

The Status of Literacy in **Oklahoma City** and the Community Plan to **Raise Literacy Levels**

If there is a beginning to the end of poverty, **literacy is it.**



OKLAHOMA CITY METRO LITERACY COALITION

VISION: Metropolitan Oklahoma City is a fully literate community.

MISSION: To lead an active collaboration of literacy learners, providers, and supporters, in order to strengthen services and to present a united voice for literacy in metropolitan Oklahoma City.

CORE VALUES: The OKCMLC holds these core values as it administers the charge from the community:

RESPECT - *To value the inherent potential and dignity of individuals by encouraging growth and opportunity.*

INNOVATION - *To actively seek and promote creative and resourceful means of delivering literacy services.*

COLLABORATION - *To build community partnerships that best serve the needs of learners, providers, and supporters.*

EQUALITY - *To foster inclusive learning environments where differences are valued and treated with respect.*

LEADERSHIP - *To mobilize and empower partners to be visible champions for literacy.*

DEDICATION - *To commit fully to the vision, mission, goals, and program of the Coalition.*



GOALS:

One: To increase public awareness of literacy and to take an active role in community initiatives which fulfill the vision of the Coalition including:

- Assistance line for referrals
- Website for resources
- Awareness campaign

Two: To promote and pilot professional development by encouraging efficient and effective services which include:

- Dissemination of best practices among the providers
- Training
- Development of Personal Relationships
- Communication
- Review and Evaluation

Three: To advocate for literacy and to sustain the viability of the Coalition by developing and directing resources for greatest impact.

Four: To identify and address the gaps and needs in services always keeping literacy as the Coalition priority.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Literacy: An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.

Strong literacy skills are necessary to help people reach their potential as family members, employees, and citizens. As parents improve their literacy skills, it becomes easier for them to be engaged in their children's education, both at home and at school. Children exposed early to reading and writing develop literacy skills that promote lifelong learning and education. Families and individuals with increased literacy skills are better equipped to make decisions that influence everything from health care to personal finances and employment.

Higher literacy skills mean higher wages.

According to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, nearly 140,000 adults in Oklahoma County have limited literacy skills - they have difficulty reading a newspaper, filling out an application

form or accessing health information and services. Literacy is an essential part of building a successful community. As Oklahoma City moves toward a more knowledge-based economy, it becomes increasingly important to have a highly literate and skilled workforce. A county with such a workforce will be more likely to retain and attract business, to maintain low unemployment and positive job growth, and to prosper as a healthy community.

THE PROCESS: In response to the growing awareness of low literacy and the issues it raises in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, the community came together to develop a plan to raise literacy levels. Concerned leaders from the Junior League of Oklahoma City, The Oklahoma City Community Foundation, the United Way, The Community Literacy Centers and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (the Steering Committee) convened the community to address literacy problems and find solutions. Acknowledging the relationship between literacy levels and income, the committee recognized the need to improve the earning capacity of lower-income residents in the area by increasing literacy levels. An important goal of the Coalition is to develop and implement a regional literacy plan to enhance services and coordinate community stakeholder efforts.

Eight task forces were formed and worked for a year to develop a plan to increase literacy levels through a coordinating Coalition. Having documented the need in the community, the task forces initiated meetings in October of 2006. The Steering Committee

worked with stakeholders to identify the key areas for impact and developed task forces in the following categories:

- *Early Childhood/Family Literacy*
- *Evaluation/Accountability*
- *Curriculum/Best Practices*
- *Funding*
- *Learner Retention and Recruitment*
- *Marketing*
- *Non-profit/ESL/Faith-based Organizations*
- *Workforce Partnerships*

The task forces met monthly over a year. Each task force was chaired by a community leader and a literacy provider.

In all, over 80 people worked on the project.

Each task force identified needs, met with stakeholders, reviewed findings, made recommendations and endorsed a plan of action for the Coalition. The Oklahoma City Metro Literacy Coalition coordinated the planning and is leading the implementation of the new area blueprint for literacy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

Key Findings:

1. There is no clear pathway for individuals in need of literacy services. An individual trying to navigate the services currently available would have to know what their specific needs are and be able to articulate those needs in literacy terms.
2. There are few family literacy service providers considering the levels of low literacy and families in poverty.
3. The demand for resources to provide literacy services is larger than the current pool of available resources.
4. There are numerous untapped funding streams and no coordinated efforts to increase resources. A deeper understanding of the state funding stream is needed.
5. There is no central tracking of all literacy programs to determine a baseline for future progress.
6. There are turf issues among providers supported by differing funding streams.
7. More ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) services are needed.

8. There is need to replicate good quality programs like the tutoring program in the Department of Corrections. Some examples of collaboration were identified but more are needed.

9. Services for out-of-school youth are limited and tracking students in the transition between high school and alternative education is needed.

10. Workforce and vocational training partnerships could be more diverse and effective by creating partnerships with community based organizations.

Recommendations Overview: Following is a selection of recommendations from each task force. A comprehensive listing of recommendations, as well as appendices, is provided in the full report.

- *Identify areas that are underserved and assist in promoting and supporting family literacy services. Target zip codes and work with residents and neighborhoods to implement activities.*

- *Distribute Early Childhood-Family Literacy Resource Directory to parents via hospitals, doctors' offices, childcare centers, etc. Make certain that they are user friendly to our population and provide follow up calls through the Smart Start Central Oklahoma Early Childhood Coalition.*

- *Support early childhood initiatives and help identify children with possible language delays.*

A rise of 1% in literacy scores leads to a **2.5% rise in labor productivity** and a **1.5% rise in GDP per person.**

THE ECONOMIST, AUGUST 28, 2004



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

- Recruit and train volunteers to work with children that have been identified as potential “high risk” readers/learners.

- Significantly increase public announcements regarding enrollment in and benefits of family literacy in auditory and visual formats with simple, direct and limited information. Provide the announcements in multiple languages, as part of the Coalition’s coordinated marketing efforts.

- Determine how literacy programs might access, use and share research.

- Determine strategies to increase and leverage available funding to maximize impact for those agencies serving adult, child and adult literacy programs.

- Increase awareness among learners of the solutions and benefits of attending literacy programs.

- Develop measurements that are simple, understandable and relevant to literacy providers in order to measure the progress towards improving literacy in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

- Develop a coordinated approach to workforce literacy by linking employers, adult education professionals, and vocational training to eliminate barriers to employment.

The Oklahoma City Metro Literacy Coalition would like to thank each of the task force members for their hard work and dedication to this process. We would also like to extend our thanks to Sandra W. LeVan, our facilitator throughout the task force meetings and to Margaret Doughty, Literacy Powerline, for her assistance in compiling this report.

This report may also be downloaded at the Oklahoma City Metro Literacy Coalition’s website www.okcliteracycoalition.org

WHAT IS LITERACY?

National Institute for Literacy
Definition: An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.

