

Summary of Library Initiatives with Decodable Books

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the work Teach My Kid to Read (TMKTR) accomplished in 2020-2022 partnering with public and school libraries to provide training about decodable books and ways to help early and struggling readers become skilled readers, access to decodable books and literacy resources, and support curating and offering collections. The report analyzes professional webinars that TMKTR offers librarians and library staff and looks at the circulation data after libraries started offering collections of decodable books. The specific data about decodable books come from our partner library, The Lodi Whittier Library in Lodi, New York, which created a Literacy Hub with a robust collection of decodable books, and from additional libraries that provided anecdotal reports about their collections. What does the report tell us?

- TMKTR has presented to over 400 librarians and library staff (since 2000) at public and school libraries and found that most librarians are unfamiliar with decodable texts or resources that support decoding.
- All the librarians and library staff who learn about decodable books want to create awareness of decodable books to help more emerging and struggling readers.
- After attending TMKTR professional learning webinars, librarians and library staff immediately want to initiate solutions and provide equitable literacy resources.
- Creating a Literacy Hub in the library is listed as the most important next step.
- Obtaining funding and choosing, ordering, and cataloging the books are challenging but essential tasks in providing more widely available literacy solutions.
- The Lodi Whittier Library, a partner library that initiated a Literacy Hub, increased circulation of decodables nine-fold after they were cataloged. In the final three months 2022 when efforts were focused on promotion, circulation again doubled.
- Creating collections of decodable books and literacy resources through the libraries provides an equitable literacy solution that parents and caregivers can access to help children learn to read.

Challenge

Literacy is a civil (basic human) right. (Robinson, 2017) Yet, only 42% of 4th graders across New York can read proficiently. For vulnerable demographics, the numbers are even lower: 21 percent of economically disadvantaged students, 30 percent of Hispanic students and 31 percent of Black students in 4th grade can read proficiently. (NAEP, 2022)

Why do so many children and adults struggle to read? One reason may be undiagnosed reading disabilities such as dyslexia. Environmental factors such as low exposure to books and literature might also play a part. Often, teachers do not receive adequate training in identifying children who are at risk of reading failure, and existing curricula often do not align with the current science of how children learn to read. (Learning to speak is natural, but learning to read must be systematically and explicitly taught.) Finally, to become fluent, children must practice with decodables: text aligned with the phonics skills they are learning. (Blevins, 2000)

Lack of awareness of and access to decodable books is a large part of the literacy challenge. Parents, caregivers, and community groups can all play a role in increasing reading proficiency by learning about and using decodable books to help children practice critical reading skills. The public library is the community resource best positioned to reach those most in need and least served.

History of Library Work

Teach My Kid to Read (TMKTR) was founded on the premise that libraries should offer parents of emerging and struggling readers decodable books and resources that support skilled reading. Many parents and caregivers go to the library hoping to find books or information that will help their struggling reader. Some parents or caregivers learn about resources like decodable books when their children get the reading help they need, and then they discover librarians or library staff are not familiar with decodable books and libraries do not stock decodable books.

Many struggling readers have dyslexia, so when Dyslexia Awareness Month approached in October 2019, TMKTR asked fifty libraries in New York and a few other states whether they would be willing to create a display of decodable books. Over fifty libraries signed up, with participation from other states who heard about the initiative. We also asked librarians and library staff if they wanted to learn more about dyslexia and resources like decodable books. We offered an introductory webinar about dyslexia to partner libraries through Glean Education to help educate librarians and library staff. TMKTR also provided videos, posters, and handouts for librarians and parents/caregivers.

At the conclusion of the month, TMKTR prepared a questionnaire to measure the success of the initiative. All participants said they wanted to learn more about decodable books. Participants also wanted more options to help struggling readers; a deeper understanding of decodable books; help with funding; and support in choosing decodables, ordering the books, and reaching out to the community.

To address the needs identified by the 50 partner libraries, in 2020, TMKTR began offering professional learning webinars to library systems, associations, and other organizations that contacted TMKTR for librarian and library staff education. During the pandemic in 2020, in-person presentations became webinars. TMKTR reached 25% of the New York library systems and worked with libraries in Michigan, Connecticut, and Illinois. TMKTR mostly presented *The Road to Decode Leads to the Library*, the introductory training that provides an overview of literacy, how we learn to read, and where resources like decodable books fit.

In October 2022, TMKTR began systematically collecting data about *The Road to Decode Leads to the Library* to measure what librarians and library staff know about literacy and decodable books and learn what next step they are willing to take to serve more families of emerging and struggling readers. The evaluation was intended to help with the content of the additional webinars and trainings and support TMKTR offers librarians and library staff.

