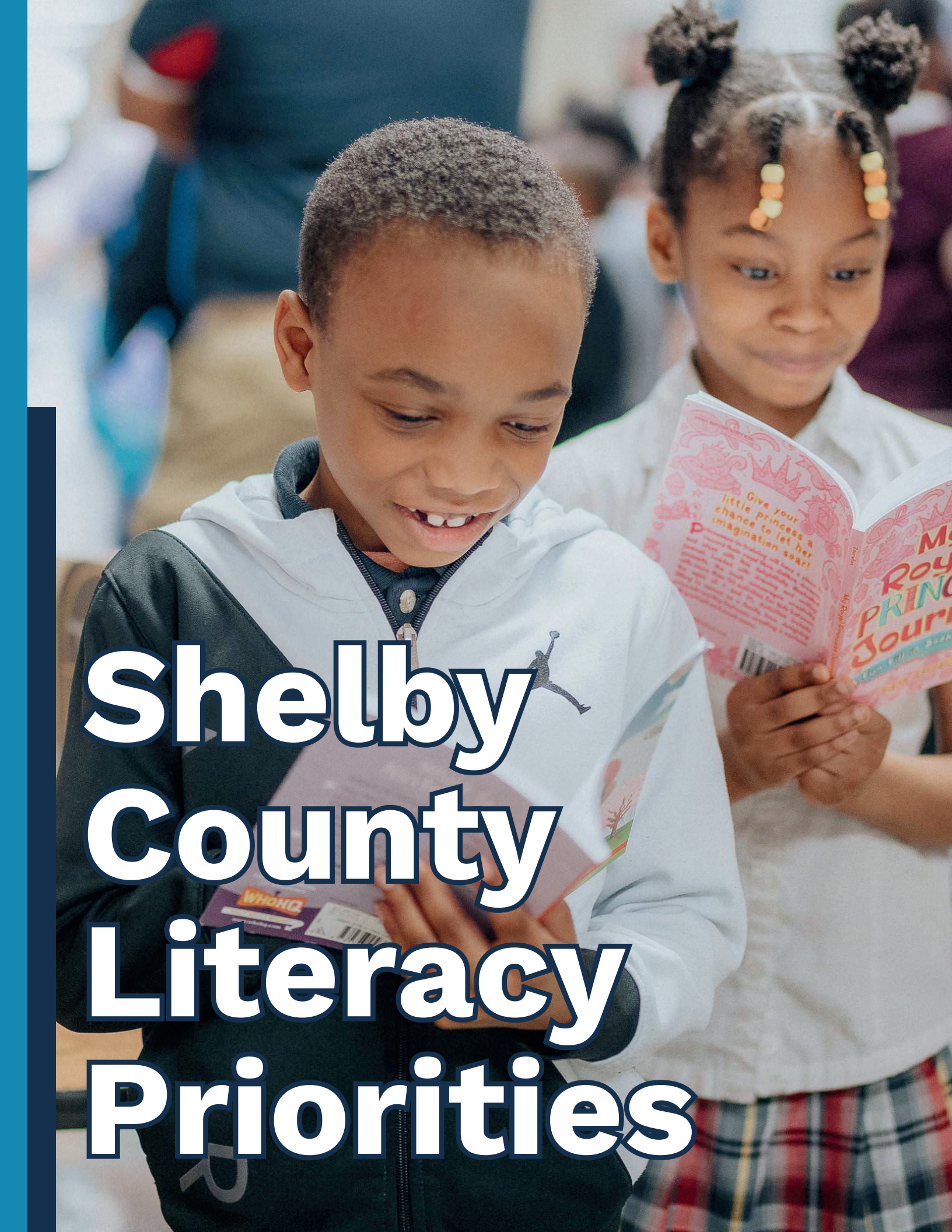
Shelby County Early Literacy Plan

2025

Convened by:



Version 1.0

A photograph of two young students in a classroom. In the foreground, a boy with short brown hair, wearing a white and black Jordan brand hoodie, is smiling and looking down at a book he is holding. In the background, a girl with her hair in two buns with yellow and orange beads, wearing a white shirt and a plaid skirt, is also looking down at a book. The books they are holding have colorful covers; the girl's book is pink and titled 'My Royal Princess Journal'.

