Literacy Needs Assessment for Greater San Antonio
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Executive Summary ......................................................................................................................... 3  
Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 17  
Background ................................................................................................................................... 20  
Impetus for Study ............................................................................................................................. 23  
Methodology and Structure of Report ............................................................................................. 25  
What is Literacy? ............................................................................................................................. 27  
Literature Review ........................................................................................................................... 35  
Population Changes and Challenges .............................................................................................. 44  
Impact of Poverty on Literacy ......................................................................................................... 58  
Early Childhood and Family Literacy .............................................................................................. 64  
K-12 Education System and Literacy Acquisition .......................................................................... 71  
After-School Programming ........................................................................................................... 82  
Youth and the Transition from School to Work and College ......................................................... 86  
Adult Literacy ................................................................................................................................ 101  
Literacy and Senior Citizens .......................................................................................................... 113  
Numeracy ..................................................................................................................................... 115  
Learning Disabilities ..................................................................................................................... 118  
Literacy and Faith-based Communities ......................................................................................... 121  
Literacy, Crime and Safety ............................................................................................................ 124  
Health Literacy .............................................................................................................................. 131  
Financial Literacy .......................................................................................................................... 135  
Technology and Computer Literacy .............................................................................................. 138  
Economic Impact of Low Literacy ................................................................................................... 141  
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 153  
Appendices .................................................................................................................................... 155  
  1. San Antonio Report Participants
  2. San Antonio Literacy Provider Survey
  3. Glossary of Literacy Terms
  4. San Antonio Needs Assessment – References
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to all the organizations and individuals in San Antonio who took their valuable time to talk with us about their work and their dreams for a future in which high levels of literacy are an accepted and expected norm. Your contributions helped frame both the issues and the recommendations in this report.

Thanks, also, to the Junior League of San Antonio for its understanding of the pervasive nature of low literacy, its vision for a new future, and its many outstanding volunteers who helped set up site visits, focus groups and interviews.

“I feel an education is very important to learn as much as you can. That way you can achieve anything in life that you would want to do to help you and your family has a better future in life.”

Sheryl Hudson, San Antonio Resident

PREPARED BY
LITERACY POWERLINE
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Antonio is a vibrant and thriving community with a growing economy. Its history has been shaped by its development as a Spanish mission station, its role in Texas independence and statehood, and by the wealth of its diverse residents over the past 150 years. The population is growing making the city the seventh largest in the United States.

Every American community wants to improve its education, and San Antonio is no exception. However, San Antonio has its own set of circumstances that present barriers as well as unique opportunities to improve its education levels.

*The San Antonio community is challenged, however, by a silent crisis: over half of San Antonians suffer from low literacy skills, a fact that severely limits the potential for future growth and prosperity.*

An estimated 27% of those living in San Antonio read only at the most limited levels. The whole community suffers as a result of low skill levels among both native born and immigrant populations (WorkSource Alamo Literacy Committee Report, 2008).

More than 50% of the adult population functions in the lowest two literacy levels, lacking the skills required to successfully graduate from high school or obtain a GED. This means they are unable to use a bus schedule effectively, calculate change at a restaurant, complete a job application or read the information on a prescription bottle. (WorkSource Alamo Literacy Committee Report, 2008)

Education systems that operate in communities with changing demographics and economies need to take the lead in designing plans for improved literacy in the community. San Antonio has a tradition of facing issues head on and many organizations are working to raise literacy levels. However, there is a lack of coordination and collaboration. San Antonio has never had a comprehensive regional literacy plan, a blueprint for the community at large to address the issue. This report will help to develop the baseline data needed to inform such a plan.

The needs assessment focuses specifically on San Antonio’s special strengths and weaknesses, the gaps, the issues, and the community suggestions for increasing literacy in the local area.
BACKGROUND

The magnitude of San Antonio’s low literacy problem is daunting. In the past, workers with limited skills succeeded because good jobs required only basic skill levels. Today, employers need workers who can read manuals and other materials, engage in complex problem solving, and operate more advanced technology.

Literacy and economic development go hand in hand. Many companies simply relocate their operations if they cannot find enough skilled workers to meet their needs in a local area. In our knowledge-based and highly mobile economy, no community can thrive without a highly skilled general population. Therefore, starting in early childhood, literacy programs must scale up and improve services by providing skills development to all members of the community.

In 2006 the Junior League of San Antonio adopted literacy as a signature project (Literacy San Antonio, 2009). Its goal is to work with the community at large to develop a lifespan learning coalition to coordinate, align and elevate literacy services. The Literacy Committee of the Junior League is acting as the catalyst to engage the community in preparing an ambitious and comprehensive plan to address the low-level literacy problem. It is encouraging all community stakeholders to unite and work together. As a first step, it has commissioned reports to analyze literacy levels in the area, identify the need for increased literacy, and assess the impact of local factors to determine possibilities for change.

PROCESS

The needs assessment process includes input from diverse sectors of the community, from well known leaders to everyday citizens to representatives of the numerous dedicated organizations providing literacy and other social services in San Antonio. In addition, experienced and professional researchers conducted site visits, interviews and focus groups throughout the area.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The City of San Antonio, WorkSource Solutions Alamo, the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, the area school districts, Alamo Community College District and regional employers have all recognized the issue of low literacy, and are increasingly concerned about the projected local shortage of skilled workers in the coming years. Their efforts to confront the problem are hampered, however, by a scarcity of resources, a lack of collaboration, limited public awareness, little community outreach and an absence of training initiatives large enough to effectively meet the need.
1. Areas of San Antonio with the lowest literacy levels are those with the highest levels of poverty. In fourteen zip codes more than forty percent of the adult population have no high school diploma or GED and in some census tracts the number rises to over seventy percent. (U.S. Census, 2006)

2. Children from single parent families and those in poverty often do not have the pre-reading skills to succeed in kindergarten and there are insufficient pre-school places to enroll all children in need. In some areas of San Antonio, 50-60% of pre-school children are not enrolled in any early childhood program. (UT Health Science Center, Early Reading Center Interview)

3. Young people spend only 20% of their time in school and, therefore, how they spend the remaining 80% of their time can have a considerable impact on their learning. Unfortunately many children do not have access to enriching literacy opportunities during this important time. (The Critical Hours Report, 2003)

4. Issues of equity concern San Antonio educators and parents. Lack of high quality resources in many of the impoverished districts impedes the success of poor children. While all schools receive state funds designed to establish a minimum educational threshold in every school, Texas public elementary and secondary schools also rely on local property taxes for supplemental revenue.

5. As many as 70% of students entering San Antonio area community colleges need to enroll in remedial classes before they can embark on work toward a degree. (Alamo Community College District, key informant interview)

6. Across the nation, one out of every three public high school students will not graduate. Those who drop out in Texas have a higher unemployment rate and lower annual earnings than high school graduates ($12,700 vs. $21,900); a higher use of Medicaid (35% vs. 20%); and are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated. (Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice High School Dropout Study, 2008)

7. Fewer than 22 percent of San Antonio adults hold a bachelor's degree which is below the average for large cities and the nation. (U.S. Census, 2006)

8. San Antonio faces the unique challenge of being home to a large population for whom English is a second language. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2006, 108,252 of

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These data are compiled by Literacy San Antonio on the “Literacy Facts” page of its website (Literacy San Antonio. 2009).
San Antonio residents age 5 or older were classified as speaking English “not well” or “not well at all”. (U.S. Census, 2006)

9. In a 2003 literacy test, seniors (65+) scored far below any other adult age group. Their score of 214/500 was significantly lower than teenagers, young adults, and those in middle age. (United Healthcare, Secure Horizon Study, 2006)

10. Estimates suggest that adult literacy service providers reach fewer than 5% of those who could benefit from literacy programs. (WorkSource Alamo Literacy Committee Report, 2008)

**STRENGTHS**

As the issue of low literacy has emerged in the past several years, a number of initiatives have developed to help address the situation and many community programs have worked hard to improve opportunities for lifelong learning. The following are some examples of current initiatives working in San Antonio.

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**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

- AVANCE provides family literacy activities that assist parents to improve their own education while working with their children to prepare them for school success (Avance San Antonio, 2009).

- The Library Foundation’s Born to Read is a partnership with the library system to ensure children have access to books and read aloud programs to instill the joy of reading (Bring Me A Book, 2009).

- Texas Rising Star program offers quality support to help child care providers increase service quality and learn how to best prepare children with pre-reading activities (Texas Rising Star, 2009).

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**K-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM**

- Communities In Schools provides a community of caring adults to offer support to students and their families to maintain school attendance and success (Communities In Schools, 2009).

- Jewish Coalition for Literacy is one of many volunteer organizations offering tutoring and mentoring to assist children struggling to maintain grade level (San Antonio Jewish Coalition for Literacy, 2009).
- KIPP Aspire Academy is leading the way in showing what can be done to increase academic achievement, keep children in a stimulating learning environment and preparing for college entry (KIPP Aspire Academy, 2009).

**OUT OF SCHOOL TIME**

- Boys and Girls Clubs offer a safe environment for children after school and focus on academic enrichment and learning support (BGC, 2009).
- Girl Scouts make literacy a key focus in their work to help girls build confidence and knowledge to help them succeed (Girl Scouts, 2009).
- The public libraries of San Antonio offer a wealth of programs and resources for children and families across the community (San Antonio Public Library, 2009).

**YOUTH**

- Catholic Charities provides support services to youth in a range of programs all based on the literacy level of the participants (Catholic Charities, 2009).
- WorkSource Solutions Alamo funds a range of youth programming focused on gaining workforce skills and experience with improved literacy as a key outcome (Alamo WorkSource, 2009).
- Girls. Inc. helps inspire girls and prepare them with skills, especially financial literacy skills, to become successful women (Girls, Inc., 2009).

**ADULT LITERACY**

- The Westside Education and Training Center of the Alamo Community College District offers creative adult literacy programs with transition to college and contextualized work opportunities (Westside Education and Training Center, 2009).
- Bob Ross Senior Multiservice Health and Resource Center and the Department of Community Initiatives partner to help seniors maintain mental acuity and literacy skills with a number of different programs and activities (Bob Ross Center, 2009).
- Each One Teach One is a one-on-one and small group tutoring program supporting adults and out of school youth with limited literacy to gain skills needed for success.

All these programs are examples of the outstanding work being achieved in the community. San Antonio has many of the puzzle pieces to solve the problem but is does not have the capacity to bring programs to scale and many areas are underserved.
CHALLENGES

In focus groups and site visits many barriers to growth were noted:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited resources</th>
<th>Absence of coordination and a common vision</th>
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<td>Difficulties of outreach to students</td>
<td>Difficulties of outreach to volunteers</td>
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<td>Difficulties of student retention</td>
<td>Lack of program space</td>
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<td>Lack of common community literacy standards</td>
<td>Lack of community literacy targets</td>
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<td>Lack of a comprehensive literacy provider network to facilitate coordination</td>
<td>Lack of a system to track and monitor progress</td>
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FINDINGS

Despite an array of dedicated organizations providing literacy services, adult literacy levels in San Antonio have remained largely unchanged for over fifteen years. The LITERACY San Antonio will be better able to increase literacy levels if it develops the following:

- United vision, message and community-wide collaboration
- Coordinated decision making structures
- Quality indicators to manage performance and tracking to measure impact
- Capacity building system to scale up current good practices
- Aggressive and coordinated fund development activities
- A comprehensive pipeline from school to college and work with lifelong learning possibilities for all

The San Antonio area does not yet have these components in place. It does, however, have many of the building blocks that could create a strong successful system to improve literacy in the area.
FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH, FOCUS GROUPS AND SITE VISITS

IMPACT OF POVERTY ON LITERACY

1. Families in poverty have higher levels of low literacy.
2. Single parent families in poverty have greater risk of low literacy.
3. Increasing literacy levels helps people out of poverty.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

1. Children entering kindergarten with limited pre-reading skills have difficulty keeping up with their peers.
2. Children from families with poor literacy skills often have poor literacy skills.
3. Many families cannot afford childcare services where early learning skills may be taught.
4. There are very few family literacy services available in San Antonio.

K-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. Students progressively fall further behind in literacy in school if they have entered kindergarten with limited skills.
2. Lack of parental involvement reduces the level of children’s success.
3. Schools do not have the additional resources to provide the needed tutoring to keep all students succeeding.

OUT OF SCHOOL TIME

1. Out-of-school-time programs enhance student learning, but San Antonio does not have sufficient programs to meet the needs.
2. Coordination needs to be improved between after-school programming and the school system.
3. Many out of school time programs lack literacy activities; staff are not trained in the concept of literacy infusion.

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**YOUTH**

1. A lack of family attitudes supportive of encouraging students to stay in school to complete education exists in the community.

2. Traditional approaches have proven unsuccessful so innovative approaches are needed to help youth succeed.

3. San Antonio has limited programs that link contextualized learning and vocational training to assist in transition from school to work.

4. There is no expectation that all students will enroll in continuing vocational or academic education.

5. Generation 1.5 students, who may have been born in the United States but grew up speaking a language other than English at home, have special needs there are not currently being addressed.

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**ADULTS**

1. The number of adults with limited literacy skills is increasing as the population increases, and that fact underscores the importance of investing in effective adult literacy services.

2. The immigrant population has declined over the past several years, but represents an important population that could benefit from literacy services.

3. There are insufficient ESOL classes available to meet the needs. If more people begin to seek classes there will not be sufficient places for them.

4. African Americans and Latinos in the community have the lowest levels of literacy, and strategies to support these populations are essential.

5. Data collected in San Antonio supports the correlation between low literacy and poverty and indicates need for a major scale-up of literacy services.

6. There is a critical shortage of programs to teach adults with the lowest literacy levels.
SENIORS

1. Issues of low literacy for seniors have not been effectively addressed to date.

2. There are good programs that could be replicated if resources were available.

3. Health literacy is crucial for senior citizens’ well-being but it is only rarely being offered to the senior community.

LEARNING DISABILITIES

1. Learning disabilities is an issue that has not been effectively addressed in the community.

2. Programs with strategies for early intervention are available but more are needed.

3. Well-trained tutors are needed to assist in programs across the age span.

NUMERACY

1. Schools are challenged by poor math performance and need new strategies to meet goals.

2. Students who have a high school diploma or a GED may still have math challenges.

3. Resources are needed to elevate and support numeracy – functional math - instruction.

4. Many math teachers and tutors are not well prepared to teach math effectively.
FAITH COMMUNITY

1. Many faith-based organizations have not been involved in literacy and have untapped resources.

2. There are some effective programs with possibilities for replication.

3. Faith communities must be reimbursed for quality services.

CRIME AND SAFETY

1. Not enough prisoners, parolees or probationers receive the quantity and quality of educational and training programs to enable them to make effective life changes.

2. Re-entry programs for men and women need to be better linked to literacy and vocational training services.

3. Youth correctional programs are reaping good results and replication of successful models is indicated.

HEALTH LITERACY

1. People with limited literacy have difficulty accessing and navigating the healthcare system and there is little coordinated health literacy programming.

2. The healthcare system is taxed by those with limited literacy who require extra time and resources which is costing the community valuable dollars.

3. People with limited English language ability do not have necessary translation services to ensure that they are well cared for.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

1. Low financial literacy in San Antonio negatively impacts the progress of families, especially military families, toward self sufficiency.

2. Many existing financial literacy programs are well organized and collaborations are creating effective services; with additional resources, these programs can be scaled up and replicated.

3. Financial literacy is a lifespan learning need, yet services are not fully coordinated from early childhood through senior programs.
COMPUTER LITERACY

1. Computer literacy classes are more appealing to many people than traditional literacy classes, providing a venue for people to re-engage in education.

2. San Antonio needs additional resources to serve the large numbers of children and adults who could benefit from computer literacy.

3. Distance learning provided concurrently with more traditional teaching and tutoring could give a more people access to services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE LITERACY

1. The business community is more invested in higher level skill training and less invested in entry level career development.

2. Literacy providers do not ordinarily infuse workforce literacy, pre-employment skills and vocational education in their programs.

3. Literacy instructors need to increase their knowledge about workforce literacy.

4. Training opportunities for people with lowest skill levels are urgently needed.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop the San Antonio Literacy Plan to enable a collaborative and coordinated approach to increasing literacy levels across the lifespan.

2. Set specific goals and targets to make the San Antonio area a highly literate community.

3. Develop a centralized information and referral system.

4. Provide high quality professional development, curriculum and instructional techniques to all providers to meet the targets established in the San Antonio Literacy Plan.

5. Build the capacity of the current service providers to serve more students more effectively.

6. Establish evaluation and accountability practices.

7. Develop programming in areas underserved and in zip codes of greatest need.

8. Introduce creative opportunities for scheduling classes, contextualized instruction, and distance learning.

9. Identify and secure public and private funding.

10. Infuse literacy into the full spectrum of community programs and funding streams.

11. Launch an aggressive public awareness campaign.
Not only does literacy pay huge dividends in quality of life but the dollars and cents add up, too:

- By increasing the high school graduation rates each graduate will earn on average $267,000 more than a non-graduate over a lifespan. (The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education, Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007)

- By reducing the number of people receiving welfare support there is a savings of $127,000 in the cost of a person’s welfare support over a lifespan. (The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education, Levin, Belfield, Muennig & Rouse, 2007)

- By increasing vocational information and skills training more people will embark on a career ladder rather than get stuck in a dead end low paying job.

- By infusing literacy goals into non-literacy programs the community can grow its capacity to serve learners at little additional cost.

- By increasing literacy levels unnecessary health care expenses that are attributable to low literacy will be reduced by $73 billion annually nationally. (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Statistics, 2004)

- By partnering on education and training for inmates and re-entry programs formerly incarcerated people will be able to earn family-supporting incomes.

- By developing a culture of literacy and an understanding of the value of education the San Antonio area will build high expectations, high quality programs and high quality results in a literate community.

CALL TO ACTION

In the twenty-first century, individuals require sophisticated skills to achieve personal and economic advancement, to meet the demands of more difficult and technical jobs, to navigate confusing health and financial systems, and to help their children gain skills for success in an increasingly complex future. Because communities are composed of individuals, community success depends upon individual success, and therefore barriers to individual literacy must be

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2 These data are compiled in the June 2008 report by the National Commission on Adult Literacy, Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce, pp. 33-40, passim (NCAL, 2008).
viewed as a challenge for the whole community. The creation of the LITERACY San Antonio is a powerful start to this process. Local leaders must call the community to action in order to elevate the issue and find creative and effective solutions. A comprehensive literacy initiative is a major investment that brings about a highly skilled workforce and a prosperous economy.

“Literacy is the key to San Antonio becoming a more vibrant, thriving and wonderful place to live. We want to make every encounter with the city an opportunity to enhance literacy from early childhood to senior services. Literacy is the currency to being a good citizen.”

Dennis Campa, Director,
City of San Antonio, Department of Community Initiatives
INTRODUCTION

The Junior League of San Antonio and those local leaders who have endorsed the Literacy Initiative have a mission to increase literacy levels in San Antonio through the vision of 100% literacy through 100% community engagement. The League has been a dynamic and integral part of the fabric of San Antonio for many years, working to improve conditions for the entire community. Literacy San Antonio is the Junior League’s signature project which it is developing in partnership with local leaders and educators (Literacy San Antonio, 2009).

San Antonio is the largest city in South Central Texas, with a population of 1,296,682 and nearly 2 million people living in the metropolitan area. Located just 150 miles from the Mexican border and the Gulf of Mexico, the city occupies 368.6 square miles of Bexar County. The Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) consists of Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe and Wilson Counties.

