

Building on Success: How Duval County's Partnership with Amira Transformed Reading Outcomes

SETTING THE STAGE

What a successful partnership looks like

THE JOURNEY

Creative solutions and strategic innovations

THE IMPACT

Reading fluency, state testing success and an "A" rating

LESSONS LEARNED

Start small, scale smart, never stop learning

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The Center for
Outcomes Based Contracting
at the Southern Education Foundation



SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

When Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) set out to address the needs of over 2,600 students reading below grade level in 2024, they weren't new to outcomes based contracting. The Florida district had already proven the model's power through two years of remarkable math tutoring success.

DCPS first joined as a pilot cohort member in 2022-23, where their math tutoring program served 450 students and achieved 53% of contracted outcomes. The following year, after expanding to serve 1,400 students who previously scored at the lowest levels on the state assessment, the program achieved over 100% of contracted outcomes.

With more than 65% of tutored 7th and 8th graders achieving learning gains on the state assessment, DCPS saw firsthand how OBC transforms outcomes for students who need it most.

BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP FOR IMPACT

In October 2024, DCPS put their OBC expertise into action with Amira Learning, an AI-powered reading intervention designed to serve ~2,600 students in grades 2-4 who were performing below grade level.

The ~\$100k contract tied 50% of payment directly to student success across three critical outcomes: whether students reached grade-level oral reading fluency on STAR assessments, whether they made gains on Florida's FAST (the state's standardized ELA assessment), and whether they ultimately achieved proficiency on this state benchmark.

With clear targets and mutual accountability built into every aspect of the contract, both DCPS and Amira were committed to transforming reading outcomes for students who had historically struggled.

THE JOURNEY

FROM CHALLENGES TO CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Implementation began under challenging circumstances. Although the Amira contract was structured to measure spring to spring growth, from students' Spring 2024 FAST scores to their Spring 2025 results, a major hurricane delayed the program's launch until after Thanksgiving. This meant teachers and schools began training and onboarding during one of the busiest times of the school year, with routines already firmly in place across 32 campuses.

Despite these disruptions, the district's commitment and the program's strong foundation ensured that progress continued. When a key district leader later departed, implementation did not falter. In fact, the transition demonstrated the strength and sustainability of outcomes based contracting itself.

The clearly defined outcomes, structured supports, and shared accountability built into the contract enabled the work to stay on track and even gain traction. Rather than being dependent on a single individual, the initiative proved to be a system grounded in clarity, collaboration, and continuity.

Under typical circumstances, if a district's implementation leader leaves mid-year, usage fidelity tends to lose steam. In this situation, in large part due to Ms. Renfro's leadership and the good stress put on the implementation by the OBC, it was actually the opposite. If we look at the data, when Niki came in, [fidelity of usage] actually continued to climb. It skyrocketed.

- Billy Warden, Vice President of Success Management, Amira Learning



WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE: FOUR STRATEGIC INNOVATIONS

INDIVIDUAL TRACKING: NAMES OVER NUMBERS



Regular meetings with building leaders at schools struggling with implementation transformed principals into school level program champions.

INTERSCHOOL COMPETITION: GAMIFYING SUCCESS



Schools embraced friendly rivalry with a leaderboard competition that rewarded schools achieving high dosage with "Amirabucks." Usage spiked district-wide after a February slump.

PRINCIPAL MEETINGS: CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE



Regular meetings with building leaders at schools struggling with implementation transformed principals into school level program champions.

REAL-TIME INNOVATION: COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING



Amira developed a new administrative dashboard tailored to DCPS needs when district leaders identified gaps in dosage tracking.

THE IMPACT

The numbers tell a powerful story of what's possible when districts and providers align around student success:

- **More than 1,200 students achieved grade-level oral reading fluency, exceeding the district's target**
- **More than 500 students achieved gains on the end-of-year state assessment**
- **~300 students achieved proficiency on the end-of-year assessment, setting them on track for future success**
- **95% of students met the recommended dosage requirements**

The successful implementation of innovative, outcomes-focused interventions like the Amira partnership demonstrated the district's commitment to measurable improvement for every student and was one of many factors contributing to a milestone moment: **Duval County Public Schools earned its first-ever 'A' grade from the state.**

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With the benefit of hindsight, DCPS identified critical improvements for future implementations.

“The majority of schools really bought into Amira and saw the impact it was making. They're already asking for it again for next year - that's a huge win. The exponential growth we saw from beginning to end of year was huge for Duval County.

- Niki Downen,
Director of K - 12 Literacy,
Duval County Public Schools



THE PATH FORWARD:

START SMALL, SCALE SMART,
NEVER STOP LEARNING

Through thoughtful analysis and commitment to renewal, DCPS demonstrates the continuous improvement mindset that makes OBC successful. **When districts and providers commit to shared accountability and continuous improvement, transformation is inevitable.**

For more information on how you can get involved, visit [our website](#).

Lessons Learned:

Strategic Improvements
for Year Two

Starting in September rather than after Thanksgiving would allow proper onboarding and full-year outcomes.

School selection needs to be more strategic, with clear buy-in requirements and principal commitment secured upfront.

Grade-level differences in assessment structures created unexpected complications that future contracts will address through mutually inclusive metrics appropriately scaled for different grade levels.