

A photograph of the Houston skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of light blue and orange, with soft clouds. The buildings are silhouetted against the sky, with some reflecting the warm light. In the foreground, there are green trees and a road with a few cars.

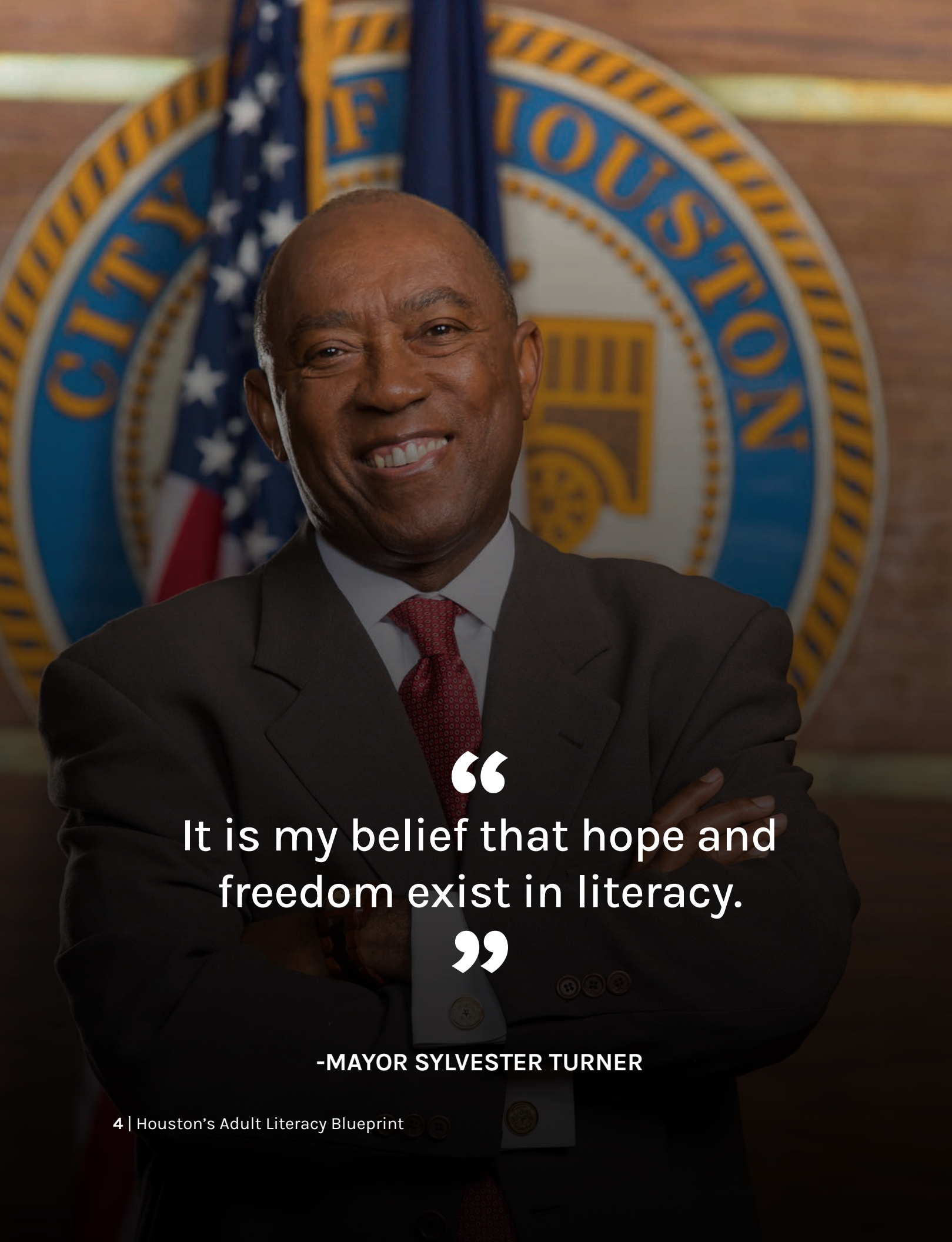
Houston's Adult Literacy Blueprint

Inspiring. Empowering. Transforming.



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“

It is my belief that hope and freedom exist in literacy.

”

-MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER

Message to the Houston Community

Dear Fellow Houstonians,

A systemic issue threatens our city's economy and challenges the prosperity of individuals and families now and for generations to come – low literacy. While literacy is a fundamental right of every Houstonian, it has not been a reality for many adults in Houston. A startling one in three Houston adults is functionally illiterate, lacking the literacy skills needed to engage in the workforce, support their family, or participate fully in society. This is simply unacceptable.

Low literacy impacts all of us. Low literacy rates have been linked to higher crime and poverty rates, poorer health, wider digital disparity, and lower economic growth. To put it simply, low literacy rates directly impact the current and future workforce, the wellbeing of our neighborhoods, and the next generation of young learners. The reality in Houston is that this challenge impacts all of us, and the time to act is now!

It is my belief that hope and freedom exist in literacy. It has the power to change and strengthen lives, families, communities, workplaces, industries, and cities. That is why I was proud to create the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy in 2019, the only office of its kind in the nation, and tasked it with partnering with the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation to create a comprehensive strategic plan to change the reality of low literacy for the more than one million Houstonians who are impacted by it today. Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint* is the result of this partnership and a product informed by research and reflective of input from dozens of cross-sector leaders across our city.

I envision a Houston where every Houstonian has equitable access to the opportunities to gain the skills they need to succeed in life. Adult literacy must be prioritized, acted upon, and sustained by the full community. A strong Houston relies on all individuals having the skills they need to participate fully in society, and that depends on each and every one of us committing to take action.

I am grateful to the community and business leaders who through the investment of their time, talents, and thought leadership have made this effort possible. Now, let us approach this challenge to eliminate adult illiteracy boldly, together, and as always, Houston Strong.

Mayor Sylvester Turner

Houston's Adult Literacy Blueprint

Purpose

In 2021, the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy (MOAL) and the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation embarked on a joint initiative to engage the community in developing this *Blueprint* to serve as a strategic and coordinated city-wide plan to ensure that more adults in our community acquire the literacy skills they need to succeed in all aspects of life.

This *Blueprint* is created in alignment with the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy developed by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

Stakeholder Involvement

A diverse group of over 100 individuals, representing the City of Houston, the business sector, non-profit organizations, adult learners, and other groups, provided thought leadership and expertise in the design of this *Blueprint* through a series of interviews and focus groups, a community survey, and a strategy lab conducted over a five-month period. We are grateful for their commitment of time and talent in the development of the *Blueprint*.

A Special Thank You

The development of Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint* was made possible through financial support provided by Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation, EOG Resources, Inc., Greater Houston Community Foundation, Phillips 66, and the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy.

We wish to extend our gratitude to Deloitte Consulting LLP for synthesizing data, research and insights from leaders and facilitating the design process for the *Blueprint*.

The creation of the *Blueprint* would not have been achieved without the research and data shared by so many organizations, including the Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC). Additionally, we are indebted to the many organizations who made their findings available for our use including, but not limited to,

- The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
- The Coalition on Adult Basic Education
- Gallup
- The Kinder Institute for Urban Research
- The National Center for Education Statistics
- ProLiteracy

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MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR ADULT LITERACY

The Houston Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy (MOAL)

In September of 2019, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner launched the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy to focus on enhancing adult literacy advocacy and awareness and its impact on our economy, communities, families, and individuals; to build capacity for and convene literacy providers for strategic coordination and collaboration; and to create, as well as facilitate, partnerships to improve literacy services to adults and their families. MOAL is the only office of its kind in the country at the time of this writing.



BARBARA BUSH
HOUSTON LITERACY FOUNDATION

The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation (BBHLF)

The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation advocates for literacy as a fundamental right for everyone and views literacy as a necessary skill to achieve individual, family, and community success. It is founded on the belief held by former First Lady Barbara Bush: "If you help a person to read, then their opportunities in life will be endless."

As the authors and champions of the development of the *Blueprint*, BBHLF and MOAL will serve as conveners, advocates, and organizers for the implementation of the goals and strategies of the *Blueprint*.



“
 The American Dream is about giving everyone who works hard an equal opportunity to succeed. If we don't give everyone the ability to simply read and write, then we aren't giving everyone an equal chance to succeed.
 ”

-BARBARA BUSH

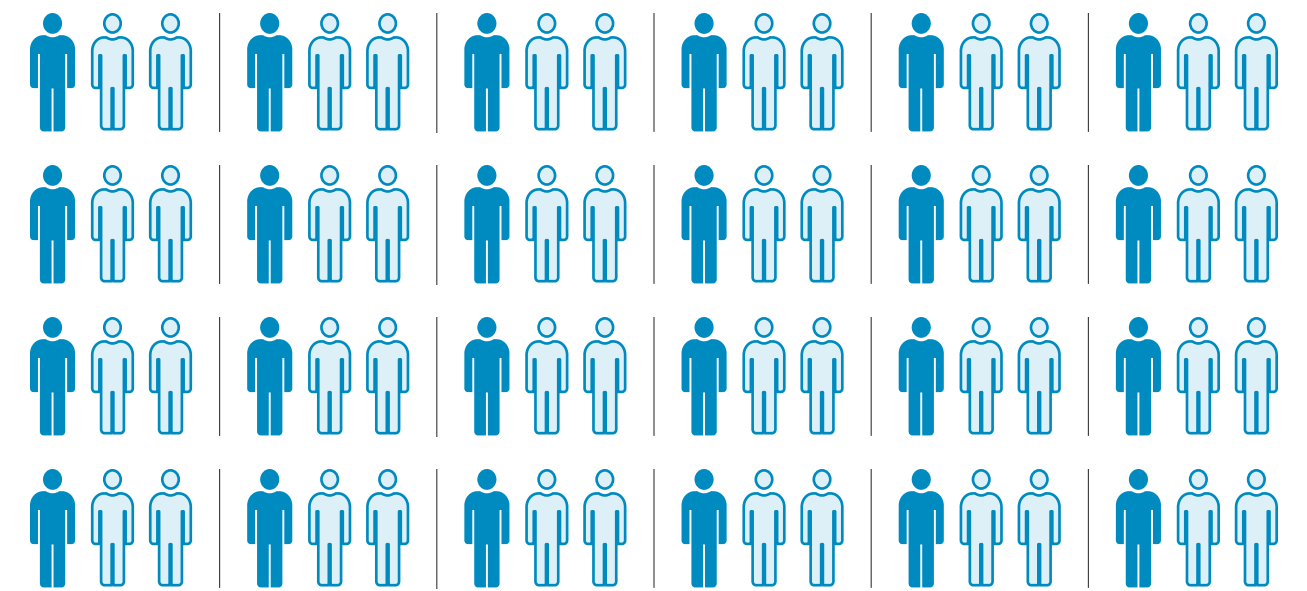
A Silent Crisis

A silent crisis rooted in systemic injustice, misunderstood by most, and unnoticed in our collective consciousness, is threatening our city's economy and social vitality - functional illiteracy. This crisis challenges daily the well-being and prosperity of families across our city and prevents many adults from reaching their fullest potential in life and the pursuit of the American Dream.

According to the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC), **32% of Harris County adults are functionally illiterate**, meaning one in every three residents do not yet have the literacy skills they need to successfully perform their role on the job, in their family, or in society.¹ These adults are at or below PIACC Level 1, the lowest level of literacy proficiency, meaning, at best, they can understand short text and complete simple forms. This is compared with those at Level 2 or above, who can at least read and integrate information in both print and digital formats.

For an in-depth description of the PIAAC scoring of levels of literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy see Appendix A.

With a highly diverse population, rapidly growing economy, and extensive and decentralized PreK-12, community college, and university systems, Houston will need to act strategically and proactively to address the pervasive, multifaceted, complex nature of low levels of adult literacy.



Background & Context

Houston is growing and diversifying

The Greater Houston area is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States with a **population of more than 7.6 million residents**, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In fact, if Greater Houston was a state, it would have the 15th largest state population in the United States.² From 2020 through 2029, Houston is projected to grow by more than 1.2 million residents, the **second highest projected growth rate of any metro area** in the United States during this time span.³

Houston's population is the most diverse in the country, with **more than 145 languages spoken in the region**⁴ (see Figure 1 for the Racial/Ethnic Composition of Houston⁵). Houston's immigrant population is also growing, with nearly one in every four Houston residents born outside of the United States.

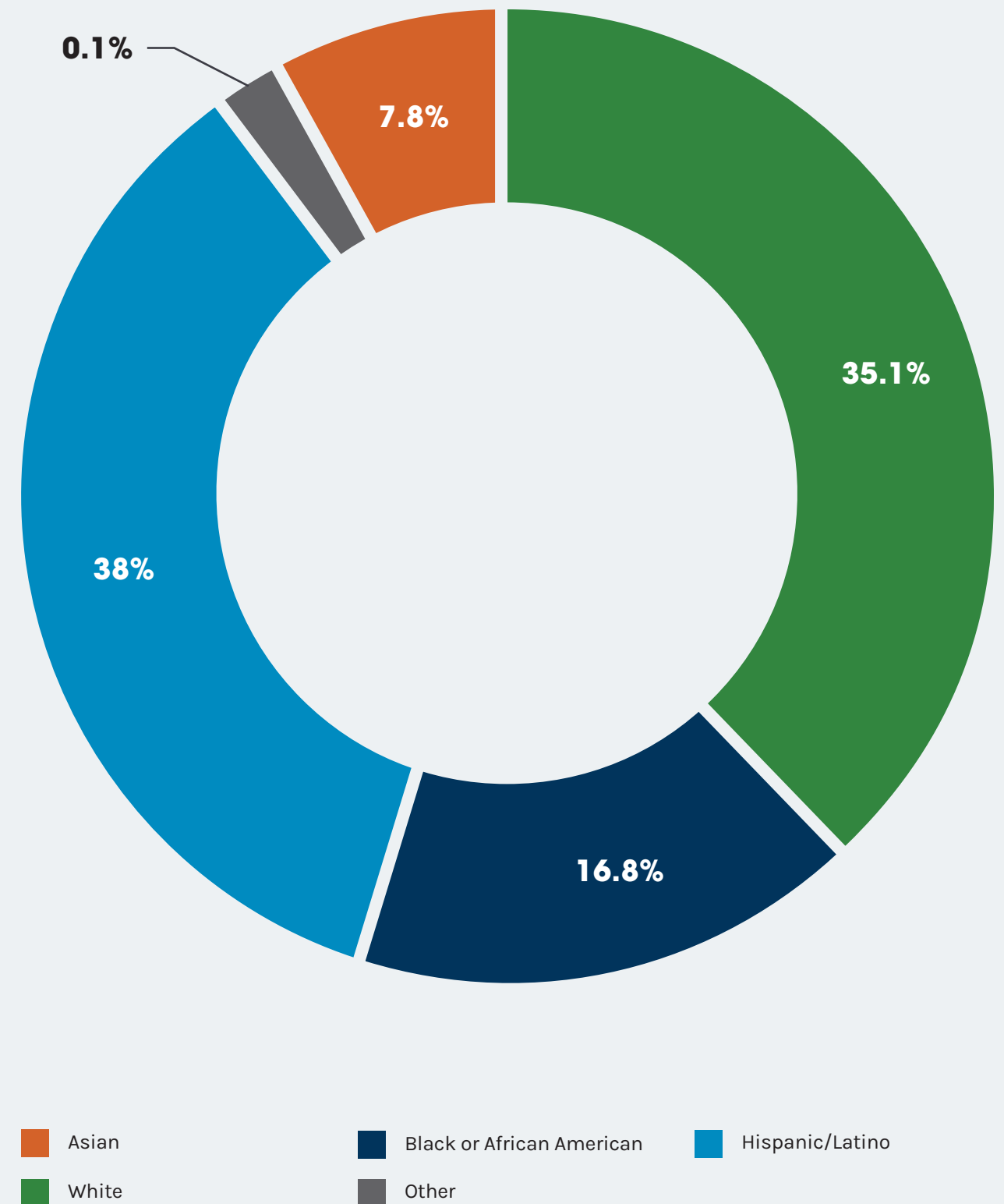
Houston's immigrant population is comprised of all education and socioeconomic levels, including highly educated and skilled professionals, working-class families, and international students.⁶ Of the **1.6 million Houston residents born outside the U.S.**, 36% have a high school education or some post-secondary education, and 41% have less than a high school education.⁷

More than 145 languages are spoken in the Houston region.⁴

The growth and diversity of Houston presents both challenges and opportunities for the city. A growing number of learners coming from different backgrounds, cultures, and languages means there is an increased demand for programs and a greater need for cultural competence and differentiation in the adult education classroom.⁸ Although meeting this increased demand for culturally-competent, diverse and inclusive adult education programs is a challenge, it is set to pay dividends for the city and its communities.

Specifically, a diverse and capable talent pool attracts companies and businesses and contributes to the local economy. For example, large technology companies, such as Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, cite the diversity of the talent pool as a key reason for relocating to Houston.⁹ Tremendous opportunities exist to capitalize on this strength, but only if Houston proactively and comprehensively addresses low literacy rates and increases the quality of and access to high-quality adult basic education programs for all Houstonians.

