A photograph of three children sitting outdoors in front of tall green grass. The child on the left is a young Black boy wearing a white t-shirt, holding a bright green book. The child in the middle is a girl with a red headband and a colorful bow, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, holding a cyan book. The child on the right is a girl with blonde hair, wearing a green t-shirt, holding a yellow book. The text is overlaid on the top right of the image.

**They say we can't get all of our  
kids to read. Don't believe it.  
But first, a story...**

**YOU WILL KNOW US BY  
OUR OUTCOMES**

The Literacy Revolution  
Has Begun

# A TEACHER. A CLASSROOM. A PROBLEM.



**"I suffered many sleepless nights trying to figure out ways to help these children."**

**~Teacher Toni Ann Plati**

Toni Ann Plati teaches first grade at Carl L. Dixon Primary School in Elmsford, New York. Now in her second decade of instruction, she's loved educating children ever since a young age. She attributes this passion to the teachers who encouraged her to always do her best, who built up her confidence by believing in her.

"I wanted to do that for other kids," says Toni Ann. "Teachers are in this profession to help students succeed in life. The first step is to work on a child's self-esteem. Students work harder at tasks when they know someone believes in them."

But Toni had a problem.

In spite of her strong desire to help her students, she couldn't find the time to consistently work one-on-one with those children needing extra support, especially when it came to reading.

As a teacher, I felt helpless," she says. "I suffered many sleepless nights trying to figure out ways to help these children. Students, even at this young age, desperately want to be like their peers who are able to read and write. When they can't, it's a blow to their esteem."



# THE PROBLEM GOES DEEPER — AND WIDER



**85% of juvenile offenders possess literacy deficiencies.**  
**Source: National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

According to the National Assessment of Progress, more than one-third of American children lack fundamental reading skills. Let that sink in for a minute. In the United States, the richest country in the world, fully one third of children cannot properly read.

Worse, literacy is a gateway problem. It has been said third grade is a key bench mark. If a child cannot read by the end of third grade, not only is this individual prone to the self-esteem problems keeping Toni Ann up at night — they are consigned to be behind for the rest of their life.

The US National Institutes of Health has found low literacy levels to be highly correlated with other poor outcomes, such as higher hospitalization rates and greater outpatient visits later in life. Illiterate adults are also less likely to properly follow prescribed medication intake and engage in crucial preventative health care screenings.

Beyond these deleterious health issues, illiteracy opens the door to greater criminal activity risks. The National Criminal Justice Reference Service reports 85% of juvenile offenders possess literacy deficiencies. "Even for those who make it through education or fail to make it through but do not interact with the criminal system as kids, illiteracy can still be a huge problem" states GenFKD, a project of YoungAmerica.Org. "It is extremely difficult to obtain professional positions with literacy deficiencies, especially if illiteracy prevented someone from finishing school, which increases their chances of being unemployed by at least twice as much."

It's therefore little wonder that the Literacy Foundation reports illiteracy also leads to higher teen pregnancy and lower lifetime income levels.

# BUT CAN WE DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?



In 2008, Dr. Carol and Jay Connor had an epiphany. Although they had been married since 1979, the two had been on separate professional tracks. Carol was a Professor of Psychology and a Senior Research Scientist at Arizona State University, and had previously held positions at Florida State University, Florida Center for Reading Research, and the University of Michigan.

Jay had demonstrated leadership in the business, nonprofit, and public policy arenas. His book, *Community Visions, Community Solutions: Grantmaking for Comprehensive Impact* still offers the most extensive analysis available on the art of linking initiatives, technologies, and systems in implementing community solutions. Jay also served as a Divisional President and Senior Vice President Marketing for two Fortune 100 corporations, so he knew what was required to build a viable business to support Carol's vision.

While Jay applied his business management experience to bringing community-wide solutions to social problems through his nonprofit, the Collaboratory for Community Solutions, Carol was dedicated to her passion: researching ways to apply technology and professional development to facilitate teachers' ability to raise literacy proficiency among k-3 school students.

Together, they believed their skills could mesh to foster incredible results. Carol wanted to go beyond single teacher training to effect widespread change on how reading was taught. And Jay had developed the skills to help manifest this change.

Their big idea? Target entire school districts instead of individual educators to convince them to adopt an evidence-based, proven system to increase students' reading abilities across the board.

# SEEDS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Combining Carol's promising literacy research with Jay's knack for transforming the theoretical into practical application, the former began Rubicon Partners, Learning Ovations' predecessor. It was awarded a Small Business Research Program (SBIR) grant to redesign and rewrite all of the software code so that Carol's A2i (Assessment to Instruction) program could be scaled in the educational marketplace.