Shelby County Literacy Priorities

County-Wide Early Literacy Priorities



Ensure Culturally Sustaining Literacy Experiences

- Center instructional and engagement practices that reflect children's identities, home languages, and communities.
- Support access to diverse books and culturally relevant programming across community settings.
- Explicitly address the needs of English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and other historically underserved populations through inclusive practices and targeted supports.



Coordinate Shared Systems, Advocacy & Policy

- Develop shared data tools, communication platforms, and advocacy strategies to support early literacy across the county.
- Pursue funding and policy changes at the county and state level that enable community-driven literacy efforts.



Establish Community Partnership Plans with Local School Districts

- Replicate the Memphis-Shelby County Schools CPP model with other districts and charter systems.
- Facilitate collaboration and shared learning among all Shelby County districts.

County-Wide Early Literacy Priorities



Strengthen Early Literacy Access & Engagement in the Birth–5 Space

- Align with existing early childhood collaboratives (e.g., First 8 Memphis) to elevate literacy within birth–5th grade systems, including childcare; friend, family, neighbor (FFN) providers; and home visiting programs.
- Support families and early care providers in fostering language and literacy development through culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate strategies.



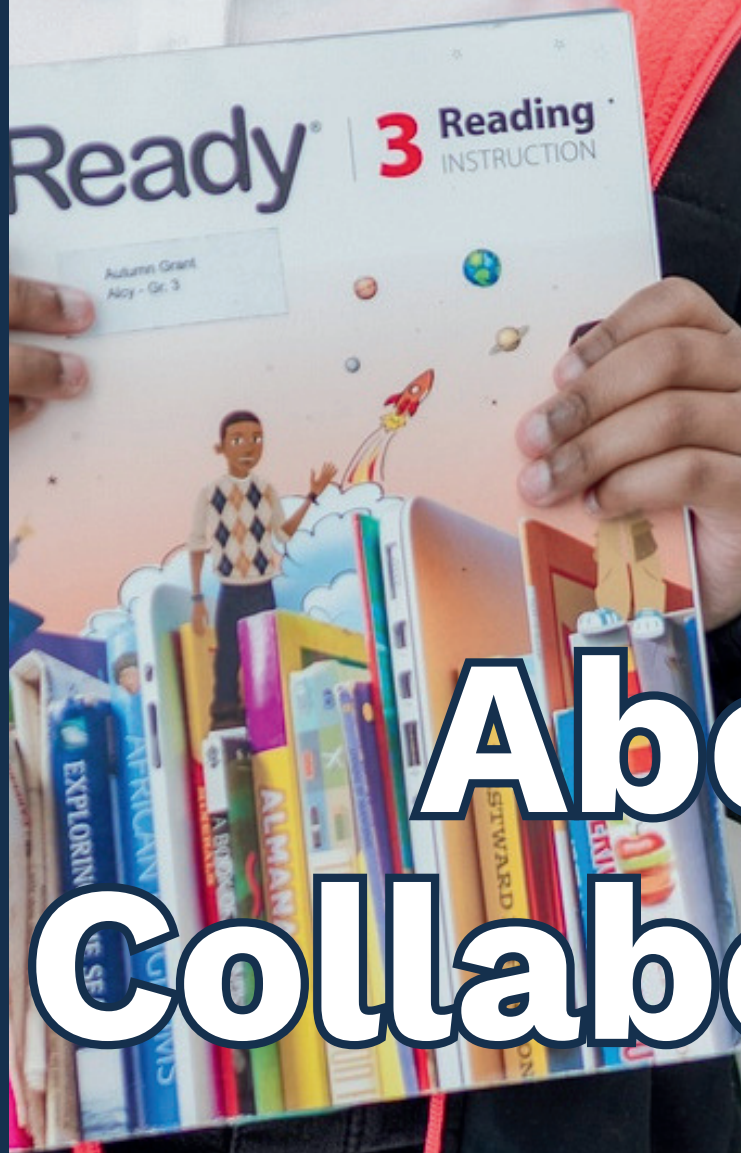
Build Place-Based Literacy Ecosystems

- Equip families, public sector entities, healthcare providers, community organizations, businesses, faith leaders, and other informal educators to foster early literacy.
- Activate homes, libraries, museums, clinics, faith centers, and OST programs as literacy-rich spaces.
- Support coordination, training, and tools to align efforts across neighborhoods and communities.

