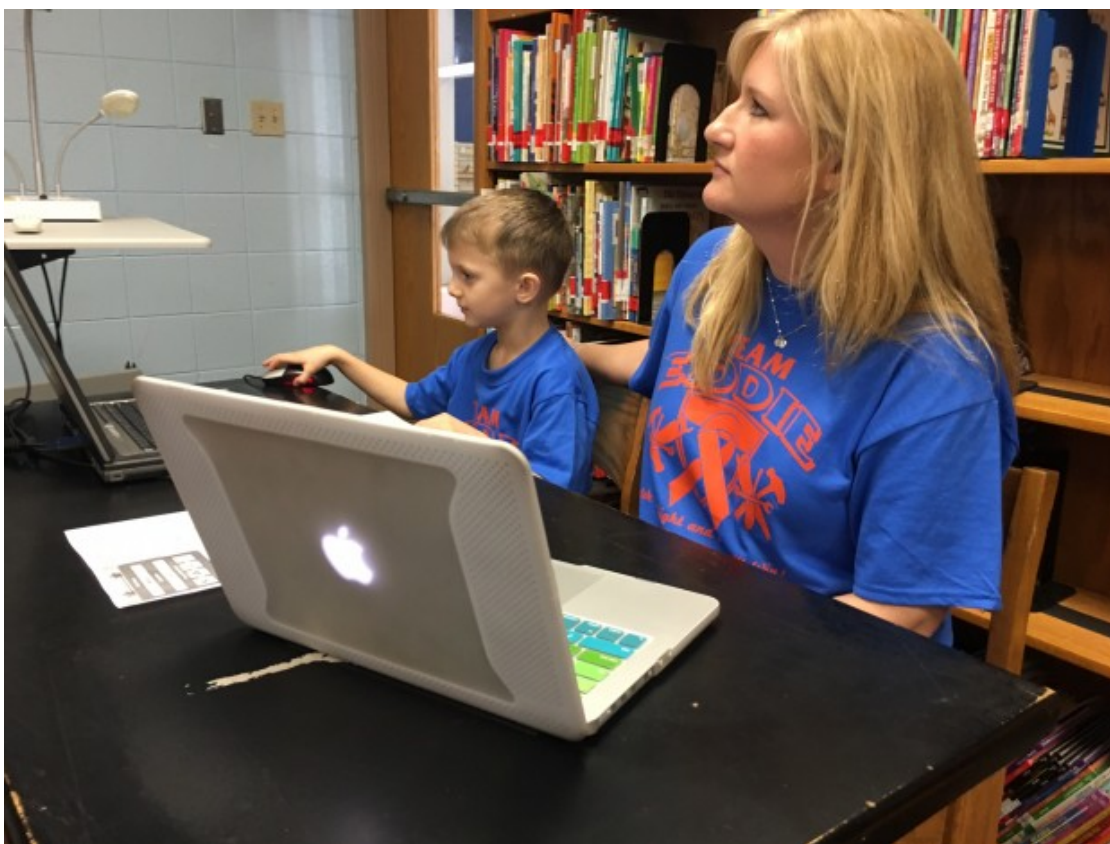


'Literacy emergency' declared | The State Journal



More than 70 percent of FIS third-graders can't read at grade level [Frankfort Independent Schools](#) Superintendent Houston Barber declared a "literacy emergency" Tuesday, acknowledging that more than 70 percent of third graders in his district can't read at an appropriate grade level. Most of those students also live in poverty, Barber said, and studies show they're four times more likely not to earn their high school diploma. The epidemic is not just a school-wide problem. It's also a community-wide problem, according to local government, business, civic and religious leaders. "When students fall behind it drags everyone else down," Frankfort Mayor Bill May said, noting that business and industry executives often look for well-educated and well-trained communities before locating there. That's why May and others joined Barber Tuesday to unveil a community-wide effort to better combat reading deficiencies through technology. Specifically, it's an app called [Footsteps2Brilliance](#) that uses songs, animation and narratives to engage readers on SmartPhones, iPads and other mobile devices. Even though Barber says 2 out of every 3 students in his district comes from a poor family, nearly all still have access to a cell phone. So city school leaders purchased licenses to enable students — and everyone in the community — to access the mobile app freely. It will especially help the number of students who have no books at their homes, they say. "We only have kids for six hours a day. When they're not in school there is learning loss," said Barber,

who recommended that parents download the app and expose their child to it at least 15 minutes a day. Barber cited research that shows students who regularly use the app gain a school year's worth of vocabulary and reading comprehension in one month. Second Street School kindergarten teacher Stacey Ross has already implemented the app with her students. She says it's great at tracking vocabulary words and progress for individual students. "As a teacher it gives me reports on every student's accomplishments," said Ross, who can then share the data with parents. Second Street kindergartner Bryan Starkey has been using the app in the classroom and at home on his mother's iPad. He's already read 29 books this year and said he likes the Footsteps2Brilliance program "because you get to play games and read books." Educators and others hope the community-wide program can be a model for others. Frankfort Independent will host a parent-training session for the app at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Frankfort High School, 328 Shelby St. For more information about the app visit [here](#).