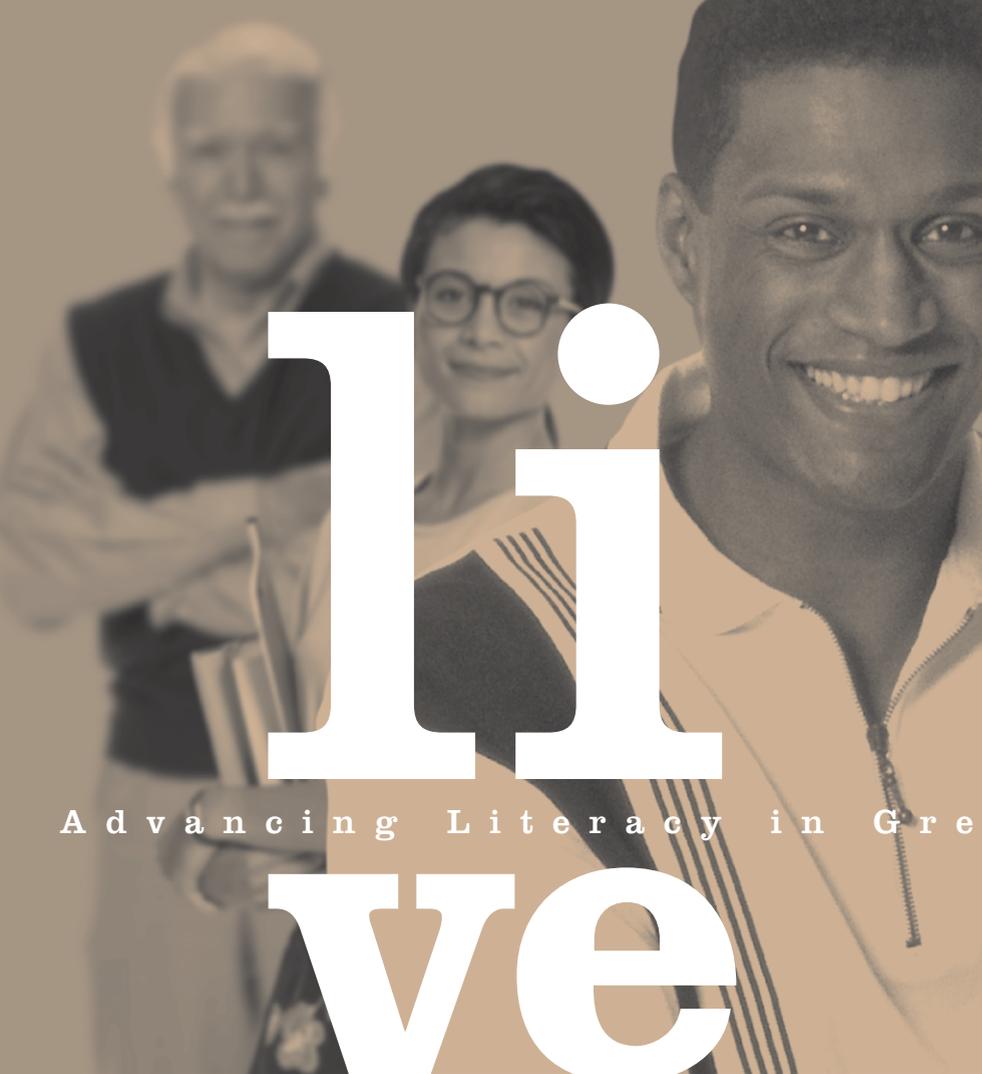


The Literacy Cooperative
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Advancing Literacy in Greater Cleveland

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Advancing Literacy in Greater Cleveland

The Literacy Cooperative
Planning Process Report and Action Plan for Literacy

The Cleveland Foundation

The George Gund Foundation

The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation

March 2006

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Advancing Literacy in Greater Cleveland

Introduction

What would you do if . . .

- You pick up a new prescription and ask about the dosage. The pharmacist replies, “All the information is on the label.” You leave, unsure of how much to take or how often.
- Your daughter hands you a school permission slip to sign. You pause for a moment, wondering what it’s for but too embarrassed to ask your child.
- You are faced with an unexpected and costly car repair. You have trouble evaluating your options between using a credit card for payment or a neighborhood cash advance service.
- Your kindergarten students are unable to recognize the letters of the alphabet. As a teacher, you worry about how this will delay early reading skills.
- You are seeking to hire a press operator for your business. Most of the applicants lack the necessary skills required for the position.

Unfortunately, these scenarios are all too familiar for many Greater Cleveland residents. Strong literacy skills—the ability to read, write, speak, compute, and problem-solve—are essential for people to succeed in our community. In the home, literacy skills promote close family interactions, informed decision-making, and lifelong learning. In school, strong literacy skills result in more capable students and higher levels of achievement. In the workplace, literacy is the foundation for success, particularly in a global environment that demands high performance and technology proficiency. Ultimately, healthy communities and families have literacy at their core, with informed and engaged residents who are better equipped to recognize and overcome civic, social, and economic challenges.

Currently, an array of dedicated organizations in our community provide literacy services to a wide range of people—from preschool-aged children gaining early literacy skills through adults looking

to earn their GED or better their employment prospects. ***Despite these meaningful efforts, literacy levels in Greater Cleveland have remained largely unchanged since 1990.***

Formal communication and coordination between organizations is sporadic, and few commonly accepted performance standards exist to measure learner gains. Awareness of available literacy services is limited, and services are not always reaching those most in need, even among individuals who actively seek to improve their literacy skills. In fact, there are far more potential learners than those currently being served. As underutilized as the system is, the provider network struggles to meet current demand. Literacy providers are understaffed and under-funded and do not have the resources to serve all who are in need.



In short, Greater Cleveland lacks the capacity to effectively coordinate literacy, and to track, monitor, and enhance the quality, consistency, and impact of literacy services.

Seeking creative and new solutions to the problem of low literacy and its implications, a broad spectrum of the community—literacy providers, county and municipal governments, foundations, school districts, libraries, nonprofits, businesses, correction agencies, human services, childcare services, workforce investment, community centers, higher education, and faith-based organizations—engaged in a 14-month planning process to examine the issue.

Collectively, this group came to a consensus on two key recommendations:

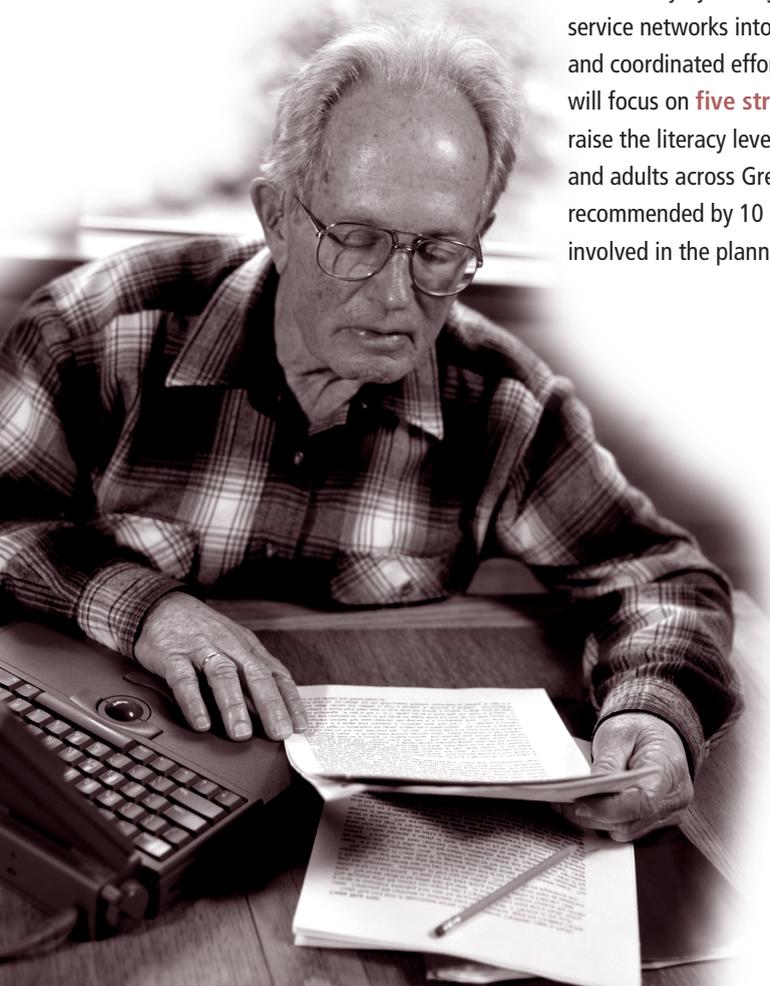
1 **Develop an Action Plan for Literacy endorsed by all stakeholders.**

Stakeholders recommended that an Action Plan for Literacy be created to guide the community's efforts to raise literacy levels. The plan will provide opportunities for all to actively participate in building solutions to the problem of low literacy. It also will be the standard by which progress is measured.