Strong literacy skills are necessary to help people reach their potential as family members, employees, and citizens. As parents improve their literacy skills, it becomes easier for them to be engaged in their children's education, both at home and at school. Children exposed early to reading and writing develop literacy skills that promote lifelong learning and education. Families and individuals with increased literacy skills are better equipped to make decisions that influence everything from health care to personal finances and employment.

Higher literacy skills mean higher wages.

FIRST STEPS: In response to the growing awareness of low literacy and the issues it raises in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, the community came together to develop a plan to raise literacy levels. Concerned leaders from the Junior League of Oklahoma City, The Oklahoma City Community Foundation, the United Way, The Community Literacy Centers and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (the Steering Committee) convened the community to address literacy problems and find solutions. Eight task forces were formed and worked for a year to develop a plan to increase literacy levels through a coordinating Coalition.

The planning process was organized by the steering committee working in partnership with the leadership team of community decision makers and a stakeholder team including:

- *Grassroots and Neighborhood Organizations*
- *Local Government (city and county)*
- *Civic Organizations*
- *Workforce Investment*
- *Schools*
- *Colleges and Community Colleges*
- *Literacy Providers*
- *Businesses*
- *Foundations*
- *Health Practitioners*
- *Family Services and Education*
- *Chambers of Commerce*
- *Non-profits*
- *Immigrants*
- *Adult Learners*
- *Community Organizations*
- *Faith-based Organizations*
- *Corrections*
- *Volunteers*
- *School Districts*

THE ASSESSMENT OF NEED

To begin to address the issues, the steering committee decided to assess the literacy needs in the community to help inform the work of the planning process. This was a complex project because literacy skills impact the quality of life in almost every aspect of the city. Valuable lifetime opportunities are significantly impacted.

According to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, nearly 140,000 adults in Oklahoma County have limited literacy skills- they have difficulty reading a newspaper, filling out an application form or accessing health information and services. Acknowledging the relationship between literacy levels and income, the committee recognized the need to improve the earning capacity of lower-income residents in the area by increasing literacy levels. An important goal of the Coalition is to develop and implement a regional literacy plan to enhance services and coordinate community stakeholder efforts. Literacy is an essential part of building a successful community. As Oklahoma City moves toward a more knowledge-based economy, it becomes increasingly

important to have a highly literate and skilled workforce. A county with such a workforce will be more likely to retain and attract business, to maintain low unemployment and positive job growth, and to prosper as a healthy community. During 2006 Oklahoma had an increase of 20,000 new jobs. New jobs in the state are increasingly diverse and focused in knowledge based occupations. It is vital to bridge the skills gap between a low-tech workforce and jobs requiring high-tech skills.

With identified low-literacy levels in the metro Oklahoma City area the skills gap cannot be resolved without first improving literacy levels. A rise of 1% in literacy scores leads to a 2.5% rise in labor productivity and a 1.5% rise in GPD per person. (The Economist, August 28, 2004).

Literacy is essential.

- for families to promote education and learning within the home
- for children to succeed in school
- for improved graduation rates
- for communities to reduce crime
- for people to become employed, self-sufficient and make progress in a chosen career
- for people to make informed decisions about civic, environmental and health issues
- for people to navigate the new technology and information resources of the 21st century
- for communities to combat the forces of poverty



NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY OKLAHOMA STATE DATA

The Coalition reviewed available research both locally and statewide. They found that the Oklahoma State Assessment of Adult Literacy (conducted in 2003/4 as part of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy released in December, 2005) was the best measure available to determine literacy levels in the community. Using a combined measure of prose, document, and quantitative literacy, NAAL researchers interviewed and tested over 20,000 adults aged 16 and over to measure their basic literacy skills. Based on their responses to different questions, individuals were assigned to one of four literacy levels, from Level 1 (lowest) to Level 4 (highest).

The four NAAL levels of literacy are:

1. BELOW BASIC- possesses no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills; examples include signing a form or searching a text to find what a patient should eat or drink before a medical test.

2. BASIC- possesses skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities; examples include using a television guide and comparing ticket prices for two events.

3. INTERMEDIATE- possesses skills necessary to perform moderately challenging literacy activities; examples include identifying a specific location on a map, and consulting a reference material to find the vitamin components of certain foods.

4. PROFICIENT- indicates skills necessary to perform more complex and challenging literacy activities; examples include comparing two editorial viewpoints, and interpreting a blood pressure chart.

Overall, there have been few changes in literacy levels between the 2003/4 NAAL survey and a similar NAAL project in 1992. The relative lack of progress over the intervening decade indicates that a look at the delivery system, literacy services, and public awareness is warranted. The new study shows that overall adult literacy in Oklahoma is similar to that of the nation though there are some differences. While the literacy levels of Hispanic Oklahomans did not differ significantly from Hispanics nationwide, the average literacy of Black and White Oklahomans are significantly lower than the average literacy of Blacks and Whites in the nation (see chart on following page).

A healthy economy is driven by high-paying jobs, and those with limited literacy skills struggle to secure livable wages. Those with limited skills are left at a severe economic disadvantage and have difficulty meeting life's daily demands. Workforce literacy needs to be a high priority in Oklahoma City and a more comprehensive

plan to coordinate workforce and vocational literacy initiatives is needed.

Government statistics show that people with high literacy levels are much more likely to be employed, while a majority of those with low literacy levels are not working.

Although many adults with Level 1 or Level 2 literacy can perform some reading tasks, their skills are not sufficient to function effectively in everyday life.

If there is a beginning to the end of poverty, literacy is it.

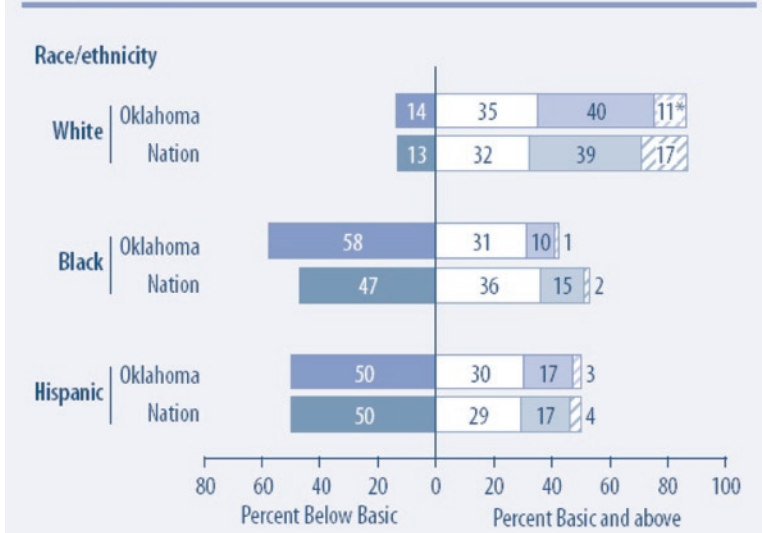
NAAL data can also be used to illustrate the racial/ethnic divide in literacy (see Figure 4).

