

Literacy Powerline's Coalition 101

What is Literacy?

The Workforce Investment Act defines literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society." All of these abilities are outlined and measured by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, which tested over 19,000 American adults in 2003 and found that literacy levels had changed very little since the previous assessment in 1992.

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

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

The definition of literacy has also expanded and now includes emergent literacy, which is children's acquisition of the pre-literacy skills needed for success in kindergarten. These skills include understanding the relationships between symbols and sounds as well as the early concepts of numeracy. Research shows that children who are unable to gain these pre-reading skills are unlikely to catch up with their peers during the elementary years and are more likely to drop out of school when they are older.

Community literacy involves establishing a process of shared problem-solving that unites communities around the vision of 100 percent literacy with 100 percent community engagement. Community literacy includes all family members and all community stakeholders to facilitate literacy infusion, the practice of including literacy throughout all community initiatives. Incorporating literacy into diverse community efforts promotes a general awareness and understanding of all its complexities.

The implementation of community literacy is both bottom up and top down. It can change the way literacy is viewed at all levels of service delivery, from the local level to the national.

Why a literacy coalition?

The magnitude of our low literacy problem is daunting, and, so far, in most communities it has not been addressed in a collaborative manner. In the past, those with limited skills may have been able to succeed because there were good job opportunities that required only basic skill levels. Today, however, the economy has changed; employers need workers with more skills, and the basic requirements for entry level jobs have increased. More and more employers require workers who can read manuals and other materials, engage in complex problem solving, and operate more advanced technology.

Literacy and economic development go hand in hand. It is not enough to expect employers to educate their own workforce; it is more cost effective for many companies to relocate their operations if they cannot find enough skilled workers to meet their needs in the local area. In the knowledge-based and highly mobile economy of the 21st century, no community can thrive without a highly skilled general population. Therefore, starting in early childhood, literacy programs must scale up services by providing skills development to all members of the community to create a strong literate foundation on which the education system can be built.

Who Belongs?

- Community based organizations
 - Workforce investment boards
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Faith-based organizations
 - Child care providers
 - Civic organizations
 - Correctional institutions
 - State adult education partners
 - Adult learners
 - The business community
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- Local media
 - School Districts
 - Community literacy providers
 - Institutes of higher education
 - City education department
 - Health care providers
 - Local government
 - Family literacy providers
 - Vocational training organizations
 - Other coalitions

What does a coalition look like?

Imagine a "pebble in the pond" model with learners at the center, service delivery providers surrounding them; with supports for effective service provision and the many community at large partners working to support increased literacy levels. Working with a collaboration coalition model allows whole communities to be engaged together in the literacy effort.



What does a coalition do?



A literacy coalition can provide your community with...

- Contracts management
- Technical assistance
- Advocacy
- Evaluation/Accreditation
- Action research
- Communication
- Volunteers
- AmeriCorps/VISTA
- Resources/Supplies Distribution
- Training and curriculum development
- Staff development
- Program development
- Marketing and public awareness
- Fund development

- Learner Retention Strategies
- Recruitment Strategies
- Software/Technology Support
- Support for lowest literacy levels
- Lesson planning innovations
- Kindergarten readiness services
- Support for lowest literacy levels
- Transition to work partnerships

With regional literacy plan that we provide, coalitions have a much higher chance of success. We...

- **Increase resources** for literacy and target investments for the greatest impact
- **Expand access** to literacy services throughout the community
- **Provide coordination** to assure the most efficient and effective services
- **Spread best practice** throughout and integrated system of lifelong learning
- **Ensure accountability** to achieve high instruction and program management
- **Engage the leadership** of the community at its highest levels to build lasting solutions
- **Keep literacy visible** as a top priority in the community

What are the outcomes?

Costs to the community, return on investment - these are the phrases that resonate with all of us as we continue to make our programs more effective and efficient. The work of the coalition also adds the layer of moving the community, as a whole, forward. Goals and measurements are designed by each community. Common themes do emerge. The following areas are considered as we assist you in developing these measurements and a quality evaluation plan.

