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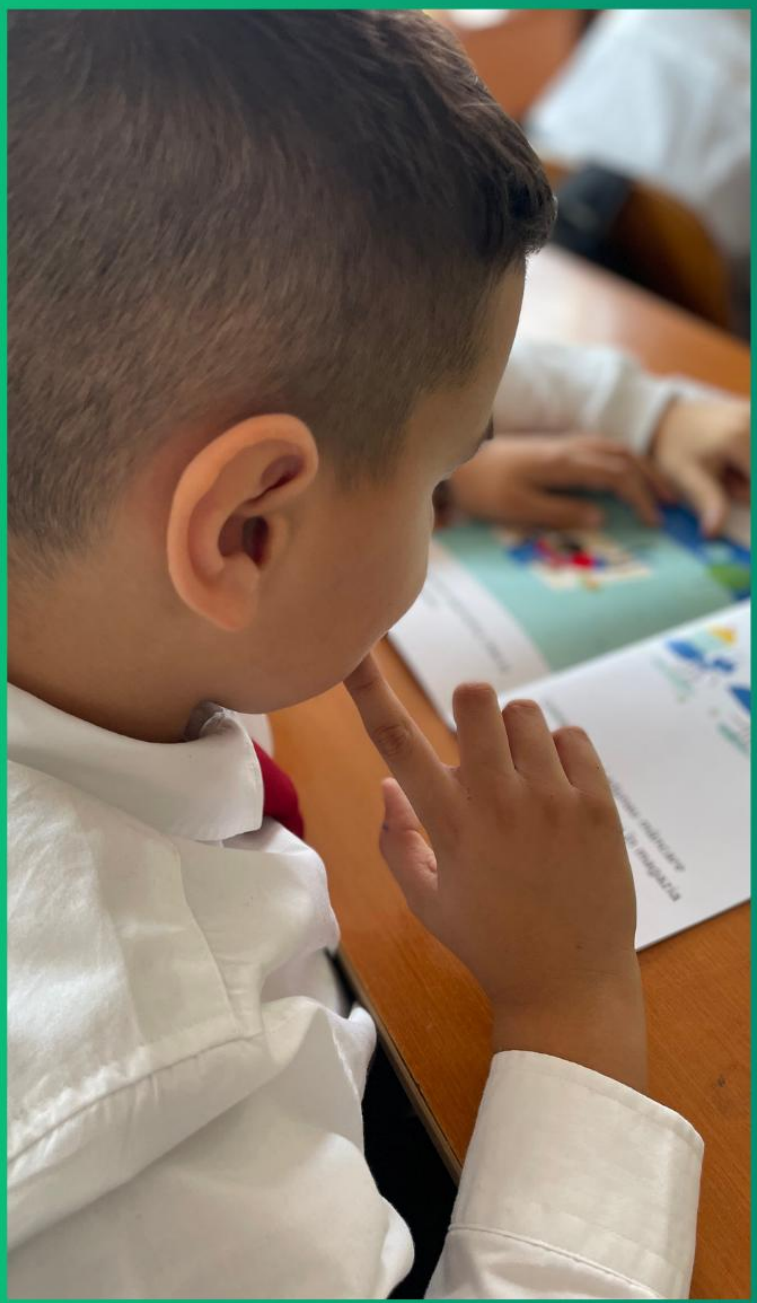
GLITTERY SCHOOLS

Programme Results Report

2025-2026



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Executive Summary

In the 2025–2026 school year, ATCC's Glittery Schools programme individually assessed 4,177 children across five cohorts, from preparatory grade through Grade 4, with approximately 225 teachers collecting the data as part of their own classroom practice.

Three results define the reference academic year. First, children in preparatory class progressed by an average of 73 points on a 150-point scale, moving from some knowledge and skills pertaining to emergent literacy at the start of the year to solid foundations for decoding by June; the share of children with excellent knowledge and skills reached 69%. Second, in Grade 1 – the year when children learn to read text (not just recognize some simple words) – 69% were reading at the level expected by year-end, up from a starting point where many could not yet read a single word. Third, and most consequential for how the programme should evolve: children who start furthest behind make the largest gains, but do not manage to catch up with their peers within a single year. Recovery is real; closing the gap is not automatic.

Teacher engagement with the programme has also strengthened over time. Comparing successive cohorts of preparatory-class teachers over the last three years, intention to continue with the programme rose from 9.16 to 9.52 (on a 10-point scale), and willingness to recommend it rose from 9.64 to 9.84.

Progress Against Pepco Targets

Replication (1,700 newly enrolled preparatory children)

The preparatory cohort tracked in this report - 1,526 children assessed at the start of the year (1,290 Romanian language of instruction, 236 Hungarian language of instruction). Against O3.1 (an increase of at least 70 points), the Romanian-language track exceeded the target: average progress was +73 points (53.2 → 126.3 out of 150). The Hungarian-language track did not reach it: average progress was +39.7 points (23.5 → 63.3 out of 193). This gap is expected rather than a shortfall in delivery, as the report itself notes, the Hungarian-language curriculum does not support systematic letter learning or decoding in preparatory class, so a 70-point target calibrated to the Romanian-track scale is not directly transferable.

Maintenance (2,465 children in Grades I–III)

Against O2.1 (at least one level of improvement on the Informal Reading Inventory), results vary by grade. In Grade 1, 82% of children (947 of 1,160) moved up at least one text level between assessments - a strong result against the target. In Grade 2, the picture is more mixed: 32% (249 of 779) moved up a level, while a further 59% (459 of 779) were already reading at the top expected level at the start of the year and remained there - meeting the bar rather than climbing it, which the target as worded does not distinguish. In Grade 3, the instrument does not track level transitions (all children are assessed on the same Level 3 text), so O2.1 cannot be reported for this grade from the current data; the closest available proxy is that 58% of Grade 3 children showed improved comprehension scores.

