

RESEARCH &
VALIDATION

CASE
STUDY

JANUARY 2025

Advancing Literacy, Attendance, and Engagement in Camden City Schools

Through Family, School, and
Community-Based Initiatives

CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

Case Study at a Glance

DISTRICT: Camden City Schools

DISTRICT GOAL: Increase student enrollment and decrease chronic absence through literacy-based family and community engagement initiatives.



17 Schools



6,956 Students

54%	Latino
43%	Black
1%	White
2%	Other

This case study highlights the work done in partnership with Camden City School District to strategically engage the family and community. As one part of its overall strategy, the district took a literacy-centered approach to engaging families, schools, and the community as a mechanism for positive change to achieve its objectives. Scholastic teams worked with Camden administrators to develop an implementation, ongoing support, and feedback loop strategy for several Scholastic programs and professional learning services, each of which is specifically designed to foster strong family, school, and community partnerships.

The **Scholastic R.E.A.L.** (Read, Excel, Achieve, and Lead) program, which offers professional learning coaching and implementation support, is a research-based initiative designed to enhance literacy skills, improve school attendance, and increase engagement through interactive read-aloud sessions, take-home books, and community support. **Professional Learning Services** also included staff development in family engagement best practices. Take-home packs, including **My Books Every Day**, **School Success Kits**, and **School Readiness Kits**, were distributed to families to help ensure all students had access to high-quality learning resources and strategies to support learning in the home. To make their classrooms feel welcoming, relevant, and reflective of their students, Camden also adopted a digital reading platform, **Scholastic Literacy Pro** and **Rising Voices Libraries**—both of which feature authentic stories of culturally and linguistically diverse students. This case study will review the implementation, key milestones, outcomes, and valuable insights gained through this collaborative effort with Camden City School District.

PROGRAM GOAL

Camden's diverse student population faces challenges similar to numerous urban districts, many rooted in economic disparity. This initiative sought to increase attendance and engagement by embracing literacy as a means to strengthen family and community ties. Programs were chosen to align with district goals and foster literacy on multiple fronts: in classrooms, at home, and within the community.

Research has shown that chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% of school days or more, can significantly impact academic achievement, making initiatives that foster consistent attendance especially valuable in students' long-term success. (1)

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Launch: The Camden City School District introduced the program at the Camden Enrollment Fair on August 23, 2023, where they distributed Scholastic School Readiness and School Success Kits. A collaborative meeting on October 10, 2023, defined the implementation strategy further, introduced an ongoing support plan, and ensured alignment with the district's literacy goals and program objectives. By October, resources had been distributed to nine schools, and Family Operation Coordinators (FOCs) were trained by Scholastic FACE (Family and Community Engagement) experts in how to best guide families in creating positive literacy experiences at home.

Training to Elevate Staff: Professional learning focused on cultivating educators' capacity to enhance strong family partnerships. Training empowered staff to implement family engagement strategies designed to strengthen trust and facilitate two-way communication. Staff developed a deeper understanding of the critical role that culturally diverse learning spaces and instructional practices play in driving learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement.

Resource Allocation: Schools received high-quality books, Mentor and Family Guides, and access to a bilingual family portal with literacy resources. Professional Learning for both Literacy Pro and Rising Voices was also provided for teachers and administrators to maximize the programs' impact in classrooms.

Partnering with Community: The program benefited from partnerships with libraries, universities, and community organizations, which provided additional resources and support. Camden actively collaborated with these organizations and mentors to create meaningful connections between students and community role models. Community events, including a book distribution at a local ice cream shop, brought together local businesses, families, and educators to celebrate literacy, reinforcing the district's commitment to community-centered education.



The children really responded to seeing community members they're not used to seeing come in, read with them, and engage with them around a text.

—Natasha Hatcher, Middle School ELA Teacher, H.B. Wilson Family School, Camden City School District

Research underscores the importance of family and community involvement in enhancing literacy outcomes, particularly in communities facing economic challenges.
(4) (5) (6) (7) (8)

Creating Welcoming and Engaging Environments: Efforts to ensure classrooms were inviting, culturally relevant, and responsive to students' diverse backgrounds were integral to the program. By offering books and materials that reflected students' experiences, Camden nurtured a sense of belonging, which research shows is linked to improved attendance and academic outcomes.