FIGURE 1: RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION: GREATER HOUSTON AREA



Houston has a robust, complex education system

The Houston area’s large education system includes seven independent school districts, which have a majority of their campuses located within the City of Houston’s limits. The most sizeable of these, the Houston Independent School District (HISD), is the largest school district in the state of Texas and the seventh largest school district in the nation, serving approximately 200,000 students.¹⁰

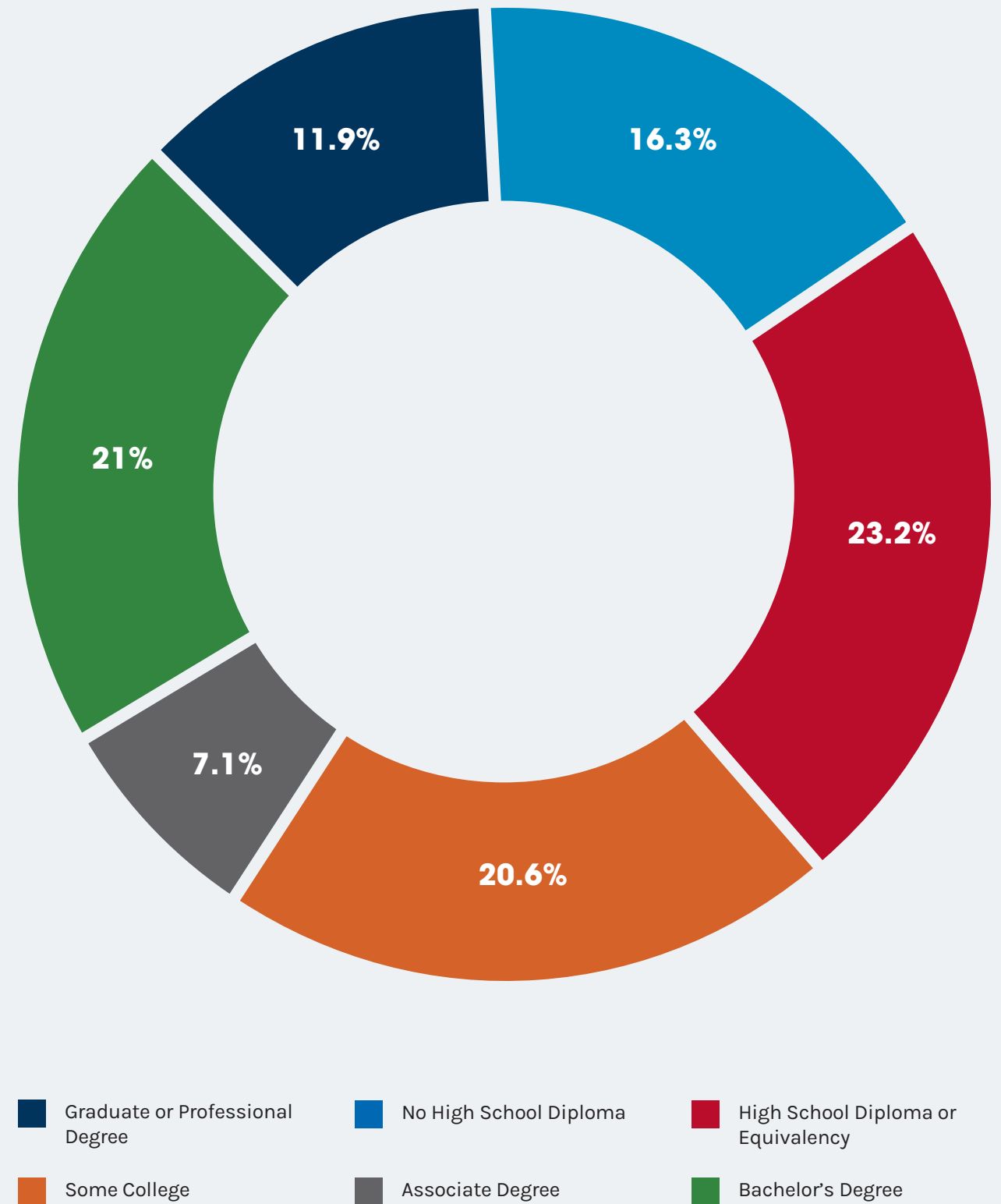
Of these students, a number will drop out of school before they have earned a high school diploma. In 2019, HISD had a high-school dropout rate of 13.6%,¹¹ nearly three times higher than the average national drop-out rate.¹² This elevated dropout rate in Houston is troublesome, since adults who do not have a high school degree are more likely to have low levels of functional literacy.¹³

According to the Greater Houston Partnership, the Houston region’s postsecondary education system is comprised of a diverse group of more than 40 colleges and universities, as well as many technical and trade schools.¹⁴ The Houston Community College System (HCCS) is the fourth largest postsecondary education system in Texas and the largest in the Greater Houston area. HCCS serves more than 57,000 students per year, with 71% attending part-time.¹⁵ The University of Houston is the largest four-year institution in the Greater Houston area and serves more than 47,000 students per year.¹⁶

Despite Houston’s extensive PreK-12 and community college system, nearly one in six adults in Houston lack a high school diploma or equivalency, and 40% of Houstonians have not persisted beyond secondary education.¹⁷ These results demonstrate the prevalence of low academic achievement in Houston, which is deeply rooted in economic and educational inequities.¹⁸ Figure 2 shows the educational attainment of the Greater Houston area.¹⁹

To support adults who may have failed to graduate from high school, who require remediation to meet college entrance requirements or increase workforce development skills, or who immigrate to Houston and seek to improve English proficiency and basic skills in reading and math, Houston has numerous adult education programs that receive funding from the federal government through the Texas Workforce Commission. Services include Adult Basic Education, high school equivalency programs, and English as a Second Language courses, as well as programs designed to prepare adults for success in the workforce. In the Houston-Galveston area, a consortium of such programs managed through the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), serves approximately 19,000 students annually. Eight out of every 10 adult learners enter federally funded adult education courses below a 6th grade functional literacy level.²⁰

FIGURE 2: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: GREATER HOUSTON AREA



However, this consortium does not include the vast network of adult literacy providers, comprised of many community- and faith-based organizations, and volunteer programs, that do not receive federal funding. Harris County has a population of 4.7 million people²¹ and PIAAC estimates suggest as many as 1.5 million²² need some type of basic skills to improve their literacy level. The capacity of the federally funded system cannot reach all the adults who need services in Houston. This makes the development of an inclusive and cohesive system where publicly funded and community programs collaborate extremely important. The Houston Area Adult Literacy Collective (HAALC), an informal network of mostly community-based programs, has been collaborating with the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy to support advocacy, communication, coordination, and collaboration efforts among all providers. The literacy providers in this network work closely with their neighborhoods and they are the first stop for adults seeking services.

Houston is primed for economic growth, but inequalities persist

When it comes to overall economic growth, Houston ranks sixth among major metro areas in number of economic development projects, programs, or activities that build capacity for long-term economic growth per capita (32.8).²³ Top industries in the area include aerospace and aviation, energy, transportation and logistics, and advanced manufacturing. Future trends show Houston is moving towards an economy based on technological innovation, renewable energy, and rapid growth in the healthcare sectors.²⁴

500 digital technology companies already call Houston home²⁵ and 80,000 new jobs were created in the region in 2018 alone with a focus on startups, technology, and innovation.²⁶ Houston also currently ranks number one in the United States for renewable energy use with more than 100 solar-related and 30 wind-related companies calling the city home. In fact, 92% of the city's power comes from wind and solar energy.²⁷ Additionally, the Center for Houston's Future projects the region will add **400,000+ new healthcare jobs, or one in four of all new jobs, in the next 15 years.**²⁸

With this current and impending economic growth, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that Greater Houston's gross domestic product (GDP) of \$478.8 billion in 2018 makes Greater Houston the seventh largest metro economy in the United States.²⁹

Greater Houston's gross domestic product (GDP) of \$478.8 billion in 2018 makes Greater Houston the seventh largest metro economy in the United States.²⁹

Despite Houston’s promising future, economic struggle and other inequities still exist for many Houstonians. **In Houston, the median household income is lower, and a greater proportion of residents live in poverty than in the rest of the country.** The median household income in the United States is \$62,843, with one in 10 residents living at or below the poverty level. In Houston, the median household income is \$52,338, with one in five residents living at or below the poverty level.³⁰

Racial disparities exacerbate economic inequality in Houston. Specifically, Black and Hispanic residents are more than twice as likely to have household incomes below \$37,500 than White residents.³¹ Increasing education attainment levels is key to closing these gaps for Houstonians and ensuring all residents are able to participate in and benefit from the city’s continuous growth.

We must elevate and prioritize the issue of low literacy in our city. The time to act is now.

Like previous crises, Houston must rally to meet and overcome this challenge

Despite Houston’s strong economy, diverse culture, and expansive education system, low literacy persists for a significant portion of its adults. This crisis of low literacy has deep roots in systemic inequities and is creating ripple effects today that will impact generations to come—unless Houston acts swiftly and purposefully.

The impacts of low literacy, along with other social and racial disparities, have been intensified and magnified by the many disasters and crises that have challenged Houston in the recent past, including the 2017 Hurricane Harvey, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, and the winter storms of 2021.

Time and again, these crises bring Houstonians together to face, respond to, and overcome challenges. Now, the city is once again called to action to address the crisis of low literacy. We must better support our fellow Houstonians and our communities and ensure that every adult is included in the future growth and prosperity of Houston. In the words of Mayor Sylvester Turner, “We are truly Houston Strong when we unite and recognize that we hold each other’s destinies in our hands.”³²

We must elevate and prioritize the issue of low literacy in our city. The time to act is now.



“
We are committed to convening all to the planning table so that together we can craft a vision for the future that **MUST** include the goal of 100% literacy for Houstonians. Literacy **IS** the heartbeat of Houston and this *Blueprint* is our call to action.
”

**-FEDERICO SALAS-ISNARDI, DIRECTOR,
MAYOR’S OFFICE FOR ADULT LITERACY**

Defining Adult Functional Literacy

Functional Literacy Definition

Literacy is most commonly defined as the ability to read and write - two foundational prerequisites for successfully completing a number of tasks in school, work, and daily life. However, the concept of literacy addressed in this *Blueprint* is much more complex and includes different skills and domains beyond reading and writing. The writers of Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint* have considered several different sources and their definitions of functional literacy, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) classification.

For the purposes of Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint*, functional literacy includes **reading, writing, computing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills at levels of proficiency to function on the job, in the family, and across society** (See Figure 3).³³ For the purpose of this definition, the term "adult" includes individuals who are 16 years of age or older.³⁴

3 Core Domains

For this *Blueprint*, the five foundations of functional literacy - reading, writing, computing, critical thinking, and communicating orally - are presented along three domains. These domains are:

Financial Literacy - the ability to make financial decisions appropriate for one's family and community³⁵

Digital Literacy - ability to access, understand, synthesize, interact with, and communicate information from an electronic environment³⁶

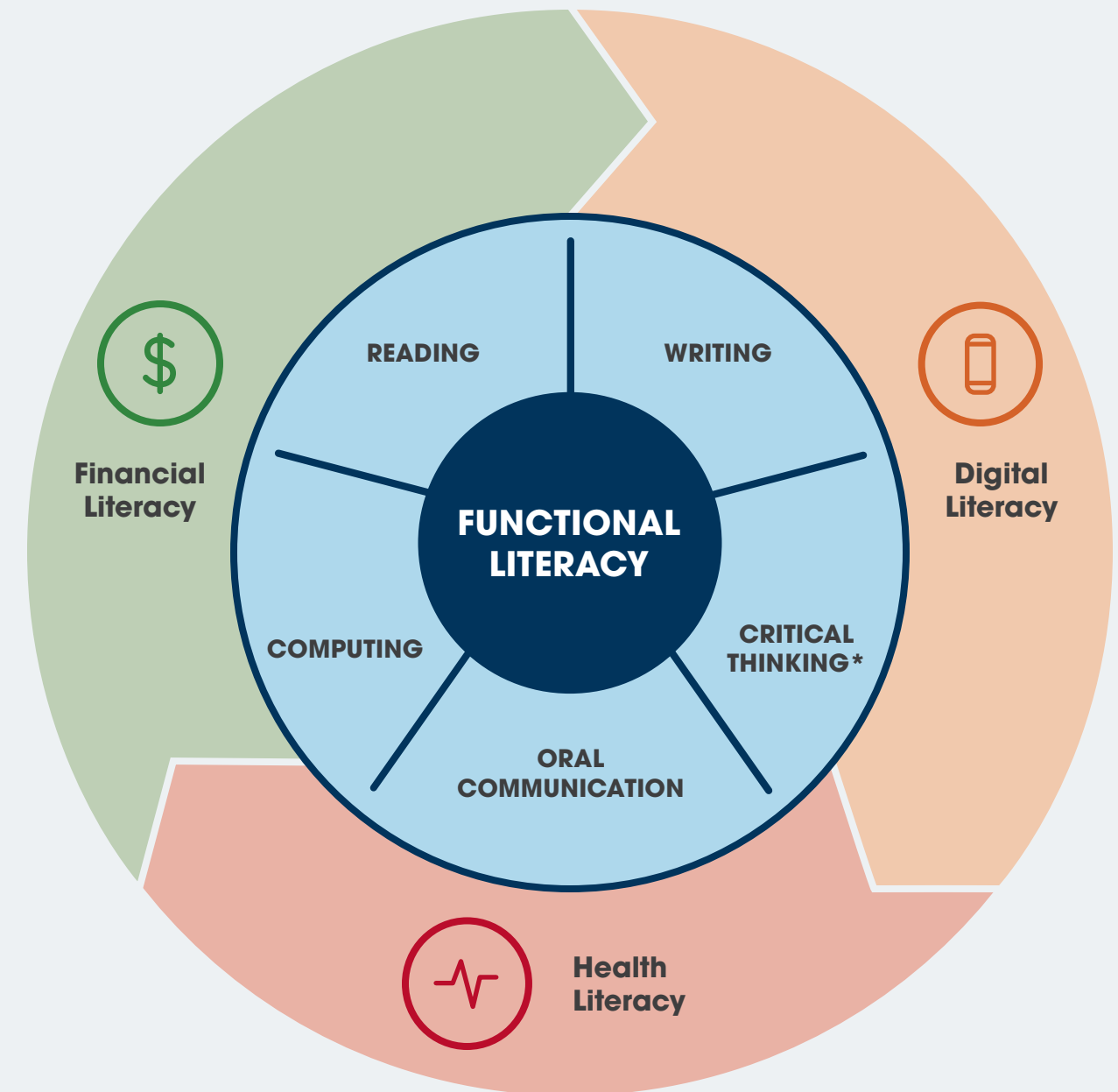
Health Literacy - ability to understand basic health information and services and to make decisions that are appropriate for oneself, one's family, and community³⁷

While there are other literacy domains, skills in the three domains chosen for our work are essential for individuals to succeed in society. Those who lack these essential skills may struggle with everyday tasks like **saving money, paying off debt, understanding instructions on prescription drug bottles, or using technology to search for, access, and use information.**

It is important to remember that adults function in many different and intersecting contexts. We are simultaneously family members and workers, active participants in our communities, and life-long learners seeking to understand our situation, learn, and plan for our futures. The foundational skills and literacy domains presented here are important whether the adult is engaged in a family literacy class, a workforce development program, or in a regular course to improve basic skills.

FIGURE 3: WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL LITERACY?

Refer to Appendix B for a complete list and definitions of additional key terms used throughout the *Blueprint*.



* Refers to the ability to make decisions, synthesize information, and solve problems.



“
The welder knows how to weld in Spanish just as well as in English. Many of us have the necessary job skills to complete tasks but need the opportunity to use them while learning English.
”

-HOUSTON ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

The Individual Impact of Low Functional Literacy

Literacy is a tool for meaningful engagement with society, and the literacy skills an individual needs depends on the context or role they have or want to play in the community. For example, the functional literacy skills and proficiency a person needs to support their child's education are different than the skills and proficiency needed to perform their role as an employee, which may be different than what is needed to engage successfully in the civic process. Even if two contexts require the same skill, for example reading, each context may require a different level of proficiency and skill application.

A key aspect in functional literacy is also the predominant language spoken in a community. Individuals who are not able to read or write in the predominant language where they live might be considered to have low functional literacy, even if they are highly proficient at reading and writing in another language. This is often an issue for immigrants and refugees who may have excellent skills in their home language, but do not yet have those same competencies in English, which can limit their opportunity to fully participate in the economy or society.³⁸

Adults have varying motivations and purposes for pursuing adult education and increasing their functional literacy skills. For example, a stay-at-home caregiver may be motivated to improve their literacy skills so they can better support and engage in their child's education, while a person looking to advance in their career may be seeking the skills and training needed to move from a low-skill job (e.g., dishwasher, custodian, agriculture worker) to a middle-skill job (e.g., electrician, plumber, paralegal).

In either of these circumstances, the key to a person's success in society is their overall level of functional literacy and their ability to successfully perform the skills they need for their context and the role they want to fulfill.

500 digital tech companies already call Houston home,²² while 80,000 new jobs were created in the region in 2020 with a focus on startups, technology and innovation.²³

Figure 4 shows how adults with low literacy may struggle to accomplish specific tasks related to the role they want to play in their family, on the job, or in society.

FIGURE 4: A LEARNER'S MOTIVATION

In the Family

“To better support my family, I need to have the skills to...”



Balance a budget



Help a child with reading and homework



Complete required government applications



Communicate with doctors



Register and participate in the voting process



Comprehend food handling instructions

Foundational Skills*
 Digital Literacy
 Health Literacy
 Financial Literacy

On the Job

“To get better job and employment opportunities, I need to have the skills to...”



Apply for a job online



Communicate via email



Perform digital work tasks



Draft a cover letter and resume



Understand work safety manuals



Navigate employee benefits

*Foundational skills refer to the following: reading, writing, computing, thinking critically, and oral communication skills.



Houston's Adult Literacy Challenge

The Systemic Injustice of Low Literacy

Racial disparities in literacy rates are connected to historical inequities in the U.S. and Houston.

In the United States, there are pervasive disparities between racial groups in levels of functional literacy. Results from the PIACC show that **both Black and Hispanic adults are about three times more likely to have low literacy skills compared to White adults.** We also see these discrepancies in numeracy, as **both Black and Hispanic adults in the United States are two times more likely to have low numeracy skills than White adults.**³⁹

These gaps exist because of structures, systems, policies and practices that have resulted in racial inequalities within the economy and the U.S. education system, and which have contributed to increased poverty, poor health, crime, and other social issues for communities of color.

Black and Hispanic adults are about three times more likely to have low literacy skills compared to White adults.

Low adult literacy is closely tied to many of the social justice issues we face as a society. If our city does not proactively address and work to solve the functional literacy skill gaps that exist for Houston's racial minority populations, there is little hope of realizing a vision for a just and equitable Houston.

“

To overcome this crisis, literacy needs to be accessible to everyone. We are all of the same cloth; we need to work together.

”

– HOUSTON ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

Inequities in adult literacy have profound impacts on economic outcomes, particularly for people of color.

Unemployment is highly related to low levels of literacy in the United States. Basic tasks associated with finding and keeping a well-paying job are extremely difficult for individuals with low literacy (e.g., creating a resume, responding to an online job posting, reading/writing work emails).