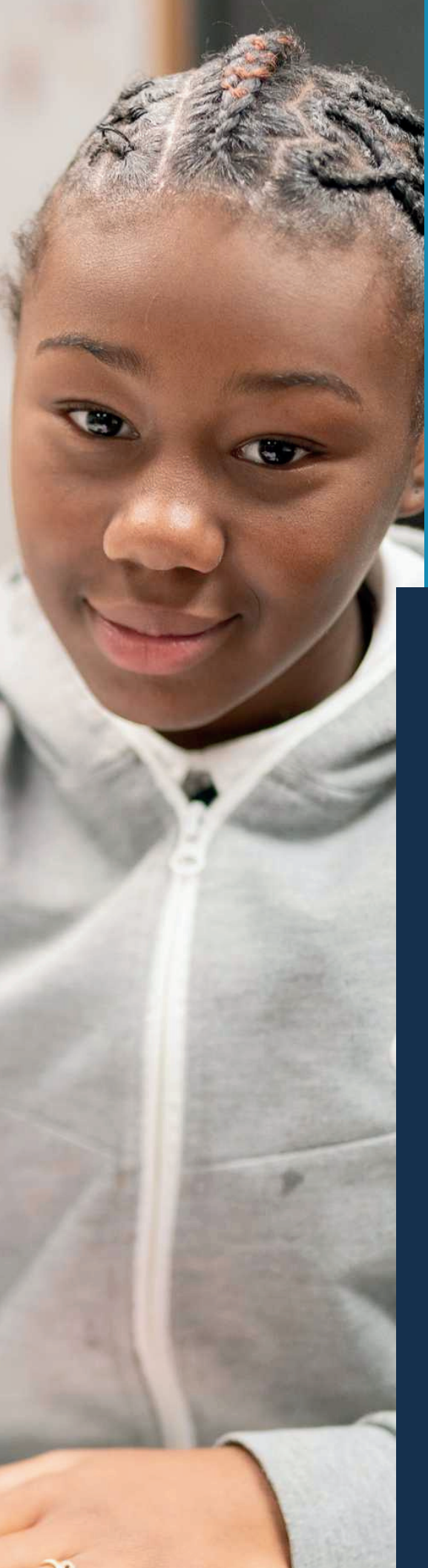


Build Community-Wide Volunteer & Tutoring Systems

- Create a county-wide system for recruiting, training, and deploying literacy volunteers and tutors.
- Leverage shared tools and standards across communities to improve consistency and access.
- Ensure tutors and volunteers are equipped to support students with learning differences, English language needs, and other unique learning profiles.



**About our
Collaboration**



Purpose

To serve as an overarching plan for advancing early literacy across Shelby County by aligning and activating community-based supports, building place-based literacy ecosystems, and ensuring in-school and out-of-school partnerships for a comprehensive, county-wide approach.

Vision

All children in Shelby County grow up in communities that nurture reading through aligned partnerships between families, neighborhoods, organizations, and schools.

Mission

To coordinate a county-wide effort that builds literacy-rich environments, empowers informal educators, and fosters strategic collaboration to ensure every child is supported on their path to reading proficiency.

Context & Rationale

Why This Plan, and Why Now?

Early literacy is one of the most powerful predictors of lifelong success. When children read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, they are significantly more likely to graduate from high school, pursue postsecondary education, secure stable employment, and lead healthier lives. We want all children in Shelby County to reach this critical milestone.