“We must look at each student as an individual. Encourage innovation in teachers. Encourage creative solutions to real problems. The school system is 40 years behind society. Single sex schools are excellent and could be optional. There are too many cuts in PE, music, and art. We should emphasize life-learning. Education is freedom and power.”

Carolyn Heath, Antioch Community Network
This historic city is a vibrant and thriving community with a growing economy. Its history has been shaped by its development as a Spanish mission station, its role in Texas independence and statehood, and by the wealth of its diverse residents over the past 150 years.

However, San Antonio is challenged by a very critical issue – that of low literacy. In the five levels of literacy identified in the National Adult Literacy Survey, 27% of adults in San Antonio fell into the lowest level. The whole community suffers as a result of low skill levels among both native born and immigrant populations (NAAL, 2008).

This literacy crisis is not unique to San Antonio. International statistics show that the United States as a whole is becoming a less educated nation. The National Commission on Adult Literacy reports in *Reach Higher America: Overcoming Crisis in the US Workforce* that “the U.S. is the only one of the thirty Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) free-market countries where young adults are less educated than the previous generation” (NCAL, 2008).

Every American community wants to improve education, and San Antonio is no exception. However, San Antonio has its own set of circumstances that present unique challenges as well as unique opportunities to solve its low literacy crisis. This assessment addresses literacy issues and solutions specific to the San Antonio area.

"My vision for the immediate future is to see every sector in San Antonio embrace and support increasing the literacy levels of people of all ages in order to improve the quality of life in our community for everyone." Veronica Collazo, Mayor’s Commission on Literacy
“Literacy is the heart and soul of a community. Every success a person or community achieves can be traced back to literacy.”

Lisa McGrath, KLRN

Education systems that operate in communities with changing demographics and economies need to take the lead in designing plans for improved literacy in the community. The city has a tradition of facing issues head on and many citizen groups are working to raise literacy levels. However, San Antonio has never had a comprehensive literacy plan. This report will help to develop the baseline data needed to inform such a plan.
BACKGROUND

The magnitude of San Antonio’s low literacy problem is daunting. In the past, workers with limited skills succeeded because good jobs required only basic skill levels. Today, employers need workers who can read manuals and other materials, engage in complex problem solving, and operate more advanced technology.

Literacy and economic development go hand in hand. Many companies simply relocate their operations if they cannot find enough skilled workers to meet their needs in a local area. In our knowledge-based and highly mobile economy, no community can thrive without a highly skilled general population. Therefore, starting in early childhood, literacy programs must scale up services by providing skills development to all members of the community.

THE CHALLENGE

According to the 2000 Census, median household income in San Antonio is barely half the $41,994 national median (Texas Data, 2009). Across the country, communities with lower per capita income are also the communities with the lowest literacy levels. Literacy is the key to reducing poverty.

San Antonio has a diverse economy based primarily on tourism, financial services, healthcare, and national defense. Many parts of the economy are thriving.

- Trinity University’s bi-annual impact study produced with the San Antonio Area Tourism Council reports that 22 million tourists visit the city each year. The Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center pumps 8.7 billion dollars into the local economy by hosting over 300 events each year. 94,000 workers are needed to serve the 750,000 conventioneers. These workers need education skills, English language ability, and job training. Entry level workers with these skills are getting harder to find (Stefl-Butler, 2006).

- The South Texas Medical Center, which employs 27,000 people and has a $2.8 billion budget, is the largest medical center serving the southern-most portion of the state (STMC, 2009). It coordinates a network of research, higher education institutions, and clinics. Vocational training for entry level positions requires a GED at minimum and ongoing access to professional development.
Fort Sam Houston, Brooke Army Medical Center, and Lackland Air Force Base are located in the San Antonio area. The defense sector, which employs over 89,000 people, has a $5.2 billion impact on the city’s economy. A competent civilian workforce is essential to serve these military installations.

Each of these key economic sectors requires increasingly sophisticated worker skill levels to maintain a competitive edge.

**SAN ANTONIO’S RESPONSE**

In the 1980’s, a city-sponsored initiative to address low literacy levels in San Antonio was developed through the creation of the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy under the leadership of then mayor Henry Cisneros. This was a first and powerful effort to begin to address the problem although it limited its focus to adult literacy.

A city bond for literacy, passed by the City Council, provided five million dollars to build community learning centers in six designated council districts. The city budgeted monies for the maintenance and partial staffing of the centers in partnership with adult education services funded by the Federal Workforce Investment Act (San Antonio Commission on Literacy, 2009).

Today, these literacy centers serve thousands of adults. But they cannot reach the hundreds of thousands of men and women still needing literacy support. Indeed, this initiative’s budget has not been increased since the original bond, even though the city has grown greatly. Early childhood literacy activities have evolved in distinct and separate initiatives. A number of organizations, many convened under the City’s Department of Community Initiatives, support early childhood and after-school programs. But there is no lifelong learning system that would reduce the need for future adult education services.

In 2006 the Junior League of San Antonio adopted literacy as a signature project (Literacy San Antonio, 2009). Its goal is to work with the community at large to develop a lifespan learning coalition to coordinate, align and elevate literacy services.
“It is my hope that Literacy San Antonio will bring the best minds and resources in the area together to promote awareness for and develop the literacy levels of the community which will increase the quality of life for all now and future generations.”

Lydia Martinez, Northside Independent School District
IMPETUS FOR STUDY

Literacy providers working independently have been unable to reverse the increasingly low literacy levels among San Antonio residents, despite their best efforts. The Junior League and its Literacy San Antonio partners recognized low literacy as a critical issue in the area and convened stakeholders to collaborate on the development of strategies and solutions. Key partners include:

- Workforce Solutions Alamo (the regional Workforce Investment Board) (Workforce Solutions, 2009). The Literacy Taskforce recommended improved adult literacy interventions to the Mayor and City Council as a component of the Literacy San Antonio initiative.

- The Texas P-16 Plus Council including Commissioners of K-12, higher education, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (P-16 Council, 2009). This Council is also focusing on literacy as an essential factor enabling young men and women to successfully transition from school to either work or college.

- The recently-formed PATH project, comprised of the Alamo Community College District, Workforce Solutions – Alamo, the City of San Antonio, South Central Project GREAT and Windham School District (PATH Project, 2009). PATH shares resources and ideas to help create a network of services for adult learners as they enter vocational training and the workforce.

- Mayor Hardberger’s P-16 Plus Council of Greater Bexar County (P-16 Plus Initiative, 2008), which spotlights literacy as a key component to its goals to:
  - Ensure that all infants and children are ready to learn.
  - Enhance access and persistence across all educational levels.
  - Promote a college-going culture for all to succeed.
  - Develop an expectation of career and lifelong learning for all citizens.

The LITERACY San Antonio Committee of the Junior League is acting as the catalyst to engage the community in preparing an ambitious and comprehensive plan to address the low-level literacy problem. It is encouraging all community stakeholders to unite and work together. As a
first step, it has commissioned reports to analyze literacy levels in the area, identify the need for increased literacy, and assess the impact of local factors to determine possibilities for change.

This report, known as a Needs Assessment, seeks to determine the reasons for this decline and to make recommendations that can guide the planning process. Literacy Powerline was commissioned to conduct this Needs Assessment because of our national reputation for assessing local needs, building effective plans and structures to increase literacy, and developing strong community-wide collaborations that have a measurable and positive impact on people's lives and communities.

As these initiatives and others are developed there is a need for coordination and collaboration so that there is no duplication of services, resources are maximized and efforts are aligned to a literacy plan that leads to a fully-literate community.

If you can’t read, write and comprehend then generations to come will experience problems with vital services – the consequences if we don’t take action could be terrible. It scares me today! We must address the literacy needs of our city.

John Braxton, the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy
This Needs Assessment analyzes the literacy landscape of the San Antonio area to demonstrate where needs exist, both sociologically and geographically. Data has been collected from a variety of sources including recent census information, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, and a number of national, state, county, and city data sets. Additional information has been drawn from government sources including the Department of Education and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. E-mail and telephone interviews with key community informants broadened our base of knowledge. Focus groups among diverse populations provided valuable input. These data have been used to make comparisons and project trends by educational, occupational, economic, social, and demographic characteristics. Data are presented in tables, charts, and geographic map formats as needed.

Current literacy levels for adults and children in San Antonio have been estimated using statistical source materials from the Texas Education Agency, Texas LEARNS, the Texas Workforce Commission and local area school districts. These statistics have been compared to archival data from studies including the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, the State and County Estimates of Low Literacy, and Department of Labor publications. The Needs Assessment also includes a review of scholarly literature that identifies risk factors associated with low literacy to provide a context for the regional planning process.

The Junior League set up the series of focus groups and interviews using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research method for gaining insight into how individuals perceive a community issue. Questions were designed to assess perceived needs, program benefits, barriers to learning, and gaps in literacy services. This process involved meeting with focus groups averaging eight participants. Their comments are included verbatim in several sections of the report, and consolidated themes are identified in the “findings” section of this report. Once the meetings and interviews were completed, the notes were coded and specific themes identified.

Respondents included service providers from the full lifetime learning spectrum as well as health, computer, family, workforce, and financial literacy providers. A list of participants plus

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3 The IPA study is “phenomenological” because it focuses on the uniqueness of the individual’s perceptions and experiences, and it is “interpretive” because sense must be made of the informants’ thoughts and perceptions in the context of the issue and the community. It is an inductive approach that avoids prior assumptions, encourages open-ended dialogue, and brings unforeseen information to light – all of which brings new perspectives to the issue. IPA supports data-driven hypotheses, and its results can be compared to the quantitative research that produces a more complete picture of the literacy landscape in the community.
the guiding questions for these discussions are included in the appendices. Literacy Powerline customized a survey instrument to make it applicable to San Antonio’s characteristics.

Our youth will be actively engaged in the many education and extracurricular activities that the community provides. Girls will become advocates for themselves and their communities.

Lea Bengels-Rosenauer, Girl Scouts
WHAT IS LITERACY?

The Workforce Investment Act 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” (DOL, 1996). All of these abilities are outlined and measured by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, which tested a sample of over 19,000 American adults in 2003 and found that literacy levels had changed very little since the previous assessment in 1992 (NAAL, 2003).

People often think of literacy solely in terms of reading and writing, but there are many aspects of literacy that are broader than just the basic skills. These include health literacy, workforce literacy, financial literacy, computer literacy, family literacy, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). A glossary of literacy terminology can be found in the appendices.

The definition of literacy has broadened over time because of the changing nature of society. With the growth of technology and the need for higher skill levels in the workplace, students who might once have succeeded effectively in life with an eighth grade reading level and a minimum package of basic skills must now have a high school diploma and college coursework demonstrating a more diverse and complex set of abilities.

The definition of literacy has also expanded from just adult literacy to include lifelong learning, including children’s acquisition of the pre-literacy skills needed for success in kindergarten, such as understanding the relationships between symbols and sounds, and the early concepts of numeracy. Research shows that children who are unable to gain these pre-reading skills are unlikely to catch up with their peers during the elementary years and are more likely to drop out of school when they are older.

Community literacy involves establishing a process of shared problem-solving that unites communities around the vision of 100 percent literacy with 100 percent community engagement. Community literacy includes all family members and all community stakeholders in order to facilitate literacy infusion, the practice of incorporating literacy in all community initiatives. Incorporating literacy into diverse community efforts helps to promote literacy more effectively and increases the general awareness and understanding of the issue of literacy. The implementation of community literacy is both bottom up and top down. It can change the way literacy is viewed at all levels, from the local level to the national.
FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Participants in the interview process provided valuable insight, perspectives and data to inform the Needs Assessment. Participants included representatives from:

- Adult literacy (practitioners and learners)
- Local and state government
- Healthcare
- Faith-based groups
- Children’s literacy
- Higher education
- K-12 education
- Business
- Civic organizations
- The arts
- Funders
- The workforce investment system
- Community members not enrolled in literacy programs
- Community members enrolled in literacy programs
- Financial literacy providers

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Every person interviewed identified low literacy levels as a major concern in San Antonio. Many participants were able to point to a literacy program or project that was doing a fine job and accomplishing good work. The following are examples of their concerns and observations:

- Low literacy is the critical issue affecting the local economy.
- Low literacy negatively impacts health, public safety and financial security.
- It is a daunting challenge to increase the effectiveness of literacy services so that they make a major difference.
- There is no major initiative to address the low literacy issue in San Antonio, even though it is a major crisis that must be resolved to insure the prosperity of the community.
- The Junior League is to be commended for stepping forward to act as a catalyst in the dialogue.
Lack of information and structured opportunities for communication across all literacy sectors conspire to keep San Antonio’s literacy levels low even though there is a strong sense of collaboration when players are able to work together.

School systems need to be transparent; parents have the right to move to schools that work best for their children. One parent commented, “The literacy initiative should try to make learning a family effort. Parents are intimidated by school and feel they cannot challenge the system.”

Lack of any coordination among different project types and funding silos. Several people said that there was little coordination between early childhood, out-of-school, and adult literacy service providers.

**KEY ISSUES**

**CHILDREN’S EARLY LITERACY**

Participants noted that low literacy is intergenerational in nature; parents with low literacy skills are less able to prepare their children in the pre-kindergarten years or help them as they progress through school. Children who do not acquire the necessary pre-literacy skills are at a severe disadvantage for the rest of their lives. Participants said that early childhood literacy activities linked to increasing parent literacy must become a foundation for literacy education if San Antonio is to break the cycle of low literacy.

**LITERACY AND HEALTH**

Participants mentioned low literacy as a major factor impacting San Antonio’s health care. Many families living in poverty and those with limited English literacy skills use the emergency room as their major care center. One key informant commented, “Language is a major issue for us. I have to write several versions of materials to give to patients.” Several people noted a concern that children were playing the role of parents by being the interpreters in discussions with healthcare practitioners.

**WORKFORCE LITERACY**

The most pressing need identified by participants in every focus group was the low literacy levels among the workforce and its impact on San Antonio’s economy. They cited a lack of investment in building a highly skilled workforce for the future; employers not doing enough skill training; employees lack of time to seek out evening or weekend programs. Conversations about increasing workforce skills rarely include adult literacy service providers. While businesses find resources to train their higher skilled employees, they often neglect to bring their
lowest skilled workers up to speed. “We don’t have a work-ready population and no one is really focusing on this well enough.”

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

Residents’ limited English proficiency challenges San Antonio’s education system and its workforce. Participants noted that limited English proficiency is an issue not only for new immigrants but also for many who have lived in the community a long time. An adult literacy provider said, “It is a requirement of adult education to deliver services in English only, resulting in non-English speaking folks getting easily discouraged. We have to find a solution to this problem.”

**VALUING EDUCATION**

The role of parents is vital in the child’s educational development. “Parents do care! Every parent wants their child to succeed but many can’t read and cannot help their children,” said one participant. Another participant mentioned that in some cultures parents are not considered the first teachers for their children. “Many parents do not see their role as teaching their children pre-reading skills. They see that as the role of the school system.” Others observed that when many family members do not graduate from school, it is a major achievement for a child to graduate or receive a GED. Higher education was often not an expectation of families or students.

**OTHER ISSUES MENTIONED IN ALL FOCUS GROUPS**

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

Low literacy among incarcerated men and women creates a financial cost to the community as well as impacting safety. Infusing literacy into the criminal justice system was high on many participants’ lists of potential solutions to explore. Participants expressed concerns about the success of existing re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated men, women and youth who are returning to San Antonio with few skills, no housing and severely limited job opportunities.

**MARKETING AND OUTREACH**

Participants said that there is little public awareness of the local programs available to help solve the literacy problem. The stigma surrounding low literacy prevents people from reaching out for help and is compounded by an absence of a visible marketing message. Many people attending focus groups did not know about programs in the community and rarely heard marketing messages from organizations recruiting students. Several people commented on the
idea that literacy needed to be “sold” to the community through a comprehensive and highly visible marketing campaign.

Participants were confused about the process for finding a program. Some expressed a concern that if they, as well educated community leaders, had not heard about programs then how would someone with low literacy skills find the best locations/programs in which to enroll. There is no coordinating body with a hotline to assist people in finding programs. It was noted and appreciated that the Junior League was taking a lead to address this issue.

After a speech to the Hispanic Lawyers Association, I heard the lawyers ask why many Hispanic parents value having teenaged children working rather receiving an education. A campaign needs to understand this traditional thinking. Vocational training as well as college are both necessary options. There is a need to push the benchmark and standards higher, because we need to make kids competitive. One participant noted, ‘What is needed is a massive campaign, something that really makes an impact on the thinking in our city. It must educate parents and future parents about long term investment of education.’

CENTRALIZED TRACKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Gathering data about San Antonio literacy activities proved to be very challenging because there is no coordinated system into which all providers are reporting. There is no comprehensive service directory and providers were identified throughout the process of this Needs Assessment. Others may still not be identified. Because programs report primarily according to how they are funded, it is difficult to track literacy services across funding streams. Many nonprofit programs rely on private funding and do not report to any central entity. Thus the number of people enrolled in adult literacy programs, or children in afterschool programs, remains unknown.

Without such centralized data, the return on investment and the effective use of funds cannot be documented and compared over time.

FUNDING NEEDS

All those interviewed agreed that current funding levels are insufficient to meet the needs of San Antonio’s community. They urged the Literacy Initiative to develop creative and collaborative strategies to maximize current funding.

“To get started we must have a fund-raising plan in place,” said one participant. In every focus group someone mentioned a program that existed in the past and does not exist now. Lost funding affects early childhood programs, youth projects, adult literacy classes, and vocational training programs.
There is little incentive for programs to serve those that are hardest to serve. One key informant said, “Funding is tied to student achievement; my students are at the lowest level and only make gains over the long haul.” Several noted that it was easier to provide services to youth and adults who were close to success.

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**VOLUNTEERS**

San Antonio has few volunteer tutoring programs for adults and out-of-school youth. Although participants knew of several programs in San Antonio where a strong volunteer base was used to support and complement instruction, not enough is done to recruit volunteers for literacy.

In school systems, businesses that adopt schools do a good job in supplying volunteers, but there is no coordination of volunteer recruitment and training.

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**NUMERACY**

Low levels of numeracy in San Antonio impact the ability of employers to find a skilled workforce. In community colleges at least 70% of new students require remedial math.

“We have to resolve this literacy issue in San Antonio, because our investment in human capital is the only thing that will make our city the great place it should be.”

Jean Brady
SERVICE ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN FOCUS GROUPS

CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Participants noted children are not always well prepared to succeed in school “When children start behind, we can’t expect them to catch up without major interventions,” said one focus group participant. ‘The schools have to focus on pre-kindergarten level work before they can begin with the kindergarten curriculum.’

One participant commented, “It starts in Austin where our state legislators must invest in our children. Our elected officials are ‘illiterate’ about the needs of our children.” Several people pointed out the lack of coordination among children’s service. “Funding drives children’s services, not the need to help our children.”

Parents with limited skills and resources face significant challenges in accessing support for their children. Many parents do not understand the roles they could play in supporting their children in school. When they have had difficult experiences themselves as school children, they are less likely to read and understand communications and invitations from their own child’s schools.

A number of groups discussed the inconsistent quality from elementary through high school. There are pockets of excellence in San Antonio, but children’s next steps are often limited. “Edgewood ISD is years ahead in this area. The superintendent is motivated, and the children in the elementary schools do well. Unfortunately, a breakdown occurs in middle schools, and we don’t know how to solve this problem.”