- for families to promote education and learning within the home
- for children to be prepared for and succeed in school
- for people to become employed, self-sufficient and climb a career ladder
- for people to make informed decisions about civic, environmental and health issues
- for people to navigate in this new information and technological era
- for communities to combat the forces of poverty and crime
- and for employers to grow their businesses

The national statistics bear out the reasons for our efforts. The Center for Benefits-Costs Studies at Columbia University reports that a high school graduate earns \$267,000 more than a non-graduate over a lifespan. And for each high school graduate there is a lifetime savings of \$127,000 in the cost of welfare support. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid

Statistics reported in 2004 that \$73 billion is spent each year for unnecessary health care expenses that are attributable to poor literacy.

What is literacy infusion?

A powerful community development strategy is fully integrated literacy services and funding. Few communities have this today. The result is a fragmented approach that has not accomplished the vision of 100 percent literacy.



The infusion model will help coordinate and build ownership throughout communities.

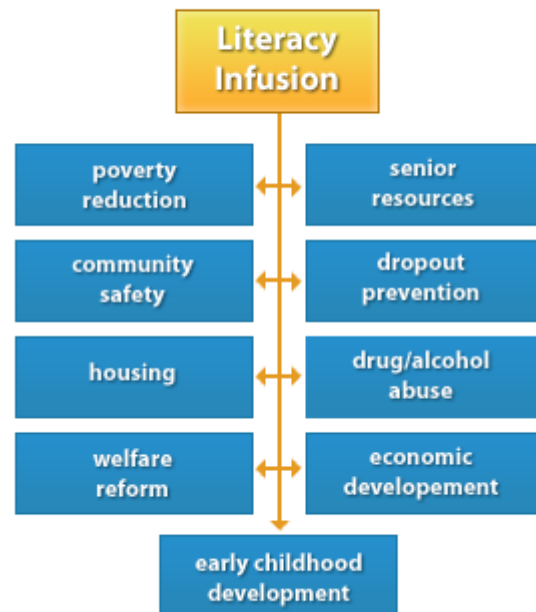
Literacy is not the goal! It is a tool and does not belong in any one social issue area but in all.

As we just said, most communities address social issues, including literacy, in isolation. In their own boxes. The infusion model breaks literacy out of the box and puts it into every box.

