

DELAWARE  
**Literacy  
Alliance**



 Delaware  
Communities  
of Excellence

# The State of Literacy in Delaware Delaware Literacy Alliance Plan 2024-2027



**DelawareLibraries**



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### The Delaware Literacy Alliance gratefully acknowledges the following:

- Division of Libraries for backbone leadership and funding
- PMG Consulting for assessment, project management, and report
- Literacy Delaware for its partnership and collaborative efforts
- The Delaware Literacy Alliance Advisory Board for their continued support and advocacy. (Please find a full list of Advisory Board members in the appendices)
- National and state literacy champions who shared their data and perspectives:
  - Interviewees
  - Focus Group Members
  - Survey Participants
- National partners who collaborated and supported efforts to disseminate and collect information for the landscape analysis and facilitate the creation of the Delaware Literacy Alliance:
  - Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN), administered by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
  - The International Literacy Association (ILA)
  - The National Skills Coalition
  - GOAL Collective, administered by the Tennessee College Access and Success Network
- State partners who collaborated and supported efforts to disseminate and collect information for the landscape analysis and facilitate the creation of the Delaware Literacy Alliance:
  - Delaware Division of Libraries
  - Delaware Department of Education
  - Sussex County Health Coalition
  - Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement
  - United Way of Delaware
- All interviewees, focus group participants, and survey participants shared their time and perspectives. All quotes provided in this report have been approved for release by the individuals.

## FOREWORD

Today, we stand united, driven by a shared vision of a literate Delaware where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. We are humbled by the support and collaboration of our fellow advocates.

The journey toward literacy is a challenge and a calling for us all. We have witnessed the transformative power of literacy and its profound impact on individuals, families, and communities. Yet, we also recognize the persistent gaps that remain, requiring us to push beyond the boundaries of conventional approaches.

Within the pages of this report, you will find the wisdom and experiences of experts who have played a pivotal role in shaping literacy initiatives in Delaware. From renowned educators and community leaders to dedicated volunteers and passionate learners, their voices resound with hope, determination, and a shared belief in the life-changing power of literacy. It is a testament to the tireless work, resilience, and unwavering determination of countless individuals who have dedicated their lives to promoting literacy in our state.

As co-chairs, through the Delaware Literacy Alliance, we are harnessing the power of collaboration, learning from proven methodologies, and drawing inspiration from renowned frameworks such as Baldrige, Lean, and Collective Impact. We are thrilled to share these insights with you, providing a roadmap for collective action and sustainable change. We extend our deepest gratitude to all the contributors, partners, and supporters who have played a vital role in bringing this report to fruition. Your unwavering dedication and belief in the power of literacy have made this collaborative endeavor possible.

We firmly believe that achieving a literate Delaware is not a solitary pursuit but a collective endeavor that transcends boundaries and unites us all. The Delaware Literacy Alliance has fostered a spirit of collaboration, inviting stakeholders from various sectors, including education, health, workforce, and nonprofits, to join forces. Together, we will continue to create a platform where diverse perspectives, innovative ideas, and best practices converge.

This report marks a new beginning. It is an invitation for each reader to join us on this journey. We urge you to not only absorb the knowledge within these pages but let it ignite your passion, spark conversations, and inspire action. Let us continue to empower lives, uplift communities, and make literacy a fundamental right for all Delawareans. Together, we can pave the way for a literate Delaware where literacy opportunities flourish, where dreams are nurtured, and where success knows no bounds!

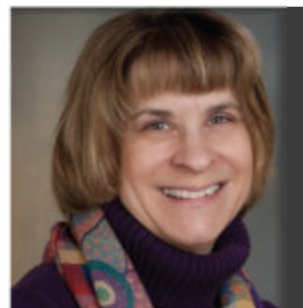
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**Dr. Annie Norman**  
State Librarian  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Delaware Division of Libraries, in partnership with the state's leading adult literacy organization, Literacy Delaware, has launched efforts to understand the Delaware literacy landscape and seek opportunities to address the literacy needs of Delaware residents. The newly launched Delaware Literacy Alliance (DLA) was formed during these efforts to focus on providing a

more equitable landscape and enhancing the quality of life for Delaware residents. Through a facilitated process of bringing together statewide stakeholders, efforts have united to form a comprehensive literacy ecosystem that promotes literacy for all.

