



Supporting Implementation of Evidence-Based Literacy Practices in Catholic Schools

In 2023, the National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL) partnered with the Archdiocese of Chicago (ADOC) to meet a critical need: helping Catholic school educators better understand dyslexia and how to support students who struggle to read. With more than 3,000 teachers serving students across 148 schools—and limited access to special education services—ADOC needed targeted, practical professional development. NCIL delivered.

THE CHALLENGE

ADOC's unique context created urgent needs. Unlike public schools, most students with learning differences remain in general classrooms with minimal specialized support. General educators need immediate skills to recognize dyslexia signs and implement evidence-based interventions to support struggling readers. NCIL stepped in with a tailored professional learning series designed specifically for this context.

NCIL'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE

NCIL crafted a cohort-based series of virtual webinars, each 90 minutes long, on four essential topics:

- Understanding Dyslexia
- School-Based Screening for Dyslexia Risk
- Using Data to Identify Supports
- Reading Instruction for Students with Dyslexia

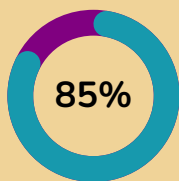
As the partnership evolved, NCIL also provided advanced training on:

- Using Data to Identify School-Based Supports for Students with or at risk for Dyslexia
- Reading Instruction for Students with Dyslexia
- Intensifying Reading Instruction for Students Who Are Not Making Desired Progress

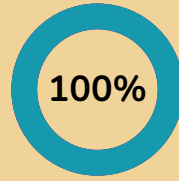
Educators weren't just given theory—they walked away with resources they could immediately put into practice.

MEASUREABLE IMPACT

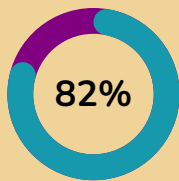
Surveys confirmed that NCIL's professional learning series delivered both high quality and real value:



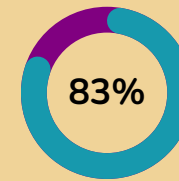
on average rated training as excellent or very good.



of introductory participants planned immediate implementation after the sessions.



on average found content highly useful and relevant.



of advanced participants planned immediate implementation after the sessions.

SYSTEM-WIDE TRANSFORMATION

- **Scale:** Six cohorts were trained across 62 schools, reaching approximately 150 classroom teachers and principals.
- **Educator Growth:** Teachers transitioned from uncertainty to confidence in identifying and supporting struggling readers.
- **Institutional Capacity:** ADOC developed systematic training capabilities and evidence-based practice monitoring, establishing sustainable improvement infrastructure.

Together, these outcomes marked the beginning of a system-wide shift toward a consistent, evidence-based approach to literacy instruction, empowering educators to better serve students with or at risk for dyslexia.

LESSONS LEARNED

The collaboration between NCIL and ADOC revealed valuable insights into successful capacity-building initiatives.

Lesson 1: Honor Context

With each school approaching dyslexia differently, NCIL adapted its content and talking points to match the realities on the ground, ensuring training was practical and usable.

Lesson 2: Understand Participants

Educators showed a deep desire to help students with reading difficulties. Their engagement reflected not just compliance but genuine commitment, and NCIL leveraged that energy to maximize impact.

Lesson 3: Collaborate Closely

Success depended on strong communication with the ADOC Director of Inclusive Education. This close partnership ensured that professional learning was aligned, supported, and sustained beyond the training sessions.

THE BROADER IMPACT

This partnership exemplifies how targeted, systematic professional learning transforms educational systems. By strengthening the knowledge and skills of educators, NCIL helps entire school systems grow their capacity to identify and support students with dyslexia—students who might otherwise struggle without adequate support. The result? More children are gaining the skills they need to read, learn, and succeed.