PIACC results show that in the United States, 16% of adults who were unemployed, and 28% of those who were out of the labor force—meaning they are jobless and not actively searching for a job—had low levels of literacy.⁴⁰ Locally in the Houston-Galveston area, data from 2019 shows that 22% of adult learners are unemployed and 28% are out of the labor force when they enter federally funded adult education programs.⁴¹

Disparities in economic outcomes exist between racial groups in the Houston area, as they do in many other regions in the United States. In Harris County racial disparities exist in levels of poverty and income: poverty levels for Black and Hispanic individuals are more than three times higher compared to White individuals, and the median household income for White households is nearly double that of Black households (See Figures 5 and 6).⁴²

According to the PIACC 16% of those who are unemployed and 28% of those who are out of the labor force have low levels of literacy.⁴⁰

Additionally, the most recent unemployment data for the State of Texas shows that the **economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have left Black, Hispanic, and Asian American/Pacific Islander populations with nearly double the unemployment rates of White populations** (See Figure 7), further widening existing racial gaps in unemployment.⁴³

These disparities lead to very real adverse impacts on individuals and communities, including discrepancies in homeownership and the ability to cover emergency expenses. For example, in the City of Houston, **Black and Hispanic populations are almost two times less likely to own a home, and three times more likely to not be able to come up with \$400 to meet an emergency expense, compared to White populations.**⁴⁴

For all Houstonians to rise and prosper as the city rapidly grows, it will be important to concentrate efforts on empowering marginalized communities with the proper tools, resources, and skills to achieve economic mobility. **Literacy is one of the most important of these tools, as it opens the door to economic opportunity and increases the likelihood of upward social mobility.**

FIGURE 5: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN POVERTY IN HARRIS COUNTY

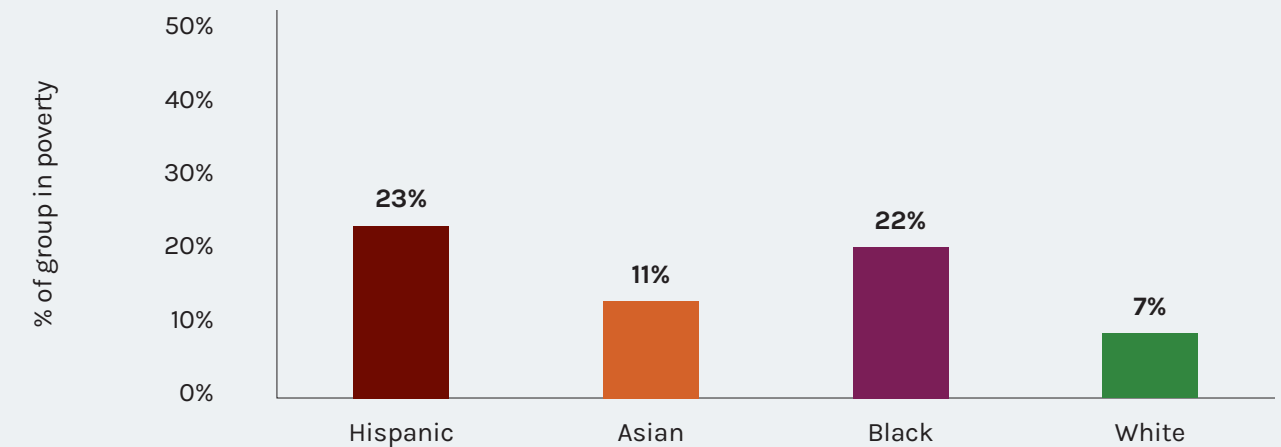


FIGURE 6: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN INCOME IN HARRIS COUNTY

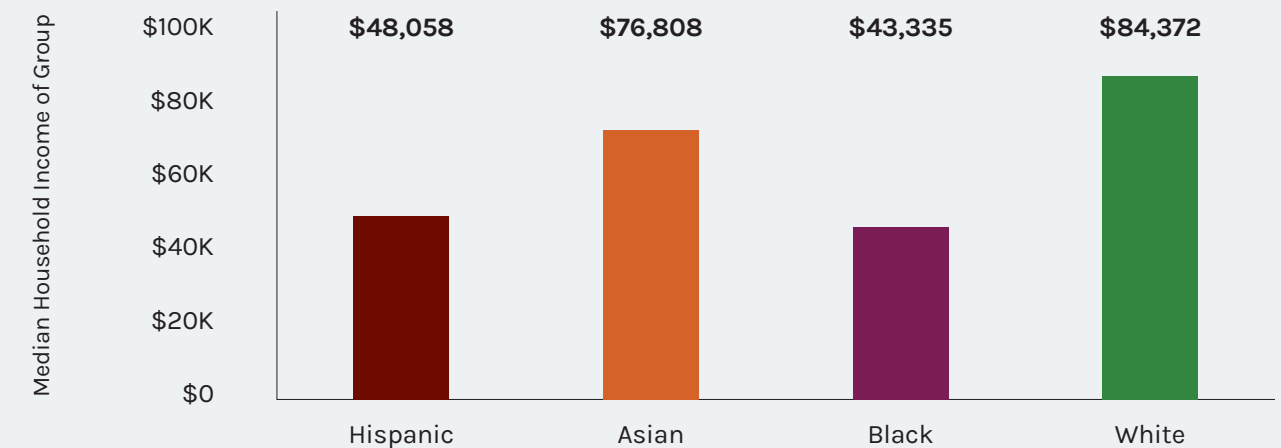
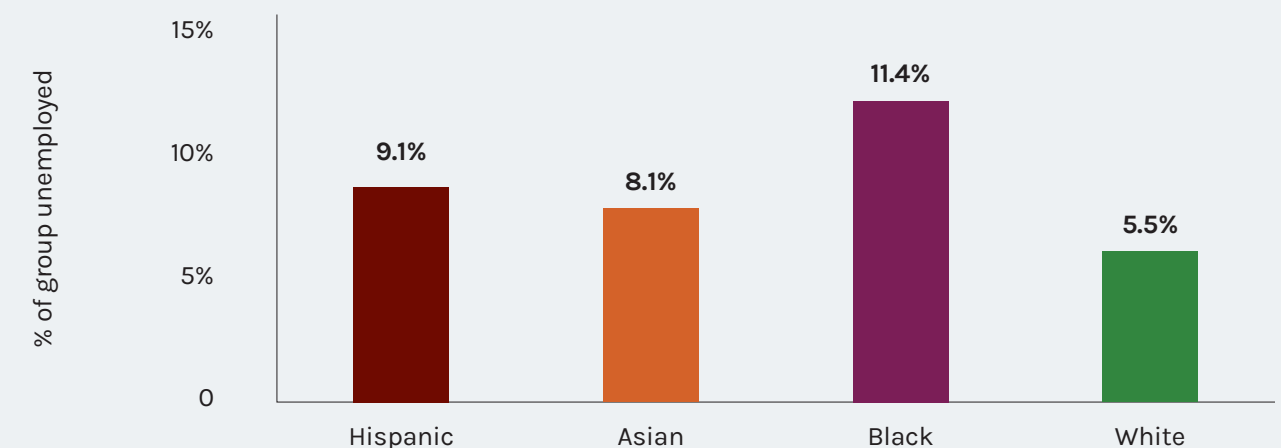


FIGURE 7: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN 2020 (Q3 UNEMPLOYMENT IN TEXAS)



94% of adult education learners in Harris County are people of color.⁴⁷

Enduring inequities in education exist and reinforce economic disparities across racial lines.

The same racial inequities that appear related to economic outcomes exist for overall educational attainment. This is not surprising, because educational attainment and economic outcomes are inextricably linked, and, together, they reinforce racial disparities in society.

In the Houston area, U.S.-born Hispanics are twice as likely and U.S.-born Blacks are 40% more likely to have less than a high school or only a high school education, as compared to U.S.-born Whites.⁴⁵ Hispanic and Black adults are also more likely to need and seek out adult basic education opportunities to build the literacy skills they need to succeed in their roles in work, family, and society, and as lifelong learners.

In fact, national data from federally funded adult literacy programs show that 77% of adult education learners who participate in those programs across the United States are people of color.⁴⁶

Locally, this number is even higher. **In Harris County, 94% of adult learners in federally funded adult literacy programs are people of color, with the vast majority – greater than 85% - being Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino.** (See Figure 8 for the Racial Breakdown of Adult Learners in Harris County federally funded adult education programs.)⁴⁷

People of color make up 58% of the overall population in Harris County, yet are disproportionately participating in federally funded programs aimed at boosting literacy and workforce readiness skills.⁴⁸

Even within the population of adult learners, we can see the impact of racial inequities when we examine the literacy levels that adult learners have when they first enter a federally funded program in the Houston area. **More than a quarter of White adult learners enter adult basic education programs with at least 6th grade functional literacy skills, while that percentage is considerably lower for learners of color (see Figure 9).**⁴⁹ This difference underscores the pervasiveness and individual impact of racial injustice, and how it manifests in education and literacy.

“
 The crisis is not going to change until
 the system changes. The sooner there’s
 an intervention, the sooner we can move
 forward and solve the problem.
 ”

– MARGARET DOUGHTY, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
 (RETIRED), LITERACY POWERLINE

FIGURE 8: RACIAL BREAKDOWN OF ADULT LEARNERS IN HARRIS COUNTY

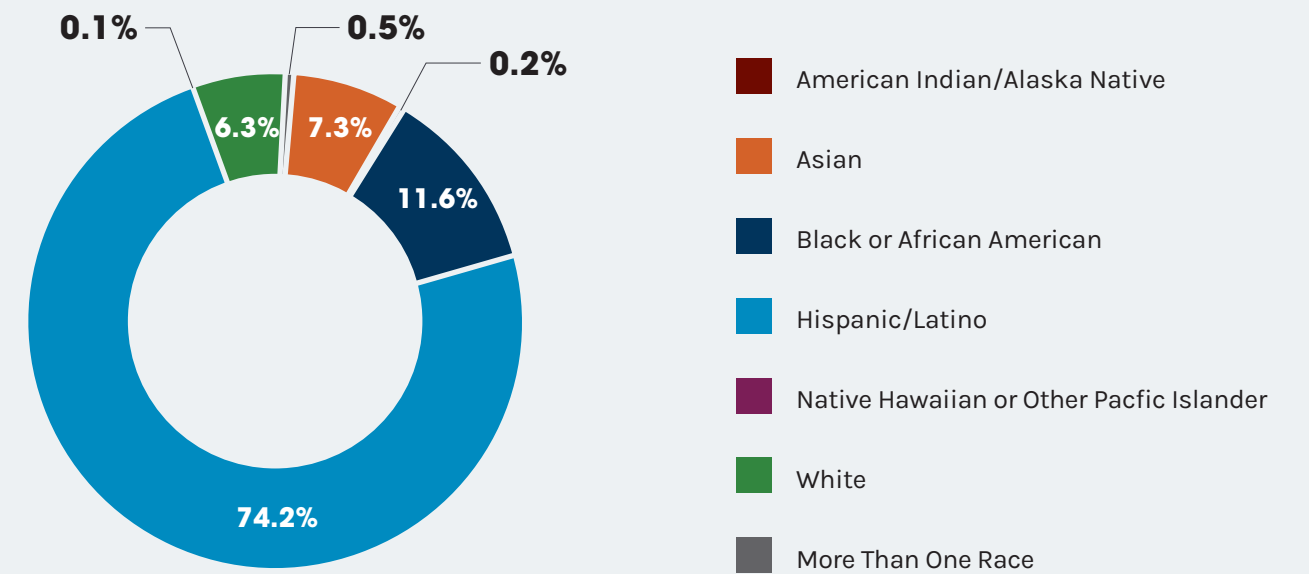
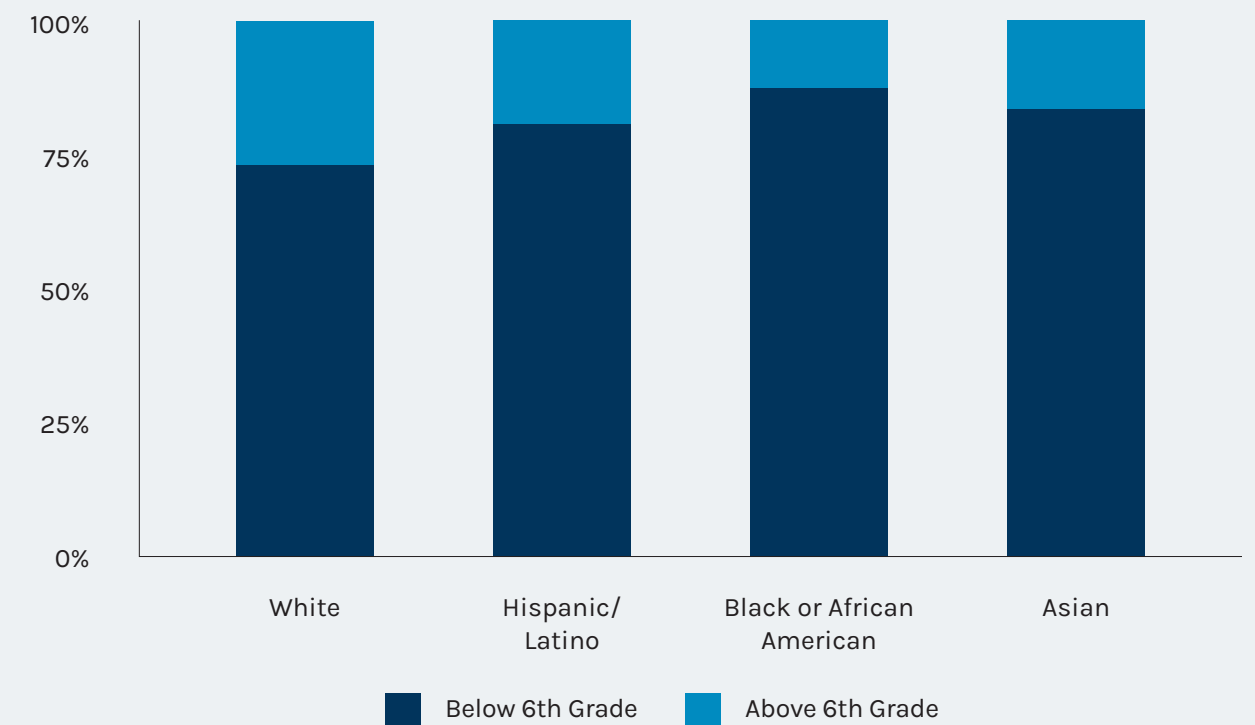


FIGURE 9: RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN ENTERING GRADE LEVEL FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN HARRIS COUNTY





“
 Some of the inequities communities
 are facing begin with a low-skilled, low
 literacy community. You can talk about
 any initiative you want, but what we really
 need are literacy initiatives.
 ”

– CLAUDIA AGUIRRE,
 PRESIDENT AND CEO, BAKERRIPLEY

Low adult literacy connects to inequities in the overall health and success of communities, particularly communities of color.

Low levels of adult literacy have profound impacts on the overall health and success of the community. Specifically, low literacy relates to crime rates, health quality, and civic participation, with a disproportionate effect on communities of color.

Literacy is at the heart of health disparities and public health.

At some point in their life, every citizen needs to be able to identify, understand, use, and make decisions surrounding health information and services. Individual reading, writing, and numeracy skills are an important aspect of this. However, research shows that many healthcare activities are complex and highly technical for most people, even those with proficient skills in reading, writing, and numeracy.⁵⁰

Research spanning multiple decades has shown that adults with low literacy skills generally have less health-related knowledge, experience poorer control of their chronic illnesses, are less likely to receive preventive healthcare, and are more likely to be hospitalized and use emergency services. Additionally, adults with low literacy skills are four times more likely to report “fair” or “poor” health compared to those with strong skills.⁵¹ As a result, this leads to higher healthcare costs for everyone, not just the affected individuals.⁵²

Adults with low literacy skills are 4x more likely to report “fair” or “poor” health compared to those with strong skills.⁵¹

Health literacy, or the ability to understand basic health information and services and to make decisions that are appropriate for oneself, one’s family, and community, is essential for the sustainable well-being of all individuals, families, and communities. Research shows that increasing levels of health literacy for individuals increases their overall health.⁵³ In fact, improving health literacy has the potential to prevent an estimated one million hospital visits which would save billions of dollars a year in the United States.⁵⁴

Health disparities are of particular concern for racial minorities. Black adults are much more likely to have low health literacy compared to White adults.⁵⁵ Additionally, people of color are also less likely to have access to affordable healthcare, which ultimately leads to disparate health outcomes.

In Houston Hispanic families are almost three times and Black families nearly two times less likely to have health insurance than White families.⁵⁶ This lack of coverage can lead to the underutilization of preventative health services and poorer health outcomes for these groups. For example, in Houston, Black and Hispanic adults have higher rates of obesity – which increases the risk of many diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.⁵⁷

Literacy gives a voice to disadvantaged communities and is a key contributor to civic participation.

The need for informed discourse and civic engagement has become increasingly important over the past years. Civic involvement and engagement are imperative for any democratic society to progress and flourish. Low literacy prevents individuals from fully engaging in this aspect of public life. Without functional literacy skills gained from education, individuals are not able to evaluate and synthesize information important to understanding vital political and social issues that affect their quality of life and livelihood. Research shows that there is a strong connection between an individual's education level and their civic participation.