Key Communication Messages

The children who needed it most made the biggest leap: With Pepco's support, ATCC's Glittery Schools programme reached 4,177 children across five grade levels this year - and the children who started furthest behind made the greatest gains, closing part of the literacy gap that may impact their entire school career and lifelong learning preparedness:

- 1,526 children entered the programme in preparatory class this year. On the Romanian-language track, they gained an average of 73 points on a 150-point literacy scale - exceeding the 70-point target - and the share with excellent literacy foundations rose from 43% to 69% in a single school year.
- Among the 2,465 children continuing in the programme through Grades 1–3, 82% of Grade 1 children advanced at least one reading level over the year, and Grade 3 children showed a marked jump in comprehension - 58% answered more questions correctly by year-end than they had in the fall.
- For the 126 Grade 4 children - the first cohort to complete the full primary cycle in the programme - the children who started as the weakest readers improved their reading speed the most, nearly doubling it in some cases. This is direct evidence that sustained, individualised support keeps working even for children who have struggled the longest.
- Teacher confidence in the programme continues to grow, not fade: across three years of preparatory-class cohorts, teachers' intention to continue with the programme rose from 9.16 to 9.52 out of 10, and their willingness to recommend it rose from 9.64 to 9.84.
- Children who start behind recover consistently, but they do not fully close the gap within a single year.

Assessment Design

From the very first year, **the assessment design has kept the child at its centre**. Each child is measured individually by their own teacher, at the beginning and end of the school year, and their progress is tracked from preparatory class through the end of primary school.

This choice comes at a cost. **The assessment requires between four and thirteen hours of individual work per classroom**, depending on the instrument, and in the absence of a comparison group, the data describes what happened to the children in the programme without allowing causal claims about what would have happened without it. In exchange, it shows us things an aggregate measurement cannot: who is falling behind, why, and what changes for the children who start out furthest behind.

All other information we collect from teachers, about classrooms or resources, serves to help us understand and correctly interpret the data about the children.

How We Measured Children's Progress

The programme uses two assessment instruments. Each child is assessed individually with one of the two instruments described below, by their own teacher, twice per school year: in the fall (September-October), and in summer (May-June). **The assessment takes between 15 and 30 minutes per child and is conducted one-on-one.**

The **Emergent Literacy Assessment** is applied in preparatory class and measures the foundations of reading and writing: what the child knows about how a book and printed text work, the extent to which they recognize letters, whether they can break words into sounds, whether they recognize simple written words, and whether they can spell simple words. The total score ranges from 0 to 150 points on the Romanian-language track and 0 to 190 on the Hungarian-language track, since the Hungarian alphabet has 44 letters instead of 31. The two scales are not directly comparable.

The **Reading Inventory** is applied from Grade 1 through Grade 4 and measures fluency, comprehension, and spelling, using texts calibrated to difficulty levels. Each child reads the text suited to their level, and the teacher records three things: how many words in a text they read correctly per minute, how many comprehension questions they answer correctly, and how many dictated words they spell correctly.

> *The two instruments measure different things and are not compared with each other. Reading speed is also only compared between children who read the same text level, since a harder text is naturally read more slowly.*

Text Levels and What They Mean at Classroom Level

Texts are organised by difficulty level, from the simplest, at 17 words, to those over 250 words. Each grade has a corresponding text complexity, in line with the national curriculum.

Grade	Expected Text Level	Text Length
Preparatory Class	Emergent literacy, no text to read	-
Start of Grade 1	Level PP or Level P	17 or 33 words
End of Grade 1	Level 1	68 words

Grade	Expected Text Level	Text Length
Grade 2	Level 2	106–108 words
Grade 3	Level 3	140–149 words
Grade 4	Level 4	over 250 words

A child is considered to be at grade level if they read the expected text at a speed above a set threshold, taken from Romanian normative benchmarks for reading fluency, published in 2022 by Bodea-Hațegan, Talaș and Trifu. We used the 25th percentile of the benchmark for each grade - the threshold below which, at national level, the slowest quarter of children falls.

At the start of the school year, we apply the previous year's threshold, and at the end, the current year's. A child assessed in October may have consolidated what they needed to achieve by the end of last year, not prove that they have already reached the standard for the year they have just started. This means the bar rises during the year, so start- and end-of-year percentages should not be read as a simple increase.

> *The normative benchmarks by Bodea-hategan et al were built on a single text, identical for all grades, whereas our programme uses texts adapted to each child's level. The comparison with normative thresholds is indicative, not exact.*

Why We Measure Expected Level, Reading Speed, and Comprehension

Reporting only how many children reached grade level would hide most of what actually happens in a year. A child who goes from 5 to 20 words correctly read per minute does not appear anywhere in such a categorization, even though they have made a considerable leap. Likewise, stagnation can be hidden in the data: a child who stays at 80 words per minute appears, year after year, as being at grade level.

This is why we measure and report three things separately: the text level reached, position relative to the expected level, and progress in fluency. These three can move in different directions, and where that happens, we have flagged it explicitly.

At each text level we also measure comprehension, through questions addressed orally to the child after she has finished reading the text. A child can read quickly without understanding, and the programme tracks both. A child is classed as having very good comprehension if they answer all questions correctly, good comprehension if they get one or two wrong, and weak comprehension if they get more wrong. Text complexity also shapes comprehension: a child may have very good comprehension of a Level 1 text and weak comprehension of a Level 2 text, without this representing a regression. We also measure spelling, by dictating five words of a specific complexity.

Who Collects the Data, and What This Fact Means

Data is collected by teachers, under classroom conditions. This is a deliberate choice: whoever uses the results is the one who produces them, and the assessment becomes part of teaching practice rather than an external exercise. The consequence is that we have to allow for variation, which we flag in every report.

- Progress is calculated only for children measured at both time points. Those missing at one time point are not a random group: they are more often children with high absenteeism or who changed

schools, and therefore likely children with weaker results. Progress figures are, for this reason, slightly optimistic.

- There are considerable differences between classrooms in measured progress. Some of this variation reflects teaching, some reflects how the instrument was applied. Classrooms with unusual patterns are identified and individually verified.
- There is no comparison group for most cohorts, so the data describes how the children in the programme have evolved, without allowing causal claims.

What We Collect From Teachers

Beyond individual child assessments, teachers complete three types of surveys: an entry form gathering demographic and baseline information that helps build a profile of teachers at both cohort and programme level; reporting sheets, at the start and end of each year, recording enrolled and assessed children, locality type, and reasons some children could not be assessed; and a reflection questionnaire, applied at year-end, covering teaching practices, use of assessment results, available school resources, perceived readiness to work with different categories of children, and open-ended questions about the programme itself.