The Road to Decode Leads to the Library Evaluation Design

Two survey tools were developed to evaluate the webinars:

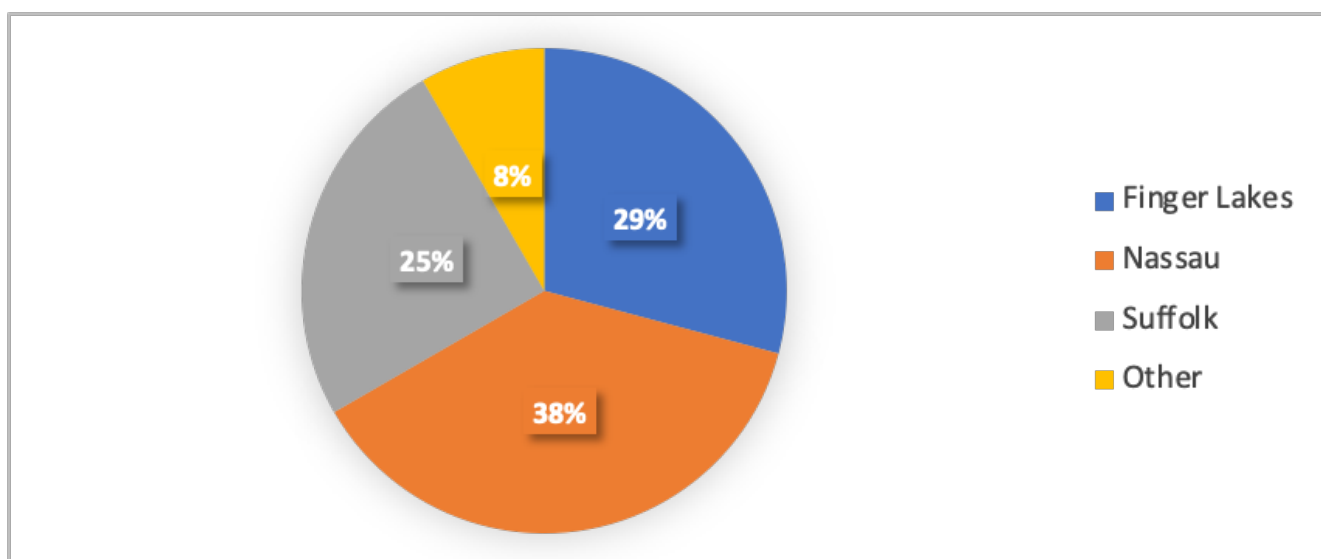
1. A short pre-assessment warm up asked participants to rate their understanding of key literacy terms and awareness of literacy resources prior to attending the webinar. We also asked why they chose to attend this webinar.
2. The post-event assessment asked about format, content, and technical ease of the webinar and gave an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements. The post assessment again asked participants about some of the key literacy terms. This program evaluation is designed to answer the following questions:
 - Who participated in the webinar and evaluation?
 - What was the participant's level of prior knowledge of dyslexia, the needs of struggling readers, and the resources to help them?
 - What motivated participants to sign up for this webinar?
 - Did participants find the webinar helpful and worthwhile?
 - Did participants gain specific content knowledge by attending the webinar?
 - Do participants plan to take specific steps to follow up on what they learned in the webinar?

Part 1. Warm up Survey Analysis

A. Who participated in the webinar?

A total of 31 participants from six library systems joined the webinars. We received 24 responses to the warm-up surveys that participants completed prior to the webinar. (Response rate: 77%) Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents representing each library system. Note that "other" includes various library systems throughout New York.

Figure 1. Library system participation in *Road to Decode* webinars



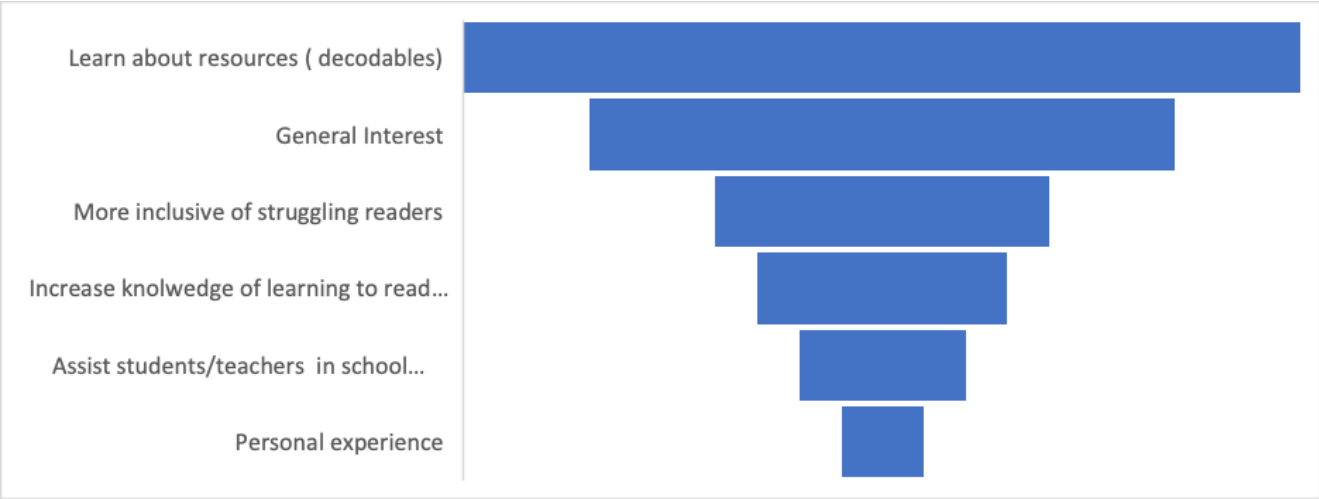
B. What was the respondent’s level of prior knowledge, struggling readers, and the resources to help them?

Before attending *the Road to Decode Leads to the Library*, less than half (46 %) of respondents chose 60% as the percentage of America’s inmates who are functionally illiterate. Half of the respondents correctly identified 85% of juveniles in the court system as being unable to read above a fourth-grade level. Half of the respondents also recognized that 95% of children have the cognitive ability to become skilled readers.