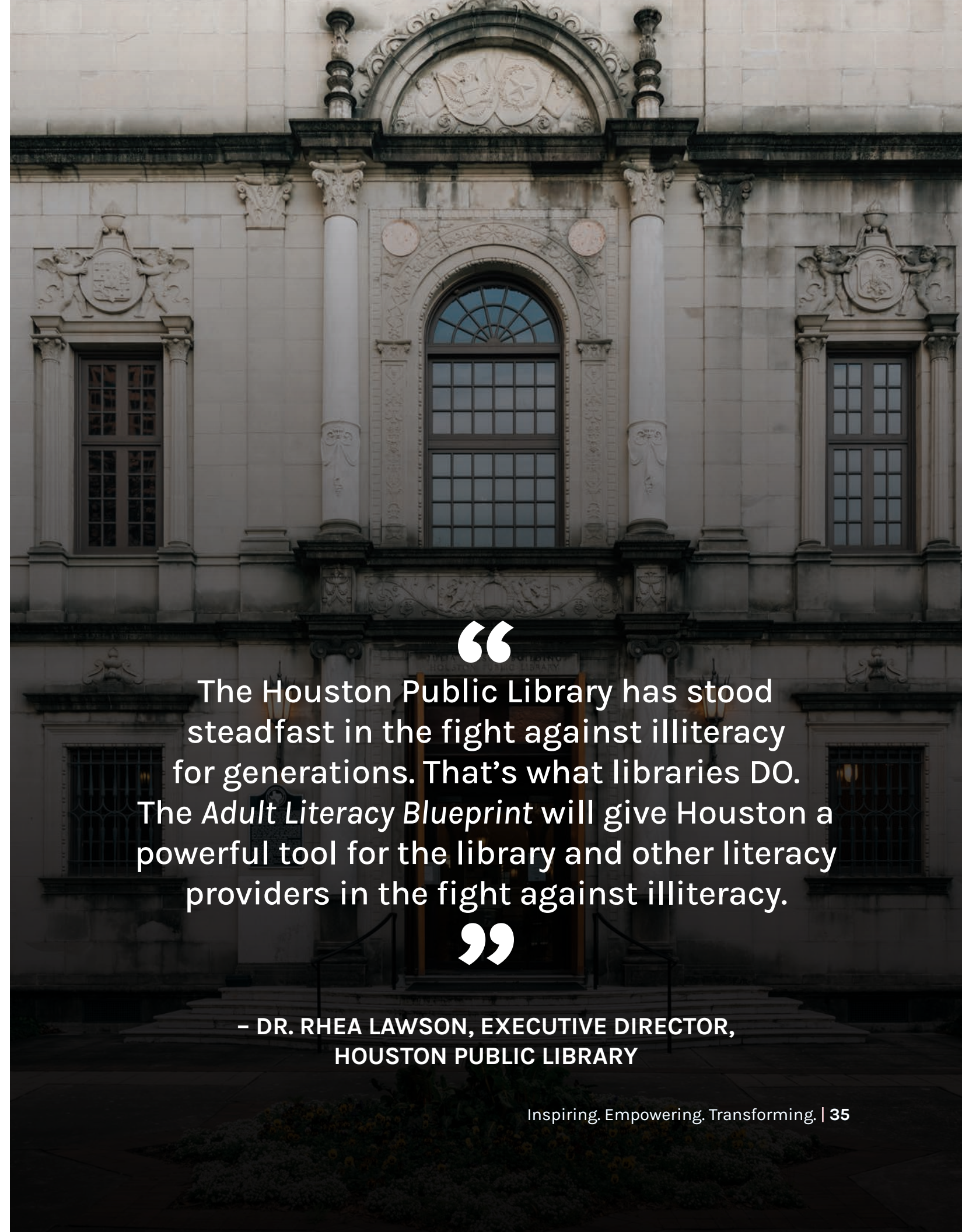
For example, **the voting rate for adults without any college education was over two times lower than for those with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2020.**⁵⁸ Even if they do participate, individuals with less education often lack confidence in the process and feel like their voices are not being heard in public matters. In fact, 60% of individuals with low academic skills feel they have no influence on public decisions and the political process.⁵⁹ These factors, along with other societal inequities, contribute to lesser voter turnout for communities of color. Recent analysis from the Pew Research Center shows that White Americans have higher voter turnout than Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans.⁶⁰

60% of individuals with low academic skills feel they have no influence on public decisions and the political progress.⁵⁹

In addition, civic participation has implications for Houston's large immigrant English as a Second Language (ESL) population. **In 2019, over 60% of adult learners in federally funded adult basic education programs across Harris County participated in ESL courses.** In addition, 81% of ESL learners in Harris County enter federally funded adult education programs at the lowest three levels of educational functioning. This means that they are at best only able to provide basic personal information on simple forms and read simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace, and community in English.⁶¹ Nationally, PIACC results show rates of low literacy are over twice as high for non-native compared to native born U.S. Adults.⁶²

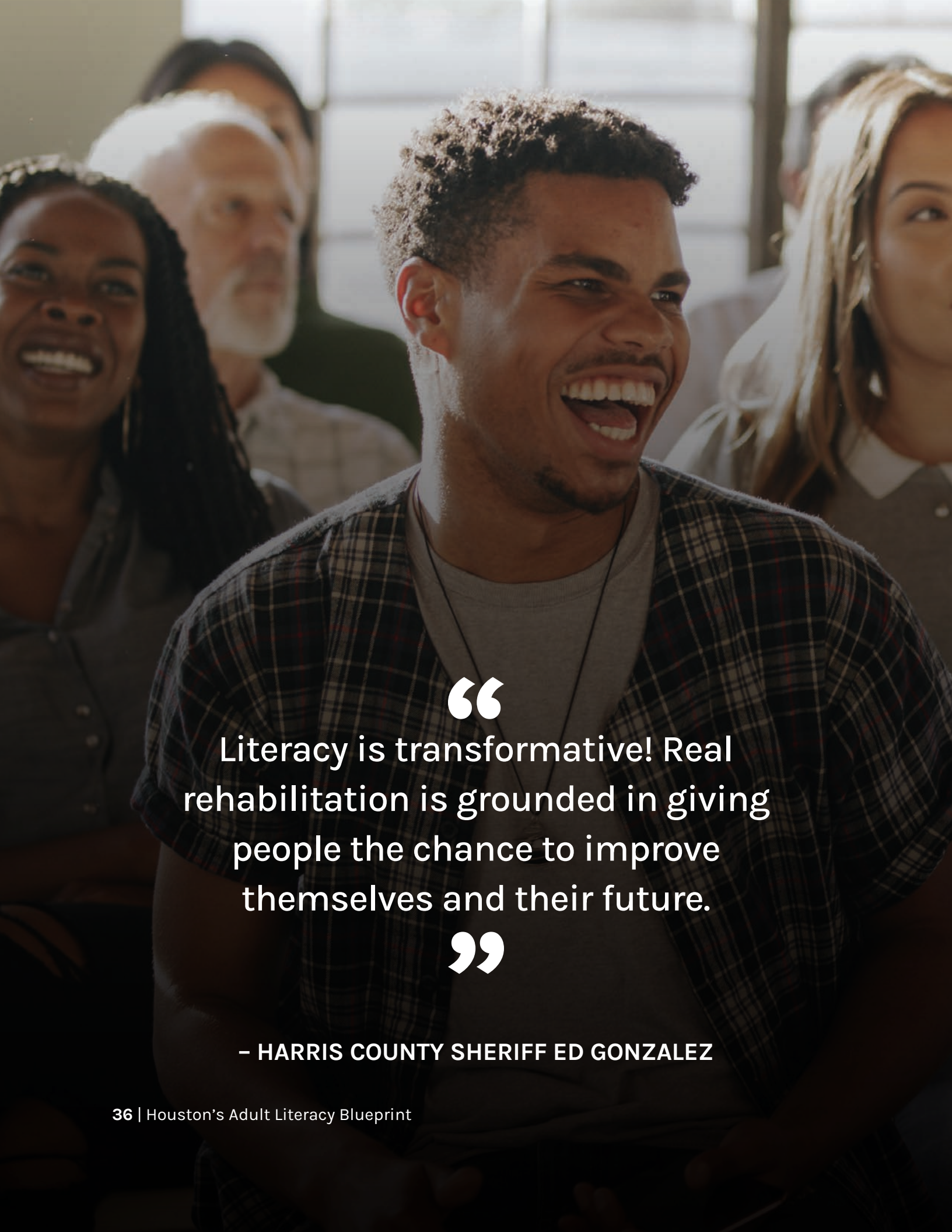
Along with basic literacy classes, civic preparation courses are a key foundation of adult education for many non-native born adult learners in the United States. Literacy and civic participation represent key steps for many immigrants to becoming fully integrated into the United States and their community. Naturalization empowers immigrants to fully engage in their communities and understand the rights and freedoms they have in their new country.⁶³

Ultimately, the strength of our democracy and public life depends on literacy; and the future of many depends on their ability to advocate for themselves and their families, which will not be possible without fundamental literacy skills.



“
The Houston Public Library has stood steadfast in the fight against illiteracy for generations. That's what libraries DO. The *Adult Literacy Blueprint* will give Houston a powerful tool for the library and other literacy providers in the fight against illiteracy.

”
– DR. RHEA LAWSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



“

Literacy is transformative! Real rehabilitation is grounded in giving people the chance to improve themselves and their future.

”

– HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF ED GONZALEZ

Adult education and higher literacy rates offer the opportunity for transformative rehabilitation and safer communities.

Low levels of functional literacy are among the most significant related factors to the continuing criminal justice crisis in the United States. In Houston, the yearly crime rate of 56 violent and property crimes per 1,000 residents is one of the highest in the nation.⁶⁴ According to the U.S. Department of Justice, **“the link between academic failure and violence, delinquency, and crime is welded to reading failure.”**⁶⁵ Around 30% of all incarcerated adults in the United States have not completed high school, which is twice as high as the general population.⁶⁶ Locally, 2019 data from the Houston-Galveston area shows 75% of adult learners in prison enter correctional adult basic education programs below a 6th grade functional literacy level.⁶⁷

Increasing functional literacy skills has the power to reduce crime and increase the likelihood of success for incarcerated individuals after their release. Unfortunately, correctional education programs have regressed significantly over the past four decades, despite their proven success at reducing recidivism. Prisoners who participate in correctional adult education programs are 43% less likely to recidivate than inmates who do not.⁶⁸

Pre-pandemic participation in these programs included 21% of incarcerated adults studying towards a formal degree or credential and 70% wanting to be, but not currently, enrolled in an academic class or program.⁶⁹ As of mid-year 2020, most prisons had to shut down in-person programs due to COVID-19, which resulted in less access to education programs for incarcerated individuals.⁷⁰

Lower opportunities to grow literacy skills, obtain diplomas/certifications, and acquire vocational and employment skills fall particularly heavily on incarcerated Black and Hispanic populations, who are disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system.⁷¹ As the United States comes to terms with the lingering effects of its oppressive racial history, expansion and improvement of adult education in prisons and jails embodies an evidence-based and practical way to reduce low literacy and address racial inequities.

In the Houston-Galveston area, 75% of adult learners in prison enter correctional adult basic education programs below a 6th grade functional literacy level.⁶⁷

The Digital Divide

Inequities in digital technology and broadband access are pervasive in Houston and affect marginalized communities the most.

Lack of access to digital technology and broadband internet greatly affects those in poverty and increases existing inequities related to literacy. In today's highly-digital world, it is incredibly difficult to function and advance in society without access to a computer or broadband internet connection at home. These inequities were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when these capabilities were a necessity for things like applying for a job or attending classes to continue one's education.

Lack of access to digital technology and broadband internet was an issue throughout the country and in Houston during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently in Houston, one in six households does not have a computer at home and almost twice that amount, about one in three households, does not have broadband Internet access.⁷²

Inequities also exist in terms of access to digital technology and broadband. National numbers show that only 56% of adults in households earning \$30,000 a year and 46% of adults lacking a high school diploma have home broadband service. It is also reported that **32% of those without a high school diploma are dependent on their smartphone for internet access.** This severely limits their ability to fully access and utilize the internet for essential tasks that may only be available with a computer.⁷³


In Houston, one in six households do not have a computer at home and almost twice that amount, about one in three households, do not have broadband Internet access.⁷²

Inequities also exist with digital literacy skills, which are necessary to effectively use technology.

Access to technology devices and internet connectivity is the first step to closing the digital divide. However, access does not guarantee that individuals will have the required skills to effectively utilize these devices. Many adults who lack foundational literacy skills may also struggle with essential digital literacy skills.

This lack of digital literacy can have a profound impact on an individual's way of life. Adults who are low in digital literacy also have a lower rate of labor force participation and are more likely to work in low-skilled jobs for low wages.⁷⁴ As the jobs of the future become increasingly more digital, individuals with low digital literacy will continue to be more likely to work in low-wage jobs.





“
Technology is like our neighbors. We all have them, but we really don't know or understand them. Access is not enough; we need the digital literacy training to truly understand how to use the technology.
”

– HOUSTON ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

Like other forms of literacy, digital literacy also highlights racial inequities in our country. In the U.S. 44% of Black, and 27% of the Hispanic population have low digital skills, compared to only 20% of the White population.⁷⁵ Additionally, we see workers of color are disproportionately affected by digital skill gaps. For example, Black workers make up only 12% of overall workers, but represent 15% of the subset of workers who have no digital skills and 21% of those with limited skills. Additionally, Latino workers make up 14% of overall workers, but represent 35% of workers with no digital skills, and 20% of those with limited skills.⁷⁶

As the world and workforce becomes more digitally advanced, these disproportionate outcomes will continue to persist and expand unless urgent, drastic action is taken.

Distance learning is becoming more prevalent and has allowed educators to continue serving students during the pandemic.

Adult basic education and workforce development providers have been deeply impacted by the pandemic. COVID-19 forced all instruction to transition to be completely digital and remote for learners. This has left providers scrambling to implement remote learning technologies and curriculums to reach adult learners. In a nationwide survey by ProLiteracy, 70% of the adult literacy instructors who had not previously taught remotely had moved all of their instruction online.⁷⁷

This rush to move coursework to an online format has called on many teachers to quickly learn how to use these new technologies to facilitate their classes. To meet this demand for digital skills, many local, state, and professional development learning opportunities became available to help support educators in a remote environment.⁷⁸

Enrollment and retention of adult learners has also been greatly affected by adult education services moving to a digital and remote format. In fact, **current program enrollment for federally funded programs in the Houston-Galveston area has been reduced by half compared to typical enrollment numbers before the pandemic outbreak.**⁷⁹

The stress and hardship from unemployment, lost income, childcare responsibilities, and sickness and death have left many adult learners without the necessary time and resources to navigate the new and complex digital format for continuing adult education services.⁸⁰ In addition, some adult learners may have a stronger preference for in-person learning and choose to not seek services in a completely digital environment.

Latino workers make up 14% of the overall workforce but represent 35% of workers without digital skills, while Black workers make up 12% of the overall workforce but represent 15% of workers without digital skills.⁷⁶

However, for those who learn well in a remote environment, and have the access and skills to use digital technology, expanded distance education services have extended learning opportunities by creating flexible coursework that can be accessed anytime and from anywhere.⁸¹

Due to the increased reliance on technology from the COVID-19 pandemic, digital and distance education are set to continue to become more prevalent in the future. Hybrid in-person/online classroom models are poised to be the ideal direction for adult education. To keep up with this trend, it will be important for providers and organizations to offer educators and adult learners the resources to successfully utilize these services, while continuing to meet learner needs.



Spotlight: Leveraging Innovative Solutions to Reach Adult Learners during the Pandemic

In January 2019, the Adult Literacy Partners of Houston, a team comprised of EastSide University, Memorial Assistance Ministries, and Community Family Centers, earned a spot to pilot Learning UpGrade and Cell-ED apps, as part of the Barbara Bush Foundation Adult Literacy XPRIZE initiative presented by Dollar General Literacy Foundation.

The pilot consisted of an assertive campaign consisting of eblasts, social media posts, text sharing, and even a “tour” of team trainers that visited Greater Houston Area literacy provider sites to help teach instructors how to use the apps with their students. As a result of this effort in November 2019, the Adult Literacy Partners of Houston won a national award which they received at the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy’s inaugural National Summit on Adult Literacy in Washington, D.C.. Little did the team, and their participating provider colleagues, know that within four months apps and other internet-based technologies would be their only means of providing literacy services.

In March 2020, the “Stay Home, Work Safe” order was issued, and Houston was required to temporarily close all business and services as a result of the pandemic. However, the providers who either had a pre-existing digital literacy option and/or had participated in the XPRIZE competition, opened their virtual doors and resumed services within weeks. In fact, at the same time schools and colleges were estimating their time to provide remote learning options, 14 Greater Houston Area adult literacy providers were already conducting classes and continuing to produce performance gains that included improvements in digital literacy proficiency. When surveyed in June 2020, active providers reported serving over 9,000 learners between April and May 2020 – the height of the pandemic. The extended impact of the Adult Literacy XPRIZE competition now included digital literacy, access, continued education options, and the foundation for blended learning models that continue to evolve in Houston’s provider community today.⁸²

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 70% of the adult literacy instructors who had not previously taught remotely had moved all of their instruction online.⁷⁷

It will be impossible to break the cycle of poverty without first breaking the cycle of low literacy.

Impact on Children & Families

Low literate adults often face an undeserved stigma.

The importance of childhood literacy is well-documented and receives both widespread attention and noticeable investment.

In contrast to early childhood education expenditures and promotion, investment in adult literacy education has been and still is insignificant in comparison.⁸³ This is troubling since there is a wide body of research showing that **investments in adult education result in improved reading scores for both parents and children.**⁸⁴ This multi-generational effect makes adult literacy a critical piece in improvement of childhood and early education literacy rates.

In the United States, conversations about education and the importance of literacy are almost exclusively linked to childhood. However, once children become adults, our perception of their inability to read or write changes. A stigma exists for low literate adults in the United States, perhaps because of a belief that low literate adults lack skills solely due to an individual fault or mistake rather than perhaps other reasons, such as the systemic challenges of the U.S. education system, economic and social factors, or a learning disability.

However, we know that a **cycle of low literacy** exists for many individuals and families across generations, made up of reinforcing systemic circumstances that span an entire lifetime.

The cycle of low literacy impacts individuals across generations.

The cycle of poverty is a widely recognized sociological phenomena where without access to opportunities and basic resources, individuals in poverty tend to stay in poverty for their whole lives, which impacts several critical outcomes for their children, thus continuing the cycle generationally. Families stuck in this cycle often lack necessary basic opportunities, resources, skills, and education. These disadvantages collectively compound, making it extremely difficult for individuals to break the cycle.

Deeply interwoven in the cycle of poverty is low adult literacy. For example, 43% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy skills live in poverty, compared to only 4% of those with the highest levels of literacy skills.⁸⁵ Studies have also shown that adults with low literacy have poorer health, limited job opportunities, and struggle to support themselves and their children.⁸⁶

A mother's education level is the leading determinant of a child's reading success.⁹⁰

The cycle of low literacy similarly impacts generations of individuals. Research shows **72% of children who have low literate caregivers are likely to be at the lowest reading levels.**⁸⁷ This is particularly troubling given that 25% of Houston’s population is under 18.⁸⁸ Therefore, Houston must act with a sense of urgency to break the cycle and prevent a future wave of adults with low literacy.

Given these realities, it will be virtually impossible to break the cycle of poverty without first breaking the cycle of low literacy. Figure 10 depicts the cycle of low literacy, the implications and how complex it can be to end the cycle. The cyclical nature of literacy makes the collective work of parents, educators, and community leaders even more paramount as we seek to support children throughout their educational journey and prepare them to become a ‘global graduate’, ready to reach their fullest potential in life.

Improving adult literacy can break the cycle of low literacy.