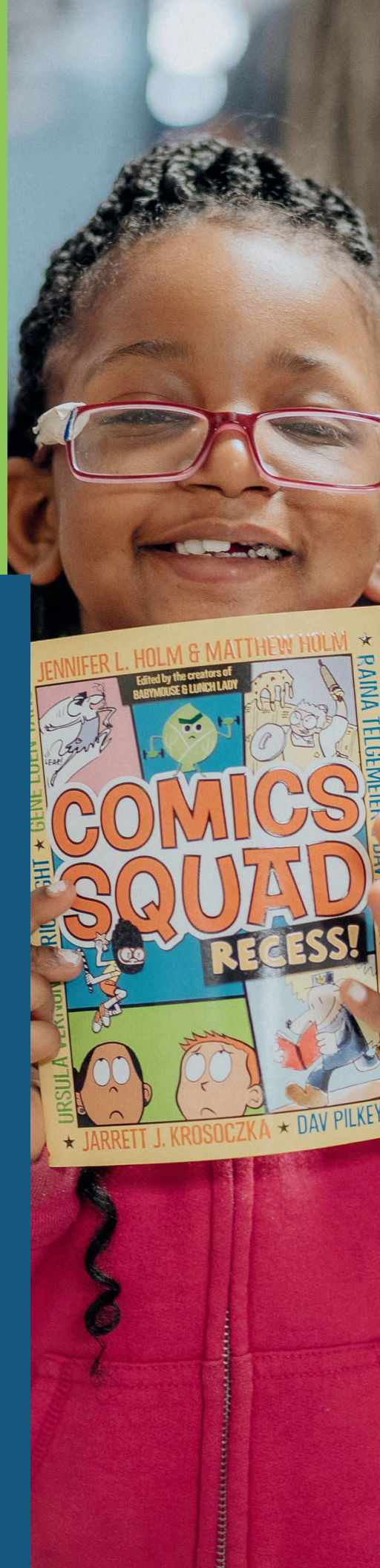
Over the past decade, coalitions of partners have taken action toward this goal:

- **In 2015**, a consortium of public and private stakeholders developed the **Memphis Early Childhood Plan**, identifying key needs and strategies from birth through 3rd grade.
- **In 2019**, the **Early Literacy Consortium (ELC)** was formed to bring community partners together to align early literacy efforts.
- **In 2021**, Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) began developing a districtwide literacy framework, which led to the adoption of a formal **Community Partnership Plan (CPP)** in 2023.
- **In 2022**, the Raleigh Literacy Zone launched as a place-based pilot to bring literacy supports directly into neighborhood settings.
- **Throughout this time**, organizations like **First 8 Memphis, Stand for Children Tennessee, Seeding Success, Urban Child Institute, Literacy Mid-South**, and more have led cross-sector collaboration to build a more equitable and effective early literacy system across the county.

These efforts—alongside many others led by grassroots organizers, nonprofit leaders, public institutions, and families—have laid the foundation for deeper collaboration. Still, much of this work has remained concentrated in specific organizations, schools, or systems.

This plan is part of the county-wide Read901 strategy, Shelby County's local effort to build a more literate community. Read901 brings together a multi-sector network to build a coordinated early literacy system. The strategies and structure of this plan—especially the development of Literacy Zones and CPPs—are designed to complement and strengthen the broader Read901 initiative.

While this plan centers on early childhood and K–5th grade literacy, the collaborative recognizes that literacy is a lifelong pursuit. Family literacy, adult basic education, and caregiver supports all play a role in children's development. Other collaboratives like Literacy Mid-South's Network for Adult Basic Literacy & Education (N-ABLE) will continue to champion adult learning needs alongside this plan's focus on early literacy.



The Opportunity Ahead

This plan responds to a shared call for a county-wide, community-driven strategy—a plan that connects formal and informal learning environments, centers family voice, and provides space for every district and neighborhood to lead.

What makes this plan unique is its dual commitment to:

- Building place-based, community-powered literacy ecosystems across neighborhoods, libraries, out-of-school time programs, faith institutions, and homes
- Partnering with school districts and charter systems directly to develop a local Community Partnership Plan (CPP) that supports shared priorities and structured collaboration.

By aligning around shared goals, clear priorities, and inclusive structures, we believe Shelby County can become a place where all children have the early literacy support they need to thrive.





