



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE
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MELC Brief Series Community Inquiry Study

BRIEF IV:

**THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING:
HOW MECKLENBURG COUNTY CBO MEASURE IMPACT
AND SCALE SUCCESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**

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PREFACE

The purpose of this research brief is to share findings about how community-based organizations (CBOs) located in Mecklenburg County, NC measure the impact of their literacy services.

An overview of the study background and methodology is summarized in the Executive Summary titled Early Literacy Services Provided by Community Based Organizations in Mecklenburg County: An Inquiry Study.



HOW DO CBOS MEASURE IMPACT?

CBOs in the Mecklenburg County area recognized the critical importance of measuring, analyzing, and transparently reporting their contribution to early literacy outcomes, often employing a multifaceted measurement approach. Most CBOs (85%, n = 23) summarized their impact in impact reports, shared publicly on an annual basis. Quantifying and sharing impact via public reporting signals strong commitments to accountability and continuous improvement.

CBOs utilized a diverse range of indicators to track program reach, participant perceptions, and the resulting impact on child and family outcomes. These indicators are organized into the categories below, with the specific measures used for each detailed in the table.

1 Impact By Numbers

2 Impact by Perspectives

3 Impact by Assessments

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
IMPACT BY NUMBERS	Number of students (supported)	Total number of individual students engaged in programming or services, regardless of intensity or frequency. Includes students who received books through donation or distribution, participated in programs across various geographic areas, or were supported through partnerships with reading resource centers or Little Free Libraries.
	Number of adults (trained/reached)	Total count of adults including teachers, parents, caregivers, volunteers, & community members engaged with the organization in support of literacy development. Includes volunteer engagement, as well as those reached through partnerships, reflected by the number and types of partners served, social media reach, membership and email subscribers, & attendance at hosted events.
IMPACT BY PERSPECTIVES	Change in Perceptions	Shifts in attitudes, beliefs, self-esteem, or self-identities related to reading and literacy, measured by surveys, observations, reflective notes, or achievements. Indicators include increases in the number of books in the home, family reading time and frequency, reading engagement and willingness, and local partner participation in collaborative literacy efforts.
IMPACT BY ASSESSMENTS	No Measures Used	Programs acknowledged the importance of impact data but did not collect or use it due to barriers (e.g., capacity, resources, access to data sets, tools, or expertise).
	Formal Assessments	Standardized and validated tools used to measure academic progress and performance among students and adult learners. Includes assessments that generate data comparable across individuals and settings, such as diagnostic screeners, benchmark tests, progress monitoring tools, report cards, and end-of-year evaluations, including pre- and post-assessments (e.g., DIBELS, BOY/EOG, Fluharty, DaCy, MAPs, DECA, Azi, etc.).
	Informal Assessments	Non-standardized tools or methods used to monitor participant learning, engagement, and perceptions. Includes data gathered through observations, surveys, anecdotal notes, testimonials, participant feedback, and interest-holder input.
	Informal Program-Specific Evaluations	Locally developed or formal program evaluation tools used to assess the effectiveness of training, coaching, technical assistance, and student progress within tutoring or instructional programs. Includes pre- and post-training or coaching assessments, coaching action plans, & program-specific student progress evaluations. Evaluations provided formative feedback focused on program implementation, participant development, and student learning outcomes.
	Student Outcome Data Impact Reports	Communication of program outcomes and effectiveness (e.g., annual reports, newsletters, website, data shared).

HOW DO CBOS PARTNER FOR IMPACT?

By sharing data (as permitted) and aligning programmatic goals, CBOs formed networks of services, which reduced redundancy and ensured families and schools had streamlined access to trusted, well-aligned supports through an integrated system. By strengthening communication among partners and increasing visibility of available resources, networks made it easier to coordinate and bundle complementary services and increase their reach, thus expanding impact. As an exemplar, Read Charlotte explained how they expanded reach through the formation of key partnerships:

"We've had multiple partners that through our work with them, we've been able to show program and system level impact for years. For example, Reach Out and Read where we've got 50% more children being prescribed books and language during well-child visits than in 2017. Through our partnership with the YMCA, we brought to town a summer reading model called Summer Literacy Infusion, which was adding one day of literacy, one hour of literacy, four days a week into traditional summer camps to stop summer reading loss."

Several other CBOs similarly partnered in programming, demonstrating a culture of collaboration and support in the pursuit of improving literacy outcomes in the county.

SUMMARY

1

By utilizing diverse measurement tools, CBOs do more than just track numbers—they align their daily operations with their core mission. Sharing data through impact reports fosters transparency and fuels a cycle of continuous improvement. When CBOs use data insights to refine their programs, participant outcomes often improve.

2

Furthermore, a data-driven culture serves as a bridge for partnerships, allowing organizations to integrate services and scale their collective reach.



Recommended Citation: Sinclair, K.D. & Beach, K.D. (2026). *The Proof is in the Pudding: How Mecklenburg County CBO Measure Impact and Scale Success Through Partnerships* (Research Brief). Mebane Early Literacy Center.
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