



**OFFICE of
EDUCATION INNOVATION**

Circle City Readers

Results from the First Program Year (SY 2023-24)

OCTOBER 2024

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Background

In the fall of 2022, the Indianapolis City-County Council approved \$1.2 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to launch Circle City Readers, a program designed to support literacy and reading proficiency across Indianapolis in response to falling reading proficiency rates exacerbated by COVID-19.

The program is administered by the Mayor's Office of Education Innovation (OEI), which researched successful tutoring programs, vetted the curriculum, and designed the tutoring structure. Day-to-day programming is managed by Program Director Brooke Arnett-Holman, an experienced educator who recruits and trains tutors and coordinates with partner schools to ensure the program is running smoothly.

After a successful pilot program in spring 2023, Circle City Readers expanded to 10 schools for the 2023-24 school year. The schools included are a combination of mayor-sponsored charter schools (MSCS), schools in the Indianapolis Public Schools Innovation Network, direct-run IPS schools, and schools within the Metropolitan School District of Warren Township:

- Avondale Meadows Academy (MSCS)
- Tindley Genesis Academy (MSCS)
- Vision Academy Riverside (MSCS)
- Global Prep Academy (MSCS/IPS Innovation)
- Liberty Grove School (MSCS/IPS Innovation)
- The PATH School (MSCS/IPS Innovation)
- Sankofa @ Arlington Woods 99 (IPS Innovation)
- Jonathan Jennings 109 (IPS)
- Hawthorne Elementary (Warren Township)
- Pleasant Run Elementary (Warren Township)

Program Structure

Teachers and school staff identify students to participate in Circle City Readers. Although schools have discretion, the target audience for the program are students who have struggled with literacy skills or those who are behind grade-level and unlikely to pass state reading exams. Once identified, students attend 30-minute small-group (2-4 students) tutoring sessions three to four times per week during their allotted small group intervention time. This structure ensures students do not miss core classroom instruction and allows them additional learning support during time they might otherwise be working independently or with peers.

Students meet consistently with the same tutor, which allows them to build relationships and rapport with a trusted adult who cares about them and their community. The relationship-building serves as further incentive for students to regularly attend tutoring and creates meaningful opportunities for community members to engage with their local schools and drive academic progress.

Circle City Readers uses [Amplify Tutoring](#), a high-quality curriculum based on the science of reading. The scripted lessons make tutoring simple and effective, allowing tutors to tailor lessons to each student's specific needs. Amplify Tutoring is an [ESSER and Title funded](#), high-impact tutoring program that complements the efforts of K-6 students, educators, and families in building reading proficiency and confidence. The program also aligns to requirements for high-quality curricular materials set in state statute. To measure progress, students are tested three times per year using the DIBELS literacy assessment, a widely used battery of tests to determine early literacy skills.