Community Engagement & Co-Design Process



Our Process

This plan is the result of years of sustained input, collaboration, and shared visioning by partners across Shelby County. It reflects the voices, values, and expertise of **community-based organizations, educators, public institutions, funders, researchers, families, and faith leaders**—all working toward the common goal of improving early literacy outcomes.

Rather than being developed in a single moment or meeting, this plan was **assembled through years of ongoing engagement** in both formal and informal spaces. Partners shaped the priorities and structure of this plan through a wide range of engagement formats, including:

- Surveys and structured feedback loops
- Virtual and in-person consortium meetings
- Document review and collaborative editing
- Small-group strategy sessions and working groups
- Community focus groups and public events

These interactions have taken place within and beyond the Early Literacy Consortium (ELC), and they reflect a collective understanding that no single entity can improve early literacy alone.

Co-Ownership Going Forward

The work of this plan is not finished—it is meant to evolve. Partners will continue to shape its implementation through the same collaborative practices that created it.

- Priority teams, open to a wide range of partners, will be the primary mechanism for shared planning, accountability, and progress tracking.
- The ELC will continue to facilitate inclusive spaces for listening, learning, and coordination across sectors.
- Additional engagement methods will include partner convenings, learning exchanges, surveys, and community events.
- A versioning system (1.0, 1.a, 1.1, 2.0) will be used to track the plan's evolution over time. This approach allows for clear documentation of changes, from minor formatting fixes to major strategic shifts, while providing transparency about how the plan progresses.

This plan belongs to the community. Its strength will come from the people and organizations that continue to shape, own, and act on it together.

The Action Plan

SY25-26 - SY26-27

This plan is structured to guide progress over the next three years. Each priority includes suggested examples of action types, not mandates.

Community partners will collaboratively define specific activities based on local context, relationships, and momentum already underway.



Strengthen Early Literacy Access & Engagement in the Birth–5 Space

Focus: Align with existing early childhood education efforts (e.g., First 8 Memphis) while elevating early literacy in childcare, FFN, and home environments.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**

- Explore opportunities to deepen the literacy component of existing birth–5 initiatives
- Connect with family-serving organizations, FFN networks, and early care providers to elevate literacy as part of child development
- Gather feedback from families and providers about current literacy practices and needs

- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**

- Pilot alignment strategies that support early literacy across diverse early childhood settings (e.g., home visiting programs, child care, health systems)
- Partner with First 8 Memphis and others to co-create messaging and tools specific to birth–5 literacy

- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**

- Expand successful literacy alignment efforts to additional early learning partners
- Contribute to long-term advocacy efforts that elevate early literacy as a key early childhood outcome



Expand and Deepen Place-Based Literacy Ecosystems

Focus: Build on the success of the Raleigh Literacy Zone by strengthening and expanding literacy ecosystems across other neighborhoods in Shelby County.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**
 - Document and reflect on lessons learned from Raleigh Literacy Zone
 - Identify new neighborhoods that could benefit from literacy ecosystem work
 - Engage local stakeholders in defining what place-based literacy support should look like in their context
- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**
 - Support early ecosystem work in 1–2 new neighborhoods
 - Offer tools, training, and coordination support to site-based informal educators and anchor institutions
- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**
 - Formalize support structures across all literacy zones (Raleigh and new additions)
 - Develop feedback loops and shared learning opportunities between neighborhoods



Build Community-Wide Volunteer & Tutoring Systems

Focus: Enhance coordination, consistency, and equity in tutoring and volunteer literacy supports across the county.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**
 - Map existing tutoring and volunteer initiatives and identify gaps
 - Convene tutoring providers and volunteer leaders to explore shared training and onboarding practices
- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**
 - Pilot shared referral or recruitment models
 - Develop or adapt common volunteer training resources that reflect science of reading and local literacy needs
- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**
 - Expand shared models and participation across libraries, faith centers, schools, and community sites
 - Track collective impact and refine systems based on community feedback



