



THE FLORIDA TALENT CENTER

**DATAHUB**

# Case Study:

Using the Power of Data to Drive Strategic Workforce Outcomes and Investments in Early Literacy

Analyzing 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Literacy and Investment Opportunities in Hillsborough County Schools

2025

**THE FLORIDA  
TALENT CENTER**  
*Powered by the Florida Chamber Foundation*

# Analyzing 3rd Grade Literacy and Investment Opportunities in Hillsborough County Schools

## Florida's Future Starts Early

Florida's talent pipeline begins with Florida's earliest learners, meaning that investing in Florida's young students from as early as birth to grade 3 is an investment in the future of Florida's workforce. The Florida Chamber Foundation's 2030 Blueprint outlines six goals related to Talent Supply and Education, spanning the cradle-to-career continuum. Two goals in the Florida Chamber Foundation's 2030 Blueprint focus on Florida's elementary school students. To grow Florida into a Top 10 global economy by 2030, we must ensure that:

- 100% of children are ready for kindergarten, and
- 100% of Florida 3rd graders read at or above grade level.

Businesses across Florida have recognized the importance of these benchmarks, as 3rd grade is when students go from learning to read to reading to learn. This key transition point in education has shown that 3rd grade literacy is an important indicator of success throughout a student's educational journey and beyond.

### *Improving Florida's talent pipeline for a better workforce*

**>80%** of Florida's workforce has essential **employability skills**

**>60%** of Floridians 25-64 have a high-value **postsecondary certificate, degree, or training experience**

**95%** of entering **high school students graduate within 4 years**

**100%** of Florida **8th graders read & perform math at or above grade level**

**100%** of Florida **3rd graders read at or above grade level**

**100%** of children are **ready for kindergarten**

Similar to the significance of 3rd grade reading achievement as a building block for later academic and workforce success, Voluntary PreKindergarten (VPK) and Kindergarten Readiness are foundational to success in the next steps in education. When a student is considered “ready for kindergarten”, it has [shown to positively impact 3rd-grade reading proficiency, as 75% of children who enter kindergarten behind never catch up to their peers.](#)

Business and community involvement in every stage of the talent pipeline is necessary to secure Florida’s workforce, and many choose to invest in this early elementary stage, including those in Hillsborough County who are referenced in this case study. Currently, 57% of Florida’s 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are reading on or above grade level, with one-third of the counties in the state seeing even lower literacy rates. With over 94,000 third graders across Florida not reading at grade level, interventions cannot be solely at a state, or even a county level, because student outcomes and challenges vary by every zip code and every school. To help business leaders target investments where they are needed most, data, like 3rd grade reading outcomes, are available on the Florida Talent Center Data Hub, making it easier to identify areas of opportunity for impact.

## Introduction of Data Hub

### Overview of all Data Hub Data

The Florida Chamber Foundation's newest public-facing tool, the **Florida Talent Center Data Hub**, provides business, education, and community leaders with key cradle-to-career metrics to strategically form partnerships, target investments, and build talent pipelines. The Florida Talent Center Data Hub includes four dashboards: Early Learning, K-12 Education, Postsecondary Education, and Workforce, enabling business and community leaders to better understand challenges and opportunities at the state, county, zip code, and school level. Highlighted metrics include:

- Access and affordability of quality childcare
- The impact of early learning on Kindergarten Readiness
- Student performance in reading, math, and science
- Postsecondary completion and salary data

- Workforce development for opportunity populations such as:
  - Veterans
  - Persons with disabilities
  - Adults without a high school equivalency diploma
  - And more.

As business, education, and community leaders consider the challenges that Florida's students face, the Florida Talent Center Data Hub arms them with the data needed to implement strategic and effective investments, policies, and initiatives.

## Data Specific to this Case Study

### *Kindergarten Readiness*

Among so much else, the Florida Talent Center Data Hub includes data on Florida's K-12 learners, beginning with Kindergarten Readiness. This measure, which represents the percentage of Florida's new students who are "[Kindergarten Ready](#)," is available for every school in the state, allowing for focus by county and school.