Participants were also asked to rate their level of engagement with several reading programs specifically designed to be decodable and accessible for struggling readers. Respondents scored very low on familiarity with decodable texts or related reading programs.

C. What motivated respondents to attend the webinar?

Figure 2. Open-ended comments about reasons for attending the webinar



In open-ended comments (see Figure 2), respondents most often expressed an interest in learning about the resources that are available to struggling readers, and several specifically mentioned learning about decodable books. For example, one respondent attended *to increase knowledge of how children learn to read so we can better help families find materials, and also to hear about helpful materials to purchase*. Several indicated a general interest in the topic and some respondents specifically mentioned a desire to make their library more inclusive for struggling readers. One respondent wanted *To learn how to make the library better for all students*. Two respondents indicated that they were attending as school staff, and one shared a personal interest, as a family member struggled with dyslexia: *I can tell his brain doesn’t work like his older siblings...*

Part 2. Analysis of Post-Webinar Surveys

The Webinar Structure and Objectives

Following each webinar, we asked participants to complete a short post-webinar survey. 25 of the 31 participants completed the survey (80% response rate).

On a scale of 1-4 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree) participants were asked to assess their level of agreement with several statements about the structure of *The Road to Decode Leads to the Library*. Table 1 is a summary of their responses. The mean represents the average of all responses, and the mode is the response most often selected.

Table 1. Participants' assessment of the structure of the webinar

Statements	Mean	Mode	Range
Easy to sign onto the webinar	3.6	4	1-4
Could hear the presenters clearly	3.5	4	1-4
Understood platform tools for participation	3.5	4	1-4
Easy to see the slides	3.6	4	1-4
Slides helped understanding of content	3.5	4	1-4
Well organized presentation	3.6	4	1-4
Material appropriate for time allotted	3.5	4	1-4
Interactive content was helpful	3.6	4	2-4
Enough time to ask questions	3.5	4	1-4

- A large majority of participants rated all aspects of the webinar presentation highly.
- Respondents checked “strongly agree” most often in their ratings.
- Signing in, the ease of the visuals, and the interactive content were rated most highly.

At the conclusion of the webinar, we asked participants to rate their level of understanding of the webinar content. Table 2 summarizes their responses. The same scale was used. (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)

Table 2. Participants' understanding of webinar content

Statements	mean	mode	range
I understand more about the obstacles to early literacy.	3.4	=	1-4
I can describe the two roads that lead to skilled reading.	3.3	3	1-4
I can recognize the signs of struggling readers.	3.3	3	1-4
I can define decodable books and how they differ from leveled books.	3.0	3	1-4
I am considering how my library can create a Literacy Hub.	3.5	4	1-4

- Respondents agreed that they had a better understanding of all of the content presented in the webinar.
- More respondents agreed than strongly agreed with the first four statements.
- However, most respondents strongly agreed that they were considering how their own libraries could create a Literacy Hub.

D. Did participants gain specific content knowledge by attending the webinar?

Before the webinar started, we asked participants to rate their level of understanding of key terms and concepts related to dyslexia and the resources available to address the needs of struggling readers. Figures 3 and 4 show respondents' level of understanding before and immediately after the webinar.

Figure 3. Participant rating of their understanding of key terms and concepts before and after the webinar