Ensure Culturally Sustaining Literacy Experiences

Focus: Promote diverse, affirming, and relevant literacy practices and materials across community settings.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**
 - Conduct community inventory of culturally sustaining books, programs, and strategies
 - Elevate voices from culturally and linguistically diverse communities to define what sustaining practices mean locally
- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**
 - Support family and community-facing literacy activities that celebrate identity, culture, and language
 - Provide training or shared learning opportunities for informal educators and tutors
- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**
 - Integrate these practices into summer programs, OST programs, and ecosystem strategies
 - Evaluate reach and impact with community-defined indicators



Coordinate Shared Systems, Advocacy & Policy

Focus: Strengthen county-wide communication, coordination, and advocacy to sustain literacy efforts.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**
 - Convene partners to align on shared values, data needs, and advocacy priorities
 - Begin to explore shared communication tools and storytelling platforms
- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**
 - Pilot coordinated messaging, shared data tools, or pooled funding strategies
 - Identify 1–2 advocacy goals that align across multiple priorities
- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**
 - Sustain and grow advocacy and funding work with broader coalition support
 - Maintain communication infrastructure and annual reporting



Establish Community Partnership Plans with School Districts & Systems

Focus: Expand the MSCS CPP model to the many Shelby County school districts & systems, recognizing the unique context and strengths of each.

- **SY25–26: Foundation Phase**
 - Reach out to community & school leaders to explore interest
 - Share the CPP model and invite conversation about adapting it locally
 - Identify key community & school players who can develop and adopt the plan
- **SY26–27: Early Implementation**
 - Begin development of CPPs with interested districts/systems & community partners
 - Identify shared interests in community-driven literacy work
- **SY27–28: Scaling & Sustainability**
 - Finalize CPPs
 - Facilitate cross-district networking and resource sharing
 - Support shared projects or communications that connect CPP districts county-wide



A close-up photograph of a child's hand holding a yellow pencil, poised to write on a worksheet. The worksheet features a reading passage about the Statue of Liberty and a section for writing supporting sentences. The background is blurred, showing more of the worksheet and the child's arm in a blue sleeve. A vertical blue and green bar is on the left side of the image.

Shelby County Early Literacy KPI Structure

North Star Indicators (System-Level Impact)

These are long-term, county-wide literacy outcomes our collaboration aims to influence over time. They provide strategic direction and a shared sense of purpose.

Examples:

- % of children reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade (county-wide)
- % of children entering kindergarten meeting language/literacy readiness benchmarks
- *These indicators should be revisited annually as part of county-wide reflection and progress-sharing.*

Plan Progress Indicators (Strategic Milestones)

These indicators track how the collaborative is advancing through the action plan over the three-year timeline. They measure movement across priorities, not just outcomes.

Examples:

- # of priorities with active priority teams established
- % of priorities with Year 1 (“foundation”) activities completed
- # of community partners engaged across multiple priorities
- milestone completion by year (based on the 3-year sequencing guide)
- # of school districts/charter systems with a draft or completed CPP

These can be updated quarterly or semi-annually and used to fuel accountability and storytelling within the collaborative.



Priority-Specific KPIs (Priority Team Defined)

Each priority area (e.g., Volunteer Systems, Culturally Sustaining Practices) will have its own priority team that defines what progress looks like by monitoring existing work and tracking new efforts. These may include outputs, short-term outcomes, or partner-defined benchmarks.

Examples (defined by future groups):

- # of family literacy nights hosted in early care settings
- # of volunteers trained with aligned tools and deployed in target zip codes
- % of families who report feeling confident supporting literacy at home
- # of place-based partners integrating early literacy activities

These KPIs will evolve based on what data is available, what priority teams value, and where the collaborative sees impact.





Governance & Implementation

SY25-26 - SY26-27

The Shelby County Early Literacy Community Partnership Plan is designed to be owned and advanced by community partners across the county, with coordination through the Early Literacy Consortium (ELC). This section outlines how implementation will be organized and how partners will collaborate to move the work forward.



Role of the Early Literacy Consortium (ELC)

The ELC serves as the coordinating body for this plan, supporting alignment, transparency, and collaboration across all six priority areas.