Budget and Funding

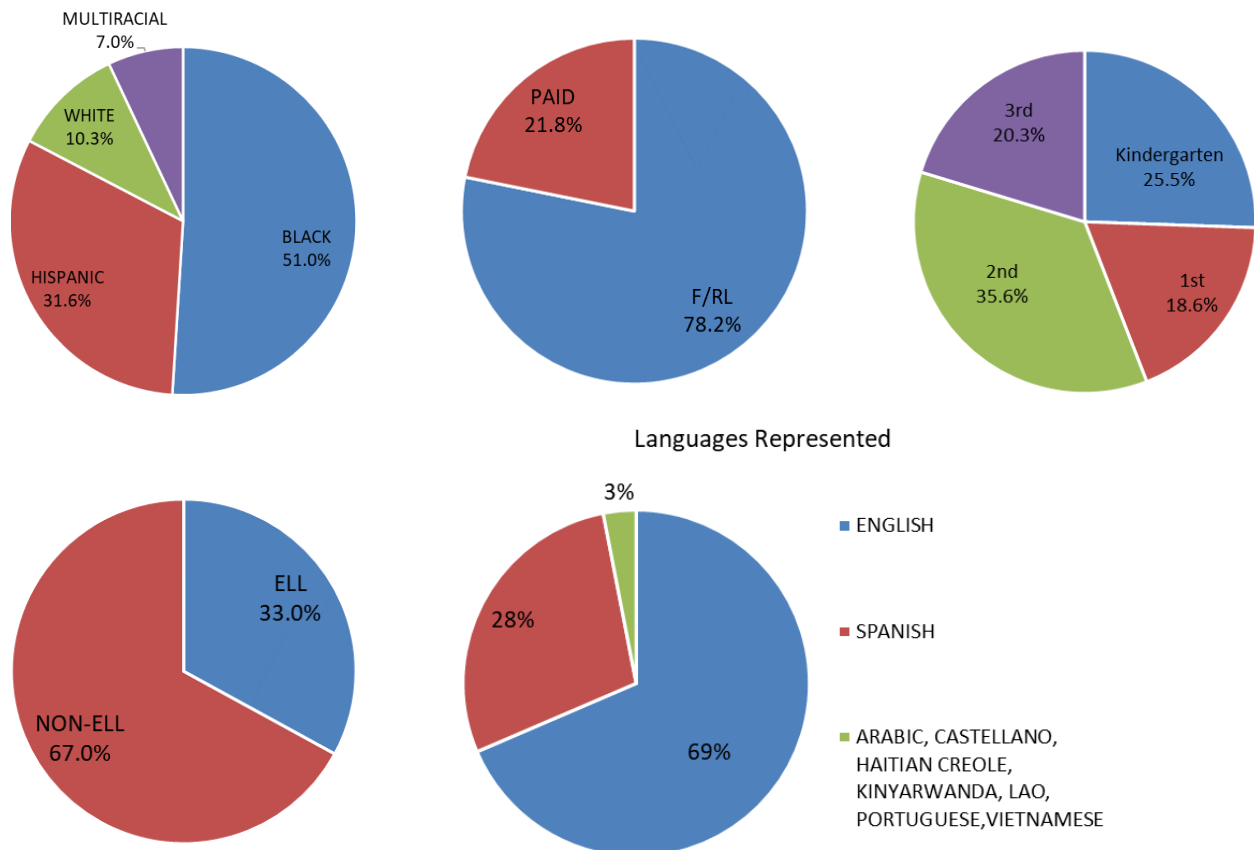
Circle City Readers will be funded through the 2024-25 school year with American Rescue Plan Act funds, but funding has not been secured past May 2025.

Personnel costs make up the majority of Circle City Readers’ budget. Tutors work an average of 12 to 20 hours per week with pay starting at \$22 per hour. Currently, ARPA funds are administered by a contracted company. Moving forward, the goal would be for partner schools to take on costs for administering payroll and associated expenses, allowing for more funds to go directly to the program. The remaining funds support programming and materials for students.

An estimated budget of \$1.3 million (about \$2,100 per student) is needed to continue the program at the current scale of 500-600 students per year. In 2024, approximately 2,700 Marion County third grade students did not pass IREAD-3. To scale up to address that need, the budget would increase to about \$5.3 million per year. Expanding tutoring would also expand tutor employment opportunities, bringing about 200 part-time tutor jobs to Indianapolis neighborhoods.

Students Served





Circle City Readers served a little more than 500 students last year in kindergarten through third grade, with the following demographics:



Results and Data

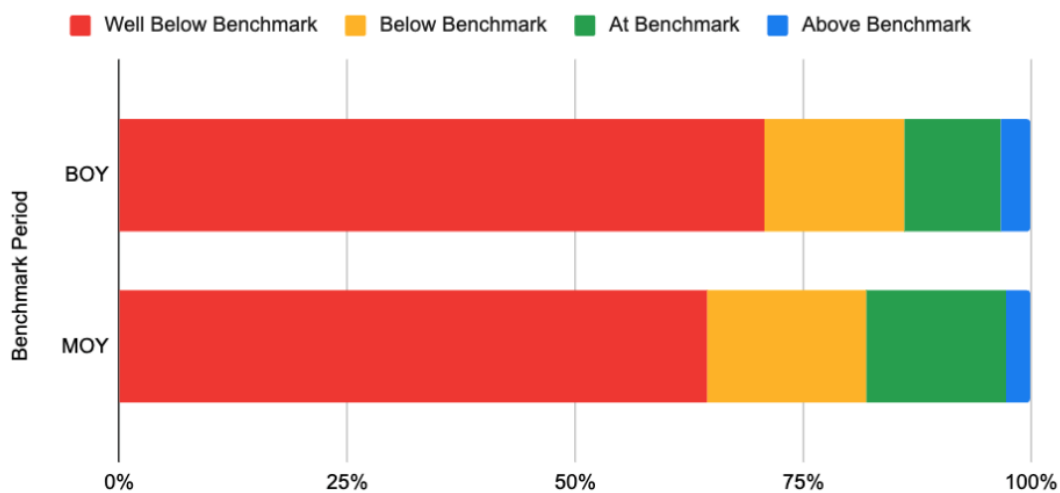
In the first year of the program, Circle City Readers saw considerable progress based on results from the DIBELS assessment, which is given at three points in the year; beginning, middle, and end. The DIBELS Composite Score is a combination of three scores that provides an estimate of a student’s skills and/or reading proficiency. If a student is at or above the benchmark level on the composite score, risk is low, which means it’s more likely that the student will reach reading goals. The results in this section, including the graphs and charts, were originally analyzed and reported by Amplify Tutoring.