Traditional approach

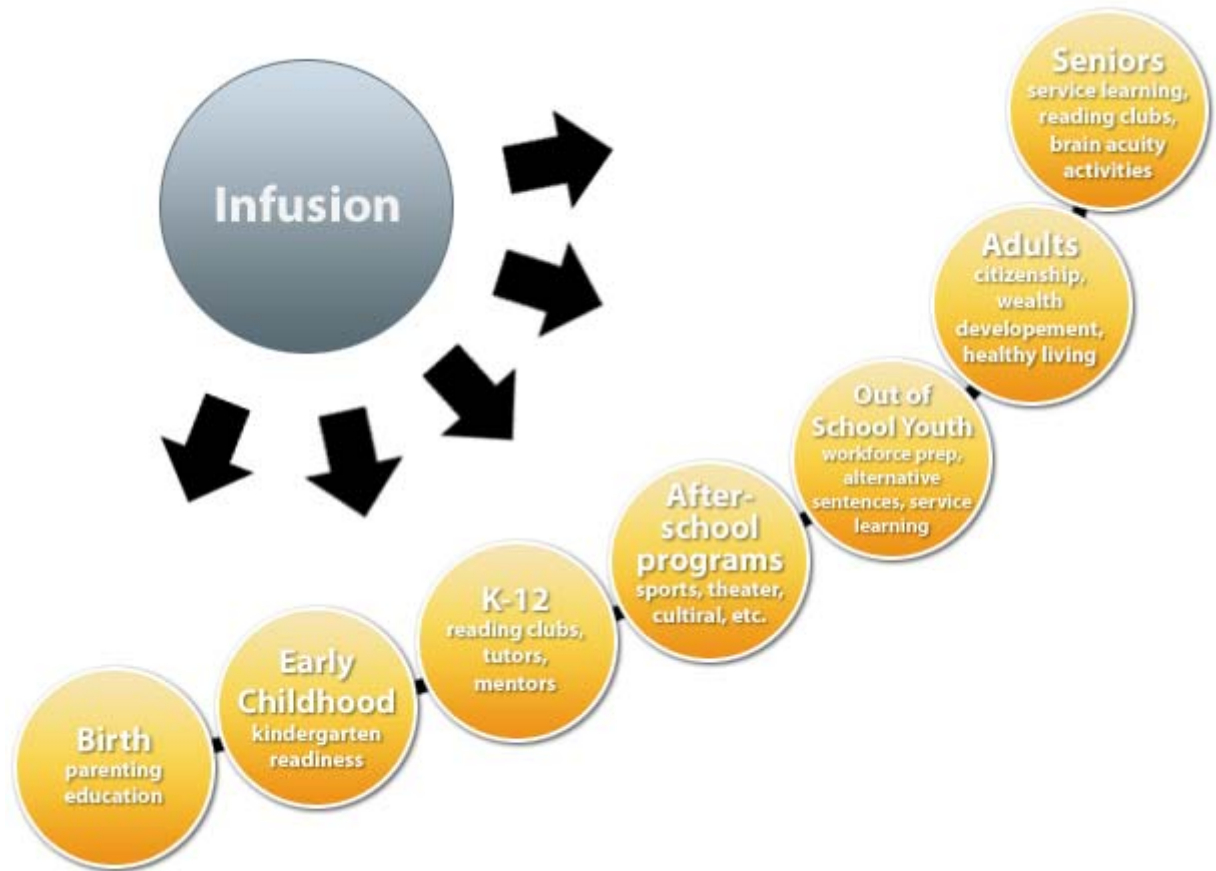


Literacy infusion approach



For community transformation to take place:

- Infusion must occur across the age span of lifelong learning
- Activities must cross social issue initiatives and
- Infusion must be at all levels of community planning