Studies show that training educators in literacy skills and fostering mentorship relationships can significantly enhance reading comprehension and student engagement. Exposure to culturally responsive books also helps students develop a sense of identity and inclusivity. (2) (3)

Empowering Families: Family engagement was central to Camden's attendance and literacy goals. Parents were provided with take-home books, literacy guides, and access to an interactive family portal. Training events for families included guidance on reinforcing classroom learning at home and the importance of consistent attendance to academic success. These trainings are designed to help sustain students' reading habits through shared literacy experiences at home and decrease rates of chronic absences.

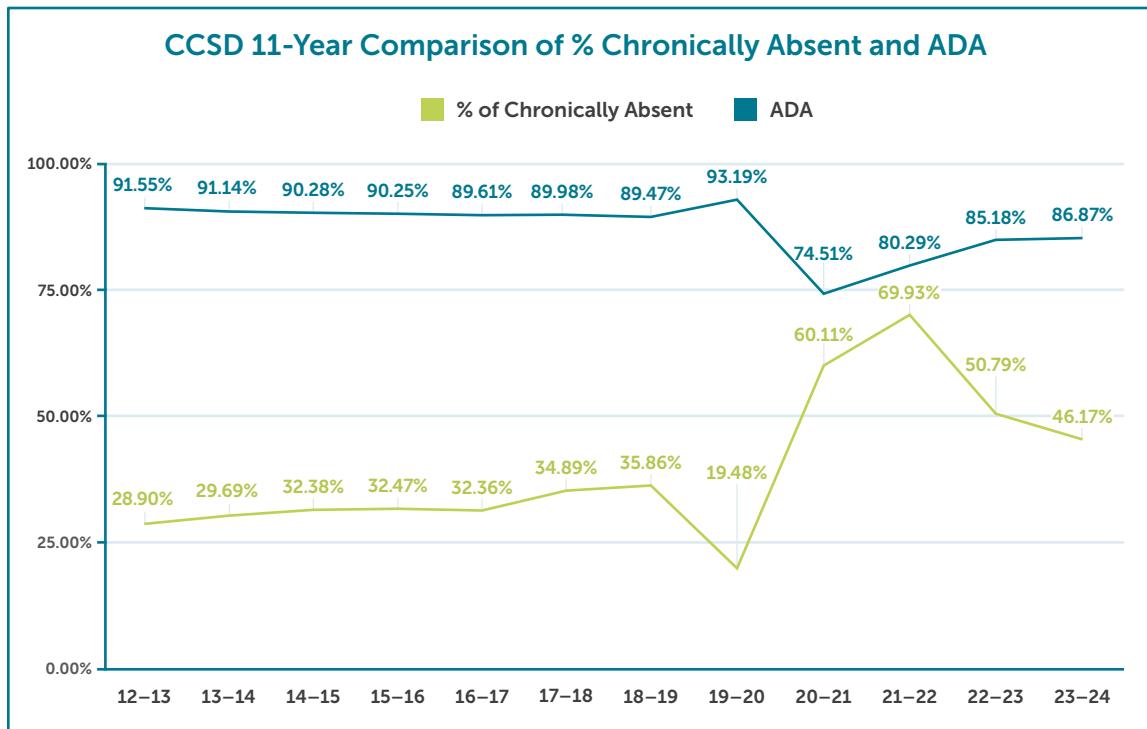
PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

OUTCOMES AT A GLANCE:

1. Chronic absence rates decreased by 4.6% in the year following program implementation.
2. Volunteer community mentors forged strong, trusting relationships with students centered on literacy.
3. Students reported a stronger sense of belonging at school.
4. School staff saw increased engagement and cross-divisional collaboration among their peers.
5. Students and families expanded their access to books and learning resources.