In Oklahoma City there is no central tracking of learning data. Tracking occurs only as it relates to individual funding streams. The following chart shows the numbers served in state funded adult education system with Workforce Investment Act Title II funds, but many programs are funded by other public and private sources some of which are required

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY OKLAHOMA STATE DATA CONTINUED

to report data but none are required to report to a central source in Oklahoma City. Therefore, at this point there is no way to determine the full and accurate numbers either of learners, or of their retention or completion of programs.

Figure 4. Percentage of adults in Oklahoma and the nation in each quantitative literacy level, by race/ethnicity: 2003

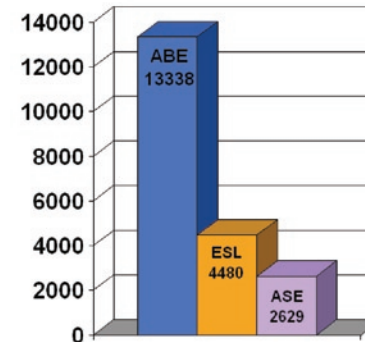


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, STATE ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY, OKLAHOMA, 2003

Total state wide number of adults served through WIA Title II in Fiscal Year 2005 was 39,068. Total unduplicated count was 20,447.

These figures include the nearly 140,000 adults in Oklahoma County with limited literacy skills. Of those, only about 11,000 are currently being served. People reading at low literacy levels are often intimidated by their limited skills, are hesitant ask for help and have difficulty accessing the system if they do try to find a class. A survey of literacy providers indicated the growing numbers of immigrant learners enrolling in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes but the predominant program is adult basic education that includes GED. There are numerous programs that offer both dedicated literacy instruction or include literacy in other activities. Literacy providers in the area include:

- *Correctional institutions*
- *School districts*
- *Health facilities*
- *Higher education remedial learning locations*
- *WIA adult education locations*
- *Libraries*
- *Family literacy programs*
- *Community-based organizations*
- *Workforce centers*
- *Faith-based programs*
- *Childcare/parenting programs*



ABE=Adult Basic Education
ASE= Adult Secondary Education
ESL=English as a Second Language

SOURCE: OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 2005

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY

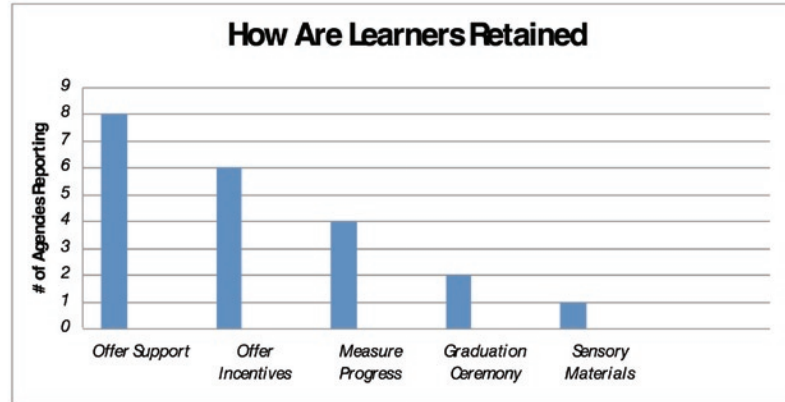
OKLAHOMA STATE DATA
CONTINUED

The 2000 US Census indicates that in those areas of Oklahoma County, in which under 40% of the population have high school diplomas or equivalency, fewer services are offered.

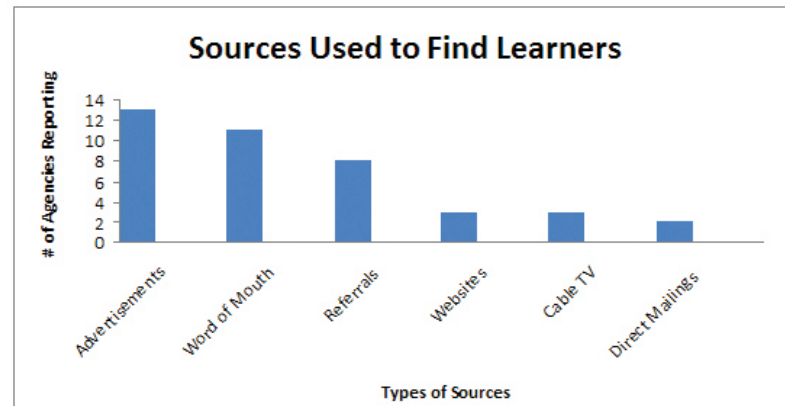
Metropolitan Adult Education providers have used a range of strategies to identify potential learners but greater and more targeted outreach is needed if more learners are to enroll in programs. Using diverse marketing has helped increase enrollment in some programs.

Providers report that learner retention is also challenging for the following reasons:

- other needs encroach on learner time and take a higher priority, including health issues, work schedules and family needs.
- learners find that some programs are not customized to meet their specific interests and goals.



Source: Learner Recruitment and Retention Task Force Survey 2007



Source: Learner Recruitment and Retention Task Force Survey 2007

The community expressed a need for more family literacy programs. Limited literacy of parents greatly impacts the learning of children. Children in situations of poverty often have parents with limited literacy skills. Such children may not have the pre-reading skills needed to succeed in kindergarten. Research shows that children who are behind when they enter school are less likely to catch up with their peers and more likely to drop out in middle or high school.

Of the 171,000 children in Oklahoma County, the United Way reports that over 38,000 live in poverty. Many of these children have parents with limited literacy skills or limited English skills.

The local figures for births to teens may also be adversely impacted by the low literacy level of the teens' parents as well as the teens themselves. In 2002-04, the local teen birth rate was 68.7 out of every 1,000 girls age 15-19.

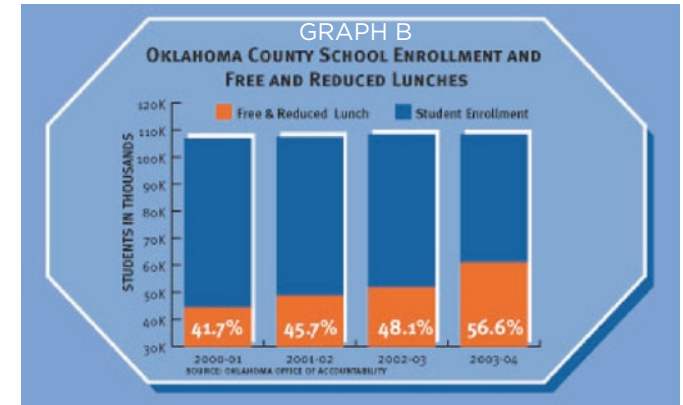
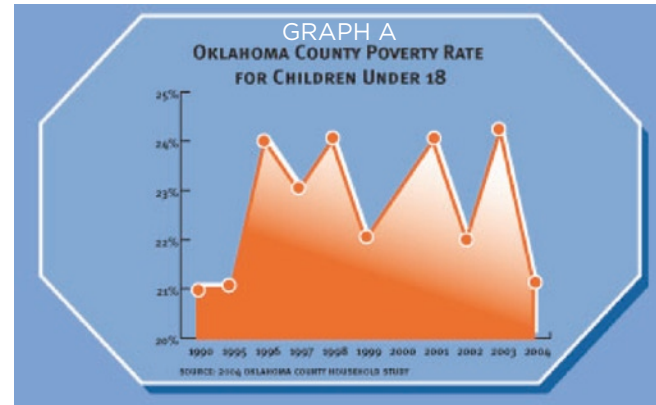
NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY

OKLAHOMA STATE DATA CONTINUED

High school drop out data for the metro area indicates that 16.5 percent of youth do not complete high school including 32.9 percent in the Oklahoma City Public Schools (2005-06). Some of these youth transition into alternative programs but many do not. Those who do not achieve a high school diploma or a GED can expect to earn less over their lifetime. A high school graduate earns \$267,000 more than a non-graduate over a lifespan. Non-graduates cost the community in tax dollars for welfare support. For each high school graduate there is a savings of \$127,000 in the cost of welfare support over a lifespan (Center for Benefits-Costs Studies -Columbia University).

Kids Count reported increases in wage and salary employment in 2004 revealing a moderate change in the poverty rate for all Oklahoma County households. Since 1990, the official poverty rate has decreased by 1.1 percent, but looking at the actual numbers of people in poverty, 2004 returns Oklahoma County to poverty levels near that of 1990 while supporting a population that has increased over 12

percent. In 2006, the national poverty rate was 12.5 percent; Oklahoma was 15.4 percent. However, the Oklahoma County poverty rate of 22.1 percent was above the rates for both the nation and the state (see Graph A). (Source: Community Action Project: August 28, 2007)



Graph B shows that since the 2000-2001 school years, the percentage of children eligible for free and reduced lunches has grown by more than one third. This is a clear indication that overall child poverty is steadily increasing in Oklahoma County, no matter what other economic indicators may suggest. Slightly more than two-thirds of Oklahoma County's children and youth live in households in which all parents in the family work. Nationwide in 2000, 66.4 percent of children lived in households in which all parents in the family worked.

Children whose parents, or parent, work outside of the home need some type of child care or after-school care. This care can be provided in a home by a relative or child care professional. Some young children attend a home- or center-based child care program. Older children may attend a school-based or community-based after-school care program. **Demand for after-school, evening and weekend care, as well as care for sick and special needs children continues to be one of the fastest growing needs relating to child care. In Oklahoma County, 41.7 percent of those surveyed stated they had difficulty obtaining childcare so they can go to work.**

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. There is a wide range of service provision in the area offering GED, Basic Skills and ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages).
2. There are few family literacy service providers considering the levels of low literacy and families in poverty.
3. There is no clear pathway for individuals in need of literacy services. An individual trying to navigate the services currently available would have to know what their specific needs are and be able to articulate those needs in literacy terms.
4. The demand for resources to provide literacy services is larger than the current pool of available resources.
5. There are numerous untapped funding streams and no coordinated efforts to increase resources.
6. There is no central tracking of all literacy programs to determine a baseline for future progress.
7. There are turf issues among providers supported by differing funding streams.
8. A deeper understanding of the state funding stream is needed.
9. More ESOL services are needed.
10. There is need to replicate good quality programs like the tutoring program in the Department of Corrections.
11. Some examples of collaboration were identified but more are needed.
12. Services for out-of-school youth are limited and tracking students in the transition between high school and alternative education is needed.
13. Workforce and vocational training partnerships could be more diverse and effective by creating partnerships with community based organizations.

METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING PROCESS & PRIORITIES

TASK FORCES: Having documented the need in the community, the task forces initiated meetings in October of 2006. The Steering Committee worked with stakeholders to identify the key areas for impact and developed task forces in the following categories:

- *Early Childhood/Family Literacy*
- *Evaluation/Accountability*
- *Curriculum/Best Practices*
- *Funding*
- *Learner Retention and Recruitment*
- *Marketing*
- *Non-profit/ESL/Faith-based Organizations*
- *Workforce Partnerships*

The task forces met monthly over a year. Each task force was chaired by a community leader and a literacy provider. Each task force identified needs, met with stakeholders, reviewed findings, made recommendations and endorsed a plan of action for the Coalition. The Oklahoma City Metro

Literacy Coalition coordinated the planning and is leading the implementation of the new area blueprint for literacy.

THE PRIORITIES OF THE COALITION ARE:

1. Measure the impact of the collaborative effort and ensure that literacy levels are raised for children, youth and adults who have limited literacy or language abilities (English for Speakers of Other Languages).
2. Document and create a well-coordinated, integrated system for service delivery.
3. Build strategic partnerships to better serve providers and learners and to develop system capacity to serve more learners.
4. Analyze funding streams to determine whether current funding efforts are maximized and if there are under or untapped opportunities.
5. Raise public awareness with an increased emphasis on outreach and learner retention strategies.

COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

Who will do what by when?

The leadership team will endorse the plan and the Mayor will be asked to make literacy the number 1 priority in the community.

EVERYONE WILL BE ASKED TO...

- Read to children
- Speak up about the importance of literacy as it concerns economic development and public welfare
- Volunteer
- Make a gift to local literacy organizations

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY WILL BE ASKED TO...

- Support existing literacy programs through donations and in-kind work
- Encourage employees to volunteer
- Host classes on-site
- Connect with schools on internships and job-shadowing

EDUCATORS WILL BE ASKED TO...

- Carefully assess students for literacy needs and make referrals when needed
- Provide tutoring
- Create local partnerships to support literacy programs
- Help develop and support standards for instruction and student performance

FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES WILL BE ASKED TO...

- Recruit volunteers
- Offer vacant space to expand literacy centers to neighborhoods
- Stay informed on community literacy resources
- Donate books for literacy programs libraries, and individuals

Long Term Impact

How will we know when we get there? What will we see?

THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE:

- A highly visible new community focus on literacy
- A strong coordinated advocacy message
- Increased access to information for program enrollment
- Increased and visible new partnerships
- Higher community expectations

ADULT LEARNERS AND FAMILIES:

- Reduced waiting lists and more program and location choices
- Creative opportunities for innovative ways for program learning and self study
- Increased opportunities for program input
- More relevant learning materials linked to health, financial, workforce, and computer literacy
- More support for ESOL and programs meeting the needs of special populations
- Support in transition to college and the workplace

THE FUNDING COMMUNITY:

- Increased fund development and shared grant writing opportunities
- More research driven applications based on best practices
- More opportunities to leverage public and private partnerships
- Increased spotlights on success

COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION CONTINUED

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY:

- *Working partnerships for collaboration*
- *Increased communications among leadership*
- *Better skilled employees*
- *Opportunities for additional training for incumbent workers*
- *Stronger engagement from leadership in meeting countywide literacy goals*

PROVIDERS:

- *Increased technical assistance for program improvement*
- *Increased opportunities for staff development, training and program development*
- *Increased networking and wraparound service support*
- *More resources*
- *More volunteer support and mentoring*

Why Will These Strategies Work?