Adult literacy and education levels have widespread and profound impacts on children and families. **Children of high school dropouts have a much higher likelihood of also dropping out of school, which establishes a recurring pattern potentially spanning multiple generations.**⁸⁵

As a child’s first teacher, a caregivers’ literacy level can have lasting effects on the lives of their children. Research shows that a mother’s education level is the highest determinant of a child’s academic success, overshadowing other predictors, such as family income and neighborhood.⁹⁰

Successful educational attainment begins at home, even before a child enters school. According to the Urban Child Institute, a child’s brain develops at a rapid rate during their early life. By age 3, the brain has reached 80% of its adult size. Reading and problem solving at home and building relationships with books among parents and children encourages learning at a critical time in a child’s development.⁹¹

Furthermore, reading and solving problems in the home is fundamental to preparing a child to enter kindergarten with vital reading skills. In Houston, studies show that each year, 60% of children who enter kindergarten lack these requisite reading skills.⁹² Reading, telling stories, solving problems, and thinking critically with adult caregivers should start at an early age and be encouraged across all families. When parents teach children how to read, ask questions, solve problems, and ultimately navigate the world, they are developing the building

FIGURE 10: CYCLE OF LOW LITERACY*

AGES 0-4

- Limited access to high-quality early childhood programs and services.
- Lack of parent and family education and support.

GRADES K-3

- Insufficient school and home literacy resources.
- Inequity in access to effective teachers and schools.



ADULTS

- Lack of comprehensive adult education system.
- Diversity increases complexity of literacy/workforce development.
- Low-literate adults must self-identify for supports/services.

GRADES 4-12

- Lack of literacy skills integrated across the curriculum.
- Insufficient school interventions.
- Inequity in access to effective teachers and schools.

*This cycle holds true for native speakers as well as for second language learners.

blocks for academic and life success.⁹³

Children who come from less-educated families are much more likely to grow up and become low-skilled adults. In the United States, adults who grew up with parents who had low levels of education, are 10 times more likely to have low skills compared to adults who grew up with more educated parents.⁹⁴

The effect of low adult literacy on children and families is compounded by poverty. Children from low-income families lack the critical one-on-one reading time that is essential for their development. On average, children growing up in low-income families are only exposed to 25 hours of one-on-one reading.

This is in stark contrast to the 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one reading children growing up in middle-class families are exposed to.⁹⁵

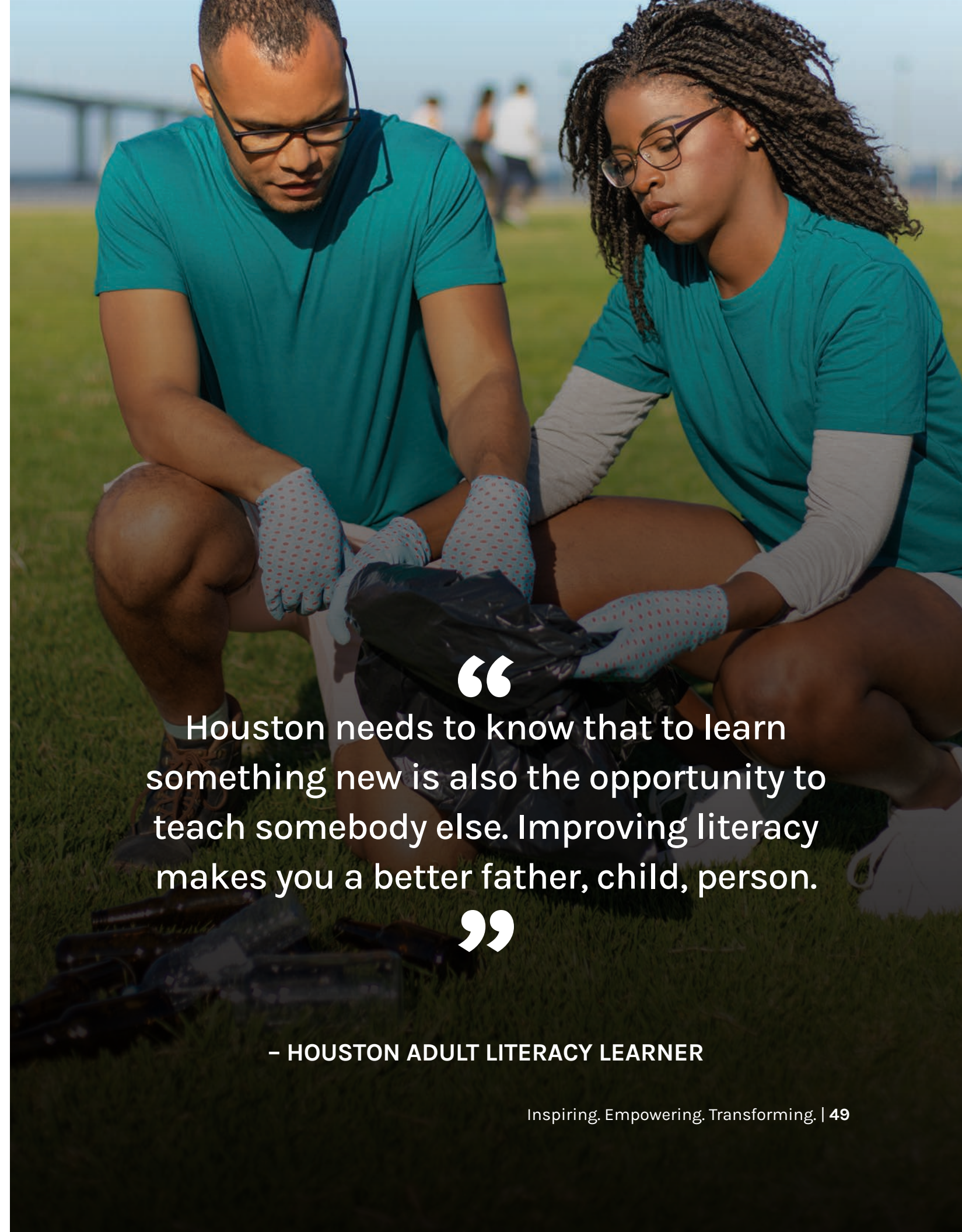
Improving adult literacy can be a powerful tool to help low-income families break the cycle of poverty and low literacy. Parents are often motivated to improve their functional literacy skills, so they may provide a better life for their families.

Additionally, this dedication and motivation to learn often inspires their children and other family members to persevere and succeed in schooling. In fact, programs designed to boost the academic achievement of children from low-income neighborhoods are more successful if they simultaneously provide education to parents.

Research also shows that literacy programs targeting the entire family benefit the parents through improved socioeconomic status,⁹⁶ as well as children through increased gains in vocabulary, language comprehension, and self-esteem.⁹⁷


The impact that a caregiver has on their child's education and future literacy skills is astounding. Thus, it is vital that we focus our efforts to increase literacy levels for all by improving the literacy levels of

Adults who grew up with parents who had low levels of education, are 10 times more likely to have low skills compared to adults who grew up with more educated parents.⁹⁴



“Houston needs to know that to learn something new is also the opportunity to teach somebody else. Improving literacy makes you a better father, child, person.”

– HOUSTON ADULT LITERACY LEARNER



“
We can ill-afford, socially and economically,
to allow low literacy rates to persist and
jeopardize the prosperity and vitality of
Houston and its people.
”

– JULIE BAKER FINCK, PH.D. PRESIDENT & CEO,
BARBARA BUSH HOUSTON LITERACY FOUNDATION

adults. To break the cycle of low literacy and give Houston's children the opportunity to grow up and thrive as productive members of society, we must address the challenge of low adult literacy directly.

The Cost to Businesses & Our Economy

Low rates of adult literacy come at a tremendous cost for Houston's economy.

Low rates of adult literacy have an immense impact on Houston's economy. Having a workforce with proficient literacy skills leads to more people finding higher paying jobs and contributing to the community, thus increasing revenue from taxes and increased productivity. Recent research by Gallup® commissioned by the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation shows that Harris County would see a gain of 3.3% to its GDP if all adults moved from at or below Level 1 proficiency to Level 2 - resulting in gains to its economy worth about \$13 billion.⁹⁸

Harris County would see a gain of 3.3% to its GDP if all adults moved from at or below Level 1 proficiency to Level 2 - resulting in gains to its economy worth about \$13 billion.⁹⁸

For individuals, levels of literacy directly relate to annual income. Houstonians with a 1 or lower literacy level could see their annual incomes rise \$13,000 if they increased to Level 2.⁹⁹ Individuals at or below Level 1 are able to, at best, understand short texts and complete simple forms, compared with those at Level 2, who are able to read and integrate information.

Low adult literacy also puts a significant strain on common societal resources. Adults with low literacy skills are more likely to rely on government assistance programs, be incarcerated, use emergency services and hospitals, and be unemployed than those with higher literacy skills.

In fact, it is estimated that **low literacy and unemployment costs the U.S. \$225 billion a year from lost workforce productivity, crime, and loss of tax revenue.**¹⁰⁰ Additionally, it is estimated between **\$106-\$238 billion in healthcare costs a year are linked to low health literacy skills.**¹⁰¹

Not only will increasing literacy rates decrease financial constraints on the economy, but it will also act as a source of increased growth and revenue, yielding a significant return on investment, economically and socially. Literacy is linked to better health,¹⁰² higher levels of civic engagement,¹⁰³ and higher earnings.¹⁰⁴ These positive benefits translate into higher standards of living, measured by growth in GDP.

Future workforce trends forecast an increased need for employees with functional literacy and employability skills.

Future workforce trends show that middle-skill jobs (jobs that require some post-secondary education and/or on-the-job training for technical skills) are going to dominate the local Gulf Coast/Houston economy. **By 2024, 58.8% of all jobs in the Gulf Coast/Houston region will require education or training beyond the high school level** and the majority of these will be middle-skill jobs.

In 2024, employers in the Gulf Coast/Houston region will need 1.3 million workers in middle-skill positions.¹⁰¹ Currently, Houston may not be able to meet this demand for talent. As of 2019, **40% of Greater Houston residents possess a high-school degree or lower, and 16% do not have a high school degree or equivalent at all.**¹⁰⁶

More than eight in ten middle-skill jobs require digital skills.¹⁰⁷

In addition, middle-skill jobs often interface with a number of digital technologies, with more than eight in ten middle-skill jobs (82%) requiring digital skills.¹⁰³ Trends also point towards technology transformations and an increase in humans interfacing with advanced technology (e.g., bots, artificial intelligence, etc.) for middle- and high-skilled positions in the workplace.

In 2020, 70% of organizations worldwide said their organization was exploring or already using AI at some level. In addition, 60% of workers worldwide said their organization was using AI to assist rather than to replace workers, meaning that many workers will be forced to upskill to help facilitate and manage interactions with these new intelligent technologies.¹⁰⁴ This trend was confirmed by surveying local Houston organizations who overwhelmingly agreed that all employees at their organizations will need to demonstrate increased digital and technology skills to be successful in their roles over the next 15 years.

Given the findings and trends on future workforce development needs, it is going to be critical for employers and businesses in Houston to invest resources in improving adult literacy and basic education. Without first addressing these foundational functional literacy skills it will be impossible to upskill the local talent pool to meet future skill demands.



“
We are in a world where illiteracy cuts you off not only from jobs, but also from access to the city and to all the opportunities available in Houston.
”

- DR. STEPHEN KLINEBERG,
KINDER INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH

Houstonians with a literacy level of 1 or lower could see their annual incomes rise \$13,000 if they increased to Level 2.⁹⁹

Businesses have the opportunity to support both adult learners and their organizational success.

At a high level, adult literacy is closely tied to the success of large organizations and employees. Improvements in adult literacy yield increased cost savings and productivity gains for companies¹⁰⁵ and are also connected to better individual outcomes for employees such as higher levels of promotion and less absenteeism.¹¹⁰

Research findings also suggest that larger companies may be more aware of this and are more likely to make more investments in literacy through work-based trainings.¹¹¹ Adult literacy rates are also important to the success of small businesses, since many small businesses, including restaurants, small grocery stores, and other retail or service-oriented businesses are likely to employ many low-skilled workers for minimum wage work.¹¹²



Spotlight: Supporting Non-Native Speaking Employees through English as a Second Language classes

Many businesses within Houston offer opportunities for upward mobility; however, access to these opportunities is sometimes out of reach for employees due to the level of their English language proficiency. To help overcome these barriers two local companies - Professional Janitorial Service of Houston, Inc. (PJS) and the Hyatt Regency Downtown Houston - have been providing English as a Second Language (ESL) classes free of charge to their employees.

In partnership with local adult literacy providers, the worksite ESL classes at PJS and the Hyatt Regency provide customized English coursework to employees in a supportive and empowering environment. In particular, these classes have produced some of PJS's strongest supervisors and increased employee loyalty and retention. For the Hyatt Regency, participation in these ESL classes resulted in improvements in communication with hotel guests, management, self-confidence in work performance, and teamwork.

To promote these classes, PJS provides a \$250 monetary incentive to recognize employees' time and effort. The Hyatt Regency also makes an effort to promote their ESL classes by offering a customized series of lessons designed to support the employees' work at the hotel and a flexible schedule that meets the needs of the hotel team.

PJS and the Hyatt Regency's worksite ESL classes have shown that the knowledge and skills employees gain can be taken with them and applied everywhere they go. For example, these work sites have witnessed emotional employee testimonies expressing how these new skills build confidence in communicating with English-speaking individuals in everyday life (e.g., supervisors, doctors, children's teachers etc.).

At the conclusion of each class cohort, both the Hyatt Regency and PJS hosted celebration of achievement ceremonies to encourage advanced studies and new recruitment for future participation in classes. Currently, both PJS and the Hyatt Regency continue seeking opportunities to provide these programs for their employees.

**In 2024
employers in
the Gulf Coast/
Houston region
will need 1.3
million workers
in middle-skill
positions.¹⁰⁵**



Spotlight: Empowering Houstonians through Transformative Skills Training and Education

Locally, the non-profit Goodwill Houston is unique in that it is a workforce development provider and employer. Goodwill Houston's Opportunity Accelerator program focuses on connecting young adults to transformative job readiness, digital skills, and typing trainings. The program also offers career planning support by connecting young adults to Career Navigators, who help them explore their interests, connect them to industry-specific trainings and high school equivalency courses, and motivate them by setting clear goals and tracking progress towards achieving those goals.

In addition, Goodwill Houston also offers a number of industry specific workforce development opportunities, including Apartment Maintenance Professionals (AMP), Google IT Support, and Careers in Construction training programs.

The AMP program is supported in partnership with the Texas Apartment Association and United Way to provide training to become a maintenance professional and run an effective maintenance program. Goodwill Houston's AMP program has been highly successful and boasts a 90% industry placement rate. Google IT Support training helps individuals kickstart their careers and open doors for future credentialing in IT-tech support through self-paced digital learning. Finally, Careers in Construction is a 3-week program that provides learners with the basic skills needed to work in any part of the construction industry. Upon completion of the program, individuals are set up with the necessary skills to earn credentials - including the NCCER Core Training, CPR/First Aid, OSHA-10, and Flagger Certification - that can lead to successful careers in construction.¹¹³





With programs like these, Goodwill Houston has made an incredible impact and created countless opportunities for many local residents to improve their education and employment prospects.

The Value of Adult Education in Houston

Houston's adult literacy challenge is systemic because it impacts every aspect of life in our community and it requires urgent action to overcome. The future growth and health of Houston depends on all Houstonians having the opportunity to access quality adult basic education to build the skills they need for their roles in their family, on the job, in society, and as lifelong learners. The investment in adult education is both life changing and effective. 2019 federal and state funding data from the Houston-Galveston area shows that it takes an investment of just \$2,200 per year in adult education to raise an adult learner up one educational functioning level, or around two grade levels.¹¹² Figure 11 shows just some of the transformational impacts and outcomes of adult basic education and other adult learning opportunities.

With higher rates of economic hardship and difficulty meeting basic needs, individuals with low adult functional literacy are put into a particularly vulnerable position in society. High-quality learning opportunities are a human right and need to be made available to all Houstonians in need. By improving adult literacy rates through education and skills training, a greater number of Houston's most marginalized will be able to obtain living-wage employment, advance economically, support their families and children, and play a positive role in society.

FIGURE 11: IMPACTS OF ADULT EDUCATION

IMPACT AREA	IMPACT TO HOUSTON'S ADULT LEARNERS
 <p data-bbox="1734 544 1926 604">EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION</p>	<p data-bbox="2020 433 2859 524">85% of adult learners in federally funded programming in the Houston-Galveston area were employed or enrolled in postsecondary education or training within one year of exiting their program.¹¹⁵</p> <p data-bbox="2020 534 2859 624">In 2019, 71% of adult learners participating in federally funded programs moved up at least one educational functioning level in the Houston-Galveston area.¹¹⁶</p>
 <p data-bbox="1734 907 1864 967">INCOME & WEALTH</p>	<p data-bbox="2020 826 2890 897">Overall, individuals who have more than 100 learning hours in Adult Basic Skills Programs (ABS) average \$10,000 more in annual income.¹¹⁷</p> <p data-bbox="2020 907 2874 967">Increased schooling and financial literacy directly contribute to increases in household net wealth.¹¹⁸</p>
 <p data-bbox="1734 1280 1911 1310">RACIAL EQUITY</p>	<p data-bbox="2020 1199 2859 1300">In Harris County, 94% of adult learners in federally funded adult literacy programs are people of color, with the vast majority - greater than 85% - being Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino.¹¹⁹</p>
 <p data-bbox="1734 1622 1926 1653">FAMILY LITERACY</p>	<p data-bbox="2020 1461 2828 1562">A mother's education level is the highest determinant of a child's academic success, overshadowing other predictors, such as family income and neighborhood.¹²⁰</p> <p data-bbox="2020 1572 2905 1693">Literacy programs in which parents and children develop literacy skills together yield great returns on investment through improved socioeconomic status for adults¹²¹ and through increased gains in vocabulary, language comprehension, and self-esteem for the entire family.¹²²</p>

A Strategic Plan For Action

Houston's systemic literacy crisis will not be solved overnight or with simple solutions. Due to the complexity and nature of this issue, it will take the careful coordination and a collective effort of the entire city to make substantial progress.

Over 100 representatives of adult education providers, businesses, and community stakeholders have collaborated to develop seven key goals for the *Blueprint*, supported by specific strategies, recommended actions, and key metrics to measure progress and inform future decisions.

This *Blueprint* builds on the progress made because of the 2014 *Blueprint for Community Action* and other literacy best practices, such as the Right for Literacy Declaration which spelled out the five critical pillars explaining the importance of literacy.¹²³

Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint* is grounded in four principles of action, which will guide the implementation of each goal, strategy, and action.