## DELAWARE IN NUMBERS

*Of the nearly*

**1 million**   
residents, almost half are library  
card holders



**48**

Local Education Agencies  
*Including charter schools*



**3**  
Counties



**19**

School Districts

*Additionally,  
there are*



**57**  
Municipalities<sup>1</sup>



**33**

Public libraries  
across the state<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Delaware's state website: <https://delaware.gov/guides/municipalities>

<sup>2</sup> From the Delaware Libraries website: <https://lib.de.us/list-of-libraries/>



## THE “WHY”

Approximately **130 million** adults lack basic proficiency, and **43 million** adults cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third grade level<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately Delaware’s statistics are in alignment with these national metrics. Approximately **20.3 percent** of adults within the state have low literacy, causing Delaware to rank **26** out of the 50 states for literacy rates<sup>5</sup> (a ranking of states based on literacy rates is provided in **Appendix A**). At least **56 percent** of Delawareans are not proficient readers, **with roughly 129,649 reading below a third grade reading level**<sup>6</sup>.

Adults are not the only state residents who suffer from low literacy. Of the **141,729** students enrolled in Delaware schools during the 2021-2022 school year, **only 42 percent** were deemed proficient in language arts, and **only 29 percent** were proficient in math<sup>7</sup>. The percentage of third graders who read at grade level has steadily

decreased, from **54 percent** in 2015 to **35 percent** in 2021<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the average reading scores for 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students have steadily decreased for the past decade<sup>9</sup>. As of 2019, only **26 percent** of 12th grade students scored at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math assessment<sup>10</sup>, and only **37 percent** of 12th grade students read at or above the proficient level on the NAEP<sup>11</sup>.

**Across the nation, systems intended to develop literacy levels are failing, resulting in children and adults being unable to realize their full potential. Children fall further and further behind academically and adults experience significant barriers to success in the ever-evolving workforce, affecting them economically, as well as in their roles of family and community members.**

<sup>3</sup>From the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy: <https://map.barbarabush.org>

<sup>4</sup>From the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy: <https://map.barbarabush.org/assets/cards/BBFFL-Literacy-Card-DE.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>From the Barbara Bush Foundation: <https://map.barbarabush.org/assets/cards/BBFFL-Literacy-Card-DE.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>From July 2022 PIAAC Data from Literacy Delaware.

<sup>7</sup>From the Delaware Report Card: <https://reportcard.doe.k12.de.us/detail.html#aboutpage?scope=state&district=0&school=0>

<sup>8</sup>From the CORE Clear Impact RBA Scorecard.

<sup>9</sup>From the National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cnb/reading-performance>

<sup>10</sup>From the National Science Foundation: <https://www.nsf.gov/nsb/sei/edTool/data/highschool-06.html?toggle=0>





<sup>11</sup>From the Nation’s Report Card: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2019/g12/>



## COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

The **Delaware Literacy Alliance** operates from a collective impact model facilitated by the nationally recognized Baldrige Excellence Framework<sup>12</sup>. Known as the **Communities of Excellence (COE)**, this framework promotes the idea that large-scale social change requires broad, cross-sector coordination.

