



ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES EARLY LEARNERS PROGRAM

Despite relatively high enrollment rates at both primary and secondary schools in the Caribbean, recent assessments show that only nine percent of Grade 2 students are reading at or above grade level in the OECS Member States. This low proficiency in reading directly impacts student performance in other subjects and affects longer term prospects for employment or advanced education. Low reading proficiency levels are one of the drivers behind the region's elevated school drop-out rates. Being a school drop-out puts youth at higher risk for involvement in crime and violence. To address these challenges, USAID and the OECS partnered to develop the Early Learners Program.

The USAID Early Learners Program (ELP) improves the reading achievement levels of grade K-3 students in the six independent OECS Member States of Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Program comprises seven key components to address factors that improve children's ability to read:

- 1) **Pre-Service Teacher Training Curriculum** improves student teachers' capacity to assess and teach early grade reading;
- 2) **In-Service Teacher Professional Development** develops current teachers' capacity to assess and teach reading through training, coaching, and classroom observations;
- 3) **Student Assessments** identify and formatively address student reading needs;

- 4) **Teaching and Learning Resources** support reading activities in the classroom and in libraries using student and teacher handbooks, library books, and whole-class learning aids;
- 5) **Reading Curriculum Framework** supports the revision and endorsement of the OECS curriculum framework in each member state;
- 6) **School Reading Improvement Planning** funds community-initiated early grade literacy activities; and
- 7) **Language of Instruction Policies** support children learning to read in the language they speak and understand.

QUICK FACTS

- Over 35,000 students in the six program countries benefit from improved reading instruction and learning materials, including approximately 5,100 from Antigua and Barbuda, 4,100 from Dominica, 6,700 from Grenada, 3,100 from St. Kitts and Nevis, 9,300 from St. Lucia, and 7,400 from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
- Approximately 2,025 teachers benefit from in-service training in the teaching of reading and individualized coaching on instructional practices, including 274 from Antigua and Barbuda, 288 from Dominica, 369 from Grenada, 201 from St. Kitts and Nevis, 477 from St. Lucia, and 416 from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
- Approximately 300 OECS primary schools received \$1.7 million in teaching and learning materials, including 36 from Antigua and Barbuda, 48 from Dominica, 59 from Grenada, 27 from St. Kitts and Nevis, 68 from St. Lucia, and 58 from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

BUILDING REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE

ELP contributes significantly to the region's focus on evidence-based decision making by providing up-to-date data on regional reading performance and teacher education. In 2016, USAID conducted a comprehensive Early Grade Reading Assessment along with studies on reading and teacher education. Assessment results indicated that only 9% percent of Grade 2 students are reading at or above grade level, with 33% of students reading at the Grade 1 level, and 58% below the Grade 1 level. This low proficiency in reading directly impacts student performance in other subjects such as language arts, science and math.

In addition to contributing to the regional knowledge base in reading, the assessment and studies support ongoing beneficiary country efforts to sustain critical program components while providing feedback to teachers and education officials on student achievement and how teacher professional development impacts student performance. For example, the assessment demonstrated that males consistently perform worse than females in key learning assessments, a noted trend in the region. To address this disparity, the Program expands teachers' knowledge of instructional techniques equipping them to better respond to gender differences and ensure disadvantaged students are better served.

REGIONAL GOAL: IMPROVING STUDENT READING

Improving reading performance by creating a culture of reading is a common goal of USAID, the OECS Commission, and Member State Governments. Achieving this goal involves extensive collaboration with entities such as regional and national teachers' unions, parent-teacher associations, the US Peace Corps, and the NGO, Hands Across the Sea.