ATTENDANCE RATES

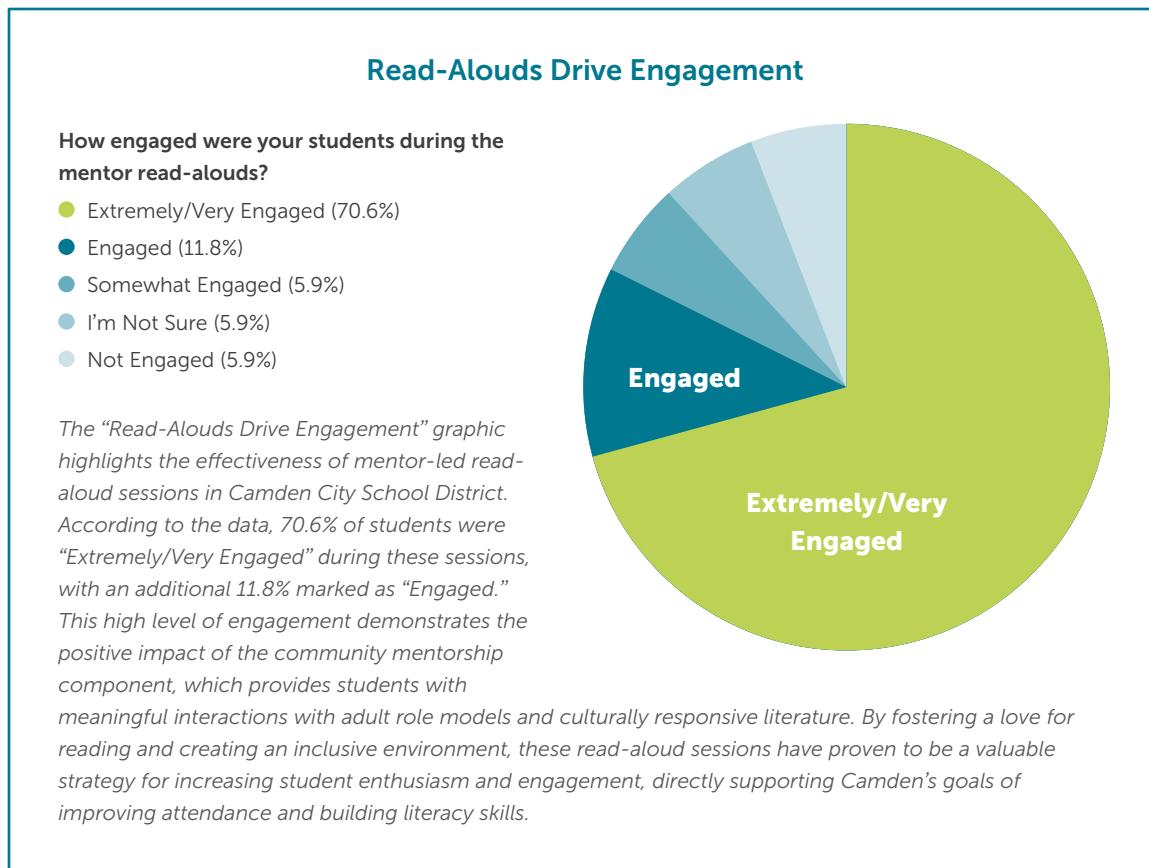
In the year following program implementation, Camden City School District saw a 4.6% decrease in chronic absenteeism rates.



¹Teachers may assign a range of grade levels for individual students or an entire class through the settings within Literacy Pro.