Child Assessment Results, 2025–2026 School Year

What the Data Show

In 2025–2026, 4,177 children were assessed by 225 teachers across five cohorts, each at a different grade level.

Three results stand out from the data.

First. In preparatory class, children progressed by an average of 74 points on a 150-point scale, from an average score of 50 at the start of the year to 124 at the end. On entry, 43% of children had limited literacy foundations; by year-end, 69% had reached the category of excellent achievement.

Second. In Grade 1, by year-end, 69% of children were reading the Level 1 text - the level expected by the end of Grade 1. The proportion of children reading at the level expected for that moment is 79% at the start of the year (simpler text) and 70% at the end (one level more complex text), the decrease reflecting the fact that text complexity rises during the year. This is the year in which decoding is actually learned.

Third, and most important for how we understand the programme. Across all five cohorts, children who start at the lowest level progress the most, while those who start highest progress the least. Recovery is real and consistently visible. At the same time, the gap between the two groups does not close within a year: children who start behind finish the year, on average, below the level from which their more advanced peers started.

> *All figures in this report refer to children assessed at both the start and end of the school year, so that progress is measured on the same children. Their number is smaller than the total number of children assessed at least once.*

Who the Children and Teachers Are

The programme worked with five cohorts simultaneously in 2025–2026. Each cohort is identified by the year in which the children emtered preparatory grade.

Cohort	Grade in 2025–26	Teachers	Children in Rural Areas	Children Assessed at Start	Children with Both Assessments
2025–2026	Preparatory	91 (18 Hungarian, 72 Romanian)	61%	1,526	1,478
2024–2025	Grade 1	82 initial, 75 final	59%	1,406	1,160
2023–2024	Grade 2	48 initial, 46 final	73%	836	779
2022–2023	Grade 3	15 initial, 14 final	92%	283	227
2021–2022	Grade 4	7 initial, 6 final	60%	126	90

The number of teachers decreases with cohort age. Figures for Grade 3 and Grade 4 therefore relate to small groups and should be read as remarks on the evolution of the classes/ children that remained in the programme, not generalised to all children who passed through it.

Most of our beneficiary children are taught in rural schools. The proportion ranges from 59% to 92% depending on cohort, with older cohorts generally showing a higher rural share.

Children Who Were Not Assessed

This school year, teachers also recorded, alongside information on assessed children, the reasons some children were not assessed. The difference between the number of children enrolled in participating classrooms and the number actually assessed comes from several causes noted by teachers in the reporting sheets:

- Transfers to other schools or moves abroad, mentioned by teachers across all cohorts.
- High absenteeism (caused by other than changing domicile), particularly in Grade 2, where several teachers noted an inability to complete the assessment with certain children.
- Children with special educational needs, including cases of home schooling, for whom the instrument was not applied or was only partially applied.
- Lack of time for individual assessment, explicitly mentioned by some teachers.

Results by Cohort

> *It is important to note that the number of children assessed does not correspond 1:1 to the number of children in the programme. Most cases of children with only one assessment are due to transfers - either they left during the school year (initial assessment only) or joined during the year (final assessment only). To represent progress, only children assessed at both points are analysed.*

2025–2026 Cohort - Preparatory Class

1,290 children were assessed on the Romanian-language track and 236 on the Hungarian-language track at the start of the year; 1,242 children on the Romanian track were assessed at both points and are included in the progress calculation.

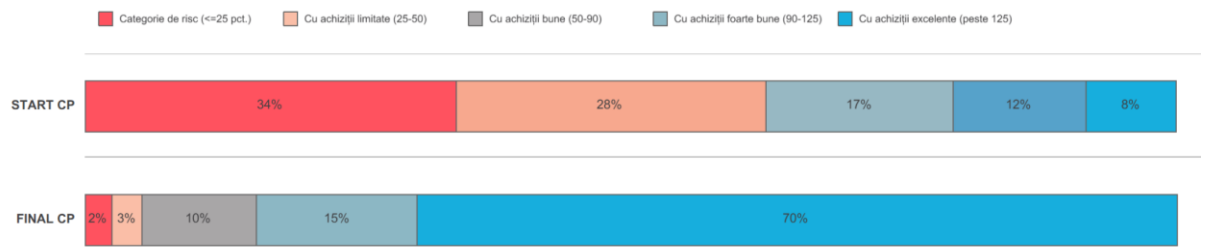
Romanian-Language Track

The average score rose from 53.2 to 126.3 points out of 150, an average progress of 73 points in one year.

How Children Started Preparatory Class	Children	Score at Start	Score at End	Progress
At-risk category (<25 pts)	397 (34%)	13.4	101.8	+88.4
Limited foundations (25.1–50)	335 (28%)	36.8	130	+93
Good foundations (50.1–90)	256 (17%)	69.7	140.8	+71.1
Very good / excellent foundations (90.1–150)	254 (20%)	120.6	148	+27.4
Total cohort	1,242 (100%)	53.2	126.3	+73

Of children assessed in preparatory class, 62% were in the at-risk or limited-foundations category - generally children who did not attend kindergarten regularly, were not read to at home, and had no family support for literacy. This group recorded the greatest progress, nearly 90.8 points, reaching an average score of 114.

By the end of preparatory class, 12% of children remained in the at-risk category, below 50 points on the emergent literacy assessment - these are the children entering Grade 1 without the expected foundational skills, for whom the following year is decisive. 67% surpassed the 90-point threshold, indicating good to very good foundations for literacy acquisition. In total, 85% of the cohort finished preparatory grade with very good to excellent foundations.



> *Preparatory class does not measure comprehension of a read text, since most children cannot yet read. The instrument instead measures the foundations that make later reading comprehension possible.*

Hungarian-Language Track

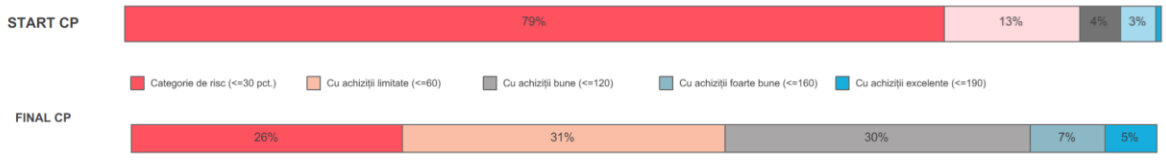
The average score rose from 23.5 to 63.2 points out of 193 - an average progress of 40 points in one year.

