



DIXSON CONSULTING

The Literacy Clinic

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The Literacy Clinic (TLC) is a program designed to support newly incarcerated adults attain their high school equivalency graduation; support k-2 students in public schools in St. John the Baptist Parish; and provide tutoring support for juveniles who are justice-involved in the River Parish community. TLC started in 2022 and has reached nearly 427 adults, justice-involved juveniles and k-2 public school students. In school year 2024-2025, TLC will expand to service a school in Orleans Parish.

Literacy, the ability to read, write, and speak effectively and with fluency, is essential and critical for full participation in society at large. The program takes a pipeline approach to addressing the literacy crisis in the River Parish region and in Orleans Parish. The data on the relationship between low literacy and incarceration are stark, but clear about the importance of literacy instruction as a preventative measure and as a potential deterrent for future criminality. Nearly 85% of all incarcerated juveniles are functionally illiterate¹. Teens with low literacy skills generally do not graduate high school and are effectively locked out of the job market. The rates of functional illiteracy of incarcerated adults are equally as concerning. Nearly 60% of all incarcerated adults are functionally illiterate². Thus, it is crucial that we address and eradicate the literacy crisis in the U.S. and Louisiana.

The promise of TLC is its multi-generational approach. That is, the program not only aspires to engage recently incarcerated adults and justice-involved juveniles, but it also partners with local schools to provide support for their literacy programs that align with requirements by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE)³.

The following are the goals of TLC:

- 1. The Literacy Clinic will increase high school equivalency graduation rates among criminal-court-involved adults in St. John the Baptist Parish**
- 2. The Literacy Clinic will increase at-grade-level reading rates among children in grades K-2,**

¹ <https://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html>

² https://nces.ed.gov/naal/prison_lit.asp

³ https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/literacy/louisiana-comprehensive-literacy-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=500c6418_6

attending public schools in St. John the Baptist Parish and Orleans Parish

- 3. The Literacy Clinic will identify juvenile-justice-involved youth with literacy deficits and/or who are one or more grade levels behind and provide tutoring services aimed at closing learning gaps/grade level gaps for this population**

This report will base its evaluation on the program's three goals using available survey, interview, and achievement data.

Goal 1: The Literacy Clinic will increase high school equivalency graduation rates among criminal-court-involved adults in St. John the Baptist Parish.

Goal 3: The Literacy Clinic will identify juvenile-justice-involved youth with literacy deficits and/or who are one or more grade levels behind and provide tutoring services aimed at closing learning gaps/grade level gaps for this population

To meet these goals, TLC, identified the following benchmark:

1. Provide 10 adults and/or juveniles pleading to probation for non-violent, non-sex-related offenses in the 40th JDC support in enrolling in and completing literacy instructional courses at River Parish Community College or with other comparable literacy support service provider.

Outcomes:

TLC enrolled 7 adults and/or juveniles to participate and for whom they would support as they pursued a graduation certificate through the HiSet program (adults). One adult who participated in TLC completed the HiSet program and will earn her high school diploma in August 2024.

The program partnered with a local non-profit organization, Thoughts Before Actions, to establish contact, maintain communication, and document progress with juvenile justice-involved youth who were enrolled in TLC.

Considering that TLC missed meeting their enrollment benchmark coupled with the limited data on attendance and completion, TLC might consider developing and using consistently, more robust data protocols that track participation, progress, and completion, before they fully implement the program. I recommend a formal enrollment process with electronic time and date stamps to ensure accurate data to track attendance, progress, and completion. Similarly, I recommend an electronic call log to track successful engagement and attempts to communicate with each participant.

Goal 2: The Literacy Clinic will increase at-grade-level reading rates among children in grades K-2, attending public schools in St. John the Baptist Parish and Orleans Parish

TLC partnered with two elementary schools in the St. John Parish. Over the course of two school years, TLC reached 420 students in grades k-2. The program used a multi-pronged approach to provide support for school leaders and teachers to meet and exceed their literacy goals as documented in their literacy plans required by the LDE.

Outcomes:

TLC hosted or provided financial support for fifteen (15) literacy events that included providing books for each student, classroom sets of books for two elementary schools, and Author's Corners where authors of children's books visited classrooms to read their books and engage in conversations with the students about the books.