There were two important outcomes needing pursuit:

1. Carol's perfecting of a reading education system for teachers.
2. Jay's solution for scaling this system to districts throughout the country.

# SUCCESS MEANS TRANSFORMING THE PARADIGM



Reading is not a natural function. Our brains must learn to “decode” words to make sense of them.

Still, the biggest hurdle was changing the prevailing educational mindset. For too long, experts believed reading to be an automatic skill every child possessed — something that just needed to be developed.

The reality is reading is **not** a natural function. The brain must learn how to “decode” words on a page to make sense of them.

According to the National Reading Panel, there are 3 elements to literacy success:

1. Instruction must be based on each student's individual needs.
2. Because reading isn't a naturally occurring ability, instruction must be explicit and systematic.
3. The optimum learning environment brings students with similar needs to together to learn in small groups in heterogeneous classrooms.

# THEY WEREN'T ALONE IN THEIR THINKING. YET SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS PERSISTED



As recently as 2016, surveys showed 92% of educational leaders agreed that the above three takeaways were the required elements for literacy success. Yet, 87% of this same group also felt overwhelmed with trying to accomplish meaningful change in their general education k-3 classrooms.

Due to Carol's research being grounded in thousands of classroom hours, she developed the evidence base to close the belief and practice gap by finetuning the A2i Professional Support System for classroom use, identifying best practices. She then created and rigorously tested algorithms to identify what type and amount of instruction each child needs to maximize literacy gains. Algorithms were also created to demonstrate effectiveness and ensure the features within A2i point teachers to optimal learning activities.

Meanwhile, in 2014, Rubicon Partners officially relaunched as Learning Ovation when Jay obtained a grant from the ED/IES FastTrack SBIR Program to enable the organization to do the practical research to position its solution in the educational marketplace.

# NEW MINDSET. NEW APPROACH.



MINDSET

For years, our country's educational approach has been generalized with the emphasis on standardizing education for every child. The key takeaway from Learning Ovations' research is that we must individualize for children to get the outcomes we seek.

What's revolutionary about Learning Ovations' approach is that it uses abundant data that no single human — or group of humans — could ever amass, much less study, to determine an individualistic approach to each student in the class.

A good way to understand this concept is to consider a scenario in which you have five third-graders in a classroom. One advanced kid may be reading Harry Potter, two other kids may have average reading skills, and the other two may have no familiarity at all with books.

These two struggling students may not even know their letters, much less how to read. Yet, the present classroom structure would teach all these kids the same. What individualized instruction delivers to the fifth child that doesn't even know their letters is a whole set of support activities and curriculum choices that would be helpful to them, but not needed for the other three children, much less the individual reading Harry Potter.

**The key takeaway from Learning Ovations' research is that we must individualize for children to get the outcomes we seek.**

# HOW IT WORKS



# Learning Oventions

YOU WILL KNOW US BY YOUR OUTCOMES

Learning Oventions' innovative Azi platform offers:

- Quick assessments and progress tracking for each student.
- An easy-to-use dashboard to help teachers organize personalized student reading instruction and reinforcement into teacher-guided and student-supported learning.
- Teacher-focused classroom structure for small group instruction based on individual requirements while being sensitive to children's social and emotional needs.
- Support for teachers' existing materials. (Azi gives specific lesson suggestions for each child and small group in the reading and ELA programs already in the classroom.) There is NO need to purchase new student materials since Azi helps teachers maximize resources they are already familiar with, while providing additional, complementary evidence-based resources.

# TONI ANN'S STORY (PART 2)



"Reading is a difficult skill to teach children," says Toni Ann. "The difficulty in teaching reading for me stems from large group instruction."

Before A2i, Toni Ann would teach a skill in a large group, then send students to their seats to accomplish tasks. Some assignments were modified for the students needing it, but not consistently.

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Desperate to change its underperforming literacy rate, her district decided to adopt the A2i program in 2018.

"Would it make a difference?," Toni Ann wondered at the time.

"I decided to give the program a chance," she says. "The results floored me. First, I loved the small group setting throughout my literacy block. Student groups were able to work independently while I was able to deliver guided instruction to other groups."

# TONI ANN'S STORY (PART 2)



**“The results floored me. I loved the small group setting throughout my literacy block.”**  
**~Teacher Toni Ann Plati**

Work was differentiated for all student groups, allowing Toni Ann to notice how relaxed the children suddenly were. Even better, they began to develop a great sense of accomplishment within themselves.