2 **Create a collaborative organization to carry out the plan.**

Given the magnitude of the plan as outlined, building a coordinated, integrated, well-managed literacy network requires a centralized system and structural design. As suggested by the planning process, the design will be based on a new set of guiding principles and quality standards that lead to good practice and excellent programming.





These key recommendations will be realized through **The Literacy Cooperative**, a new entity working on behalf of the community to put forth a new vision for literacy service delivery. This effort will bring together all providers to address the issues of low literacy by linking other groups and service networks into a greatly expanded and coordinated effort. The Cooperative will focus on **five strategic areas** to raise the literacy levels of children, youth, and adults across Greater Cleveland. As recommended by 10 separate task forces involved in the planning process.

The Cooperative will:

- 1** Provide a centralized information and referral center;
- 2** Ensure that training, curriculum, and instruction techniques are available to providers;
- 3** Establish evaluation and accountability standards;
- 4** Identify and secure public and private funding for literacy; and
- 5** Launch a public awareness and outreach campaign.

All of these strategies aim to build system capacity and increase learner recruitment, retention, and skill level. The Cooperative expects to flow funds through to the community with a well-managed system of checks and balances and a seal of approval for organizations meeting high-quality performance standards. It will help to quantify return on investments for learners and funders. Finally, it will encourage partnerships that increase the likelihood of cost-effective programming and enhanced system capacity.

Why is Literacy Important?

Literacy skills affect parent-child interaction, school performance, graduation rates, employment opportunities, earnings, and the quality of life in our communities. Today, people require more sophisticated skills than ever before to navigate health and financial systems, cope with advanced technology, and meet the demands of more high-skilled jobs. With improved literacy skills, individuals:

- **Gain access** to information and resources;
- **Have a voice** to express ideas and opinions with confidence;
- **Take action** to solve problems and make decisions without having to rely on others; and
- **Develop lifelong learning** in order to keep up with the world as it changes.²

Strong literacy skills are necessary to help people reach their potential in their roles as family members, employees, and citizens. Children exposed early to reading and writing develop literacy skills that promote lifelong learning and education. As parents improve their literacy skills, it becomes easier for them to be engaged in their children's education, both at home and at school. Families and individuals with increased literacy skills are better equipped to make decisions that influence everything from health care treatments to financial practices to employment decisions.

Equally important, a literate workforce attracts and retains enterprises that offer jobs with benefits and higher wages, thereby creating a stronger economy for Greater Cleveland. With the dramatic shift from a labor-based to a knowledge-based economy, it is increasingly important to have a workforce with the appropriate skills. For entry-level workers, this means

having the skills necessary to obtain a job. For incumbent workers—those already in the workforce—increased literacy skills enable employees to climb the career ladder. Transitioning incumbent workers out of entry-level jobs creates opportunities for new employees. This mobility is beneficial for both individuals and the economy.

Finally, literacy is fundamental to active citizenship and full participation in a democracy. Barriers to literacy, often seen as the individual's burden, must be viewed anew as the entire community's challenge. As a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political, and economic activities, and for lifelong learning, literacy helps grow an informed electorate and energizes communities toward justice, equity, and equality.³

Today, people require more sophisticated skills than ever before to navigate health and financial systems, cope with advanced technology, and meet the demands of more high-skilled jobs.

What Does Literacy Mean?

In the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the U.S. Congress defines literacy as:

“an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.”

While the word *literacy* may immediately conjure up images of a parent reading to a child or an adult reading the newspaper, the above definition suggests that it can be considered in many contexts:

Workforce Literacy—an individual’s knowledge of and ability to meet the expectations of the workplace, in terms of both job-specific skills and issues of personal responsibility and behavior, so that a worker can obtain and retain employment and increase his/her productivity, salary, and benefits.

Financial Literacy—an individual’s ability to understand and discuss principles involved in earning, spending, saving, and investing, and to read and understand such documents as billing statements, pay statements, estimates, loan agreements, and other financial documents.

Health Literacy—an individual’s ability to obtain, process, and understand basic information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions, including the ability to access information, recognize health indicators, access care, navigate institutions, complete forms, provide consent, communicate with professionals, provide information for assessment and diagnosis, understand directions, and follow regimens. ^{4,5}

English-Language Literacy for Speakers of Other Languages—an individual’s ability to transfer native language skills to English and to function effectively in an English-speaking environment.

The National Adult Literacy Survey, conducted for the U.S. Department of Education in 1992 and 2005, notes that those individuals with Level 1 and Level 2 literacy skills, the most basic, are likely to be excluded from all but minimum wage work.⁶ They are left at a severe economic disadvantage and have difficulty meeting life’s daily demands.⁷ Although many adults with Level 1 or Level 2 literacy can perform some reading tasks, their skills are not sufficient to function in everyday life. People at these low levels have difficulty reading street signs, using ATMs, reading the newspaper, or reading the dosage on a medicine bottle. *In fact, the National Governors’ Association and the National Educational Goals Panel concluded that Level 3 literacy is the minimum necessary to function in today’s society.*⁸

Individuals with higher literacy levels tend to have better communication skills, more opportunities for education and job advancement, and higher earnings.

Tasks that can be completed at each literacy level⁹

People with Level 1 Literacy can:

- **Locate** one piece of information in a sports article;
- **Locate** the expiration date on a driver's license; and
- **Total** a bank deposit entry.

People with Level 2 Literacy can:

- **Interpret** appliance warranty instructions;
- **Locate** an intersection on a street map; and
- **Calculate** postage and fees when using certified mail.

People with Level 3 Literacy can:

- **Write** a brief letter to explain a credit card billing error;
- **Use** a bus schedule to choose the correct bus to get to work on time; and
- **Determine** the discount on a car insurance bill if paid in full within 15 days.

People with Level 4 Literacy can:

- **Explain** the difference between two types of benefits at work;
- **Use information** in a table to determine the percent of days in January below 10 degrees; and
- **Calculate** the correct change when given prices on a menu.

People with Level 5 Literacy can:

- **Compare** and summarize different approaches lawyers use during a trial;
- **Use information** in a table to compare two credit cards and explain the differences; and
- **Compute** the cost to carpet a room in a house.

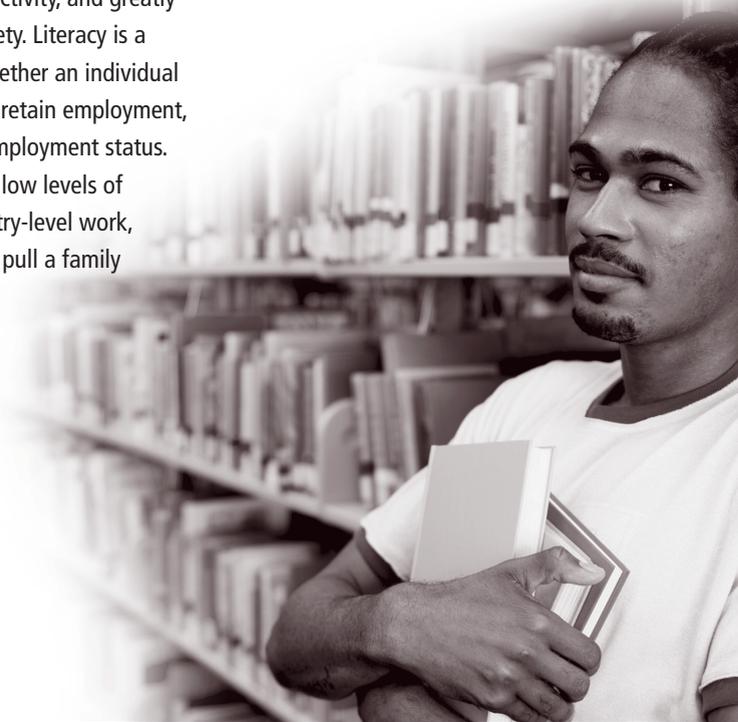
Individuals with Level 1 and Level 2 literacy skills, the most basic, are likely to be excluded from all but minimum wage work.