In addition, TLC funded field trips related to literacy for two schools. This funding provided free entrance for students and their parents and covered transportation to and from the field trip. This inclusion of parents is critical to the literacy development of young children. The research on the positive impact of parental involvement and engagement in literacy experiences for young children is robust and overwhelmingly clear about its importance⁴. This support is critical especially in Louisiana where funding for public education is precarious given the interest in expanding vouchers and the presence of charter schools in Orleans and East Baton Rouge Parish. Thus, it is important that schools find partners who can provide critical support for key academic areas, especially in literacy.

Interview data⁵:

In an interview with one school principal, she describes TLC as an important partner who has helped her teachers, students, and parents, access materials and experiences they would not have otherwise been able to afford. Moreover, she credits TLC with inspiring in her students a love for books and reading. Because TLC ensures that every student in grades K-2 is given a book at every Author's Corner event, the students have been able to build their own home library. Access to print books is critical for literacy development of young children⁶.

Survey data:

Over 420 students responded to all surveys related to the Author's Corner event at their schools. One hundred per cent of the student respondents rated the events as 5, Strongly Agree, on a 5 point-Likert scale survey. The survey questions given to students are below:

1. How well did you like the book?
2. How well did you like the author reading the book aloud?
3. Would you like to have another author read to you?
4. What part of the book did you like the most from the Author's Corner?

⁴ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496346.pdf>

⁵ See Appendix A for Interview protocol

⁶ <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/bookaccess/index.html>

32 adults that included parents, teachers, and community-stake holders completed four (4) surveys across 3 time points during the program: The start of each program year, the middle of each program year, and the end of each program year. The respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the program with 100% of respondents giving a rating of 5 on a 5-point Likert scale that they would recommend the program to a friend or colleague.

Parent responses illustrate the need for the TLC program. Parents asked for more intentional support and training on how to help their children with reading and writing at home.

Teachers were pleased with the opportunities to engage with the community on literacy nights and believed that programs like TLC are critical for the literacy achievement of young children.

Community members were equally supportive of and excited about TLC and its involvement with public schools in the region.

Overall, the K-2 focus of TLC appears to be more impactful. The range of offerings for students, families, teachers, and community members is more developed than what is currently in place for adults and juvenile justice-involved students.

Areas for Growth:

Across all adult respondents, they were consistent with the feedback they offered as it pertained to ways TLC can improve its programming, data collection and evaluation methods, and engagement and communication with families, teachers, and community members.

The following recommendations come directly from survey data and interview data.

Recommendations:

1. Create and implement a more systematic and robust process to collect data from parents and students.
 - a. Employ multiple methods of data collection with parents. Many parents do not have access to desk top computers or have consistent wi-fi/internet access. They may use their cell phones to text and check email, but that may not allow them to fully participate in surveys or other data collection methods that rely on internet-based platforms and technology.
 - b. Translate all surveys and information for families and community members into Spanish for English-Language Learners participants and their families. Some ELL students and their parents may not be fully literate in Spanish; thus, it is imperative that the program work with a translator who understands how to communicate across a range of literacy levels in Spanish.
2. Expand the program to middle schools and middle school students.
3. Engage with Parent Teacher Organizations
 - a. Provide parent literacy trainings
 - b. Provide hands-on trainings where both parents and teachers attend and learn together
 - c. Expand methods and opportunities for both TLC and schools to engage with parents

4. Incorporate more technology into literacy events to expand the number and kind of authors that families and students can meet and talk to.
 - a. Generate a list of resources for principals.

Conclusion:

Taken in total, TLC is a promising program that has been met positively and with considerable interest and excitement across a range of stakeholders. While the program needs a more robust and consistent method to collect data, maintain contact with participants, monitor their progress, evaluate the program's impact, and adjust the programming or infrastructure, stakeholders remain excited about the program and will recommend it to friends and colleagues. Thus, the potential for TLC's growth in both the River Parish region and in Orleans Parish is considerable. As a relatively young program with limited staff, the paucity of data and lack of protocols is minor and can be corrected relatively quickly.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

What are the benefits of the literacy clinic supporting her students their families?

What impact has TLC had on the students?

What are some areas of improvement?

What are some areas of growth?

In what ways does TLC support the schools' literacy programs and incentives to support students with reading gaps in literacy?