Principles of Action

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are the primary lens for approaching and implementing every goal, strategy and action in the *Blueprint*.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) broadly encompasses the pursuit of guaranteeing the fair treatment, access, opportunity, advancement, and voice to a wide range of identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability) in our society.¹²² In pursuit of a more just and equitable city, each goal, strategy, and recommended *Blueprint* action will be approached, implemented, and measured through a DEI lens. This will ensure that the application and implementation of the *Blueprint* is connected to the diverse group of learners that it is created to serve, and that all of the *Blueprint*'s efforts are directed toward establishing equity for all adults across the diverse city of Houston.

The *Blueprint* Vision: All adults in Houston will have ready, equitable access to high-quality education to gain the literacy skills and knowledge they need for their roles in work, life, and the community by 2036.

Progress is centered on, driven through, and ultimately owned by adult learners and their communities.

The specific resources and strategies needed to boost low literacy rates across Houston will differ across communities, neighborhoods, and individuals. In addition, lasting progress is more likely to be achieved if it is driven through and ultimately owned by the communities and learners themselves. Because of this, it is essential that the implementation of the *Blueprint's* strategies and actions incorporate the input, perspectives, and collaboration of the communities and individuals they are designed to support.

Systemic solutions require cross-sector partnerships, collaboration, and commitment to adult learners.

In order to address the systemic injustice of low literacy in Houston, a network of partners from across sectors and industries must coordinate and collaborate together. For the *Blueprint*, that means bringing together the key stakeholders that play a role in the lives of adults learners—from employers and the education system to adult literacy providers, faith-based organizations, and community organizations—to listen to and understand learner and community needs, innovate and implement new solutions, and provide the scalable resources and funding to make a lasting impact.

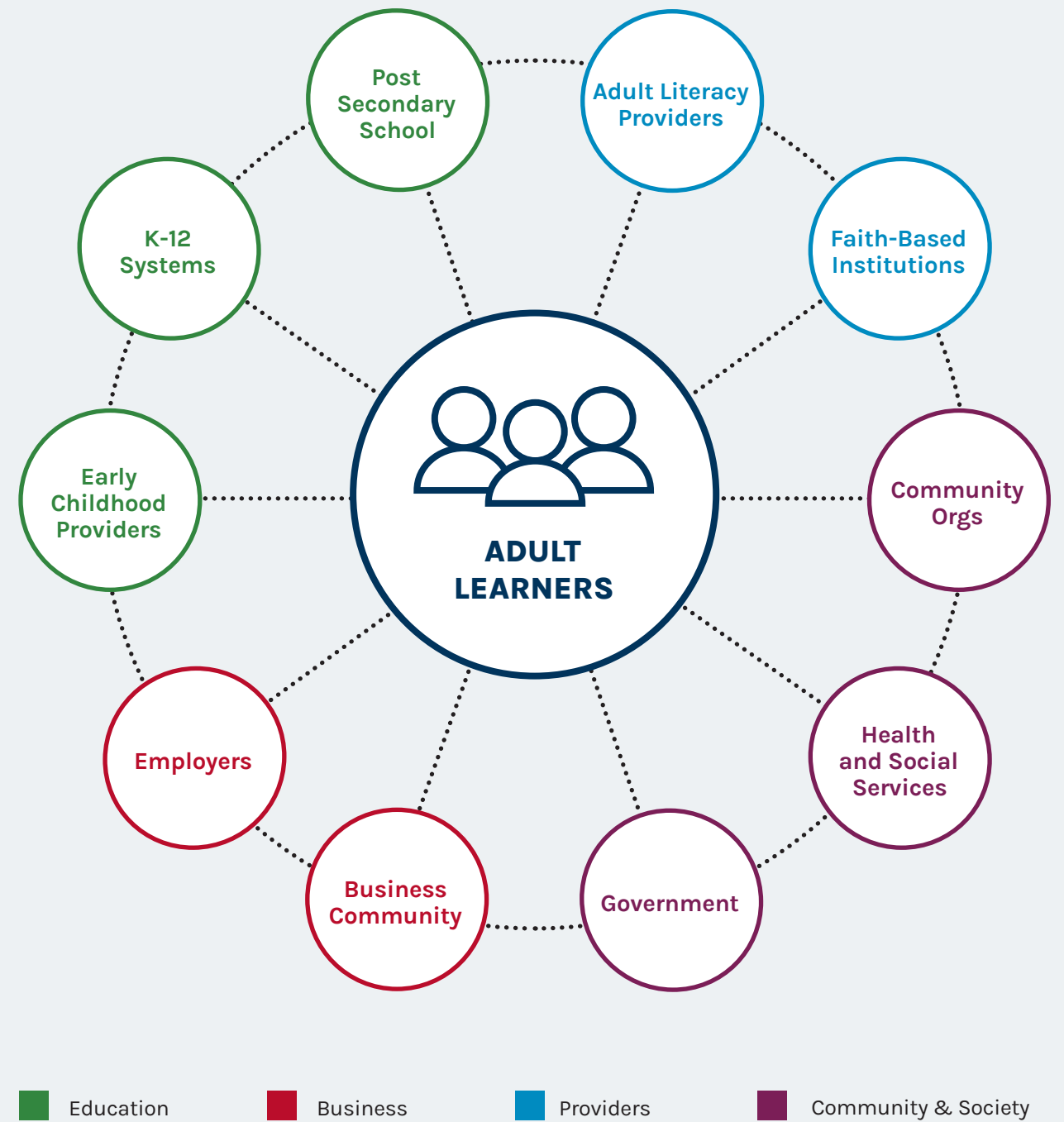
The work of the *Blueprint* is ever-evolving and must be approached with a mindset of continuous improvement.

Houston's *Adult Literacy Blueprint* will continue to evolve over time as more information is gathered, community engagement efforts expanded, and implementation efforts undertaken. The approach to implement the *Blueprint's* strategies and actions must recognize and capitalize on this. The *Blueprint's* collaborators should use a framework such as the *Blueprint's* Cycle of Continuous Improvement (Appendix C) to guide its work in an iterative and data-driven way.

The Role of the *Blueprint* Authors and Leadership Organizations

The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation (BBHLF) and the Houston Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy (MOAL) will undertake roles as conveners, advocates, and organizers for the implementation of the goals, strategies, and related recommended actions outlined in the *Blueprint*. BBHLF and MOAL will convene and collaborate with a network of cross-sector partners to drive community ownership and measured progress of *Blueprint* initiatives.

FIGURE 12: LEARNER-CENTRIC NETWORK



Houston's Adult Literacy Blueprint Goals

GOAL 1: Awareness and Action

Raise awareness of and galvanize communities to address and solve the systemic crisis of low literacy.

GOAL 2: A Comprehensive System

Create a data-informed, comprehensive, cross-sector system of adult literacy programming, services, and resources.

GOAL 3: Multi-Generational Learning

Expand access to and improve positive outcomes for participation in basic education, family literacy, health literacy, and financial literacy learning opportunities across generations.

GOAL 4: Workforce Skills and Opportunities

Improve employability skills and increase access to career and entrepreneurship opportunities for adult learners.

GOAL 5: Digital Resources and Skills

Reduce the gap in access to technology and digital resources and increase the number of adults completing digital skills training.

GOAL 6: Common Data System and Practices

Design, develop, and implement a common data and learning management system for adult literacy.

GOAL 7: Sustainable Resources for Progress

Establish sustainable resources to support and build capacity for *Blueprint* initiatives and progress.

GOAL 1: Awareness and Action

Raise awareness of and galvanize communities to address and solve the systemic crisis of low literacy.

Strategy 1: Develop and implement a strategic communications plan and provide a toolkit for cross-sector leaders to spread a common, unified message about low literacy and the *Blueprint*.

KEY METRICS
Media & marketing reach of strategic communications (e.g., number of impressions, views, or shares, audience size, audience diversity)
Measured stakeholder action taken because of strategic communications (e.g., click-through rate, donation rate, or action rate)
Number of downloads of the communications toolkit & resources
Number and diversity of organizations and cross-sector leaders who download and use the toolkit, with representation from organizations who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Level of relevancy, effectiveness, and usability of the toolkit to different stakeholder groups, measured via a survey of stakeholders who download the toolkit
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Work with cross-sector partners, including providers, to identify the specific messaging needs, mediums, and methods to deliver effective communications to Houston's diverse communities, community leaders, and stakeholder groups.
Work with cross-sector partners, including providers, to utilize the voices and perspectives of a diverse range of adult learners to develop marketing material to de-stigmatize low literacy and communicate its impact across Houston.
Integrate and execute specific tactics to engage multicultural and multilingual media, including print, online, radio/podcasts, other broadcast outlets, and community-specific flyers, billboards, and papers.
Utilize social media platforms to elevate awareness and distribute information on functional literacy and the individual, social, and economic impact of low literacy on Houston.
Highlight ongoing research about adult literacy, its impacts, real-life stories of adult learners, and recent happenings with adult literacy providers via websites and social media.
Create digital resources (e.g., social media infographics, videos) for partner organizations or individuals to use within their networks to support the <i>Blueprint</i> and adult literacy in Houston. This includes resources for organizations, individual supporters of the <i>Blueprint</i> , and adult learners to use to encourage others to enroll in literacy programs or services.

Strategy 2: Launch digital and in-person campaigns and engagement strategies with trusted community leaders, adult learners, and organizations to capitalize and build upon social momentum and encourage public action.

KEY METRICS
Number of unique digital signatures for the Action for Adult Literacy pledge
Social media metrics & trends (e.g., number of shares, interactions)
Number and diversity of community leaders, adult learners, and organizations who contribute to the creation and/or delivery of the awareness campaigns, with representation from diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number of community participants who attend live or virtual campaign events or forums
Level of relevancy, effectiveness, and usability of the toolkit to different stakeholder groups, measured via a survey of stakeholders who download the toolkit
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Design & launch an online pledge campaign for all supporters and partners—individuals and organizations—to sign as evidence of their commitment to the <i>Blueprint</i> and its initiatives.
Develop & implement dynamic awareness campaigns and experiences (e.g., social media, digital, in-person) that engage individuals actively with the challenges that low literacy presents to individuals day-to-day.
Partner with faith and community leaders and other trusted sources to encourage public action and involvement in <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives.
Identify and engage social media influencers and networks or coalitions related to literacy.
Work with existing advocacy organizations to connect efforts to improve adult literacy with related work around social inequities.
Recruit & engage local, regional, and nationally prominent figures (e.g., elected officials, athletes, entertainers) to serve as relatable champions and spokespeople for each community.
Leverage existing and develop new partnerships with local, state, and national media entities to encourage public action and involvement in <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives

Strategy 3: Advocate for policy and legislation in support of adult learners and positive literacy outcomes.

KEY METRICS
Number of literacy or adult education policy initiatives drafted or proposed to decision makers
Diversity of policy focus areas (e.g., family, workplace) for drafted or proposed policy initiatives
Number of active policy makers engaged in or supporting literacy or adult education policy initiatives
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Monitor and participate in local, regional, and national policies, campaigns and activities that align with and support literacy in Houston through engagement with Mayor's Director of Government Relations Office.
Obtain policy maker support for the <i>Blueprint</i> and its initiatives through the online pledge campaign.
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 adult (?) literacy efforts in Houston.
Disseminate important literacy-related policy information to stakeholders, including key elected officials and policy makers.
Engage national literacy organizations (e.g., COABE, ProLiteracy) to share Houston's successes and monitor national trends & issues.
Identify and work with local individuals and organizations (e.g., Houston Chamber of Commerce, Houston-Galveston Area Council) in Houston who can champion future policy and advocacy initiatives related to adult literacy.

GOAL 2: A Comprehensive System

Create a data-informed, comprehensive, cross-sector system of adult literacy programming, services, and resources.

Strategy 1: Convene and foster a diverse network of adult literacy providers and strategic, cross-sector partners, and adopt a collective impact model of strategic action.

KEY METRICS
Number of literacy providers and cross-sector partners (e.g., businesses, community organizations, government or civic representatives) participating in the network, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Specific outcomes of network working groups, to be defined by network members
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify the specific mediums, facilitation methods, and logistics to effectively convene and engage the network of providers and cross-sector partners.
Launch cross-sector working groups, define key working group goals, and convene working groups regularly to advance key <i>Blueprint</i> goals and strategies.
Identify a network leadership team to oversee progress, provide guidance and strategies, and continuously evaluate needs, gaps, and areas for improvement.
Convene working groups regularly to make collective progress toward achieving <i>Blueprint</i> goals, increase working group accountability, share best practices, and identify points of collaboration and support.

Strategy 2: Map, catalog, assess, and communicate available literacy providers and community resources for adult learners.

KEY METRICS
Number of stakeholders, organizations, and resources mapped
Literacy provider and adult learner feedback about resource repository, its usability, value, and effectiveness
Number of active policy makers engaged in or supporting literacy or adult education policy initiatives
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Monitor and participate in local, regional, and national policies, campaigns and activities that align with and support literacy in Houston through engagement with Mayor's Director of Government Relations Office
Obtain policy maker support for the <i>Blueprint</i> and its initiatives through the Action for Adult Literacy pledge
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 adult (?) literacy efforts in Houston
Disseminate important literacy-related policy information to stakeholders, including key elected officials and policy makers
Engage national literacy organizations (e.g., COABE, ProLiteracy) to share Houston's successes and monitor national trends & issues
Identify and work with local individuals and organizations (e.g., Houston Chamber of Commerce, Houston-Galveston Area Council) in Houston who can champion future policy and advocacy initiatives related to adult literacy

Strategy 3: Collect, analyze, and use program demographic and outcome data to identify and promote successful program models and evidence-based innovative practices to replicate and scale for maximized impact and outcomes.

KEY METRICS
Number and quality of best practice program models and spotlights identified
Positive outcomes (e.g., expanded overall access, increased equity in access to learning opportunities, adult learner outcomes, etc.) from application or expansion of identified best practices
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify relevant program data (e.g., Houston Galveston Area Council, literacy providers, business, and community data) to leverage and analyze.
Perform analysis of program data to identify effective program models and identify innovative solutions to address <i>Blueprint</i> goals and pilot initiatives for particularly marginalized populations (e.g., the homeless, the incarcerated, disadvantaged gender or racial groups).
Collect adult learner testimonies to understand & document their journey in Houston and identify specific pain points and barriers to access, especially for marginalized groups (e.g., disadvantaged racial or gender groups, the incarcerated, immigrants).
Working with cross-sector working groups, identify best practices and innovations to address and overcome barriers and pain points identified for adult learners.
Pilot, test, and scale successful programs with cross-sector partners and network working groups, if applicable.
Regularly communicate best practices and model programs to cross-sector partners and network working groups (e.g., Quarterly newsletter).

Strategy 4: Align all adult literacy providers around common learning objectives, content standards, a set of assessments, and connections across learning opportunities.

KEY METRICS
Number of providers who adopt and align around common learning objectives, content standards, set of assessments, and connections across learning opportunities
Diversity of providers (e.g., federally funded, non-federally funded, faith-based, geographic service area, etc.) who adopt and align around common objectives, content standards, assessments, and connections across learning opportunities
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Align providers around common definitions of key terms and concepts to support communication and collaboration.
Adopt common measurements for adult learner progress to inform provider awareness of program effectiveness.
Align providers around a common set of content standards and learning outcomes.
Align providers around common program quality indicators and design standards.
Create and align providers around connections between different learning opportunities across providers.
Sponsor a shared charter for adult literacy providers that summarizes a commitment to DEI and includes specific actions and objectives for providers to ensure equitable access for all learners.

Strategy 5: Promote existing professional development systems and build and scale a credentialing program for adult literacy programs, staff, educators, and volunteers.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of adult literacy program leaders, staff, educators, and volunteers who complete professional development, with representation from organizations that serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of credentialed adult literacy programs, staff, educators, and volunteers
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct current state analysis among literacy providers and perform regular stakeholder engagement activities to understand professional development needs, preferences, perspectives, and capacity.
Identify, promote, and expand access to researched-based training curricula and professional development opportunities, including the TCALL Professional Development Portal, for adult literacy program leaders, staff, educators, and volunteers.
Develop or identify a standard, value-based credentialing program for adult literacy programs, staff, educators, and volunteers.
Communicate value of credentialing (e.g., increase in potential funding) to facilitate buy-in and successful adoption across adult literacy programs.
Promote opportunities for adult literacy program leaders, staff, educators, and volunteers to develop new skills, connect with other stakeholders, and participate in mentoring or coaching.
Provide professional development resources to adult literacy program leaders, staff, educators, and volunteers to support their ability to identify and differentiate instruction for diverse learning needs (e.g., learning disabilities, multi-lingual learners) and provide culturally competent programming through a DEI lens.
Gather and implement feedback from adult literacy program leaders, staff, educators, and volunteers on professional development opportunities, the credentialing program, and resources .

GOAL 3: Multi-Generational Learning

Expand access to and improve positive outcomes for participation in basic education, family literacy, health literacy, and financial literacy learning opportunities across generations.

Strategy 1: Work with the Mayor’s Office of Education to increase collaboration between adult literacy providers and existing pre-K-12 system to implement family literacy programming for learners of all ages, their parents, and other caregivers.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity (e.g., age, gender, race, neighborhood, immigrant status, language spoken) of adult learners participating in programming, with representation from diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of pre-K-12 and adult literacy providers participating over time, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Overall positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify evidence-based national, state, and local family literacy programs and build capacity and funding for implementation across Houston through the network of adult literacy providers.
Connect with and create partnerships between pre-K-12, community organizations, and adult literacy providers to assist and provide literacy resources to pre-K-12 students, caregivers, and high school students at risk of dropping out of school.
Connect with and support early education and childcare centers to work with adult literacy providers to provide learning opportunities for caregivers.
Utilize pre-K-12 school system communication channels to promote awareness of adult learning opportunities to students’ caregivers (e.g., multi-lingual take home fliers, attachments to report cards/transcripts, etc.).

Strategy 2: Identify best practices, create cross-sector partnerships, and foster innovation to provide community-centered resources and support for learners of all generations in a variety of settings.