1. The Action Plan will be adopted and fully supported by all stakeholders.
2. Providers will implement quality standards and build capacity with the appropriate training and access to technical assistance.
3. Funders will increase support as they see the results of coordination and cooperation.
4. Enhanced communication among providers and greater overall transparency will reduce turf issues and increase coordinated pipelines and transitions for learners.
5. Community members will realize their goals in the local literacy campaign.

Funders will **increase support** as they see the results of **coordination and cooperation.**



LITERACY PROVIDER CALL TO ACTION

The combined work of the task forces identified that a Coalition was needed to meet the goals of the community wide plan. Participating literacy providers proposed the following:

1. A centralized organization to coordinate the implementation of the Community Literacy Plan.
2. A Coalition to represent their needs in the broader community.
3. The Coalition to bring leadership to the table and elevate the issue of low literacy.
4. The Coalition to be an entity that helps reduce paperwork, specifically related to grant writing. The Coalition to apply for large grants on behalf of the providers, then sub-grant to the local providers.
5. The Coalition to always consider not competing with the providers for funding at the forefront of the mission.
6. Development of a common set of measures among providers linked to technical support and funding.

7. A coordinated plan for delivery of services.

8. The Coalition's board and executive director to build collaboration among providers to help resolve turf issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

OVERARCHING STRATEGIES:

- *Step Up to Quality*
- *Build overall system capacity*
- *Develop coordination and collaboration through the Coalition*

Each task force established work goals and determined recommendations for the community wide literacy plan.

EARLY CHILDHOOD - FAMILY LITERACY TASK FORCE

The goal set by the task force was “To create strategies to ensure that parents, caregivers and/or a child’s first literacy contact are supported and have what they need to raise literate children.”

The term “family literacy services” means services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours and duration, to make sustainable changes in a family and to integrate all of the following activities:

- *Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.*
- *Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.*
- *Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.*
- *An age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.*

The early childhood period was defined by the task force as 0 to 8 years old as a result of the needs assessment of our community with a special emphasis on Early Childhood - Family Literacy Services available in the Oklahoma City community. The Central Oklahoma Smart Start Early Childhood Initiative is instrumental in moving the dialogue forward and representatives served on this task force.

The Task Force felt strongly that the Coalition would not create new programs at this point, but would offer support, education and information to the community on services presently available. Information from this forum has been compiled in an Early Childhood - Family Resource Directory which will be distributed to the various Oklahoma City literacy and social service agencies.



CHALLENGES:

1. A challenge for the Task Force was that there are wonderful Early Childhood Literacy programs but few comprehensive family literacy providers; however, the providers of Early Childhood services have criteria/eligibility requirements and certain geographical areas covered.
2. Several Early Childhood Literacy providers distribute literacy packets that include “How to read to your young child” but often the parents themselves cannot read. Also, there needs to be follow up calls to the families that receive these packets.
3. Schools need to produce literate first and second graders. If a child cannot read well by the third grade, it is too difficult to play “catch up.”
4. Transportation in helping parents and children attend literacy classes is a significant problem for which we have no solution.

EARLY CHILDHOOD - FAMILY LITERACY TASK FORCE CONTINUED

FAMILY LITERACY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Identify areas that are underserved and assist in promoting and supporting family literacy services.
2. Target zip codes and work with residents and neighborhoods to implement activities.
3. Distribute Early Childhood - Family Literacy Resource Directory to parents via hospitals, doctors' offices, childcare centers, etc. Make certain that they are user friendly to our population and provide follow up calls through the Smart Start Central Oklahoma Early Childhood Coalition.
4. Support a pre-reading screening test for 4-5 years olds and help identify children with possible language delays.
5. Train volunteers to work with children that have been identified as potential "high risk" readers/learners.
6. Provide a support system that remediates 1st and 2nd grade struggling readers in partnership with the school district.
7. Provide quality family literacy programs that meet regularly and can provide needed social support to families.
8. Significantly increase public announcements regarding enrollment in and benefits of family literacy in auditory and visual formats with simple, direct and limited information. Provide the announcements in English and Spanish, as part of the Coalition's coordinated marketing efforts.
9. Work with legislators to support the school system in providing the best reading/language curriculum that will ensure a child's reading success.
10. Develop school/literacy agency partnerships to help work with children, adults and families concerning their literacy issues.
11. To make the greatest impact in Early Childhood - Family Literacy, a focus on mothers is recommended. A mother's level of education is the most crucial and strongest predictor of a child's academic success.
12. Explore successful fatherhood initiatives around reading to children.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND BEST PRACTICES TASK FORCE

In an attempt to develop improved program quality, the Curriculum Task Force provided recommendations to members of the Literacy Coalition on best practices and effective curriculum and instruction.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Determine how literacy programs might access, use and share research.*
- *Consider staffing issues among full, part-time and volunteer instructors and then recommend sustainable staffing structure and practices.*
- *Review current professional development and training opportunities.*

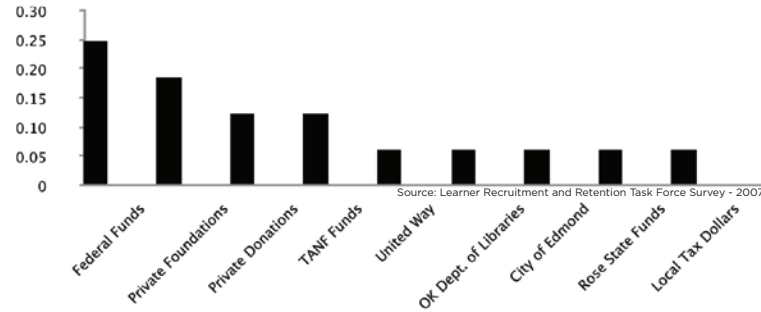
The Curriculum Task Force recommends that a user-friendly website be developed so that all best practice and curriculum materials can be easily accessible to all programs. This should be designed in partnership with the agencies currently providing training and professional development services. The website should provide links to national and statewide resources and be managed by an ongoing professional development task force or Coalition staffer who will provide a calendar of training events to the community and share information centrally about special opportunities and trainings. Trainings will be tracked and their impact measured through the evaluation system. The Task Force recommends that neighborhood libraries, schools and the Coalition make the resource information readily available to residents, as well.

