



Literacy for all: The story of Sobral

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The scorching, arid northeastern state of Ceará, Brazil has long been known for growing cashews and coconuts. Now, it's defied expectations by cultivating one of the world's best public elementary school systems, despite high rates of poverty. How Sobral transformed its public school system and attained near-universal literacy offers lessons for communities everywhere.

With 85 elementary schools and almost 34,000 students, Sobral now dominates national assessments in reading and math—outscored even affluent students in São Paulo, Brazil's financial center. In 2000, only 48% of Sobral's second-graders were reading at grade level. By 2004, that figure had almost doubled to 92%, with an average of 95% in the years since (until 2020 pandemic school closures). Since 2014, the average Sobral fifth grader has scored not just "proficient" but "advanced" on Brazil's national proficiency test (National Basic Education Assessment System, or SAEB).

Moreover, Sobral has accomplished this success with an only four-hour school day, which remains Brazil's norm for elementary schools. It was not until 2014 that Sobral began to experiment with a seven-hour school model. Even more compelling: Sobral has shared its playbook and replicated its success in nearby cities. Today, of the 100 top-scoring elementary schools in Brazil, a staggering 86 are in Ceará, and 27 are within Sobral.

Recognizing the transformative power of Sobral's approach, Brazil's national education ministry and the Lemann Foundation [have teamed up to disseminate Sobral's](#) ideas more widely across the country. They aim to address the disheartening

reality that half of public school students in the rest of the country are still illiterate by the third grade. [The Economist](#), [Financial Times](#), and [The Guardian](#) have all written about Sobral's educational triumphs. The World Bank has [shared some of Sobral's strategies](#) with other countries.

Sobral's story is one of system-wide transformation. It's a tale of a community that, over many years, changed every aspect of its primary education system. It features a grand vision and bold political leadership. It speaks to the power of aligned instructional systems, deep investments in educators, and a culture of love, support, and high expectations. It's a multi-faceted story that demonstrates the possibility of achieving near-universal literacy, even in resource-constrained environments.

"Sobral had to make many mistakes and learn a lot on its trajectory, had to try many different models, and constantly learn to improve," said Herbert Lima, Sobral's current Secretary of Education, in an interview in August. "Today, we hope to inspire other municipalities to accelerate through these steps more rapidly."

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

Sobral's success demonstrates that near-universal literacy is an achievable aim for any city, regardless of socioeconomic status. It required a multifaceted approach to aligning the entire system around a clear goal, with an emphasis on a strong instructional core. Essential components included:

- **Sustained and unified political leadership:** Sobral reforms were initiated by a visionary mayor. Success required continued commitment by subsequent city leaders, using shared language around a clear goal.
- **Investment in classroom educators:** Sobral ensured that all their teachers had the tools, skills, time, support and flexibility to do their best work, including research-backed curricula, real-time formative assessment data, planning time, and adaptive and ongoing professional development.
- **Prioritizing instructional leadership:** In Sobral, principals are selected for their capacity to develop a team of educators who produce results for students. They have the autonomy to lead, and also receive ongoing training and support.
- **Rapid-cycle progress monitoring and adaptation:** Sobral educators conduct formative assessments every 15 days, quickly identifying students who are not meeting benchmarks and personalizing instruction accordingly.
- **A culture of care, accountability, and support:** Sobral's culture fostered a sense of belonging for everyone, encouraged a growth mindset for both students and adults, and united the community towards a shared mission.

Poor city, poor educational outcomes

The state of Ceará is considered by many Brazilians to be a rural backwater. Many of Sobral's 210,000 residents work in agriculture or factories, and the city has historically had one of the country's highest rates of poverty and one of the lowest rates of student achievement. It is likely that citizens of Sobral in the 1990s would be shocked at current student outcomes and scarcely recognize the local school system. Back then, under-investment in the city's public education system showed up in predictable ways: derelict facilities, underprepared teachers, and abysmal student test scores.

Some teachers had not graduated from high school, while others had only a fifth grade education. Some had side jobs and would skip class to cut a client's hair or harvest crops. Principals were political appointees rather than experienced educators. Parents, faced with the harsh realities of poverty—and reading signals from their schools and political leaders—worried more about whether their children were going to work than whether they could read.

