



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSPIRE ENGAGED AND CONFIDENT READERS

**The Effects of Large Print on
Student Literacy Development**

CONSIDERING THE STATE OF STUDENT LITERACY

Across the United States, from statehouses to school district board meetings, educators and policymakers are discussing new strategies to ensure that all students are effective readers. After many years of debate about the most impactful methods for supporting literacy development, there is growing consensus that understanding the science of how students learn to read and then develop proficiency with reading is important. While there is not a single definition of the “science of reading,” common attributes include teaching explicit skills, like phonics and phonemic awareness, as well as taking an evidence-based approach to evaluating student reading fluency and comprehension. Central to these discussions is an understanding about how students’ learning differences and reading challenges—including ADHD, dyslexia, and English language development—play into their overall literacy development.

As noted in a recent *American Libraries* article, Scarborough’s Reading Rope provides a way to explain the complicated relationship between the various factors that influence literacy development, including comprehension skills, like vocabulary, and word recognition skills, like decoding.¹ While all the factors identified are important, classroom teachers and school librarians are also fully aware of the value of student engagement in the learning process, including in literacy development. To support sustained reading success beyond the mechanics of phonics, vocabulary, and syntax, we need to engage students in the actual reading process by providing them with texts through which they can develop confidence in their abilities and further interest in reading.



“Many of my students struggled with confidence and were not very engaged readers at the start of this school year. I definitely feel that I have been able to meet their needs becoming confident and fluent readers by using large print books.”

Special Education Teacher, Grade 10,
O’Fallon High School (IL)

To better understand the role of large print books in supporting student literacy development, Thorndike Press, from Gale, part of Cengage Group, partnered with Project Tomorrow® to design and implement a new nationwide study during the 2023–2024 school year investigating the impact of large print text on student reading engagement and achievement levels. A similar study during the 2018–2019 school year resulted in landmark findings. Today’s focus on the science of reading and the critical need for student reading interventions created demand for new research. Through the latest study, we discovered additional insights for classroom teachers and school librarians who are supporting improved literacy outcomes for all students.

The large print format provides readers with several key characteristics, including a larger font size than standard edition books; enhanced spacing between words and lines, with fewer words per page; and clearer contrast between text and the background color of the page. While the large print format has a strong legacy of supporting reading engagement and proficiency for adults, most notably those with visual challenges, this study is on the increasingly important impact of large print text on young readers.

1. [Vincent Hyland](#) and [Melissa Jacobs](#), “[Beyond the Book List](#) [Connecting libraries to the science of reading](#),” *American Libraries*, August 28, 2024.

About the Study

This report documents the key findings of the study, which included the participation of elementary, middle, and high school students, teachers, and librarians from thirteen schools nationwide. The study included two high schools, nine middle schools, and two K-8 schools. The selection of schools was specifically focused on student and community diversity. Ten of the thirteen schools in this study have student populations that are over 56% African American and/or Hispanic. The student populations in eight of the schools qualify for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of home poverty. Within the study cohort, four of the schools are in urban communities and nine are in suburban towns.

Research Methodology

In each school, students had access to a variety of large print titles provided by Thorndike Press to use within regular classroom reading activities. The titles provided were popular, age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction titles, including *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Crossover*, and *The House on Mango Street*. Teachers incorporated the large print titles into regular instructional practices, such as literature circles, book clubs, read-alouds in class, self-paced student reading, and guided reading methodologies. Student and teacher experiences, along with their valuations on those experiences, were captured through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

In total, approximately 1,500 students in grades 4–12 and fifty-six teachers and librarians participated in this large-scale study.

Key Study Findings

In 2024, school principals woke in the middle of the night worried about three confounding challenges: 1) how to close the achievement gaps between students in their school (per 61% of principals); 2) how to support their teachers dealing with increased classroom workload due to the diversity of student needs coupled with decreased engagement issues (60%); and 3) how to ensure that their school is providing all students with the appropriate social, emotional, and mental health supports to enable more effective classroom learning and student self-efficacy (52%).² Solving these challenges is an increasingly difficult task in our schools today.