FUNDING TASK FORCE

The goal of the task force was “to determine strategies to increase and leverage available funding.” The group determined the following top priorities:

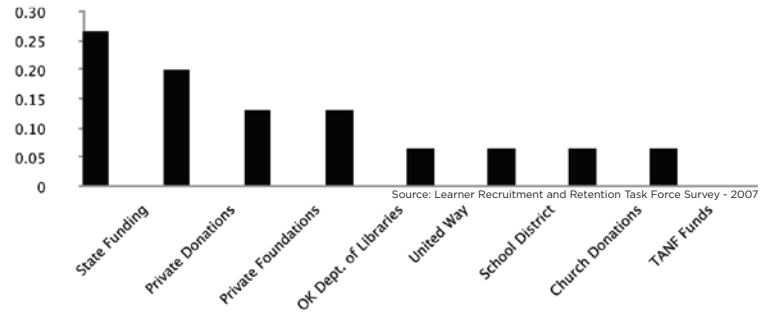
1. Determine and analyze the current funding streams for literacy services in Oklahoma County.
2. Research other opportunities for funding not currently being directed to Oklahoma County.
3. Learn how other cities and states have used a literacy Coalition to leverage funding.

Research was conducted with several corporate entities including Verizon Wireless, Dollar General, Target, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, Hastings, and the Gates Foundation to determine their commitment to literacy and whether or not funds were being directed from those companies to Oklahoma County. Additional research with public and nonprofit agencies was undertaken to examine current funding streams.



A number of public funding streams were identified where literacy was an eligible activity. Families, HUD, Community Development Block Grants, 21st Century Learning Center Act Funding. The Federal Register should be reviewed systematically and regularly to identify potential opportunities for literacy service delivery.

A flow chart showing funding streams for adult literacy, as the task force believes they are allocated at this point in time, was developed.



FUNDING TASK FORCE CONTINUED

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Coalition should initially target support to existing agencies that have demonstrated need. Both adult and children's literacy services should be supported and the Coalition charged with leveraging resources to maximize impact for those agencies serving adult and family literacy.
2. The Coalition should develop a structured approach to meeting community needs through a structured funding plan.
3. The Coalition should develop a certification course for all literacy providers through the Step Up to Quality program. This will assist in developing funding criteria and provide a basis for flow through support to providers.
4. Develop a common set of outcome measures for literacy providers and allow for funding based on performance (i.e., increase in reading levels; increased test scores; attendance and drop out rates; etc.).
5. The Coalition's board should make a concerted effort to target corporations not currently giving dollars to the Oklahoma City area.
6. Begin efforts to work with the State Department of Education to direct state funding to the Coalition based on a plan that includes diverse providers and geographic areas, as well as certified agencies and a common set of outcome measures.
7. Provide assistance with grant writing and offering support to increase the ability of providers to raise resources.
8. Provide joint fund raising activities so that collaborative proposals are developed through the support of the Coalition.
9. The Coalition should target high priority national grants to apply for on behalf of the community.

LEARNER RECRUITMENT, PLACEMENT AND RETENTION TASK FORCE

The task force charged itself to look at the needs of adults (age 18 and over) whose literacy skills were basic or below basic as well as out of school youth. To do this, the group interviewed agencies serving the population and learners who were in literacy programs. **The task force discovered that the best means of communication (promotion and recruitment) is word of mouth among learners.** Self motivation was the primary reason for learner persistence. Unfortunately, several populations were identified as underserved including the mentally challenged, immigrants and those without transportation and childcare.

THE GOALS WERE TO EXAMINE WHAT WORKS FOR RECRUITMENT, PLACEMENT AND RETENTION:

- *Strategies to increase numbers of persistent students*
- *Improvement of placement*
- *Provision of incentives*
- *Recommendations to build capacity of providers*
- *Strategies to remove learning barriers*
- *Ensuring learners are included in their learning and in the local decision making process*

The adult learner population not only needs literacy instruction, they need workforce support, health care support and life skills.

LEARNER RECRUITMENT, PLACEMENT AND RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Increase awareness of the issues in the community with a centralized outreach system.*
- *Increase awareness among learners of the solutions and benefits of attending programs.*
- *Establish an assistance phone line for learners and volunteers.*
- *Contextualize learning to the needs of learners and include workforce, health, computer, financial and family literacy options.*
- *Use word of mouth communication in churches and other organizations.*
- *Provide targeted support for ESOL learners.*
- *Maintain a committee of learners, volunteers and providers to advise the work of the Coalition.*
- *Pursue transportation assistance and childcare support.*
- *Emphasize self-pacing as means of retention.*
- *Establish learner support groups.*

The adult learner population not only needs **literacy instruction**, they need **workforce support, health care support and life skills.**



NON-PROFITS, SCHOOLS, FAITH-BASED, ESL TASK FORCE

The Task Force started with the goal of providing recommendations to strengthen programs, build capacity and develop partnerships to support non-profit providers, faith-based organizations, and schools/colleges providing literacy services.

The range of service providers in the metro area is very diverse and includes rehabilitative programs for prison re-entry, housing authority programs and homeless project literacy.

The Task Force examined the successes, challenges, and benefits to the community of various types of partnerships that could be formed through the Oklahoma City Metro Literacy Coalition. The group identified strategies to strengthen relationships among program providers as well as relationships with the community at large. It was concluded that the development of a referral system for learners, the enhancement of a centralized training component with opportunities to learn and

share, ongoing assistance with resource development, and the incorporation of higher education into community programs as areas with numerous possibilities for the Coalition's growth and expansion. The development of partnerships and the structuring of pipelines to create a lifelong continuum of learning were considered a major goal of the Coalition.

THE TASK FORCE MET MONTHLY FOR EIGHT MONTHS WITH FOCUSED DISCUSSIONS ON VARIOUS ISSUES THAT INCLUDED:

- Categories of literacy services for a directory.
- Types of services offered by various providers.
- Possibilities of mapping service providers.
- Referral services offered by others, i.e. 211.
- Encouraging programs to join the Coalition.
- The necessary ingredients for enticement to the Coalition.
- The various needs/challenges of programs.
- What the Coalition can offer to benefit programs and providers.
- Factors that effect success/challenge for programs.
- Roles of higher education in Oklahoma City's literacy arena.
- Identification of service gaps.
- Exploration of different types of partnerships in various Coalition models.

NON-PROFITS, SCHOOLS, FAITH-BASED, ESL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Coalition will provide a referral system for services.
- The Coalition's roles include the development of a website and a hotline.
- A mapping of services and providers will be included on the Coalition's website.
- The Coalition will offer assistance to providers with funding resources such as awareness of funding opportunities, grant writing, and group grant applications.
- The Coalition will provide training opportunities on a regular basis in several areas including resource development, volunteer management, grant writing, best instructional practices and specific training on requested or suggested literacy topics.
- The Coalition will incorporate forums and opportunities for providers and others to share information among its activities on a regular basis.
- The Coalition will continue to be inclusive for all organizations and entities concerned with literacy issues in the metro Oklahoma City area.

WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS TASK FORCE

The goal of this task force is to explore the relationship between the need for skilled workers and the roles the education and business communities can play to collaboratively meet those needs and improve literacy levels in the workplace.