“They loved working in groups! I also noticed the ‘whole child’ began to develop. Struggling students felt good about themselves and were eager to learn. Test scores also rose to a level that surpassed my expectations.”

Nowadays, Toni Ann can sit in an intimate setting with a small group and observe what each child has learned and who still needs to grasp better skills. Gone too, are her sleepless nights.

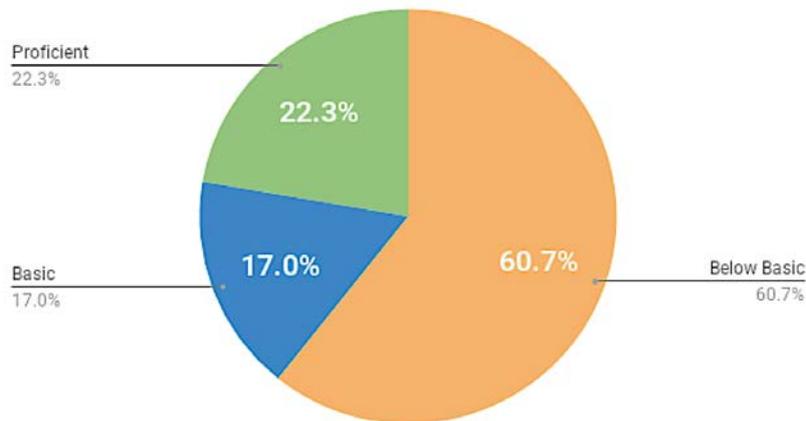
“As a result of A2i, I feel excited and happy for the children,” says Toni Ann. It’s so nice to see them evolve, academically and emotionally throughout the year. Like the teachers who positively influenced me, it gives me a sense of pride knowing I can help these children in a new and effective way.”

# LET THE OUTCOMES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

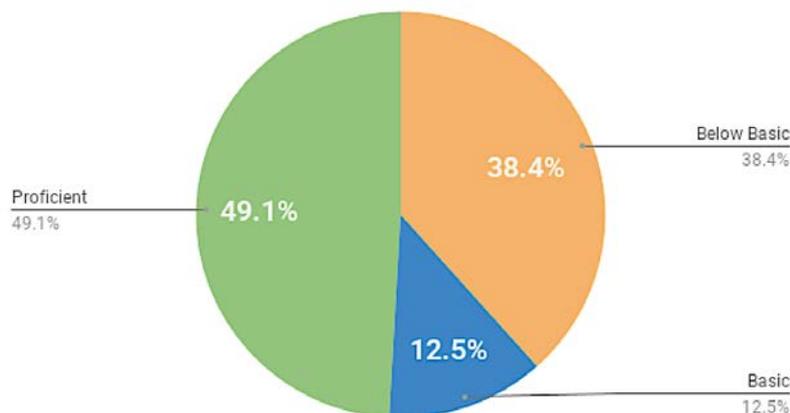
We are so excited to share the following results. The below pie charts display the progress made by Learning Ovations Schools over the 2018-19 school year.

60.7% of first grade students began in the fall reading at below basic levels. However, due to our support, only 38.4% ended the year at this level. Even better, the percentage **of grade-level teams averaging proficient and advanced levels increased by more than 120% over the school year!**

FALL 2018: Grade 1 Learning Ovations Outcomes (Yr 1)



SPRING 2019: Grade 1 Learning Ovations Outcomes (Yr 1)



# LET THE OUTCOMES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Such stellar results stem from our organization's ESSA-strong, research-based A2i Professional Support System backed by seven randomized control trials, empowering K-3 educators to individualize instruction. Since its inception, Learning Ovations has implemented A2i throughout the country in order to achieve national priorities in coordination with the U.S. Department of Education.

Here are some of the highlights of its efficacious model:

**Solid Academic Footing:** Learning Ovations received a federal ESSA Education Innovation and Research expansion grant based on rigorous research.

**Ease of Use/Complementary Support:** A2i is designed to align with state and district strategies focused on improving K-3 reading and overall student achievement, including:

**-MTSS/RTI.** A2i supports multi-tiered systems of support in systematically addressing support for all students.

**-SPED, ELL, and CCSS.** Because A2i uses existing curriculum materials, it's optimized for state standards and suitable for a range of student levels, from mainstream SPED and ELL to enrichment

## Cost Reductions

**-K-3 Literacy Savings:** Providing quality K-3 literacy instruction is more affordable than costly intervention in later grades.

**-Community-Wide Savings:** 3rd grade literacy is linked to many keystone outcomes, providing long-term, community-wide savings.

