



Statement on Education and Literacy

The Literacy Roundtable is a coalition of literacy providers in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. As an independent not-for-profit organization, we recommend the following be considered when addressing literacy and related issues in the public forum.

Literacy education is situated within the larger context of social needs such as housing, health care, and workforce development.

As such, in the United States:

- Low health literacy costs between \$106 and \$238 billion each year in the U.S. (Center for Health Policy Research)
- Over 60% of the prison population have basic or below basic literacy and math skills, compared to 44% of the regular population. (National Assessment of Adult Literacy)
- 30% of adults 18 and over without a high school diploma live below the poverty line, compared to 15% with a high school diploma, 11% with some college, and just 5% with a four year degree. (U.S. Census Bureau).

Literacy is the learning of knowledge, ideas, and strategies that unfolds *across the lifespan.*

Adults encounter many changes throughout their lives that make continued access to education important. As the economic landscape changes, adults will need to broaden or improve their reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills. As adults have families, they need more access to health and financial information, and need to understand English, math, science and social studies well enough to help their children through school. As technologies change and improve, adults need technology skills to bridge the digital divide.

Education is a human right as stated in the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights.

Providing public education is a responsibility of society and is a service essential to the social welfare of its citizens.



Education is a civil right and is essential to fulfill the democratic principles on which our country was founded.

However, education is not included as a civil right in the U. S. Constitution. We believe every citizen has a right to an equal, high-quality public education.

The promise of a literate citizenry is compromised if education is not fully funded across the lifespan.

Spending nationally for education in 2003-2004 was \$8,287 per pupil for K-12, \$6,500 for Head Start and \$212 for adult education. Of the 96 programs funded by the US Department of Education, adult education is one of only four education programs that received an effective rating in 2006 from the Office of Management and Budget. Funding for adult education is an effective investment and should be increased to levels comparable to K-12.

The teacher is the primary agent of instruction, not the program, and every effort must be made to provide qualified literacy teachers for each classroom.

Students of all ages deserve high quality instruction that is grounded in research, engaging, and designed to meet their unique instructional needs. To ensure this high quality instruction, professional teachers, volunteer tutors, and other instructors must have access to high quality research-based professional development.

The primary purpose of assessment is to inform instruction.

Educational programs and teachers must be accountable to the students they serve and assessment is an important part of this. However, too much instructional time is being taken up and content determined by high stakes, punitive tests. Accountability is best served if assessment is combined with appropriate resources and used to inform and improve instruction, not punish programs, teachers, and students.

We propose that school districts take heed of standards for assessment set forth by professional organizations such as the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, Literacy Research Association, American Educational Research Association, and FairTest. These organizations are unwavering in their unity around the need for multiple forms of assessment, not single high stakes testing.



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The debate on education needs to more accurately reflect the complexities of education, the importance of education across the lifespan, and the principle that a high quality education is the right of all.

The current debate presents polarizing choices, single issue magic bullet solutions, and pits children against adults, public vs. charter, native English speakers against non-English speakers, parents against schools, and professionals against volunteers.