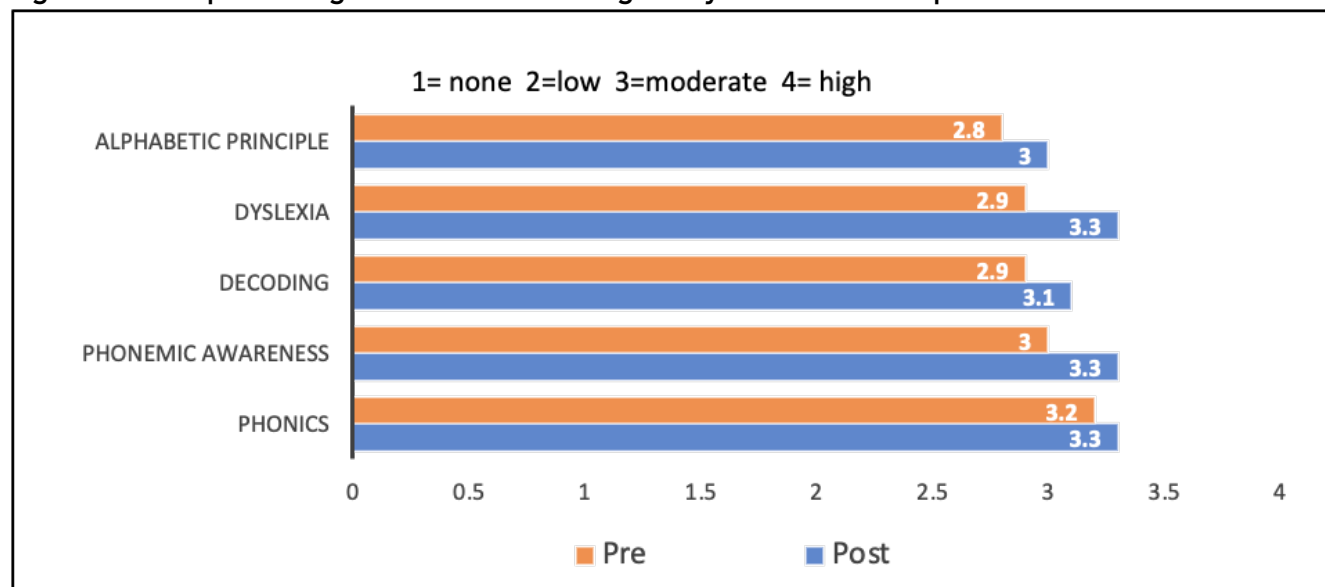
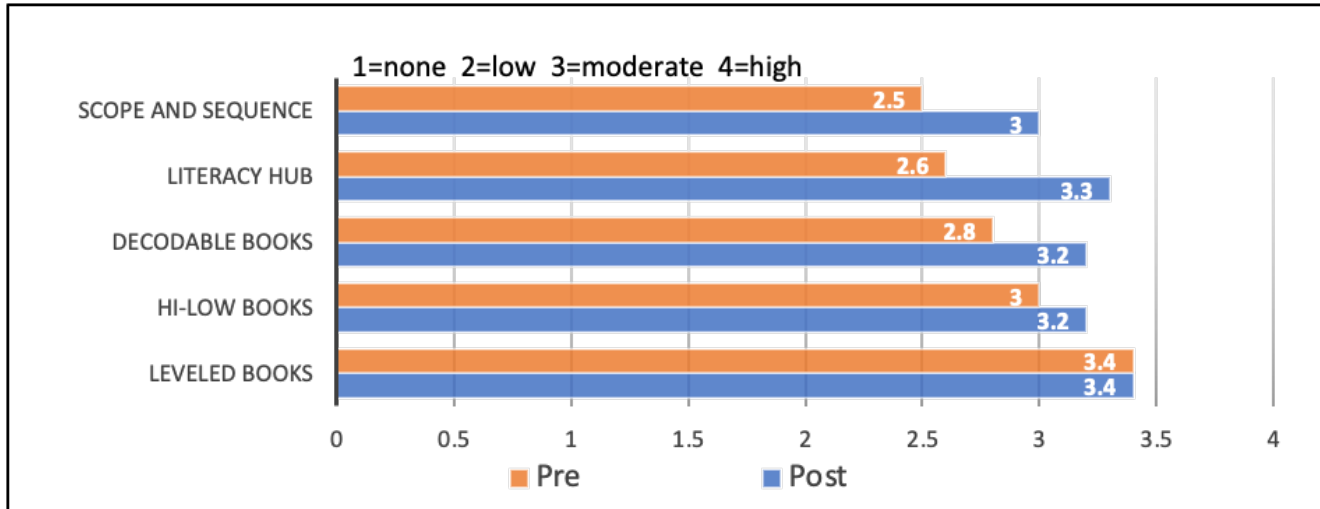


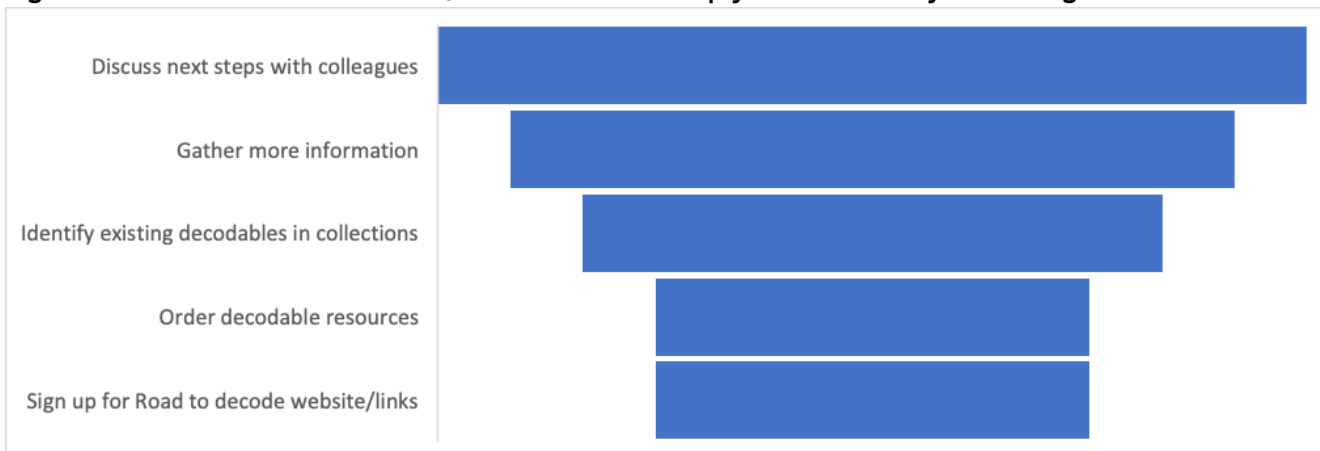
Figure 4. Participant rating of their understanding of key terms and concepts before and after the webinar (cont.)



- On average, respondents generally reported low to moderate understanding of key terms and concepts prior to the *Road to Decode Leads to the Library* webinar.
- Respondents reported similar levels of understanding of leveled books both before and after the webinar.
- For all other terms and concepts, immediately following the webinar, respondents perceived their understanding of key terms to have improved to approximately a moderate level.
- The understanding of the term *Literacy Hub* showed the most improvement in understanding.

E. Do participants plan to take specific steps to follow up on what they learned in the webinar?

Figure 5. As a result of this webinar, what is the next step you will take in your setting?