ELC responsibilities include:

- Facilitating regular convenings for progress updates and shared learning
- Tracking plan-wide milestones and coordinating data/reporting
- Supporting communication across priority teams, funders, and stakeholders
- Maintaining and updating the shared action plan, as needed
- Convening ad hoc strategy or troubleshooting sessions as needed

Priority Teams

Each of the six plan priorities will have a dedicated priority team made up of community partners, district liaisons, and other relevant stakeholders. Priority teams are the engines of implementation and co-creation.

Each priority team will be responsible for:

- Identifying specific goals and opportunities aligned with the priority
- Defining and tracking relevant indicators
- Sharing updates and lessons with the ELC
- Coordinating pilot activities, resource needs, and shared tools
- Identifying the alignment of ongoing work to plan priorities
- Ensuring community voices are represented in planning

Priority teams may vary in size and format depending on the scope and timeline of the priority. Some may operate continuously, while others work in sprints or around specific milestones.



Community Champions and Conveners

For each priority team, one or more community champions may be identified to serve as lead conveners. These champions will help organize meetings, steward communication, and maintain continuity.

Community champions may:

- Be organizations already leading in this area
- Serve as thought partners to ELC leadership team
- Help ensure representation from neighborhoods and municipalities across the county

Champions are not the “owners” of a priority, but the facilitators of shared progress.

School District Engagement

A central goal of this plan is to support the creation of Community Partnership Plans (CPPs) between Shelby County’s school districts/charter systems and the community organizations around them. Each CPP will include the formation of a school-led collaborative body—modeled after MSCS’s Strategic Partners for Literacy (SPL)—to advance the shared early literacy priorities of the school system and community.

Each district’s CPP will include:

- A collaborative body led by the school system that includes key community partner leaders (funders, nonprofits, universities, etc.)
- Priority-specific teams to implement the CPP in partnership with community organizations
- School-aligned strategies that reflect both school and community strengths
- Shared indicators defined by the school and its community partners

District representatives are also encouraged to:

- Participate in county-wide priority teams (ELC) where there is alignment
- Share learning and tools between districts through the ELC
- Use the county-wide plan to support the design and implementation of their local CPP

This structure supports both localized ownership and county-wide coherence, ensuring each district’s CPP reflects its unique context while aligning with broader goals.



Plan Maintenance and Adaptation

This plan is intended to be living and flexible, not static. At least once per year, the ELC will host a plan review session to:

- Reflect on what's working and where pivots are needed
- Add or adapt action steps based on emerging opportunities
- Reconfirm commitment and coordination across priority teams
- Share progress on milestones and KPIs

Version System Detailed

The plan uses a versioning system to track progress and development stages:

- **Version 1.0: Represents the initial aligned plan developed from stakeholder input and review.**
 - It means we agree the priorities are right to pursue; the structure is strong enough to move to implementation; and priority teams will launch to pilot and refine what's in the plan.
 - It does not mean the plan is permanent or inflexible, or that every section is complete or fully resourced.
 - It is meant as a living foundation that priority teams will follow, adapt, and update as needed.
- **Minor Adjustments:** formatting fixes, typo corrections, small clarifications (+a, Version 1.a)
- **Moderate Update:** new strategies from priority teams, refined KPIs, revised roles (+.1, Version 1.1)
- **Major Versions:** adding/removing a priority, changing the structure, major strategic shift, ending a plan cycle (+1, Version 2.0)

The versioning approach allows for:

- Clear documentation of how the plan evolves over time
- Ability to track which changes were implemented and when
- Transparency in communication with all stakeholders about plan progress



Communications & Storytelling Plan





Building a county-wide culture of literacy requires more than strong strategies—it requires strong stories. Communication will play a vital role in ensuring that families, partners, and the broader public understand the vision of this plan, see themselves reflected in it, and feel invited to take part.