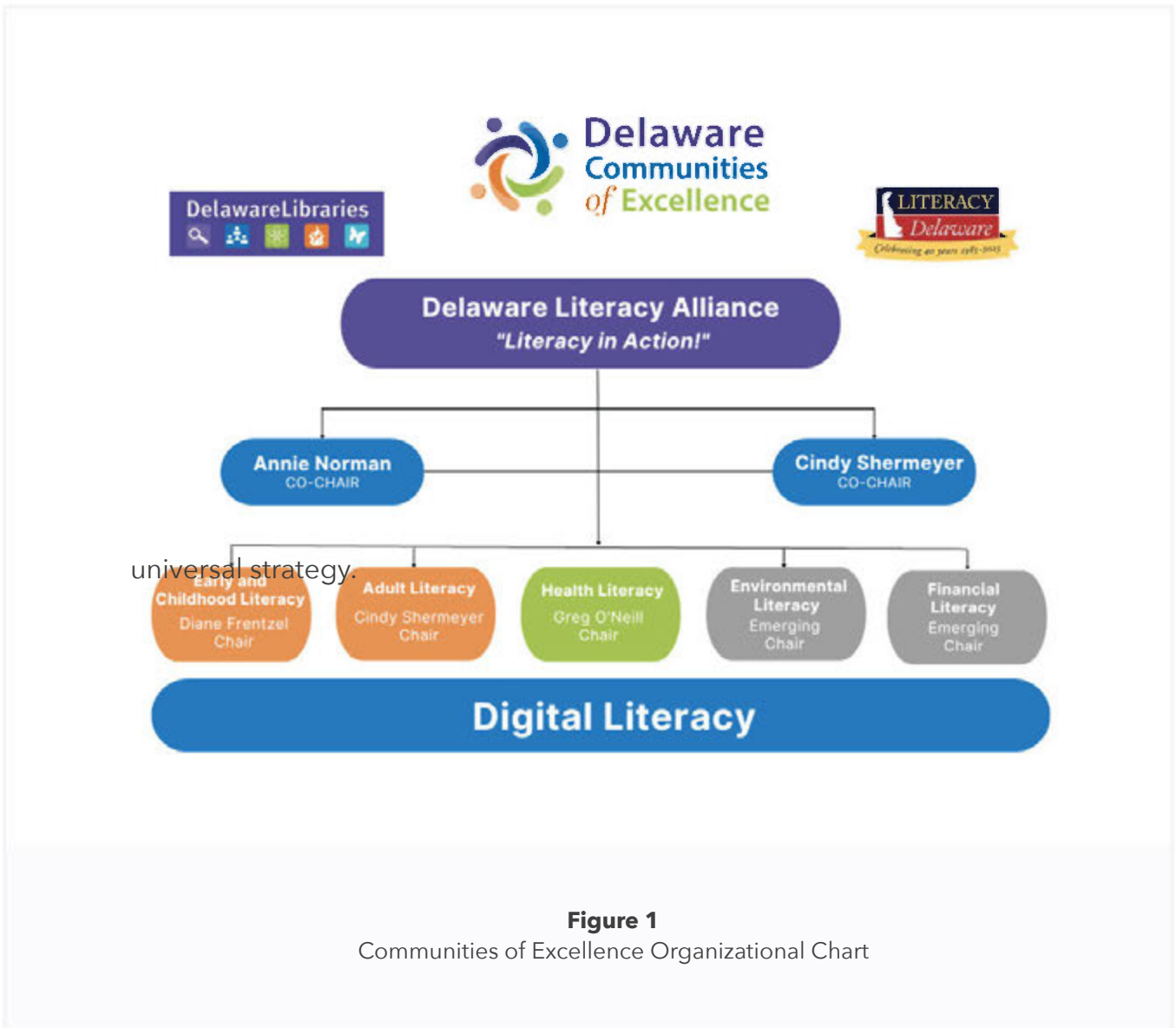
The core values of **Communities of Excellence** consist of **Equity, Respect, Collaboration, and Adaptability**:

-  **Equity:** We value and will ensure that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity are embedded in all of the work that we do.
-  **Respect:** Our behaviors and work reflect our values through transparent, empathetic, and trusting relationships, which honor an individual's privacy.
-  **Collaboration:** As the catalyst for Delaware Communities of Excellence, collaboration will allow opportunities for the community, partners, and individuals to be engaged, acknowledged, and heard.
-  **Adaptability:** We will be agile, continuous learners as we adapt to the changing needs of our collaborative and the community for which it serves.