Proficiency

Status	Level	Likely to be performing at grade level at end of year?	Support Level
	Above Benchmark	Yes; negligible risk (90% or higher chance of meeting goal)	Core
	At Benchmark	Yes; minimal risk (80% or higher chance of meeting goal)	Core
	Below Benchmark	No; some risk (20% or higher chance of meeting goal)	Strategic
	Well Below Benchmark	No; at risk (less than 20% chance of meeting goal)	Intensive

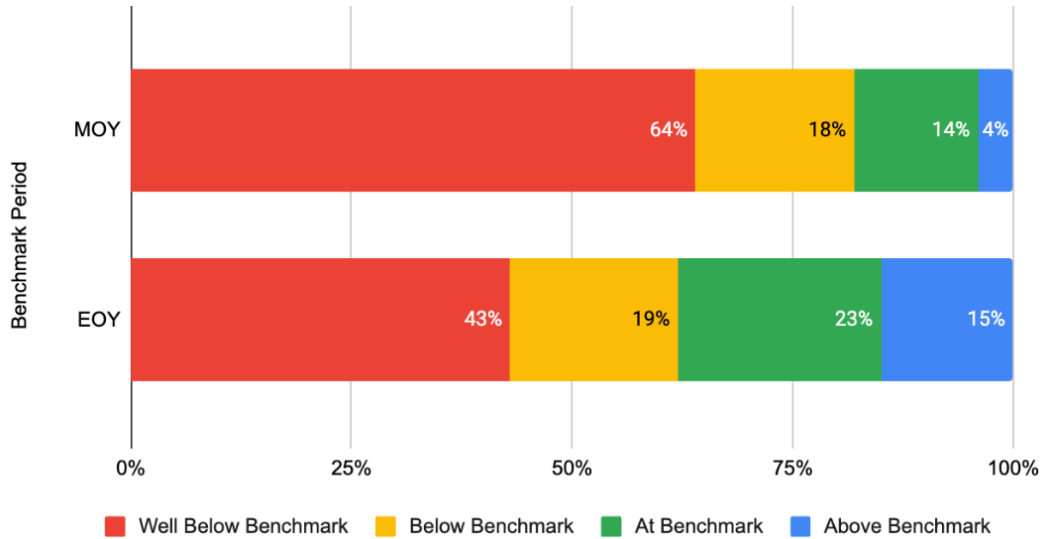
Beginning-of-year (BOY) to middle-of-year (MOY) data was available for 320 students in the program. 86% were Well Below Benchmark or Below Benchmark at the beginning of tutoring. During that time, there was a 6.2 percentage point decrease in Well Below Benchmark, meaning 20 students progressed a proficiency level.

Benchmark Period	Well Below Benchmark	Below Benchmark	At Benchmark	Above Benchmark
BOY	70.6%	15.3%	10.6%	3.4%
MOY	64.4%	17.5%	15.3%	2.8%



