

HOUSTON'S LITERACY CRISIS:
.....
A BLUEPRINT
..... FOR
COMMUNITY ACTION

A report from
BARBARA BUSH HOUSTON LITERACY FOUNDATION



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“If you help a person to read,
then their opportunities
in life will be endless.”

BARBARA BUSH, FIRST LADY

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The foundation has implemented a practical, high-impact strategy that will increase Houston's literacy rates and will serve as a model for other cities.

Dear Members of the Houston Community:

My mother, Barbara Bush, has always believed, "*If you help a person to read, then their opportunities in life will be endless.*" Known by many as "The First Lady of Literacy," she advocates for literacy as a foundation for individual, family, and community success. She placed literacy on the forefront of the nation while in the White House and 25 years ago launched the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Since the foundation's inception, more than \$40 million has been invested in nearly 900 family literacy programs across America.

Last year, my mother invited my wife, Maria, and me to continue her legacy right here in the city my parents have called home for nearly a half-century by creating the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation. The foundation's mission is to improve the quality of life of Houstonians across all age groups through the power of literacy. The foundation has implemented a practical, high-impact strategy that will increase Houston's literacy rates and will serve as a model for other cities.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to reach his or her God-given potential, which is why it is critically important that we attack Houston's literacy crisis with every resource possible and invest in effective strategies. **We must take action to reverse the disastrous social and economic impacts caused by the vicious cycle of illiteracy in our society.** We call upon everyone in Houston to make the literacy promise – join us in bringing an end to Houston's literacy crisis.

Sincerely,



NEIL BUSH

Chairman,

Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation



**“WE CALL UPON EVERYONE IN HOUSTON TO
MAKE THE LITERACY PROMISE – JOIN US
IN BRINGING AN END TO HOUSTON’S
LITERACY CRISIS.”**

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members of the Houston Community:

Since September 2013, the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation has taken on the important role of convening more than 100 community leaders to identify Houston's literacy crisis and develop a plan of action to boost literacy rates across people of all ages. I am pleased to share our findings and the plan in *Houston's Literacy Crisis: A Blueprint for Community Action*. This detailed report serves to:

- Frame Houston's literacy crisis through a synthesis of key research and important data across four categories – children from birth to kindergarten, children in kindergarten through third grade, adolescents in grades four through 12, and adults.
- Provide a plan that includes goals, strategies, and steps for the community to act upon that will increase literacy rates across the city.

The comprehensive *Blueprint for Community Action* will evolve over time, based on additional data, research, and community engagement.

I am grateful to Deloitte for making literacy a priority and for donating more than 1,000 hours of service leading up to and including the preparation of this report. I am also appreciative of the many community leaders, whose expertise provided valuable insight for the creation of the *Blueprint for Community Action*. Increasing literacy rates must be a top priority for every education institution, school district, business, organization, and individual in our city. We must work together to overcome the complex and pervasive issue of low literacy in Houston.

Sincerely,

JULIE BAKER FINCK, PH.D.

President,

Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation

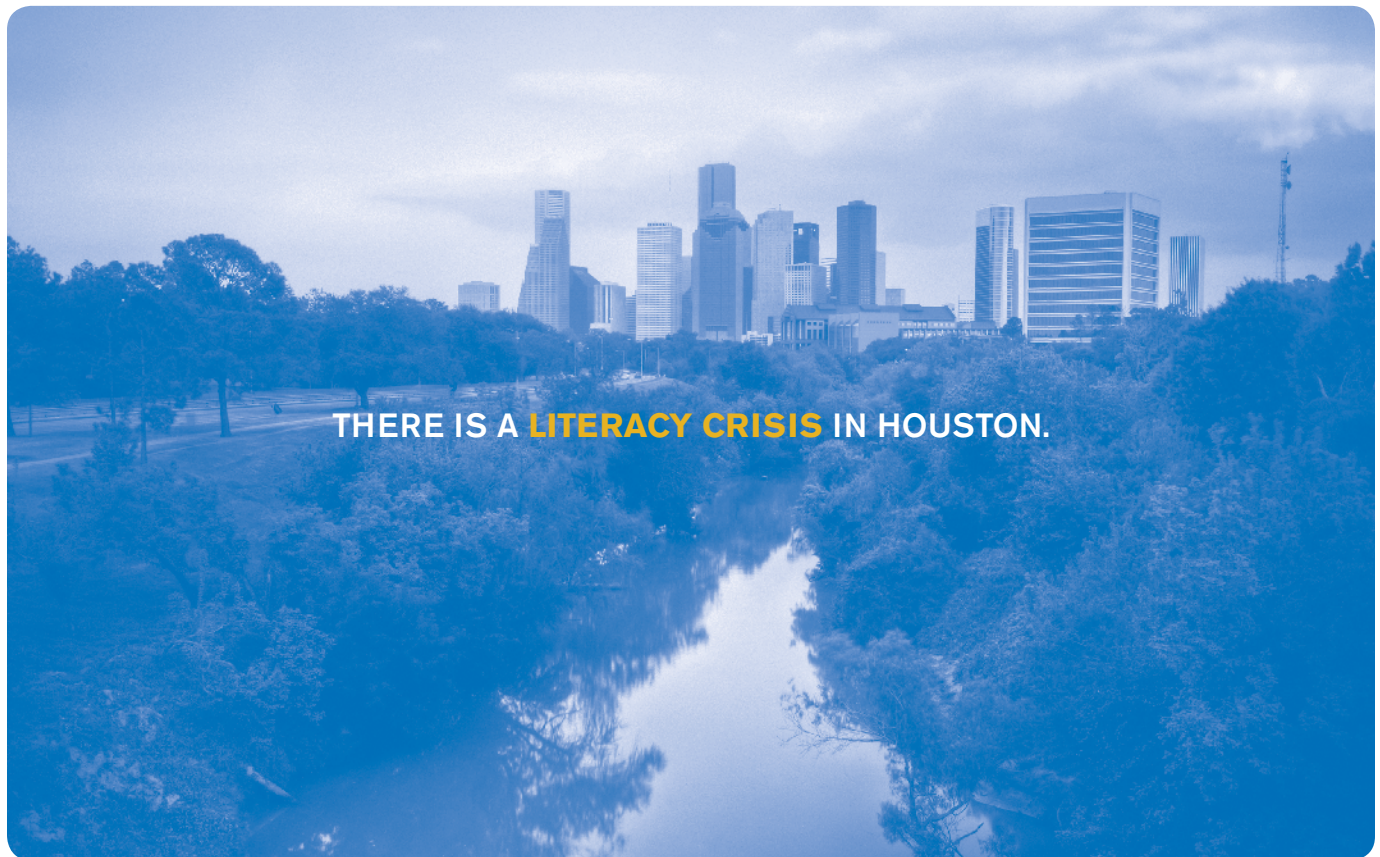
Increasing literacy rates must be a top priority for every education institution, school district, business, organization, and individual in our city.

“ WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO OVERCOME THE COMPLEX AND PERVASIVE ISSUE OF LOW LITERACY IN HOUSTON. ”



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Literacy – the ability to read, write, speak clearly and think critically – is, indisputably, a fundamental skill necessary for success in school, work and life.



THERE IS A **LITERACY CRISIS** IN HOUSTON.

NEARLY
600,000
SCHOOL-AGED
CHILDREN IN HOUSTON

73%
OF THE NEARLY HALF-MILLION
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN
IN HOUSTON ARE CONSIDERED
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED

AS MANY AS
60%
OF HOUSTON-AREA
KINDERGARTENERS
ENTERED SCHOOL
WITHOUT THE REQUISITE
READING-READINESS SKILLS



Houston's Literacy Crisis

Houston's literacy crisis is evident across all age groups – early learners from birth to kindergarten, children in kindergarten through 3rd grade, adolescents in grades four through 12 and adults. School-age data is aggregated across the five major Houston-area school districts: Aldine Independent School District (ISD), Alief ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Houston ISD, and Spring Branch ISD – and other districts and charter school networks with a majority of schools in Houston city limits.¹

Year after year, Houston's youngest children enter kindergarten lacking adequate reading-readiness skills. Based on 2013 assessments administered by Houston-area school districts, as many as 60 percent of children did not possess the literacy skills expected upon entering kindergarten.² The wide “readiness gap” of entering kindergartners places significant pressure on teachers and the entire education system to apply additional resources to help students “catch up” so that they can meet or exceed academic expectations from the onset of their school years.

Third grade is a critical milestone in a child's education, because this is when the child transitions from learning how to read to reading to learn. Research has shown that 3rd-grade reading proficiency is not only related to future school success, such as graduation rates and college readiness levels, but is also related to dropout and incarceration rates.³ That is why it is particularly alarming that 25 percent of Houston-area 3rd graders performed at an unsatisfactory academic performance level on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading exam administered in 2013, which required only that students answer 20 out of 40 questions correctly for satisfactory academic performance level. Furthermore, only 18 percent of 3rd graders scored at the advanced academic performance level, which indicates that children are fully prepared for the next grade. In fact, many of the more than 55 percent of 3rd graders who performed at a satisfactory academic performance level may have still required additional education or support in order to be fully prepared for the 4th grade.⁴ This data is particularly concerning because national research shows that children who do not read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade are four times less likely to graduate on time or drop out.⁵

Houston's literacy crisis is evident across all age groups—early learners from birth to kindergarten, children in kindergarten through 3rd grade, adolescents in grades four through 12 and adults.

1 in 5

HOUSTON 3RD GRADERS
PERFORMED AT AN
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL
IN READING, WELL-PREPARED
FOR 4TH GRADE

1 in 4

HOUSTON 3RD GRADERS
FAILED TO MEET THE
MINIMUM SATISFACTORY
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE LEVEL
ON THE STATE
READING ASSESSMENT

3RD GRADERS FROM
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
HOMES SCORED

19%

LOWER IN READING THAN
THEIR NON-ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED PEERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ACHIEVEMENT

GAPS

ARE EVIDENT ACROSS
EVERY GRADE IN
READING AND WRITING
ON STATE-MANDATED EXAMS

1 in 5

HOUSTON ADULTS
IS FUNCTIONALLY
ILLITERATE

An additional problem among Houston's 3rd graders is the significant achievement gap. The reading achievement gap between African American and White 3rd graders was 24 percent and was 16 percent between Hispanic and White 3rd graders.⁶ Third graders from economically disadvantaged⁷ homes scored 19 percent lower than their non-economically disadvantaged peers.⁸ This is critical because, on average, nearly 75 percent of the nearly half-million school-aged children in Houston are considered economically disadvantaged. This rate increases to more than 80 percent in inner-city school districts, such as the Houston Independent School District.⁹

Low literacy rates among Houston's students persist through middle school and into high school. Specifically, in the spring of 2013, only 4 percent of 7th graders scored at an advanced academic performance level on the state-mandated writing exam, and 31 percent performed at an unsatisfactory academic performance level.¹⁰ Among 8th graders, 18 percent failed to meet minimum expectations on the reading exam, and 22 percent scored at the advanced academic performance level.¹¹ Also, approximately half of Houston's high school students who took the English I reading and writing end-of-course exams, which are required for graduation, did not meet minimum standards.¹² Although students receive opportunities to retake the exams, they are burdened with passing prior exams while simultaneously keeping pace in other required classes. In addition, the achievement gap in reading and writing exists at every grade tested, and is as wide as 30 percent.¹³

Finally, one in five adults – roughly 330,000 people – in Houston is considered functionally illiterate,¹⁴ unable to manage daily activities and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level in any language. This rate is similar to the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 *American Community Survey* results, in which one in four Houston adults does not have a high school diploma, General Education Diploma (GED) or equivalent.¹⁵ Low literacy levels have significant social and economic impacts on the well-being of individuals, families and communities.