Important note: For children being instructed in Hungarian (mother tongue), the national curriculum as well as teaching practices, differ from the ones used for children being instructed in Romanian. In Hungarian speaking preparatory grade, neither the curriculum, nor classroom practice supports systematic letter learning (the largest component of the total emergent literacy score, 132 points out of 190), nor decoding-based word reading (12 points out of 190) or phoneme-grapheme correspondence (the spelling task, 6 points out of 190). Instead, strong emphasis is placed on phonological, including phonemic-awareness (22 of the 190 total points) and oral communication skills (not evaluated by our instrument).

How Children Started Preparatory Class	Children	Score at Start	Score at End	Progress
At-risk category (<30 pts)	178 (79%)	11.7	48.8	+37.2
Limited foundations (30.1–60)	38 (13%)	41.7	103.5	+61.8
Good foundations (50.1–90)	8 (4%)	73.5	113.1	+39.6
Very good / excellent foundations (90.1-150)	12 (20%)	108.0	168	+60
Total cohort	236 (100%)	23.5	63.3	+39.7

92% of children started preparatory class in the at-risk or limited-foundations category - generally children who did not attend kindergarten regularly, were not read to at home, and had no family support for literacy. This group recorded progress of nearly 40 points, reaching an average score of 56.6.

By the end of preparatory class, 64% of children remained in what we consider, as a rule, the at-risk category, with scores below 60 points on the emergent literacy assessment. These are the children entering Grade 1 without the generally expected foundational skills, for whom the following year is decisive. 10% surpassed the 90-point threshold, indicating good to very good foundations for literacy acquisition.



> *Preparatory class does not measure comprehension of a read text, since most children cannot yet read. The instrument instead measures the foundations that make later reading comprehension possible.*

2024–2025 Cohort - Grade 1

This is the programme's largest cohort: 1,406 children assessed at the start of the year by 82 teachers, of whom 1,160 were also assessed at year-end (N=1,160 after data cleaning). 75 teachers remained in the programme through the end of the year.

In Grade 1, children learn text decoding and must climb a fairly steep slope: from literacy foundations to reading at a speed of at least 23 words correctly read per minute, and from a 17-word text to one of over 60

words, with letter clusters, diphthongs, and multiple three-syllable-plus words. The data reflects just how steep this climb is.

At the start of the year, 248 children could not yet read the Level P text and were assessed on the easier Level PP text. By year-end, 827 children (69% of the cohort) were reading the Level 1 text, the level expected by the end of Grade 1.

Fluency at Level P Text, Words Correctly Read Per Minute (WCPM)

How Children Read at the Start of Grade 1	Children	WCPM at Start	WCPM at End	Reach Text 1
Excellent fluency	135	97.9	102.1	90%
Very good fluency	83	60.5	82.1	88%
Good fluency	143	43.0	66.2	93%
Satisfactory fluency	195	29.5	54.0	86%
Weak fluency	197	17.2	40.9	80%
Very weak fluency	159	6.7	26.0	81%
Extremely weak fluency/ Assessed on PP text	248	7.6	23.8	19%
Total cohort, start–end	1,160	31.5	50.6	71%

> *Speed at the end of the year is measured, for most children, on a more difficult text than at the start. A speed decrease accompanied by a move to a higher text level is expected and should not obscure real progress.*

Children's Path Between the Two Assessments

The table below shows each child's path between the two assessment moments. Within each path, the text is the same or changes in the same way for everyone, so progress is directly interpretable.

Child's Path	Children	WCPM at Start	WPCM at End	Progress
From Text P to Text 1	779	39.3	59.7	+20.4
Stayed on Text P	121	30.8	49.9	+19.0
From Text PP to Text P	122	7.2	24.6	+17.4
Stayed on Text PP	80	5.7	12.2	+6.6
From Text PP to Text 1	46	12.1	41.8	+29.7
From Text P to Text PP	12	-	-	Data error
Total cohort, start–end	1,160	31.5	50.6	+19.1

The 779 children who moved from Text P to Text 1 read 20 more words per minute, even though the final text is twice as long and more challenging. The 122 who started on Text PP and reached Text P tripled their oral reading speed (measured in words correctly read per minute).

The group deserving the most attention is the 80 children who remained on Text PP at both time points. They progressed by 6.6 words per minute, from 5.7 to 12.2, and enter Grade 2 without having begun decoding. They need continued support to reach fluent reading of a text at their grade level.

Comprehension of Level P Text, Four Questions

Text Comprehension	At Start	At End	Difference
Very good comprehension	53%	67%	+14 p.p.
Good comprehension	40%	30%	−10 p.p.
Weak comprehension	7%	3%	−4 p.p.
Total cohort, start–end	675 children	675 children	-

Text comprehension improves steadily: the proportion of children answering all four questions correctly rises from 53% to 67%, while the proportion with weak comprehension falls from 7% to 3%. By the end of Grade 1, among the 833 children assessed on the more difficult Level 1 text, 44% had very good comprehension and 11% had weak comprehension.

2023–2024 Cohort - Grade 2

836 children assessed at the start of the year by 48 teachers, of whom 779 at both time points. This is the cohort with the second-highest rural share after Grade 3, at 73%.

At the start of the year, 42 children could not yet read the Level 1 text and were assessed on the Level P text. By year-end, 678 children (87% of the cohort) were reading the Level 2 text, the level expected by the end of Grade 2.

The proportion of children reading at the expected level is 84% at the start of the year and 74% at the end. This decrease does not indicate regression, but reflects that both text complexity and the threshold rise: the start-of-year requirement is Level 1 text at over 23 words correctly read per minute, while the end-of-year requirement is Level 2 text at over 49 words per minute - the Grade 2 standard.