A reading culture, with books in the home and larger community, lets children know that education is important. Several people commented that there seems to be little communication between schools and out-of-school programs. One example cited of an emerging successful collaboration is in Northside ISD.

ADULT LITERACY SERVICES

Fewer than 5% of adults who might benefit from literacy services are enrolled in current programs (NAAL, 2003). Service providers are “all about promoting literacy but don’t have the resources to serve all who need help.” It was suggested that the rate of low literacy may be even higher than is documented. Many people are afraid to enroll in programs, both because program intake and assessment processes are unnecessarily complicated to negotiate and because of stigmas associated with them. Several participants expressed a need to develop a new culture that creates pride in learners choosing to go back to school.
Adult learners’ input into the dialogue is critical. “I finished school, but I did not learn. I felt left out. I wanted to learn, but I did not think my teachers took the time to help me,” said one student. Another commented, “My mom was shocked that I got a diploma, but I could not read.”

An agency worker commented, “Low literacy affects every area with which I am involved.” “This [literacy] initiative gives us a new opportunity to share and collaborate – it is really needed” and must be relevant to people’s needs.

“Education is the foundation that every individual builds their future upon.”

Elsie McCormick, Each One Teach One
LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to examining the perceptions in the community and the current local data, a brief review of recent scholarly literature describes what is already known in the field of literacy.

CHILDREN’S AND FAMILY LITERACY

The work of Padak and Baycich (Padak, 2003) reviewed the effectiveness of family literacy programs and the benefits to all: children, parents, families and communities of those involved. Research indicates that family literacy programs impact children’s motivation, social skills, attitudes and even health. Adult learner persistence (attendance in programs) increases when parents are enrolled in family literacy programs rather than only adult education classes. Families in family literacy programs report improved relationships and increased parental involvement in their children’s educational activities.

The work of Justice and Pullen (Pullen, 2006) demonstrates the value of programs that include story-telling, literacy-related play activities and the use of teacher-guided pre-reading activities. Learning from the best practices of successful programs both in the local area and nationally will help to identify the most effective program models. For example, the Early Childhood Development Initiative in Rochester, NY is among the best resources of early childhood data in the nation.

The National Education Association research reports identify the role parents can play in building success:

- When parents are involved in their children's education at home, children do better in school; when parents are involved in school, children go further in school — and the schools they go to are better.
- The family makes critical contributions to student achievement from preschool through high school. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background.
- Reading achievement is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science.
- Reading aloud to children is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Talking to children about books also supports academic achievement.
- When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically.
- Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters.
Literacy Needs Assessment for San Antonio

- The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.
- Positive results of parental involvement include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.  

Language skills, including speaking and oral communication are necessary and integral to developing strong literacy skills throughout childhood. Research shows that ordinary families differ immensely in the amount of experience with language and interaction they regularly provide their children and are strongly linked to children’s language accomplishments by age 3. Children are like their parents in activity levels, in vocabulary resources, and in language and interaction styles. In one study, 86 percent t to 98 percent of the words recorded in each child’s vocabulary consisted of words also recorded in their parents’ vocabularies.

Hart and Risley also found that the average child living in poverty was receiving half as much language per hour (616 words per hour) as the average working-class child (1,251 words per hour) and less than one-third that of the average child in a professional family (2,153 words per hour). They conclude that by age 4, the child in an impoverished family might have 13 million fewer words of cumulative experience than the average child in a working-class family. The researchers also found that children in professional families were hearing more affirmatives (encouraging words) than children in working class welfare families (Hart & Risley, 2003).

4 The outcomes of parental involvement have been documented in the following research:

- Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Sheldon, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003).
- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; Pate & Andrews, 2006).
- Parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).
- Parent involvement increases support of schools (Pate & Andrews, 2003).
- Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).
- Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).
- Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).
- Types and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

5 These conclusions are based on a study conducted by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, who observed 42 families for 2 and a half years for an hour each month to learn about what typically went on in homes with 1- and 2-year-old children learning to talk (Hart & Risley, 2003).
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The National Institute for Out-of-School Time (NIOST, 2009) reports that after school programs have a critical effect on youth, but only when programs are of substance and quality. Some research shows that what is done after school has at least as much bearing on success for some students as what is accomplished in the school day (National School Boards Association, 2009). Students’ participation in after-school programs is associated with better grades, work habits and task persistence, and builds confidence, self esteem and improved attitudes toward school. Durdak and Weisberg (2007) reported that while there are a wide range of program activities, from sports through arts and cultural activities to clubs and formal tutoring and mentoring, most after-school programs do not deliberately infuse literacy activities in activities.

All programs that have a reading component, even though they may not be advertised as reading programs, can help children succeed. When literacy is infused in a wide range of programs in a non-academic environment reading skills can be strengthened. For example, a coach can ask a player to read the next play to the team during practice.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

Students are dropping out of schools at an alarming rate, even though schools are working diligently to increase retention rates for both middle and high school students. There is a great deal of research on efforts to increase retention and to reengage students who have left school or have marginal attendance. The following strategies are those identified by The National Education Association based on a series of research reports (Dianda, 2008):

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION’S 12 DROPOUT ACTION STEPS:

1. Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21. Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 in the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical to eradicate the idea of "dropping out" before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education.

2. Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students.

3. Make sure students receive individual attention in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (18 or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day.
4. **Expand students' graduation options** through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma. For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences.

5. **Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools** so that students see the connection between school and careers after graduation. To ensure that students have the skills they need for these careers, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

6. **Act early so students do NOT drop out** by offering them high-quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; strong elementary programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work when they enter middle school; and middle school programs that address causes of dropping out that appear in these grades and ensure that students have access to algebra, science, and other courses that serve as the foundation for success in high school and beyond.

7. **Involve families in students' learning at school and at home** in new and creative ways so that all families can support their children's academic achievement, help their children engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved in their children's education from preschool through high school graduation.

8. **Monitor students' academic progress in school** through a variety of measures during the school year that provide a full picture of students' learning and help teachers make sure students do not fall behind academically.

9. **Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates** by gathering accurate data for key student groups (e.g. by race, ethnicity, economic status), establishing benchmarks in each state for eliminating dropouts, and adopting the standardized reporting method developed by the National Governors Association.

10. **Involve the entire community in dropout prevention** through family-friendly policies that provide release time for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules for high school students that enable them to attend classes on time and be ready to learn; "adopt a school" programs that encourage volunteerism and community-led projects in school; and community-based, real-world learning experiences for students.

11. **Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to engage students to prevent them from dropping out** including professional development focused on the needs of diverse students and students who are at risk of dropping out; up-
to-date textbooks and materials, computers, and information technology; and safe modern schools.

12. **Make high school graduation a federal priority** by calling on Congress and the president to invest $10 billion over the next 10 years to support dropout prevention programs and states who make high school graduation compulsory.

Students, as young as thirteen and as old as twenty one who have dropped out of traditional education, need special assistance. The NAAL study of 2003 reports on the low literacy levels among young people who are incarcerated.

Laudon Aron’s research (Urban Institute, 2006) recommends high quality alternative pathways for youth, especially programs to re-engage youth who have not thrived in traditional settings. As states and school districts adopt high academic standards, improve accountability, and achieve excellence, Aron reports, "Little attention is being paid to the need for scaled efforts to reconnect dropouts to education options that prepare them for success in the economy of the future".

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**ADULT LITERACY AND ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL)**

The research in adult literacy indicates that traditional approaches to teaching adult literacy and ESOL have not worked well. National estimates suggest fewer than five percent of those who could benefit from services are actually enrolled in classes. Persistence studies led by John Comings (Porter, Cuban, Comings & Chase, 2005) found that the majority of adult learners who do attend programs do not put in the number of hours needed to increase their literacy skills. Indeed, one hundred and fifty hours is the average number of hours of study adults need to achieve a one grade level increase.

When adult learners are able to put their learning in context, they achieve better results. A 2006 study by Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni and Deng concluded that teacher roles, instructional models and classroom norms all affect the success of the participants (Beder, et al., 2006). Unfortunately, as the Center for Adult English Acquisition notes in a 2003 study, the part-time nature of most adult education means that many instructors do not have ready access to professional development (Burt et al, 2003).

Over the past ten years, increasing numbers of immigrants has led to an increase in the demand for ESOL programs both in San Antonio and nationwide.
SENIOR LITERACY

Reading is a skill that helps maintain mental acuity into old age. As life expectancy increases and as seniors become a larger proportion of our population, literacy skill development for seniors will take on greater importance. Studies of adult learners indicate that older learners experience more shame about their limited skills, which they may have effectively hidden for much of their lives. Aging brings increased stress on many levels, and low literacy only makes those problems worse. According to a United Healthcare Secure Horizons study, “At the individual level, low literacy was reported to be associated with greater shame and frustration, greater poverty and unemployment, poorer health and health care access, and greater risk of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias associated with cognitive decline.”

LITERACY AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. One in every 100 Americans 16 and older is behind bars (2.6 million in 2006); about 43 percent of whom do not have a high school diploma and 56 percent have very limited literacy skills.

When released back into society, men and women have an extremely difficult time getting jobs both because of their prison records and also because many have insufficient education and literacy skills (NCAL, 2008). Research suggests that education in prison is a major way to increase employment rates. Yet the 2003 NAAL report indicated that only 19% of inmates had achieved a GED while incarcerated and only five percent were enrolled in pre-GED programs (NAAL, 2003).

WORKFORCE LITERACY

According to the 2007 State New Economy Index, “Workers who were skilled with their hands and could reliably work in repetitive and sometimes physically demanding jobs were the engine of the old economy. In today’s New Economy, knowledge-based jobs are driving prosperity… jobs held by individuals with at least two years of college” (Kauffman, 2007). The skills needed to get and keep jobs are referred to as workplace literacy, or Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) when taught in the context of language acquisition. In Reach Higher, America: Overcoming the Crisis in the U.S. Workforce, the research on workforce literacy is summarized bluntly: “America’s workforce is compromised by a lagging K-12 education system, a significant increase in immigration from non-English speaking countries, and an adult education system that is now obsolete and ill-equipped to meet the 21st century needs” (NCAL, 2008).

In 1971, young men who had dropped out of school and were working full-time earned $35,087 (in 2002 dollars). By 2002, this figure had fallen 35%, to $23,903. According to the Bureau of
Labor Statistics in its publication, *Occupational Outlook*, Winter 2004-2005, "When an occupation has workers with different levels of education, the worker with more education is better able to compete for the job (Moncarz & Crosby, 2005). The *Outlook* article goes on to describe how individuals with a high school degree and some college or vocational training are more likely to be hired, to earn more when they start a job and over a lifetime, and to become supervisors.

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**HEALTH LITERACY**

Research by the Institute of Medicine, *Healthy People 2010*, identifies the range of health issues impacting people with limited literacy (Ratzan & Parker, 2006). Even people with higher literacy skills lack essential health knowledge and skills necessary for a healthier life. The NAAL executive summary, *The Health Literacy of America’s Adults*, notes that 53% of adults surveyed had intermediate levels of health literacy and 14% had below basic levels. Only 12% were deemed proficient. (NAAL - Health, 2006). “Health literacy is of concern to everyone involved in health promotion and protection, disease prevention, and early screening, health care maintenance and policy making” (Ratzan & Parker, 2006).

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**FINANCIAL LITERACY**

Research highlighting Americans’ alarming lack of financial literacy has led to action in recent years at the highest levels of government. The current mortgage crisis highlights many of these issues. In 2002 the U.S. Treasury established an Office of Financial Education because of the growing concerns about low financial literacy not only among those with limited literacy skills, but among the general population as well. In 2003 Congress created the Financial Literacy and Education Commission, which was followed by the National Strategy on Financial Literacy in 2006 and the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Literacy (CFL, 2008). Despite the federal government’s policy to help keep America competitive and assist people in understanding and addressing financial matters, there is still a widespread lack of financial literacy among the American people. For example, when a 2007 State University of New York survey asked 17 and 18 year old Buffalo high school students’ basic questions about personal finance, the average score was only 50% (Dungay, 2006). Less than a quarter knew that income tax could be levied on interest earned in a savings account. Three fifths did not know the difference between a company pension, a 401(k) and social security. A Jump$tart survey found that only 1 in 6 Americans had ever taken a class that taught personal finance. Only three states require students to take personal finance courses (Jump$tart, 2009).
COMPUTER LITERACY

Computer literacy is the knowledge and ability to use computers and technology efficiently. The term can also refer to the comfort level someone has with using computer programs and other applications that are associated with computers. A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age (USDoC, 2004) reported that more than 65% of households have a computer. With the price of computers dropping year by year access is rapidly increasing. However, people who do not own or have access to computers are often those with the fewest skills and resources.

There are two key aspects of computer literacy: computer-assisted instruction for all ages, and learning about computers as tools.

Using computers to increase instructional hours for older youth and adults has been very effective. Many adult literacy and GED programs that incorporate computer-assisted instruction (Keup, 1999) realize gains and have highly positive comments overall. Yet over 80% indicated that they wanted more teacher instruction and more student-teacher interaction to support their computer-assisted learning. Technology is an effective and important tool yet is but one component of a successful learning environment. The same study demonstrated that when a computer-assisted format is the major instructional method to provide step-by-step learning in mathematics, with its need for higher level conceptual understanding as well as time-consuming drill and practice, it maximizes the time for teacher-student and student-student contact in the subject areas where that contact is most effective.

Community technology centers (CTC’s), initially funded by Federal dollars, are now being sustained by local funding in many communities. CTCs serve community members seeking both computer-assisted learning and computer literacy. Connections for All (C4All, 2006), enhances the capacity of CTCs to serve people with a broad range of abilities by offering opportunities for training, and access other tools and funding resources. Funded by a grant from AT&T, this project is a collaboration between CTCNet and the Alliance for Technology Access.

Individual outcomes include improved job skills and access to employment opportunities; education and improved outlook on learning; technological literacy as a means to attain individual goals; new skills and knowledge; personal efficacy and effective outcomes; better use of time and resources (Mark, et al., 1997). This same study looked at the broader impacts of CTCs, with individuals reporting increased involvement in civic activities, including writing letters to government officials, organizing and participating in voter registration drives, and experiencing a greater awareness of current events through reading newspapers. Social and community connections increased as neighborhood residents found CTCs to be safe places for families and children. CTCs created an atmosphere in which new relationships could be formed between people who were not previously connected (Davies, et al., 2003).
“Literacy is a unifying issue, one we are all concerned about, can actually do something about, and can see almost an immediate benefit in the community.”

Susan Rutherford, Chief Development Officer, Girl Scouts
POPULATION CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

San Antonio has grown at an increasing rate since the 1940’s. It grew rapidly in the past several years to become the seventh largest city in the United States.

The population of San Antonio has almost doubled in the past 30 years. It has seen greater population growth than Texas or the United States since 2000. Changes and challenges have accompanied this growth.
The growing population impacts both San Antonio and its surrounding counties. Over 68,000 people commute daily into Bexar County for employment.
The existing metro area is projected to grow by 93% by 2050, almost doubling the current population. Kendall County, to the north, will have the largest percentage of growth (276%).

Projected Population Growth for San Antonio (2000-2500) (CityPlanning Department)

The population growth rate is not the same for each population group. The Latino population is increasing at a faster rate than other groups while the White population is declining. San Antonio has a higher Latino population than Texas as a whole.

Most Latino growth is resulting from births to existing residents or because Latinos from other parts of the United States are resettling in San Antonio. Mexican immigrants in San Antonio total only 97,000, while the city's Latino population stands at 670,000.
Murdock suggests that San Antonio is now what the rest of the country will be in the future. The data provided by the former state demographer, Steve Murdock, shows graphically how the state will change in the next thirty years (Murdock, 2007). This projection gives the city an opportunity to demonstrate solutions to challenges such as low literacy, especially as more children are born to parents with limited literacy skills. As the demographics across the country change to more closely mirror San Antonio in the next thirty years, the country will be looking to San Antonio for models and solutions.

Younger families predominate in San Antonio. This will present educational challenges over the next decade. 28% of San Antonio’s population is under the age of 18 years. 10.8% are from 18 to 24 years, 30.8% from 25 to 44, 19.4% from 45 to 64, and 10.4% are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 32 years, making San Antonio a city with many young families and a growing population of children under five years old. In most large cities, people in their 20s and 30s make up the largest age groups. San Antonio, by contrast, has nearly as many people under age 20 as it has people 20 to 40 years of age.
Even as San Antonio is populated by many young families moving up the economic ladder, rates of higher educational attainment among the city's Latino adults lag behind national averages. As a result, the bulk of San Antonio's households earn only low-to-middle incomes.

“Building and supporting literacy is a fundamental mark of an educated, global community and a shared community responsibility.”

Edward A. Vara, ESC Region 20
With a growing Latino population of native born people and immigrants, those having difficulty speaking, writing, reading, and comprehending in English present issues in the family, in schools, and in the workplace. The following graph from the U.S. Census illustrates English speaking ability.
San Antonio is home to both many naturalized and native-born citizens, and many non-citizens who are documented. However the challenges for undocumented residents in San Antonio present great concern to educators serving learners of all ages in the lifelong learning spectrum. Focus group participants asserted that providing educational services for all is in the best interest of the community at large.

Those who are not citizens have a much higher poverty rate (almost double) than citizens. Naturalized citizens have a lower poverty rate than native-born citizens.
The census reports that as the Latino population grows, the Asian-American, Black and White populations are declining.
“Why resolve the literacy issue? It is a root cause factor for family stress and individual limitations. It yields isolation, inability to effectively parent, creates persistent poverty, unsuccessful students, debilitating shame, inability to support one’s family with a living wage.”

Mary Ellen Burns, United Way
In the U.S., younger age groups are more Latino than older groups. This is especially true in San Antonio. In San Antonio, fewer than half of senior citizens are Latino, while roughly two-thirds of children are. This confirms the population will be even more Latino in the future.
Texas and San Antonio tend to be younger than the national population, and, with a growing population of children and a smaller percentage of seniors, early literacy services are highly indicated, especially since many parents lack literacy skills to prepare their children for success in school.

![Population by Age Group](image-url)
With a growing population of children and a growth in immigration from other countries, the diversity of the city will continue to expand. Yet the needs of seniors must continue to be addressed even as support for the growing number of young families becomes a priority.
“We are aware that lots of kids don’t qualify for Pre-K or Head Start, so we have to look for additional systems. We are trying to build a vertical chain as we reach for success at the 3rd grade level TAKS test. We are aware that we are just one link, and we are eager to form links with other service providers. We are data driven, and feel if the data shows efforts are not working, then changes must be made. Funders need to drive the changes.” Rebecca Ramos, University of Texas Health Science Center Texas Early Education Project
The growth of immigration across the state has increased over the past decade while it has decreased in San Antonio which now has the lowest percentage of immigrants of any large city in Texas. (Source: U.S. Census)

KEY FINDINGS: POPULATION CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

1. San Antonio has special challenges faced by communities with residents who have limited English proficiency.

2. The Latino population continues to grow while other ethnic groups decline in numbers.

3. San Antonio is challenged to successfully serve its population today. The community has projections for much higher numbers, especially of children in future years. This will put an even greater strain on the education system.
IMPACT OF POVERTY ON LITERACY

In San Antonio, 25.58% of non-diploma/GED holders age 25 and older earned an income below the federal poverty level in 2006. However the incidence of poverty declined by more than half, to 11.94%, for individuals with a high school diploma/GED. The San Antonio WorkSource literacy report to the Mayor and City Council (July, 2008) notes that, “Moving the entirety of the non-diploma/GED holder population to an educational attainment level of diploma/GED would move an estimated 31,959 San Antonio residents out of poverty ([25.58%-11.94%] x 234,309) = 31,959.”