New leader, new goals

Things began to change in 1997 when Cid Gomes, an ambitious young mayor, took office. Gomes had grown up in Sobral in a politically active family. He started his political career at age 25 as a regional political coordinator, then steadily climbed the ladder of elected state positions, later becoming the youngest president in the history of the state parliament at age 32. In the 1997 mayoral race, he won 64% of the votes. Once in office, Gomes decided to make reforming schools his administration's top priority. Both his parents had been teachers and Gomes believes that “teaching is a noble mission.”

He wasted no time, immediately implementing bold and controversial reforms. First, he replaced politically-appointed school principals with leaders chosen through a rigorous selection process. He removed about 1,000 unqualified teachers from the classroom, offering them free enrollment in university-level teaching programs or jobs as teaching assistants. He also established criteria for teacher hiring and consolidated small rural schools.

These tangible education investments—building new schools, modernizing existing schools, buying new materials, and raising teacher salaries—were popular enough to grow the municipal school system's enrollment from 9,000 in 1996 to 17,000 in 1999. Under a new funding scheme, the federal government had begun to redistribute resources in elementary education, bringing additional funding to the city's schools. Gomes further maximized enrollment, and subsequently funding, by using his bully pulpit to urge families to send their children to school. He even had his deputies personally call families whose children were absent. “I would call and ask why their child had not attended school, and they thought it was a prank call,” recalled Veveu Arruda, who was Sobral's Secretary of Culture at the time.

Focusing on “literacy at the right age”

As his first term was winding down in 1999, Gomes asked Edgar Linhares, a professor of Education at the Federal University in Ceará, to conduct an educational assessment on the city’s students. The results revealed that over half of Sobral’s students who had completed second grade still couldn’t read. A subsequent assessment of students in second through fourth grade reinforced the presence of a pervasive problem with literacy.

Instead of hiding the data, Gomes shared the reading results in speeches, on television, and via radio. This transparency served as a catalyst for change and galvanized the community to take collective responsibility for student learning. In 2000, Gomes declared “literacy at the right age” as a new clear and measurable goal.

Gomes appointed Izolda Cela, a school psychologist and early childhood education specialist, to be Sobral’s Secretary of Education (this role is similar to that of a district superintendent in the U.S.). Under her leadership, the entire municipal school system transformed roles, routines, and culture to focus on literacy by second grade. The team held parent meetings, and Gomes personally attended many of them to share his vision of the needed changes. His message was one of radical learning equality: every child, regardless of their background, could and would learn to read by the end of second grade.

Secretary of Education Cela tapped external experts to build a cohesive set of aligned learning resources for kindergarten through second grade, including textbooks, student workbooks, lesson plans, teacher training, and formative assessments. These resources were systematically sequenced to scaffold students’ literacy skills. They began with phonological and phonemic awareness, built mastery (from letters and sounds to syllables, to words, to phrases, to sentences, to texts) and developed reading fluency, vocabulary, content knowledge, and comprehension.

Investing in teacher support and development

Teachers began receiving curriculum-aligned professional development for a full day each month. These monthly sessions, organized by grade, covered the upcoming month’s lessons and augmented teachers’ instructional strategies. Importantly, teachers were encouraged to adapt the lessons for their students’ individual needs. Teachers shared their ideas with each other. The trainers also received feedback from teachers on what had or hadn’t worked in the previous month, which was then used to improve the system for future years. In addition to these monthly city-wide sessions, teachers had school-based planning sessions for one full day each week, during which substitute teachers covered classrooms (using the provided lesson plans) while the regular classroom teachers met to reflect, plan, collaborate, and adjust.

The municipality also began to leverage rapid-cycle formative assessment data. Formative interim assessments were created and administered every 15 days. Instructional coordinators and principals administered and validated oral assessments. Teacher teams used this data in their weekly meetings to regroup students, adjust lessons, and match teacher strengths with student needs.

Sobral also invested in school leaders, with weekly training sessions at first. “They needed to learn how to be leaders of teachers,” recalled Cela. Previously, principals were required to get approval from the central office for everything, from fixing a broken light to buying snacks; now, they were expected to focus on teaching and learning, not building administration. This focus on student learning transformed principals into instructional leaders.

This time, the changes had the desired effect, and fairly quickly. By 2004, 92% of second graders could read, up from 48% in 2000.