Fluency at Level 1 Texts, Words Correctly Read Per Minute (WCPM)

How Children Read at the Start of Grade 2	Children	WCPM at Start	WCPM at End	Reached Text 2 (grade level)
Excellent fluency	70	134.5	119.7	99%
Very good fluency	78	99.0	94.7	99%
Good fluency	149	80.0	92.0	99%
Satisfactory fluency	173	60.1	73.8	92%
Weak fluency	99	41.8	60.0	86%
Very weak fluency	168	22.0	42.3	76%
Assessed on Text P	42	30.4	42.5	29%
Total cohort, start–end	779	62.3	73.2	87%

Children's Path Between the Two Assessments

Child's Path	Children	WCPM at Start	WCPM at End	Progress
Text 2, start–end	459 (59%)	77.0	84.7	+7.7
From Text 1 to Text 2	207 (26%)	45.4	58.7	+13.3
Stayed on Text 1	70 (8%)	33.5	60.1	+26.5
From Text P to Text 1	30 (3%)	26.8	38.1	+11.2
From Text P to Text 2	12 (1.5%)	39.5	53.5	+14.0
Total cohort, start–end	779	62.3	73.2	+10.9

The pattern is clear: the lower a child starts, the more they progress. Children in the lowest fluency category doubled their reading speed, from 22.0 to 42.3 words per minute, and three-quarters of them reached the Level 2 text.

The 42 children who started the year on the Level P text are the most vulnerable group. Only 29% of them reached Level 2 text, compared to over 86% in the other groups.

Comprehension by Text Level

Comprehension	Level 1, Start	Level 1, End	Level 2, Start	Level 2, End
Very good comprehension	52%	55%	41%	28%
Good comprehension	37%	37%	41%	52%
Weak comprehension	11%	8%	18%	20%
Total cohort, start–end *not all of the 779 children were measured for comprehension	583 children	583 children	470 children	470 children

Comprehension behaves differently by text level. At Level 1, comprehension improves slightly. At Level 2, with children reading a more challenging text, the proportion of those answering all eight questions correctly falls from 41% to 28%, while the proportion with weak comprehension remains nearly unchanged.

This decrease is expected: the Level 2 text is more difficult and the number of questions rises from six to eight. Children are also still consolidating reading fluency, which is a crucial factor of comprehension, and have not yet developed sufficient re-reading and self-monitoring routines - this „understanding simultaneously with reading" skill is still to be mastered. Fluent readers, by contrast, learn to regulate their pace to track meaning as text complexity and length grow from one level to the next.

2022–2023 Cohort - Grade 3

283 children assessed by 15 teachers, of whom 227 at both time points. This is the most rural cohort in the programme, with 92% of children in rural schools.

In Grade 3, the focus shifts from fluency to comprehension, and the data reflects exactly that shift. Reading speed rose only slightly, from 91.0 to 95.7 words per minute, while text comprehension and spelling improved substantially.

Fluency at Level 3 Text, Words Correctly Read Per Minute (WCPM)

How Children Read at the Start of Grade 3	Children	WCPM at Start	WCPM at End	Progress
Excellent fluency	10	162.2	140.8	−21.4
Very good fluency	42	130.1	129.9	−0.3
Good fluency	65	105.4	109.6	+4.2
Satisfactory fluency	39	84.0	87.1	+3.1
Weak fluency	28	64.3	70.5	+6.2
Very weak fluency	43	38.4	54.8	+16.4
Total cohort, start–end	227	91.0	95.7	+4.6

Comprehension and Spelling at Level 3

What We Measured	At Start	At End	Difference
Very good comprehension	16%	32%	+16 p.p.
Good comprehension	45%	53%	+8 p.p.
Weak comprehension	39%	14%	−25 p.p.
Very good spelling, 5 of 5 words	32%	55%	+23 p.p.
Weak spelling, under 3 words	22%	9%	−13 p.p.
Total cohort, start–end	227 children	227 children	-

Of the 231 children assessed at year-end, 58% gave more correct answers to comprehension questions than at the start of the year. This is the most important change in this cohort and matches the Grade 3 instructional objective. Spelling improves just as clearly: the share of children correctly writing all five dictated words rose from 32% to 55%.

In fluency, the children who started lowest progressed the most, gaining 16.4 words per minute, while children in the top band regressed slightly, which should be interpreted as a sign that they concentrate more on comprehending while reading rather than on reading fast and jeopardizing comprehension.

2021–2022 Cohort - Grade 4

This is the first cohort to complete the entire primary cycle within the programme. 126 children assessed by 7 teachers, of whom 90 at both start and end of the school year.

Average reading speed rose from 95.6 to 106.2 words per minute. The proportion of children at grade level is 78% at the start of the year and 68% at the end, again due to the rising threshold.

Fluency at Level 4 Text, Words Correctly Read Per Minute (WCPM)

How Children Read at the Start of Grade 4	Children	WCPM at Start	WCPM at End	Progress
Excellent fluency	1	183.3	182.7	−0.7
Very good fluency	3	151.5	159.8	+8.3
Good fluency	15	133.6	136.1	+2.5
Satisfactory fluency	29	106.1	113.0	+6.9
Weak fluency	17	86.8	106.4	+19.6
Very weak fluency	25	56.3	70.7	+14.4
Total cohort, start–end	90	95.6	106.2	+10.6

Comprehension and Spelling at Level 4

What We Measured	At Start	At End	Difference
Very good comprehension	31%	39%	+8 p.p.
Good comprehension	59%	51%	−8 p.p.
Weak comprehension	10%	10%	No change
Very good spelling, 5 of 5 words	42%	47%	+5 p.p.
Weak spelling, under 3 words	21%	12%	−9 p.p.
Total cohort, start–end	90 children	90 children	-

The greatest fluency progress came from the lowest-starting categories: children starting below 78 words per minute gained 14.4 words, and the band just above gained 19.6, while children starting above 120 words per minute gained only 2.5. By Grade 4, fluency on literary texts (like those in the Reading Inventory) typically hits a ceiling (adult reading rate).

Comprehension and spelling improve slightly, but the proportion of children with weak comprehension remains unchanged at 10%. Nine children finish the primary cycle reading their grade-level text without understanding it - for them, the transition to middle school happens without the foundational skill that every other subject depends on.

The small number of children and teachers means these figures are indicative. They are nonetheless valuable, as they show that the pattern observed in other cohorts holds even after four years in the programme.

How Children Who Start Behind Progress

This is the most consistent result in this year's data, and it repeats across all five cohorts.

Children who begin the school year at the lowest reading level progress the most. The pattern appears in every cohort, regardless of instrument, text level, or number of children.

