New Two-Year Data Show Early Signs of Progress in Kansas City's Literacy for All Students Initiative

Independent analysis from UMKC finds students in Literacy for All partnering schools nearly closing the national reading growth gap after two years

KANSAS CITY, MO, UNITED STATES, September 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- New data from SchoolSmartKC's Literacy for All Students (LFAS) initiative show early signs of progress in closing a long-standing gap in reading growth among Kansas City's youngest students. The findings, independently tracked by the Urban Education Research Center (UERC) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, cover the initiative's first two full years, from fall 2024 through fall 2025.

> "These are early signs, not a finish line. These results tell us that when we align coaching, tutoring, and family and community support around literacy, students succeed."
>
> *Dr. Angelique Nedved, President and CEO, SchoolSmartKC*

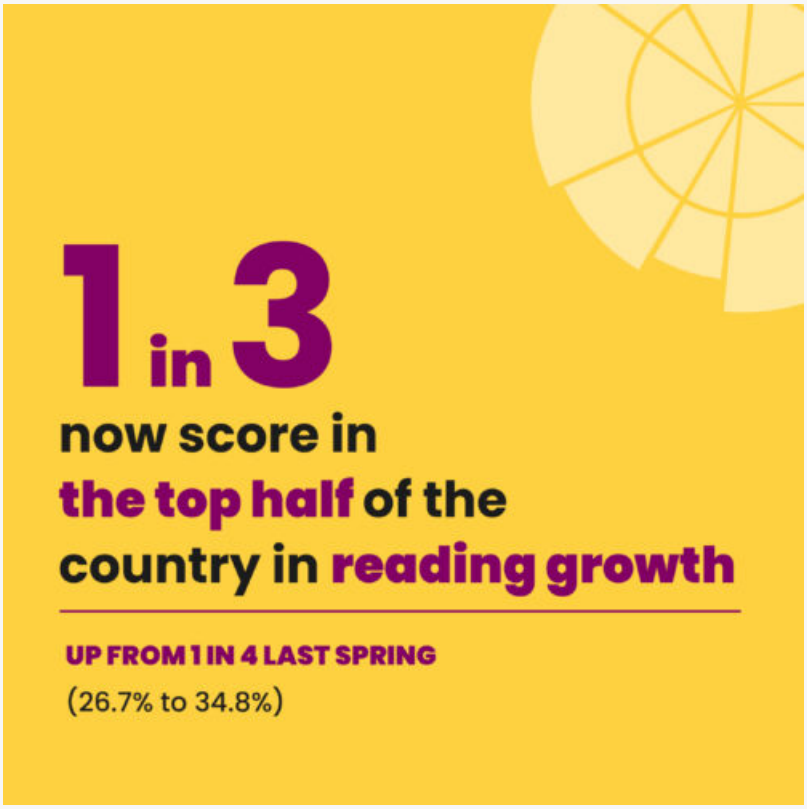
The clearest signal of progress is in student growth. Before LFAS began, 35.5% of students in partnering schools were meeting their annual literacy growth goal, a per-student benchmark set at a typical year's worth of progress. Nationally, 50% of students meet that benchmark, because it is set at the national median. By spring 2026, 48.5% of students in LFAS partnering schools were meeting their growth goal, within two points of the national rate. Because these students started well behind that line, closing most of the gap in two years is an early but meaningful indicator that the initiative's supports are reaching classrooms and students as intended.

A second measure of progress also moved meaningfully. The share of students at LFAS partnering schools scoring in the bottom quartile nationally fell from 54.4% to 36.8%. By definition, 25% of students nationally are in that range. LFAS schools started at more than double that share.

Both measures come from nationally normed reading assessments that every LFAS school gives its K-3 students in the fall, winter, and spring. Over the same two years, more students met their growth goal and fewer scored in the bottom 25% nationally.

"We want to be precise about what this data does and doesn't tell us," said Dr. Angelique

Nedved, president and CEO of SchoolSmartKC. “Grade-level proficiency on the state reading test hasn't moved yet, and we wouldn't expect it to this early based on what the research and national trends tell us. Growth comes first. Proficiency follows. The latest results are early indicators that this work is on the right track and that's worth sharing.”



SchoolSmartKC Literacy for All Students Initiative Shows Early Signs for Growth

SchoolSmartKC credits the results to the educators and school teams doing the daily work of literacy instruction, with LFAS providing a coordinated and resourced system around them. “Our schools were already working hard,” said Dr. Nedved. “Literacy for All Students aligns that work, through consistent coaching, tutoring, and support for families, across every partnering school, so that progress doesn't depend on any one classroom, grant, or any one champion.”

“Our school became a partner in the Literacy for All Students initiative last school year, and our results so far stopped me in my tracks,” said Dr. Stacy King, superintendent of Kansas City International Academy. “On the WIDA ACCESS assessment, the share of our English Language Learners meeting their growth target or reaching proficiency nearly doubled. The results reveal the impact of having literacy-trained teachers and staying the course over time. Literacy for All Students helped us to sharpen our literacy focus, and it gave us something to build on top of that foundation: coaching for every K-3 teacher, coaching for our building leaders, tutoring for every K-3 student, and learning alongside other school teams doing the same work.”

Literacy for All Students launched in 2024 as a citywide effort to strengthen early literacy instruction for Kansas City's youngest readers. Entering the new school year, LFAS serves kindergarten through third-grade students across 15 partner schools, with a long-term goal of reaching every K-3 student across the Kansas City public education system. Learn more at schoolsmartkc.org/literacy-for-all-students/.

About SchoolSmartKC
SchoolSmartKC works to accelerate student growth and proficiency across Kansas City's public education system by centering community, championing student success levers, and reimagining education. Working alongside families, schools, funders, and community partners, the

organization invests in proven strategies that strengthen early learning, improve K-12 instruction, and expand pathways to career readiness. SchoolSmartKC has supported 100% of the public schools in the Kansas City Public Education System, added nearly 800 new quality Pre-K seats, and facilitated the increase of new educators of color to to the region's schools by 10% points. Through a systems-level, collaborative approach, SchoolSmartKC is helping Kansas City become a model for public education where every student has what they need to thrive. Learn more at schoolsmartkc.org.

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