

Webinar Episode 4:

Reading Starts at Home: A Georgia Reads Community Literacy Spotlight

Overview

This fourth episode of Georgia Reads' *Best Practices Webinar Series* Spotlighted the Black Child Development Institute (BCDI–Atlanta), a 2025 Georgia Reads Community Award winner, and explored one core truth: **literacy begins long before a child enters a classroom — at home, in culture, and in community.**

Host: **Malcolm Mitchell**, Georgia Reads Coach

Panelists:

- **Tatjyana Elmore** - BCDI-Atlanta President
- **Sharon Hudgins-Beck** - BCDI-Atlanta Coordinator of Programs
- **Chantene Armstrong** - BCDI-Atlanta Expand ECE Fellow, Parent, and Early Childhood Professional

Purpose: To showcase how BCDI–Atlanta and local partners collaborate to improve literacy outcomes across Georgia communities.

Key Insights

Literacy is more than reading and writing.

Panelists defined literacy as:

- **Agency and self-worth** (seeing yourself reflected in books)
- **Access** to opportunity and life skills
- **Community health and economic stability**
- **A daily practice embedded in everyday routines**

Literacy is not just an academic goal — it is a public health and equity issue.

The Challenge: Barriers Families Face

BCDI–Atlanta highlighted common barriers impacting literacy in underserved communities:

- Transportation and access to libraries and books
- Poverty and childcare deserts
- Historical school trauma and mistrust of systems
- Cultural disconnect between materials and children's lived experiences
- Parents lacking information on how to support literacy at home

A critical insight:

Families are often viewed through a deficit lens instead of for their strengths.

BCDI–Atlanta’s Approach: A Three-Touch Model

BCDI–Atlanta’s signature **Read to Succeed Literacy Program** focuses on children ages birth to eight and uses a holistic, culturally responsive model:

1. **Children:**
 - Interactive story readings
 - Books that reflect children’s culture and experiences
 - Building home libraries, not just distributing single books
2. **Educators:**
 - Professional development on using culturally relevant literacy tools
 - Strategies to engage children more deeply with stories
3. **Families:**
 - Literacy workshops
 - Activity guides
 - Video story reads for parents who may struggle with reading themselves
 - Tools that bridge school and home learning

This model builds trust, reduces barriers, and empowers families rather than prescribing solutions.

Impact Through Real Stories

Parents shared firsthand experiences of children becoming excited about books, recognizing places and stories from their own lives, and gaining confidence through literacy events.

BCDI–Atlanta emphasized that while book distribution numbers matter, **qualitative impact matters more:**

- Children asking to read at home
- Parents feeling equipped and confident
- Communities requesting BCDI to return
- Schools changing their book collections to reflect students’ lives

Authentic engagement proved more powerful than statistics alone.

Statewide Reach

Although based in Atlanta, BCDI–Atlanta now serves families across Georgia, including rural counties, using:

- Virtual family literacy workshops
- Community partnerships
- Free resources accessible statewide

Their mission is to ensure children everywhere have equal access to culturally relevant literacy tools.

Closing Takeaways

For Leaders:

Families are experts in their own lives. Partner with them — don't "save" them.

For Organizations:

Literacy is life. It happens in everyday experiences — cooking, commuting, talking, and playing.

For Parents:

Stay open, stay engaged, and know that learning can happen anywhere.

Bottom Line

BCDI–Atlanta's work demonstrates that improving literacy requires:

- Trust
- Cultural relevance
- Family engagement
- Community partnership
- Removing barriers instead of blaming families

When children see themselves in stories and families are equipped with tools, literacy becomes a shared ecosystem — not just a classroom task.

Reading truly starts at home.