

# The ABC's of Literacy

Executive Summary

# 2024



# **TITLE:** The ABC's of Literacy

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## Background

In September 2023, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) revised its language curriculum for Grades 1 to 8. The revision is to guarantee that students have the foundational and transferable literacy capabilities with an emphasis on early interventions (Ontario Curriculum, 2024). These literacy skills include oral, written and digital for students to be able to succeed in a rapidly changing and technologically connected world (Ministry of Education, 2013; Ontario Curriculum, 2024). Literacy competencies for a digital world was identified as critical by the Ministry of Education report, *Paying Attention to Literacy*, as students “belong to a range of global communities” (2013, p. 2). The report provided actions and approaches for the teaching of literacy in Ontario schools to improve literacy learning for students which includes family-community-school partnership to nurture students’ literacy development (Ministry of Education, 2013). The adaptation of the language curriculum also includes key recommendations from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) *Right to Read* report (2022), which highlights how learning to read is not a privilege but a basic and essential human right. The *Right to Read* report (2022) made several recommendations for curriculum, instruction, early screening, reading interventions, accommodations, professional assessment, and systemic issues to better address the diverse needs of students.. These recommendations align with the Ministry of Education reports, *Paying Attention to Literacy* (2013) and *Growing Success* (2010), that emphasize literacy curriculum and pedagogies needing to be grounded in students' experiences, understanding, learning needs, and abilities to enhance their learning and literacy skill development.

## Introduction

Given these contexts, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement (“the Centre of Excellence or “the Centre”) in collaboration with the TDSB Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression department, Teachers Leading and Learning and TDSB’s Early Years hosted ABC’s of Literacy workshop on Monday, January 29th, 2024. The aim of the workshop was to facilitate a conversation Black families/caregivers and equip them with tools and resources to effectively support Black children's development in literacy in TDSB schools. This is in line with the Centre of Excellence’s mandate that underscores the need to “Support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers for their children in TDSB schools and programs and improve communication to them about Black student success, system navigation and complaint

processes”(Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, 2021). Figure 1, below, shows the inquiry questions that were guiding the workshop and work on literacy.

## Figure 1: What is Guiding Our Work? (Literacy Inquiry)

### What is Guiding Our Work? (Literacy Inquiry)

1. How can we support the reader in building a positive reader identity through explicit strategy and skill development that is contextualised?
2. How can we use a culturally relevant and responsive approach to literacy teaching that nurtures and joyfully affirms students’ racial, cultural and reader identities?
3. What literacy experiences engage and challenge students to create and share new knowledge or a deeper understanding to address complex issues and problems that are important to their lives?
4. How can we encourage students to take a critical stance, to respond or to take action as they engage in the critical analysis and evaluation of text as it relates to issues of equity, power and social justice?
5. How do educators involve caregivers and community in literacy learning?

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This executive summary reports on the findings from the 2024 ABC’s of Literacy workshop that took place on Monday, January 29th, 2024. The key findings include parents/caregivers’ experience in the workshop, effectiveness of resources and activities provided to support their children’s literacy development, and their comfortability to create school-home-community partnership to support their child’s learning and future session topics.

## Method

The data presented in this report were gathered from a survey distributed to parents and caregivers who attended the workshop. Two hundred parents/caregivers registered for the workshop and fifty-two actually attended. Out of the fifty-two that attended, 11 eleven parents/caregivers completed the online survey.

## Participant Profile

Of the 11 respondents, 6 self-identified as Afro-Caribbean, 1 as African and 4 choose not listed. For parents/caregivers who choose ‘not listed’, they identified their racial

identification as Afro/Indo and Asian Caribbean, East-Asian, South Asian and Asian. Regarding their gender identity, 8 (72.7%) identified as female and 3 (27.3%) as male.

## Key Findings

Parents/caregivers were asked if they engage in literacy activities with their children at home. 10 (90.9%) of parents/caregivers reported that they do engage in a variety of activities while 1 (9.1%) stated no but they plan to after attending the workshop. Below are some of the activities that parents/caregivers engaged in with their children at home as discussed in an open-ended question.

*“Reading, academic games”* (Parent/Caregiver)

*“Spelling, reading, drawing, writing, singing, sounding, rhyming, etc.”*  
(Parent/Caregiver)

*“Worksheets online or workbooks purchased from bookstores”*  
(Parent/Caregiver)

Furthermore, parents/caregivers were asked to report their understanding of the literacy curriculum. 4 (36.4%) parents/caregivers rated their understanding of the curriculum as ‘quite a bit’, 3 (27.3%) as ‘a great deal’ and ‘somewhat’ while 1 (9.1%) as ‘very little’.