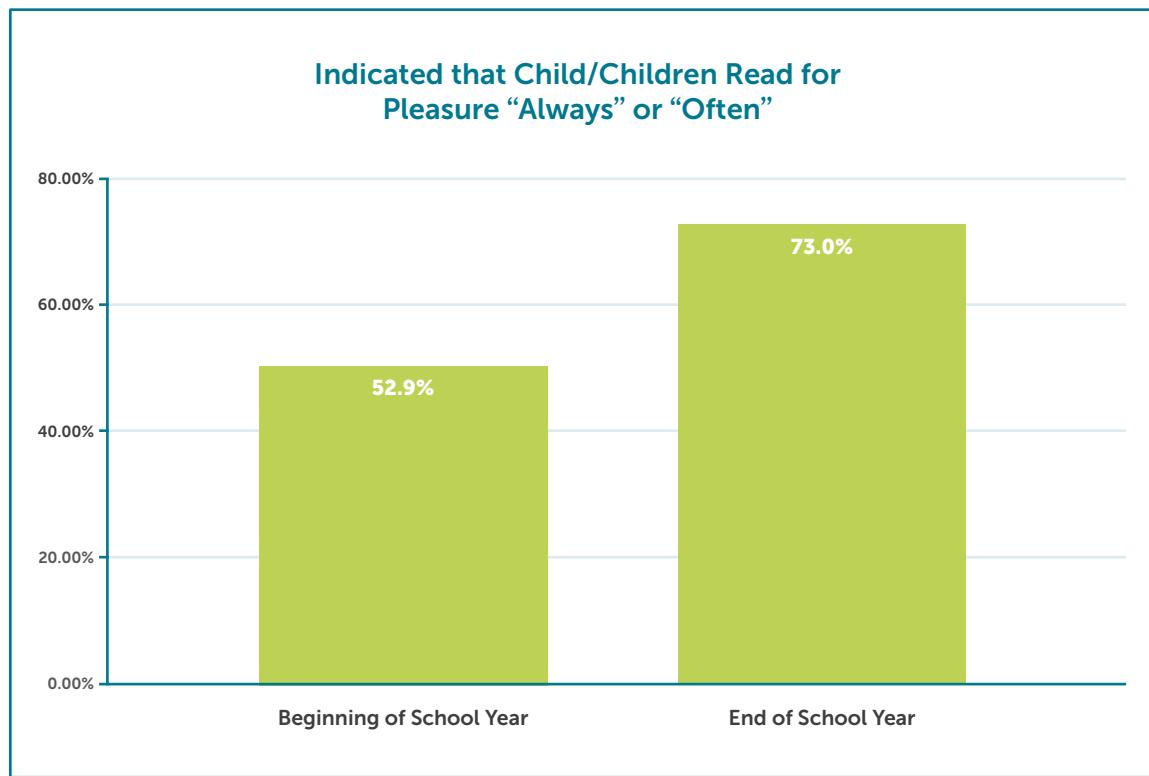
Literacy Skill Development: Educators noted meaningful progress in students' engagement and comprehension, especially with the diverse selection of texts that allowed students to see their own experiences reflected in the material. Several teachers reported a noticeable increase in students' enthusiasm for reading.

Student Engagement and Motivation: The program's mentorship component fostered a deeper connection with reading. Students often referenced the read-aloud sessions throughout the school day, demonstrating their engagement and excitement.

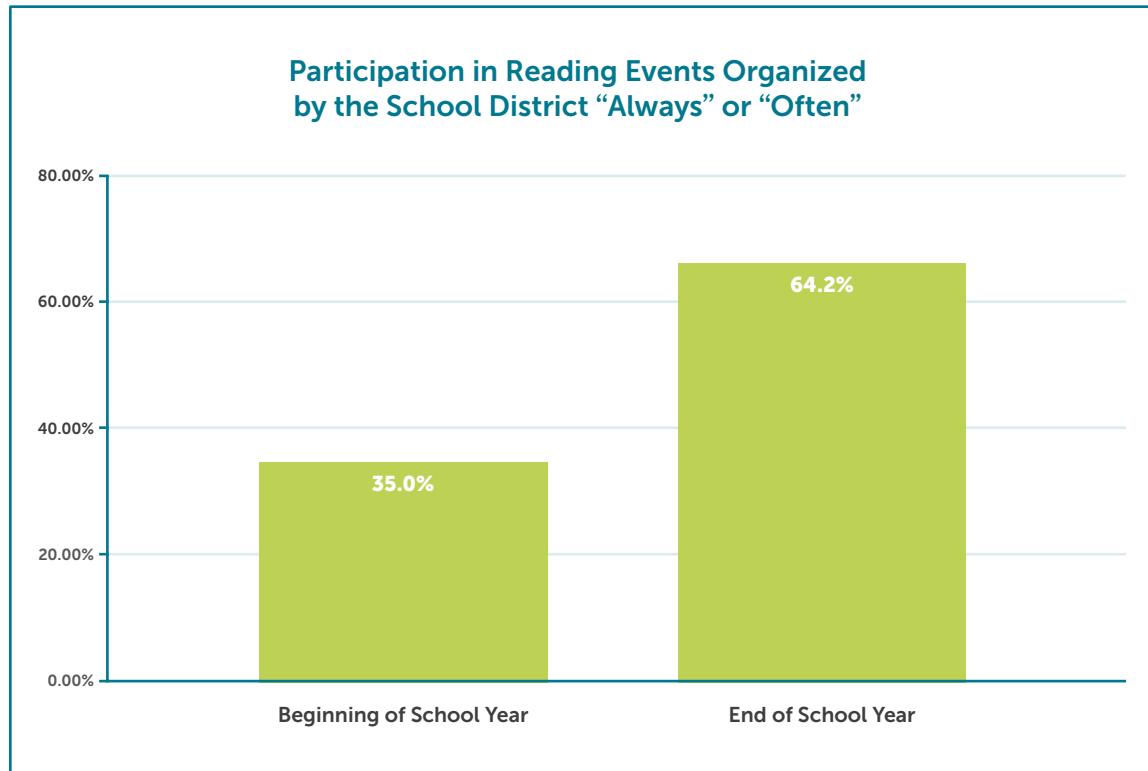


Family Engagement: Family participation in literacy activities increased, particularly among families who accessed the My Books Every Day portal. Parents reported that the program's guides and prompts helped them create enriching reading experiences at home.