In open ended comments respondents most often stated that their next step was to engage their colleagues and gather additional information (Figure 5). One respondent said *I will be bringing back the information I learned today to the library and discuss what I learned today and see what our library could improve upon.*

Finally, there was significant interest in learning more about decodable books and resources for struggling readers. One respondent will be *looking more closely at decodable books on the middle school level and for ENL [English as a new language] students.* Another responded, *I will sign up for The Road to Decode and research what materials we already have in our collection to see what topics we are lacking.*

Desired Resources and Solutions

When we asked participants about additional resources to move forward, responses generally fell into four categories; lists of decodable books, funding sources, data to support funding requests, and institutional support from library systems and schools (Table 3). For example, one respondent noted that they needed *data to support funding requests, ordering sources for materials, information on how to get investment from the schools, who to contact to get statistics on readers in [my] county*. Participants were generally very satisfied with the content and presentation of the webinar.

Table 3. What additional resources do you need to move forward?

Resources	Need Lists of decodable books and resources	Funding Sources	Data to Support Funding Request	Support from System or Administration
TMKTR Solution	TMKTR provides an extensive listing of publishers, and maintains relationships with many of the publishers.	TMKTR works through grants, donations, and sponsorships to provide access to decodable books with initiation support.	TMKTR provides the latest research and evidence to support decodable books and data about circulation, community usage, and other evaluation tools, including interviews with key stakeholders.	The typical concern is staff time. To alleviate some of the time challenges, TMKTR provides one-on-one coaching support in addition to virtual support through monthly library meetings.

Initiating Collections of Decodable Books: Lodi Whittier Library

In April 2022, the Lodi Whittier Library in Lodi, New York applied for and received grant funding to pilot the establishment of a Literacy Hub (Table 4). The Lodi Whittier Library serves rural communities within the South Seneca School District. The district has a K-12 enrollment of 610, with 54% coming from economically disadvantaged households.

A Literacy Hub is a dedicated space for emerging and struggling readers to find decodable books that they can read independently while building reading fluency. It also has resources for parents and teachers who are supporting struggling readers.

Phase one of the project; establishing the Literacy Hub, was completed in the spring of 2022. It has 267 decodable books (which are sequential and cumulative based on letter and sound correspondence in words). It also contains 38 parent/teacher resources for struggling readers and 20 books by or about individuals with dyslexia. Many of these categories have books that range from easy reader to young adult.

Table 4. Lodi Literacy Hub Collection 2022

Collection	Easy Readers	Picture books	Children's chapter	Young Adult	Adult/ Non-fiction	DVD/ Periodicals	
<i>Road to Decode</i>	126	0	65	20			
Parent/Teacher resources					36	2	
Hi-Lo Books				34			
Books by or about people with dyslexia		7	9	1	3		
TOTAL	126	7	74	55	40	2	304

- *Road to Decode* books (the decodable books names for TMKTR's program) are sequential and cumulative and based on letter and sound correspondence in words. Word choice is controlled by phonics principles rather than high frequency words that require memorization, Decodables are a teaching tool and meant for practice. Once decoding is automatic, children transition to broader literature options.
- Parent/Teacher resources provide parents and educators information of how to support a child who is struggling to learn to read.
- Hi-Lo Books are carefully written stories to motivate older readers and build reading stamina. Each book has a higher ratio of text to illustration to bridge the gap between our structured reading series and mainstream reading.
- Other resources, including books by or about individuals with dyslexia offer insight into first-hand experience of those who struggle to read.
- Images 1 and 2 (below) show how a dedicated space for a Literacy Hub displays its resources.