The **Delaware Literacy Alliance** serves as the foundational council and is supported through the backbone organization, the **Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL)**. Initiated in 2021, The Alliance serves as this work's fundamental and definitive guide. Inclusive, partner-engaged subcommittees have been developed to create an understanding of issues, align work, foster innovation, and seek to address specific targeted literacy needs throughout the state. The Delaware Literacy Alliance will work to address obstacles and gaps in programming while accelerating promising practices for literacy across the lifespan. A list of Alliance members, as well as an organizational chart detailing the structure and subcommittee chairs, is provided in **Appendix B**. Please note that digital literacy is an underpinning that is threaded through all subcommittees as a universal strategy.

<sup>12</sup>From the National Institute of Standards and Technology: <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellence-framework>





**Figure 1**  
Communities of Excellence Organizational Chart

The coalescing of key stakeholders and community partners is the strong foundation that supports this work focusing on enhancing the quality of life for all Delawareans. **The Delaware Literacy Alliance envisions a cohesive and comprehensive literacy ecosystem that ensures equity and inclusion throughout the state. This will result in a north star goal of a 100 percent literate Delaware, where every resident can truly thrive.**

The COE team welcomes your participation in this vital work.

## OVERVIEW OF LANDSCAPE METHODOLOGY

This investigation is a mixed-methods study of literacy within the Delaware landscape, inclusive of all age groups; it relates to the vast majority of the state population. The process used both qualitative and quantitative information gathering to inform the work and included up to 300 individuals in the process.

The **quantitative** portion of the research included authoritative data to describe the size and demographics of the state's population, delineate the scope of the current understanding of literacy and basic education, and compare Delaware data to that of the nation. The **qualitative** portion of the research included a community-engaged design process and deployed a three-pronged approach consisting of key informant interviews, focus group sessions, and a community-based survey. The information was consolidated and culminated in a comprehensive outline of key themes using the **SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results)** methodology. The qualitative data adds a crucial measure of depth to the data collected by ensuring the voice of the community through key partners and the consumers themselves.

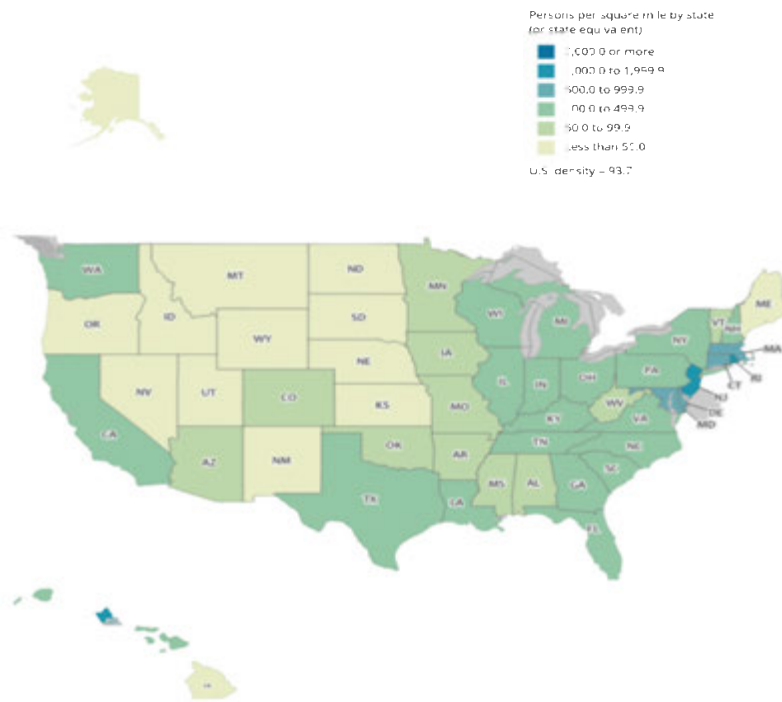
*Recognizing limitations in specific populations will be addressed on page 31.*



## NATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The landscape analysis sought to deliver a holistic view of the Delaware literacy landscape as it relates to national benchmarks. Recognizing that social determinants of health impact communities' literacy levels, we have identified key factors that, statistically speaking, may place persons at-risk for low literacy or, inversely, where low literacy places them at risk for poor social outcomes. These variables were selected based on the availability of data and their correlation to literacy according to national research. Below, we provide national statistics as a framework for understanding and comparing state data.