Continued refinements and scaling

Over the next decade, Sobral continued to refine its approach, with an eye toward closing any remaining learning gaps. Driven by data and continual feedback, educators adjusted and improved everything they had created, including student materials, teacher professional development, and assessments. Weekly planning meetings became more structured and monthly teacher training sessions were steadily improved. In 2005-07, schools focused on catching up any upper elementary students (grades 3-5) who were still behind, while also ensuring that more proficient readers continued to build comprehension with more complex text. Middle schools (grades 6-8) began adopting these strategies in 2008. In 2014, with the advent of Brazil’s national “Integral Education” strategy, Sobral changed its schedule to gradually offer full-day instruction (seven hours instead of four) in some schools. The schools used this additional time to offer enrichment activities like art and music, as well as social-emotional learning.

Gomes was elected governor of the state of Ceará in 2006, and scaled up his push for literacy across the state to all 184 districts and 5,100 schools. He created the Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PAIC), or “Literacy at the Right Age Program,” in which municipalities pledged to have kids reading by age seven. He replicated the Sobral playbook, including rapid-cycle formative assessment, intensive professional development, and high-quality curricular resources, and matched Sobral principals with school leaders elsewhere to help students across the state.

In 2017, Sobral’s students ranked first on the federally-mandated tests in Portuguese and math for second, fifth and eighth grades. The rest of Brazil and the world took notice of Sobral’s success. The World Bank sent a team to study their success, seeking to disseminate their strategies to other cities around the world. In 2019, over 70% of the municipalities in Ceará achieved a 6 out of 10 on Brazil’s national education quality index (IDEB), corresponding to “quality comparable to that of developed countries,” according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

THE MISSISSIPPI MIRACLE

Sobral's unlikely rise to the top of Brazil's Education Quality Index shares similarities with what education leaders in the U.S. have hailed as the "Mississippi Miracle," in which Mississippi's fourth-grade scores rose from being the second-worst state in 2013 to 21st in 2022. Mississippi's GDP per capita income is the lowest among all 50 states; Ceará's is the fifth lowest among Brazil's 26 states. Both Sobral and Mississippi chose to prioritize improvements in early literacy. Both invested in professional development, established tiered strategies for struggling students, sought expert advice, ensured strong foundational curriculum materials, taught phonological awareness and phonics, built oral reading fluency, developed students' content knowledge and vocabulary, leveraged regular formative assessment to inform classroom practices, and forged partnerships with families.

As a result, Mississippi's students closed their test score gap with the national average. Julie Mikuta, Co-President of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, which has made grants towards K-12 system improvement initiatives, drew this comparison: "Mississippi took a multi-faceted, competency-based approach to giving teachers what they need in order to ensure kids are learning to read. The system is all about supporting and enabling teachers to consistently be their best with students, through professional development, leadership that is aligned, investment in and time for teachers, treating them like professionals, with strong content at the core."

Both Sobral and Mississippi also benefited from strong and sustained political leadership—and used that political power to elevate instructional leadership and maintain a focus on literacy over many years. Sobral education secretary Lima underscored the importance of sustained and strong leadership: "Leadership is the foundation of all change and success in Sobral. Leadership is making hard decisions, even when they're unpopular. And beyond courage, it's about being guided by technical expertise about teaching and learning."

Mississippi First Executive Director Rachel Canter echoed this idea of sustained leadership in an [August 2023 interview](#), saying, "Mississippi has been on a 20-year climb toward that national average in reading and math ... It's certainly not something that happened overnight ... If you go back and look, you'll see that Mississippi has made steady progress actually in the last 20 years, improving its scores overall as well as at every subgroup level." Canter cited the cumulative effect of policies such as the adoption of Common Core State Standards, [Mississippi's Statewide Accountability System](#), and the often-referenced [Literacy-Based Promotion Act](#) as contributors to the state's enviable test scores.

Continued political leadership

As Sobral's mayor, Gomes catalyzed change by broadly communicating the alarming reality of widespread illiteracy and rallying the community around the urgent need for transformation. He allocated municipal resources to make that possible through buying new curriculum materials, adding staff, and training teachers and principals. The subsequent mayors since Gomes, including his former deputies, have continued to allocate political capital and resources to ensure the effectiveness of the municipal education system.

Any reform of this magnitude also requires the support and involvement of the entire community. Gomes attended parent meetings and visited schools throughout the city to share his vision and instill belief in students and educators. In the early days of the reform, when attendance was lagging, his senior staff themselves sometimes made calls to parents whose children had missed school.