Cohort	Children Starting Lowest	Children Starting Highest
Preparatory	+89.6 points	+26.3 points
Grade 1	+23.9 WCPM	+22.5 WCPM
Grade 2	+23.1 WCPM	−9.4 WCPM
Grade 3	+16.4 WCPM	−21.4 WCPM
Grade 4	+14.4 WCPM	−0.7 WCPM

This is exactly the result expected from a literacy programme targeting children who are behind, and aiming to increase educational equity. Children with the fewest resources at the start do not stand still - they catch up, and this recovery shows every year, not just the first.

And What This Data Does Not Say

Recovery is not the same as catching up. In every cohort, children who start behind most likely finish the year below the level from which their more advanced peers started that same year. In preparatory class, the limited-foundations group reaches 105 points, while the very-good-foundations group had started at 121 points. In Grade 2, children in the weakest category reach 45 WCPM, while those in the best category had started at 139 WCPM.

The gap therefore persists, even as the relative distance narrows. One year in the programme is not enough to close it, and this is precisely the reason, and the justification, for why the programme is built as a multi-annual intervention.

Data Quality and Limitations

Data is collected by teachers, under classroom conditions, with 15 to 30 minutes of individual assessment per child. This method has the advantage of directly involving those who use the results, but it also introduces variation, which we flag explicitly.

- The cohort used to calculate progress is smaller than the total number of children assessed, since it includes only children measured at both time points. Children missing one measurement are not random: they are more often children with high absenteeism or transfers, and therefore likely children with weaker results. Progress figures are, for this reason, slightly optimistic.
- The number of teachers decreases with cohort age. Results for Grades 3 and 4 come from 15 and 7 teachers respectively - the groups that stayed in the programme longest. They cannot be generalised to all children who passed through the programme.

- There are considerable differences between teachers in measured progress. In Grade 3, average classroom progress ranges from negative values to over 45 words per minute. We have identified classrooms with unusual patterns and verify them individually.
- National benchmarks used as thresholds are built on a single fixed text for all grades, while the programme uses texts adapted to grade level and each child is asked to read text which suits its current level. The comparison is indicative.
- Cohorts are not directly comparable with each other. The assessment protocol has changed between years, and teacher groups are largely different from one cohort to the next.

What's Next

In the short term, ahead of the final report, there are three lines of work.

The first is verifying classrooms with unusual progress patterns, through direct discussions with the teachers involved. The goal is not to retroactively correct the data, but to understand what happened when the instrument was applied and to improve instructions for the following year.

The second is a comparative analysis against the control group for the 2021–2022 cohort, the only one for which data exists from a group that did not benefit from the programme.

The third is consolidating the longitudinal database for the 2022–2023 cohort, which now has data from preparatory class through Grade 3 and will allow, for the first time, tracking the same children over four years.

In the longer term, this year's results raise a question that speaks directly to the programme's design. Children who start behind consistently recover, but do not catch up within a year. If the goal is to close the gap, not merely reduce it, the intensity of support for this group should be reconsidered, particularly in Grade 1, where the data shows that the biggest leap is made by children in the middle range, not those furthest behind.

Data Sources

- Emergent Literacy Assessment, applied in preparatory class, an instrument developed based on the work of Temple and Temple.
- Informal Reading Inventory, applied from Grade 1 through Grade 4, with texts calibrated to difficulty levels and dedicated assessment booklets for each level.
- Normative benchmarks for reading fluency: Bodea-Hațegan, C., Talaș, D.A., Trifu, R.N. (2022). Probă de evaluare și antrenare a fluenței în citire (PEAFC): assessment kit, technical manual. Cluj-Napoca: ASTTLR Publishing.
- Reporting sheets completed by teachers at the start and end of the school year, recording enrolled children, assessed children, locality type, and reasons some children could not be assessed.
- The programme's individual-level databases, with one row per child per school year, built on anonymous codes assigned by teachers.

What Teachers Say

At the end of the 2025–2026 school year, 167 teachers in the programme completed the reflection questionnaire. Of these, 58 taught preparatory class, 53 taught Grade 1, 31 Grade 2, 13 Grade 3, and 12 taught combined classes. 135 teach in Romanian and 32 in Hungarian. Nearly seven in ten work in a village or rural-commune school.

How Teachers Use Children's Literacy Assessment Results

The initial assessment takes an average of 26 minutes per child, with a median of 20 minutes. The year-end reassessment is shorter, with a median of 15 minutes. For a class of 20 children, this means between six and nine hours of individual assessment per year, outside of teaching hours. On average, the emergent literacy instrument takes longer.

Asked how they used the results of the initial assessment, 156 of the 167 teachers pointed to the same use: the assessment does not remain a report, but becomes a starting point for planning and differentiated teaching.

> *"I saw the children's level, where to start from."*
>
> *"I established the starting point and identified which students need more support."*
>
> *"I checked each student's score and worked on exercises where I saw they had fallen behind."*
>
> *"I used the initial assessment results as a diagnosis, a starting point for my teaching."*
>
> *"Knowing the assessment results, I know the confidence that all children will learn to read, and which aspect of reading to focus on."*

From the programme's perspective, this use is the most important outcome of the assessment component. An instrument applied correctly but unused in teaching changes nothing for the child.

Classroom Practices

Teachers report how often, in a full school week, they carry out six literacy-related activities. To allow comparison across groups and over time, responses were converted into an average number of days per week: never means 0, once a week means 1, 2–3 times means 2.5, and 4–5 times means 4.5.

Practices differ significantly from classroom to classroom, and the average across all respondents would hide exactly what matters.

Times Per Week, by Year of Programme Participation, at the End of 2025–2026

Practice	Prep Class, Year 1	Grade 1, Year 2	Grade 2, Year 3	Grade 3, Year 4
Number of respondents	63	53	31	13
Teach reading/writing to the whole class	3.31	3.88	2.97	2.42
Students work independently on a task	3.00	3.23	3.16	3.58
Use individualised exercises	2.88	2.99	2.71	3.27
Create mixed-level student groups	2.19	2.24	2.18	2.35

Practice	Prep Class, Year 1	Grade 1, Year 2	Grade 2, Year 3	Grade 3, Year 4
Create similar-level student groups	2.18	2.27	1.71	2.58
Read aloud a story outside the textbook	1.90	1.92	2.02	1.54

Whole-class instruction peaks in Grade 1, at 3.88 days per week (almost daily) then decreases steadily to 2.42 in Grade 3. This is exactly the year in which decoding is taught, and when explicit whole-class instruction makes the most sense. In parallel, independent work and individualised exercises increase with grade level.