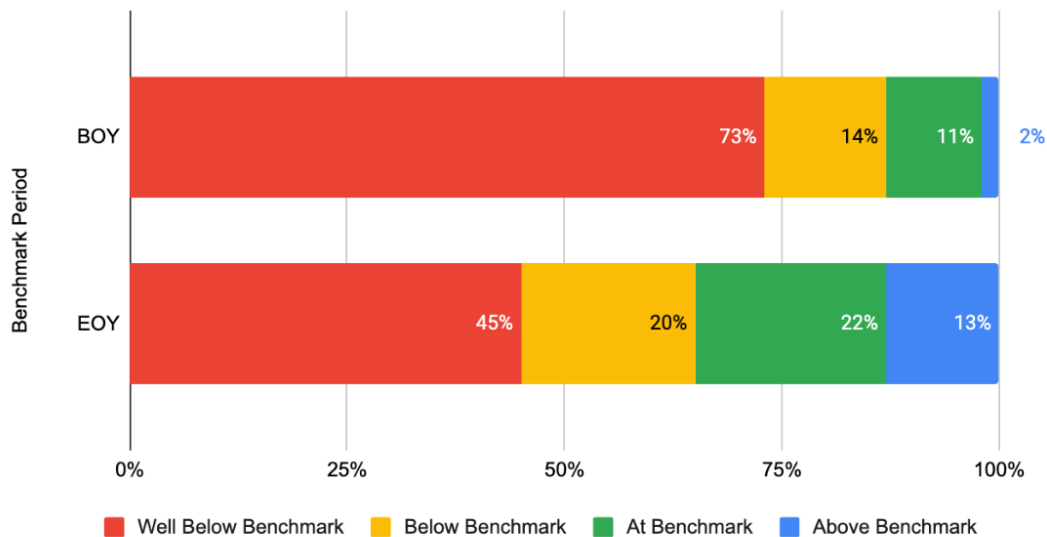
Middle-of-year (MOY) to end-of year (EOY) data was available for 285 students in the program. 82% were Well Below Benchmark or Below Benchmark at the mid-year point. By the end of the year, there was a 21.4 percentage point decrease in Well Below Benchmark, meaning 67 students progressed a proficiency level.

Benchmark Period	Well Below Benchmark	Below Benchmark	At Benchmark	Above Benchmark
MOY	64.2%	17.5%	14.4%	3.9%
EOY	42.8%	18.6%	22.8%	15.8%



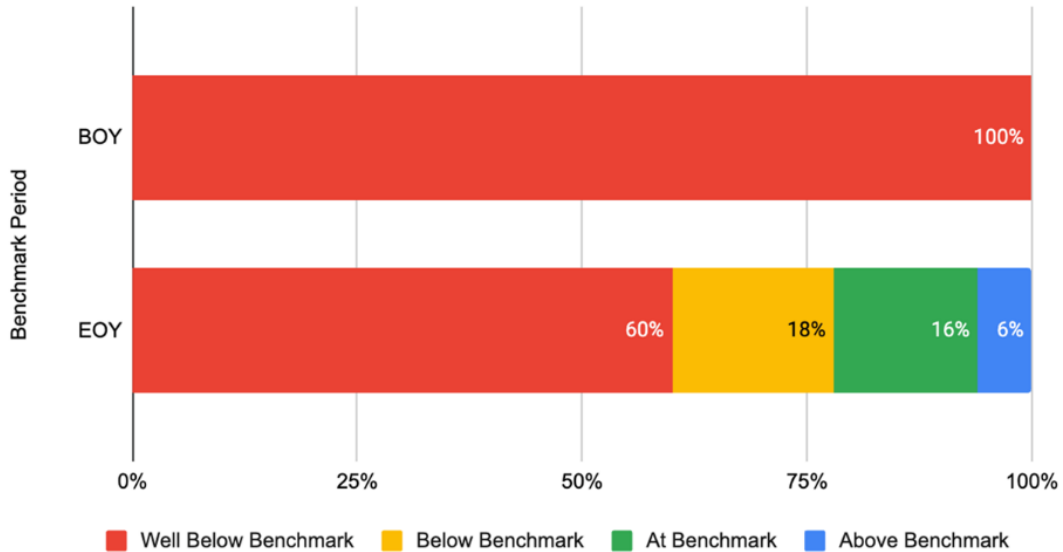
Full-year data was available for 225 students in the program. 65% were Well Below Benchmark or Below Benchmark at year end. Over the entire year, there was a 27.7 percentage point decrease in Well Below Benchmark, meaning 66 students progressed a proficiency level.

Benchmark Period	Well Below Benchmark	Below Benchmark	At Benchmark	Above Benchmark
BOY	72.8%	13.8%	11.2%	2.2%
EOY	45.1%	19.6%	21.9%	13.4%