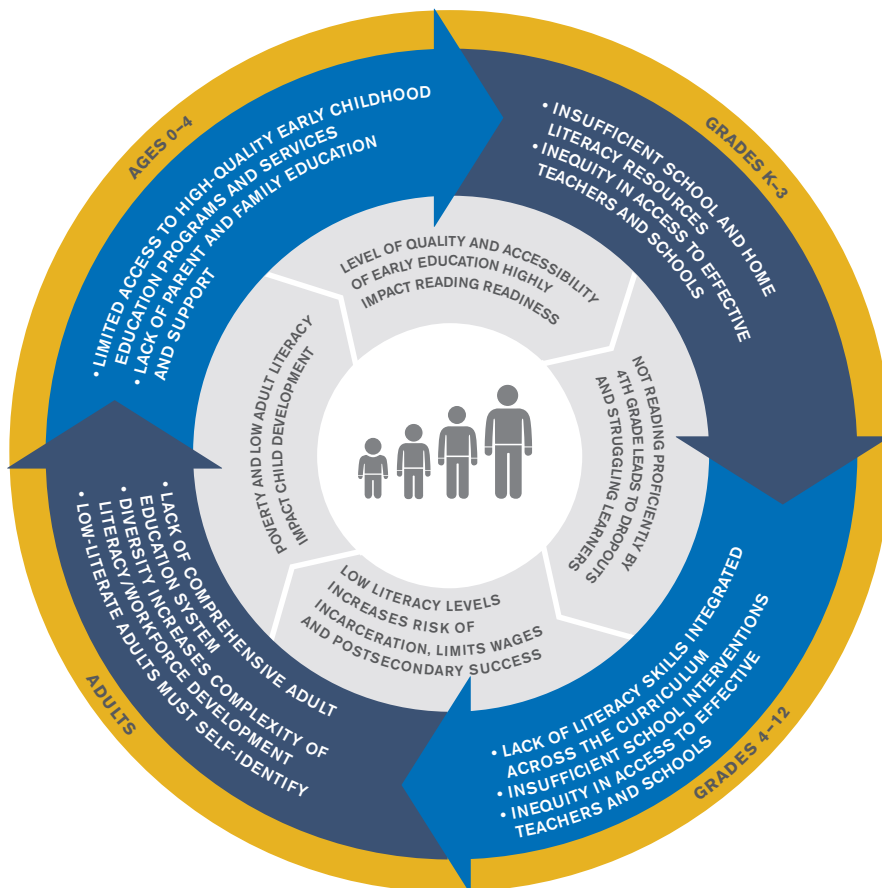


The Cycle of Low Literacy among Families

Low literacy has life long impact on individuals. For example, among adults at the lowest level of literacy proficiency nationally, 43 percent live in poverty. In contrast, among adults with strong literacy skills, only 4 percent live in poverty.¹⁶ **Studies have shown adults with low literacy skills tend to have poorer health, limited job opportunities, and difficulty supporting themselves, much less their families.**¹⁷ Just as troubling is the recurring cycle of low literacy within families. Research has shown a child's literacy level is strongly correlated with his or her mother's education level, thus triggering the likelihood of low literacy in the next generation.¹⁸ In essence, until the cycle of low literacy is broken, the cycle of poverty will remain unbroken. Figure 1 depicts the cycle of low literacy, the implications and the complexity involved in breaking the cycle.

Until the cycle of low literacy is broken, the cycle of poverty will remain unbroken.

FIGURE 1: CYCLE OF LOW LITERACY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOUSTON-AREA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES,
THUS TAXPAYERS, SPENT NEARLY
\$70M
IN 2013 ON DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION COURSES

Social and Economic Implications on Communities

Literacy is a foundational skill for individual and family prosperity and is necessary for the social and economic vitality of any city.

As shown in Figure 2, low literacy levels have profound impacts on communities.

FIGURE 2: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF LOW LITERACY

ISSUES CORRELATED WITH LOW LITERACY LEVELS	IMPLICATIONS
Crime rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 85% of juveniles who interface with the court system are functionally illiterate, and over 70% of inmates cannot read above a 4th-grade level.¹⁹ » It costs \$21,390 per inmate, per year in prison costs alone.²⁰
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Adults with low literacy have poorer overall health, which leads to higher total healthcare costs for our community.²¹
Personal income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 43 percent of adults with the lowest levels of literacy skills live in poverty, compared to only 4 percent of those with the highest levels of literacy skills.²²
Job-readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Only 34% of Houston adults ages 25 and older hold an Associate's or higher-level degree.²³ Trends suggest that the 2016 market will demand a workforce in which nearly 55% will need to earn an Associate's or higher-level degree.²⁴
Welfare and government subsidies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 'Low basic skills,' which include literacy, are seen as the most common barrier for welfare recipients who want to transition from welfare to work.²⁵
Education remediation costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Houston-area community colleges, thus taxpayers, spent almost \$70M in 2013 to provide developmental education courses.²⁶



Call for Action

The magnitude and complexity of Houston's literacy crisis will be solved neither quickly, nor simply. For this reason, the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation partnered with Deloitte Consulting, LLP and has involved many experts and leaders from across the community to develop this *Blueprint for Community Action*.

The purpose of the *Blueprint for Community Action* is to outline a plan of action to mobilize the Houston community and to elevate solving the crisis of low literacy as a top priority for our city.

The six goals of the plan are:

1. Raise awareness of Houston's literacy crisis.
2. Ensure every child enters kindergarten ready to read.
3. Ensure every child reads proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.
4. Ensure every young adult graduates on time with the literacy skills needed for the workforce or higher education.
5. Ensure every functionally illiterate adult is able to integrate into the workforce and succeed in everyday life.
6. Establish a sustainable system that supports and builds capacity for ongoing literacy success.

These goals are supported by proven strategies and detailed recommendations, along with key success indicators that will help the Houston community monitor its progress.

It's time we focus on this critical challenge – ensuring every man, woman, and child develops strong literacy skills, necessary for lifelong individual, family and community success. The *Blueprint for Community Action* offers practical solutions. Everyone deserves an opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential in life, and all members of the Houston community can play a role in making this happen.



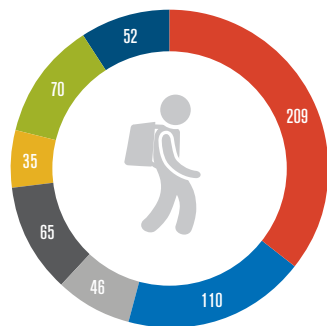
Everyone deserves an opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential in life, and all members of the Houston community can play a role in making this happen.

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

“ Low-literacy is the root cause of almost all social ills, including crime rates, dropout rates, joblessness, homelessness, social injustice and health issue inequities. ”

- ANNISE PARKER, MAYOR
CITY OF HOUSTON

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF HOUSTON STUDENTS ENROLLED IN 2012–2013
(In thousands)



- HOUSTON ISD*
- CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD
- ALIEF ISD
- ALDINE ISD
- SPRING BRANCH ISD
- OTHER ISD'S AND CHARTER SCHOOLS
- PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

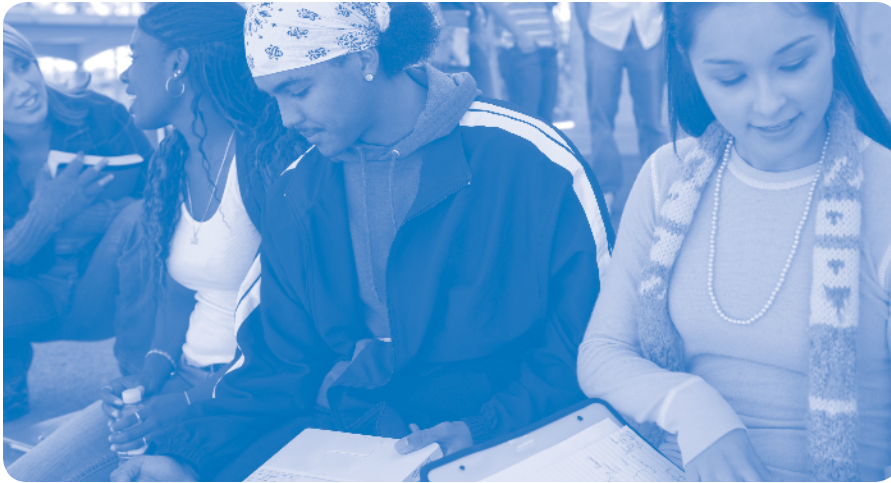
* Includes former North Forest ISD
 ** Estimated figure
 Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

Key Facts about Houston

Houston is the largest city in the state of Texas and the fourth largest in the United States, with over 2.1 million residents, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Data.²⁷ If the city were considered an independent nation, it would rank as the 30th largest country in the world based on its economic size. Houston’s population is growing rapidly and becoming increasingly diverse, with more than 90 languages spoken²⁸ and a growth rate of 7.5 percent over the past decade.²⁹ In addition, from February 2013 to February 2014, Houston-area employers created 77,000 new jobs, representing a 2.8 percent year-over-year increase, according to the Texas Workforce Commission.³⁰

The city has a complex pre-kindergarten through grade 12 education system consisting of public school districts, private institutions, and charter school networks serving over a half-million students³¹ – 10 percent of the total school-age population of Texas – across grades pre-kindergarten through 12.³²

Houston has five major independent school districts with a majority of their campuses within the City of Houston boundary. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is the 7th largest school district in the nation³³ and the largest school district in the state of Texas serving approximately 209,000 students, based on 2013 enrollment data.³⁴ Cypress-Fairbanks ISD is the 3rd largest in the state of Texas, serving approximately 110,000 students.³⁵ Houston has several prominent charter school



Not only is the size of Houston's kindergarten through grade 12 student body expansive, but also it is very diverse.⁴¹ Specifically:

81%

HISPANIC OR
AFRICAN AMERICAN

73%

ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

53%

AT-RISK OF
DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL⁴²

27%

LIMITED ENGLISH
PROFICIENT⁴³

networks, such as Harmony Public Schools, KIPP Houston Public Schools and YES Prep Public Schools. While these specific networks continue to grow in Houston, they serve only 4 percent of Houston's students.³⁶ There are also many private schools in the Houston area serving approximately 10 percent of the Houston-area students.³⁷ Figure 3³⁸ depicts the number of students served by school districts, private schools and charter school districts in the Houston area.