## Parents/Caregivers' Experience in the Workshop

Regarding attendees' overall experience, parents/caregivers reported that they enjoyed the ABC Literacy workshop. In addition, parents/caregivers stated that the workshop was informative and they learned about new literacy strategies to apply at home with their children. Below are some anecdotes from parents/caregivers who participated in the workshop.

*“Very well and informative”* (Parent/Caregiver)

*“I enjoyed it and would like to learn more”* (Parent/Caregiver)

*“Thank you for providing some suggestions on how we can help our child”*  
(Parent/Caregiver)

*“Using some new apps”* (Parent/Caregiver)

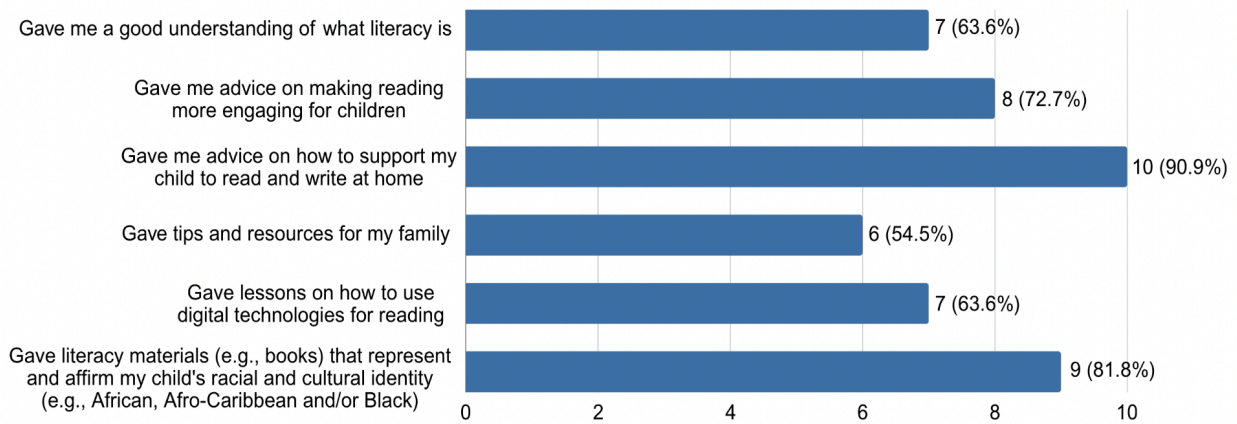
*“Yes, [I] learn about things I can do to make reading fun”* (Parent/Caregiver)

### “Yes, recipes” (Parent/Caregiver)

The majority of parents/caregivers (90.9%) responded that they received great guidance on how to support their child’s reading and writing at home to develop their literacy capabilities. Further, 9 (81.8%) parents/caregivers stated that they received literacy materials (e.g., books) that represent and affirm their child’s racial and cultural identity. Figure 2 below highlights parents/caregivers' perception of what the workshop offered them in developing their children's literacy skills.

**Figure 2. Parents/caregivers perception of what the workshop offered in developing their children literacy skills**

10. Please check all that apply. The workshop presentation...



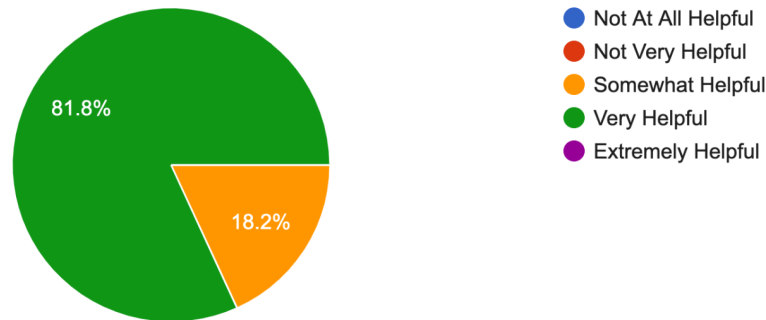
Lastly, parents/caregivers were asked to rate the helpfulness of the workshop in providing understanding of literacy that is accessible to their child’s needs (e.g., learning style, disability). Eight (8) parents/caregivers reported that the workshop was very helpful, 2 as somewhat helpful and 1 as not at all helpful.

### Effectiveness of Resources and Activities

**Figure 3: Parents/Caregivers perception of how helpful the resources were to support their child’s literacy development**

11. How helpful were the resources provided to support your child's development in reading and writing?

11 responses



Noting the helpfulness of resources shared by presenters to support their child's literacy development (refer to Figure 3), 9 (81.8%) parents/caregivers rated the resources as very helpful while 2 (18.2%) found them as somewhat helpful.