Image 1. Lodi Literacy Hub shelf

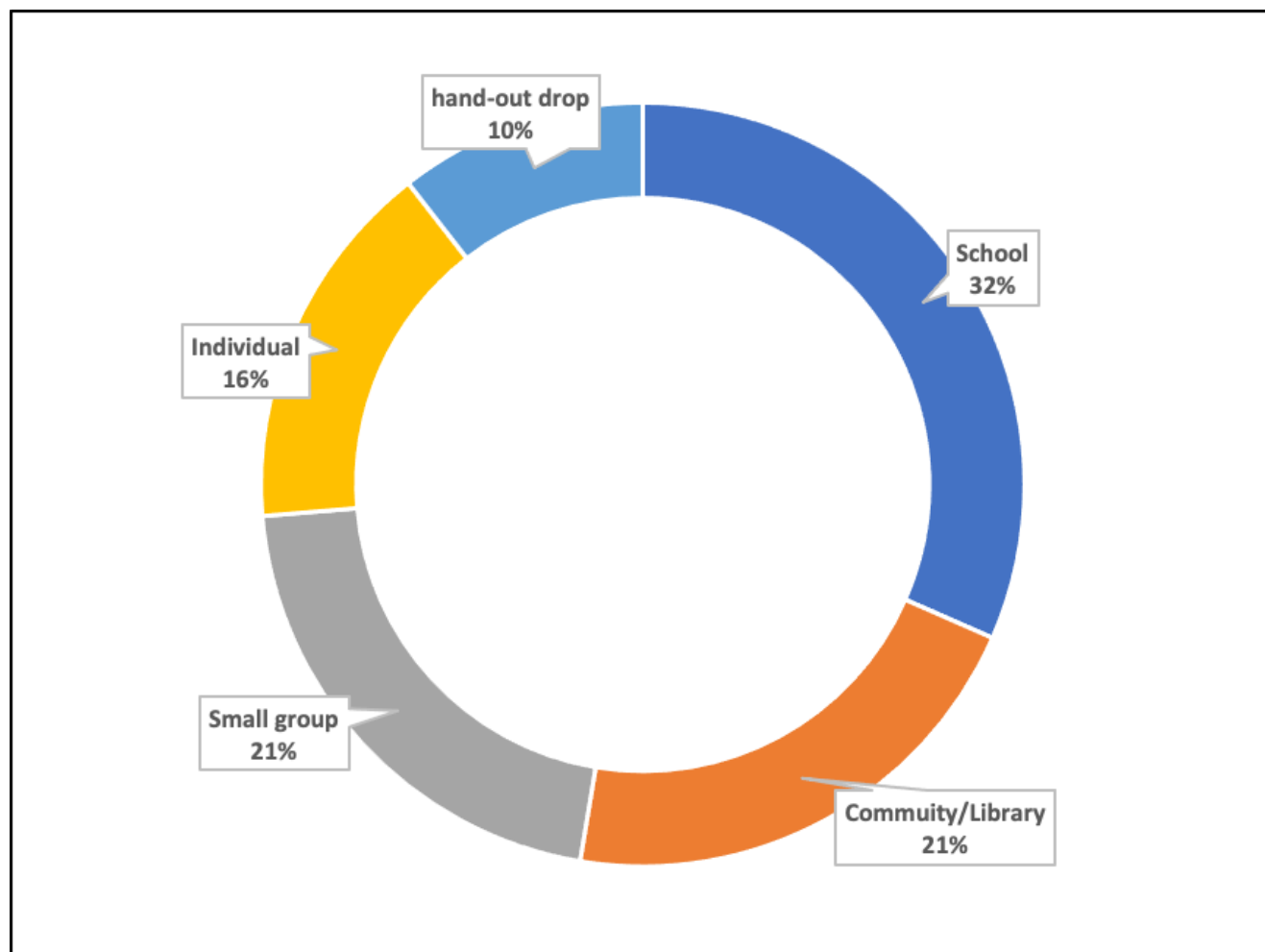


Image 2. Close up view of a Literacy Hub shelf



Phase two of the project; the promotion of the Literacy Hub through community engagement events, occurred in the fall of 2020 with October, Dyslexia Awareness Month, as the starting point. The Lodi Whittier library hosted 19 events and reached more than 500 individuals with in-person encounters that ranged in size from individual consultations with parents, to community events with more than 200 attendees (Figure 6) The library also piloted the use of a dot survey and found it to be a useful tool to promote discussion of literacy challenges and to address the stigma often associated with low reading ability.

Figure 6. Literacy promotion events October – December 2022



- The events were most often held in school settings and were often part of a larger school-related event, such as a fall open house.
- Outdoor events can be negatively impacted by inclement weather. For example, the fall festival had lower than expected attendance due to heavy rain.
- The Lodi Whittier Library maintained a display promoting the Lodi Literacy Hub throughout Dyslexia Awareness Month. This generated several requests for individual and small-group engagements. Library Director Beth Bevars followed up with each of these.

Use of the Dot Survey As an Engagement Tool

At six of the school and community events, and one educators' regional conference, The Lodi Literacy Hub piloted the use of a data collection tool called a dot survey. This project adapted this tool from the Rapid Market Survey tool used extensively at Farmers Markets to get information about customers and their purchasing habits and preferences. The tool was adapted to encourage respondents to think about their own experiences in learning to read and to get some anecdotal information about library use. Image 3 Is an example of the Dot survey tool. Figure 7 shows the distribution of the dots at the seven events.