Houston's postsecondary education system includes more than 40 community colleges, universities and technical colleges³⁹ serving more than 220,000 students. The largest postsecondary education system in Houston and 4th largest in the state is the Houston Community College System (HCCS) serving more than 49,000 students, 73 percent of whom attend part-time. HCCS awarded more than 5,700 Associate's degrees and/or certificates last year. The largest public four-year institution in the Houston area is the University of Houston (UH), which has experienced an 18 percent increase in enrollment over the past five years and serves more than 40,000 students. The UH-Main Campus awarded more than 5,400 Bachelor's and 2,000 Master's degrees last year.⁴⁰

Despite Houston's economic and cultural vitality and expansive education system, low literacy persists at all age levels. The issues at each level are explored within the next sections of this report.

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

38%

OF HOUSTON CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 5 LIVE IN POVERTY

14%

OF HOUSTON CHILDREN AGES 4 AND YOUNGER CURRENTLY RECEIVE SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE

The Gap in Literacy Begins Early

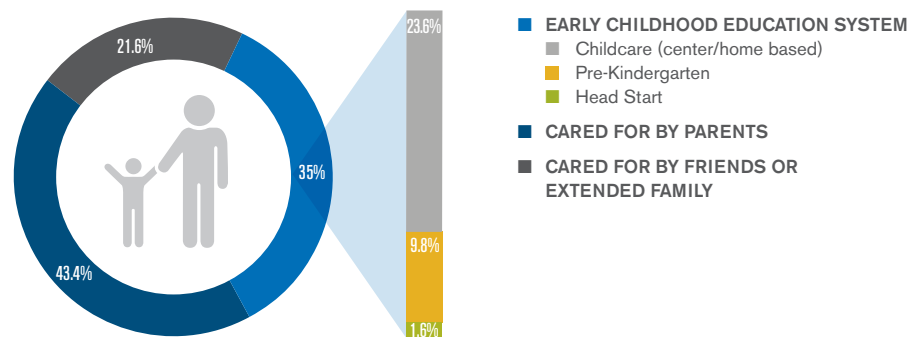
The combination of the high cost of formal early childhood education and the lack of financial resources for many Houston families creates a major early childhood education gap.

In Houston approximately 38 percent of children under the age of 5 live in poverty.⁴⁴ Even for those of greater financial means, high-quality childcare programs can account for as much as one-third of total income for a three-person family earning twice the poverty level.⁴⁵ In addition, approximately 14 percent of children ages 4 and younger currently receive subsidized childcare.⁴⁶ Consequently, only 35 percent of young children attend a licensed childcare, Head Start or pre-kindergarten program. Figure 4 depicts how young children are cared for in Houston.⁴⁷

Not only is access to early childhood education an issue in Houston, but quality is also a significant problem. Specifically, the pre-kindergarten system in Texas meets only two out of 10 quality standards and ranks 28th nationally in state pre-kindergarten funding levels.⁴⁸ The State of Texas has minimal standards for childcare licensure requirements and lacks a comprehensive system of support and oversight. In addition, the childcare system in Texas has low standards for caregivers – a high school diploma and 24 hours of training – and requires no curriculum or formal academic program requirements, resulting in a variation of quality among providers and programs.⁴⁹

FIGURE 4: ESTIMATE OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN EARLY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS BY TYPE

(Percent)



Source: Center for Houston's Future, *Community Indicator Report* 2012.



Equity in access to early childhood education is particularly important given Houston's socioeconomic demographics, because families simply do not have the resources needed for appropriate cognitive and noncognitive child development.

For example, according to research, children who live in poverty have heard 30 million fewer words than their affluent peers by age 3.⁵⁰ This “30 million word gap,” as it is oftentimes called, has harmful impacts on a child’s school readiness and long-term success without significant intervention and additional supports. This gap, in part, is due to limited discourse in the home between parent and child, lack of parental education and scant access to books in the home. In fact, research has shown there is only one book available for every 300 children in low-income areas, as opposed to 13 books, on average, in homes of middle- and high-income children.⁵¹ Books are simply a luxury that many families cannot afford, yet they are essential to a child’s development.

35%

OF YOUNG CHILDREN
ATTENDED LICENSED
CHILDCARE, HEAD START
OR PRE-KINDERGARTEN
PROGRAMS IN HOUSTON

CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN POVERTY
HAVE HEARD

30,000,000

FEWER WORDS THAN
THEIR AFFLUENT PEERS

1 BOOK

IS AVAILABLE FOR EVERY

300

CHILDREN IN
LOW-INCOME-AREA HOMES

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

ONLY
11%
OF HOUSTON CHILDREN
ATTEND A HEAD START OR
PRE-KINDERGARTEN
PROGRAM



Houston-area school districts administer different kindergarten reading-readiness assessments. Regardless of the assessment, it is clear that a majority of Houston students do not enter kindergarten ready to learn how to read.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) requires every school district to test kindergarten children three times during the school year – at the beginning, middle and end – in reading and math to monitor student progress. Unlike the assessments administered in grades 3 through 8 under the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness program, districts are able to select from a TEA-approved list of assessments to meet the kindergarten testing requirements.⁵² While this provides autonomy to school districts, it results in the inability to aggregate kindergarten student performance data across districts. In fact, among four of the largest districts in Houston – Aldine ISD, Alief ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD and Houston ISD – who provided kindergarten performance data for this report, only the two largest, Cypress-Fairbanks and Houston ISD, administered the same kindergarten reading assessment for the current, 2013–2014, school year. For this reason, kindergartener reading readiness based on results from each district’s assessment administered at the beginning of the current school year are presented in the table to the right.

Although a common kindergarten reading assessment is not administered across Houston school districts, based on the results, it is clear that there is a significant problem in our city – far too many children are entering kindergarten lacking the basic, most foundational skills necessary for them to learn how to read.



SCHOOL DISTRICT	ASSESSMENT	RESULTS
Aldine ISD	TPRI® and Tejas Lee®	54% of kindergarteners did not possess appropriate rhyming skills and 22% had not developed basic letter identification skills, two foundational skills for reading development. ⁵³
Alief ISD	easyCBM®	Among kindergarteners taking the English version of the test, 16% did not meet standard on letter sounds and 44% did not meet standard on phoneme segmentation. Among kindergarteners taking the Spanish version of the test, 21% did not meet standard on syllable segmentation (or phoneme segmentation) and 34% did not meet standard on syllables. ⁵⁴
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	Istation Early Reading Assessment®	51% of kindergarteners performed “below expected level” based on their overall reading score. ⁵⁵
Houston ISD	Istation Early Reading Assessment®	64% of kindergarteners performed “below expected level” based on their overall reading score. ⁵⁶

The need for intervention for children entering kindergarten lacking the foundational skills necessary to learn how to read places an extreme burden on educators, strains district resources, and fuels the achievement gap in later years.

The good news is that there is evidence in Houston that more high-quality early childhood education would have a significant impact. Economically disadvantaged children who attended Houston ISD pre-kindergarten or Head Start programs, on average, performed higher on kindergarten readiness assessments than the average kindergartner across the district.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, only 11 percent of Houston’s youngest learners attended a Head Start or pre-kindergarten program in 2012.⁵⁸

The benefits of high-quality early childhood education is not only evidenced in more developmentally prepared children ready to enter kindergarten ready to read, but it is also reaped with a high financial return on investment. Returns on investments in high-quality early childhood education are shown to be as much as \$16 for every dollar invested.⁵⁹ In fact, “mounting evidence shows that investments in early education may be considered as an economic development strategy.”⁶⁰ **A critical factor is to provide sustained, high-quality education across kindergarten through grade 12 – especially for economically disadvantaged children – for these investments to be fully realized.**

FOR EVERY
\$1
 INVESTED IN
 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
 THERE IS AS MUCH AS A
\$16
 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON



18%

OF HOUSTON 3RD GRADERS
SCORED AT THE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON
THE STAAR READING EXAM

24%

OF HOUSTON 3RD GRADERS
PERFORMED AT AN
UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON
THE STAAR READING EXAM

7%

OF HOUSTON 4TH GRADERS
PERFORMED AT AN
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON
THE STAAR WRITING EXAM

The Challenge of Meeting 3rd-Grade Expected Levels

Based on the STAAR reading assessment administered statewide, 24 percent of Houston's 3rd grade students performed at an unsatisfactory academic performance level. Furthermore, only 18 percent of 3rd grade students scored at the advanced academic performance level,⁶¹ which is an indicator that children are ready for the 4th grade.⁶² Many of the nearly 58 percent of the 3rd graders who performed at a satisfactory academic performance level⁶³ may have still required additional education or support to have been fully prepared for the 4th grade.⁶⁴ This statistic is alarming because research indicates that reading below expected 3rd-grade levels is highly related to future academic challenges, as well as dropout, incarceration and poverty rates.⁶⁵

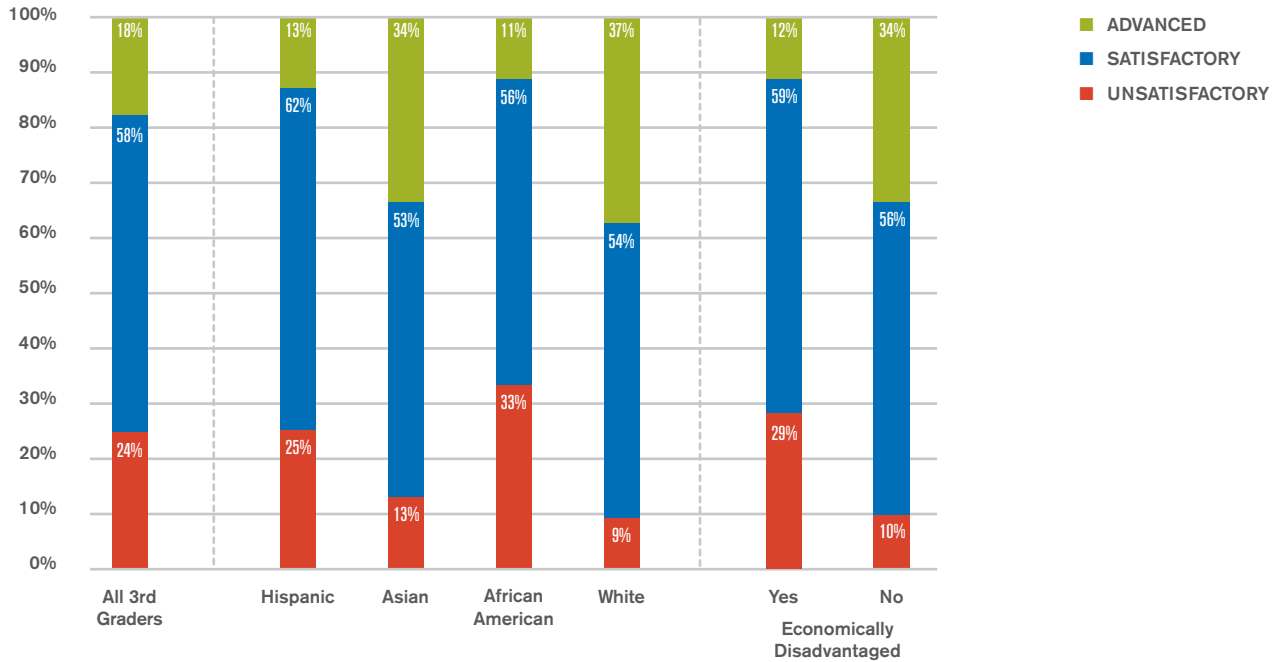
In fact, children who do not read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely not to graduate from high school on time.⁶⁶

Aggregate 3rd grade student data also illustrates a racial achievement gap and wide discrepancies between students of economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Specifically, among Houston's 3rd graders, African Americans and Hispanics were not only three times as likely, on average, to perform unsatisfactorily on the STAAR exam, but also their average score was 100 points lower than those of their White counterparts. In addition, Hispanic 3rd graders were nearly three times less likely and African American 3rd graders were more than three times less likely to perform at an advanced academic performance level than their White peers. Finally, economically disadvantaged 3rd graders were three times more likely to perform at an unsatisfactory academic performance level and more than three times less likely to score at an advanced academic performance level than their more affluent peers. See Figure 5⁶⁷ for 3rd grade reading results across Houston.

