

Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County ReadingPals and Storytimers

The mission of the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County is to provide and coordinate the services of school readiness programs, in an efficient manner, in order to help all children develop the skills needed to achieve future educational success, to support the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher, and to continue to improve the quality of services available in the community.

Its **ReadingPals and Storytimers** initiative would expand this commitment to early literacy by building on its proven ReadingPals program and introducing Storytimers. This initiative addresses the critical concern that only 52% of pre-K students in Manatee County demonstrate kindergarten readiness and 75% of those never catch up. By reaching children earlier and supporting families, Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County strives to change that trajectory.

ReadingPals targets 4-year-olds in childcare centers, pairing them with trained community volunteers who help build vocabulary, emotional connections, and foundational reading skills. This initiative would expand ReadingPals by providing family engagement kits and take-home books, recognizing that parental involvement is a critical factor in a child's educational journey. The addition of Storytimers, with literacy sessions using age-appropriate books and play-based learning, would target 3-year-olds, to foster early vocabulary and communication skills. Together, these efforts would reach approximately 100 ReadingPals families and 30 new Storytimers children each year, strengthening early literacy and school readiness in childcare centers close to Title One elementary schools.

The total initiative budget is \$246,350 with \$46,000 of the additional funding committed and \$92,350 pending. Our grant would fund \$23,473 of the \$50,000 for the existing Community Educational Initiatives Coordinator position, \$22,892 for the Local IQ platform fees, \$20,697 for family engagement kits, \$21,499 of the \$22,730 for pre-K take-home books and \$19,439 for other supporting expenses, including a portion of the building rent and marketing.

Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County is run by individuals seeking to create positive change in early learning. The sessions would be conducted inside one of three educational buses for a total of 25 to 30 weeks. The Storytimers program would use a book lending model with high-quality washable books.

Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County's fundraising base would facilitate long term sustainability. In addition, it plans to explore corporate sponsorships, in-kind donations and volunteer engagement campaigns to augment current funding sources.

The initiative aims to deepen early literacy skills through take-home books, family engagement kits and community literacy sessions, reaching over 130 children annually.