Image 3. Dot survey example

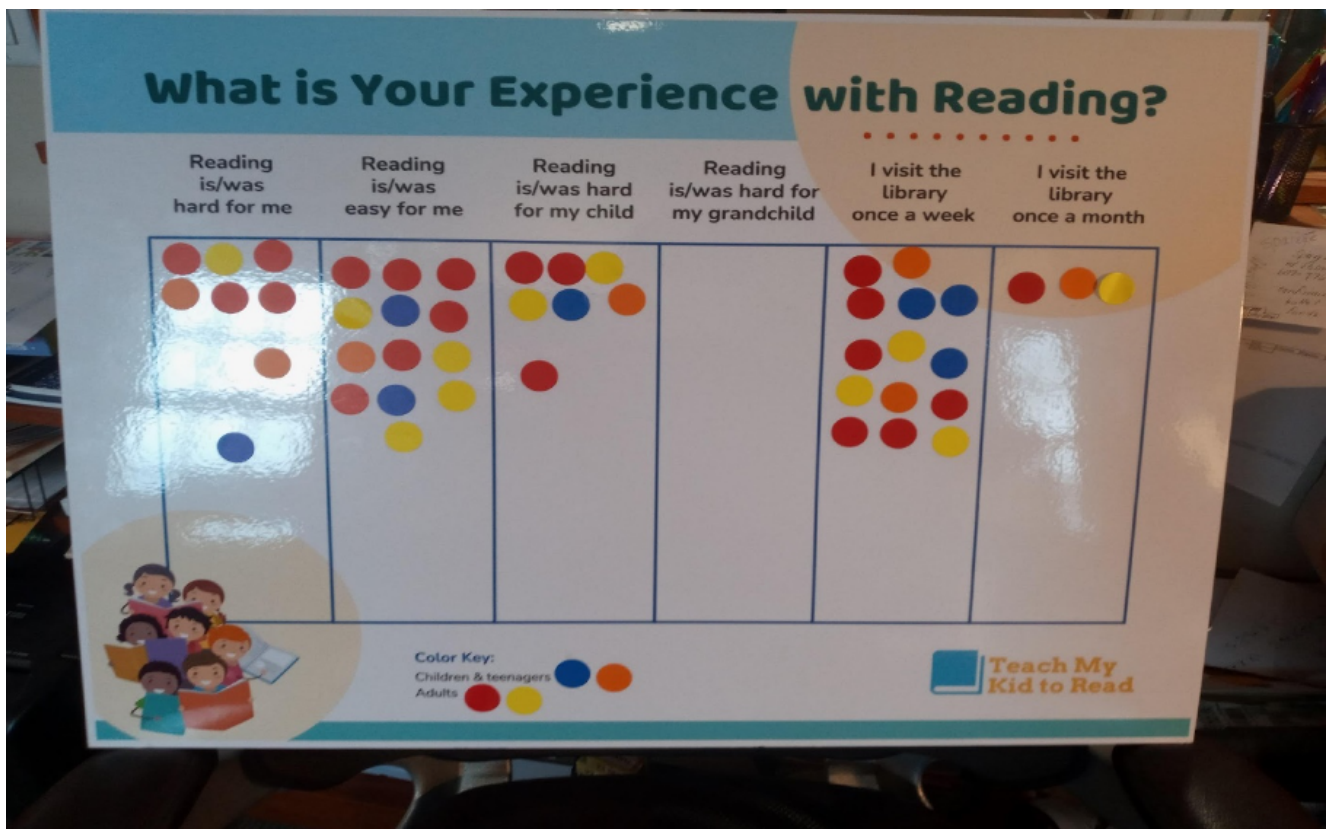
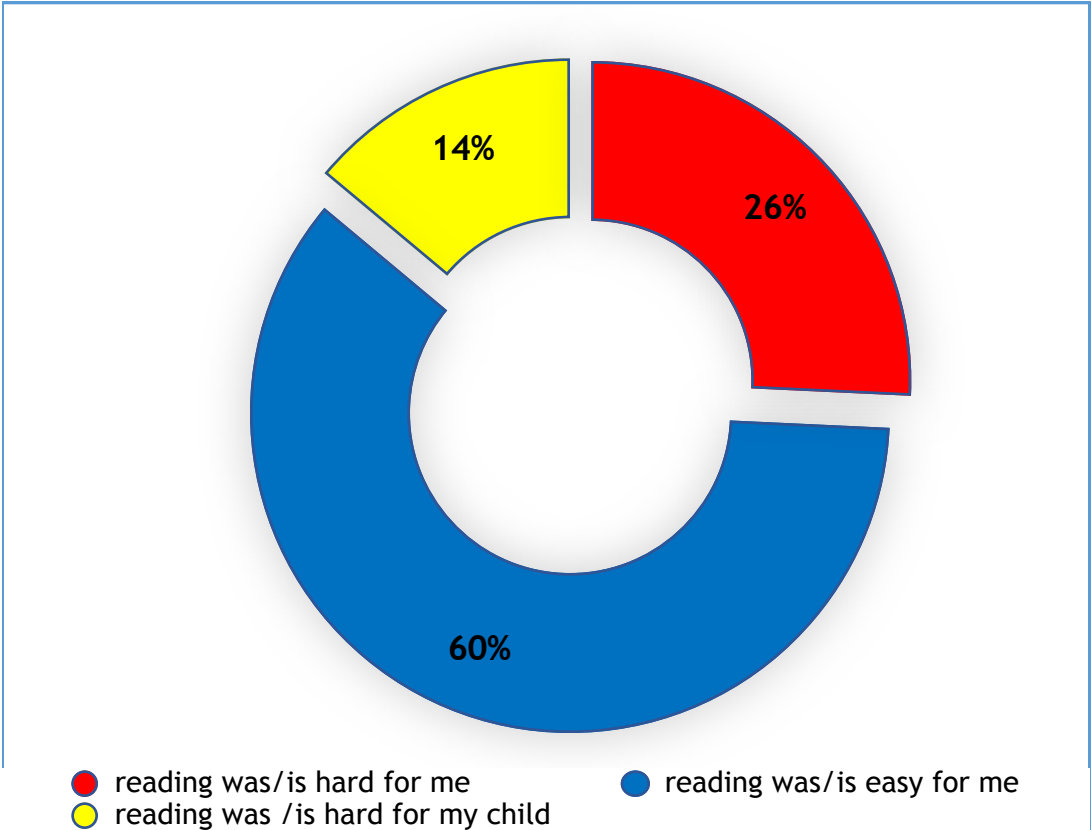


Figure 7. Dot survey results — What is your experience with reading?