KEY METRICS
Number of adult learners who participate in resulting programming
Diversity of adult learners who participate in resulting programming over time (e.g., diversity across age, gender, racial groups, neighborhood of residence)
Number and diversity of cross-sector partners participating over time, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Positive learning outcomes for adult learners overall and across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, area of residence)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Work with cross-sector partners to identify best practices and new innovations to provide resources and programming tailored to specific Houston communities and particularly vulnerable groups (e.g., homeless, incarcerated).
Create and foster partnerships with and support local businesses to offer customer programming that incorporates contextualized literacy skill building (e.g., personal finance or budgeting workshops, healthcare programming) to adult learners and adult literacy providers.
Create and foster local partnerships with and support social service programs (e.g., homeless support programs, re-entry programs), community centers, churches, faith-based organizations, and consulates to communicate value and offer services that incorporate literacy skill building with other offered services.
Partner with refugee service organizations to engage and improve adult and family literacy, using the refugees' native languages as a medium to accelerate towards (?) functional English literacy.
Encourage and support other local cross-sector partnerships and innovation to provide literacy resources and programming for caregivers and families.
Promote opportunities to improve literacy skills in parallel with community-centered public events that bring families together (e.g., community fairs, flea markets).

Strategy 3: Identify and collaborate with existing financial education providers to deliver personal and family finance modules/courses and support.

KEY METRICS
Number of learners participating in and completing financial literacy courses
Diversity of adult learners who participate (e.g., diversity across age, gender, racial groups, neighborhood of residence, immigrant status)
Number and diversity of strategic partners participating and contributing contextualized financial education curriculum, resources, and support, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Overall positive learning outcomes for adult learners and positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Partner with financial literacy providers to identify gaps in personal and family financial literacy for particularly marginalized populations (e.g., disadvantaged racial groups, ages, single parents or caregivers).
Identify and collect appropriate baseline data for financial literacy program participation and learner literacy and program impact.
Identify existing programs and best practices for increasing financial literacy skills.
Work with adult literacy providers and strategic partners (e.g., banks and financial institutions) to spread awareness of existing training and resources and expand upon current best practices to offer increased access to financial skill building opportunities and financial decision-making behaviors.
Create and foster partnerships with banks and financial institutions to innovate on current programming and embed financial literacy skill-building opportunities into their day-to-day customer services.
Work with strategic partners to identify, measure, and track learner outcomes from financial literacy courses and programming.

Strategy 4: Identify and collaborate with existing public health agencies (e.g., Houston Health Department, Harris County Public Health) and health/wellness service providers to establish education services through partnerships with adult literacy providers.

KEY METRICS
Number of learners participating in and completing health literacy courses
Diversity of adult learners who participate (e.g., diversity across age, gender, racial groups, neighborhood of residence, immigrant status)
Number and diversity of strategic partners participating, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Overall positive learning outcomes for adult learners and positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct needs assessment to determine gaps in health literacy for particularly marginalized populations (e.g., disadvantaged racial groups, ages, single parents or caregivers).
Identify and collect appropriate baseline data for health literacy program participation and learner literacy and health outcomes.
Identify existing programs and best practices for increasing health literacy skills.
Work with adult literacy providers and strategic partners (e.g., health clinics, hospitals) to spread awareness of currently existing training and resources and expand upon current best practices to offer increased access to health literacy skill building opportunities.
Encourage and support health providers to embed health literacy skill-building opportunities (e.g., fliers, charts, videos) into their day-to-day customer services.
Work with strategic partners to identify, measure, and track learner outcomes from health literacy courses and programming.

GOAL 4: Workforce Skills and Opportunities

Improve employability skills and increase access to career and entrepreneurship opportunities for adult learners.

Strategy 1: Promote the inclusion of employability skills, career awareness, and entrepreneurship training and workshops in all literacy programs throughout the city.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of adult literacy providers and educators completing professional development training on employability skills, career awareness, entrepreneurship, etc., with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number of providers offering employability skills and entrepreneurship training and workshops, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number of participants in employability skills and entrepreneurship training and workshops
Diversity of adult learners who participate in resulting training and workshops (e.g., diversity across age, gender, racial groups, neighborhood of residence)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct needs assessment of particularly marginalized, vulnerable, and/or at-risk populations (e.g., underserved neighborhoods, disadvantaged racial groups, the disabled, the homeless) to ensure equitable access and outcomes related to employability skills and entrepreneurship.
Partner with business organizations (e.g., Upskill Houston Initiative, Greater Houston Hotel and Lodging Association, Greater Houston Restaurant Association, Houston Chamber of Commerce, etc.) and others in the business community to continue identifying employability and workforce skills for future adult learner programming.
Provide professional development training on employability skills and career awareness to adult literacy providers and educators.
Provide career awareness training and resources to adult literacy providers, including guidance related to trade (e.g., carpentry), skill (e.g., artistic), or public servant (e.g., firefighters) based roles.
Provide professional development training on entrepreneurship and career exploration skills and pathways to adult literacy providers and educators.

Strategy 2: Encourage & support employers to implement or expand inclusive employer-based literacy programs tailored for their employees.

KEY METRICS
Number of employers with continued, inclusive, contextualized employer-based literacy offerings or participation in initiatives resulting from the implementation of this <i>Blueprint</i> .
Number of employees participating in and completing inclusive, contextualized employer-based programs over time (e.g., programs hosted by and located at the workplace in partnership with literacy providers)
Diversity of employees who participate in resulting employer-based programming
Overall positive learning outcomes for adult learners and positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
Positive employer feedback and employer-reported realized return on investment
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Gather case studies and structure a clear business case with the benefits of education programs and higher rates of employee literacy to business and economic success.
Implement a campaign to ‘certify’ businesses as advocates of adult literacy and diversity, equity and inclusion to promote allyship and reduce stigmas for employees.
Highlight case studies of businesses’ successes related to investments in literacy programs.
Develop and/or aggregate resources with employers to evaluate the literacy skills needed for specific roles or job skills.
Work with adult literacy providers and employers to implement inclusive adult basic education programming tailored for the specific needs of each business’ employees, including offering programming in different languages, as applicable.
Encourage and support businesses to increase apprenticeship opportunities that offer literacy and trade skill building.
Encourage the acceptance of learning credits from workplace or employer-based programs at post-secondary institutions.
Leverage voices from the business community to stress the importance of continued learning and lifelong education to be successful in future careers

Strategy 3: Collaborate with cross-sector partners to increase the number of adult learners enrolled in workforce preparation activities (e.g., Integrated Education and Training models, Career Pathways, etc.) and improve learning outcomes.

KEY METRICS
Number of participants completing workforce preparation activities
Diversity of adult learners who participate in and complete workforce preparation activities, with representation diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Learner career outcomes (e.g., certifications, employment, employment retention, promotion, change in income) after participation in workplace preparation activities
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Partner with justice and correction organizations to offer and expand access to literacy, entrepreneurship, and workplace preparation activities for the incarcerated or those on probation or parole.
Support collaboration and coordination between existing workforce preparation programming (e.g., occupational training, skills training and resume translation) and adult basic education programs to support learners in need of remediation.
Encourage and support providers to offer training and upskilling programs in multiple languages.
Build partnerships with smaller businesses to act as literacy and workforce program communication channels.
Work with businesses to utilize storefronts to offer literacy or workforce skills programs during non-business hours.
Partner with refugee and immigrant support organizations to connect skilled foreign adults with job opportunities in their industry.
Partner with organizations who support the homeless community to provide awareness of and access (e.g., transportation, resources) to workforce preparation opportunities.

Strategy 4: Partner with employers to connect adult learners with employers, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

KEY METRICS
Number of adult learners connected to employers, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship opportunities
Diversity of adult learners who connected to employers, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship opportunities, with representation from diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Positive impact outcomes related to learners' job or employment statuses, both overall and as measured across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct an analysis of existing systems and best practices that connect adult learners to employers, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship opportunities and aggregate resources in one place for adult learners.
Partner with justice and correctional organizations to match graduates of workforce skill programs with opportunities for employment or entrepreneurship opportunities once courses are complete.
Collaborate 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 the workforce or improve skills for job advancement.
Identify & create partnerships with adult literacy providers, the business community, and strategic partners to connect foreign-trained skilled adults to ESL programs and employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

GOAL 5: Digital Resources and Skills

Reduce the gap in access to technology and digital resources and increase the number of adults completing digital skills training.

Strategy 1: Advocate for policy and legislation in support of quality internet access (e.g., broadband, hotspots).

KEY METRICS
Number of policies or initiatives drafted or proposed to decision makers
Number of active policy makers advocating for or engaged in internet expansion policies
Number of investors and community leaders engaged with expanding or supporting broadband access, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Monitor and participate in local, regional, and national policies, campaigns and activities that align with and support internet expansion in Houston through engagement with Mayor's Director of Government Relations Office.
Partner with existing organizations (e.g., school districts, service providers, and other policy-influencing groups) to advocate with elected officials and governmental entities for internet expansion policies and efforts (e.g., free or reduced-cost, quality internet) across Greater Houston.
Disseminate important internet access expansion and improvement information to adult literacy providers and cross-sector partners.
Connect adult literacy providers, homeless shelters, and community centers with the City of Houston and technology companies to implement initiatives for quality internet access.
Leverage and build social capital (e.g., networks, relationships) and community engagement to increase community buy in, interest, and active support for the connection between literacy and broadband access, and for expanding broadband access in Houston.
Equip community leaders (e.g., apartment managers, faith-based leaders, community organizers, etc.) to engage in broadband expansion initiatives and be the voice of marginalized groups.
Create partnerships with technology companies and providers to establish free, community-based wireless hotspots in a variety of settings.

Strategy 2: Expand access to technology and digital resources through sustainable partnerships with technology-related businesses, the Houston Public Library, the pre-K-12 school system, and the general public.

KEY METRICS
Number of devices distributed to learners over time
Number & diversity of learners provided technology & digital resources over time, with representation diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number of community leaders engaged with the effort, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Expand awareness of existing programs in which businesses and organizations donate technology devices to be given or loaned to low-income adults or families enrolled in courses with adult literacy providers.
Develop new partnerships with local corporations to donate technology devices to literacy providers and/or community organizations to increase capacity and access to resources
Create a system for distributing technology devices through literacy providers, community organizations, and business partners.
Encourage literacy providers and learners to work with the Houston Public Library to utilize existing equipment and software and use existing digital, multilingual resources.
Partner with pre-K-12 school systems to allow access to school-provided technology and programming for adult learners in the students' families.
Create a system for the general public to be able to donate technology equipment to be given or loaned to adult learners and literacy providers.
Use existing networks, relationships, and partnerships to increase awareness and build interest in, access to, and understanding of digital resources available to communities.
Leverage voices from the business community to stress the importance of continued learning and lifelong education to be successful in future careers.

Strategy 3: Increase access to and enrollment in digital literacy and skill-building programs.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of participants in digital literacy programs, with representation from diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Completion rates of digital literacy programs across diverse populations
Overall positive learning outcomes for adult learners and positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
Number and diversity of partnerships established and leveraged to implement, promote, and support digital literacy programming, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Perform a current-state analysis of current programs and partnerships offering or supporting digital literacy and/or skill-building programs.
Identify, catalog, and promote online resource centers of learning activities, including phone applications, educational games, and quick tips to build literacy skills for adults & children.
Identify and expand existing programs and best practices for increasing digital literacy skills in a variety of settings.
Create new strategic partnerships to build opportunities for offering digital literacy programs (e.g., ESL programs, skill programs, volunteer partnerships with corporate technology group).
Partner with community leaders (e.g., apartment managers, faith-based leaders, community organizers, etc.) to build interest & enrollment in digital literacy and skill-building programs.
Provide digital literacy resources (e.g., curriculum, multilingual digital tool handbooks/manuals) that accompany distributions of technology hardware to adult learners.
Develop technology information sessions and educational resources to drive understanding of how to use the provided digital resources

Strategy 4: Provide and promote professional learning opportunities for adult literacy providers to innovate and deliver virtual or hybrid programming.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of adult literacy providers completing professional learning opportunities (e.g., digital skills training, digital instruction best practices, digital tools and innovations for multi-lingual learners), with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number of professional learning opportunities provided for adult literacy providers
Adult literacy provider feedback about relevancy and effectiveness of professional development
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify, collect, and distribute provider best practices related to establishing virtual & hybrid adult literacy programming and using technology tools to improve and enhance learning (e.g., delivery via smart phone apps).
Identify and expand access to virtual and hybrid training, instructional materials, and professional development for adult literacy providers.
Promote literacy provider access to digital literacy learning content.
Promote use of existing professional development tools related to digital training.

Strategy 5: Cultivate sustainable partnerships and investments in innovation and acquisition of learning apps, digital tools, and online learning systems for adult learners.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of adult learners who consistently participate with learning apps and online learning systems
Overall positive learning outcomes for adult learners and positive outcomes for adult learners across lines of difference (e.g., race, age, language spoken)
Number and total investment of new funders committed to sponsor or support digital initiatives
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Build on the success of adult literacy applications promoted nationally through the Barbara Bush Foundation's Adult Literacy XPRIZE initiative to increase the number of adult learner users.
Expand on success of existing partnerships with technology companies to fund and support educational technology initiatives for adult learners and adult literacy providers.
Communicate the importance and the need for digital tools, resources, and programming to generate awareness and buy-in from potential funders.
Generate new partnerships to spur new innovations, create solutions and expand access for adult learners and literacy providers.

GOAL 6: Common Data System and Practices

Design, develop, and implement a common data and learning management system for adult literacy.

Strategy 1: Collaboratively identify common data elements that serve the needs of diverse stakeholders and define the purpose, objectives, scope, and requirements of the learning management system with adult literacy providers, community organizations, and oversight entities.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of organizations who provide input to identify common data elements, including community, agency, or industry associations, and providers, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of organizations who align to and adopt common data elements, purpose, scope, & objectives, including community, agency, or industry associations, and providers, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Perform a discovery assessment of the systems that adult literacy providers and community organizations (e.g., homeless shelters, faith-based organizations) currently use to collect and track data through federally and non-federally-funded adult literacy programs.
Work with a wide range of providers and other stakeholders to define the common data to be collected and aggregated in the system (e.g., leveraging federal performance measures and metrics as a baseline, embedding DEI considerations for advancing equity).
Create alignment among adult literacy providers on standard assessments and measurements to track overall learner progress as well as program effectiveness.
Work with providers and other stakeholders to agree on adult learner demographics and other data that every organization or oversight entity should track.
Support collaboration among providers to establish audit guidelines and quality assurance procedures.
Equip community leaders (e.g., apartment managers, faith-based leaders, community organizers, etc.) to engage in broadband expansion initiatives and be the voice of marginalized groups.
Create partnerships with technology companies and providers to establish free, community-based wireless hotspots in a variety of settings

Strategy 2: Design and develop or adopt an inclusive data and learning management system that offers provider-tested usability, accessibility, feasibility, and functionality.

KEY METRICS
Unique number and diversity of providers & stakeholders engaged in interviews throughout the design process, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Results from user system testing of usability, accessibility, feasibility, and functionality
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify “must-have” features or requirements for the system.
Incorporate adult literacy provider and adult learner feedback into the identification or design of the common data and learning management system.
Implement the technology tool or solution and pilot with an initial user group.
Ensure the technology tool or solution supports coordinated transfers and cross-provider tracking of adult learners, their needs, and their progress.
Ensure that the data and learning management system is usable for providers and learners, including those who speak languages other than English.
Ensure the system is set up to measure and track outcomes across different demographic groups.
Encourage regular conversations between adult literacy providers, community organizations (e.g., homeless shelters, faith-based organizations), and businesses to identify commonly beneficial data fields for system improvement.

Strategy 3: Provide resources, training, and support to adult literacy providers and partner community organizations so that they adopt and fully leverage the common data and learning management system.

KEY METRICS
Number and diversity of providers, adult learners, and organizations that sign on to use the common data system, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of providers, adult learners, and organizations completing system training, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of providers and organizations that regularly report data and utilize the system, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify, define, & communicate the benefits providers gain from participating in the common system.
Offer training opportunities and support to adult literacy providers to reduce challenges and increase adoption of the data and learning management systems.
Define, develop, and deliver training opportunities and resources (e.g., data dictionary) for adult literacy providers about best practices for data collection, interpretation, and analysis to make informed decisions.
Identify resources to support training curricula and “train the trainer” programs for the data and learning management system.
Develop training materials & onboarding opportunities to support adult learners to use the common learning management system.
Perform outreach to learners through providers to spread awareness of the learning management system, its usability, and its benefits.

Strategy 4: Build and deliver analytics reports that measure and monitor common data to inform strategic decision-making to advance adult literacy initiatives with providers, businesses, and community organizations.

KEY METRICS
Number of unique data reports downloaded
Publication of annual data reports
Number and diversity of providers who attend the annual data report debrief event, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Develop aggregate data reports, including an online version, that include key adult literacy provider data to show progress over time.
Publish regular progress reports on the state of adult literacy to build awareness, inform provider choices, and encourage continued action.
Measure provider and community organization compliance with data & learning management system usage and quality assurance guidelines.
Convene adult literacy providers and community organizations annually through an interactive and collaborative webinar or event to discuss the data generated to inform future steps for the system debrief the annual data report findings and align on recommended next steps.
Review data & reporting standards with adult literacy providers annually for continuous improvement & alignment.

GOAL 7: Sustainable Resources for Progress

Establish sustainable resources to support and build capacity for *Blueprint* initiatives and progress.

Strategy 1: Measure results, monitor progress, and continuously improve the implementation of the *Blueprint*.

KEY METRICS
Annual publication of <i>Blueprint</i> scorecard
Year-to-year improvement for key <i>Blueprint</i> metrics
Number and diversity of adult learners and stakeholders who provide feedback, with representation diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Number and diversity of community leaders engaged, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Consistently gather adult learner feedback and input (e.g., focus groups, dynamic online suggestion box) to capture diverse perspectives on <i>Blueprint</i> initiative impact.
Develop an initiative scorecard that includes all metrics identified in the <i>Blueprint</i> .
Publish annual progress report against appropriate scorecard metrics to build awareness and encourage continued action, as appropriate.
Use data collected to inform strategic choices and continuously improve <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives.
Create, update, and sustain a prioritization and allocation strategy to align investor funding and resources based on community need and/or vulnerable populations (e.g., the homeless, the incarcerated).

Strategy 2: Create new and support existing cross-sector partnerships to increase and leverage in kind resources and services (e.g., stakeholder expertise, access to learning platforms).