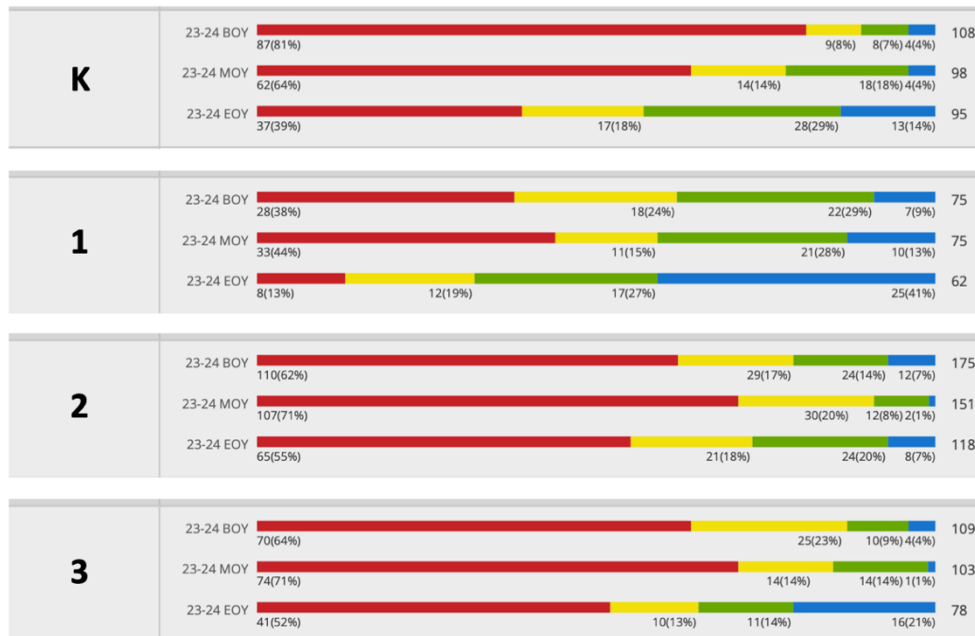
Results were more pronounced for students who started the year in Well Below Benchmark. 40.5 percent of students who began in the lowest proficiency level moved up at least one proficiency level by the end of the year. This type of growth is unlikely without the kind of intensive intervention provided by Circle City Readers.

Benchmark Period	Well Below Benchmark	Below Benchmark	At Benchmark	Above Benchmark
BOY	100%			
EOY	59.5%	18.4%	16.0%	6.1%



Proficiency by Grade Level

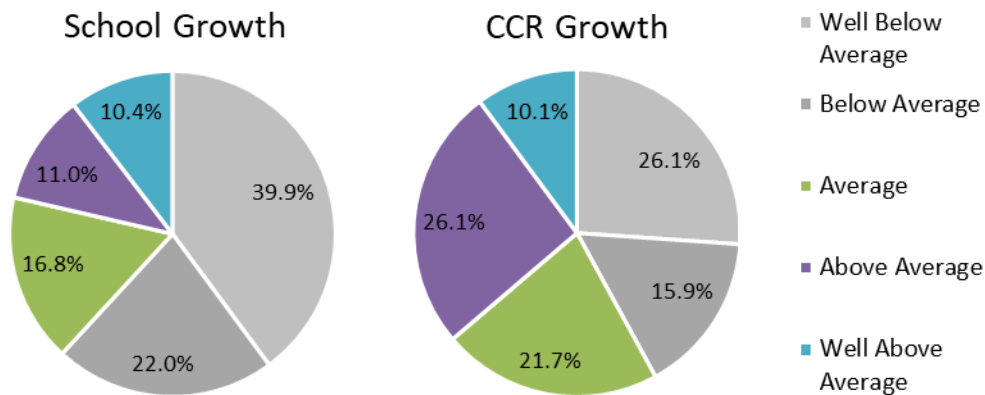
Although kindergarteners started the most behind, they closed gaps more quickly than their older peers, a trend that also held true for first graders.