Two figures stand out from the pattern. The first is grouping by similar level in Grade 2, at 1.71, the lowest value in the table after read-aloud. This is the group that also reports the lowest programme evaluations, and the two observations reinforce each other. The second is reading a story aloud outside the textbook, which stays below 2 days per week for nearly all grades and drops to 1.54 in Grade 3.

How Practices Change Over Time

A second perspective on the same data follows preparatory-class teachers, comparing what they report on entry to the programme with what they report at the end of each of the last three school years.

Preparatory-Class Teachers	On Entry	End 2023–24	End 2024–25	End 2025–26
Number of respondents	69	206	131	63
Teach reading/writing to the whole class	3.41	3.43	3.28	3.31
Students work independently on a task	3.01	2.87	3.15	3.00
Use individualized exercises	2.27	2.77	2.71	2.88
Create mixed-level student groups	2.00	2.08	2.34	2.19
Create similar-level student groups	1.57	2.06	2.31	2.18
Read aloud a story outside the textbook	2.08	2.33	2.39	1.90

The two practices the programme directly targets are also the ones that increase most clearly. Individualised exercises rise from 2.27 on entry to 2.88 by the end of this year, and similar-level grouping from 1.57 to 2.18. Comparing entry to year-end within the same generation of teachers, the increases are 0.61 and 0.62 days per week respectively - the largest in the entire set.

Whole-class instruction remains unchanged, around 3.3 days per week. The programme does not replace it, but adds differentiation on top of it.

Reading a story aloud outside the textbook moves in the opposite direction. It had increased over the first two years, from 2.08 to 2.39, but this year fell to 1.90, below the level at programme entry. It is the only one of the six practices that deteriorates, and it is also the practice most strongly supported by early-literacy research. The data cannot explain why, but it should be treated as a signal, not a fluctuation - the same observation appeared in last year's report.

> *This data is self-reported. It describes what teachers say they do, not what is observed in the classroom. Comparisons over time are between successive generations of teachers at the same point in their journey, not the same individuals tracked year over year.*

How Prepared Teachers Feel, and What They Believe About Reading

These two topics are measured twice. The entry questionnaire is applied once, at enrolment, only to teachers taking on a preparatory class. The reflection questionnaire is applied at the end of each school year, to all teachers in the programme, regardless of grade.

This structure allows two comparisons: the first tracks one year in the programme, comparing preparatory-class teachers at entry with the same group at the end of that year; the second tracks two years, comparing teachers who entered in autumn 2024 with a preparatory class and now teach Grade 1.

> *Responses are anonymous and cannot be individually linked between the two time points. Comparisons are therefore between groups, not the same individuals tracked over time. They describe where the group stands at each moment.*

How Prepared Teachers Feel to Work With Different Categories of Children

The scale runs from 1, not at all prepared, to 5, fully prepared. Increases appear across all categories, with the largest occurring exactly where teaching is more difficult.

After One Year in the Programme: Preparatory-Class Teachers, 69 on Entry and 63 at Year-End

How Prepared I Feel to Teach Reading to...	On Entry	At Year-End	Difference
Children with special educational needs	3.06	3.84	+0.78
Children who don't speak the language of instruction at home	2.94	3.53	+0.59
Children who didn't attend kindergarten	3.83	4.35	+0.53
Children who don't know letters at the start of class	4.04	4.51	+0.47
Children without support at home	3.90	4.34	+0.44
My students in general	4.36	4.80	+0.44

After Two Years in the Programme: Teachers Who Entered with a Preparatory Class in Autumn 2024, 81 on Entry, 53 at Year-End (Now Grade 1)

How Prepared I Feel to Teach Reading to...	On Entry	After Two Years	Difference
Children with special educational needs	3.36	4.18	+0.82
Children who don't speak the language of instruction at home	3.27	3.76	+0.49
Children without support at home	4.04	4.50	+0.46
Children who didn't attend kindergarten	4.03	4.48	+0.45
Children who don't know letters at the start of class	4.28	4.44	+0.16

How Prepared I Feel to Teach Reading to...	On Entry	After Two Years	Difference
My students in general	4.62	4.73	+0.12

The pattern repeats at both intervals. The two categories with the largest increase, children with special educational needs and children who don't speak the language of instruction at home, are also the categories with the lowest perceived readiness on entry. They remain, however, below the other categories even at the end, even after two years.

Categories where teachers already felt prepared, students in general and those unfamiliar with letters at the start, show the smallest increase after two years. The programme, therefore, appears to work where it is most needed.

Beliefs About How Reading Is Learned

The programme also tracks teachers' beliefs about reading, since these shape what they expect from children. Two statements describe limiting beliefs, and two describe conceptions about the nature of reading.

Agreement That...	On Entry	After One Year	After Two Years
Children without support at home won't become good readers	2.35	2.16	2.19
Some children cannot learn to read	2.86	2.57	2.60
Learning to read is a natural process	3.81	4.03	3.82
Children who read aloud fluently are good readers	3.74	4.01	3.92

The two limiting beliefs decrease and remain low, meaning fewer teachers, after a year in the programme, believe that some children cannot learn to read or that lack of home support determines the outcome. This is the change the programme directly targets, and it occurs in the first year and is sustained.

The other two statements increase, and this is a concern. The idea that learning to read is a natural process, and that reading aloud fluently is a sign of a good reader, are both contradicted by literacy research. Reading is learned through explicit instruction, and oral fluency does not guarantee comprehension. That agreement with these statements increases after a year in the programme shows that training does not sufficiently address these two conceptions directly, the same observation appeared in last year's report.

Nonetheless, to rule out that this fluctuation is explained by item ambiguity, we are considering rewording these items for the 2026–2027 questionnaire.

How Teachers Rate the Instruments and the Programme

Across the 167 respondents, the assessment instrument scores between 4.46 and 4.85 on a 1–5 scale, and programme components between 4.85 and 4.94. The likelihood of recommending the programme to other teachers is 9.84 out of 10.