### Population



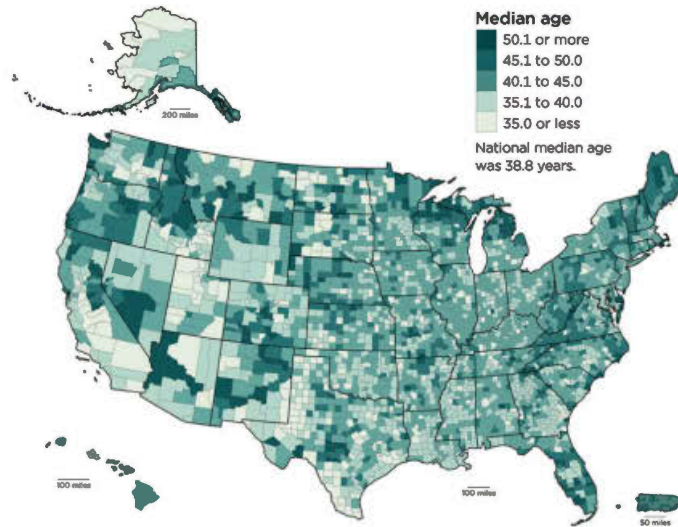
**Figure 2**

Population Distribution Across the United States

<https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=2566121a73de463995ed2b2fd7ff6eb7>

We see in **Figure 1** that the northeast region of the nation has some of the highest population densities. Delaware is one of the **most densely** populated states, despite being the second smallest state in the country. Subsequent figures display in more detail the nature of the nation's population regarding age distribution, ethnic age distribution, ethnic distribution, poverty rates, and household income.

## Age Distribution



**Figure 3**

Age Distribution Across the United States

<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2022/comm/aging-nation-median-age.html>

**Figure 3** provides an age distribution across the nation by county. As this map indicates, the United States is aging, with a national median age of **38.8 years**. Delaware has a noticeable discrepancy in aging, with a geographic pattern of younger persons residing in more northern regions of the state and adults 50 and older mostly living in southern areas.

## Ethnicity Distribution

Race and Hispanic Origin	Race and Hispanic Origin
White alone	75.8%
Black or African American alone	13.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	1.3%
Asian alone	6.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.3%
Two or More Races	2.9%
Hispanic or Latino	18.9%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	59.3%

**Figure 4**

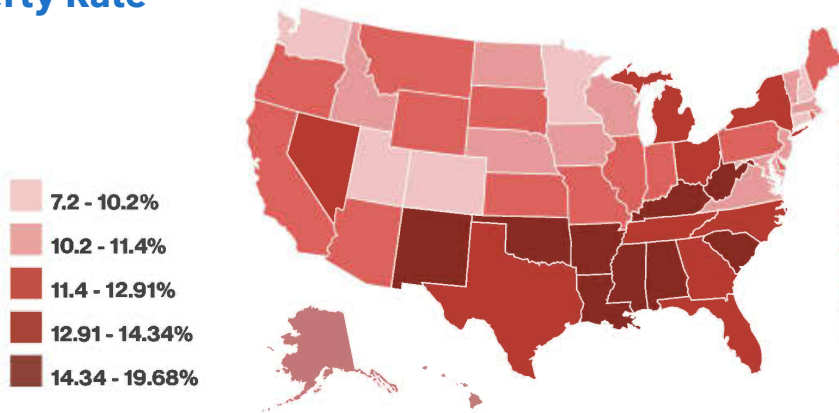
Racial Composite of the United States

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>

We see in **Figure 4** the ethnic distribution for the United States. Please note that Hispanics may be of any race, so they are included in all race categories. As a result, the percentages associated with the “Hispanic or Latino” and the “White alone” categories do not count toward the total; they merely serve as additional descriptors of ethnicity for the other categories.