Gomes leveraged the power of his bully pulpit to amplify positive incentives and celebrate progress, focusing on communal achievements rather than individual school rankings. Gomes also set the tone both in what he did—personally attending parent forums at schools—and didn't do—demurring when a teacher asked him to change the terms of her contract. He built support with popular visible changes, such as providing new classroom materials and school supplies to families and used that political capital to weather unpopular decisions, such as consolidating small rural schools and firing unqualified teachers. He recognized his own limitations and tapped experts such as Linhares and Cela to craft and execute the transformation plan, including a new curriculum, teacher training, and formative assessments. Importantly, he sustained Sobral's focus on education over time. Even after his initial structural reforms failed to improve student outcomes, he continued with a renewed focus on literacy in his second term.

Prioritizing instructional leadership

Gomes' political leadership was highly visible and garnered a lot of attention. But Sobral also prioritized a less-visible force at all levels of their school system: instructional leadership. Secretary of Education Cela tapped local experts from the federal university, and her team elevated leaders with expertise in curriculum, instruction, and assessment at all levels.

At the municipality level, the instructional leaders created a new curriculum aimed at better literacy outcomes. These new resources, which included student workbooks and lesson plans for teachers, leveraged what in the U.S. is commonly referred to as the Science of Reading (which is relevant for Portuguese) to support students' reading skill development from letters and sounds to grade-level fluency, along with vocabulary and comprehension. In the U.S., districts with higher literacy rates for low-income students have similarly benefited from this kind of instructional leadership. For example, many of the top-scoring districts identified in the California Reading Coalition's [2022 Reading Report Card](#) made an early investment in high-quality, research-backed core and supplemental instructional materials.

School-level instructional leadership was also a priority for Sobral's new team. They replaced the patronage-laced political appointment process with a rigorous selection process that includes evaluating candidates' ability to provide teachers with constructive feedback on their instructional practices. Effective teacher leaders are identified and tapped for administrator training. After completing the training program, aspiring principals are evaluated, certified, and placed into a pool. When schools need a principal, district-level leaders use this pool to select principal candidates who match the school's specific needs. Sobral also moves successful and experienced principals to struggling schools and places first-time principals in well-established, high-functioning schools.

Principals also attend regular training sessions and receive ongoing feedback during weekly visits from their pedagogical supervisor, which always include classroom observations and a discussion of those observations. In addition to support, they are given autonomy—coupled with high expectations and accountability for results.

This focus on developing principals' instructional capability is a characteristic of the highest-performing school leader training programs in the U.S., too. Jean Desravines, CEO of NewLeaders, credits the impact of the principals it has trained in part to the organization's emphasis on instructional leadership: "By empowering principals with the skills to drive meaningful educational experiences, we not only enhance individual classrooms but contribute to the broader transformation of our education system."

Investing in educators

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the transformation has been ensuring that front-line educators have the time, expertise, flexibility, and resources to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers receive a thoughtfully designed, systematically sequenced, and research-backed curriculum that includes a comprehensive package of student-facing materials, teacher lesson plans, and formative assessments. Monthly full-day training sessions cover the upcoming month's lessons and build teachers' toolkits of instructional strategies, while also providing opportunities for teachers to share their ideas with each other and soliciting teacher feedback on the training and materials based on their experience the previous month. For a full day every week, regular substitute teachers cover the classroom while teachers plan collaboratively with grade level colleagues. They examine formative assessment data, discuss individual students' needs, and learn how to group students for more intensive support.

Like any successful team, Sobral uses coaches to help teachers refine their craft. Instructional coordinators ("coordenadores pedagógicos") provide hands-on support for teachers in all aspects of pedagogical practice. Some of their activities include facilitating teacher planning meetings, reviewing lesson plans, and conducting classroom visits at least once a week. Instructional coordinators also collaborate with teachers and principals to assess students every 15 days, as well as help teacher teams develop strategies to support children who are struggling.

Instructional coordinators are themselves seasoned and successful classroom educators. Each school employs a number of coordinators who are selected by the

principal and assigned to a specific grade range based on their teaching specialties. As one second-grade teacher shared: “Good feedback is great, of course. But negative observations tell me where to focus my energy, reminding me that we’re all here to continuously grow and improve.”

Many advocates in the U.S. have long called for similar investment in teacher support, citing big potential impacts for students. Tommy Chang, CEO of the New Teacher Center, a nonprofit organization that provides training and coaching for new teachers, affirms this: “We know what it takes to teach young people to read. It only makes sense that we invest in building the capacity of teachers so they have the confidence and tools to support their students in their literacy development.”