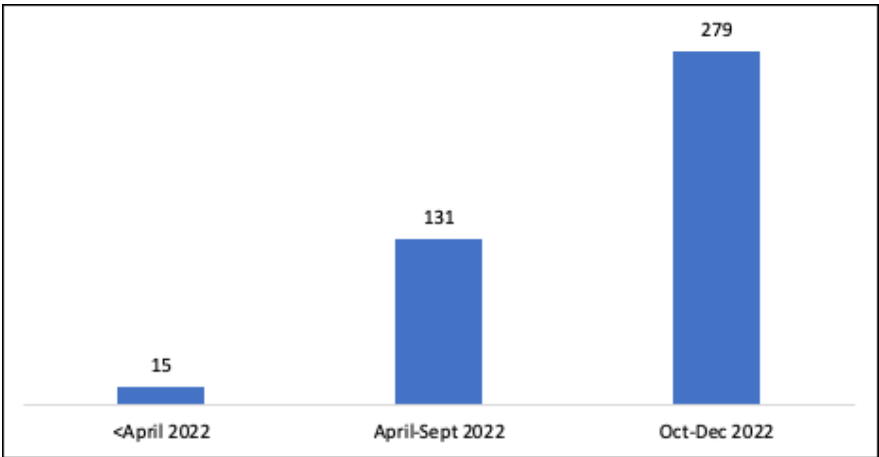


- Figure 7 represents the aggregate results of dot surveys taken at seven school and community events in the fall of 2022, where 60% of the responses indicated that learning to read was easy, 26% indicated that it was hard, and 14% noted that reading was difficult for their child.
- The dot survey is a convenient sampling tool. It is entirely voluntary. Since no effort is made to obtain a representative sample the results are not generalizable. It provides a snapshot of the reading experience of the group that has gathered.
- Validated research has shown that approximately 20% of the population has a reading challenge like dyslexia that makes reading more difficult to master.

Phase three involved sharing the process of establishing a Literacy Hub with other libraries in the Finger Lakes Library System. On October 27th, 2022, the Finger Lakes Library System hosted *The Road to Decode Leads to the Library* (see above).

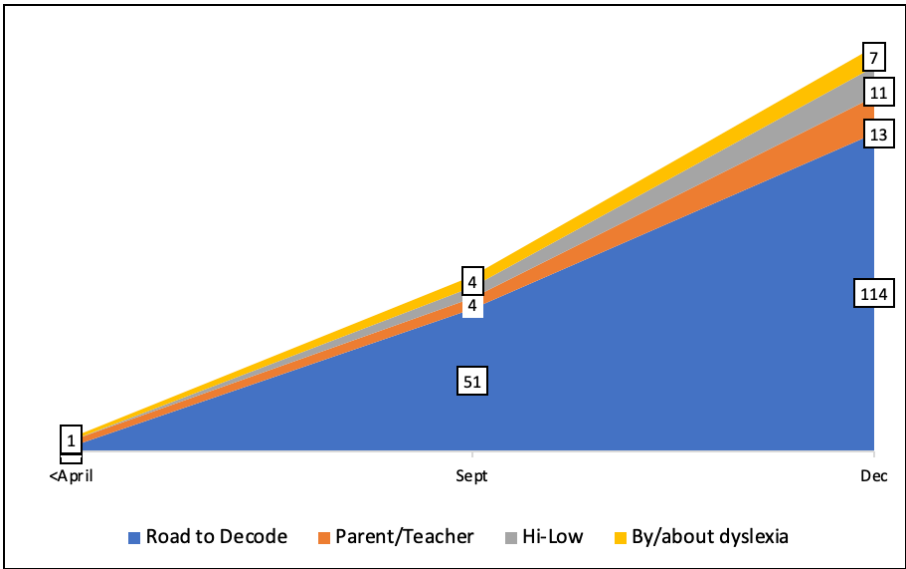
The impact of the pilot project was measured through 2022 circulation data. The data were measured at three junctures; three months prior to the establishment of the Literacy Hub, six months after the Literacy Hub was established and during the last three months of the year (2022) where efforts were focused on promotion and community engagement. While other factors, including time of the year, weather, and other library programs impact circulation, the results attributable to the pilot were still dramatic. Prior to the establishment of the Literacy Hub very few decodable books were in circulation. In the six months after the Literacy Hub was set up, circulation increased 9-fold. In the final three months of the year when efforts were focused on promotion, circulation again doubled.

Figure 8. Lodi Literacy Hub books checked out in 2022



- Prior to the establishment of the Lodi Whitter Literacy Hub very few decodable books and resources specifically addressing dyslexia were circulating in the community. However, once the Literacy Hub was established and the books displayed, circulation picked up dramatically. Circulation increased from 15 books to 131 books in the six-month period.
- In the period between October and December 2022, when the library sponsored a series of literacy promotion events, we also observed an impact. Circulation in this period nearly doubled.
- In 2022, 425 Literacy hub books circulated in the community.

Figure 9. Literacy Hub books checked out in 2022 by type



- The circulation of decodable books showed the biggest increase in circulation by far. By the end of 2022, 114 different decodable books were checked out 222 times.
- While not as dramatic, other types of Literacy Hub books also showed increased circulation, especially in the second half of the year. By the end of 2022, 13 different parent teacher resources were checked out 22 times; 11 Hi-Lo books were checked out 28 times and 7 books by individuals with dyslexia or about their experiences were checked out 7 times.

Recommendations

- Create additional webinars on technical support and literacy promotion so that there is a curriculum of three related webinars that library systems can schedule to support member libraries as they are establishing Literacy Hubs.
- Create additional opportunities for targeted support for individual libraries, through individual consultation and monthly lunch-and-learn gatherings.
- Include coding (tagging) of books in the library systems as part of the technical support so that libraries can monitor the circulation of Literacy Hub books.
- Continue to monitor community engagement events, administer dot surveys, and review circulation data quarterly to create greater community awareness of the support that libraries can provide to increase fluent reading in their communities.

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Teach My Kid to Read is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit that supports public and school libraries and staff with the information, skills, and services they need to fill a resource gap by providing equitable access to decodable books that support improved literacy for all.