## ONE FINAL WORD FROM TONI ANN



**“Many of the children who entered my classroom in September voiced the fact they didn’t like to read. Yet by the end of the year, they had found a new love for it. All due to Azi. They were now excited to read! And, my students’ excitement for learning sparked a new excitement within me. I consider myself so lucky to work in a profession that touches the lives of many in such a positive way.”**



# DON'T JUST TAKE TONI ANN'S WORD FOR IT

## Here are other educators and administrators talking about their experiences working with Learning Oventions:

"Azi is the tool that helps us organize our effort. Its evidence base gives us confidence. But it is Learning Oventions that represents the complete change in pedagogy that we are embracing. We talk about the goal as becoming a Learning Oventions school."

~Jeff Olender, Principal, Carl L. Dixon Elementary School, Elmsford School District in New York

"[Learning Oventions] understood our needs and adapted to our resources."

~Maria Villegas, Director of Curriculum, Anaheim School District in California

"Azi at School 29 has been a match made in heaven. We have successfully and smoothly achieved the same mindset. Azi means too Amazing 2 Imagine!

~Jorge Ventura, Principal, School 29, Paterson School District in New Jersey

"I think Azi has impacted more than just the student outcomes in our school. It has also affected the attitudes of the teachers. At first, they were skeptical about what it could really do for us, but once they started seeing the results — genuine results — it made a huge difference in the instruction that was occurring in the classrooms. At our most recent progress monitoring assessment, 48.8% of our first-grade students scored above the 75% percentile on their STAR reading exam. That has never happened here at Beach Avenue Elementary School and this created even more excitement in the classroom!"

~Michele Mower, Principal, Beech Avenue Elementary

**They said we couldn't get all of our kids to read, but we didn't believe them. And now you know why neither should you. Anyone can promise change, but you can trust Learning Oventions to deliver revolutionary outcomes. For more information, please reach us @ [contact@learningovations.com](mailto:contact@learningovations.com).**



**Learning Oventions**

YOU WILL KNOW US BY YOUR OUTCOMES

# MEET OUR TEAM



## Jay Connor, Founder/CEO of Learning Oventions, Inc.

Jay is the Founder/CEO of Learning Oventions, Inc. The mission driving Learning Oventions is getting all students reading at, or above, grade level by the end of third grade. Jay is passionate about this work and is actively bringing the research-based technology and professional development tool, Azi, to schools across the nation. He also has leadership experience in business, nonprofit, and public policy arenas. His book, published Spring 2003 (second edition 2005) by Wilder Press, *Community Visions, Community Solutions: Grantmaking for Comprehensive Impact* is the most extensive discussion available on the art of linking sectors, initiatives, technologies, space and systems in implementing community solutions.

Jay currently holds a courtesy appointment at the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. He is a member of the Board of Directors at the Beall Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Merage School of Business at the University of California, Irvine, where he teaches Social Enterprise to graduate and undergraduate students. He is recognized as an international speaker on system outcomes, collective impact, social entrepreneurship, and the art of bringing rigorous research to practice.

# MEET OUR TEAM



## **Amanda Jacobs, Vice President for District Outcomes**

Amanda Jacobs is responsible for implementing the A2i technology at scale. With a master's degree in both Special Education and Administration, Amanda has been a school principal at both the elementary and secondary levels. She was a KIPP founding learning specialist with an emphasis on special education as well as a classroom teacher in K-12th grade. She has been a mentor teacher at Arizona State University and Relay Graduate School for education. She currently resides in Phoenix, AZ and has utilized A2i to drive literacy outcomes across the nation.

# MEET OUR TEAM



## **Sarah Siegal, PhD, Vice President for Research & Practice**

Sarah received her master's degree from Florida State University (FSU) where she was funded through the Predoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training (PIRT) Fellow program, part of the Florida Center for Reading Research. Following the completion of her master's, Sarah joined the Developmental Psychology Graduate Program and the Institute for the Science of Teaching & Learning at Arizona State University where she completed her Doctorate degree.

Her research has focused on the development of reading, writing, and spelling skills in elementary and middle school students, as well as educational technology, writing instruction, classroom observation, and writing-assessment development. In addition to co-authoring book chapters and research papers, she has managed multiple grant-funded research projects and was instrumental in designing and developing the Azi software platform and online professional development. She continued her work as a postdoc at the University of California – Irvine, running data collection, professional development, and technology training at partner schools in Arizona. Currently, she is pursuing the mission of improving students' reading outcomes in her position at Learning Ovations Inc. as the Vice President for Research & Practice.