Understanding the Need in Greater Cleveland

Far too many Greater Cleveland residents have literacy below acceptable levels. Costs associated with low literacy attainment include lost earning power, lost family stability, lack of ability to assist children to learn, and lost hope for a better future. Low literacy impedes economic success, reduces productivity, and greatly increases costs to society. Literacy is a key determinant of whether an individual can gain employment, retain employment, and improve her/his employment status. While individuals with low levels of literacy may obtain entry-level work, it is rarely sufficient to pull a family out of poverty.

Nationally, low literacy skills cost businesses and taxpayers \$20 billion in lost wages, profits, and productivity annually.

Greater Cleveland cannot afford the costs that accompany low literacy. Addressing literacy, and its link to education and employment, is particularly important to Greater Cleveland's economic success given the following statistics for Cuyahoga County.



Child and Youth Literacy

Early Learners—Are They Ready?

One child out of five is born to a mother without a high school education.

Children born to mothers with low levels of education are less likely to demonstrate emergent literacy skills, such as letter recognition and letter/sound relationships—important precursors to reading and writing and strong predictors of later literacy skills.

Father involvement is equally important, even for very young children. Good fathering during infancy and early childhood contributes to the development of emotional security, curiosity, and math and verbal skills. Involvement by fathers in children's schooling, such as volunteering at school and attending school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and class events, is associated with higher grades, greater school enjoyment, and lower chances of suspension or expulsion from school.

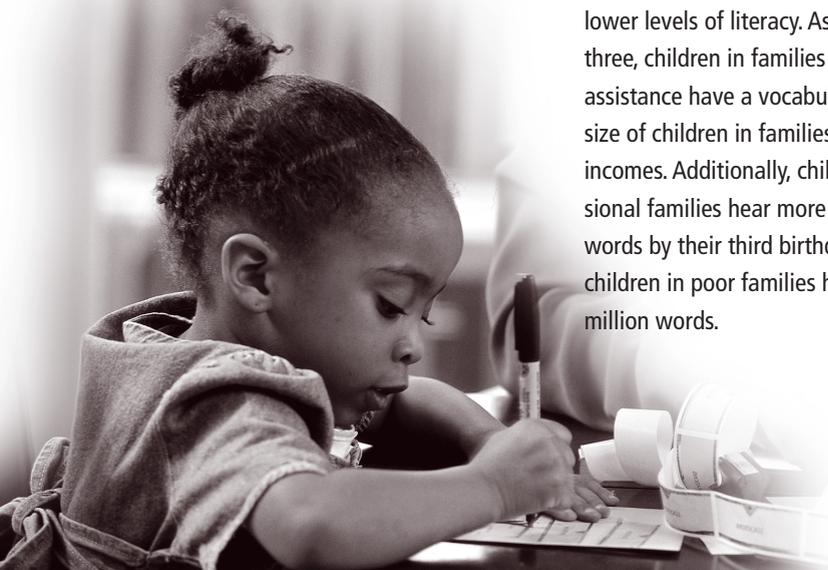
In Cuyahoga County, 17 percent of children under age five and their families live in poverty. In Cleveland, the figure is double that. Family poverty levels have an impact on literacy readiness, as higher levels of poverty are associated with lower levels of literacy. As early as age three, children in families receiving cash assistance have a vocabulary half the size of children in families with high-end incomes. Additionally, children in professional families hear more than 30 million words by their third birthday, while children in poor families hear only 10 million words.

Literacy levels of parents are strong indicators of a child's early literacy skills and later academic success. Children who are regularly read to at an early age, live in a book-rich setting, and watch parents reading for pleasure are more likely to be better readers. However, many parents struggle with their own literacy and have trouble providing a home environment supportive of literacy development.

How Do School-Age Children Fare?

Three out of five public schools are not meeting the state minimum requirement for fourth grade reading proficiency.

According to Ohio Department of Education proficiency test data, specifically the Local Report Cards for fourth grade, 119 out of 175 public schools in Cuyahoga County did not meet the state minimum requirement of a 75 percent passage rate for the fourth grade reading test during the 2003-2004 school year. A majority of these schools—72 of the 119—are located in the Cleveland



Taking letter recognition, which is a vital stepping stone to reading and writing, as an example:

Municipal School District, with the remaining 47 schools in suburban districts. In nearly seven out of 10 Cuyahoga County public schools, too many children are not passing the required reading proficiency test.

Reading deficits present in elementary school can continue throughout school and persist into adulthood. Even for those students meeting minimum state requirements, literacy skills are not necessarily reaching standards required for a successful transition to college and work.

Are Youth Getting the Skills and Work Experience They Need?

One out of 10 youth age 16-19 is not attending school and not working.

This figure climbs to 17 percent for youth in Cleveland, according to an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau figures. In Cuyahoga County, more than 60 percent of idle youth did not graduate from high school,

and in Cleveland this figure is 70 percent. Not only have high school dropout rates been very high historically, but they may be exacerbated by high-stakes testing, which may discourage learners who feel they cannot meet test expectations.

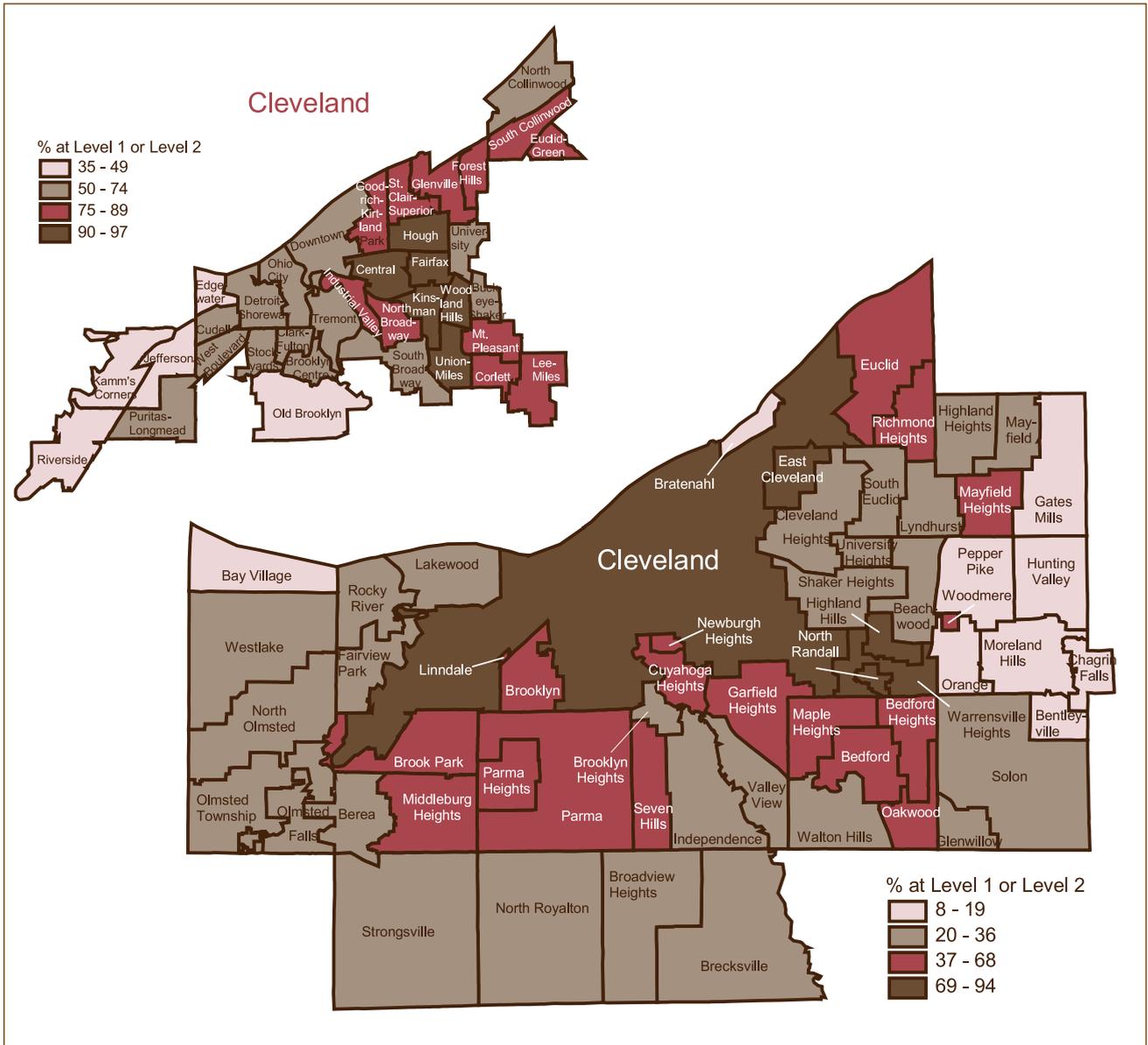
While idle youth who have dropped out of high school are particularly vulnerable, youth who are high school graduates, but not working and not pursuing higher education, also are marginalized. Not surprisingly, those who spend a lot of time during their young adult years unemployed have problems later in life finding and keeping a job. Adult literacy programs are feeling the impact of an increased number of younger learners who are trying to further their education and obtain the skills necessary to become more employable.