A culture of affection, accountability, and accompaniment

Fifteen years ago, when Brazil started ranking schools on its education development index, Sobral, already a few years into its reform journey, was ranked 1,366 out of 5,000 districts. Now, Sobral consistently ranks among the top districts and their literacy rate has remained over 90% for several years. Many Sobral students who became fluent and confident readers in the early years of the reform have gone on to university, while others have moved to larger cities in Brazil to pursue greater economic opportunity. The number of Sobral families living in extreme poverty has declined by 89%. Despite a five-year drought in the region and a national recession that reduced federal funding for local government services, Sobral’s educational outcomes remain strong, providing evidence that sustainable change took root. Meanwhile, across the rest of Brazil, half of public school students are still illiterate in the third grade.

But at the beginning, Sobral’s future success was not self-evident. Veveu Arruda, Gomes’ Secretary of Culture who is now CEO of Associação Bem Comum, a NGO that supports education system transformation, recalls, “A change in mindset was responsible for all the other changes.”

When Cela first became Secretary of Education, she was confronted with community skepticism about the city’s goal of 100% literacy by third grade. After all, even in the most advanced education systems, at least 3% of kids fail to read by the end of primary school. She recalled responding, “What if your child is part of that 3%?”

Principals and teachers talk about the Brazilian concept of *pedagogia da presença*, or pedagogy of presence. Often they will use the Portuguese word *acompanhamento* (accompaniment). Teachers see themselves walking alongside each student, providing continuous support and guidance; they feel the same support when they meet with their instructional coordinators. Similarly, superintendents visit classrooms in every school with their principals each week, sharing observations and discussing progress toward school goals. The schools in Sobral that are less successful are paired with more successful schools. This spirit of partnership makes any push toward

outcomes feel collaborative and supportive. As Francisca de Fatima Farias de Souza, principal of Emílio Sendim Elementary School, shares: “*Acompanhamento* is all about partnership, support, giving new ideas.”

American education reformers have coined the phrase “warm demanders” to describe educators who combine high expectations with nurturing support. The Sobralense use the Portuguese word *cobrança*, which does not have a direct English translation, but is similar to the verbs “charge” and “levy.” For a Sobralense, it blends the notion of accountability or “holding responsible” with strong support. A growth mindset is implicit with *cobrança*. As Aparecida Cassimiro de Lima, a second grade teacher, reflects on her conversations with each student following each formative assessment: “The most important part,” she shares, “is making that student see that this is a temporary result that can change at any moment, that this student has the amazing ability to grow and learn every day.”

In Sobral, this idea of *cobrança* is applied at every level in the education system, and adults also experience others pushing them toward their fullest potential. Within an atmosphere of support, a shared sense of accountability underscores the interactions. Francisca de Fatima Farias de Souza, principal of Emílio Sendim Public School, explains: “*Cobrança* is reminding everyone of their individual responsibilities and providing support so they can rise to the challenge. It’s saying, ‘Here’s what you’re expected to do; if you need any help to get there, I’m here for you.’”

Additionally, a feeling of warm affection and a sense of belonging pervades the schools: what educators call *acolhimento*—an “embrace” or a “warm welcome.” School leaders and teachers go out of their way to create a sense that the school community is a loving family. The warmth and trust that is built among principals, instructional coordinators, and teachers infuses the constant feedback loop that might otherwise feel harsh or judgmental. When a student is absent, it’s standard practice for schools to call the family, as it is in most U.S. schools. Sobral goes one step further: the principal often makes the call himself or herself and specifically references shared memories from school, conveying that they miss the student as a human being. Many Sobral educators also regularly visit students’ homes, sharing a coffee and conversation while getting to know students and their caregivers, further conveying that sense of belonging.

“What makes me happiest about my child’s school is this feeling of *acolhimento*,” says Maria Milene Lopes de Oliveira, mother of a first grader in Sobral. “I know that I’m leaving my child in a place where she feels good, welcome—where she feels at home.”

In Sobral schools, *acolhimento*, *acompanhamento*, and *cobrança* unite to create a culture in which every individual is loved, supported, and challenged towards the community’s ambitious goal of literacy for all. Students and adults alike feel seen and known, receive individualized follow-up, and strive towards their highest potential. This ambitious and human-centered mindset has been essential to Sobral’s transformation.

Universal literacy: achievable and scalable

As Sobral's leaders have risen to state and national leadership positions, they have shared Sobral's solutions with other municipalities across the state. The Lemann Foundation, founded by Brazilian businessman and philanthropist Jorge Paulo Lemann, has collaborated with Brazil's ministry of education to disseminate the city's ideas across the country.