## Poverty Rate



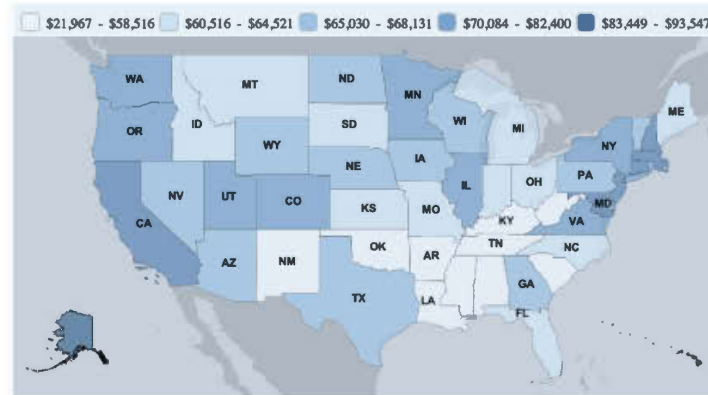
**Figure 5**

Official Poverty Rates Across the United States

<https://www.americanprogress.org/data-view/poverty-data/poverty-data-map-tool/>

In **Figure 5**, we see a geographical display of the percentage of American residents in poverty across the nation. Poverty is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as people who fall below the national poverty line, which is \$27,479 for a family of four<sup>13</sup>. Approximately **37.6 million** people in the United States are in poverty, or roughly **11.6 percent** of the population<sup>14</sup>. Note that Delaware is indicated to have a poverty rate in the third highest range, **11.4-12.91 percent**.

## Median Household Income



**Figure 6**

Median Household Income from 2017-2021 Across the United States

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/map//INC110221>

We see in **Figure 6** a geographical reflection of median household incomes for the state. Although the northeast region boasts some of the highest income rates, Delaware is noticeably lighter, indicating a lower income rate than neighboring states. Specific state demographics are provided in the following section.

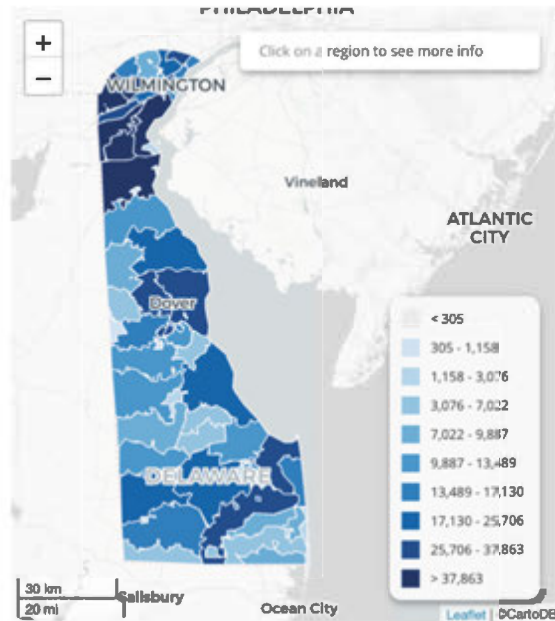
<sup>13</sup> From the Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/data-view/poverty-data/poverty-data-map-tool/>

<sup>14</sup> From the Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/data-view/poverty-data/>

## DELAWARE STATE DEMOGRAPHICS

The following state demographic information provides a high-level description of a growing state that, like the nation, must navigate complex inequities from various layers regarding populations and literacy. These layers include investment in social services, geographical positioning, age, targeted demographics, and communities, as well as many others. We are highly aware of the intricacies surrounding inequity within our state and nation and understand their impact on the literacy landscape. We do our best to exhibit the inequities tied to literacy within this analysis.

### Population



**Figure 7**

Population Distribution Within Delaware [https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/community-overview#POPULATION\\_TOTAL](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/community-overview#POPULATION_TOTAL)

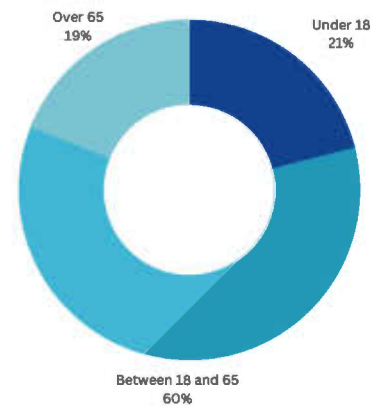
We see in **Figure 7** that the most densely populated areas within Delaware are in the northern and southeastern parts of the state. As of May 9, 2023, there are 967,679 persons living within the state, with a population density of 497 people per square mile<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>From Equity Counts Data Center: [https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/community-overview#POPULATION\\_TOTAL#POPULATION\\_TOTAL\\_COUNT](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/community-overview#POPULATION_TOTAL#POPULATION_TOTAL_COUNT)