Poverty and low literacy go hand in hand! The zip codes of residents without high school diplomas or GEDs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zip Code</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>78207</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>78237</td>
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<td>78252</td>
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<td>45.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>78210</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
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<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>78242</td>
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<tr>
<td>78223</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>78220</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
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</table>

Census tracts in San Antonio that show more than 50% of adults without high school diploma or GED

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<td>65.5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1701.02</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1712</td>
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<tr>
<td>1107</td>
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<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Zip Code</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>60.1%</td>
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<td>1307</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1715</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
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Poverty is also highly correlated with single parenthood, another issue faced by growing numbers of families in San Antonio. San Antonio has a slightly higher percent of single parent families, compared to the state of Texas and the United States.

A glance at the future of Texas from the *Texas State Demographer – The Texas Challenge in the 21st Century: Implications of Population Change for the Future of Texas* indicates the critical nature of populations, poverty and planning for the future. (http://txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/TxChall2002Summary.pdf)
San Antonio’s per capita income is sharply lower than the Texas average, which in turn is lower than the national average. Literacy education will be crucial to reversing these declining incomes. Providing support to families living in the zip codes showing highest poverty as well as to populations with lowest education levels must be a priority for Literacy San Antonio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>San Antonio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income in 1999</td>
<td>$21,587</td>
<td>$19,617</td>
<td>$17,487</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison to the five other large cities in Texas, San Antonio has the lowest per capita income except for El Paso.
Children are most likely to live in poverty. This is especially true in San Antonio, which has much higher poverty rates than the state of Texas or the United States.

There has been some improvement in poverty levels since 1990. For instance, compare the poverty level by age group from 1990 – 2000. The same graph for 2000 shows significant improvements during the 1990s. For example the percent of San Antonio children under 5 years old in poverty dropped from 35% in 1990 to 27% in 2000. These improvements cannot be maintained unless literacy levels increase.
The following chart identifies issues raised by childhood poverty. It is clear that San Antonio lags behind state and national averages.

![Child Statistics from Kids Count (Annie Casey Foundation), 2004-2006](chart.png)
KEY FINDINGS: IMPACT OF POVERTY ON LITERACY

1. Families in poverty have higher levels of low literacy.

2. Single parent families in poverty have greater risk of low literacy.

3. Increasing literacy levels helps people out of poverty.

“I long for the day when children of our city are both capable and eager readers – readers who use their skills not only to take the prescribed tests, but to satisfy their own curiosities and expand their self-chosen horizons.”

Viki Ash, San Antonio Public Library
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LITERACY

Children with limited literacy skills experience difficulty in all academic subjects throughout their school careers, as well as major challenges in their adult lives.

- Children entering kindergarten with low pre-literacy skills struggle to learn to read.
- Children in poverty have fewer reading readiness skills than their more affluent peers.
- Children whose parents have limited literacy skills are more likely themselves to have limited skills.
- The impact of falling behind in the early years forces children to work even harder as they try to catch up with their peers.
- Limited success brings lack of interest in school.
- When children perform poorly in school, there are often associated behavioral issues and family stress.
- The pattern of low performance often persists throughout school leading to increased risk of dropping out.
- Children who drop out are more likely to become involved in the court system.

Research indicates that a child’s success is closely related to the mother’s education level. The higher the mother’s education level, the more likely the child will perform well in school. The National Center for Family Literacy reports that children are better able to succeed in kindergarten when they have had good pre-school experiences, when they are proficient in English, when English is the primary language spoken in the home, when the family’s income is above subsistence, and when children regularly see parents reading (NCFL, 2009).

Participants in the San Antonio focus groups noted that social service sites rarely offer literacy services and many childcare providers do not offer pre-reading activities. One participant noted that little training is available to assist home-based childcare providers in offering pre-reading activities.

In some areas of San Antonio, 50-60% of pre-school children are not enrolled in any early childhood program. Most districts offer full-day kindergarten but not pre-kindergarten. In Northside ISD, there is no space for a Head Start program. Ironically, UT Health Science Center-Children’s Learning Institute reports that many children do not qualify for Pre-K or Head Start.
(UT Learning Institute, 2009). San Antonio’s Friends, Families and Neighbors Program (FFNs, 2009), funded by the City, is just one program working to address this issue.

Several family literacy programs have closed due to lack of funding. Even Start funding has been reduced over time, and the local community has not been willing or able to maintain service levels.

Many community-based organizations provide activities that incorporate aspects of family literacy. Programs like Precious Minds New Connections, Family Nurturing Program at the Antioch Community Transformation Center (PMNC, 2009), and Avance, San Antonio’s intergenerational family literacy program (Avance, 2009), weave literacy in program activities.

Key informants said that building knowledge and confidence for low literate families living in poverty was critical in San Antonio. Several focus group participants noted that families in poverty do not see literacy as a critical need or value having books in the home when they face other more pressing needs. Some families did not understand the value of reading to children, and others lacked literacy skills to do so.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has invested strongly in San Antonio’s development. The foundation report, Kid’s Count, demonstrates that although San Antonio had a lower infant mortality rate than either Texas or the nation, it has a higher birthrate, higher school dropout rate, more children in poverty and more children in single parent families (Annie E Casey, 2009).

The high level of young mothers and mothers with limited education is another indicator that the need for family literacy and early childhood programming is going to continue as a key issue in the community.
Children learn to speak English and become the family translator. This is an issue in both education and in healthcare. In the above graph, it is interesting to note the relatively small number of children who have difficulty speaking English. In focus group conversations, participants noted a breakdown of communication in families where parents spoke limited English. One key informant noted, “When language issues are present, we frequently have a five or six year old explaining informed consent to the parent or grandparent.”
In the following research it is of interest that Texas families read less often with their children. Data below is from the Urban Institute’s National Survey of America's Families, which compared the status of families in 13 states.

Children age 1-5 who are read to or told stories less than three times/week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>CO</th>
<th>FL</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>NJ</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>TX</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>WI</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
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The chart above illustrates the percentage of children age 1-5 who are read to or told stories less than three times per week in various states and the national average.
Key informants noted cultural differences in San Antonio’s communities. Parents need to be offered culturally-informed strategies so they can increase pre-reading activities with their children.
KEY FINDINGS: EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LITERACY

1. Children entering kindergarten with limited pre-reading skills have difficulty keeping up with their peers.

2. Children from families with poor literacy skills often have poor literacy skills.

3. Many families cannot afford childcare services where early learning skills may be taught.

4. There are very few family literacy services available in San Antonio.

“We need smaller classes and more individual attention so that everyone can succeed.”

Judy Lackritz, The Jewish Coalition for Literacy
K-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM AND LITERACY ACQUISITION

The Education Service Center, Region 20, is one of 20 regional education service agencies within Texas which assist school districts in improving student performance and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of school operations.

Fifteen school districts serve the families of San Antonio:

- Alamo Heights Independent School District covers 9.4 square miles and serves students from Alamo Heights, Terrell Hills, Olmos Park, and a portion of north San Antonio.

- East Central Independent School District is a small district on the eastside of San Antonio, including portions of the Southton and China Grove areas.

- Edgewood Independent School District covers the area just south of St. Mary’s University between Culebra and Highway 90.

- Fort Sam Houston Independent School District serves children of families within the Fort Sam Houston Army Post and such other military reservation territory which is subject to the same post or base commander.

- Harlandale Independent School District is located on the south side of San Antonio. Its students are a multi-ethnic population, including many children of service personnel stationed at various San Antonio military bases.

- Judson Independent School District serves the Live Oak area on the northeast side of San Antonio, near Loop 1604 and I-35.

- Lackland Independent School District covers children of families at Lackland Air Force Base, which is located on the southwest side of San Antonio near Highway 90 and SW Military Drive.

- North East Independent School District is the second largest school district in the San Antonio area. It spans approximately 144 square miles in the north central and northeast areas.

- Northside Independent School District is the largest school district in San Antonio and the fifth largest in the state of Texas. NISD serves the north and northwest areas of San Antonio.
Randolph Field Independent School District serves the children of families stationed at Randolph Air Force Base, which is located on the northeast side off Loop 1604 in the Universal City area.

San Antonio Independent School District is the third largest school district in San Antonio. SAISD consists of 79 square miles in central Bexar County.

Somerset Independent School District is one of the smaller districts. The district covers some parts of southwest San Antonio, as well as Somerset, Texas, near the crossroads of South Loop 1604 W. and Somerset Road.

South San Antonio Independent School District serves the south side of San Antonio.

Southside Independent School District also covers portions of south San Antonio. However, it is one of the smaller districts with fewer than 5,000 students enrolled.

Southwest Independent School District includes 115 miles in the southwest quadrant of Bexar County. Facilities include 15 campuses with fully-equipped gymnasiums at all levels.
The city is also home to more than 30 private schools and charter schools. These schools include San Antonio Academy, Central Catholic Marianist High School, Holy Cross High School, Incarnate Word High School, and St. Anthony Catholic High School.

While most San Antonio school districts serve some children in poverty, over 90% of students in San Antonio ISD are economically disadvantaged. Several local lawmakers have urged more stringent efforts by schools to provide equal educational opportunities to all children.

San Antonio’s growing number of charter schools reflects the community’s growing frustration with the K-12 system. But charter schools are not always the solution. When the Texas Education Agency released ratings for all public schools, including San Antonio’s 48 charter schools, two local charter schools, La Escuela de Las Americas and Rick Hawkins High School, posted unacceptable ratings on the state’s school report card.

La Escuela de Las Americas could be closed after two years of bad ratings under the Federal No Child Left Behind regulations. So far the Texas Education Agency has no plans to close the school. Rick Hawkins High School is one of six schools in the School of Excellence in Education district. The district overall was ranked academically acceptable, saving Rick
Hawkins from closure in 2007. Key informants commented that the state must hold all schools, even charter schools, accountable. One participant noted that the funds are wasted on programs that have a track record of failure.

“The high illiteracy rate adversely impacts our city’s ability to have an educated workforce and keeps families in poverty. If not significantly addressed, it could undermine our city’s future.”

Shannon Nisbet, Family Service Association
Some San Antonio schools fared well on the state's 2007-08 report card. Harmony Science Academy, part of a 19-campus statewide charter district, earned the coveted “exemplary” rating two years in a row. “We have a system that works really well,” the principal reported, “Throughout the year we have benchmark tested three times to investigate whether the students understand the curriculum. We have been using our data to find out the students who need remedial classes and there is no fee for any tutorial.”

Charter schools in Texas are rated in one of two ways: through the standard system used for traditional public schools, under which they can apply exceptions to reach a higher rating; and through an alternative rating system designed for charter schools that aim to educate students who would otherwise drop out of school.

Issues of equity concern San Antonio educators and parents. Lack of high quality resources in many of the poorer districts impedes the success of poor children. While all schools receive state funds designed to establish a minimum educational threshold in every school, Texas public elementary and secondary schools also rely on local property taxes for supplemental revenue. The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), acting on behalf of students whose families reside in poor districts, challenged this funding arrangement recently. SAISD argued that their students suffer because their schools lack the property tax base other districts utilized.

The reliance on assessable property, SAISD claimed, causes severe inter-district disparities in per-pupil expenditures. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to examine the system with strict scrutiny since there is no fundamental right to education in the U.S. Constitution and since the system does not systematically discriminate against all poor people in Texas. Given the similarities between Texas’ system and those in other states, the Court concluded that the funding arrangement was not "so irrational as to be invidiously discriminatory." Justice Powell argued that on the question of wealth and education, "The Equal Protection Clause does not require absolute equality or precisely equal advantages." Given this Supreme Court ruling, the need for additional support in the elementary school years is crucial.
A scan of statewide TAKS scores reviewed for three San Antonio districts showed that SAISD lagged behind the local area and the state.
Students fall further behind in their reading scores as they move through grade levels. School districts are working hard to increase best practice strategies to provide remediation.
Some districts are performing above state standards by 10th grade, but others, including SAISD, are as many as eight percentage points lower than the state average.

The findings of the recent audit of SAISD, headed up by nationally known curriculum expert Fenwick English, found that, “SAISD just isn't challenging its students enough. Classrooms are not the student-centered places the district's leaders want them to be. At the high school level, teachers are assigning seatwork or lecturing the class. Talk to educators familiar with tenets of high school reform being pushed across the country, and they will quickly recite the three Rs: Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. Those same educators tend to advocate classroom learning that is engaging and hands-on.” The district's academic performance has improved over time, but students, especially Latino and African American students, still lag behind their white counterparts across the state in math and science.”

*Kids Count* analyzed the level of engagement of students and concluded that Texas students are less engaged than students in many other states. One focus group participant noted, ‘Students reading below 6th grade in high school have a hard time being engaged in a science or math class written at a 9th or 10th grade level!’
Literacy Needs Assessment for San Antonio

Children age 6-17 who are highly engaged in school

Susan Athene, Communities In Schools
How does family literacy influence student test scores? The NAEP 2000 national reading assessment of fourth-grade students found the following:

- Higher than average scores were achieved among students who reported more types of reading material at home. The researchers found that 68% of students who had three or more different types of reading materials at home performed at the Proficient level, while students who had two or fewer types of reading material at home tended to perform at the lower Basic level. Students who had 4 types of reading material at home performed the highest of all.

- Students who discussed their studies at home, however frequently, had higher average reading scores than students who reported never discussing their studies at home. The study found that 83% of students who discussed their studies once a month or more at home performed at the Proficient level, compared to students who never or hardly ever discussed their studies at home and tended to perform at the Basic level.

- Students who talked about reading with family and friends, however frequently, had higher average scores than students who never or hardly ever talked about reading. Students who talked about reading once or twice a week performed the highest. (Donahue, p57, Table 3.6)

The 2003 NAAL examined how parents/caregivers with different literacy levels interacted with their children. Those with higher literacy levels had more educational resources in the home and engaged in more literacy related activities. The percentage of parents with children ages 2-17 whose children often saw them reading increased with each literacy level. The percentage of parents who helped children with their homework also increased with each literacy level. In addition, even though almost all parents reported that their children had at least one or two books of their own, the percentage was even higher among parents with intermediate or proficient prose literacy.

In focus group discussions, both teachers and community service providers noted that increasing levels of parental involvement were needed to help increase literacy scores.

**KEY FINDINGS: K-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM AND LITERACY ACQUISITION**

1. Students progressively fall further behind in literacy in school if they have entered kindergarten with limited skills

2. Lack of parental involvement reduces the level of children’s success

3. Schools do not have the additional resources to provide the needed tutoring to keep all students succeeding.
“If we don’t fix education citywide and reach equity, San Antonio will be on a permanent slide toward poverty and economic stagnation, not to mention ethical compromise. All of our children are all of ours.”

Mark Larson, KIPP Academy
AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Young people spend only 20% of their time in school and therefore how they spend the remaining 80% of their time can have a considerable impact on their learning. Unfortunately many children do not have access to enriching opportunities during this important time. Latchkey children are unsupervised and those who spend their after school time on the streets can face numerous dangers.

Out of School Time (OST) programs can be a solution to these problems. They can provide additional supports for school success and can help to bridge the gap between school and home for many children. Research undertaken by the Wallace and Nellie Mae Foundations has demonstrated that OST programs produce the following benefits:

- Greater engagement in learning – improved behavior in school, increased sense of self, better work habits and improved attitudes to school
- Higher academic performance – improved homework completion, improved grades, higher scores on achievement tests and reduction of grade retention

These results can also translate into benefits for working parents, who gain peace of mind by knowing children are in a secure and supervised location and involved in well structured programs.

OST programs are not a cure-all. The Critical Hours Report (2003) researched numerous programs across the country and determined “a few hours a day in an after-school program is not likely to compensate for a poor quality education or years of alienation from school culture and expectation.” However, the same study did report:

- Youth benefit from consistent participation in well run, quality after-school programs
- After-school programs can increase engagement in learning
- After-school programs can increase educational equity
- After-school programs can build key skills necessary for success in today’s economy

One study of over a quarter million youth in grades 5 – 12 noted that participants in 4-H programs had:

- Higher educational aspirations
- Higher achievement motivation
- Greater desire to help others
Higher self esteem
Better decision-making skills
Higher level of interaction and communication with adults
Better ability to make friends

Texas children lag behind others in the country who are involved in extracurricular activities. (Kids Count)

In San Antonio, informants spoke of a lack of coordination between in-school and out-of-school programs, lack of available transportation to take children to programs, and lack of information for parents to let them know what was available.

Available after-school programs include:

- The Smart Play Smart program operated by City Parks and Recreation, where staff meet their students at school and walk with them to the park for recreation.
- The San Antonio After School All-Stars that provides technology, education, life skills, sports and cultural activities for over 3,000 children a year.
- The After-School Challenge Program, previously implemented by the City Parks and Recreation Department, which is now operated through the Department of Community
Initiatives (DCI). DCI has established partnerships with eight school districts and four delegate agencies to continue the After-School Challenge Program in 133 Elementary and Middle Schools.

Program fees are based on family income, family size, and the number of children from a family who participate in the program. An estimated 11,000 children receive homework assistance, tutoring, and other school-related assistance, in addition to participating in recreational activities. Program staff, recommended by each district, operate daily activities, supervised by one teacher.

Infusing literacy throughout all out of school children’s activities could go a long way to supporting children’s success in school. Current partners in this collaborative effort include:

- The San Antonio Public Library, which serves thousands of children and families during after school hours and during summer and other holidays;

- Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, which are beginning to infuse literacy into their activities. The literacy component of the San Antonio Girls Scouts notes, “Girl Scouts knows that literacy in and of itself pertains to more than simply the ability to read. Literacy encompasses writing, communicating with others, and processing ideas. Girl Scouts is unwavering in its commitment to literacy.”

Pat Medina, San Antonio Youth Literacy
KEY FINDINGS: AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

1. Out of School Time programs enhance student learning, but San Antonio does not have sufficient programs to meet the needs.

2. Coordination needs to be improved between after-school programming and the school system.

3. Many out of school time programs lack literacy activities; staff are not trained in the concept of literacy infusion.
YOUTH AND THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK AND COLLEGE

Youth with skills to succeed in college and/or the workplace are an essential part of a healthy community. Youth facing an uphill struggle for success need support to transition from school to college and/or work. In 1990, the National Center on Education and the Economy released *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages*, describing the critical situation faced by youth who drop out of school without needed skills.

San Antonio has a slightly smaller percentage of people without high school diplomas, compared to several other large Texas cities, although Texas lags behind other states.

The America’s Promise Alliance notes that, “The likelihood that a ninth-grader in one of the nation’s biggest cities will clutch a diploma four years later amounts to a coin toss — not much better than a 50-50 chance. Cross into the suburbs, and the odds improve dramatically.”

High school graduation rate data is notoriously poor. In 2007, the National Governors Association stated: “Unfortunately, the quality of state high school graduation and dropout data is such that most states cannot accurately account for their students as they progress through high school.”
The U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data listed San Antonio ISD dropout rate as 51.9 on April 1, 2008. In San Antonio, key informants noted that low literacy among youth compounds the dropout situation, increases the risk of crime, and creates barriers to successful employment. Focus group participants expressed grave concerns about the inadequate services for youth at risk of dropping out and for those already out of school. “Too many youth are becoming a drain on the community rather than an economic force upon which to build the area’s future,” said one provider.