Writing is a key component of literacy. In Texas, only 4th graders take a writing exam at the elementary level. Unfortunately, as reflected in Figure 6,⁶⁸ more than 30 percent of 4th graders failed to meet minimum expectations, and only 7 percent scored at the advanced academic performance level. There was a 13 percent performance gap among Hispanic and White students at the advanced academic performance level and a 14 percent gap among African American and White students at the advanced academic performance level. More than 38 percent of African American and 34 percent of Hispanic students scored at an unsatisfactory academic performance level as compared to only 15 percent of White students. In addition, 37 percent of economically disadvantaged students scored at an unsatisfactory academic performance level as compared to 15 percent of their more affluent peers. The achievement gap was 14 percent at the advanced academic performance level between socio-economic groups.

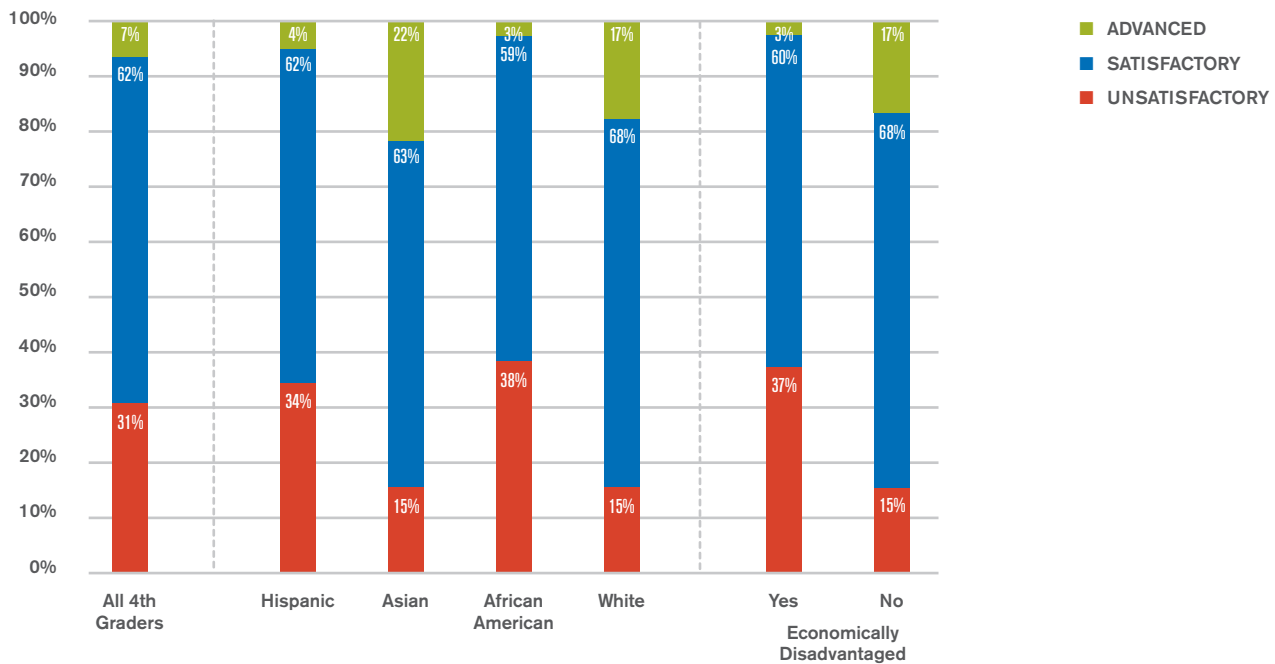


FIGURE 5: HOUSTON 2013 GRADE 3 STAAR READING



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

FIGURE 6: HOUSTON 2013 GRADE 4 STAAR WRITING



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

MORE THAN
30%

OF HOUSTON 7TH GRADERS
FAILED TO MEET
SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVELS ON
THE STAAR WRITING EXAM

ONLY
4%

OF HOUSTON 7TH GRADERS
SCORED AT THE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON
THE STAAR WRITING EXAM

ONLY
22%

OF HOUSTON 8TH GRADERS
SCORED AT THE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON
THE STAAR READING EXAM



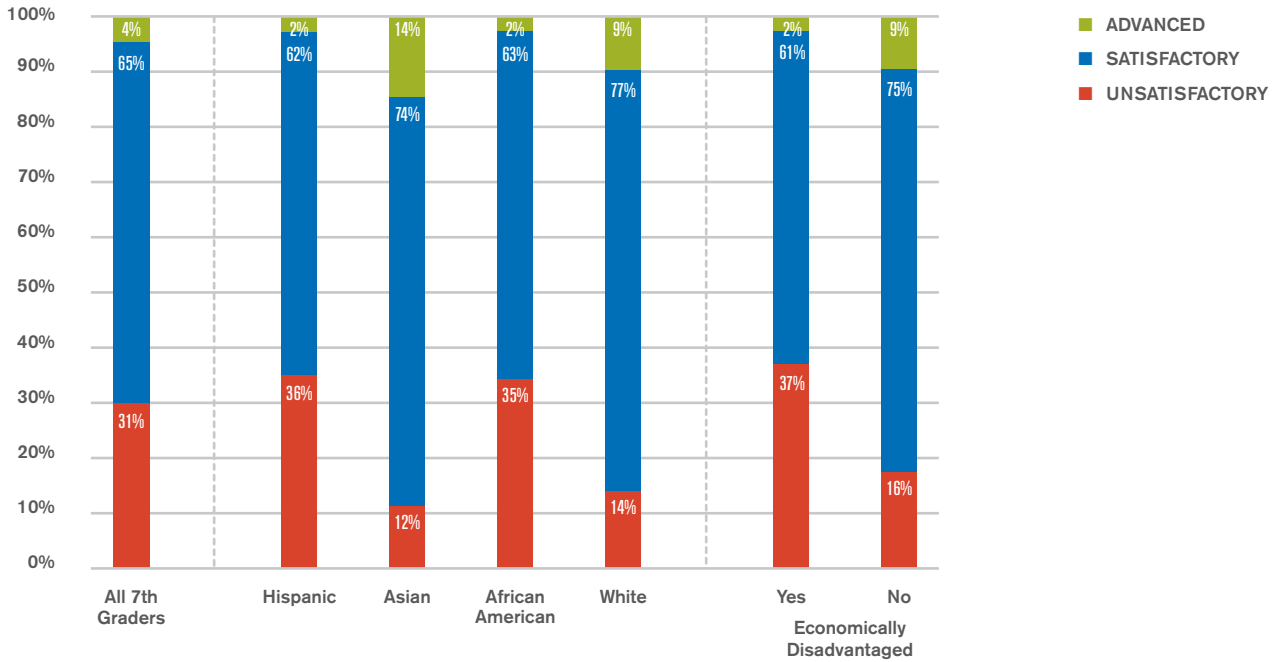
Low Literacy and the Achievement Gap Continue into Middle and High School

Writing scores among 7th graders were relatively consistent with the 4th grade writing performance levels. At the 7th grade level, only 4 percent of students scored at the advanced academic performance level and more than 30 percent failed to meet satisfactory academic performance levels. See Figure 7.⁶⁹ There was an 8 percent achievement gap at the advanced academic performance level among both Hispanic and African American students as compared to White 7th graders. Fourteen percent of White 7th graders scored unsatisfactory academic performance levels as compared to 36 percent of Hispanic students and 35 percent of African American students, a gap of 22 and 21 percent, respectively.

Houston's 8th grade Hispanic and African American students continue to perform more than three times as poorly as their White counterparts. See Figure 8.⁷⁰ Even though STAAR test data reveals that a majority of Hispanic and African American students performed at a satisfactory academic performance level, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rates only those students who score advanced as postsecondary, college, and career ready. Hispanic and African American 8th graders were approximately three times less likely to score at an advanced academic performance level than their White peers. The gaps between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged 8th grade students were consistent with 3rd grade gaps. Given that 81 percent of Houston's students are either Hispanic or African American,⁷¹ significant resources are required not only to remediate, but also to enable students to become college and career ready.

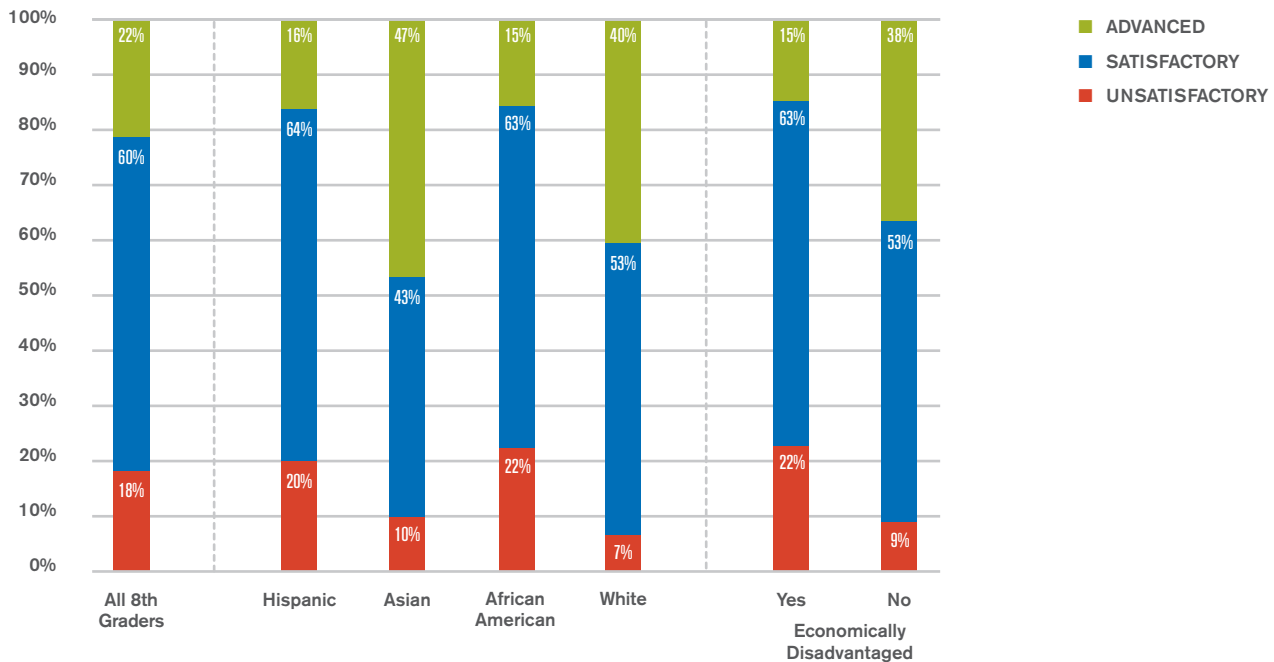


FIGURE 7: HOUSTON 2013 GRADE 7 STAAR WRITING



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

FIGURE 8: HOUSTON 2013 GRADE 8 STAAR READING



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

36%

OF THE HOUSTON
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
WHO TOOK THE
STAAR ENGLISH I READING EXAM
DID NOT MEET
MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS

55%

OF THE HOUSTON
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
WHO TOOK THE
STAAR ENGLISH I WRITING EXAM
DID NOT MEET
MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS

ONLY
10%

OF HOUSTON
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
SCORED AT THE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON THE
STAAR ENGLISH I READING EXAM

ONLY
4%

OF HOUSTON
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
SCORED AT THE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE LEVEL ON THE
STAAR ENGLISH I WRITING EXAM



Low Literacy Rates Drive Dropout Rates

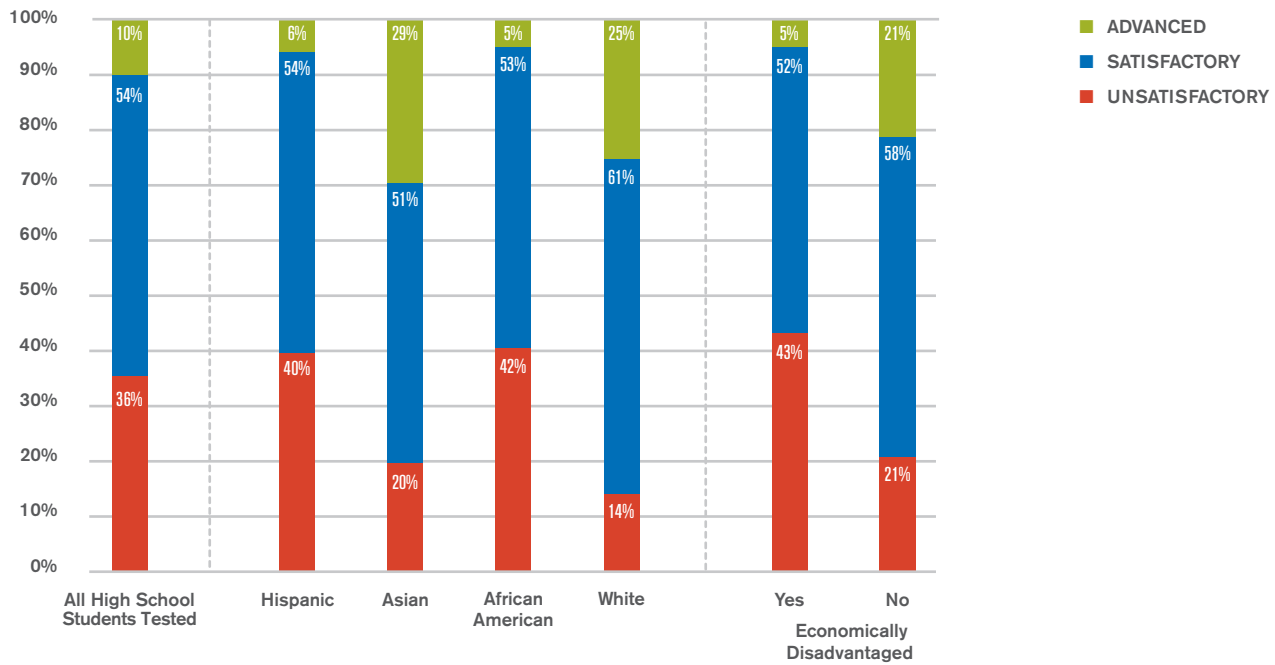
Texas high school graduation requirements for the Minimum High School Program (MHSP) require that students be able to pass five out of 11 STAAR End of Course (EOC) assessments – English I, English II, Algebra I, U.S. History, Biology.⁷² With a heightened level of rigor and each year an increase in satisfactory scaled score requirements, students must meet or exceed the minimum score for those five required EOC assessments to graduate.⁷³ According to the 2013 STAAR End of Course results, 36 percent of Houston high school students did not meet minimum expectations on the English I Reading exam. See Figure 9⁷⁴ for overall reading results. In addition, 55 percent of high school students who took the English I Writing exam did not meet minimum expectations. See Figure 10⁷⁵ for overall writing results.

There were also significant achievement gaps. Specifically, Hispanic and African American high school students tested were four times less likely to score at an advanced academic performance level on the English I exam and were more than three times more likely to perform at an unsatisfactory academic performance level as compared to their White peers. Only 1 percent of Hispanic and African American high school students tested scored at an advanced academic performance level on the English I Writing exam as compared to 6 percent of their White peers. The majority of Hispanic and African American students failed to meet minimum expectations on the English I Writing exam. Economically disadvantaged high school students tested were four times less likely to score at an advanced academic performance level and more than twice as likely to score unsatisfactory academic performance level on the English I Reading exam than their more affluent peers.⁷⁶

It is also important to note that minimum satisfactory academic performance level requirements will increase in subsequent years, because the TEA plans to gradually phase-in increased minimum standards for students to pass.⁷⁷ Thus, while these statistics are alarming already, if nothing is done, more students will be at risk of not graduating on time and overall dropout rates will increase.

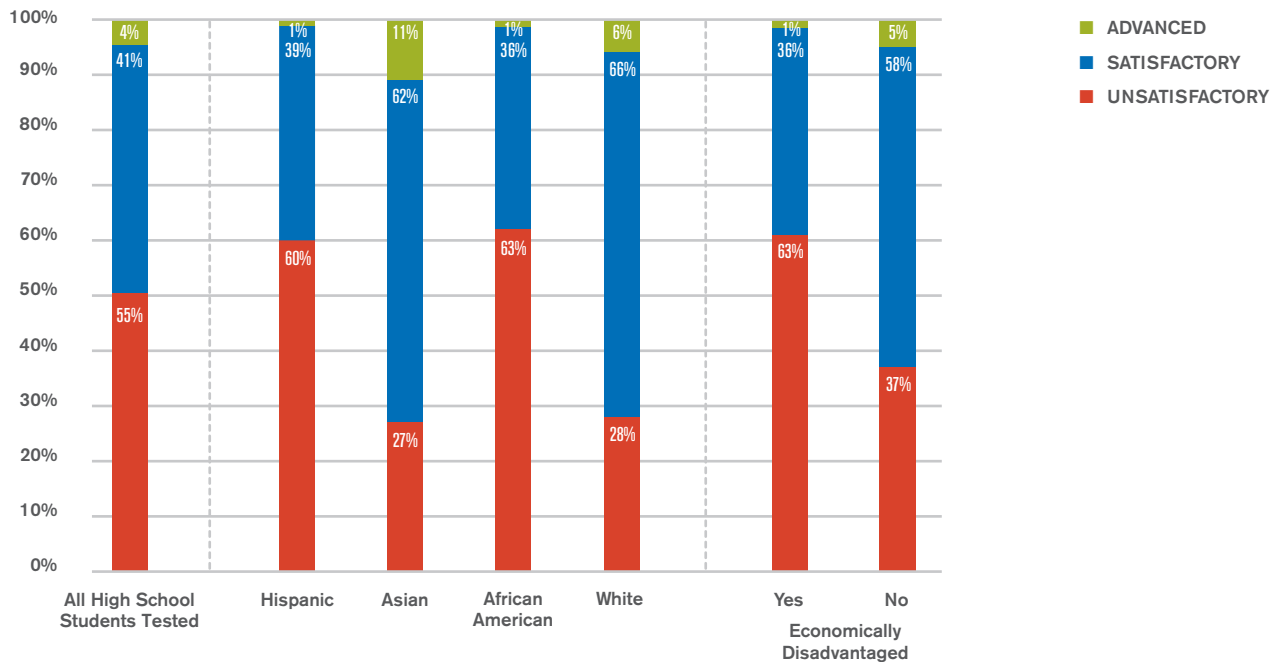


FIGURE 9: HOUSTON 2013 HIGH SCHOOL STAAR ENGLISH I READING



Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

FIGURE 10: HOUSTON 2013 HIGH SCHOOL STAAR ENGLISH I WRITING

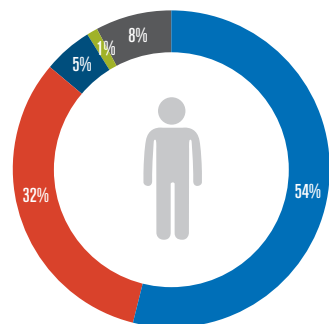


Source: Texas Education Agency, 2013.

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

FIGURE 11: HOUSTON 2011–2012 SCHOOL DROPOUTS

(Percent)



- HISPANIC
- AFRICAN AMERICAN
- WHITE
- ASIAN
- UNIDENTIFIED RACE

Source: Annual Dropout Data, Texas Education Agency 2011–2012.

More than 4,300 of Houston's students dropped out in 2011–2012.⁷⁸ The dropout population largely consists of students who are Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged.

Among dropouts, African American students are disproportionately over represented, consisting of over 32 percent of dropouts in comparison to 23 percent of the overall student population.

See Figure 11 for details on Houston's dropouts.⁷⁹ High dropout rates contribute to alarmingly low levels of literacy among adults in Houston.

One Out of Five Adults Lacks Basic Literacy Skills and Even More Have Limited Job Options

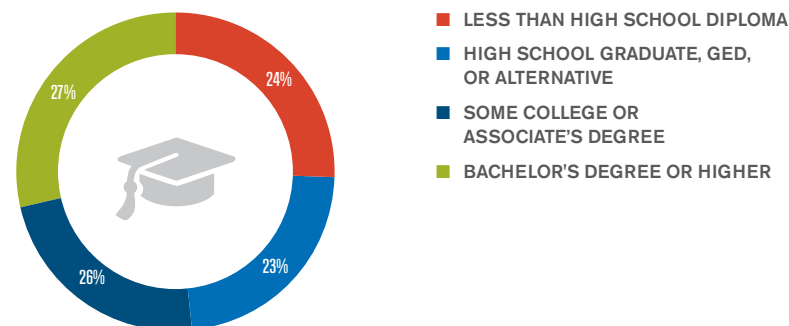
An extrapolation of recent national data to Houston's demographic profile suggests that approximately 20 percent of Houston adults are functionally illiterate.⁸⁰

This means they are unable "to read, write, and 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."⁸¹

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 *American Community Survey* results, 24 percent of Houston adults do not have a high school diploma, GED or equivalent. See Figure 12⁸² for information on education attainment levels of Houston's adults. Even among those who do have a high school diploma, nearly two-thirds entering the community college system require remediation before enrolling in courses counting toward a degree.⁸³

FIGURE 12: HOUSTON'S ADULT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 *American Community Survey* 1-Year Estimates.