KEY METRICS
Number of new cross-sector partnerships (e.g., businesses, community organizations, government or civic representatives) created, with representation from partners who serve diverse populations (e.g., across race, ethnicity, neighborhood, industry sector, disability, life circumstance, etc.)
Total number resources (e.g., in kind donations) invested in adult literacy in Houston
Total number of professionals who provide feedback or expertise (e.g., in kind donation of services) to advance <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct current state resource assessment to determine existing in kind resources and services available to determine existing partnerships and determine the need for new partnerships, including employers and representatives of diverse industry sectors.
Create new partnerships, based on the current state assessment, and support existing partnerships to increase in kind resources and services.
Create awareness among current and potential partners about the efficiency and effectiveness of existing adult literacy programs and the potential opportunities to support the <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives to generate additional support.

Strategy 2: Leverage existing and develop new cross-sector partnerships to increase funding for adult literacy across Houston.

KEY METRICS
Number of new funding & donation partnerships created and sustained
Monetary value invested in adult literacy in Houston
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Conduct funding analysis of current funding resources, funders, and investors (e.g., federal endowments, regional area grant makers, non-governmental private funders and foundations).
Generate awareness among current and potential investors and partnerships of the impact of low adult literacy, the efficiency and effectiveness of existing adult literacy programs, and the need for adequate financial contributions.
Promote incorporation of adult literacy as a part of grants from key funders.
Advocate for corporate matching programs for donations made to Houston-area adult literacy providers & organizations.
Create and communicate core funding milestones for the <i>Blueprint</i> (e.g., set time-bound, specific funding goals for each year).
Track federal, local and grant-based funding opportunities and connect adult literacy providers to opportunities to apply for and receive funding for programs.
Support training and methods for providers' self-promotion and marketing capabilities to increase the probability of a grant award (e.g., identify and/or develop grant writing training curricula so all providers can apply for appropriate funding opportunities).
Create frameworks for large-scale, broad-based support (financial and volunteer) initiatives for individual companies interested in supporting adult literacy efforts.

Strategy 4: Leverage, develop, and sustain a volunteer pipeline to support *Blueprint* initiatives and progress.

KEY METRICS
Number of new volunteers consistently engaged in adult literacy initiatives in Houston
Increase in volunteers who use provided training and resources
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Identify, align, and communicate best practices for sourcing, equipping, and mobilizing volunteers, including an online volunteer matching system.
Conduct current state analysis of volunteer needs related to adult literacy and organize volunteer opportunities based on roles, capacity, and level of engagement.
Actively recruit adult literacy instructors and other volunteers as needed to fill volunteer needs for adult literacy providers and other <i>Blueprint</i> initiatives.
Equip volunteers with best practice materials, methods, and processes through a developmental toolkit.

Appendices

Appendix A

PIACC Standards for Measuring Functional Literacy

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)’s website “The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is a cyclical, large-scale study that was developed under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).” The NCES funds, leads, and supports the administration of the PIACC in the United States. The PIAAC assesses key functional literacy skills through specific literacy, numeracy, and digital tasks at different levels of difficulty. The survey ranks literacy and numeracy levels on a scale of 1 (lowest skill level) to 5 (highest skill level) and ranks digital literacy on a scale of 1 (lowest skill level) to 3 (highest skill level).¹²⁵

Harris County’s results from the most recent 2017 PIACC assessment can be found in Figures 13 and 14 (note: results for digital literacy are not available at the county level).²⁶

Individuals with low literacy based on PIACC data are considered to perform at or below Level 1. This means that these individuals struggle with reading brief texts to locate information that is related to the information available in a given question, entering personal information onto a document, recognizing basic vocabulary, determining the meaning of sentences, and reading paragraphs of text.¹²⁷

Those with low numeracy scores on the PIACC study are also considered to perform at or below Level 1. Individuals with low numeracy have challenges with counting, sorting, performing basic arithmetic operations with whole numbers or money, understanding simple percentages such as 50%, and identifying simple graphical or spatial figures.¹²⁸

The final component of the PIACC is related to digital literacy. Based on the PIACC standards, individuals with low digital literacy are classified as performing below Level 1. This means those with low digital literacy have difficulties using digital technology for simple, straightforward tasks that require limited reasoning and steps to complete.¹²⁹

FIGURE 13: LITERACY

Shows the percentage of Harris County residents who scored at each literacy level compared to the percentages for the State of Texas

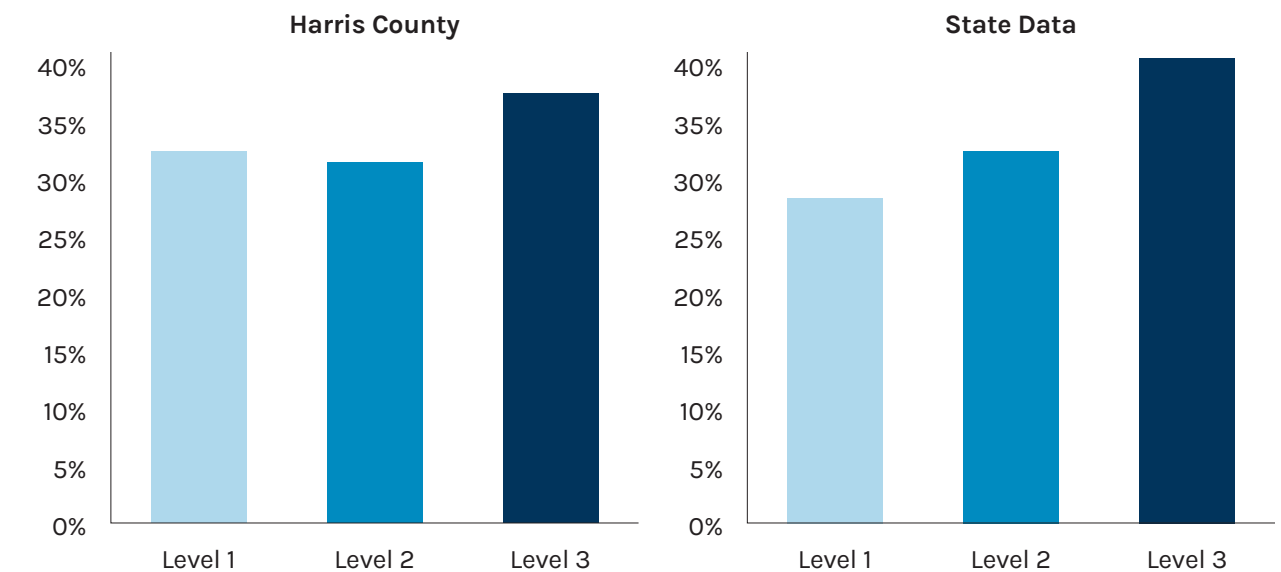
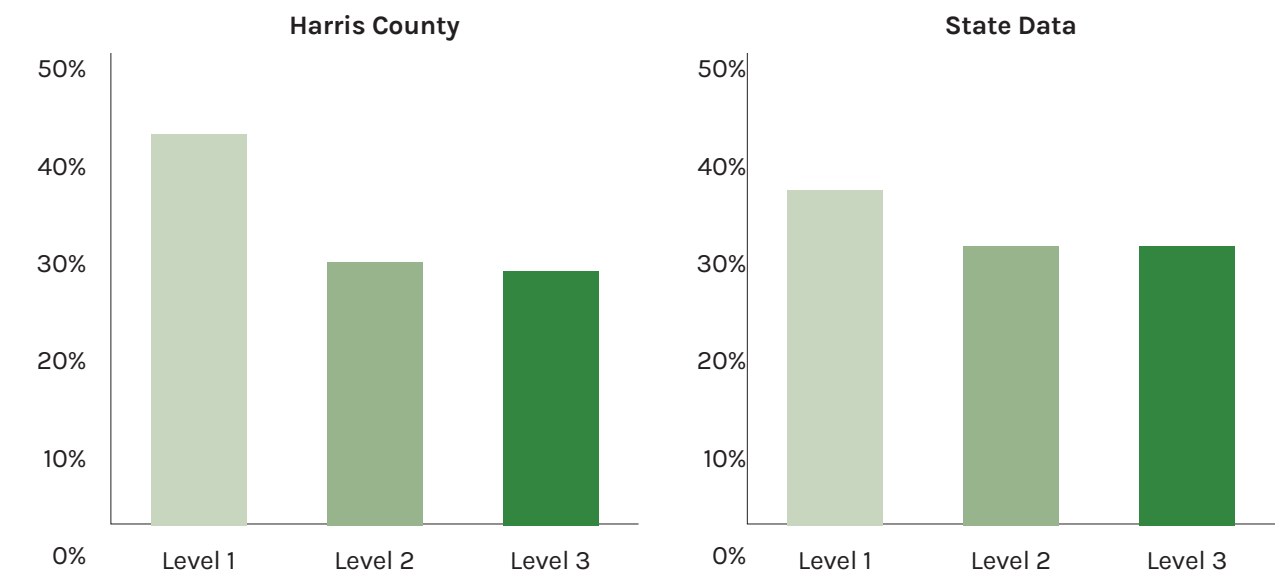


FIGURE 13: NUMERACY

Shows the percentage of Harris County residents who scored at each numeracy level compared to the percentages for the State of Texas



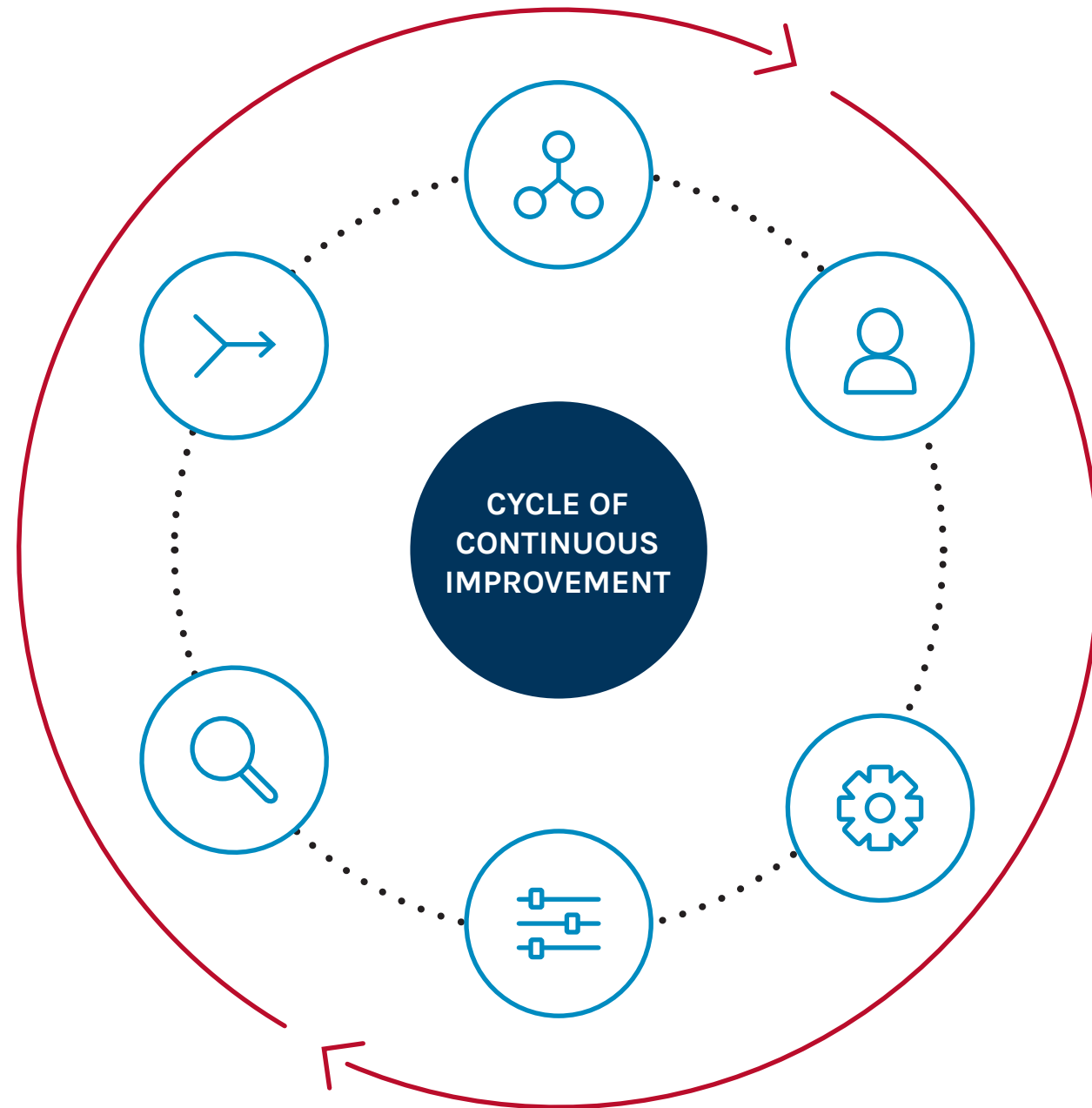
Appendix B

TERM	DEFINITION
Adult Basic Education	Refers to instructional programs for adults whose basic skills (reading, writing, computation, and critical thinking) are assessed at the eighth-grade level or below and who, thus, cannot proficiently function on the job and in society to fulfill their goals and potential. ¹³⁰
Adult Learner	Individuals over the age of 16 who did not complete their K-12 education, or who possess a high school diploma, equivalent, or higher but nevertheless have gaps in basic skills such as reading, writing, communication, or math. ¹³¹
Career Pathway	A combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved; prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual's education and career goals; includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster; organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable; enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.¹³²
Collective Impact Model	The commitment from cross-sector stakeholders to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. The model also typically includes shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization. ¹³³
Digital Literacy	The ability to access, understand, synthesize, interact with, and communicate information from an electronic environment. ¹³⁴
Document Literacy	The ability needed to understand and use information from a variety of documents and materials. ¹³⁵
Employability/ Workforce Readiness Skill	The general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors. ¹³⁶

Family Literacy	Involves the literate activities families engage in at home and in the larger community. These interactive routines might include reading and writing together, playing an educational video game, or simply talking to infants and responding to the sounds they make. ¹³⁷
Financial Literacy	The ability to make financial decisions appropriate for one's family and community. ¹³⁸
Functional Literacy	Includes reading, writing, computing, critical thinking, and communicating orally at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and across society. ¹³⁹
Health Literacy	The ability to understand basic health information and services and to make decisions that are appropriate for oneself, one's family, and community. ¹⁴⁰
Information Literacy	The ability to acquire, organize, and process information in contextually useful manners. ¹⁴¹
Integrated Education and Training (IET)	A service approach that provides AEL (adult education and literacy) activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. ¹⁴²
Numeracy	The ability to compute and solve problems in context. ¹⁴³
Plain Language	Using the simplest, most straightforward language to express an idea. ¹⁴⁴
Prose Literacy	The ability needed to understand and use information from a variety of texts. ¹⁴⁵
Readability	The degree to which a given group of people find certain reading matter comprehensible. The readers literacy proficiency needs to match or exceed the level of literacy needed to understand the information being read. ¹⁴⁶
Technological Literacy	The ability to select and use appropriate technology for the task. ¹⁴⁷
Workforce Preparation Activities	Activities, programs, or services designed to help an individual acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills, including competencies in utilizing resources, using information, working with others, understanding systems, and obtaining skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment. ¹⁴⁸
Workplace Literacy	The basic language, communication, numeracy, and problem-solving skills needed to accomplish job tasks effectively in the learner's workplace and in a specific role (e.g., on-the-job training or role specific upskilling). ¹⁴⁹

Appendix C

Framework for Continuous Improvement



IDENTIFY

Identify and understand data-informed gaps

- Identify key metrics to measure success of the effort
- Identify and analyze available data and discover additional context



PLAN

Collaborate and coordinate the plan

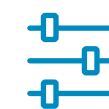
- Create a plan to close targeted gap(s) and achieve identified goals
- Assemble and collaborate with key stakeholders



IMPLEMENT

Execute the plan

- Elicit feedback from stakeholders throughout implementation
- Implement the plan, potentially with a pilot group or initial scope



MEASURE

Assess progress and metrics to enhance

- Synthesize qualitative feedback
- Measure the identified key metrics



LEARN

Review results and identify insights and opportunities

- Document lessons learned, key insights, and future opportunities
- Reflect on progress and success



COMMIT

Outline approach and next steps for continued improved action

- Outline updated roles and responsibilities for continued action
- Make commitments for next steps to continuously improve

Contributing Organizations

Adult Education Center	Comcast	Greater Houston Restaurant Association	Hyatt Regency Downtown Houston	National Center for Education Statistics	System for Education Empowerment and Success (SEDES)
AmeriCorps	Community Family Centers	Harris County Department of Education	Intel	Neuhaus Education Center	Texas Capital Bank
ASTOUNDZ	ConocoPhillips	Harris County Judge's Office	Interfaith Ministries	Open Door Mission	Texas Workforce Commission
AT&T	Crestwood Equity Partners LP	Harris County Public Library	ION	Phillips 66	The Alliance
AT&T Sportsnet	CrossWalk Houston - Memorial Drive United Methodist Church	Harris County Sherriff's Department	Kinder Foundation	PNC Bank	Twin Oaks ESL Program
AVANCE Houston	Deloitte Consulting	H-E-B	Knowledge-First Empowerment Academy	Prestige Learning Institute	Tyson Foods
BakerRipley	Dress for Success Houston	Hess Corporation	Legacy Community Health	PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)	United Way THRIVE - United Way of Greater Houston (UWGH)
Bank On Houston	EastSide University	Hotel and Lodging Association of Greater Houston	Literacy Now	Professional Janitorial Service (PJS)	University of Houston
Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy	Elite Mixed Martial Arts	Houston Area Urban League	Literacy Powerline	ProLiteracy	UpSkill Houston - Greater Houston Partnership
Capital IDEA Houston	Entercom	Houston Astros Foundation	Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)	Reliant	Volunteer Houston
CenterPoint Energy	EOG Resources, Inc.	Houston Community College	Lone Star College	Rice University	Wesley Community Center
Cheniere Energy	Fort Bend Literacy Council	Houston Food Bank	LSC Tomball Community Library	Salvation Army	West Houston Assistance Ministries (WHAM)
Chinese Community Center	General Consulate of Qatar in Houston	Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	LyondellBasell	San Jacinto College	Workforce Solutions
CITGO Petroleum	Goodwill Industries	Houston Independent School District	Marathon Oil	Search Homeless Services	YMCA
City of Houston	Greater Harris County Manufacturers Association	Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo	Memorial Assistance Ministries (MAM)	SheSpace	
Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE)	Greater Houston Community Foundation	Houston Public Library	Mexican Institute of Greater Houston (MIGH)	StalwartMC	

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