There is a need to undertake a broad survey of employers to identify needs. **The Chamber of Commerce has identified the fact that many businesses have difficulty hiring skilled workers because limited literacy prevents potential workers from accessing better paying jobs.**

One of the problems with literacy in the workplace is lack of proficiency with the English language. Oklahoma City has several agencies which provide ESOL instruction and are great resources for organizations that have issues with non-English speaking workers. The American Institutes for Research has developed an adult literacy program, called the Workforce Research and Analysis Program as well as ESL programs and services. The Coalition should review and analyze their programs and others for successful strategies to aid Oklahoma City organizations with literacy in the workforce.

WORKFORCE LITERACY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Identify current organizations and planning activities that might inform the discussion.*
- *Encourage a common understanding about workforce literacy.*
- *Include needs of job seekers and incumbent workers in literacy training.*
- *Foster regional cooperation with multiple training entities.*
- *Suggest creative strategies to build a seamless ladder of services for pre and post employment.*
- *Explore the barriers to youth and adults as they encounter the workforce system.*
- *Provide suggestions of creative and innovative workforce development partnerships and workforce literacy opportunities.*
- *Assist in the creation of a coordinated system for workforce literacy effectively linking, strengthening, and building capacities of employers and adult education, literacy and vocational training services.*
- *Ensure the provision of high quality and customized literacy services to residents in the Oklahoma City metro area.*
- *Provide training to literacy providers to increase the level of contextualized content for work preparation for job seekers.*
- *Provide training to the business community about the need and benefits of literacy skills training as an investment in the future of the local economy.*
- *Support the Work Keys program adopted by the state. The Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development (GCWED) and many of its partner agencies are currently rolling out a system of assessment and certification designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers.*
- *Build a career-ready certificate program with a portable credential documenting that potential or incumbent employees possess certain fundamental skills required by employers here and across the country.*
- *Use nationally recognized assessments to measure skills and provide a common language between educators, businesses, and community members.*
- *Use the assessment system to validate the skills and skill levels of job seekers and compare them to the skills needed for jobs in today's economy.*

EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY TASK FORCE

The Evaluation and Accountability Task Force has developed some measurements that can be used by the Board of Directors to evaluate the progress of the Coalition providers, but also determine how effective the Coalition organization will be in coordinating the literacy initiative and getting the message out to the general public. **One guiding principle used by this task force was to develop and to use measurements that were simple, understandable and common to most of the providers.** Consequently, the task force recommends the following items to measure the progress of improving literacy in the Oklahoma City metro area:

HEADCOUNT - *The number of students who have received an initial assessment of their abilities- "Numbers Served."*

RETENTION - *The number of students assessed who successfully complete the first 6 weeks of instruction with further breakdowns of three months, six months and one year.*

IMPROVEMENT - *The number of students who have progressed one or more educational functioning levels (EFL) in either reading, language or math. Other benchmarks might be for workforce, financial, health and family literacy.*

STANDARDIZED TOOLS - *An agreement is needed to determine the measurement tools that will be used for gathering data.*

GED - *For those programs offering GED preparation classes, the number of students who have received a GED diploma.*

The task force determined that the Coalition needs to evaluate itself and its relationship with the providers, learners and the general public. In order to accomplish this objective, the following measurements are suggested:

TUTOR TRAINING - *The number of training sessions that have been conducted or the number of tutors who have been trained.*

HOT LINE REFERRALS - *The number of referrals that have been made, assuming a hot line exists.*

WEBSITE HITS - *The number of contacts (hits) to the Coalition's website.*

RESOURCES RAISED - *Number of applications and percentage of success.*

IN-KIND RESOURCES DISTRIBUTED - *The number of items distributed, such as the distribution of books, educational materials, curriculum, etc.*

MARKETING AND OUTREACH - *Benchmarks for awareness raising will be set.*

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES:

Providers currently use a variety of databases and evaluation techniques. This presented a challenge in developing a uniform evaluation system as we did not want the Coalition to create additional requirements for the service providers. Consequently, we decided to keep it simple and use procedures which are fairly common in the literacy community. The measurements offered to the Board of Directors can be used to evaluate how effective the providers are performing versus a base period, such as 2006 or 2007. The Board can also use the same process to evaluate how well their organization is performing versus a base period or their goals.

CENTRALIZED TRACKING:

A centralized system will be used by the Coalition to collect all the data the task force has identified. This system will be used to determine progress toward goals. Data will be analyzed and used for on-going improvement strategies and technical assistance will be provided where needed to help providers in attaining targets.

MARKETING TASK FORCE

MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Develop a marketing plan to ensure that literacy becomes a major priority in the community, to recruit and retain learners from across the age spectrum, and develop a campaign with both general messages to the entire community and targeted messages to specific audiences.*
- *Identify the various marketing audiences including learners, volunteers, etc., and determine marketing needs for each group.*
- *Identify organizations working on similar issues and building literacy plans - request the literacy plans of those groups and determine ways to collaborate.*
- *Suggest strategies for an outreach campaign to increase enrollment.*
- *Identify strategies to partner with radio, TV, print and other media.*

A successful campaign for literacy **must both educate and inspire** Oklahoma City metro area to:

- Learn more about literacy.
- Acknowledge the impact of literacy on economic development and quality of life in our region.
- Seek ways to become involved individually or through business, government, and faith and community-based groups.
- Fully support the efforts of all literacy stakeholders in the transition to collaborative efforts.
- Encourage and facilitate employees and community members who take an initiative to improve their literacy.



APPENDIX 1: TASK FORCE PARTICIPANTS

Thank you to all who have worked so hard to put this report together, especially the co-chairs of the task forces. A special note of thanks to Sandra W. LeVan, our facilitator throughout the task force meetings.

COORDINATING TEAM

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Mrs. Becky O'Dell
Mrs. Beth Patterson
Mrs. Mary Surbeck
Mrs. D.J. Thompson

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Mrs. Mary Surbeck

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Mr. Eddie Foreman - Co-chair
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Mr. Randy Chandler
Ms. Barbara Loudermilk
Ms. Monica A. Mahon

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Mr. Tom Martin, Co-Chair
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Ms. Melanie Anthony
Ms. Debbie Bell
Ms. Jessica Martinez-Brooks
Ms. Masie Bross
Ms. Char Carter
Ms. Carmen Clay
Ms. Katie Fitzgerald
Mr. Douglas M. Gibson
Ms. Beatriz Meyer
Dr. Gail Nash
Mrs. Beth Patterson
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Mrs. Jamie Farha, Co-Chair
Ms. Alisa Allen
Mr. Charles de Coune
Ms. Patricia Fennell
Ms. Stacy Dykstra
Ms. Susan Frantz
Ms. Kristin Epperson Smith
Ms. Cindy Storck
Ms. Alexis Combs
Ms. Charlotte Wyatt
Ms. Dana Morrow
Ms. Susan Donchin