Indeed, Sobral has made it abundantly clear that achieving near-universal literacy is not fantasy nor reserved for affluent communities: it is an achievable aim for any city, regardless of socioeconomic status. In the early 2000s, U.S. researcher Douglas Reeves coined the phrase "90/90/90 schools" to describe schools where 90% or more of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area. Sobral's achievement is similar, as is the achievement of other cities in Ceará.

In the U.S., charter management organizations like Rocketship Public Schools and Success Academies serve many students living in poverty who attain high levels of academic achievement. Bonita Unified in Los Angeles and Etiwanda Elementary in San Bernardino, the top scoring districts on the California Reading Coalition's Reading Report Card for low-income Latino students, further demonstrate that students can learn to read regardless of family income and English proficiency—if schools focus on that goal.

Sobral and nearby municipalities in Ceará have also demonstrated that the path to success is not mysterious, although it is multifaceted. It does not require superhuman feats, but it does require discipline and sustained focus. It takes resources, but is not cost-prohibitive. It doesn't need much technology. Instead, it requires aligning all parts of the system to focus on a strong instructional core, deep investment in building capacity at all levels, responsive iterations over time, and crucially, an unwavering belief in the potential for growth of both children and adults.

As Sobral's Secretary of Education Lima emphasized, "It's about deconstructing that myth, that stereotype that a disadvantaged child can't learn. That's not true. The thing that will ensure a child develops to her fullest potential is the quality of education she receives." Chris Ann Horsley, Bonita's former Director of Elementary Curriculum and now School Board member, echoed the importance of mindset: "Some people think that some kids can't learn; they blame it on parents' backgrounds. But all kids can. To see it in action is the biggest eye opener."

Today, Sobral schools score a 9.1 out of 10 on Brazil's national education quality index (IDEB) and are considered the top-ranked elementary school system in the country. Yet they continue their journey of improvement, adapting, and evolving. They have added school psychologists to help teachers integrate social and emotional skills into their classrooms, and to directly support students. In accordance with Brazil's federal push, Sobral's leaders are almost doubling the length of the school day (from four to seven hours), and using that time to emphasize social-emotional learning and leadership development. Lima, Sobral's current Secretary of Education, is investing in more technology in schools. He also has discussed taking on management of the

city's high schools (currently managed by the federal government) so that Sobral can align their schooling for students all the way through twelfth grade.

Reflecting on Sobral's remarkable progress and ongoing work, Arruda, part of the system's early transformation as Gomes' Secretary of Culture and now sharing its lessons as CEO of NGO Associação Bem Comum, remarked, "Schools are alive, classrooms are alive, teachers are constantly evolving."

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITIES

1. Over 90% literacy by second grade is achievable at scale. Sobral, despite its poverty, has achieved and sustained this level of success. Other cities in Ceará, as well as places in the U.S., provide additional proof that nearly all students, regardless of economic background, are capable.

Do you believe this to be true? Who in your community believes all students are able to read? What would it take to galvanize political will towards this goal?

2. We know how to achieve near-universal literacy. It's not mysterious, but it does require discipline, sustained focus, and responsive iteration over time. All parts of the school system must focus on a strong instructional core, which in turn requires deep, ongoing investment in teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders to build capacity.

What elements of your local system are already aligned with this approach? What aspects of your local system could most readily be adjusted to contribute towards universal literacy?

3. It takes a village to transform a system. Achieving and sustaining results requires a whole community of educators and leaders to step forward and open their hearts, engage their talents, work collaboratively, and push themselves and each other on behalf of students.

Who in your community is ready to work towards this goal? What is stopping you? What is one thing you could do next?



About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

The [Center on Reinventing Public Education](#) (CRPE) is a nonpartisan research organization at [Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College](#). We rigorously examine and test transformative ideas, using our research to inform action. We are truth tellers who combine forward-thinking ideas with empirical rigor. Since 1993, we have been untethered to any one ideology but unwavering in a core belief: public education is a goal—to prepare every child for citizenship, economic independence, and personal fulfillment—and not a particular set of institutions. From that foundation, we work to inform meaningful changes in policy and practice that will drive the public education system to meet the needs of every student.

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Other resources

The [Story of Sobral](#) is a 35-minute documentary film that captures the human stories behind Sobral's success and this report. Also available are [three condensed versions](#) of the film that cover different key aspects of Sobral's story.

This project is part of CRPE's [Scanning the World for Solutions](#) series, a collection of education innovations from across the globe that could be harnessed and scaled to address educational challenges within the United States.

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