These averages, however, hide a meaningful difference. Teachers in the programme are at different years of participation: preparatory-class teachers are in their first year, Grade 1 teachers in their second, Grade 2 in their third, and Grade 3 in their fourth. Breaking down by this dimension reveals a consistent pattern.

Programme Evaluation by Year of Participation, End of 2025–2026 School Year

Measure	Prep, Year 1	Grade 1, Year 2	Grade 2, Year 3	Grade 3, Year 4
Number of respondents	63	53	31	13
Instrument - usefulness for planning (1-5)	4.87	4.72	4.55	4.85
Instrument - time required (1-5)	4.40	4.55	4.23	4.85
Instrument - would recommend (1-10)	9.81	9.77	9.19	9.85
Resource sets (1-10)	9.86	9.74	9.35	9.85
Ease of implementation (1-10)	9.35	9.55	8.87	9.31
Contribution to children's literacy (1-10)	9.38	9.58	9.13	9.85
Will continue next year (1-10)	9.52	9.64	9.06	9.92
Would recommend the programme (1-10)	9.84	9.91	9.74	10.00

The cohort in its third year, Grade 2 teachers, rates almost every dimension lower. Differences are small in absolute terms, but appear simultaneously across nine of nine indicators, making it unlikely to be chance. The largest gaps are in ease of implementation, 8.87 versus 9.35 and 9.55 in the preceding and following years, and in intention to continue, 9.06 versus 9.52 and 9.64.

A plausible explanation, not directly confirmed by the data, is that the third year brings the greatest distance between what the programme requires and what it provides: children's needs grow more varied, texts become longer, and initial enthusiasm has worn off. This is worth exploring in mentor discussions, as it is likely the point where the programme loses the most teachers.

> *The Grade 3 group has only 13 respondents, so its values - the highest in the table - are unstable and do not support the conclusion that things improve in year four. They may simply reflect that whoever remains by year four is whoever fits the programme best.*

The Same Cohort, Three Years Running

A second view compares preparatory-class teachers at the end of each of the last three school years. This does not track the same individuals, but successive generations of teachers at the same point in their journey.

Preparatory-Class Teachers, Year-End	2023–2024	2024–2025	2025–2026
Number of respondents	206	131	63
Instrument - clarity of description (1-5)	4.93	4.82	4.97
Instrument - usefulness for planning (1-5)	4.90	4.79	4.87
Instrument - time required (1-5)	4.51	4.50	4.40
Mentor support (1-5)	4.94	4.92	4.97

Preparatory-Class Teachers, Year-End	2023–2024	2024–2025	2025–2026
Resource sets (1–10)	9.72	9.84	9.86
Ease of implementation (1–10)	9.18	9.37	9.35
Will continue next year (1–10)	9.16	9.35	9.52
Would recommend the programme (1–10)	9.64	9.77	9.84

Ratings are stable year to year, and the three intention measures increase consistently: intention to continue rises from 9.16 to 9.52, and recommendation from 9.64 to 9.84. The only dimension that decreases slightly is time required for assessment.

The Cost of Assessment, in Time

Assessment time per child differs sharply between the two instruments, and this is the most practically relevant information for programme planning.

Average Time Per Child	Initial Assessment	Reassessment
Preparatory class, emergent literacy	39 minutes	27 minutes
Grade 1, Reading Inventory	15 minutes	13 minutes
Grade 2, Reading Inventory	17 minutes	12 minutes

For a class of 20 children, the preparatory-class emergent assessment means approximately 13 hours of individual work at the initial assessment and 9 at reassessment, outside teaching hours. The Reading Inventory, from Grade 1 up, requires between 4 and 6 hours. This explains why time required is the only instrument dimension scoring below 4.5, and why the preparatory-class assessment is the most vulnerable to being skipped.

What Teachers Observe in Children

The open-ended question about what teachers observed in children when using programme resources received 167 responses. Almost without exception, they describe the same two things: attachment to books as objects, and increased willingness to read.

> *"They were delighted with the books they received, with being able to build their own library, with being able to write their names on them."*
>
> *"My students were very excited, they eagerly waited to go to the book shelf."*
>
> *"Joy, emotion, delight, and the pleasure of reading, they told me they read them repeatedly at home."*
>
> *"All students read with more pleasure. Students who struggle with reading or writing show more courage."*
>
> *"Children became more engaged and more confident in their own ability to learn."*

These observations are teachers' perceptions, not measurements. They describe what the adult in the classroom sees, and their value lies in indicating a shift in the relationship with books that reading-assessment instruments do not capture.

What Changed in Teaching

Asked about the most important change brought about by programme participation, teachers mainly describe a shift from uniform teaching toward differentiation, and a more analytical attention to the components of reading.

> *"I learned to meet the child who is struggling where they are, without boring those who can do more."*
>
> *"It made me pay more attention to detail. There are children who read but cannot segment phonemically."*
>
> *"I became aware of the importance of knowing each child's level, and how important differentiated instruction is."*
>
> *"As a beginner, it gave me very clear teaching techniques, I saw their effectiveness, so I know how I'll continue."*
>
> *"Strategic planning, precisely knowing the cause of each child's difficulties in handling read or listened-to texts."*

The second quote deserves separate attention. A child who reads fluently but cannot segment phonemically is exactly the kind of situation an assessment based only on speed would not reveal, and the fact that teachers are beginning to notice it is a result of the instrument, not just the training.

Limitations of the Evaluation

- The 167 respondents are the teachers who remained in the programme through year-end and chose to complete the questionnaire. Their ratings of the programme cannot be generalised to everyone who started the year.
- About one in five open-ended questions received a long, elaborate response with visibly different structure and vocabulary from the rest. Most responses, however, are short and in the teachers' own words, and the quotes in this chapter are selected from the latter.
- Programme evaluation and instrument evaluation are measured on different scales, 1 to 5 for component dimensions, 1 to 10 for intentions and recommendation. Figures are not comparable across the two scale types.
- Data on teaching practices is self-reported. It describes what teachers say they do, not what is observed in the classroom.

Access to data

Links to all data:

- Preparatory grade - ROMANIAN
- Preparatory grade - HUNGARIAN
- First grade - CLS I
- Second grade - CLS II
- Third grade - CLS III