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Mr. Josh Beasley, Co-Chair
Ms. Pam Blundell
Mr. Erin Carlstrom
Ms. Julie Collins
Dr. Marny Dunlap
Ms. Mary Young

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Mrs. D.J. Thompson, Co-Chair
Mr. Matt Bown
Ms. Lee Ann Bratten
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Ms. Vicki Land
Ms. Donna Morris
Mrs. Chris Morriss

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Ms. Eleanor Goetzinger
Mr. Marion Jowaisis
Mr. Terry Miller
Mr. Ronald Paddock
Ms. Anita Roesler
Ms. DeVoria Gaines-Ruffin
Mrs. Lathonya Shivers

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Mr. John McCarroll, Co-Chair
Ms. Elizabeth Bailey
Mr. Scott Coppenbarger
Mrs. Mary Delafield
Ms. Betty Gordon
Ms. Lori Holliday
Ms. Katie Price
Mr. Ed Pulido

CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION TASK FORCE

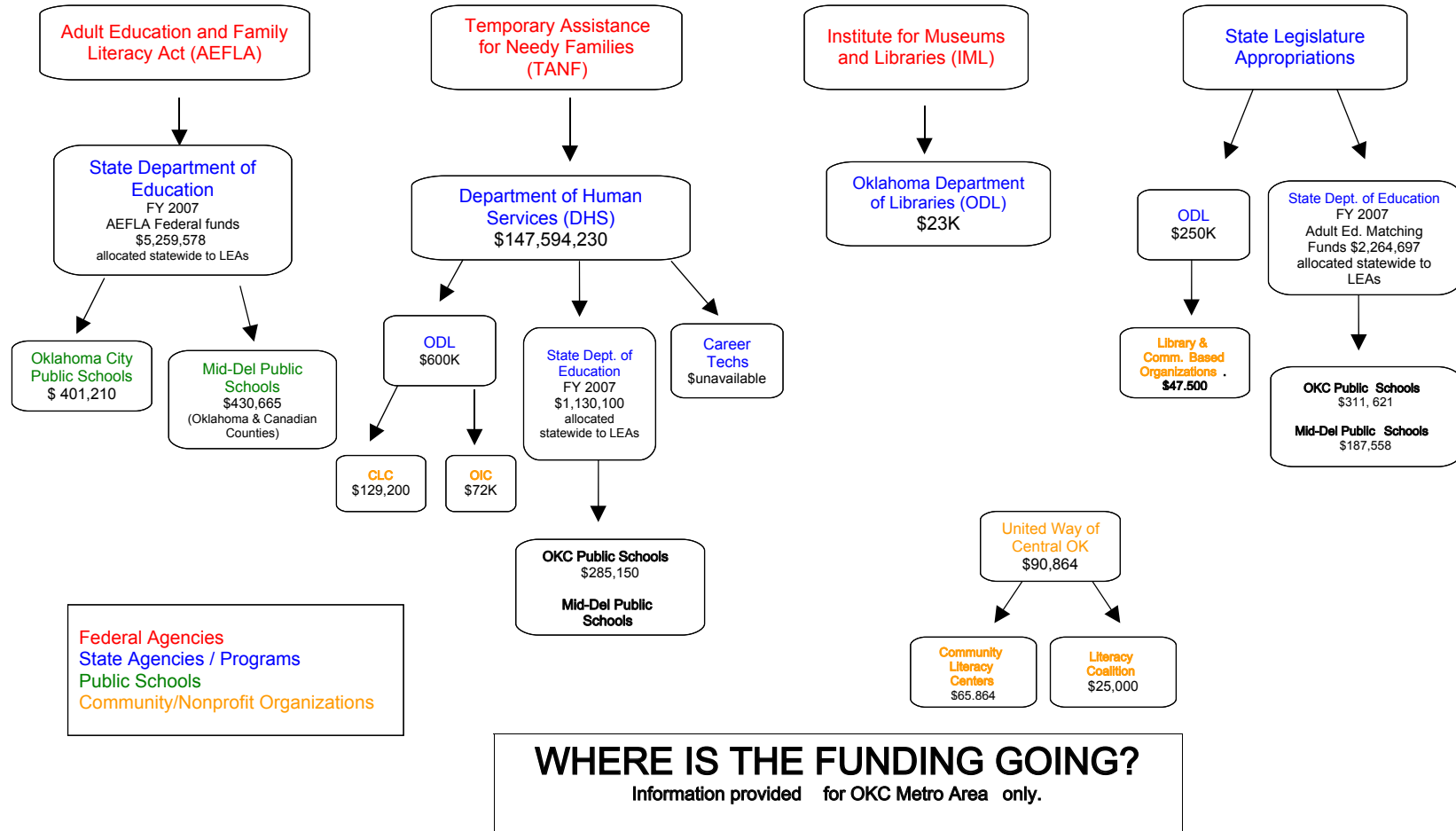
Mrs. Patricia Kelly, Co-Chair
Mrs. Alisa Dorman, Co-Chair
Ms. Carrie Brown, PhD.
Ms. Shannon Carter
Ms. Stephanie Curtis
Ms. Arlene Nelson
Mrs. Karla Wallace
Ms. Charlotte Wood-Wilson
Ms. Shannon Carter

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Oklahoma
Capitol Hill Technology Center (OCCC)
Celebrations!
Community Action Partnership
Community Action Program
Community Literacy Centers
Council Road Baptist Church
Early Head Start – Sunbeam Family Services
East Sixth Street Christian Church
El Centro de Oportunidades
Even Start Program-Oklahoma City
Even Start – Putnam City
Faithworks Inner City – Shidler Elementary School
Head Start Programs (Community Action Program)
H.O.P.E. Ministries
Junior League of Oklahoma City
Latino Community Development Agency
LEAP Program of Trinity International Baptist Church
Meadowood Baptist Church
Metro Library Outreach
Metropolitan Library System
Metro-Tech
Mid-Del Adult Learning Center
Northeast Resource Center
Oklahoma Christian University

Oklahoma City Community College
Oklahoma City Community Foundation
Oklahoma City Literacy Council
Oklahoma City Public Schools Adult Learning Center
Oklahoma City University
Oklahoma Department of Education
Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care
Oklahoma Department of Libraries
Oklahoma Educational Television Authority
Oklahoma Literacy Resource Office
Oklahoma Parents as Teachers
Opportunities Industrialization Center
Payne Education Center
Positive Tomorrows
Project Read
Project Transformation
Putnam City Baptist Church
Rainbow Fleet
RSVP of Central Oklahoma
Smart Start of Central Oklahoma
TEEM
United Urban Indian Council
United Way of Central Oklahoma
Whiz Kids
Workforce Oklahoma

APPENDIX 3: FUNDING SOURCES



Oklahoma City Metro Literacy Coalition



P.O. Box 14456
Oklahoma City, OK 73113

www.okcliteracycoalition.org