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice published a comprehensive study authored by Brian J. Gottlieb, updated in 2008. The study reviewed the 2005 class of dropouts in Texas, an estimated 119,000 students. The study notes that the cumulative number of dropouts in the state aged 20 – 64 is about 2,595,000. Those who drop out in Texas have a higher unemployment rate and lower annual earnings than high school graduates ($12,700 vs. $21,900); a higher use of Medicaid (35% vs. 20%); and are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated. David Lindsay, Texas LEARNS Advisory Committee member, concludes, “Combining the incremental costs of dropouts from lost tax revenue and higher spending on Medicaid and incarceration produces a current-year cost to Texas tax payers of $123 million for the 2005 dropout class and $2.679 billion for the total working-age dropout population.” (Total Year Incremental Dropout Costs for Texas Taxpayers)
According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2006, San Antonio’s “dropout” population (age 25 and older, without a high school credential) has declined 3.65% since 2000, that decrease is more than the national decline during the same period (3.26%).

It is harder for older individuals to get a GED or complete a high school diploma when they have to juggle the demands of work, children and other responsibilities. The 2003 NAAL found that those who failed to obtain their diploma or GED at age 19 or younger had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than adults who had obtained their diploma or GED as teenagers. It also found that college graduates who received their college degree at 23 or younger had higher scores in all three test areas.

**Overview of Status Variables Associated with Dropping Out** (Macmillan, 1991; Rosenthal, 1998; Rumberger, 1995; Wolman, Bruininks, & Thurlow, 1989) show the following among average groups of students:

- **Age.** Students who drop out tend to be older compared to their grade-level peers.
- **Gender.** Students who drop out are more likely to be male. Females who drop out often do so due to reasons associated with pregnancy.
- **Socioeconomic background.** Dropouts are more likely to come from low-income families.
- **Ethnicity.** The dropout rate is higher on average for Black, Latino, and Native American youth.
- **Native language.** Students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to have higher rates of dropout.
- **Mobility.** High levels of household mobility contribute to increased likelihood of dropping out.
- **Ability.** Lower scores on measures of cognitive ability are associated with higher rates of dropout.
- **Disability.** Students with disabilities (especially those with emotional/behavioral disabilities) are at greater risk of dropout.
- **Parental employment.** Dropouts are more likely to come from families in which the parents are unemployed.
- **School size and type.** School factors that have been linked to dropout include school type and large school size.
- **Family structure.** Students who come from single-parent families are at greater risk of dropout.
Overview of Alterable Variables Associated with Dropping Out (Macmillan, 1991; Rosenthal, 1998; Rumberger, 1995; Wolman et al., 1989), has assessed the following reasons why students drop out:

- **Grades.** Students with poor grades and low literacy levels are at greater risk of dropout.
- **Disruptive behavior.** Students who drop out are more likely to have exhibited behavioral and disciplinary problems in school.
- **Absenteeism.** Rate of attendance is a strong predictor of dropout.
- **School policies.** School policies associated with higher dropout rates include raising academic standards without providing supports, tracking, and frequent use of suspension.
- **School climate.** Negative school climate is associated with higher rates of dropout.
- **Parenting.** Homes characterized by permissive parenting styles have been linked with higher rates of dropout.
- **Sense of belonging.** Alienation and decreased levels of participation in school have been associated with increased likelihood of dropout.
Attitudes toward school. The beliefs and attitudes (e.g., locus of control, motivation to achieve) that students hold about school are important predictors of dropout.

Retention. Students who drop out are more likely to have been retained than students who graduate. Using National Education Longitudinal Study data, being held back was identified as the single biggest predictor of dropping out.

Students who are succeeding tend to stay in school. Therefore increasing student performance may be the best strategy to use with groups most likely to fail. A synthesis of information from a variety of studies (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Hurley, 2000) identifies the following factors in student success:

- Supportive, nurturing family and home environment
- Interaction with and involvement of committed, concerned educators and other adults
- Perseverance and optimism
- Positive attitude toward school and increased motivation to obtain a diploma
- Positive, respectful relationships between staff and students
- Satisfaction with the learning experience (e.g., social climate, instructional climate, school course offerings, and school rules)
- Relevance of curriculum
- Fair discipline policies

In San Antonio, youth who drop out of high school have a variety of options to continue their education. They can attend a GED program offered by a City learning center or an adult education program; they can attend a vocational training program through the Workforce Investment Board; or they can enroll in a community college.

San Antonio has 100,000 students enrolled in 31 higher education facilities including University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and five campuses of the Alamo Community College. Private schools include St. Mary’s University, Our Lady of the Lake University and University of the Incarnate Word and Trinity University.

A primary goal of the Texas Higher Education Board (THECB), called Closing the Gaps, is to increase Texas’ college enrollment by 630,000 more students by 2015. 85% of the projected enrollment increase will be in 3 regions of the State, with the largest of those regions being South Texas, including San Antonio and its surrounding counties.
While many families think they cannot afford college education for their children, the Texas Tomorrow II plan funds college courses for students in San Antonio schools beginning in 2008.

A significant barrier to college education is the fact that a high percentage of those who pass the GED and enter college do not succeed in college level courses or pass the college entry level test. To address this problem, GED Challenge 800 courses at St. Philip’s College (Alamo Community College) have become a cornerstone of the GED Center’s offerings. Unlike most typical GED classes, GED Challenge 800 classes focus on building critical thinking skills and preparing student for college-level courses. Students learn to take useful notes, manage their time, and balance the demands of college coursework while preparing for the GED examination. This rigorous curriculum enhances the likelihood that students will successfully complete college coursework.

Another example of innovative programming is at the Westside Training Center where students enroll in vocational skills’ training that prepares them for high growth jobs.
YOUTH ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN FOCUS GROUPS 
AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Focus group participants noted that some youth transition directly from high school to adult literacy programs and, where this is successful, it should be encouraged. On the whole, however, participants believed that the adult literacy classes do not appeal to youth who drop out of school. Retention rates for youth concurrently enrolled in GED Challenge 800 and vocational training classes are much higher than those who are in traditional GED programs. The new GED 800 program at St. Philips College moves a student quickly to GED success while concurrently preparing them for college level classes. One informant described the program, “It has a very rigorous curriculum and students are required to pass all remedial courses. There has been a long term problem with students who pass the GED with the lowest passing levels and then cannot pass the college entry test. This type of program ensures that students are prepared to pass at higher levels that will facilitate their passing the entry test.” Other informants noted that new GED graduates really struggle without support at the college level which results in a high dropout rate. “Counselors must be much better prepared to offer support in the transition from adult literacy programs to college.”

In addition to high dropout rates, many adults with diplomas also cannot read well. Participants suggested that youth could be attracted to programs that incorporate arts as a medium for infusing literacy.

Youth recruitment in adult literacy programs is an enormous challenge. Many youth referred by social service agencies never arrive at the program. Youth who enroll frequently never come back. “Many are embarrassed by their lack of skills and inability to read well enough to fill out forms and start the program.”

18 and 19 year old immigrants who are too old for the school system present particular challenges. These students do not fit into the school environment, but there are few programs specifically for them. Key informants commented that young adults (18-23 year olds) are the fastest growing group in adult education programs. They suggested that a process be established where students who fail or drop out automatically get back on track and rejoin the system.

Several focus group participants mentioned Communities In Schools, a program that uses successful strategies to help students stay in school and make the right choices. Communities In Schools connects schools with community agencies, parents, and volunteers, creating a community of caring adults who work hand in hand with educators. Through a holistic, one-on-one case management approach, Communities In Schools reaches students most at-risk for dropping out of school.

Another key informant spoke about the emergence of gangs in San Antonio. It was suggested that the gang issue is probably bigger than San Antonio is prepared to admit and that low literacy
skills may be a major barrier preventing youth from accessing vocational and educational programs, leading them to turn to gangs instead. Anti-gang work programs like the Youth Against Gang Activity and the Neighborhood Place have shown positive results.

The Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program, serving students expelled from school, provides daily instruction, supervision, and educational activities designed to motivate these youth to make positive changes in their lives by focusing on their strengths. A major priority of the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program is to engage these youth in education by re-establishing a positive relationship between the schools, students, and their families.

**Enrollment Information for Bexar County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program**

Informants emphasized the role the family plays in encouraging and supporting youth to build literacy skills and prepare for the future, yet few support services are available in San Antonio for parents of youth in transition.

**WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES THAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM PARENT INVOLVEMENT?**

- Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003).

- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003).
Parents who participate in decision-making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Parent involvement increases support of schools (NMSA, 2003).

Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2002).

Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002).

Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005).

Types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

“Education is important, because it impacts every aspect of a person’s life: financial, personal, health issues, physical well-being, and feeling self-confident in life.”

Joyce Spender, Instructor, Antioch, Each One Teach One,
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING PARENT INVOLVEMENT FOR YOUTH

1. Identify the concerns and issues of parents in the education of their children.

2. Develop, in collaboration with parents, shared goals and missions concerning young adolescents' learning and development. (Ruebel, 2001)

3. Develop a long-range parent involvement plan. "Parental involvement may be implemented as a stand-alone program or as a component in comprehensive school-based programs." (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005, p. 37).

4. Engage in parent professional development (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005; Marzano, 2003). First, identify focus areas for parent professional development. Then develop, with parents, a balanced, comprehensive program of partnership. For example, parents might prefer one- to two-hour free weekly sessions held at night or as a series of mini-courses. The professional development could discuss specific parent behaviors or it could be used as a vehicle to involve parents in other aspects of the school (Marzano, 2003).

5. Create a resource inventory to identify strengths, skills, and cultural and contextual knowledge of both parents and faculty members.

6. Develop a repertoire of strategies (e.g., interactive homework, student-led conferences) designed to increase parent involvement at school and at home.


8. Establish open and two-way lines of communication (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005; Epstein et al., 2002; Jackson & Andrews, 2004; NMSA, 2003) for thoughtful and reflective conversation.

9. Use a variety of meeting spaces, including neighborhood centers (NMSA, 2003) for equitable access and non-threatening environments.

As a result of the kinds of interventions listed above San Antonio might begin to expect more students to transitional into higher education but there are other issues that impact the transition to college including cultural, financial and motivational.
The National Education Association has identified twelve action steps:

1. **Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21.** Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 in the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical to eradicate the idea of "dropping out" before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education.

2. **Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old** to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students.

3. **Make sure students receive individual attention** in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (18 or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day.

4. **Expand students' graduation options** through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma. For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences.

5. **Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools** so that students see the connection between school and careers after graduation. To ensure that students have the skills they need for these careers, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

6. **Act early so students do NOT drop out** by ensuring that students have high-quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; strong elementary programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work when they enter middle school; and middle school programs that address causes of dropping out that appear in these grades and ensure that students have access to algebra, science, and other courses that serve as the foundation for success in high school and beyond.

7. **Involve families in students' learning at school and at home** in new and creative ways so that all families - single-parent families, families who live in poverty, immigrant families, and families in communities of color -- can support their children's academic achievement, help their children engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved in their children's education from preschool through high school graduation.
8. **Monitor students' academic progress in school** through a variety of measures during the school year that provide a full picture of students' learning and help teachers make sure students do not fall behind academically.

9. **Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates** by gathering accurate data for key student groups (such as racial, ethnic, and economic), establishing benchmarks in each state for eliminating dropouts, and adopting the standardized reporting method developed by the National Governors Association.

10. **Involve the entire community in dropout prevention** through family-friendly policies that provide release time for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules for high school students that enable them to attend classes on time and be ready to learn; "adopt a school" programs that encourage volunteerism and community-led projects in school; and community-based, real-world learning experiences for students.

11. **Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out** including professional development focused on the needs of diverse students and students who are at risk of dropping out; up-to-date textbooks and materials, computers, and information technology; and safe modern schools.

12. **Make high school graduation a federal priority** by calling on Congress and the president to invest $10 billion over the next 10 years to support dropout prevention programs.

These recommendations can become a platform on which Literacy San Antonio develops a local Community Literacy plan.
Racial disparities in educational success concerned informants. “Because of the strong correlation between poverty and poor academic success, fewer students of color enroll in higher education” said one key informant. An African American key informant commented, “The community is separated and is not inclusive. You can just cross a street in some neighborhoods and go from the Black community to the Hispanic. Many African Americans have very poor literacy levels but not enough is being done to provide programs in their neighborhoods.”

The Brookings Institute reports fewer than 22 percent of San Antonio adults hold a bachelor's degree, below the averages for large cities and the nation. Latinos hold college degrees at a lower rate (11 percent) than the city's African Americans (17 percent) and whites (37 percent). San Antonio also lags behind other cities in college/university enrollment. Yet the proportions of adults with high school diplomas and bachelor's degrees rose significantly in the 1990s, suggesting that San Antonio may be "catching up" with its large-city peers. "I think this is part of the education we must do related to public awareness," said one focus group participant. ‘Families and students must learn that higher education is for everyone.’ (www.brookings.edu/reports/2003/11-livingcities)

San Antonio also is challenged by a particular group of students, the Generation 1.5 students who are U.S. educated English language learners. This term represents a diverse population of
students in terms of educational experience, native and English language proficiency, and language dominance. These students may have immigrated to the United States while they were in elementary or high school while others were born in this country but grew up speaking a language other than English at home. “They may see themselves as bilingual, but English may be the only language in which they have academic preparation or in which they can read and write. At the same time, these students may not feel that they have a full command of English, having grown up speaking another language at home or in their community.”

Generation 1.5 students often appear in conversation to be native English speakers with typical social skills of the native born. However, they are usually less skilled in the academic language associated with school achievement, especially in the area of writing. In key informant interviews concerns were raised related to the limited vocabulary of Generation 1.5 students who dropped out of school or who are transitioning from school to college. “There is a need to provide special programming for Generation 1.5 students to help them meet academic and vocational training potential.” Generation 1.5 students have limited or no literacy in their first language. According to Thonus (2003, p.18), many of these students “have lost or are in the process of losing their home languages without having learned their writing systems or academic registers. Unlike international students, generation 1.5 students lack a basis of comparison in fully developed oral, written, or both systems of a first language.”

KEY FINDINGS: YOUTH AND THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK AND COLLEGE

1. A lack of family attitudes supportive of encouraging students to stay in school to complete education.

2. Traditional approaches have proven unsuccessful so innovative approaches are needed to help youth succeed.

3. San Antonio has limited programs that link contextualized learning and vocational training to assist in transition from school to work.

4. There is no expectation that all students will enroll in continuing vocational or academic education.

5. Generation 1.5 students have special needs there are not currently being addressed.

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“Education is important. Teach people and tell them about the literacy programs. Letting them know is very important.”

Deserie, San Antonio Resident
Adult literacy services in San Antonio offer basic skills, GED, ESOL, and citizenship classes and are primarily delivered through Texas LEARNS. Community and faith-based organizations also offer literacy services in this traditionally fragmented delivery system. Some literacy education is offered in other social service agencies including refugee and immigration, drug and alcohol recovery, prison re-entry, housing, and workforce development. Many nonprofit literacy services have closed because of insufficient funding over the past several years.

One key informant stated, “In terms of adult education, what is in place is not working, and there is a need for some system changes.” Key informants noted that critical issues in adult literacy are: 1) retention of adult students; 2) lack of support for adults who read below a sixth or seventh grade level; and 3) the stigma of low literacy.

In January 2009 the National Center for Education statistics released data based on research of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy reporting on literacy levels in states and counties. The following information compares the counties surrounding Bexar County.
The chart shows the NAAL estimates for the percent of population lacking basic literacy skills in the counties of the San Antonio area. The black dot and number represents NAAL’s best guess, and the red lines show their “95% confidence interval” meaning they are 95% sure that the actual number is somewhere within that range.

Multiplying each county’s NAAL rate by its adult population allows us to calculate the number of adults in each county who lack basic literacy skills. This estimate suggests that Bexar County is home to some 83% of the area’s population in need of literacy support.
One informant stated, “It is really difficult to identify all those who need help in San Antonio. There are stigmas involved in accessing services from certain systems.” Others mentioned the need for better assessment tools to bring adults with low literacy to programs in a positive way, streamlining the enrollment process to make it easy and smooth.

The Literacy Committee of the San Antonio WorkSource reports, “Counting the dropout population in the region does not sufficiently illustrate the literacy crisis we face. The primary/secondary school system frequently ‘graduates’ individuals with insufficient math and language skills to pursue higher education and career goals, leaving a broad cross-section of the population in need of academic remediation to progress to meet their full potential. In fact, Alamo Community College’s officials estimate that 70% of incoming freshman are required to take remedial math or English.”
In the San Antonio community, most state and federal funding for adult education flows to:

1. City of San Antonio (8 community learning centers)
2. San Antonio Independent School District
3. North East Independent School District
5. Education Service Center Region 20

These partners:

1. Receive $3,988,434 for Adult Education.
2. Serve 17,403 at a cost of $229 per customer for an average of eight hours a week for those who maintain attendance.
3. Provide service to only 5.08% of residents with low literacy.

Very few funds flow to nonprofit and faith-based providers, despite a clause in the Workforce Investment Act requiring ‘direct and equitable access.’ Those being served by private non-profit groups are harder to track because San Antonio has no mechanism to collect information across program types or funding streams.

One informant noted, “We can’t keep doing the same thing over again and expect it to work. We must create more innovative programs that welcome people and ensure their needs are met. The word literacy is a real disincentive to attend a program!” One provider stated, “We encourage participation but there are not the wrap-around services to make it work.”

Yet in programs offering wrap around services, counseling and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families support, participants needed help filling out the required paperwork just as they needed assistance filling out WIC applications, transportation requests, food stamps, etc. A focus group participant commented that literacy can also be of value in the legal system with conflict resolutions and problem solving.
Challenges of accountability measurement have hurt some systems. “We must review and address this,” said one participant. “If we are ‘teaching to the test’ or trying to hit key benchmarks at the expense of individualizing instruction for children and adults, then we must find better ways to measure success.”

Participants stressed the need for easily-accessible neighborhood based services. Others said that transportation services would increase program enrollment and that perhaps taxi or van services could be considered. Transportation is a major community issue in any case, regardless of its impact on literacy.

San Antonio has the capacity to serve more students in its adult education system. Yet too many adult programs look like copies of traditional school experiences. Several key informants noted that while San Antonio had a Commission on Literacy most people had not heard of it. “If San Antonio is serious about this issue the Mayor and City Council need to elevate the Commission with a stronger mandate for change and the resources to make the changes happen. It is embedded in layer of bureaucracy and has no real authority.”

Adults with above a sixth grade reading level can obtain free adult education at the city’s learning centers, the community college campuses, some school districts and a few nonprofit organizations. However, students must pay for programs outside the mainstream of free literacy services. Some use Pell grants to enroll in college for remedial courses and use up their access to that financial support before they are even prepared to take college level courses. ‘We must find
a way to expand literacy funding so that all literacy services are free and you only start with financial aid after you enroll in accredited college courses.’

The biggest issue raised in the focus groups was that of learners with very limited skills. One key informant noted, “When I refer a student to an adult literacy program they only manage to stay a short while. Their skills are too low for the classes and the teachers don’t have time to help those struggling at the lowest levels. There is no organized system for tutoring in those programs and they focus on the students who they can get to GED because it makes their numbers look good!”
FOCUS GROUPS WITH ADULT LITERACY PROVIDERS

Adult literacy service providers were concerned that reduced budgets and program cuts have seriously impacted their services. With program closings and staff changes, they have great difficulty sustaining an effective system. Literacy providers also noted that more resources and programs are needed to serve those with below-third grade levels.