School and work are core activities during late adolescence, and it is critical that youth be engaged in them to avoid a marginalized adulthood.

- **38 percent** of kindergartners whose mothers had less than a high school degree could recognize letters.
- **57 percent** of kindergartners whose mothers had a high school diploma/GED could recognize letters.
- **69 percent** of kindergartners whose mothers had some college (including vocational) could recognize letters.
- **86 percent** of kindergartners whose mothers had at least a bachelor's degree could recognize letters.²¹

Currently, more than half a million Greater Clevelanders lack the skills to obtain jobs that provide a decent standard of living.

ESTIMATES FOR THE PERCENT AT LEVEL 1 OR LEVEL 2 LITERACY BY CUYAHOGA COUNTY MUNICIPALITY, 2000



The map illustrates the estimates for the percent at Level 1 or 2 literacy for each Cleveland neighborhood and suburban municipality. The percent at Level 1 or Level 2 in Cuyahoga County did not experience significant change between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, roughly 543,480 people aged 16 and older (49%) were estimated to have literacy in the Level 1 or Level 2 range. By 2000, that number fell to approximately 509,260 people aged 16 and older (47%). In both time periods, about half of the population had literacy below what is considered to be the minimum standard for good paying jobs with decent benefits.²⁵

Adult Literacy

One adult out of two has literacy skills below the minimum standard—a statistic unchanged since 1990.

Nearly half of the population (47 percent) aged 16 and older in Cuyahoga County have literacy skills below the required minimum of Level 3. In raw numbers, that translates into almost 510,000 residents with Level 1 or Level 2 literacy skills. In Cleveland, 69 percent of residents over age 16, or nearly 245,000, have literacy levels below the minimum standard.

Educational Attainment

The National Adult Literacy Survey examined the relationship between learners' literacy and educational attainment levels. According to the survey, mean literacy proficiencies increase as education levels increase. For example, the mean literacy proficiency of individuals with a high school diploma or GED equivalent, which is the highest education level of 30 percent of Cuyahoga County residents, aged 25 and older, is Level 2. For those individuals who have not attained this level of education (18 percent of Cuyahoga

County residents aged 25 and older), the associated literacy level is Level 1 and the lower end of Level 2. It is not until some post-secondary education is attained that mean literacy levels increase to Level 3.

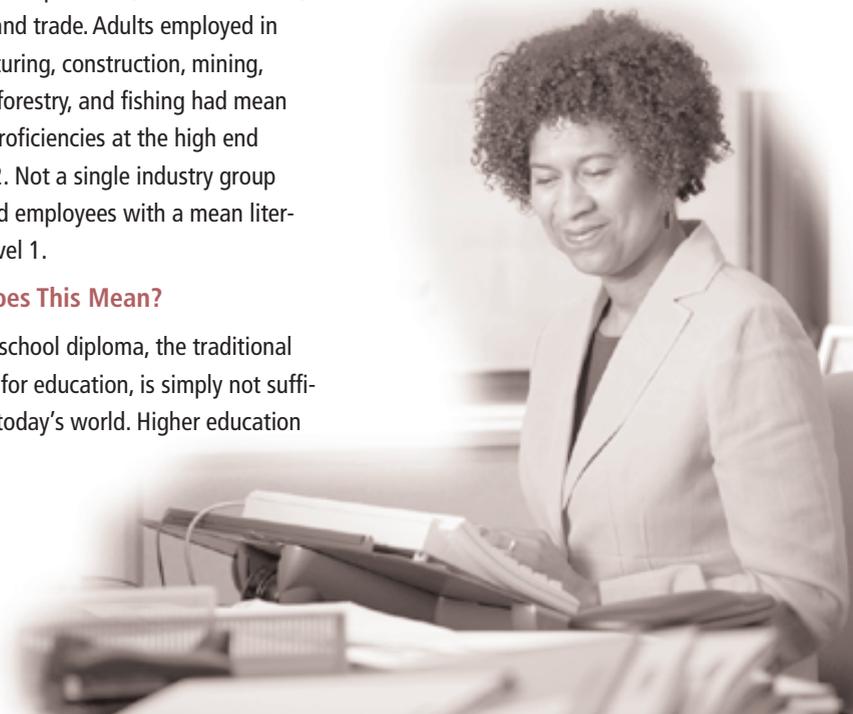
Employment Opportunities

The National Adult Literacy Survey also examined the relationship between learners' literacy and employment industry groups. Adults employed in most industry groups had mean literacy proficiencies in the Level 3 range, including finance, insurance, real estate, public administration, services, transportation, communications, utilities, and trade. Adults employed in manufacturing, construction, mining, farming, forestry, and fishing had mean literacy proficiencies at the high end of Level 2. Not a single industry group comprised employees with a mean literacy of Level 1.

What Does This Mean?

The high school diploma, the traditional standard for education, is simply not sufficient for today's world. Higher education

is critical. For children, the message needs to begin early and be encouraged throughout adolescence. For adults, it means creating demand for and access to continuing education leading to certificates, associate's and bachelor's degrees. With employers demanding a more literate workforce for the knowledge-based economy, people with Level 1 and Level 2 literacy skills are likely to be excluded from all but minimum wage work. Currently, more than half a million Greater Clevelanders lack the skills to obtain jobs that provide a decent standard of living.



Challenges to Learning— Opportunities for Change

Literacy services available in Greater Cleveland generally have not kept pace with the demand. Sixty-two percent of providers report an increase in enrollment over the previous year, and 33 percent report course waiting lists.²⁶ Despite these indications of great need, site visits reveal empty or near-empty classrooms, suggesting a mismatch between services offered and services needed. This mismatch occurs on two fronts: individual learner barriers to accessing and completing literacy programs, and provider challenges in coordinating literacy services to adequately meet learners' needs.

Despite these indications of great need, site visits reveal empty or near-empty classrooms, suggesting a mismatch between services offered and services needed.

Barriers Learners Face

Even though a literacy provider may offer services that meet the needs of a particular learner, that does not necessarily mean that the learner enrolls in, attends, or completes the instruction. In fact, nationally, only 10 percent of people needing literacy services enroll in programs. Among those who do enroll, 20 percent never even come to the first class. After the first three weeks enrolled in the literacy program, it is common for only 50 percent of those enrolled to remain.²⁷ Local literacy providers commented that retention in Greater Cleveland is probably similar, though such measures are not universally tracked.