Survey data showed that the percentage of caregivers indicating that, in their family, their child/children read for pleasure either "Always" or "Often" increased from 53% to 73% from the beginning to the end of the school year.



The program also drove increased participation in reading events organized by the school or district. The percentage of caregivers indicating that they have participated in reading events organized by the school/district either “Always” or “Often” increased from 35% at the beginning of the school year to 64.2% at the end of the school year.



Equity and Inclusion: Including culturally relevant texts helped create a sense of belonging among students. This contributed to a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment where students felt valued and seen.



I created a connection with the young Spanish-speaking students at Catto. I was able to translate and read the books to them in English as well, which taught the students to understand the vocabulary and become more confident in speaking two languages.
—Vanessa Arroyo, Camden City School District, R.E.A.L. Community Volunteer Mentor

Research supports the idea that a positive and enthusiastic learning environment enriched by culturally relevant materials fosters student engagement and motivation.
(9) (10)

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Implementation Considerations: While the program encountered some logistical challenges, the district worked proactively to address these, ensuring that the R.E.A.L. program complemented existing core subjects and integrated smoothly into the school day. Additionally, the district expanded outreach efforts to engage harder-to-reach families, utilizing local resources to help every student benefit fully from the program.

Adaptations and Improvements: Based on feedback, the district adjusted the program's implementation, reflecting its commitment to ensuring accessibility and effectiveness for all students. These adaptations helped foster a more seamless experience for both students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Research supports the positive impact strong family and community engagement initiatives have on learning outcomes. This research in practice consists of four unique and targeted approaches:

- 1. Elevating Staff** to cultivate strong, trusting relationships with students and families centered on academic outcomes.
- 2. Empowering Families** with the tools, resources, and confidence to participate in and support their child's learning.
- 3. Welcoming and Engaging** all students and their families through responsive learning environments.
- 4. Partnering with Community** and organizations to expand literacy and responsive instruction.

The **Scholastic R.E.A.L.** program has laid a strong foundation for literacy enhancement in conjunction with family and community engagement. Within the Camden City School District the program has helped to create meaningful, lasting impacts on students, families, and the broader community. By focusing on diverse literature, community mentorship, and active family engagement, the program has fostered a culture of reading that resonates deeply with students and families, making reading a celebrated part of daily life. This approach not only cultivates a love of reading, but also strengthens essential literacy skills that are foundational for academic success and lifelong learning.

The district's commitment to providing high-quality, inclusive learning experiences has been instrumental in driving these positive outcomes. **Teachers throughout the district have observed notable improvements in literacy and critical engagement areas such as student attendance, participation, and overall enthusiasm for learning.**

The program's emphasis on diverse literature helps students see themselves represented in what they read, fostering a sense of connection and belonging that enhances their commitment to academic growth. As students feel more seen and supported, their confidence and motivation to read improve, positively impacting their academic journey.

Scholastic R.E.A.L., My Books Every Day, and Professional Learning courses highlight the importance of reading outside the classroom by bringing it into the home and community. Parents and caregivers have embraced the essential role they play in advancing their children's literacy by regularly discussing stories and attending reading events. This family-centered approach not only reinforces reading habits, but also empowers families as active participants in their children's educational experiences, creating a supportive environment where literacy skills are nurtured at home and in school alike. The cumulative effect is a community-wide dedication to literacy that benefits students and, ultimately, the entire Camden district by setting up young learners for long-term success.



I find the R.E.A.L. program to be effective. It was well worth the investment.

—Natasha Hatcher, Middle School ELA Teacher, H.B. Wilson Family School, Camden City School District

RECOMMENDATIONS

To build on this initiative's success, an ongoing focus on community mentorship and family engagement is recommended. Expanding outreach and adapting to community needs will help ensure the program reaches its fullest potential. Additionally, tracking reading scores and attendance rates in the coming years will provide valuable insights into the program's long-term impact.

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