

**BACKGROUND**

*“The ability to read fluently and for understanding...is perhaps the most important foundational skill for U.S. adult citizens' health, well-being, and social and economic advancement. It is a gateway to lifelong learning, education, and training” (Sabatini, 2015). However, studies indicate disturbingly low literacy rates for children and adults in the US. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) revealed that only 39% of 4th graders and 32% of 8th graders read proficiently (USDOE, 2022). The link between poverty and low literacy rates is well documented. Unfortunately, a longstanding upward trajectory of the prevalence of children in poverty has now resulted in low-income students comprising the majority of students in our nation’s public schools (A. E. Casey, 2018).*

*The difficulties in language and literacy that some children encounter begin at a very early age and often persist. Hart and Risley’s (1995) landmark study of interactions with young children highlighted the linguistic disadvantage experienced by children growing up in poverty. In their study, socioeconomically disadvantaged children were exposed to about one fourth of the number of words during their first years of life as children from affluent families. Studies conducted since Hart and Risley’s have continued to document the lack of literacy experiences for young children in poverty. Researchers have found lower rates of children in poverty being read to by family members. For example, “While 59% of children from families with incomes of 400% FPL [federal poverty level] or greater were read to every day, only 36% children from families with incomes less than 100% FPL were reported to be read to daily.”*

*These differences in exposure to language and print put children from low-income families at serious and long-term risk for a host of difficulties. For example, in follow-up studies conducted 29 years after measuring British preschoolers’ vocabularies, it was found that many of the children with weak receptive language in preschool continued to experience academic problems throughout school. These children were also more likely to experience persistent social, emotional, and behavioral problems. However, many of these effects were diminished by high quality preschool and primary school instruction. Effective early intervention that targets children with low levels of language and literacy development is critical, but too many teachers are poorly equipped to provide such intervention to the children who need it.*

*The key to improving reading proficiency is to build educators' specialized skills in effective reading instruction through research-based professional development. The School District of Manatee County serves as a catalyst to promote academic and personal growth for their students. The school district is partnering with the University of Florida Lastinger Center (UFLC) to improve student literacy outcomes through specialized training in the Science of Reading.*

### **COMMUNICATION AND EVALUATION**

**Communication.** *UF Lastinger Center will meet with the School District of Manatee County to ensure collaboration, communication, and continuous improvement. UFLC will share progress towards the timely completion of the deliverable.*

**Evaluation.** *Continuous evaluation facilitates planning and improves decision-making in a proactive, formative manner. The UFLC will provide the School District of Manatee County with a final evaluation report that will include the following data points:*

- *Analysis of growth in educator content knowledge*
- *Educator participation in professional development*
- *Session evaluations*
- *Analysis of child outcomes in literacy (if data are available)*