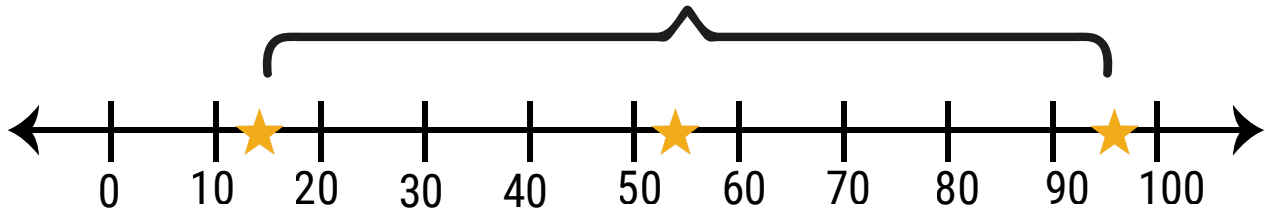
### *3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Scores*

The Florida Talent Center Data Hub includes hundreds of data points across every stage of the talent pipeline, including 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading outcomes across every school in Florida. The tool allows for the focus on one county and the sorting of schools based on reading level. This simple organization of granular data allows leaders to dive deep into one specific county.

## Case Study: Analysis of Hillsborough

To see the potential use and applicability of this data availability and organization, let's consider just one of Florida's 67 counties - Hillsborough County. In Hillsborough County, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency varies across schools by an incredible 80 percentage points – from 95% at McFarlane Park Elementary to 15% at across 3 different schools, Washington Elementary, Shaw Elementary, and Potter Elementary. The lowest performing schools also have scores much lower than the Hillsborough County average of 53%.

80 Percentage Point Gap Between Lowest and Highest Performing Schools



Hillsborough County Lowest, Average, and Highest School 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Proficiency Levels

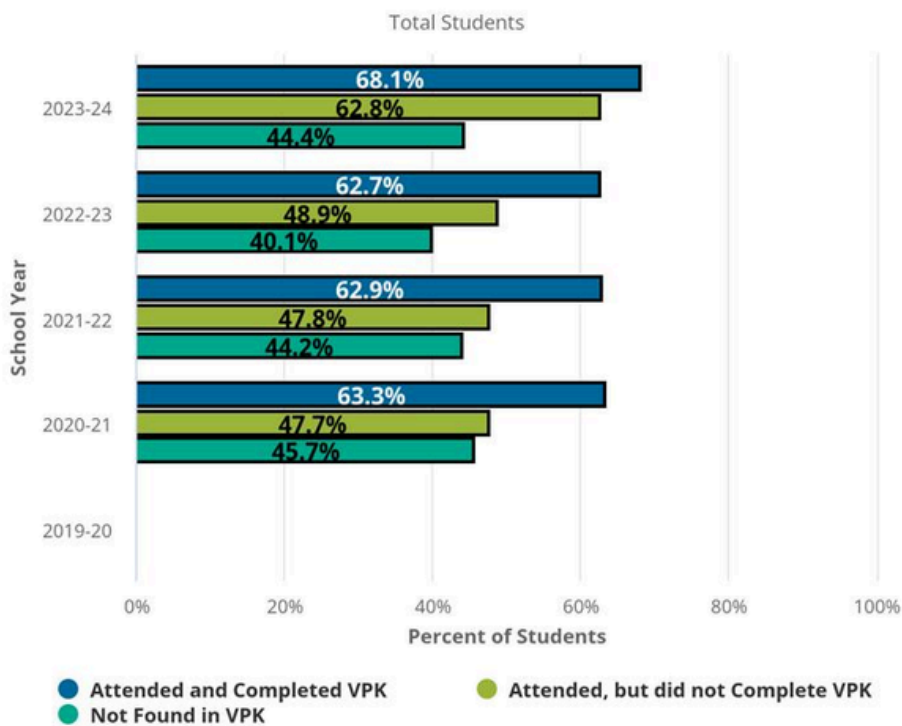
The variation in proficiency scores across schools highlights the importance of focusing efforts on those with a high percentage of students struggling to meet grade-level benchmarks. Targeting support to these schools can significantly impact overall county success by reaching the students most in need. The Florida Talent Center Data Hub enables businesses and community leaders to pinpoint schools with the lowest percentages of students reading at grade level—such as the bottom five schools identified here—which may be the strongest candidates for targeted support and investments. Additionally, access to the actual number of students reading below proficiency allows planning groups to allocate appropriate funding, staffing, time, philanthropic efforts, and other resources based on the scale of need.