A typical GED/ABE student attends class only 2 or 3 times a week for a maximum of 12 hours, despite research indicating that it may take as many as 150 hours instruction for him/her to increase just one grade level. When learners often drop out when they do not make sufficient educational progress in programs offering classes only once or twice a week.

Staff in adult literacy programs noted that most offer traditional classroom instruction. Learners commented that they did not feel programs met their need for individual support. Those with the lowest skills drop out of traditional programs or may be referred out of programs. Programs like Avance have on-site adult education classes as part of their family literacy activities to help those with very limited skills. Faith-based programs also offer programs for adults who have difficulty in traditional adult education classrooms. Faith-based programs foster participation in unique ways:

- They identify established community leaders and encourage them to reach out to those in need of services.
- They capitalize on the “oral tradition” so that all people can learn about what opportunities are being offered.
- Faith communities are willing to plan events away from the program site.
- Faith-based programs are not shy about asking for honest feedback from learners.

In all the focus groups and interviews, there was a great deal of discussion about accessing literacy programs. “People trying to hide their low literacy are always passing the buck,” one participant explained, “asking others to fill in forms or ‘forgetting’ their glasses.” Many are ashamed of their low skills. There is a strong sense of embarrassment and a stigma related to low literacy that make it difficult for people to muster the courage to enroll in literacy programs.
San Antonio faces the unique challenge of being home to a large population for whom English is a Second Language. Most of its immigrant population is Latino. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2006, 108,252 or 6.03% of San Antonio residents age 5 or older were classified as speaking English “not well” or “not well at all”. Of those, 104,399 were Spanish speaking. Nationally, 4.82% of the population was classified as speaking English “not well” or “not well at all” in 2006, while in the state of Texas that percentage was 8.64%. San Antonio’s relatively high (nationally) percentage of “Spanish speaking” population, is due in large part to the predominance of first, second, and third generation Latino citizens that reside in the region. This number is likely under-reported due to the prevalence of “undocumented” residents in the region.

Most adult literacy programs in the San Antonio region offer ESOL classes. Some people are highly literate in their native languages while others have no literacy skills at all. Key informants commented that there is a strong tradition of new immigrants wanting to work, sometimes more so than native born residents, and that drive has helped to maintain high class attendance and persistence in ESOL programs.

Once immigrants enter the workforce, however, it is more challenging for them to maintain their participation in language programs. Companies have difficulty persuading refugee workers to enroll in Vocational English as a Second Language, even when stipends and promotions are offered. Employees find it difficult to make additional time after the workday. Transportation is also an issue. Shift work compounds the problem, because people are not always on the same shift and programs are not always available at the times employees come off their shift.

Some employers encourage attendance at community literacy programs but do not arrange for on-site classes. More ESOL and VESOL services for incumbent workers are needed in workplaces. English literacy was also reported as a major problem by health care providers because of the dangers of unsuccessful communication in a medical setting.

INPUT FROM ADULT LEARNERS

Because of the very low program attendance levels in adult literacy programs, report researchers met with potential learners and discussed their needs. Many noted that education was indeed important to them, many had dropped out of school, and many had dreams of success. “My neighbor would like to come with me but he works long hours and can’t take the time”, said one learner.
Some older community members recalled that family or income issues had prevented them from pursuing their education. Many older learners may not even realize that educational opportunities still exist at their age.

Participants reported that once a student falls behind in the education system, it is difficult to catch up again. There is often little help. Some people had been socially promoted with their class even though they had not passed the prior grade, and then they could not keep up with the higher level work.

Participants said that there are very few programs where work and education are concurrent, and it is difficult to earn an income while taking the necessary training. In addition, many interviewees did not know about the variety of options that may have been available when they dropped out of school.

Many potential learners had difficult experiences in the school system: “I went to 10th grade and no classes since then.” “School was hard. It was a hard time.” “I wasn’t focused. I was bored.” “People don’t go back because they are embarrassed. They start and don’t finish.”

Peer pressure was also a contributing factor to school failure: “My friends did not pass in school either’, said one of the learners, ‘They have never gone back to school but I do tell them about it.’

Several people noted that neither their family nor any other person was pushing them to succeed, a fact that made it easier to drop out: “I guess most people don’t take courses or go back to school because they have no family structure, no one pushing.” “Sometimes peer pressure [to not be in school] is just too much, too much free time, being out on the streets.”

Issues of low expectations were also an important aspect of dropping out and not persevering: “I think people don’t keep going to school or classes because they lost their ambition.” “They have low self esteem.” “It is the convenience of not needing to do it.”

People identified pride, family tradition, fear of failure, fear of judgment from peers, and lack of information as reasons for not attending programs. They noted that programs are sometimes boring, not designed to appeal to the people they serve, and not relevant to their lives: “I had a sense of rejection/failure.” “I was in a special education program in school and there was nothing for me to go to after I left school. I wanted to keep on learning and I was very pleased to find this program. I love this school.”

Participants reported that people drop out of programs because they become frustrated, lack patience, have low confidence, have learning disabilities and may suffer from depression or anxiety.
Transportation and childcare were both reported as major barriers to program access.

Throughout all the interviews, participants raised issues of limited numeracy. Even at the college level, key informants noted that teachers were seeing an increased need for math remediation. One community leader commented, “Students seem very fearful of math. We have to find a way to prepare them for math at work.”

Still there is a widespread desire for numeracy. A potential adult learner commented, “I would like to learn math. I don’t have much of a mind for math.” Participants suggested that the way we teach math might not be the best for preparing people for success in the subject. One indicator of poor financial literacy knowledge and skills is that more than 400,000 people ($24 million) are due economic stimulus checks but have not claimed them.

Issues at the worksite are challenging for employees having difficulty with written materials. Employers don’t always recognize that someone has low literacy skills so they assume a person has poor work ethics or is lazy. “There is still a stigma and people hide it from their boss who wonders why they don’t apply for promotions,” reported one participant.

**KEY FINDINGS: ADULT LITERACY**

1. The number of adults with limited literacy skills is increasing as the population increases, and that fact underscores the importance of investing in effective adult literacy services.

2. The immigrant population has declined over the past several years, but represents an important population that could benefit from literacy services.

3. There are insufficient ESOL classes available to meet the needs as more people begin to enroll.

4. African Americans and Latinos in the community have the lowest levels of literacy, and strategies to support this population are essential.

5. Data collected in San Antonio supports the correlation between low literacy and poverty and indicates need for a major scale-up of literacy services.

6. There is a critical shortage of programs to teach adults with the lowest literacy levels.
“Education is very important to every child so that they can be a better citizen.”

Teariani Jones, San Antonio Resident
LITERACY AND SENIOR CITIZENS

Senior citizens are a group whose special literacy needs often go unrecognized. In a 2003 literacy test, seniors (65+) scored far below any other adult age group. Their score of 214/500 was significantly lower than teenagers, young adults, and those in middle age. Part of this result can be explained by the fact that many seniors grew up in a time when educational opportunities were less available; another reason is that mental skills, including literacy skills, can decline with old age.

![Literacy Scores by Age Group](image)

Preserving mental function is crucial for seniors. A 2006 survey of Americans aged 63 to 80 commissioned by United Healthcare's Secure Horizons found that mental acuity is the biggest concern among seniors.

- Nearly 6 out of 10 seniors are concerned about staying mentally sharp (59%).
- Less than half say they are concerned about maintaining social relationships (48%).
- Less than one-third are concerned with dealing with depression (32%).
- Less than a third are concerned with dealing with loneliness (31%).

The same survey found that seven out of ten seniors were concerned about their health and wellbeing, and Alzheimer's was the most feared disease. For seniors without the literacy skills to access, navigate and understand health care systems and treatments, these fears are even worse. Just three percent of senior citizens have proficient health literacy skills and most do
not understand medical instructions well. This creates a major challenge for health, educational, and social services.

“When seniors are isolated they deteriorate both mentally and physically,” said one key informant. “That is why we are focusing on creating support services for seniors and literacy is a component that we must address in our services.” The Bob Ross Senior Center is a good example of a program with a thriving literacy component. “Literacy reduces social isolation,” said another informant, “and this is especially true for senior citizens.”

Participants said that retired seniors are most interested in strengthening skills in computers, health knowledge, and financial planning. In San Antonio, classes in these areas are not readily available. For some, education is simply a goal they have long dreamed of but never had the chance to pursue; one informant was impressed to see the joy of a 75 year old when she earned her GED.

Seniors who have good mental function can experience the rewards of volunteerism by assisting others as tutors or as leaders of book clubs and discussion groups. Seniors in assisted living can benefit from volunteers reading with them and having good on-site libraries. “I’d like to see a library at every senior center,” said one focus group participant.

According to the 2000 Census, San Antonio seniors who speak other languages report much higher English ability than their younger counterparts.

**KEY FINDINGS: SENIOR CITIZENS**

1. Issues of low literacy for seniors have not been effectively addressed to date.

2. There are good programs that could be replicated if resources were available.

3. Health literacy is crucial for senior citizens’ well-being but it is not being offered to the senior community.
NUMERACY

Numeracy includes the type of math skills needed to function in everyday life, in the home, workplace, and community (Withnall 1995). Students of all ages are challenged by math in everyday situations like reading board games or video game instructions, cooking, shopping, crafts, financial transactions, traveling, interpreting information in the media, and taking medications.

Throughout all the interviews, participants raised issues of limited numeracy. Even at the college level, key informants noted that teachers were seeing an increased need for math remediation. “We have to include math instruction in our general discussion about literacy because it is a growing problem,” said one interviewee. “Some of the instructors are not very comfortable about teaching math. The process has changed over the years and it is difficult to keep up with the newest methods of instruction,” said another.

The September/October 1995 issue of GED Items describes the challenges of math instruction:

A. Certain topics included in the high school math curriculum, such as trigonometry, advanced algebra, or calculus, seldom come up in the lives of most adults. At the same time, insufficient attention is paid by schools to developing the estimation skills adults need to handle tasks which do not require precise calculations, and to "number sense" skills—the meanings people attach to numbers. Examples of "number sense" would include grasping big numbers used in discussing corporate or government budget cuts, or small numbers, such as those involved in evaluating risks.

B. Most adults, regardless of their occupation or living environment, need to be able to plan, handle, and monitor the use of resources, such as money and supplies, or time and people. Such tasks require people to optimize the use of resources, often in the presence of conflicting goals and demands. Skills needed to handle such tasks often differ markedly from those needed to solve word problems which schools use to simulate real-world dilemmas.

C. Adults often need to handle tasks involving numbers embedded in text such as comprehending a problem and choosing an action based on data from forms, schedules, manuals, technical and financial documents. Most high school and adult mathematics instruction, however, tends to rely on textbooks and workbooks which use "distilled" language that does not replicate the contextualized demands found outside the school.

D. Mathematics instruction in the U.S. has paid little attention to development of interpretive skills essential if students are to become informed citizens who can make sense of verbal or text-based messages that touch on quantitative issues but that do not involve direct manipulation of numbers.
Numeracy focuses on developing conceptual understanding rather than computational prowess. From the comments of focus group participants, math instruction for both children and adults may not provide skills needed for success in life, especially for those students who already have low literacy skills.

GED tests measure the "major and lasting" educational skills and concepts that contribute to adults’ successful functioning in our society. The mathematics curriculums in high schools often focus on preparing students post-secondary institutions. Advanced algebra and calculus courses are important to some career paths, but more than half of U.S. 18-year-olds don't go on to college or need such advanced mathematical theory.

Lynda Ginsburg at the University of Pennsylvania’s National Center on Adult Literacy comments in an article, “Thinking About Numeracy Instruction, “Adult numeracy teachers are a varied group. One U.S. national survey of full time adult educators (regardless of teaching assignment) determined that only 64% of the responding teachers felt "prepared" or "very prepared" to teach math. More than half, regardless of the number of years teaching, indicated that they would most want to know more about "number sense" to improve their math teaching (Sabatini, et al., 2000). An earlier survey of adult education programs in the United States showed that 80% of adult learners receive some mathematics-related instruction but only 5% of the instructors in the programs are certified to teach mathematics (Gal & Schuh, 1994).

Learners who have diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities or different learning styles are frequently comfortable with workbook exercises that represent familiar and well-defined tasks, even if they don't understand why they are doing what they are doing. One focus group participant commented, “Math is kind of hard. I’d like to learn it better.” Other students concurred. Participants suggested that the way we teach math may not be preparing people for success in the subject.

Technology has made a difference in math instruction because assignments can be customized to specific learning styles. However, smaller programs with fewer resources and no computer labs often depend on volunteers who lack expertise to manage such instruction. Instructors themselves may suffer from ‘math phobia.’
KEY FINDINGS: NUMERACY

1. Schools are challenged by poor math performance and need new strategies to meet goals.
2. Students who have a high school diploma or a GED may still have math challenges.
3. Resources are needed to elevate and support numeracy – functional math - instruction.
4. Many math teachers and tutors are not well prepared to teach math effectively.

“I went to all of the activities at my daughter’s school. I want to be sure everyone is helped... literacy is so important ...don’t forget the older people as well.”

Joseph Webster, San Antonio Resident
LEARNING DISABILITIES

According to the 2003 NAAL survey, 6 percent of adults reported that they had been diagnosed or identified as having a learning disability. These adults had lower literacy levels than average. Adult literacy instructors in San Antonio report that many men and women with learning disabilities have not been diagnosed. Some children and adults with learning differences are supported in some school district programs and centers such as the Winston School.

Participants noted that there are many kinds of disabilities that affect learning, and that many disabled people fall outside the scope of current services. For example, people suffering from multiple challenges including mental health and substance abuse may also have low literacy skills. They may suffer from the effects of lead poisoning or have cognitive disabilities that affect their ability to pay attention in school. Men and women with multiple challenges often push literacy lower down their list of individual priorities. Life skills classes for persons with disabilities serve a very limited number of people.

Key informants noted that most community-based basic literacy students are people with learning differences whose needs have not been met in traditional educational settings. Even trained instructors and tutors find it difficult to work with people who are learning disabled, so retaining effective teachers is a challenge.

San Antonio has a number of professional centers to support people with learning differences. The programs are costly, yet people with limited incomes do not get information about available financial support. Each One Teach One is the only partner program that provides individualized support for learners in the City’s community learning centers. The other program offering such individualized support closed several years ago.

In the workforce, few employers offer workers special education and learning differences accommodations. While the Workforce Investment Act allows for special support for men and women in need of services, few workers are enrolled in such programs and assessment and diagnosis is expensive.

Men and women without a high school diploma who are served by the public health and human service system are expected to enroll in GED classes. Those persons with learning disabilities or have limited literacy may be penalized for not accomplishing an academic goal. Several key informants suggested increasing the number of workforce and pre-employment programs where literacy and vocational training were jointly offered and participants received a vocational certificate.
“I have always been inspired by Margaret Mead’s words ‘Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.’ And so it is with education and literacy efforts – it begins with a small group of committed people.”

Margaret Anderson, P-16 Plus Council
KEY FINDINGS: LEARNING DISABILITIES

1. Learning disabilities is an issue that has not been effectively addressed in the community.

2. Programs with strategies for early intervention are available but more are needed.

3. Well-trained tutors are needed to assist in programs across the age span.

“One of the main goals we should focus on in San Antonio and Texas, as well as nationally, is developing programs that help students not just attain literacy and pass the GED, but also become truly college-ready so that the full spectrum of possibilities and opportunities is available to them. In this way, we can ensure that all of us have access to the satisfaction, self esteem, and power that come from full participation in our communities and in our society as a whole.”

Gabriela Perez, St. Philips College
LITERACY AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

In San Antonio, faith-based communities offer a range of social services, including parenting classes, childcare, after-school programs, prison reentry workshops, mental health services, and literacy education. However, the literacy component of many of these programs is rarely infused into other services.

Organizations like Community of Churches for Social Action, the Antioch Community Transformation Network, Catholic Charities, and schools run by the Archdiocese of San Antonio operate educational programs for the community.

Faith-based leaders noted that issues of literacy and learning disabilities can be found in any congregation, from the heart of the city to the middle class suburbs. One leader commented that churches, synagogues and temples provide a great community outreach vehicle for identifying both those who might benefit from programs and those who might like to volunteer. “I think people would be more comfortable getting services at the church. We should integrate literacy into other activities and use a word that is not so negative.”

One informant said, “Many churches are informally teaching literacy, supporting those with fewer skills in Sunday school classes but not using the term literacy because of the stigma attached to it.” Another noted, “In African-American churches, the tradition is to read the Gospel aloud and many with low skills are able to recite many passages by heart.” It was suggested, “Normal outreach may not work, but faith communities have strong communication patterns. The faith community offers legitimacy to the issue of illiteracy. I know that they will respect me and I will have genuine support.”

Many churches informally teach but do not get financial support for doing so. To scale up their work, faith-based organizations need resources. ‘There should be no expectation of free service from pastors…they have a monetary value and they ARE charging for their time (donation).” Neither the Jewish Coalition for Literacy nor the Antioch Community Transformation Network receives federal dollars but they, like many, are discouraged by from applying by the confusing process.

Focus group participants noted that churches can bring a compelling message about the value of going back to school. They suggested a good outreach campaign would:

- Bring identified community leaders within the church to the table;
- Capitalize on the oral tradition;
- Host “High Attendance Day” (Bring a Friend Day);
- Plan literacy activity away from the program site;
Ask for the participants to give feedback about services they would like;

Talk with learners who are congregants;

Bring folks together to do “FUN” things.

Faith-based organizations noted that it is difficult to recruit volunteers. The Jewish Coalition for Literacy commented, “Only fifty percent of our tutors are Jewish. We have 16 years tutoring 3rd graders to pass the TAKS test. We recruit from synagogues and Jewish Federation members, but volunteers come from all faith communities.”

The Volunteer Center at the United Way recruits and tracks community volunteers for placement at local not-for-profits. “The ‘early retired’ population is a good group, but they hesitate to commit one day/week.” “Working in a more coordinated way with the faith community could really increase community volunteerism for many different types of literacy programs.”

Learning in the faith community is an important family activity. “We try to make learning a family effort. Parents are intimidated by the schools, and feel they cannot challenge the system. Schools send the same message. Teachers don’t feel empowered. Parents don’t feel welcome.” Leaders commented on the inequity of academic opportunity in San Antonio. “Why are we not spending the same amount of money on every student? Money talks and it matters! Why are there so many school districts? Why is money not distributed equitably? When you start on an unlevel playing field, you have a lot more pulling up to do. Education is freedom and power.”

The Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of San Antonio include 36 elementary school serving 10,500 children. The schools support parents as the primary educators and partners of education. The schools commit to provide inspiring Catholic active learning and quality education. Additionally the Archdiocese manages the following secondary schools.

Antonian College Preparatory High School, San Antonio
Atonement Academy, San Antonio
Central Catholic Marianist High School, San Antonio
Holy Cross High School, San Antonio
Incarnate Word High School, San Antonio
Providence High School, San Antonio
St. Anthony Catholic High School, San Antonio
St. Gerard Catholic High School, San Antonio
Other denominations also operate schools from early childhood through high school. Comments from informants suggest the need to coordinate among all faith-based providers to ensure that literacy services are maximized. “We must all work together on this issue if we are going to really make change.”