Why are so many individuals in need of literacy services not enrolling in available programs, not attending classes once enrolled, or not completing them?

- **Many do not know** such programs exist;
- **Many are too embarrassed** to ask for help;
- **Classes often conflict** with work schedules;
- **Childcare and transportation** are not available;
- **Waiting lists** are often long;
- **Classes lack** personalized attention; and
- **Classes are not** sufficiently meeting learner needs.

Learners mention several incentives that may help remove barriers and maintain enrollment. These include on-site childcare, bus passes, calculators, computers, and books to take home to read to

Children and youth providers cite a need for more early-childhood interventions, after-school literacy tutoring, and support for middle and high school students...

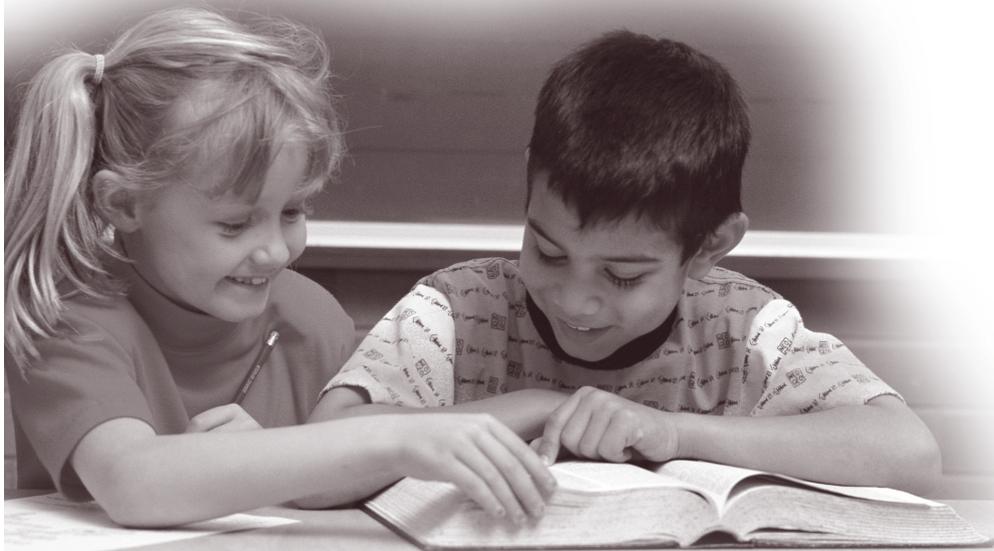
children. The best motivation, however, is to know they are gaining skills. Ultimately, people enroll in literacy classes because they want to get a better job, learn conversation skills, read the newspaper to be informed, learn to speak English better, understand financial and medical information, and be good role models for their children.

Literacy Provider Concerns

Literacy providers are particularly concerned about issues of capacity, including limited funding, classroom space, qualified teachers, and other resources, including computers. Providers for both adults and children agree on the need to increase the number of learners they serve and to establish ongoing assessments of learner gains and retention. Adult literacy providers note many areas where there are unmet needs for services, including workforce preparation,

literacy in correctional settings, and support for those with learning disabilities.

Children and youth providers cite a need for more early-childhood interventions, after-school literacy tutoring, and support for middle and high school students, as well as improved communications with school systems. Another common concern is the lack of wrap-around services, such as mentoring, counseling, emergency assistance, and other human services. Some literacy providers already offer additional support services, but too often, these services are not coordinated with the literacy offerings. Ultimately, a more collaborative effort would increase the effectiveness of every program.



The Action Plan for Literacy

The Action Plan for Literacy will serve as the community's guide to raise literacy levels and be the standard by which progress is measured. It calls for the development of strategic partnerships to build accountability, quality, and increased system capacity. It will identify ways in which community stakeholders in county and municipal governments, foundations, school districts, libraries, nonprofits, businesses, corrections, human services, childcare services, workforce investment, community centers, higher education, and

faith-based organizations can support project goals that enhance their own mission and activities. Indeed, the plan will provide opportunities for all to collaborate and actively participate in building solutions to the problems associated with low literacy.

The plan focuses on five strategic areas identified through the planning process. All of these strategies aim to build system capacity by supporting learner needs, enhancing partnerships, and improving existing programs.

Strategic Area

1

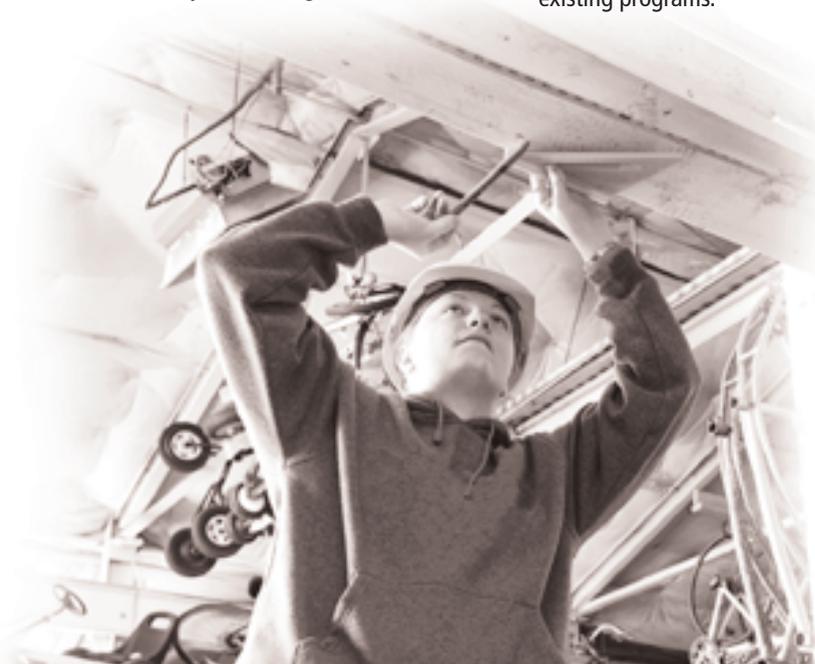
Centralized Information and Referral Center

Key Findings

Literacy is often thought of as a separate and distinct issue, rather than an integral component of the community's economic development, education, and human services agenda.

Representatives from workforce development, homelessness services, the justice system, and others all expressed a desire to integrate literacy more fully into their work. Employers know the effects of having a workforce with low literacy, but have not yet become part of a comprehensive solutions-driven approach to combat the issue.

Current literacy services in Greater Cleveland are fragmented and are driven too often by funding rather than by a comprehensive plan to meet the needs of learners.



There are more than 180 self-identified literacy programs in Cuyahoga County, most of which have no formal relationship with one another. Since funding streams tend to target specific populations for specific services, individuals often have to move from program to program seeking appropriate literacy services.

There is insufficient follow-up with learners and volunteers as they approach the literacy system, and no clear, consistent pathway for learners as they gain literacy skills.

Understandably, potential learners enter the literacy system from multiple access points. However, once they tap into the system, there is no coordinated way to ensure that they are getting the right services or making appropriate gains. Transition points are particularly problematic. There is no clear and continuous learning pathway—from providers offering basic skill development, to GED programs, to college, and to employment.

Providers in Greater Cleveland lack consensus on what constitutes an effective literacy program.

Volunteers, too, find themselves without sufficient follow-up and support once trained or assigned to a learner.

Action Plan

Establish a centralized information and referral center that connects and infuses literacy into all sectors and initiatives, provides a consistent point of contact for potential learners and volunteers, and ensures that learners continue to meet goals.

Stakeholders indicate that the array of organizations that deliver literacy services would benefit from being part of a fully-networked and complementary system. Furthermore, they indicate that literacy must become part of a broader conversation, to include government, nonprofit, and the private sector. A centralized information and referral center will ensure that literacy is a top priority in Greater Cleveland. Such a center is critical to advancing literacy goals in the community. This “information hub” will manage,

inform, and coordinate support for projects undertaken by partners to ensure continuity and quality. It will provide information to funders, both public and private, and help identify opportunities that enhance current activities and expand the breadth, scope, and performance levels of projects.