	<b>School</b>	<b>Percentage Reading at 3rd Grade Level or Above</b>	<b>Number of 3rd Graders Not Reading at Grade Level</b>
<b>1</b>	Washington Elementary School	15%	35
<b>2</b>	Shaw Elementary School	15%	89
<b>3</b>	Potter Elementary School	15%	55
<b>4</b>	Oak Park Elementary School	17%	53

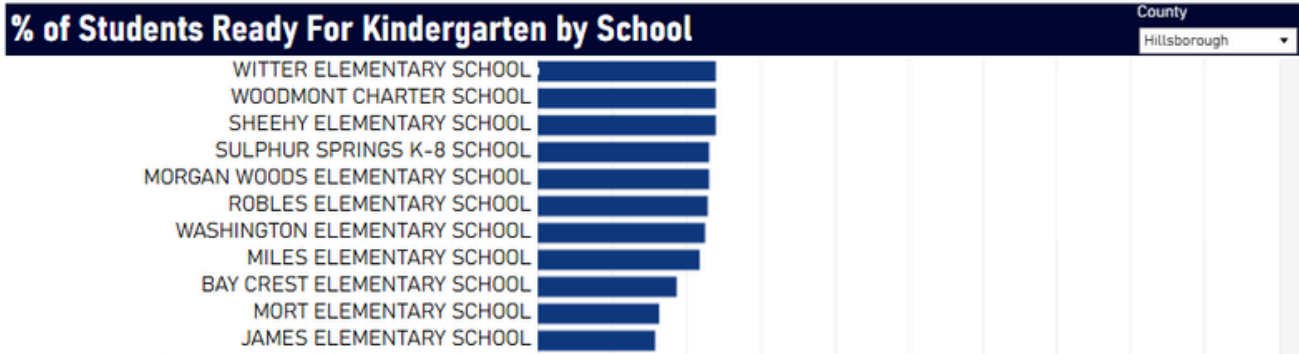
## Connection Between VPK, Kindergarten Readiness and 3rd Grade Reading Scores

Those who complete VPK are more likely to be ready for kindergarten - across Florida, 3rd graders who completed VPK prior to kindergarten also perform better in their 3rd grade reading outcomes. In Hillsborough County specifically, of those who attended and completed VPK, 67% went on to test as “on or above grade level” in 3rd reading. This is compared to 39.5% of those who were not found on any VPK records.