This plan outlines a shared communications and storytelling approach designed to:

- Raise visibility of early literacy as a county-wide priority
- Celebrate community-led progress and neighborhood wins
- Support transparency and trust across sectors
- Foster collaboration and reduce duplication of effort
- Invite new partners, volunteers, and families into the work

Core Communication Components

Regular Progress Updates

- Share milestone achievements and key data points through newsletters, infographics, or public dashboards
- Offer brief quarterly updates from priority teams or CPPs
- Release an annual “State of Early Literacy in Shelby County” report to reflect on county-wide progress

Community-Centered Storytelling

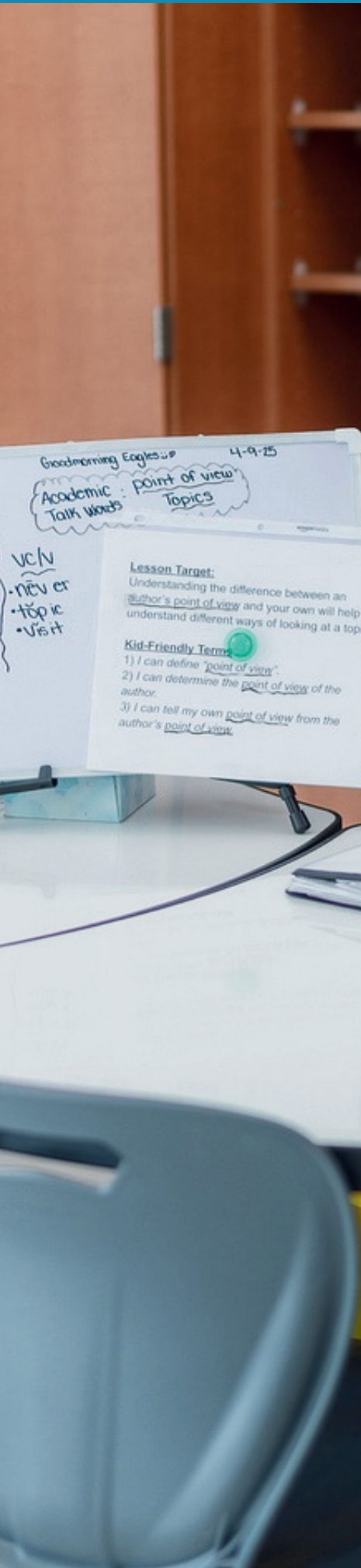
- Highlight stories of impact from across neighborhoods (families, tutors, librarians, program leaders, etc.)
- Use video, blog posts, social media, and community radio to feature voices across sectors and zip codes
- Collaborate with place-based partners to lift up local literacy efforts in real time

Partner-Focused Messaging

- Create a partner toolkit to help organizations share aligned messages and promote the plan
- Offer shared language and visuals to unify literacy efforts across Shelby County
- Amplify successes from priority teams and district CPPs via ELC communication channels

Family Engagement Campaigns

- Collaborate with trusted messengers (faith leaders, health providers, teachers) to share tips and tools
- Use everyday language to show families how they already support literacy—and how to do even more
- Promote joyful, culturally relevant literacy activities in homes and communities



Communications Rhythm

Frequency	Activity
Monthly	Social media storytelling or partner spotlight
Quarterly	Brief plan progress updates + partner highlights
Annually	Full report on literacy progress + call to action
Ongoing	Collection of family and partner stories across neighborhoods

Guiding Principles

- **Celebrate community** over programs
- **Lift up many voices**, not just centralized leadership
- **Center joy and equity** in all messaging
- **Communicate in multiple formats and languages** instead of relying on traditional methods
- **Close the loop**—always show how stories or feedback shape the work



First Steps & Near Term Priorities

To move from planning to action, the Early Literacy Consortium (ELC) and its partners will begin coordinated work in the following areas during SY25–26:

- **Establish and launch priority teams** for each of the six county-wide priorities, beginning with identification of conveners, shared goals, and early KPIs.
- **Engage school districts, charter systems and community partners** to explore interest and readiness for co-developing Community Partnership Plans (CPPs), modeled after the MSCS CPP.
- **Map current efforts** (e.g., tutoring programs, family engagement events, literacy zones) to identify overlaps, gaps, and opportunities for alignment.
- **Convene community partners** to co-define early literacy metrics and establish shared tools for tracking and communication.
- **Begin building community awareness** of the plan through storytelling, presentations, and tailored outreach by neighborhood, sector, and school system.