The information and referral center will support an expanded hotline to ensure that any inquiry where literacy is a stated or hidden priority will be professionally and knowledgeably addressed. It will establish volunteer recruitment services, identify training opportunities, match volunteers with providers, and assure appropriate follow-up and support. It also will host a list server and Web site and provide information on promising practices from local, state, and national literacy sites.

The information and referral center also will create transition strategies for every learner, including referrals to higher-level learning opportunities as well as incentives to complete programs. There will be a concerted effort to coordinate services from birth through adulthood to improve continuity and effectiveness.

Training, Curriculum, and Instruction Techniques

Key Findings

Literacy providers lack opportunities for training and ongoing professional development.

Although there are numerous literacy training opportunities in Greater Cleveland, most are tied to specific funding streams and are not open to a wide range of providers. The training of instructors in literacy programs also varies considerably. Just 60 percent of the sites require paid instructors to have a college degree. About one quarter of the sites require only a high school diploma. Volunteers, used by most programs, have few requirements around educational attainment.

Literacy curricula are not consistent across providers.

While funding streams dictate some curricula, particularly in adult education, most providers create their own coursework for learners. This makes evaluation and assessment of programs particularly

difficult. It also creates barriers for learners, who may be accessing multiple service providers. In the case of children's programs, few are aligned with the school curriculum and state standards.

The quality and quantity of learner instruction varies across programs.

Many providers are not trained in effective methods of reading instruction or identification of learning disabilities. Learners are not always assessed properly and placed in appropriate classes. For those fortunate to find programs that meet their instructional needs, most sites offer less than ten hours a week of instruction. Research shows that programs offered for 15-20 hours a week have higher retention rates and yield better outcomes.²⁸ Obviously, few learners are able to dedicate this amount of time to literacy classes, as jobs (often more than one) and family obligations take precedence.

Action Plan

Ensure that high-quality training, curriculum development, and instruction techniques are available to providers so that they can build program capacity in an environment of increased accountability.

Quality assurance issues must be addressed by the literacy provider community. This imperative is shared by providers, learners, and funders. Taking care to respect the individual nature of the many different programs in Greater Cleveland, there are many opportunities for system-wide improvements. All improvements should meet the goals of maximizing learner gains and reducing the amount of time it takes for learners to meet their objectives.

Through this collaborative effort, providers may secure appropriate levels of technical assistance to help meet their ongoing program improvement goals. This will include professional development and training provided in a collaborative, noncompetitive environment at no—or low-cost to providers. The technical assistance will be ongoing and will utilize a train-the-trainer approach.

There also will be an effort to increase high-quality program offerings in non-traditional settings. To maximize effectiveness, literacy services should be offered in the context of employment and other real-life situations. Programs will be developed that show employers that investing in employees' literacy skills is a cost-effective way to increase competitiveness and productivity.

Evaluation and Accountability

Key Findings

There are few commonly accepted standards across programs.

Providers in Greater Cleveland lack consensus on what constitutes an effective literacy program. Some are logistical issues: where and when classes are offered, wait list and referral policies, and availability of on-site child care. Others are content related: teacher-to-student ratio, quality of volunteer training, types of books and materials, and coursework, instruction techniques and assessment.

Providers offer little evidence of progress their learners are making.

Learners who enroll in programs indicate there are few feedback mechanisms as to their progress meeting goals. Many feel they enroll in classes “forever.” Each program uses different tools to measure learner gains, depending on learner age, funding silo, and curriculum.

Few providers have ever been independently evaluated for performance or outcomes.

Only a few programs, primarily supported by public funding streams, include evaluation in their budget. This is a particularly troublesome issue for foundations, which are increasingly demanding evidence of impact in exchange for grant support. Corporate funders also look for proven success. This also is a concern for learners, who seek assurance that their time spent in programs is a good investment.

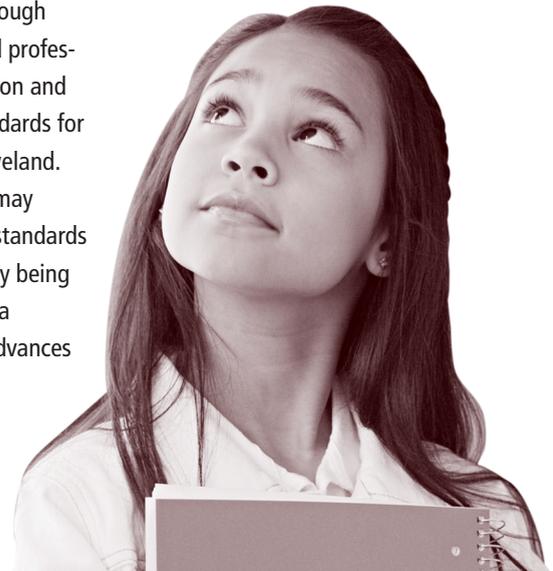
Action Plan

Establish accountability standards, set and measure targets for learners, and determine evaluation tools for ongoing program improvement.

Providers agree on the importance of developing quality standards to best meet the need of the learner. Through this initiative, local providers and professionals with expertise in evaluation and accountability will establish standards for literacy programs in Greater Cleveland. A number of national resources may be drawn upon. Locally, literacy standards for children ages 0-5 are currently being developed by Invest in Children, a public/private partnership that advances

the interests of young children in Cuyahoga County. Some local school districts have developed literacy curricula which ought to guide the design of after-school programs.

Through this collaborative effort, a centralized assessment system will be developed where all literacy providers can track learner progress against agreed-upon standards. It will drive data-based decision making and program improvements. The centralized system will be instrumental in advancing learner gains, particularly as learners move between programs. It will be Web-based, and technical assistance will be made available to train providers on how to interact with the system.



Aggregated data also will be collected and stored within a centralized system, allowing for easier evaluation of programs. For the first time, Greater Cleveland will have apples-to-apples comparisons, and an accurate view of the number of learners accessing services and the progress they are making.

Strategic Area **4**

Fund Development

Key Findings

Literacy providers cite lack of funding as their primary barrier to adequately running their programs and serving more learners.

Funding constraints limit literacy organizations' ability to recruit and retain qualified staff and volunteers, keep centers open for extended hours of operation, recruit and retain more learners, and otherwise manage operating expenses and capital expenditures.

Financial support comes to literacy programs in Greater Cleveland through a complicated web of funding streams, including state and federal grants, private foundations, corporations, fee-for-service contracts, and individual donors.

The majority of literacy programs in the County reported that funding support for literacy comes from private and corporate foundations. Small numbers of programs reported funding through city, county, and state sources. The application, eligibility, and reporting requirements of public sources are viewed as complex, particularly for programs that lack sufficient development staff.

Action Plan

Create a fund development center where information about funding opportunities is disseminated, and shared grants are submitted to local, state, and national funders (both public and private) to bring more literacy dollars to Greater Cleveland.

According to a study by Cleveland State University's Center for Public Management, there is approximately \$10.4 million in additional federal and state government funding capacity that could be, under the right circumstances, accessed for Cuyahoga County literacy programs and services.²⁹

The fund development center will offer technical assistance and funding briefings for providers; identify opportunities for

shared, collaborative grants; and identify and secure untapped federal and state dollars and in-kind contributions for community providers. New funding streams will be identified to build capacity, and there will be an emphasis on financial accountability tools to evaluate performance and determine the return on the investments.

The fund development center also will engage the foundation and business community to become active partners through support for innovation, success, and sustainability. In addition, it will encourage the creation of partnerships with school districts, community colleges, the workforce development system, and health and human service organizations to optimize resources and increase their impact.

To aid local providers in their efforts to prepare competitive grant applications, a "clearinghouse" of up-to-date information pertaining to the availability and deadlines for potential sources of funds through both public and nonprofit foundation sources will be available. As appropriate, the fund development center will coordinate the writing of joint proposals among literacy providers and other organizations and ensure that programs will be held to a higher level of accountability.

Public Awareness and Outreach

Key Findings

Greater Cleveland's low literacy levels are generally unknown in the broader community.

While many literacy service providers are aware of the breadth of the problem of low literacy in our community, there is little awareness among individuals and organizations outside this provider circle. It is clear that literacy needs to be raised to the highest of community priorities across all sectors.