The largest postsecondary education system is the Houston Community College System with over 49,000 students, 75 percent of whom attend part-time. With many working, the average time to earn an Associate's degree is 4.2 years, and fewer than 20 percent of part-time HCCS students graduate within six years. The largest public, four-year institution in the Houston area is the University of Houston (UH), which has experienced an 18 percent increase in enrollment over the past five years and serves more than 40,000 students. The UH-Main Campus awarded more than 5,400 Bachelor's and 2,000 Master's Degrees last year. Reflective of Houston's demographics, 68 percent of Bachelor's degrees are awarded to at-risk students.⁸⁴ State-wide college success rates indicate fewer than 50 percent of students who enter community colleges persist to graduation, and fewer than 30 percent of college students earn any degree (2- or 4-year) within 4 years.⁸⁵

In Texas the developmental education pipeline follows a downward trajectory. Among Texas high school graduates who enter college, 41 percent require developmental education coursework, and, of those, only 60 percent could meet Texas Success Initiative (TSI) reading requirements within two years.⁸⁶ According to the 2013 *Texas Public Higher Education Almanac*, for every 100 students who entered the community college system as part of the Fall 2008 cohort and who performed below the state college readiness standard, 76 percent enrolled in a developmental reading education course. Sadly, however, upon completion of the developmental reading course, only 61 percent of those students achieved college readiness levels. Furthermore, of those achieving college readiness levels, only 33 percent successfully completed their first college-level course counting toward a degree program.⁸⁷

Adults who have trouble reading, doing math, solving problems, and using technology will find the doors of the 21st-century workforce closed to them.⁸⁸

24%

OF HOUSTON ADULTS
DO NOT HAVE A
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA,
GED OR EQUIVALENT

2/3

OF STUDENTS ENTERING
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SYSTEM REQUIRE DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION COURSES BEFORE
ENROLLING IN COURSES
COUNTING TOWARD A DEGREE

50%

OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENTS REMAIN ENROLLED
UNTIL GRADUATION

THE LITERACY CRISIS IN HOUSTON

85%

OF ALL JUVENILES WHO INTERFACE WITH THE JUVENILE COURT SYSTEM ARE FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE

70%

OF INMATES IN AMERICA'S PRISONS CANNOT READ ABOVE A 4TH GRADE LEVEL

43%

OF ADULTS WITH THE LOWEST LEVEL OF LITERACY SKILLS LIVE IN POVERTY

Social and Economic Implications of Low Literacy

Low literacy has profound implications on the quality of a person's life, his or her family and the entire community. Specifically, low literacy relates to crime rates, health quality, income levels, job-readiness levels, participation in welfare and government subsidy programs and developmental education cost in postsecondary institutions.

Crime | According to the Department of Justice, "The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure." Specifically, 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate, and over 70 percent of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a 4th grade level.⁸⁹ Furthermore, an inmate costs taxpayers \$21,390 annually,⁹⁰ not including lost opportunity costs to contribute to the economy.

Health | Investigations conducted mainly during the past 15 years have found that adults with low literacy generally have less health-related knowledge, manifest poorer control of their chronic illnesses, are less likely to receive preventive health services, and are more likely to be hospitalized. This leads to higher healthcare costs for all.⁹¹ Also, adults with low literacy skills are four times more likely to report "fair" or "poor" health than those with strong skills.⁹²

Income | Forty-three percent of adults with the lowest level of literacy skills live in poverty compared to only 4 percent of those with the highest levels of literacy skills.⁹³ The probability of falling into poverty is three times higher for high school dropouts than for those who finish high school. The median personal income of high school graduates during their prime earning years, ages 25 to 54, is 200 percent that of high school dropouts.

The children, sadly, of high school dropouts have a much greater chance of dropping out of school, and this becomes a cyclical pattern.⁹⁴



Job Readiness | According to a report published in July 2013 by Workforce Solutions,⁹⁵ more than 75 percent of high-growth jobs demanded by the Houston-Galveston Gulf Coast region over the next decade will require a minimum of postsecondary vocational training or an Associate's degree. Individuals demonstrating higher levels of literacy are more likely to be employed, work more weeks in a year, and earn higher wages than individuals demonstrating lower literacy proficiency levels. For example, in a study involving adults of varying literacy levels, adults with the lowest literacy levels reported working on average 18 to 19 weeks in the year as compared to adults with higher literacy levels, who reported working about twice as many weeks – between 34 and 44.⁹⁶

Welfare and Government Subsidies | There is also a high correlation between welfare recipients and their education levels. Welfare recipient data from the Urban Institute reveals that 42 percent have not completed high school and another 42 percent did not go beyond a high school degree. “Low basic skills” is seen as the most common barrier for welfare recipients who want to transition from welfare to work.⁹⁷ For single mothers who are welfare recipients, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program data showed that women who are high school dropouts are much more likely to be on welfare than women who have a high school degree or postsecondary education. Of the approximately 1.2 million single mothers on TANF in 2002, more than 41 percent were high school dropouts.⁹⁸

Remedial Education Costs | Houston's major community and technical colleges – Houston Community College, Lone Star College, and San Jacinto College – spent nearly \$70M in developmental math, reading, and writing courses for their students. These courses do not count toward a degree.⁹⁹

75%
OF HIGH-GROWTH JOBS
DEMANDED BY THE
HOUSTON-GALVESTON GULF COAST
REGION OVER THE NEXT DECADE
WILL REQUIRE A MINIMUM
OF POSTSECONDARY
VOCATIONAL TRAINING OR
AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE

42%
OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS
HAVE NOT COMPLETED
HIGH SCHOOL

“ For the region's economy to continue its strong growth, it will be critical that we work to improve educational attainment, and that begins with enhanced literacy at all levels. ”

– BOB HARVEY, PRESIDENT
GREATER HOUSTON PARTNERSHIP

BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

The key six goals of the *Blueprint for Community Action* are:

1. Raise awareness of Houston's literacy crisis.
2. Ensure every child enters kindergarten ready to read.
3. Ensure every child reads proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.
4. Ensure every young adult graduates on time with the literacy skills needed for the workforce or higher education.
5. Ensure every functionally illiterate adult is able to integrate into the workforce and succeed in everyday life.
6. Establish a sustainable system that supports and builds capacity for ongoing literacy success.

The objective of the *Blueprint for Community Action* is to define six overarching goals, provide strategies for each goal, outline recommended activities and define metrics for measurement of success.

As evidenced in the previous chapter, Houston is facing a literacy crisis across all ages of the population. The crisis is profound and will require efforts of the entire community to positively impact literacy rates using proven interventions. The issue of low literacy across our city cannot be solved by simply focusing on any one group of Houstonians. Low literacy is complex, intergenerational, and affects all demographics. Thus, the *Blueprint for Community Action* addresses all affected groups with the goal of breaking the low literacy cycle.

With the input of almost 100 community, business, and education leaders and literary experts, BBHLF developed a set of targeted and age-specific strategies, detailed

recommendations and key metrics. In addition to directly impacting literacy rates for targeted age groups, BBHLF also aims to raise awareness of the literacy crisis and to create a sustainable support infrastructure for those organizations who are already working to improve the literacy rates in Houston for people of all ages.

The next section describes the details behind the goals, strategies and recommended actions, which are based on specific, research-based programs and interventions. The *Blueprint for Community Action* will continue to evolve over time as more information is gathered, community engagement efforts are expanded, and implementation efforts are undertaken.



Goal #1: Raise awareness of Houston's literacy crisis.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Elevate the priority of Houston's literacy crisis in public opinion.	» Measure Houstonians' awareness of the literacy crisis and its effects on the community at large and on key stakeholder groups.
	» In partnership with a public relations agency, develop and execute a strategic communications plan that will outline a multicultural media outreach plan, including print, online, and broadcast outlets, to reach all target markets.
	» Identify local, regional, and national prominent figures (e.g., elected officials, athletes, entertainers), who will serve as champions and spokespeople for the foundation's literacy campaign.
	» Align the foundation's annual calendar with existing local, regional, national and international literacy initiatives.
	» Present <i>Houston's Literacy Promise</i> , a pledge that all supporters will sign, committing their aid to advancing the foundation's mission.
Use emerging technology and social media tools to engage and inform the public.	» Develop an online portal and social media tools dedicated to raising awareness of the foundation and Houston's literacy crisis.
	» Increase the visibility of the Houston literacy online portal through partnerships with existing non-profits, libraries, companies, churches, other social organizations, districts, and institutions of higher education.
	» Create digital resources that partner organizations may use within their networks to support the literacy campaign. This will include a variety of resources (e.g., visuals and graphics as well as text-rich communications) that are culturally sensitive and relevant for Houston's diverse community.
Create a focal point to champion community literacy efforts.	» Create a formal Houston literacy advocacy group consisting of businesses, nonprofits, educators, and other key leaders.
	» Create a formal Houston young professionals group for the foundation.
	» Organize and implement events and speaking opportunities to raise awareness of the foundation's efforts and to gain the support of a wide range of stakeholder groups.
Influence policy and legislation.	» Monitor local, regional, and national policies and campaigns that align with and support literacy in Houston.
	» Partner with existing organizations (e.g., school districts, service providers, higher-education institutions, coalitions, and other policy-influencing groups) to advocate with elected officials and governmental entities for stronger policies and increased resources to support literacy efforts in Houston.
	» Disseminate important literacy-related policy information to stakeholders.

Goal #1 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
Literacy issue awareness survey scores	Biennial	Conduct annual survey to measure public awareness
Social media metrics	Quarterly	Social media analysis including website views, document downloads, number of users and discussion trends
Policy initiatives	Biennial	Number of literacy policy initiatives developed and implemented

BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Goal #2: Ensure every child enters kindergarten ready to read.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Improve measurement and tracking of young children's readiness for school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Define kindergarten 'school readiness' in Houston with common expectations and indicators of performance. » Develop methods to establish a baseline of results from the different kindergarten reading assessments administered by school districts. » Actively engage in the design and development of statewide kindergarten-readiness assessments under development by the Texas Education Agency and in partnership with the Children's Learning Institute. » Develop and maintain a Houston-area database of individual student-level performance against school readiness indicators and determine the potential accessibility by literacy organizations to better inform school instruction and services. » Educate parents on the interpretation of literacy (reading and writing) assessment results, and provide clear strategies for supporting their child's literacy development based on those results.
<p>Increase access to and evaluate quality of early childhood programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Continue to maintain the database of existing Houston early childhood education programs and quality indicators through Qualifind, in partnership with Collaborative for Children. » Advocate for the adoption and implementation of the Quality Rating Information System (QRIS) to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of all types of early childhood programs. » Partner with school districts and research institutions to correlate a child's education prior to entering kindergarten with performance at school to evaluate the efficacy of early childhood education programs. » Promote and support licensed childcare center accreditation (National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Association of Christian Schools International and National Association for Family Childcare) and individual provider certification (e.g., Child Development Associate and Council for Professional Recognition). » Increase awareness of resources available through federal grants that are free. » Inventory Head Start, pre-kindergarten and licensed childcare programs in the Houston area and document current capacity and demographics of children and their families who are served by those programs. » Advocate for universal high-quality, pre-kindergarten programs for all Houston children with priority to children of poverty. » Collaborate in the expansion of high-quality programs for children from birth through three years.
<p>Expand training and professional development for early childhood education instructors and providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify and expand access to training and instructional materials for early childhood education providers. » Ensure training is delivered for childcare providers on family literacy programs and classroom instructional strategies. » Support sharing of evidence-based practices that yield increases in reading-readiness levels (e.g., curriculum, instructional strategies, parent engagement, class size, and other areas), and establish professional learning communities across providers (Head Start, licensed childcare and pre-kindergarten programs).



STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Assist parents and informal care providers with home-based literacy programs and interventions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop and conduct an orientation program for organizations upon approval of licensure to operate as childcare providers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Encourage parents to read aloud with their young children for a minimum of 15 minutes every day.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand access to early literacy parent/family resources in multiple languages (DVD/Books/YouTube/Literacy websites) to be distributed in targeted neighborhoods through community-based organizations and partnerships with hospitals.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Enlist all service providers associated with parents of children ages 0–3, including doctors, nurses, toy retailers, grocery stores and department store chains to provide early literacy strategies and resources to parents and families.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide parents and caregivers with literacy materials and basic instructions for use.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Research and recommend Smart Phone apps that support literacy development and provide resource for parents to access.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Promote the cognitive benefits of dual-language conversations and reading at home in multilingual families.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide materials for parents on how to assess children’s readiness for school and help parents identify early warning signs of learning disabilities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand upon successful home visitation programs for parents/families of young children through training of additional volunteers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop and/or expand access to current resources to assist young learners when they transition into kindergarten (e.g., importance of regular attendance, understanding academic expectations, interpreting important assessment data or information, and how to support the child’s ongoing development during kindergarten, and other).
<p>Increase children’s access to print and digital books and reading-level-appropriate materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Plan and execute book drives for distribution of age-appropriate books to children in targeted neighborhoods.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand library accessibility (hours and locations – e.g., mobile libraries) and link library providers to family literacy programs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Build libraries in pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs where they do not exist.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand or develop partnerships with national organizations, such as Dolly Parton Imagination Library, that provide free books or educational magazines to children of low-income parents along with leveraging school book purchases with publishers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop partnerships and increase capacity to increase student access to digital books and e-reader technologies (e.g., explore broad licenses).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Invest in increased capacity of existing Houston-based organizations focused on building children’s home libraries.

Goal #2 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
School readiness	Annual	Utilize the beginning-of-year school district reading assessment data to determine the percent of children ready for kindergarten across Houston
% of children attending high-quality early education programs	Annual	Annual estimate of enrollment rates and demographic participation levels across early childhood education programs
Number of age-appropriate books at home	Annual	Estimate the average number of books in homes in targeted neighborhoods

BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Goal #3: Ensure every child reads proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Improve measurement and tracking of student achievement.</p>	» Create a common database of kindergarten through 3rd grade reading results across Houston-aggregated by district, school and zip code.
	» Develop a handbook for parents to provide key developmental milestones and meaning of “reading at grade level.”
	» Support school districts’ efforts to identify students with limited English proficiency and potential learning disabilities.
<p>Improve teacher effectiveness in grades K–3.</p>	» Partner with colleges of education and regional providers to increase the depth and rigor of instruction on evidence-based literacy strategies and pedagogical acumen within alternative and traditional teacher certification programs.
	» Increase professional development opportunities for educators and instructional leaders.
	» Develop standard protocols for special areas of need including newcomer Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, LEP students transitioning out of English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual programs, and students with identified learning disabilities.
	» Educate teachers and administrators on best practices for personalization of coursework for students.
<p>Improve campus and district leadership effectiveness.</p>	» Enhance understanding and importance of foundational literacy among administrators and district leadership.
	» Support professional development opportunities for administration and district leadership with continued focus on foundational literacy.
	» Identify means to incorporate programs that improve parent literacy at every elementary school.
<p>Support summer, after-school, and out-of-school literacy programs.</p>	» Inventory, assess capacity and document availability and impact of Houston-area providers of after-school and summer literacy programs.
	» Convene “out-of-school” and summer literacy program providers to share lessons learned, best practices and resources.
	» Develop a coherent plan for expanding programs into neighborhoods/schools with low literacy performance levels.
	» Educate parents on available summer and after-school literacy programs and the importance of enrichment activities.
	» Broaden partnership with local nonprofits to increase availability and quality of summer programs focused on literacy.
	» Identify and train adult mentors for summer and after-school programs.
	» Identify and distribute technology-based programs for summer reading.
	» Increase access of reading-level-appropriate books in summer school and after-school programs.
	» Advocate for extending hours of operation at community- and school-based libraries.
	» Coordinate summer programs among districts and literacy providers to ensure alignment and impact on student learning.



STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Promote family literacy initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Promote existing and new initiatives to read books to children across all formats (traditional and digital). » Encourage parents to engage young children for a minimum of 15 minutes every day by reading books and asking questions to stimulate literacy development. Educate families on the benefits of their child's daily reading, independently or together. » Create literacy VIBE among families (Voice; Interest; Books; Ears). » Coordinate literacy events across the city aimed to engage families and community. » Support efforts to make books accessible to all families (building home libraries and greater access to school libraries).
Support school districts' efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Implement an early warning tracking system for student absenteeism and corresponding timely intervention. » Educate parents on the impact of chronic absenteeism on academic achievement, particularly at the early ages. » Identify "priority" schools with high rates of students with chronic absenteeism and understand root causes. » Promote incentives for increased attendance rates and help remove barriers to attendance. » Expand mentoring programs and ensure that students with high absenteeism are mentored by a caring adult.

Goal #3 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
Reading at grade level	Annual	% of children reading at grade level at end of 3rd grade using STAAR data
Number of certified teachers	Annual	Number of teachers with Early Literacy Teacher certificates
Remediation required	Annual	Measure remediation rates required after school year (Tier 2/Tier 3)
Chronic absenteeism	Annual	% of children who are absent 10% of the time or more of the school year

BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Goal #4: Ensure every young adult graduates on-time with the literacy skills needed for the workforce or higher education.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Increase student access to more rigorous, college-ready courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Encourage 8th grade students and their parents to enroll in more rigorous high school coursework such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate to increase student achievement.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase local and national opportunities for students to increase their literacy skills through rigorous after-school, talent identification, and summer college preparatory programs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand opportunities for SAT® and ACT® prep classes at the high school level.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase professional development opportunities for teachers to implement critical reading and writing instruction across all content areas.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Design robust resources for teachers to use that will ensure students develop strong writing skills across the curriculum.
<p>Improve resources and effectiveness of in-school interventions for below-level students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase the depth and rigor of instruction on evidence-based literacy strategies and pedagogical acumen within alternative and traditional teacher certification programs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Deploy reading intervention specialists to every low-performing school.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Advocate for secondary reading intervention endorsement.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create sustainable Response to Intervention (RTI) programs at the secondary level appropriate to the student population, which would include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Supporting literacy for all content areas b) Implementing system for identifying students in the 40th percentile in reading and writing c) Monitoring progress d) Enhancement of writing across curriculum e) Master schedules that include intervention courses f) Establish a continuum of coursework appropriate to students' current ability level starting in 4th grade
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase differentiated professional development and embedded coaching opportunities for secondary teachers that emphasize reading, writing, and problem-solving teaching strategies.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Encourage the effective use of technology to support students who are struggling with reading and writing.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Support students learning to read and write in an electronic format.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Educate teachers on best practices for personalization of coursework for students with identified learning disabilities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop and publicize best practices for students who are identified as newcomer LEP students and establish transition program for students who have exited ESL or ELL programs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide professional development to teachers on best practices for meeting needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.



STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Support summer and after-school literacy programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Educate parents on available summer and after-school literacy programs and the importance of enrichment activities. » Broaden partnership with local nonprofits to increase availability and quality of reading-oriented summer programs. » Identify and train adult mentors for summer and after-school programs. » Identify and distribute technology-based programs for summer reading. » Increase access of age-appropriate books in summer and after-school programs. » Advocate for extending hours of operation at community and school libraries. » Increase access to the arts, and motivate students through spoken word, theater, and other mediums as a means to improve speaking and writing skills and demonstrate capabilities through creative and artistic methods.
<p>Encourage students to strive for education beyond high school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Educate parents on the importance of preparing students for middle school, high school, and beyond (i.e., coursework selection and classes for college credit). » Launch pledge program for students to commit to continuing training and education after high school. » Improve and increase access to college and career readiness programs. » Encourage students to take greater advantage of early-college and dual-credit options. » Increase capacity of school districts, higher education and community organizations to support families and students in the completion of college, scholarship and financial aid applications.
<p>Support districts' efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Implement early-warning tracking system for student absenteeism and corresponding timely intervention including home visits with an emphasis on younger students. » Educate parents to access resources to help reduce chronic absence and improve academic achievement. » Identify "priority" schools and students and understand root causes to chronic absenteeism. » Remove barriers and create incentives to reduce absences. » Expand mentoring programs and ensure that students with high absenteeism are mentored by a caring adult.

Goal #4 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
Readiness for middle school	Annual	% of 6th grade children that are middle school ready as defined by STAAR test
Readiness for high school	Annual	% of 8th grade children that are high school ready as defined by STAAR test
Readiness for college and/or workplace	Annual	% of students that are college ready as measured by the Texas Success Initiative % reduction of Houston-area high school graduates who are required to take a remedial English course in college
Intervention certification	Annual	Increase in number of teachers with Literacy Intervention (4–12) certification
Summer program participation	Annual	Number of Houston students participating in summer literacy programs

BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Goal #5: Ensure every functionally illiterate adult is able to integrate into the workforce and succeed in everyday life.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Build capacity for literacy programs including English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, Adult Special Education, other adult literacy programs in community-based agencies and community college programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Support collection of non-federal and non-state-funded adult literacy enrollment and performance information into existing state databases or in another suitable database, such as the Texas Online Learner Database (TOLD), managed by Houston Center for Literacy.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create a literacy and adult education continuum to address the needs of adult learners at all levels.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Assess resource requirements and develop a plan for expansion of existing capabilities in nonprofit, faith-based, higher education and other government-funded entities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Research and promote adult education classes at early education facilities (co-location) to improve access.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ensure a more holistic, life-course approach to literacy, particularly in the expansion of programming.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify resources to support the provision of researched-based, training curricula and “train the trainer” programs for adult education service providers and staff.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop strategies to incorporate adult literacy services with public libraries, faith-based organizations, community-based programs, refugee service organizations, public high schools and on-site in corporate America.
<p>Create citywide awareness regarding the importance of literacy and adult education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Share Houston-based, state and national research studies, and data (i.e., return on investment of adult education) in terms of impact on adults and children and the education continuum.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Promote adult education in the overall education spectrum.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Emphasize the importance of vocational English programs among adults leading to fast-track employment and higher earning potential.
<p>Develop options for education of citizenship-seeking adults.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Bring citizenship programs and other early literacy programs to early education centers (i.e., GED in Spanish, Spanish Literacy, and Computer Literacy in Spanish).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify resources to increase the number of well-trained ESL instructors, both paid and volunteer, in local nonprofits and in faith-based institutions providing ESL classes and citizenship support.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Incorporate with family literacy into adult education courses to double the impact and return on investment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create partnerships with refugee service organizations to engage and improve adult and family literacy and use the refugees’ native languages as a medium toward English literacy.



STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Provide support for adult students with learning challenges and special needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve learning challenge identification skills of adult education providers. » Investigate the funding complexities and feasibility of supporting education beyond high school graduation or GED completion.
<p>Promote the distribution of technology-enabled self-study applications as part of a blended adult education approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop inventory of available literacy technology-based software applications. » Create a system for distributing computers and software applications through existing providers. » Build awareness of options among target population and provide necessary access, training and motivation to enable computer-based literacy self-study. » Partner with the Houston Public Library to utilize existing equipment and software to increase participation. » Continue to develop partnerships with local corporations to donate used computer equipment to literacy providers to increase capacity and access to resources.
<p>Create workforce literacy initiative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify high-growth sector industries with career ladder opportunities and potential high wages for training through workforce investment, community college and Houston-area chambers to offer affordable short-term introduction training leading to entry-level jobs. » Partner with the workforce development system to ensure that low-skilled, under-employed, and displaced workers with limited skills have access to training opportunities created by innovation and resources leveraged across the community. » Build on existing collaboration with businesses to provide entry points for internships, on-the-job training (OJT), shadowing and work experiences for adult learners with low literacy skills seeking to enter or improve skills for job advancement. » Ensure that sufficient pre-bridge and bridge training programs exist for adults reading below the 8th grade reading level or with limited English proficiency to integrate educational and vocational readiness outcomes, using established models such as I-BEST, and work with community colleges on this initiative. » Partner with justice and correction organizations to ensure inmates have the ability to improve basic literacy and workforce skills while incarcerated, on probation or on parole and offer transitional workforce literacy courses and support for formerly incarcerated men and women so they can succeed in the workplace.

Goal #5 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
Adult literacy rate	Every 2 yrs.	% of Houston adults that are functionally literate; conduct literacy survey
Adults served	Annual	Number of adults served by adult education centers
Degrees and certificates earned	Annual	Number of GEDs, certificates, Associate's degrees, Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees and others

Goal #6: Establish a sustainable system that supports and builds capacity for ongoing literacy success.

STRATEGIES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Measure and monitor progress and results of <i>Blueprint</i> implementation.	» Develop a scorecard that includes all metrics identified in the <i>Blueprint</i> .
	» Create a common database of literacy results across Houston for all age groups to populate the scorecard.
	» Publish annual progress report against appropriate scorecard metrics.
Increase public and private monetary giving to support literacy efforts.	» Encourage funders to incorporate literacy as a part of all grants.
	» Create awareness of the efficiency and effectiveness of existing literacy programs.
	» Create frameworks for large-scale, broad-based support (financial and volunteer) initiatives for individual companies (e.g., “Adopt a Community” or “Adopt a School”).
	» Encourage corporate matching programs for donations made to Houston-area literacy providers and organizations.
Implement technology solution for volunteer matching and monitoring.	» Encourage governments to incorporate a “literate workforce” feature into contracts that require contracts to employ literate workers or contribute to literacy projects.
	» Implement a high-tech “matchmaking” tool that matches interested volunteers and corporate volunteer programs with volunteer opportunities.
Increase volunteer and literacy tutor skills and capacity.	» Integrate social media tools within the volunteer match system.
	» Create volunteer eligibility criteria and identify time requirements.
	» Identify and/or develop literacy volunteer training curricula.
	» Create/replicate “train-the-trainer” volunteer and tutor programs to take to scale.
Improve city-wide systems that provide important services necessary for learning success.	» Integrate online training programs as appropriate.
	» Partner with national programs such as Americorps, Americorps VISTA, CityYear and others to build capacity in the implementation of research-based literacy programs across age groups.
	» Expand City of Houston vision-screening programs for children to ensure that they have access to corrective eyewear.
	» Improve information systems for Houston residents to seek information on mental and medical health services, early childhood education programs and options, adult education and workforce development programs, and other wrap-around programs and services.

Goal #6 Key Success Indicators

KEY SUCCESS METRIC	FREQUENCY	CALCULATION METHOD
Number of volunteers and volunteer hours	Annual	Measure number of people and hours of individuals engaged in improving literacy in Houston
Donations amount	Annual	Total number of dollars put to work in Houston to solve literacy crisis
Initiatives implemented	Annual	Number of new initiatives implemented as part of the <i>Blueprint</i> plan for action

APPENDIX



Mission of the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation

The mission of the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation is to improve the quality of life of Houstonians across all age groups through the power of literacy.

Everything the BBHLF does is guided by the following set of core principles:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

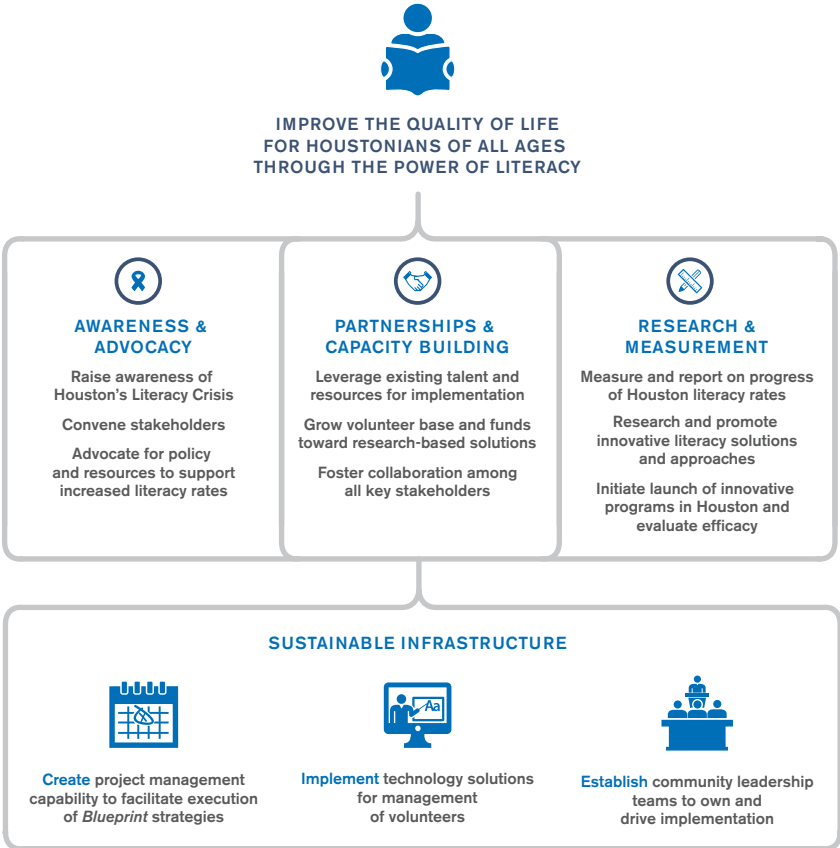
Equity	Literacy is a fundamental, human right. Everyone deserves access to the resources necessary to become literate.
Urgency	There is no bigger, more important problem to address that is facing Houston than low literacy levels of people across all ages.
Effective	The solutions developed and implemented should be first and foremost evidenced-based.
Innovation	Houston is a city of innovation and entrepreneurship. That talent must be harnessed in ways that increase literacy rates of its residents.
Collaboration	No single organization possesses the talent and capacity to solve Houston's literacy crisis, so collaboration among all stakeholders is critical.
Responsibility	Success will require that organizations and businesses take ownership of various strategies and recommended actions of the <i>Blueprint</i> .
Volunteerism	Donation of time and talent is invaluable. Volunteer engagement must be purposeful and meaningful both for the volunteer and the individual(s) served.
Persistence	The community needs a sustained effort over many years to have a significant impact on the literacy crisis.
Accountability	The resources dedicated, the people served, and the resulting increase in literacy indicators need to be measured and reported to the community.
Scalability	Given the magnitude of Houston's literacy crisis, scalability of services and resources is paramount.

There is no bigger, more important problem to address that is facing Houston than low literacy levels of people across all ages.

Role of the BBHLF

The BBHLF recognizes that there are a number of organizations in Houston that are achieving success in helping people of all ages improve their literacy skills and their quality of life. Many of these groups lent time and expertise in the development of this report and the BBHLF values the talent and resources these organizations possess and the quality of education and services they provide each and every day on behalf of our city and its residents. Unfortunately, many of them lack adequate infrastructure and resources – human, technology, facilities and funding – needed to address the full scale of the literacy crisis in Houston. It is not the intent of the BBHLF to duplicate their efforts or provide direct services to support families and individuals.

FIGURE 13: BBHLF MISSION AND ROLE





Rather, the BBHLF will serve in the following roles to advance its mission:

- » **Awareness and Advocacy** | Raise awareness of the literacy crisis that exists in Houston and advocate for increased resources through the implementation of a strategic communications and engagement plan.
- » **Partnerships and Capacity-Building** | Foster collaboration among civic, philanthropic, community, business, faith and education leaders, agencies and institutions to increase capacity by leveraging existing resources and mobilizing additional funding and volunteers.
- » **Research and Measurement** | Measure and monitor progress of literacy rates across the city; commission research to fill current “gaps”; and bring innovative, evidenced-based literacy practices to Houston.
- » **Sustainable Infrastructure** | Champion the implementation of needed technology systems and cultivate commitment among stakeholders in the development of structures to support the strategies of the *Blueprint for Community Action*.

The mission and role of the BBHLF are illustrated in Figure 13.

Implementation Approach

In the next six to 12 months, the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation will work with community leaders to prioritize the *Blueprint* strategies and identify natural owners of implementation, some of which already have been identified in the specific strategies outlined in this report. The development implementation of plans will occur through the gathering of additional input, community buy-in, and identification of resources necessary for success. The implementation plans will also serve as a tool to monitor progress of the overall community efforts and will be used during annual reporting on progress toward Houston's literacy improvements.

BBHLF envisions the implementation plan to be a working public document that is regularly updated. Development of the plan will be focused on realistic timeframes, commitments and discipline in execution. In addition to the development of the implementation plan, BBHLF will enable regular project management reporting mechanisms which will inform the Houston community on the accomplishments of specific activities, ultimately aimed at increasing literacy rates in Houston.

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| 5Works, Inc. | Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston | NAACP Houston Branch |
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| Aldine Independent School District | Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, Inc. | Neuhaus Education Center |
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