Return on Investment

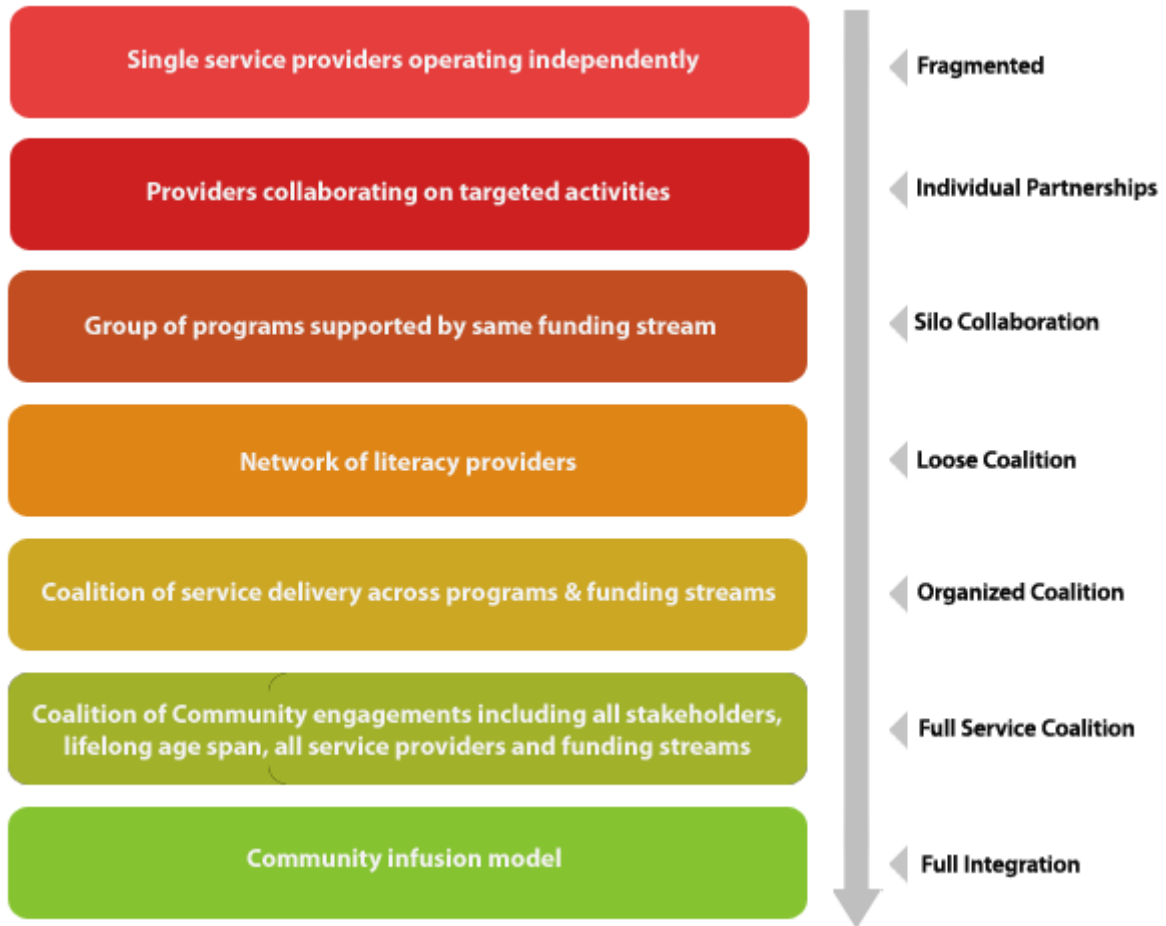
By infusing literacy goals into current non-literacy programs the community can grow their capacity to serve learners at little additional cost. Not only does literacy pay huge dividends in quality of life but the dollars and cents add up, too:

- By increasing the high school graduation rates each graduate will earn on average \$267,000 more than a non-graduate over a lifespan.
- By reducing the number of people receiving welfare support there is a lifetime savings of \$127,000 in the cost of welfare support.
- By increasing vocational information and skills training more people will embark on a career ladder rather than get stuck in a dead end low paying job.
- By increasing literacy levels there will be a reduction in the \$73 billion nationally spent each year for unnecessary health care expenses that are attributable to poor literacy.
- By partnering on education and training for inmates and re-entry programs crime rates will decrease and fewer tax dollars will be needed for the criminal justice system.

- By developing effective pipelines a culture of literacy will be built and high expectations, high quality programs and high quality results will make a literate community.

Through communitywide planning, issue elevation, and infusing literacy into funding and service goals, literacy becomes an integrated part of the community's development strategy.

Historic Progression of Model



Report from Everytown Literacy Coalition

Everytown is in Everyone's County. It is the state capital of Everystate and is located on the east bank of the Every River. It has a population of 424,852 and supports an economy expanding from traditional manufacturing and service to biotechnology, tourism and construction. Everytown is America's 70 somethingist largest Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). A mayor and 12-member elected Metropolitan Council administer the city.

The traditionally white population now includes larger numbers of Vietnamese and Hispanic families. The mayor complains that reduced federal dollars stretch the city resources to the limit and that crime is on the rise.

Not enough children enter kindergarten with essential skills needed to succeed. The school superintendent is under pressure from the community to do something about increased dropout rates in the high schools.

The United Way continues its tradition of funding human service agencies but still basic needs in the community go unmet.

The Workforce Investment Board struggles to meet the numbers required and is just taking those students who are likely to succeed the fastest.

The Chamber is bemoaning the fact that they can't attract new businesses because the skilled workforce is just not available.

Something had to be done to increase literacy levels!

Source: <http://www.literacypowerline.com/pages/resources/coalition101>