### Attending VPK Makes a Big Difference



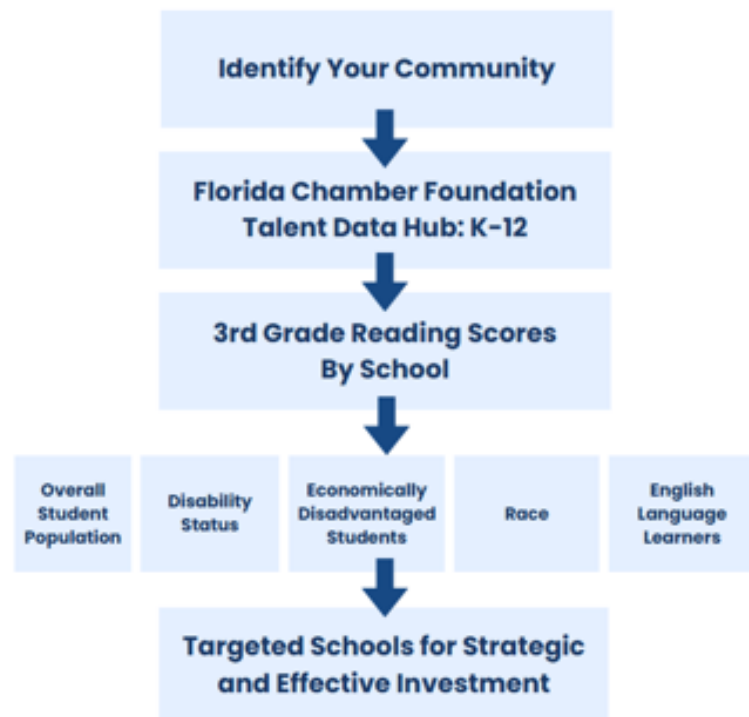
Completing VPK, entering elementary school as “Kindergarten Ready,” and 3rd grade reading achievement are all interconnected on the pathway to educational success, meaning investment at any point in the early learning system is beneficial. “Since 75% of Florida kindergartners never catch up to their peers, and the foundation for all learning is set before a student ever enters an elementary school, identifying and adopting schools with low kindergarten readiness levels is a proactive approach to improving 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading outcomes’ explains Makayla Buchanan, Director of Early Learning and Literacy.



## How Can Businesses Leverage Data to Inform Partnerships and Create Impact?

In Hillsborough County, the Transforming Early Literacy Initiative, or “TELI,” is a partnership between Hillsborough Education Foundation and Hillsborough County Public Schools designed to increase early literacy rates by focusing efforts on the schools with the highest needs. TELI’s efforts are concentrated in 14 elementary schools where students are often economically disadvantaged, and a large portion of third graders are reading below grade level, highlighting the value of using data to identify and target resources where the need is greatest. This approach has led to improvements in literacy in these schools, reaching 1,279 students over the year, as well as over 1,200 hours of professional development provided to teachers.

Prior to the creation of The Florida Chamber Foundation’s Florida Talent Center Education Data Hub, Florida’s student achievement data was publicly available, but not compiled into one place, making it more difficult to draw connections across other education indicators, such as kindergarten readiness and chronic absenteeism, nor are scores always disaggregated by demographics.



However, The Florida Chamber Foundation's Florida Talent Center Education Data Hub: K-12 dashboard includes all this information in one easily digestible tool, allowing for a fuller picture of the realities of K-12 education in Florida. Businesses that aim to see similar results to TELI can find their county's early learning and literacy metrics all in one place. To learn more how you can turn data into actions, visit [flchamber.com/earlylearningfl](http://flchamber.com/earlylearningfl) to view replication promising practices.

Even further, the data can be disaggregated by demographic, allowing business and community leaders to identify proficiency broken down into other categories, like economically disadvantaged students or English language learners. Businesses with a specific philanthropic focus can use this level of granularity to better target their efforts toward the students they are best positioned to help.

A business philanthropic leader, driven by the desire to strengthen Florida's talent pipeline and future workforce, can follow examples like this one from Hillsborough, in improving early literacy by utilizing the Florida Talent Education Data Hub to see what schools in their community would benefit most from targeted interventions, adding momentum to a student's journey from classroom to career.

The Florida Chamber Foundation Business Alliance for Early Learning will use the early learning portion of Florida's groundbreaking Talent Center Data Hub to highlight early learning promising practices in each of Florida's 67 counties and will proactively share these proven success factors with each county as a way to leverage business leadership and investments and as a strategy to position Florida as the first state in America where 100% of our kindergartens are ready for school and 100% of our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are reading proficiently.

# Thank You to the BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY BOARD



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