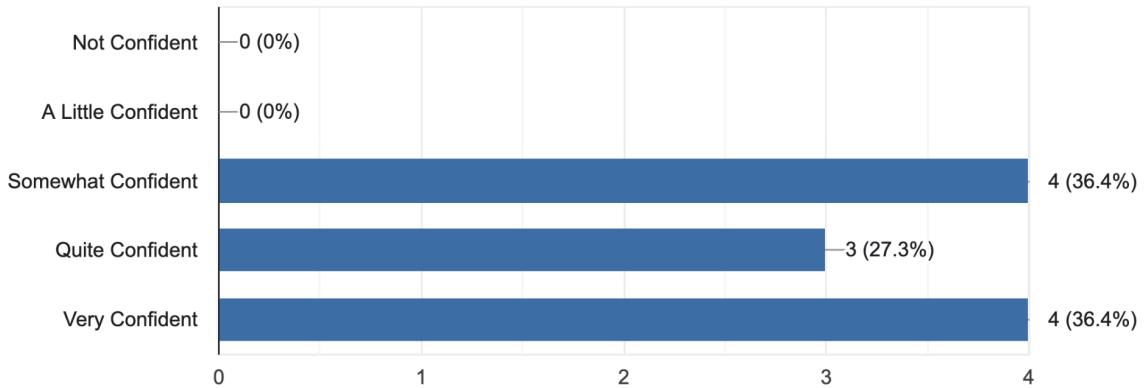
Additionally, the range of activities and lessons that the workshop engaged in were determined to be helpful by parents/caregivers in their learning to support their child's literacy development. For instance, 7 parents/caregivers rated the statement 'encouraging understanding of and reading word skills (e.g., sounding out to teach reading of new words)' as very well, 3 as somewhat well and 1 as extremely well. For the statement 'instructional reading strategies', 6 parents/caregivers rated it as very well, 2 for both somewhat and slightly well and 1 as extremely well.

## School-Home-Community Partnership

**Figure 4: Parents/Caregivers confidence in their ability to create helpful learning school-home-community partnerships to support their child**

14. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is "Not Confident" and 5 is "Very Confident"), how confident are you in your ability to create helpful learning school-home-community partnerships for your child? You can choose any number from 1 to 5.

11 responses



School-home-community partnerships are crucial for affirming Black students' intersectional identities, grounding culturally relevant and responsive education in their and families lived experiences and their growth and development including academic success (Munroe & Lambert, 2022). Given this context, parents/caregivers were asked how confident they are in their ability to create helpful learning school-home-community (e.g., with teachers, the Centre of Excellence, etc.) partnerships to support their child literacy development (refer to Figure 4). Four parents responded that they are very confident in their abilities while 4 rated themselves as somewhat confident and 3 as quite confident. To enhance school-home-community partnerships, it is important to continue building trust and welcoming spaces to increase parents/caregivers confidence to seek and engage in collaborative relationships with educators and schools.

## Recommendations

Parents/caregivers who participated in the workshop made the following recommendations for upcoming sessions:

Themes	Recommendations
Literacy Support for Students with Disability	Literacy workshop that focuses on students with disabilities, diverse learning needs and styles. This theme aligns with the OHRC Right to Read (2022) and Ministry of Education (2010) Growing Success reports that highlight the importance of modification to literacy that correlate to students capabilities and outlines numerous recommendations to better meet the literacy needs of students with reading disabilities.



Themes	Recommendations
	<p align="center"><i>“How to effectively help children who are autistic”</i> (Parent/Caregiver)</p>
<p>Diverse Subjects and Multimodal Learning Methods</p>	<p>Continue the opportunity provided by extending the subjects covered in the workshop for parents/caregivers to receive more resources, activities, and lessons to help them support their child’s learning at home.</p> <p>Parents/caregivers also expressed the need for diverse multimodal learning methods, including technology, to engage multiple learning styles and provide variety in the tools used for learning.</p> <p align="center"><i>“math, science, music, history, and art”</i> (Parent/Caregiver)</p> <p align="center"><i>“online math tools”</i> (Parent/Caregiver)</p>
<p>Phonics and Phonemic Awareness</p>	<p>Parents/caregivers expressed interest in learning about phonics and phonemic awareness to help them with developing their child’s reading skills at home.</p> <p>Phonemic awareness (sounds in words) and phonics (correlating sounds with letters) are effective for developing literacy amongst children in primary grades. Both are important as phonemic awareness, sounding out words, helps children to progress to phonics, connecting the sounds with letters, to eventually be fluent and automatic readers.</p> <p align="center"><i>“How to use phonics and phonemic awareness activities to teach my child to read”</i> (Parent/Caregiver)</p>

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