Existing marketing and communications efforts by individual organizations are insufficient to raise awareness levels among learners and potential volunteers.

As noted earlier, only 10 percent of people needing literacy services enroll in programs; 90 percent do not. While there are many reasons individuals are not accessing needed services, lack of awareness and outreach is one primary issue. It is clear that the general public needs extensive information on the importance of literacy and how to seek and obtain supports.

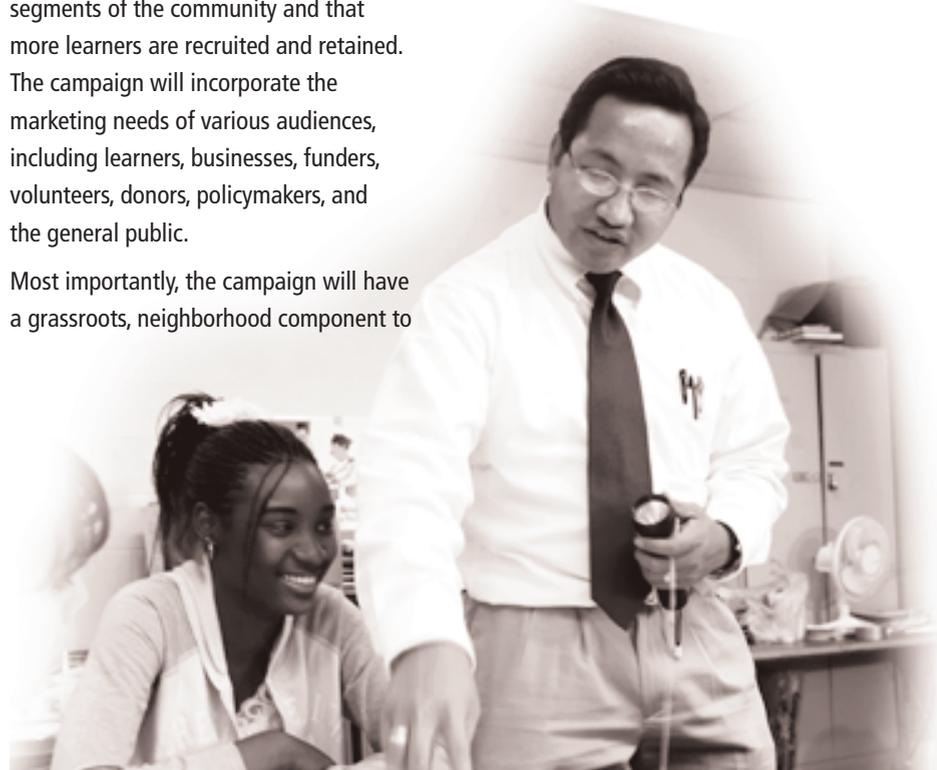
Action Plan

Launch a coordinated marketing and public relations campaign targeting the general public, policymakers, funders, potential learners, and potential volunteers to highlight the scope of low literacy, its many ramifications, the availability of services, and the value of lifelong learning.

The marketing and public relations campaign will create strategies to ensure that literacy becomes a major priority for all segments of the community and that more learners are recruited and retained. The campaign will incorporate the marketing needs of various audiences, including learners, businesses, funders, volunteers, donors, policymakers, and the general public.

Most importantly, the campaign will have a grassroots, neighborhood component to

organize community and faith-based organizations to lead intensive, neighborhood-based literacy blitzes. The effort in each neighborhood will include a community literacy campaign on the importance of reading with children, literacy acquisition success stories, and the link between literacy and improved jobs, school success, and community engagement. The blanketed approach will alert neighborhoods that literacy is the key to an improved Greater Cleveland future and connect more potential learners with appropriate services.



Why these strategies will work

- **The Action Plan for Literacy** will be formally endorsed and adopted by all stakeholders.
- **All segments** of the community will be focused on the issue of literacy and this collaborative, coordinated effort.
- **Programs** that are relevant to and structured around learner needs will be supported and additional programs will be developed.
- **Providers** across Greater Cleveland will adopt quality standards, will have access to training and technical assistance without regard to specific funding streams, and will benefit from enhanced communication, transparency, and support.
- **Linkages** among programs at all age groups and literacy levels will provide a ladder to success for learners.

The Organization

The future of this initiative requires a successful and transparent transition from planning to implementation, building upon the widespread community buy-in and trust established over the past 14 months. Given the scope and scale of this project, the plan will require resources of many types, including partners, funding, and, most importantly, organization. Successful execution of the Action Plan for Literacy depends on a community-based entity charged with implementing, managing, and evaluating the plan. To address Greater Cleveland's literacy needs in a systemic, ongoing fashion, a new entity—**The Literacy Cooperative**—is necessary.

Mission

The Literacy Cooperative will advance literacy through an effective service delivery system reflecting the highest standards in the field.

Vision

All children and adults in Greater Cleveland will reach their highest literacy potential for employment, self-sufficiency, and lifelong learning.

The Literacy Cooperative is a new, independent nonprofit service organization

responsible for implementing the key strategies of the Action Plan for Literacy. It provides the organizational framework for a systemic approach to literacy solutions. The organization will have a strong oversight and coordination role and will focus on strategies currently not being fulfilled by direct service providers. It will act as a high-level broker and convener, spanning all segments of the community and reaching beyond traditional literacy service providers to link with public, private, nonprofit organizations, and other collaborative efforts and systems.

A board of directors will oversee, support, and promote Cooperative activities. It will be composed of strong community leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. The Cooperative will be leanly staffed by individuals with expertise in nonprofit organizational development, business management, fundraising, advocacy, and government relations. This work will be focused on capacity building, strategic planning, collaboration, and network building. The Cooperative will create yearly plans that guide the work, and will issue a report to the community each year, outlining activities, successes, and continued recommendations for change.

A Call to Action

An economically competitive community requires a literate populace. This report outlines a comprehensive action plan for Greater Cleveland that will bring about broader literacy among its citizens and support a stronger, more vibrant community. The plan calls our community to action to address the low levels of literacy prevalent throughout Greater Cleveland. Everyone has a role to play.

Everyone can:

- Read to children;
- Speak up about the importance of literacy when issues of local economics, safety, public welfare, and quality of life are being discussed; and
- Take some time each month to volunteer to read or teach at a local literacy program, library, or school.

Businesses can:

- Offer on-site literacy classes to employees and others;
- Connect with schools to plan internships and job shadowing opportunities;
- Support literacy through direct donations, in-kind and pro-bono support; and
- Encourage employees to be involved in their communities as volunteers.

Schools can:

- Carefully observe and assess students for literacy needs;
- Monitor students and provide tutoring opportunities and referrals to services;
- Create and support standards for instruction and student literacy performance; and
- Provide parents with resources to become active literacy models and mentors.

The Philanthropic Community can:

- Include literacy as a funding priority across program areas;
- Champion literacy as a key to healthy and sustainable communities;
- Demand return on investments; and
- Leverage relationships with national colleagues to support the literacy effort.

Elected Officials can:

- Make literacy a policy and funding priority;
- Advocate for systems to support learners who need literacy training;
- Encourage a literacy component in other programs; and
- Advocate for quality preschool opportunities and all-day kindergarten.

Faith-Based and Community Organizations can:

- Recruit volunteers;
- Solicit books for literacy programs, libraries, and individuals;
- Offer child care or transportation for parents attending literacy programs; and
- Provide space for expanded literacy services in neighborhoods.

Jails, Prisons, and Detention Centers can:

- Provide GED and other training;
- Develop a work-readiness approach for all individuals; and
- Offer active support and follow-up for people returning to the community.

Colleges and Universities can:

- Provide evaluation, curriculum development and training for literacy programs;
- Organize student service projects with local literacy providers; and
- Help college students stay in school and move up the ladder of literacy.

Media Entities can:

- Bring attention to literacy through PSAs, feature stories, and editorials;
- Leverage local and national personalities to speak to the cause; and
- Help recruit learners through broadcast communications.