KEY FINDINGS: LITERACY AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

1. Many faith-based organizations have not been involved in literacy and have untapped resources.

2. There are some effective programs with possibilities for replication.

3. Faith communities but must be reimbursed for quality services.
LITERACY, CRIME AND SAFETY

Approximately 55,000 felony offenders are released from Texas state prisons each year, and about 4,000 live in San Antonio and Bexar County. The area is also home to many families of incarcerated people. A large number of children of incarcerated men and women are (or were) in foster care or without adequate family support.

The San Antonio WorkSource Literacy Committee reported, “While the quantifiable effect of education on crime rates and incarceration rates can be difficult to define, and reported effects can often vary from publication to publication, it is well known (and widely publicized) that education has an inverse impact on crime rates (higher education equals reduced crime rates) and reduces recidivism.” G.W. Bracey demonstrates the impact of low literacy among the community’s imprisoned members:

“As of 1997, 62% of whites, 69% of blacks, and 77% of Latinos in prison did not have a high school diploma. Prison-based education programs can help. Most research into the impact of education on recidivism finds positive effects, whether the program provides basic secondary education, vocational education, or college education.” - Bracey, G. W. Locked Up, Locked Out. Phi Delta Kappan v. 88 no. 3 (November 2006) p. 253-4

In interviews, informants noted that low literacy related to incarceration is a cost to the community, both in financial terms and loss of safety. The booming prison business in Texas represents a growth industry for the region, although taxpayers pay the price of increasing cost of incarceration. Prison families who follow inmates to Bexar County increase the demand on San Antonio’s social services. It is not unusual for family members to have limited literacy skills, and the problems that accompany this deficit frequently follow them.

It is difficult for any incarcerated person to re-enter society, but it is even more difficult when the community lacks sufficient supports and programs offering literacy and vocational training.
The following statistics about the inmates released into San Antonio County in 2003 were obtained from the Texas State Division of Criminal Justice Services:

Crime statistics show that although crime rates have dropped over the past few years, San Antonio’s crime rate is higher than the state average and has been increasing relative to the rest of the state.
The Windham School District provides educational services in the Bexar County Adult Detention Center and the Dominguez Unit. The district was the first school system of its size to be established within a statewide prison system. Windham is one of the largest correctional education systems in the nation. The Windham School District provides educational programs to meet the needs of eligible prisoners in TDCJ, with a goal to reduce recidivism by assisting men and women to become responsible, productive members of their communities.

In the Dominguez Unit, 27 Windham staff provides the following services to 2,200 inmates:

- Literacy/Reading
- Title I
- CHANGES/Pre-Release
- Cognitive Intervention
- Parenting Seminar
- Project RIO
- Career and Technology Programs: Computer Maintenance Technician, Technical Introduction to Computer-Aided Drafting
- Project RIO assists inmates as they prepare for re-entry into the larger community. Focus group participants noted that it is difficult for people to have success on re-entry when there are few literacy services for continuing the education begun in the correctional facility. The re-entering population needs key system supports including education, housing, employment, public assistance, substance abuse, and mental health treatment for successful, crime-free integration into the community.

**Low Parole Approval Rate a Key Policy Driving Growth**

88,000 inmates are eligible for discretionary release in prison or 66% of the prison population

55% of those eligible have a “non-violent” offense of record

31% Minimum under Guidelines

26%
Incarceration rates in the U.S. have quadrupled in the past twenty-five years. Over 650,000 state and federal prisoners are released from prison each year (Harrison and Beck, 2005). A body of recent research indicates that the transition from prison to community for a substantial portion of this population is highly problematic.

Texas incarcerates more of its population than any other state except Louisiana. It keeps its inmates in jail longer. Statistics show that 60% of ex-prisoners will return to the criminal justice system for violating the law. However, only 24% of men and women with high school education return to prison. Inmate with two years of college have only a 10% rate of recidivism; those with four years of college have a 5.6% rate of recidivism Post graduate degree holders have a 0% recidivism rate! (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prison and Jail Inmates, April 2002)

The racial disparity of incarcerated people is dramatic: One out of every four adult Black men in Texas is under some form of criminal justice supervision. The incarceration rate of African Americans in Texas is about seven times higher than that of whites.
“Statistics indicate that the expansion of the Texas prison system and widespread incarceration of its citizens is costly and ineffective at reducing crime rates. The disparity may be attributed in part to criminal activity by released inmates since as imprisonment rates escalate, recidivism rates also increase.” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prison and Jail Inmates, April 2002)

Men and women re-entering San Antonio are significantly younger than those in the rest of the state. Just over half of those released from prison have a high school diploma or equivalency.

Youth who participate in Texas Youth Commission (TYC) specialized treatment programs have much lower recidivism rates. TYC offenders are generally the most serious or chronic offenders in Texas or have failed probation and/or treatment efforts in their communities. State district judges send youth to the Texas Youth Commission for felony-level offenses committed by children from age 10 through ages 16. TYC operates 14 secure institutions, nine halfway houses and a statewide parole system. It maintains authority over the youth until their 21st birthday. The Ayres House in San Antonio is one such halfway house. TYC Researchers, following young offenders for a period after their release from secure facilities from 1993 to 1997, found:

- The likelihood of a TYC youth being rearrested for any offense within one year of release declined from 59.6% to 48.9%.
- The likelihood of a TYC youth being rearrested for a violent offense within one year declined from 12.2% to 9.2%.
- The likelihood of a TYC youth being re-incarcerated within a year declined from 35.6% to 28.9%.
- The likelihood of a TYC youth being re-incarcerated within three years declined from 52.8% to 50.8%.

Proving educational and vocational training programs is a proven strategy to reduce recidivism. Supporting adults and youth while they are incarcerated, and for some years after they re-enter the community, encourages their successful integration into the community. Such supports create additional taxpayers and decrease crime rates. Not all persons in the criminal justice system receive effective services because of budget constraints, low literacy levels, mental health issues, caseloads for parole and probation and many other barriers. Yet investment in education is a cost-effective solution.
KEY FINDINGS: LITERACY, CRIME AND SAFETY

1. Not enough prisoners, parolees or probationers receive the quantity and quality of educational and training programs to enable them to make effective life changes.

2. Re-entry programs for men and women need to be better linked to literacy and vocational training services.

3. Youth programs are reaping good results and replication of successful models is indicated.
HEALTH LITERACY

According to the NAAL (2003) health literacy survey, among adults receiving Medicare and Medicaid benefits, 27% and 30% respectively had below basic health literacy levels.

The San Antonio WorkSource Literacy committee reports, “The cost of low health literacy in the United States is estimated to be in the range of $106 - $238 billion annually (Vernon, et al. 2007) When one accounts for the future cost of low health literacy that result from current actions (or lack of action), the real present day cost is closer in the range of $1.6 - $3.6 trillion.”

Health literacy is defined by Healthy People 2010 as “The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” The American Medical Association Council of Scientific Affairs defines functional health literacy as “The ability to read and comprehend prescription bottles, appointment slips, and other essential health-related materials required to successfully function as a patient.”

Those with limited literacy skills are more likely to:

- Have difficulty navigating the complexity of healthcare systems
- Misunderstand oral instructions and written instructions from healthcare practitioners
- Lack access to healthcare support designed for those with low literacy
- Fail to complete courses of treatment or follow medical orders
- Have disproportionately poor health

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants spoke of the impact of low literacy on healthcare in San Antonio. They considered health literacy a crisis in the community that costs time and resources the community cannot afford. One participant commented, “The issue of health literacy is yet another drain on the economy of the community.”

Different communities and ethnic groups view the health system in diverse ways and face separate challenges depending on background and culture. Many healthcare providers lack education and cultural awareness of different community’s health concerns.

Health literacy affects people even before they enter the health system since many have difficulty understanding who can help them and where to find appropriate services.

The San Antonio Health Collaborative brings all area hospitals together to do preventative health care with a strong sense of knowledge, empathy, and compassion. The Collaborative acts as a “Chamber of Health.” “The health gaps that we have most recently identified are obesity, health
literacy, access to care, and youth mental health,” reported a focus group participant. “We recognize the extreme needs surrounding health literacy and are funders for San Antonio’s Health Literacy Project.” This project is developing creative strategies but needs additional support and marketing.

Healthcare leaders noted that an enormous amount of resources and expertise is wasted when people access the system inappropriately: Those without health insurance use the emergency room as a primary care provider. Eligibility misunderstandings about Medicaid compound the problem. One informant noted, “Low literacy affects every area with which I am involved. The lower the literacy level, the higher the poor health status. When language issues are present, frequently we have an English-speaking 6 year old explaining informed consent to the parent or grandparent!”

Several participants noted that health care policies exacerbate the problem. Physicians are not paid when they spend needed extra time with patients. Yet a patient with low English ability or low literacy skills requires more time. This creates a dilemma for doctors who, at some locations, are able to spend only seven minutes per patient, and are paid according to the number of patients they see in a day.

One participant noted, “St. Mary’s is considering piloting a health literacy project using evidence-based curricula already in place in other states. We need them altered to make them more culturally appropriate for San Antonio. These programs would be available for K-12 groups, and would be evaluated each year. We are also creating community medical homes through community centers.”

Many adults have difficulty filling out paperwork and coping with the complexities of the healthcare system. Informants reported that doctors are not trained to identify low literacy in patients. Native English language speakers are often too embarrassed to disclose that they cannot read materials and prescriptions. Patients may only be identified as having literacy issues when they don’t comply with medications or other health instructions.

Low literacy in some sectors of the medical workforce creates additional healthcare challenges. In hospitals, the laundry, housekeeping, kitchen, and grounds departments frequently have employees with limited literacy skills. Some locations have offered ESOL and VESOL training in the past, but making time for class is a major challenge. The healthcare field would benefit from hiring more persons of color, especially persons who speak the language of many community residents.

A new group of health care providers have recently prepared health materials at low literacy levels and developed visually-communicated therapies for those with low literacy. Health literacy classes are rare.
Many people mentioned the need for public awareness and outreach related to the health literacy issue: “Health literacy should be a component of the healthy community message – we do not promote it currently.” Participants said there should be more early intervention and preventative treatment but there is not yet a system to coordinate this.

“Health literacy goes beyond the written word, because it encompasses empowerment of the individual and their community in achieving a good health status as a social norm.”

Nicole Rogers, San Antonio Health Coalition

Participants suggested that strategies such as expanding school-based health clinics, increasing translation services, and increasing health literacy services would be important in making change. The cultural case manager works hard to develop new materials to make communication easier, but there is no formal staff training in health literacy. Translation is very expensive but necessary, as the hospital serves patients in 25 different languages.
KEY FINDINGS: HEALTH LITERACY

1. People with limited literacy have difficulty accessing and navigating the healthcare system.

2. The healthcare system is taxed by those with limited literacy who require extra time and resources.

3. People with limited English language ability do not have necessary translation services to ensure that they are well cared for.

“Reading and writing are the vehicles for success, and unless we partner and strategically decide to make an impact we will continue along the same path of the haves and have-nots.” Annette Rodriguez, Girls Inc.

“It’s about time passionate people come together to stop the literacy problems in our community.” Ada Soto, Girls Inc.
FINANCIAL LITERACY

Key informants noted that financial literacy is catching the community’s attention, especially in light of the national housing foreclosure crisis and homeowners’ inability to make mortgage payments. The problem extends well beyond those with low literacy skills to the general public. Naill Ferguson, in *The Ascent of Money*, writes that it is a “well-established fact that a substantial proportion of the general public is ignorant of finance.”

Those with limited literacy skills and limited resources often face the most difficult economic situations. Making decisions about credit, maintaining home ownership, paying mortgages, and repaying loans are challenging for anyone, let alone those poorly equipped to understand financial systems.

‘Financial literacy must be infused at every level of literacy learning,’ said one key informant. An example: In 2005, Texas Deputy Assistant Secretary for Financial Education, Dan Iannicola, Jr. taught a personal finance lesson to Girl Scouts, aged 9-11, in San Antonio, to kick off a financial literacy initiative sponsored by the Girl Scouts called CentsAbility. The program teaches Scouts how to set realistic financial goals, how to plan for those goals, how to establish a savings plan, and how to create a realistic budget based on current income and expenses.

Many people with limited financial literacy skills don’t know where to get the financial information they need. Local banks and credit unions offer some courses, but there is little coordination of effort or broad-based marketing to the community at large. Men and women without bank accounts are at the mercy of predatory lenders; those that have accounts often do not have the knowledge and skills to make economically wise decisions.

The City of San Antonio’s Family Economic Success Program offers residents opportunities to build assets through the use of tax credits, savings and other financial strategies. FESP is a collaborative partnership of the Department of Community Initiatives, the Internal Revenue Service, Annie E. Casey Foundation, the United Way and Catholic Charities. The group now includes local colleges as well as businesses and banking institutions including Frost Bank, Bank One and Wells Fargo. Families in the program are eligible to enroll in San Antonio’s Individual Development Account program after they have attended 15 hours of financial literacy classes.

Recently San Antonio Independent School District initiated the Capital One Financial Corporation/Junior Achievement Finance Park, a mobile financial education program. The program will teach basic money-management skills to nearly 1,000 middle-school students. These students will then have the opportunity to put their newly learned money management skills to test in a high-tech learning lab. This innovative learning environment houses a mock city where students can experience the challenges of making real-life financial decisions. While at Capital One/Junior Achievement Finance Park, the students are assigned fictional jobs, incomes,
families and expenses. More than 100 Capital One Bank associates will mentor the students along their financial journey at the park.

Smart Money financial literacy classes are available to San Antonio Housing Authority residents. Such programs provide an opportunity for people who have typically not enrolled in literacy programs to re-engage in education.

Scaling up these efforts to touch the lives of more San Antonians will have great impact. By contextualizing literacy to provide content vital to their lives, adult learners can enroll in classes without being associated with the stigma of a traditional literacy program. They can learn essential life skills that will improve their economic success and lead them toward higher levels of self sufficiency.

“Too many people get stuck in developmental education. We can’t do what student failed over again. Our new plan must be different with a career pathway for each person.”

Anson Green, Westside Education and Training Center, Alamo Community College
KEY FINDINGS: FINANCIAL LITERACY

1. Low financial literacy in San Antonio negatively impacts the progress of families toward self sufficiency.

2. Financial literacy programs are well organized and collaborations are creating effective services; with additional resources, these programs can be scaled up and replicated.

3. Financial literacy is a lifespan learning need, yet services are not fully coordinated from early childhood through senior programs.
TECHNOLOGY AND COMPUTER LITERACY

“Preparing people with computer skills for the jobs that will be needed in the next few years must be a focus for those planning a literacy initiative,” said one key informant. “The digital divide is a real issue. Those in poverty do not have computers or access to them.”

The technological revolution has widened the gap between rich and poor, as well as the gap between those with basic skills and those without. The 2003 NAAL survey found that 51 percent of adults with Below Basic document literacy and 43 percent of adults with Below Basic quantitative literacy believed that their job opportunities were limited ‘a lot’ by their lack of computer skills. Adults who completed information technology courses with certifications had higher average document and quantitative literacy scores than adults who had not. Most computer training courses require a basic literacy level for participation, and many manuals are written at a level too high for persons with limited literacy skills to comprehend.

NAAL also reported that as adults improved literacy levels, their children were more likely to have a computer in their home with word processing capability or Internet access.

As computer prices decrease and online access expands, the digital divide may narrow. One key informant, however, was concerned about the costs of internet access and the fact that so few people in poverty had computers at home, “My clients have to go to the library to use a computer and that is an additional journey.” Others noted, “The digital divide is just more evidence that San Antonio is a city of the haves and have nots. We must make computers and computer literacy more easily available for all.”

The City of San Antonio Department of Community Initiatives Family Resource and Learning Division do provide computer literacy services through the Margarita R. Huantes Family Resource and Learning Center and six Community Family Learning and Resource Centers (CFRLC). Since voters approved bonds for its support in 1989, the Literacy Services Administration has provided support to the adult literacy and education initiative, overseeing construction of citywide CFRLC’s, and staffing the San Antonio Commission on Literacy. Each community center is equipped with a computer lab and offers local residents opportunities to enroll in programs. There are few distance learning opportunities offered at the sites, however.

Higher education students are required to achieve computer competency to graduate from college, although adult literacy programs require no such competency. San Antonio College, for instance, defines computer literacy as:

- A working knowledge of the terminology and concepts required to use computer hardware, software, and systems
Competency in using the computer systems to accomplish tasks efficiently in the production of useable documents

- Computer use for self instruction
- Retrieving and storing information
- Communicating information

Computer literacy is needed both in the full range of lifespan education in San Antonio and throughout the business community. Many literacy providers have limited numbers of computers and limited computer training programs. Key partnerships are being developed between businesses and community-based organizations to support the expansion of computer literacy. For example, Microsoft’s mammoth new data center in San Antonio is a partner in the Westover Hills area, which also is home to similar projects for Stream Realty, Christus Health Systems, Valero Energy, Frost Bank and Power Loft. The data center reinforces Microsoft’s commitment to the San Antonio community. Its recent award to Alamo Area Community Information System is worth more than $450,600 in cash and software. Alamo Area Community Information System is a community non-profit committed to providing computer data, computer information and computer literacy classes in English and Spanish.

The need for computer literacy is crucial to the local workforce. At the Wilford Hall USAF Medical Center in San Antonio numerous computer systems have been introduced into the operational environment. Training for these systems has been restricted primarily to transaction processing and routine report generation for those actually involved as users of these systems. Wilford Hall USAF Medical Center has developed and implemented a broad computer literacy program designed to raise the computer literacy of the overall staff, and specifically to inform executive and middle management of the general capabilities of the computer systems. Brown-bag lunchtime video-tape theater on a series of computer-related subjects is available in addition to formal classes developed in a modular format. Each formal class is tailored to the specific needs of the target executive or middle management group. However, employees at the entry level are not being adequately prepared to access the career ladders available in the medical field. Corporate leadership is needed to expand computer skill training to all employees.

Computer labs can be found in many community programs across San Antonio but they reach only a small segment of the population. On a site visit to a literacy center with an early childhood computer lab it was clear that the lab was well equipped with five computer stations for children but no children were in attendance and the lab was locked. A scaled-up literacy initiative could increase the number of labs, the intensity of their use, and training for staff so they can provide effective services.
1. Computer literacy classes are more appealing to many people than traditional literacy classes, providing a venue for people to re-engage in education.

2. Computer literacy is an equalizer that can reduce the stigma of low print literacy.

3. San Antonio needs additional resources to serve the large numbers of children and adults who could benefit from computer literacy.

4. Distance learning provided concurrently with more traditional teaching and tutoring could give a more people access to services.

“Adult education is an important focus in the region. We must help parents to help their children.”

Terry W. Smith, ESC Region 20
ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOW LITERACY

Literacy is fundamental to success in the workplace. Families with strong literacy skills are needed for a community to thrive. The positive economic effects of literacy, however, depend upon people’s ability to apply their skills in the workplace. Many San Antonio residents lack skills even to complete work application forms; their low literacy skills prevent them from successfully holding jobs. San Antonio’s relatively low unemployment rate means that most men and women who want jobs can find them. However, jobs available for low-skilled employees pay equally low wages; so many people have to cobble together two and three part time jobs to make ends meet.

San Antonio is the fourth fastest growing large city in the United States:

(Large city = 500,000+   Source: U.S. Census, as reported on cnn.com.)
The following statistics (and inferences) about the impact of increased high school diploma/GED recipients among drop-outs provides some perspective on the potential impact of increased education. (San Antonio WorkSource Literacy Committee Report, 2008):

- **Wages:** Median Earnings of non-Diploma/GED holders age 25 and older were $16,627 in 2006, 43% less ($12,369 less) than the median earnings for the greater population age 25 and older. In contrast, median earnings for individuals with an educational attainment level of Diploma/GED were $23,539.
- **Moving workers:** Moving the entire non-Diploma/GED holder population to an educational attainment level of Diploma/GED would add an estimated 2,384 workers to the San Antonio payrolls.