The need to meaningfully engage students in reading and help them develop stronger literacy skills impacts all three of these challenges. The increasing importance of literacy development for all students is certainly central to closing the achievement gap. However, the heightened focus on that critical component often results in increasing teacher workload through the expected (or mandated) usage of new interventions, practices, and support materials in the classroom, with a goal of ensuring that all students are reading at grade level. Correspondingly, for many students who struggle with reading fluency, particularly those students with learning differences and/or insufficient English language skills, the new intensity around reading proficiency can exacerbate existing student stress and anxiety about their academic achievement and learning self-efficacy.

2. Speak Up® Research Project Findings, 2024 (not yet published). Project Tomorrow.

The key findings from this year's large print efficacy study provide new insights into how schools can address both the need for increasing student literacy proficiencies and the three key challenges of closing the achievement gap, supporting teacher effectiveness in the classroom, and enabling student self-efficacy as more proficient readers.

Closing the Achievement Gap

FINDING 1: The inclusion of large print texts in classroom reading activities supports literacy development for all students, regardless of reading levels or learning differences.

Evidence:

- Overall: 87% of teachers agree large print had a positive impact on their students' reading success
- Teachers reported increases in students' reading comprehension levels
 - 77% for below-grade-level readers
 - 55% for students diagnosed with ADHD
- Teachers noted improved Lexile reading scores by two grade levels
 - 71% for at-grade-level readers
 - 59% for below-grade-level readers
- Teachers also saw benefits for English learners (ELs)
 - 48% noted faster acquisition of English language skills
 - 76% said ELs highly benefited from large print

Supporting Teacher Effectiveness in the Classroom

FINDING 2: Access to large print titles for schoolwork reading increased students' engagement in learning and enjoyment in reading.

Evidence:

- 89% of students in grades 6–12 enjoyed reading the large print book
- 48% of high school students said they were more engaged in reading the large print book than other books for schoolwork
- Teachers also noticed increased student participation in classroom read-aloud activities
 - 74% for below-grade-level readers
 - 63% for students diagnosed with ADHD
 - 52% for at-grade-level readers

FINDING 3: Large print as a reading intervention was easy to integrate within existing instructional practices.

Evidence:

- The integration did not require any teacher professional development, changes in curriculum, adjustments to teaching practices, or technology
- 87% of teachers agreed that their students' reading capacities were positively impacted by large print access, including reading skills like letter and word recognition, fluency, and comprehension
- 100% of teachers said it would be valuable to have more large print titles easily accessible by students in classroom libraries
 - 82% said it would be very valuable
- 86% of teachers said they would recommend the use of large print titles to other teachers to support student literacy development

Enabling Student Self-Efficacy as a More Proficient Reader

FINDING 4: The use of large print text for schoolwork reading supported students' emotional and mental health and their self-efficacy as readers.

Evidence:

- Teachers noticed students' stress and anxiety associated with schoolwork reading decreased
 - 81% for below-grade-level readers
 - 58% for students diagnosed with ADHD
- Teachers also saw increased student confidence in their reading abilities
 - 87% for below-grade-level readers
 - 55% for students diagnosed with ADHD

FINDING 5: Students believe that access to large print books will support enhanced learning.

