

THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS (SUMMARY)

A coordinated, well-managed literacy system is essential if learners are going to improve their literacy skills. To achieve such a system, all stakeholders in the literacy planning process participated in one of nine content-specific task forces. Each group was charged with creating literacy goals for the particular topic area, determining the activities necessary to achieve those goals, and outlining the benchmarks by which these goals would be measured. All groups expressed the need for a more coordinated, integrated literacy system; nearly all task forces specifically indicated the need for a new collaborative organization to carry out their proposed recommendations. A summary of each task force's recommendations is below.

Community- and Faith-Based Organizations Providing Literacy Services

Charge: Determine the specific needs of community and faith-based organizations providing literacy services. An increased commitment to volunteer services is central to the community and faith-based organizations task force's recommendations. The group argues that without dedicated volunteers, most literacy providers would have limited ability to serve learners. The group recommends that a new literacy entity focus on the effective recruitment, training, placement and recognition of volunteers. In addition, they suggest that this new organization offer resources to providers that help identify services needed and available in neighborhoods of greatest need. The task force reiterates the need for programming that meets the varying needs of all learners, including adults, children and families.

Community and School Partnerships

Charge: Determine the ways that schools and colleges can partner with literacy service providers. The community and schools partnership task force recommends that a new literacy entity look for and support opportunities to build effective relationships between schools and literacy providers. The task force suggests developing a clearinghouse of literacy programs that is organized by school district and provider agency and documents collaboration and examples of replicable partnerships. In addition, the task force wants the new literacy collaborative to compile and disseminate best practices to the literacy and educational community that focus on improving learners' academic achievement.

Curriculum, Instruction and Promising Practices

Charge: Identify effective curriculum, instruction, and promising practices. This task force's primary recommendation is to develop a clearinghouse for curriculum, instruction and promising practices. The group expressed interest in building a more formal network to help providers build partnerships, foster interconnections, link to online libraries and explore distance learning options. The group suggests that all professional development opportunities be offered in a collaborative—not competitive—environment that promotes best practices and empowers teachers and literacy providers to learn new skills.

Evaluation and Accountability

Charge: Explore the success of the assessment, placement, and outcomes of learners in literacy programs. According to the evaluation and accountability task force, for there to be true accountability, every literacy service provider must achieve minimum performance goals and develop indicators of program quality. This task force recommends that an outside entity review all evaluation instruments/tools currently being used by area literacy providers. If enough commonalities exist, the task force proposes that a non-direct service provider develop, issue and interpret a standardized literacy assessment for all agencies.

Family Literacy

*Charge: Create strategies to ensure parents, a child's first literacy contact, have what they need to raise literate children. The family literacy task force takes recommends that any community-wide literacy efforts build upon and strengthen existing efforts to address gaps in literacy for children from birth to age five, most notably the *Invest in Children* initiative. The group suggests working with child development experts to: determine if childcare providers can expand services to include literacy and parent education; explore ways that the school system can foster family literacy activities, especially those that link parent literacy and homework support; and build upon family literacy resources and strengths already present in*

the community. Finally, the task force recommends that a coordinating body develop an overall literacy marketing campaign with a component that emphasizes and targets family literacy.

Fund Development

Charge: Determine strategies to increase available funding, leverage dollars and build creative partnerships to increase the return on investments and extend funds to their maximum potential. The fund development task force's primary recommendation is to create a collaborative body that: leverages public and private dollars from previously untapped national, state and local funding sources; provides technical assistance; increases funding opportunity awareness; and coordinates grant applications. Nearly all task force groups, irrespective of their content focus, made recommendations to create a community-wide approach to fundraising. In addition, the fund development task force recommends that an outside entity establish accountability tools to evaluate providers' performance and determine donors and volunteers' return on investment.

Professional Development

Charge: Explore the training and professional development support needs of literacy service providers. The professional development task force's focus is on identifying and disseminating successful literacy curriculum models. Like the many of the task forces, the professional development task force is committed to introducing a regional approach to the delivery of both literacy services and professional development. The group recommends that a new entity expand its definition of literacy to encompass more than reading and writing; professional development materials should be offered to all service providers and must focus on how literacy levels impact learners' ability to manage technology, finances, culture, economics, media, family, health and employment.

Recruitment, Placement, and Retention

Charge: Outline strategies to increase learner recruitment and retention, build capacity, improve placement and increase persistence. This task force recommends a more strategic approach to recruiting and retaining learners in literacy programs. The task force suggests that potential learners can connect with all community services through a single contact number and web address. The group recommends establishing an entity that will: improve learner orientation process and address student concerns raised during orientation; gauge learner progress and celebrate success; offer continuous training of instructors to keep them up-to-date on best practices and emerging techniques; and design transitional strategies for when learners finish classes, reach goals and move on to additional courses or employment.

Social Justice

Charge: Identify the needs of learners, focusing on those who have limited literacy skills and lack other support mechanisms. The social justice task force's primary recommendation is to build a literacy network that supports and provides access for all learners. They suggested that an outside entity offer ongoing focus groups aimed at understanding the barriers that prevent learners from accessing literacy services. The taskforce expects to use this feedback to create a more learn-centered literacy system. The group also recommends developing formal partnerships with a wide variety of previously untapped community groups. Finally, the social justice task force underscores the need for an improved system that is based on equity and inclusively (developing curriculum for learners and professional development opportunities for providers that are sensitive to diverse background, education levels and cultures).

Workforce Partnerships

Charge: Identify opportunities for collaboration between the education and business communities to meet workforce needs. The workforce partnerships' recommendations center on improving all aspects of workplace-based initiatives. The task force suggests that a coordinating body assemble best practices that emphasize improvements in worker literacy, revise job descriptions to include required literacy competencies, increase locations that offer workforce literacy training and build formal partnerships with employers. The task force also recommends that a new literacy entity strengthen connections between pre-and post-employment efforts to help learners build a career ladder of success. This proposed coordinating body should establish a well-defined workforce literacy system that links providers, learners and employers. Finally, the task force recommends that an outside entity establish annual benchmarks

measure outcomes and plan for collaborative system improvements. When objectives are met, incentive opportunities should recognize achievements.