The Texas Workforce Commission reports unemployment rates at slightly lower than the state average. (http://www.twc.state.tx.us/news/press/2008/051608epress.pdf)
Many local companies have an aging workforce, which will become a major issue in the next several years as baby boomers retire. New employers such as Toyota have been attracted to the area in recent years, yet companies like AT&T have left the area. In the chart below the red area indicates the population as a whole and the blue area represents the workforce growth of the population.

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**BEXAR COUNTY LABOR FORCE: 1970-2010**

The Decennial Census figures for Bexar County show significant increase in employment growth since the early 1970’s with a 174% increase or 481,000 increase projected to 2010. This 2010 Labor Force projection source is the City Planning Department’s estimate based on the past 30 year trend line.
MAJOR EMPLOYMENT CENTERS FOR SAN ANTONIO ARE IDENTIFIED BELOW

- Employment is situated along transportation corridors.
- Major employment sectors are medical, manufacturing, government, finance/insurance, and research.
- Population growth is strongly related to employment growth.
CityData.com identifies the most common industries for males as construction, accommodation and food services and for females as healthcare and educational services.
Most common occupations in those industry sectors are identified below.
Source: Texas Workforce Commission
http://www.tracer2.com/admin/uploadedpublications/1729_sanantoniomsa.pdf
(San Antonio Metropolitan Area includes Atascosa, Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe, Kendall, Medina and Wilson Counties)
## Occupations with Most Projected Total Annual Openings, Alamo WDA, 2004-2014

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<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Projected Annual Openings</th>
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<td>Office &amp; Administrative Support Occs.</td>
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<td>Combined Food Preparation &amp; Serving Wrkrs, Inc. Fast Food</td>
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<td>Other Personal Care &amp; Service Wrkrs</td>
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<td>Professional, Science, &amp; Technical Occs.</td>
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<td>General and Support Services Occs.</td>
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<td>Business &amp; Financial Operations Occs.</td>
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<td>Engineering, Planning, &amp; Survey Occs.</td>
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<td>Installation, Maintenance, &amp; Repair Occs.</td>
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<td>Management Occs.</td>
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<td>Bars, Cafeterias, and Cafeteria Occs.</td>
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Source: Texas LMCI Tracer (Alamo WDA includes Bexar Co. and 11 nearby counties)

http://www.tracer2.com/cgi/dataanalysis/AreaSelection.asp?tableName=Occprj
Working with the City Planning Department to ensure that there are sufficient skilled workers to meet the needs of the growth occupations must be a primary initiative of San Antonio’s literacy plan. Key informants suggest that by strengthening their relationships with the school districts, businesses build the skills needed for students to transition from school and GED programs to work. Focus group members expressed the need to increase higher education opportunities and enroll more lower-literacy-level students in vocational training and certificate courses while building contextualized adult literacy opportunities. As the local economy becomes more diversified, especially in automotive, aerospace, biotech/medical and finance sectors, the literacy plan must prepare for these needs.

The Workforce Solutions Alamo Board is working with the Department of Community Initiatives to expand training programs that increase entry level skills for adult education students. “We are working on the Skills to Compete Campaign,” said a key informant, “It is important to provide incentives to business to invest in training lower skilled workers.” The Governor’s Emerging Technology Fund is one model. “Pilot [projects] and best practice models must be brought to scale – we are just not doing enough for the thousands of San Antonians who would like to upgrade their skills to enable them to enter the workforce and for those who are incumbent workers whose career possibilities are stalled in dead end, entry level jobs.”

“It is critical that we continue to focus on improving education in our urban schools. Our children’s lives depend on it. We have to be willing to do whatever it takes to create the literate leaders of tomorrow.”

Angela Dominguez, Principal, Young Women’s Leadership Academy
Another key informant commented that the situation has not really changed for many years. “We know we have a huge problem but there is no one coordinated plan to address the issue, just lots of initiatives that may or may not fade away.” "This is a bilingual city and will increasingly be so. We must recognize this fact and not only increase English literacy proficiency but also bilingual workplace support.”

The Alamo WorkSource Board approved the award of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for workforce services contracts totaling over $14 million to four local community organizations for Fiscal Year 2007. The Board selected SER Jobs for Progress, Inc. to operate and manage its career centers located in the City of San Antonio and Bexar County. It selected the Alamo Area Development Corporation (AADC) to operate and manage career centers located in the 11 surrounding rural counties. The Board also selected Good Samaritan Community Services and the George Gervin Youth Center to provide youth development services to individuals between the ages of 14-18 in the City of San Antonio and Bexar County. Good Samaritan was also awarded a contract to provide similar services in the surrounding 11-county rural area.

Each year, Alamo WorkSource serves over 80,000 job seekers (youth and adult) and over 8,000 employers in the Alamo Area through its network of local one-stop career centers and youth service providers. The career centers provide a wide array of workforce services to employers and job seekers, ranging from job matching and referral to financial assistance with education and training. The youth development contractors are focused on preparing the region’s youth with the skills needed to enter the workplace or continue their education in college or technical training. Several sites include both core and intensive support services that could include literacy and vocational training. “For those clients with higher level skills the centers probably work, but some of my students went to the WorkSource Center and it was difficult for them to navigate the system and they are not likely to return.”

WorkSource Centers refer most people with very limited literacy skills to basic ABE and ESOL services rather than provide them with literacy as part of their vocational and pre-employment skills training. New strategies are needed to assist those with limited literacy skills as they seek to join the workforce or increase their opportunities for career advancement by increasing their skill levels.
Occupations with Greatest Projected Growth, Percent, Alamo WDA, 2004-2014

Projected Increase, Percent, 2004-2014

- Engine & Other Mach Assemblers: 377.1%
- Hazardous Materials Removal Wrks: 94.4%
- Septic Tank Servicers & Sewer Pipeline Cleaners: 64.4%
- Derrick Oprs, Oil & Gas: 64%
- Service Unit Oprs, Oil, Gas, & Mining: 62.7%
- Roustabouts, Oil & Gas: 61%
- Rotary Drill Oprs, Oil & Gas: 60.6%
- Medical Assistants: 60%
- Riggers: 57.1%
- Physician Assistants: 54%
- Recreational Vehicle Service Techs: 52.6%
- Occupational Therapist Assistants: 52.3%
- Extraction Wrks: 51.4%
- Physical Therapist Assistants: 50%
- Biomedical Engineers: 49.7%
- Network Systems & Data Communications Analysts: 49.4%
- Occupational & Physical Therapist Assistants & Aides: 49.4%
- Gas Plant Oprs: 49.4%
- Helpers--Extraction Wrks: 49.1%
- Petroleum Pump System Oprs, Refinery Oprs, & Gaugers: 47%
- Physical Therapist Aides: 46.4%
- Occupational Therapist Aides: 45.7%
- Environmental Engineering Techs: 45.5%
- Computer Software Engineers, Applications: 45.4%
- Motorcycle Mechanics: 44.9%
- Forensic Science Techs: 44.7%
- Special Ed Teachers, Preschool/Kindergarten/Elementary Schoo: 44.6%
- Home Health Aides: 44.1%
- Materials Engineers: 43.7%
- Other Healthcare Support Occs.: 43.6%
- Computer Software Engineers, Systems Software: 43.4%
- Emergency Medical Techns & Paramedics: 43.2%
- Database Administrators: 42.5%
- Physical Therapists: 42.3%
- Electro-Mechanical Techs: 42.2%
- Occupational Therapists: 41.2%
- Special Education Teachers, M iddle School: 40.9%
- Radiation Therapists: 40.3%
- Dental Hygienists: 40%
KEY FINDINGS: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOW LITERACY

1. Literacy providers do not ordinarily infuse workforce literacy, pre-employment skills and vocational education in their programs.

2. Literacy instructors need to increase their knowledge about workforce literacy.

3. Training opportunities for people with lowest skill levels are urgently needed.

“Our approach to literacy must be family centered. So many parents are lost because of the language difference. When you don’t know where your kids are and what they are doing you can’t help them. If families hope to prosper they must have strong literacy skills.”

Cindy Schoenmakers, Assistant Director,
City of San Antonio, Department of Community Initiatives
CONCLUSION

To address the needs identified in this report will challenge San Antonio’s ability to come together as a community. This Needs Assessment confirms what many in the community know: Low literacy is a critical issue for San Antonio and must be addressed at a scale to make substantive change.

A coordinated effort must involve a broad array of stakeholders working together for success. The study was designed to 1) estimate literacy levels in the area, 2) identify the need for increased literacy, and 3) assess the impact of local factors determining possibilities for change.

In the twenty-first century, individuals require more sophisticated skills than ever before to achieve personal and economic advancement, to meet the demands of more difficult and technical jobs, to navigate confusing health and financial systems, and to help their children gain the skills needed for success in an increasingly complex society.

Because communities are composed of individuals, community success depends upon individual success, and therefore barriers to individual literacy must be viewed as a challenge for the whole community. Local leaders must make a call to action in order to elevate the issue and pave the way for the creative and effective solutions to come. A comprehensive literacy initiative can be a major investment, but it can also bring enormous dividends: a highly skilled workforce, a prosperous economy and new hope for the future of the entire community.
“We see business as a strong partner in education but we must do more to develop even more partnerships.”

Alicia Thomas, North East ISD
1. SAN ANTONIO REPORT PARTICIPANTS
2. SAN ANTONIO LITERACY PROVIDER SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Please respond to each question completely. Questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer. When you have completed the survey, please click the “Submit” button at the bottom of the page.

1. *Provide your Organization’s contact information. Please fill in completely.*
   Organization Name:
   Executive Director Name:
   Physical Address:
   City and Zip:
   Phone:
   Literacy Program Coordinator Position:
   Literacy Program Coordinator Name:

2. Does the organization have 501(c)?
   Yes
   No

3. Please enter the web and e-mail addresses in the space below.
   E-mail:
   Website:

4. What types of literacy services does your organization offer? Select all that apply.
   Early Childhood (Birth to 5 years old)
   Pre-K
   Homework Help
   Subject Tutoring
   Literacy Testing
   Out-of-school Youth Literacy Programs
   Learning Disability Assessment
   Learning Disability Tutoring
   Adult Basic Reading and Writing (ABE)
   Basic Math
   English as a Second Language (ESOL)
   Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL)
   Native Language Literacy
   Volunteer Tutoring
   Literacy for Incarcerated Youth___, Adults____
   GED Instruction/Test Preparation
   GED Testing
   On-Site Workplace Literacy
   Citizenship
   Parent Education
Family Literacy
Health Literacy
Financial Literacy
Computer Literacy
Other (please specify)

5. *Approximately how many clients did your organization provide literacy services to in Fiscal Year 2006-07?*

6. What percentage of your organization’s literacy clients belong to the below age groups? *Percentages should total 100.*

   _____ Early Childhood/Pre-K (less than 5 years)
   _____ Childhood (5 years to 15 years)
   _____ Youth (16 years to 20 years)
   _____ Adult (21 years and older)

7. Does your organization provide literacy services at the physical address provided in Question 1, or at other locations?

   On site only
   On site and at other locations
   Other locations only

8. If literacy services are provided at other locations, please list the locations where literacy services are provided.

9. How far away is the nearest Sun Tran bus stop from your organization or to the location(s) where literacy services are provided?

   Less than ¼ mile
   ¼ - ½ mile
   ½ - 1 mile
   More than 1 mile
   Varies by location
   Don’t know

10. In your estimation, where did your organization’s literacy service clients reside during Fiscal Year 2006-07? Indicate the approximate percentage of clients from each zip code. *Percentages should total 100. (zip code table included)*

11. In your estimation, what percentage of your clientele uses public transportation as their primary mode of transportation?

   Fewer than 10%
   More than 10% but fewer than 50%
   More than 50%
12. What percentage of your staff involved in literacy initiatives is teacher certified?

13. *If your organization requires a pre-test for new clients to determine their baseline literacy levels prior to receiving services, please describe your pre-test procedure, including types of assessments used. If you do not pre-test clients, please enter “N/A.”

14. If your agency measures or assesses clients’ progress, briefly describe your procedures/metrics.

15. Please describe the tracking system or database (e.g. ASISTS) that your agency uses to track clients’ progress?

16. What do you see your agency’s areas of greatest need? Select all that apply.

- Volunteer Recruitment
- Fundraising
- Staff Retention
- Clientele Recruitment
- Public Relations
- Planning
- Staff Training / Development
- Record-Keeping
- Evaluation and Accountability Procedures

17. Please list any additional needs that are not listed above.

18. What is your organization’s total Fiscal Year 2006-07 budget for literacy services? $__________

19. Which of the following funding sources did your literacy services receive in Fiscal Year 2006-2007? Select all that apply.

- State Adult Education System
- Workforce Investment Board
- Public School System
- Department of Justice
- City Funding
- County Funding
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Labor
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Workforce Investment Act Title I
- Workforce Investment Act Title II
- 21st Century Learning Center Act
- Community Technology Centers
- El Civics
- Even Start
- Head Start
- Early Reading First
- Incarcerated Youth
- Private Foundations
- Corporations Foundations
20. In the spaces below, please enter the percentage of funding you received in Fiscal Year 2006-2007 from the following sources (for all literacy programs combined).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
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<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public School System</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Adult Education System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Foundations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Donors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events/Fundraising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. Please enter the name of each organization you partner with (and, if applicable put in parentheses the name of any grants that jointly fund that collaborative effort). If you do not collaborate with any organizations, simply write N/A.

22. For your literacy programs, what are the biggest challenges you face regarding funding? Select all that apply.

- None - we don't have a problem getting resources
- Time and complexity of proposal development process
- Data collection and reporting requirements
- Staff time and resources to secure and monitor grants
- Knowledge of potential literacy funding sources
23. What information about funding would be useful for your organization? *Select all that apply.*
   None
   New sources of funding for literacy
   Finding agencies willing to collaborate on literacy projects
   Accessing federal funds
   Accessing corporate funds
   How to write a grant
   How to prepare a “cost of services” price sheet

24. What other information about funding would be useful for your organization?

25. What other information about funding would be useful for your organization?

Thank You!

Thank you so much for your time! Your time and input are greatly appreciated.
3. GLOSSARY OF LITERACY TERMS

Adult Basic Education: Reading and Writing (ABE)
Programs that teach English-speaking adults and out-of-school youth how to read and write through classes, small groups, or individual tutoring and Distance Learning.

Basic Math/Numeracy
Programs that teach basic math skills, applied math, and workplace applications.

Children’s Literacy
- Programs that provide direct instruction in beginning reading and writing skills to children.
- Early Childhood Education programs; Pre-K and Kindergarten
- Homework Assistance: Programs that help children or youth with their homework by providing instructors and/or study space. Reading Enrichment: Services that motivate children and youth to read.
- School-based Tutoring: Programs that help children improve their reading and writing skills at their public schools. Schools identify children to be served. Community and neighborhood programs and private, fee based organizations also offer tutoring

Citizenship Education
Programs that teach skills to immigrants and others who do not speak English as their first language to prepare them for U.S. citizenship.

Computer Instruction
Programs that offer instruction in computer skills for academic, personal, family, and work related purposes. CAI (Computer Aided Instruction)

Content Standards
The term used in a variety of fields to describe what individuals need to know and be able to do for a particular purpose.

Contextualized Instruction
Education that facilitates the acquisition of an active application of knowledge, skills, and learning processes by embedding instruction in real world activities. Teaching and learning is situated in an authentic, real life context that has meaning for the student.
Distance Learning
Distance Learning (DL) is a type of educational process where the majority of the learning takes place with the teacher and student at different locations. In distance learning, teaching and learning are not conducted in a traditional classroom setting. Instruction may be computer based, on television (e.g. PBS), or a combination of both. Instruction is individually prescribed to students.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Programs that teach reading, speaking, and writing in English as a second language to English Language Learners (ELL).

Family Literacy / Parent Education
- Programs that teach parents or guardians of young children how to improve their own reading and writing skills, and how to build early literacy skills in their children.
- Programs that teach literacy and parenting skills to parents or guardians of young children
- PACT Time - Parents and Children Reading Together

Financial Literacy
Programs that teach basic skills in managing personal finances: reading a paycheck, checking and saving accounts, personal money management. Some programs include home buyer education.

Functional Literacy
A level of reading and writing sufficient for everyday life but not for completely autonomous activity; the application of the skills and knowledge of reading and writing to adult or near-adult responsibilities in the workplace and required life skills.

GED General Education Development
Instructional programs that teach the skills needed to pass the GED exam; to complete the coursework for those who do not have a traditional high school diploma.

GED Test
Five separate tests given over several hours in math, language arts/reading, science, social studies, and language arts/writing. Programs providing GED Testing set requirements for taking the test and minimum grade level attainment on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) test.
Health Literacy
Programs that teach the ability to access, understand, and use information that promotes and maintains health; includes programs that teach nutrition, reading prescriptions, safety, as well as oral language skills to talk to a doctor or medical professional about health issues.

Incarcerated Education for Youth
For youth age 16-20 years old, the adult basic education, GED preparation, Learning Disability Assessment and tutoring provided in jails and prisons.

Learning Disability
A serious difficulty with processing information, understanding and using spoken or written language, and/or reasoning and doing calculations in math. Programs provide a series of diagnostic assessments to determine a learner’s strengths and areas where accommodations to instruction would be helpful.

Native Language Literacy (BENL - Basic Education in Native Language)
Programs that teach non-English speakers how to read and write in their native language and prepare them for future English-language learning.

Performance-Based Assessment
A tool for measuring student learning that requires the student to construct or produce a response to an assessment item or task. Performance assessments attempt to emulate the context or conditions in which the intended knowledge or skills are actually applied. Examples might include on-demand writing tasks; projects resulting in a product, performance, or event; and portfolios involving a collection of student work related to multiple standards or themes.

Tutoring
- Programs that provide one-on-one instruction in reading, writing, math and other subjects.
- Homework Assistance: Programs that help children or youth with their homework by providing instructors and/or study space.
- Reading Enrichment: Services that motivate children and youth to read.
- School-based Tutoring: Programs that assist children improve reading and writing skills at their own public schools; schools identify children to be served.
- Adult Education: Programs that provide instruction to adults who score below the 5th grade level on the TABE test or who state that they are unable to read. Literacy volunteers often provide this type of educational service.
Workplace Literacy
- Workplace Literacy: Basic literacy training in reading, writing, computer skills, and math offered for employees at the workplace (employers or organizations that teach workplace literacy skills at the sites where employees use those skills) or at adult literacy program sites supported by employers.
- Vocational English for Speakers of Other Languages (VESOL): An approach towards teaching English as a second language centered on vocational/workplace specific needs.
- Career Center: Literacy organizations that provide adult learners with career training and job development.
- One Stop Center: A service of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to assist job seekers with their employment and hiring goals, and employers in growing their businesses and meeting their hiring needs.

Work Readiness Credential
Programs with a common, national standard for defining, assessing, and certifying that individuals can meet the demands of entry-level work and learn on the job. Examples include: Work Keys and Equipped for the Future.
4. SAN ANTONIO NEEDS ASSESSMENT – REFERENCES


Literacy Needs Assessment for San Antonio


Military City USA. Available online at: www.militarycityusa.com.