Conclusion

The time for dwelling on challenges and concerns is in the past. Many organizations in Greater Cleveland are working hard to help learners with their literacy needs. Now we need to effectively coordinate literacy services, and to track, monitor, and enhance the quality, consistency, and impact of literacy programs. Providers and learners understand that a coordinated literacy system will help everyone on the path toward improved literacy. The Literacy Cooperative is a response to this opportunity.

Thank you to all who participated in the planning process and who will be part of the solution as these recommendations are implemented.

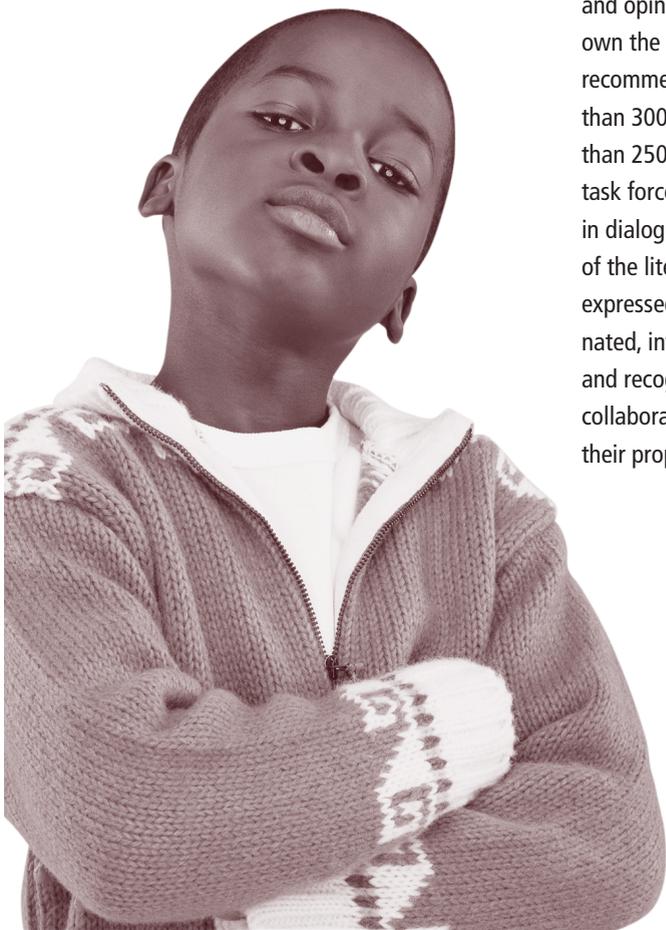
Methodology: Partners and Planning Process

In June 2004, The Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, and The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation authorized planning grants to determine the viability of The Literacy Cooperative for the Greater Cleveland area. The overall goal was to determine the need, identify solutions, and implement a collaborative literacy plan with community stakeholders to create an effective, seamless pathway for lifelong learning, from early childhood through K-12 and into adult learning.

To prepare for this initiative, the foundations hired a national consultant and literacy expert, Margaret Doughty, to help manage the project. Representatives from the foundations and Doughty made up the leadership team. The leadership team identified a range of planning tasks, which included identifying partners to discuss program goals and parameters, implementing a visioning process, and developing task force groups to accomplish each goal. The foundations contracted with a team of consultants for discrete aspects of the project, including:

- **A literacy needs assessment** to determine the breadth of the problem of low literacy in Cuyahoga County;
- **A funding analysis** to determine whether current funding efforts are maximized and whether there are untapped opportunities;
- **A current service assessment** to get an accurate picture of the literacy provider community in Cuyahoga County and to identify strengths and weaknesses; and
- **A process evaluation** of the literacy planning initiative.

The Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, within the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, was engaged to conduct the literacy needs assessment. The Center for Public Management at the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University prepared an analysis of literacy funding in Cuyahoga County. Doughty conducted a survey of literacy providers to gather basic information about services and populations served, including learner demographics, funding sources, successes, and challenges. Additionally, she visited a sampling of 20 providers, representing a broad spectrum of services. Finally, the



convening foundations also commissioned a process evaluation of the literacy planning initiative, and hired TRANS.FORM, an independent research and organizational development consulting firm, to conduct it.

The leadership team convened community stakeholders to be part of the process, not only to solicit their professional wisdom and opinions, but also to write the plan, own the outcome, and implement the recommendations. Over 14 months, more than 300 individuals representing more than 250 different organizations joined task forces, attended forums, or engaged in dialogues to address specific pieces of the literacy puzzle. The task forces expressed the need for a more coordinated, integrated literacy system and recognized the need for a new collaborative organization to carry out their proposed recommendations.

Leadership Team

The following individuals made up the leadership team for the planning of The Literacy Cooperative and are responsible for the development of the Action Plan for Literacy.

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**Providers and learners understand
that a coordinated literacy
system will help everyone
on the path toward improved literacy.**

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Planning Process Participants

The following individuals generously donated their time, insight, and expertise to the planning of The Literacy Cooperative and development of the Action Plan for Literacy. Participants offered recommendations and provided critical feedback at community-wide meetings and forums throughout the 14-month process.

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* Denotes individual no longer
with organization.
All names and organizations listed
correctly to the best of our ability at
time of printing. We apologize for
any omissions or errors.

Endnotes

- 1 Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change. December 2004. *Literacy Needs Assessment Technical Report for Cuyahoga County*. Based on estimated percentages of adults in Cuyahoga County with Level 1 and Level 2 literacy skills, as defined by the study, in 1990 and in 2000.
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- 4 Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. 2004. *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. Accessed online at <http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=19723>.
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- 6 Comings, J., S. Reder, and A. Sum. 2001. *Building a Level Playing Field: The Need to Expand and Improve the National and State Adult Education and Literacy Systems*. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Accessed online at <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/opcomings2.pdf>.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1999. *Literacy in the Labor Force: Results from the National Adult Literacy Survey*.
- 10 *New Expectations for a New Century: The Adult Education Imperative* by Cheryl Keenan, Director, Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. Keynote Speech, Commission of Adult Basic Education Conference, Anaheim, CA. May 5, 2005.
- 11 Child Trends and Center for Child Health Research. 2004. *Early Child Development in Social Context: A Chartbook*. Accessed online at <http://www.childtrends.org>.
- 12 National Center for Family Literacy. 2005. "Fatherhood." Accessed online at <http://www.familit.org/Resources/Research/2002LiteracyFactsandFigures/fatherhood.cfm>.
- 13 Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change analysis of Census 2000 data.
- 14 Hart, B., and T. Risley. 1995. *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co
- 15 Child Trends and Center for Child Health Research, *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Ohio Department of Education data were downloaded from http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/Power_Users.asp.
- 18 Proficiency tests are also administered for writing, math, science, and citizenship. Proficiency tests results by school building can be found on the Ohio Department of Education web site (<http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/>) or in the Appendices to *Literacy Needs Assessment Technical Report for Cuyahoga County* available online at http://www.clevelandfoundation.org/images/Poverty_CenterFinalReport.pdf
- 19 Child Trends and Center for Child Health Research, *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2004. "Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity." In *KIDS COUNT 2004 Data Book*. Accessed online at <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount>.
- 22 Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, *Ibid.*
- 23 Census 2000 analyzed by the Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN). Accessed online at http://www.censusscope.org/us/s39/c35/chart_education.html.
- 24 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Ibid.*
- 25 Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, *Ibid.* The Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change study brought together data from the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey with Greater Cleveland data from the 2000 U.S. Census, using a mathematical model developed by Stephen Reder. This methodology estimates the literacy proficiencies in local areas based on census data for aggregate characteristics of adults in those areas. For more information on this method, see S. Reder, *Synthetic Estimates of Literacy Proficiency for Small Census Areas*. Accessed online at <http://www.casas.org/lit/litdata/reder.pdf>. For more details about how this model was applied to Cuyahoga County see *Literacy Needs Assessment Technical Report for Cuyahoga County* available online at http://www.clevelandfoundation.org/images/Poverty_CenterFinalReport.pdf.
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- 28 Research studies available from the National Center for Adult Literacy and Learning, available online at <http://literacy.org/ncaal.html>, and the Center for Law and Social Policy, available online at <http://www.clasp.org/>, support this.
- 29 Center for Public Management, Levin College of Urban Affairs.