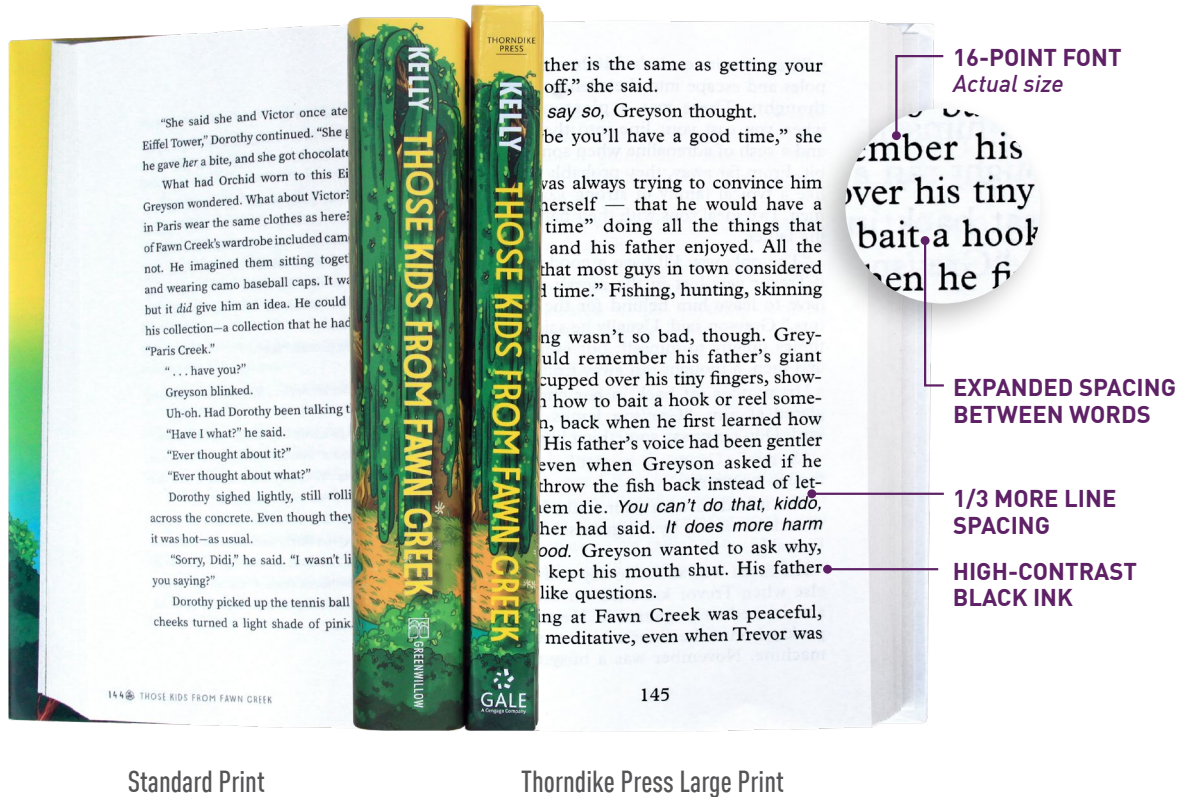
Evidence:

- Students agreed they should have more access to large print books in school
 - 75% of grade 6–8 students
 - 86% of grade 9–12 students
- 62% of students in grades 6–8 said reading skills will improve with large print books

ABOUT THORNDIKE YOUTH LARGE PRINT BOOKS

See the Large Print Difference.

With a larger font size, expanded line spacing, and fewer words per page, large print helps students turn pages faster and stay engaged while reading.

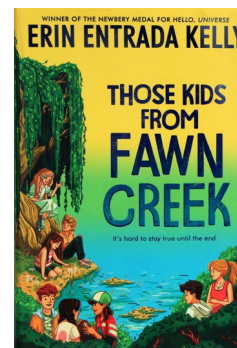


Standard Print

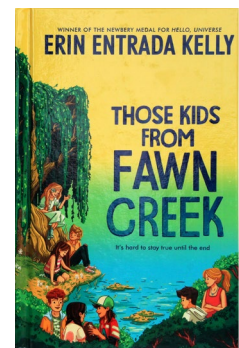
Thorndike Press Large Print

Help young readers enjoy trendy youth titles in a more accessible format.

Thorndike Press youth large print books are unabridged and similar in size and weight to the standard editions, and feature the same cover art and illustrations. Plus, they don't have the words "large print" on the outside.



Standard Print



Thorndike Press Large Print

ABOUT PROJECT TOMORROW

Project Tomorrow is a nationally recognized education nonprofit organization with a focus on understanding the impact of new learning models and interventions on student outcomes and teacher effectiveness. Our mission is to help education, business, and policy leaders make the best decisions for education through the effective use of research-based insights that highly leverage the authentic views and perspectives of K-12 stakeholders, notably students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Our work includes the highly regarded Speak Up Research Project and an annual series of customized evaluation, feedback, and efficacy studies that examine key trends in education. Learn more at www.tomorrow.org.

ABOUT THORNDIKE PRESS

As the world's leading large print publisher, Thorndike Press helps readers of all ages enjoy books. Since 1999, we've published high-quality, high-interest titles in large print for readers in grades 3–12. Our catalog of 1,000+ youth large print titles grows monthly with popular books kids want to read. Librarians and educators trust our large print books to help middle-grade and young adult students develop the skills they need to become successful lifelong readers.



Hungry for more data and insight? Download the full white paper at gale.com/thorndike/literacy