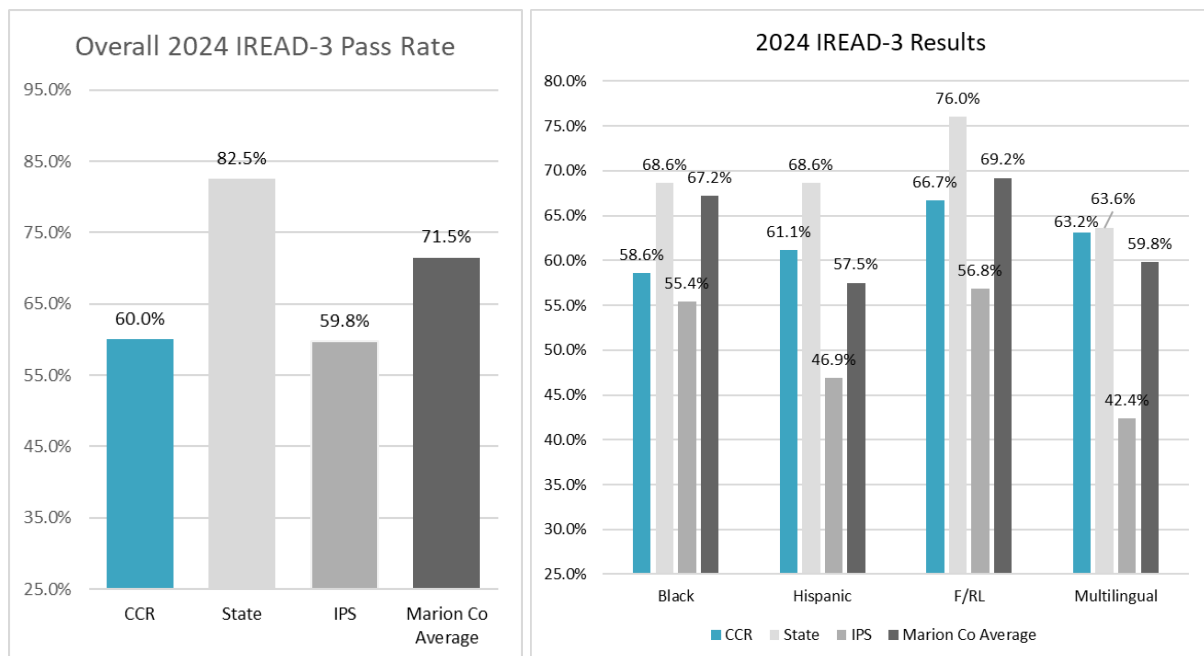
Growth

Growth is measured using five nationally normed categories for changes in student proficiency between two benchmark periods: Well Above Average, Above Average, Average, Below Average, and Well Below Average.

DIBELS growth data shows Circle City Readers students outpaced the growth of their non-CCR peers. The charts below show the growth of students that began the 2023-24 school year in the Well Below Benchmark or Below Benchmark proficiency categories from four participating CCR schools that also administered DIBELS school wide. Of the total identified high-risk students, 21.4% who did not participate in CCR achieved Above Average or Well Above Average growth. By comparison, 36.2% of Circle City Readers students achieved Above Average or Well Above Average growth. Circle City Readers students outpaced their peers' growth by 14.8 percentage points.



While these DIBELS results are noteworthy, Circle City Readers students' performance on the 2024 IREAD-3 exam, Indiana's state assessment for foundational reading skills given to all third graders was particularly striking. Third graders who participated in CCR and were identified as having the highest risk of not meeting grade level expectations performed on par with all IPS tested third graders.



Additional analysis of student subgroups shows that performance of Circle City Readers students is comparable to or outperforming all Hispanic, Free and Reduced Lunch, and Multilingual tested students in IPS and, on average, Marion County. These results stand in contrast to [Multilingual learner data presented by Dr. Katie Jenner](#) to the Indiana State Board of Education in August 2024. Her report calls for, “additional, targeted reading support,” for Hispanic and English Learners, as these student groups have decreased in reading proficiency at the state level.

Challenges

The challenges Circle City Readers faces are similar to the challenges faced by many public schools across the city. The primary hurdle noted in year one was difficulty hiring and retaining quality tutors. Although prospective tutors are not required to have a formal education background, they must demonstrate a growth mindset as well as an ability to effectively carry out tutoring responsibilities. They must also commit to consistent schedules to ensure the best results for students.

Additionally, creating tutor schedules to accommodate each school’s individual literacy blocks throughout the day takes significant collaboration and flexibility, especially when tutors are serving multiple schools in a given day or week. However, this balance is important so that students can receive both core instruction and the targeted intervention of Circle City Readers.

Finally, like for many schools post-pandemic, attendance remains a factor in student progress. For the first semester, average attendance was 84%, and for the second semester, average attendance was 83%. Schools with more consistent attendance and enrollment, and less tutor turnover, generally saw stronger student outcomes. This will continue to be a focus area in future years.

Conclusion

Circle City Readers has already led to substantial improvements in participating schools, driving not just increases in literacy proficiency, but higher than expected growth throughout the year. It is especially impactful for students from diverse backgrounds and our youngest learners, but, crucially, all students who participated improved from where they began.

What might be possible if a student’s reading skills could no longer be predicted by their race, home language, or family income? What kind of impact could our city see if literacy gaps were eliminated before they even took hold? It is critical that resources are identified to continue the program if this vision is to be realized.

Circle City Readers is poised to continue supporting students during the 2024-25 school year and stands ready to collaborate with community and philanthropic leaders across the city to realize a vision where all Indianapolis students are equipped with the skills they need to pursue successful futures.