## Age

Age Group	Count	Percent of Population
Under 18	204,207	21.0%
Between 18 and 65	581,448	60.0%
Over 65	182,024	19.0%



**Figure 8**

Age Distribution for Delaware

<https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/locations/state/community-characteristics>

**Figure 8** details the age breakdown of residents within Delaware. **The majority of residents are between 18 and 65**, with a median age for the state resting at 41. It is interesting to note that those under 18 and those over 65 are nearly equal, at **21 percent** and **19 percent**, respectively.

## Ethnicity

Population by Race 2021

Race	Count	Percent of Population
White	652,587	67.0%
Black	212,795	22.0%
Asian	38,528	4.0%
Two or More Races	37,567	4.0%
Other Race	21,937	2.0%
Native American	3,560	0.0%
Pacific Islander	705	0.0%

Ethnicity	Count	Percent of Population
Non-Hispanic	876,329	91.0%
Hispanic	91,350	9.0%



**Figure 10**

Ethnic Distribution for Delaware

<https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/locations/state/community-characteristics>

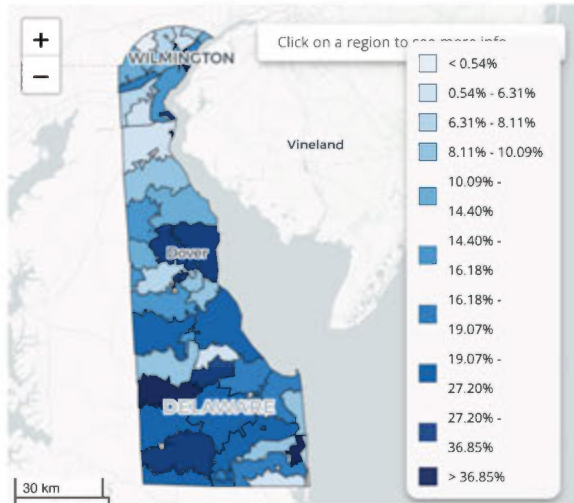
As **Figure 10** shows, exactly **91 percent** of residents identify as non-Hispanic<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> From My Healthy Community: Community Characteristics: <https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/locations/state/community-characteristics>



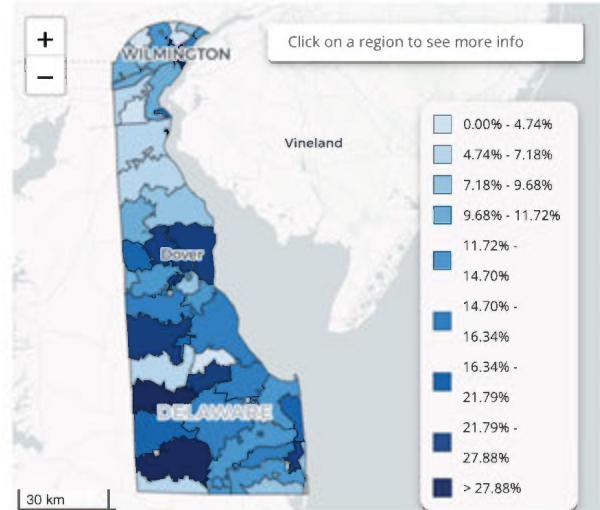
## Poverty

Delaware tracks family poverty and child poverty rates individually. Below, **Figure 11** and **Figure 12** indicate current poverty rates for both families and children, respectively.



**Figure 11**

Map of Family Poverty Rate in Delaware  
<https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/wealth-creation>



**Figure 12**

Map of Child Poverty Rate in Delaware  
<https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/wealth-creation>

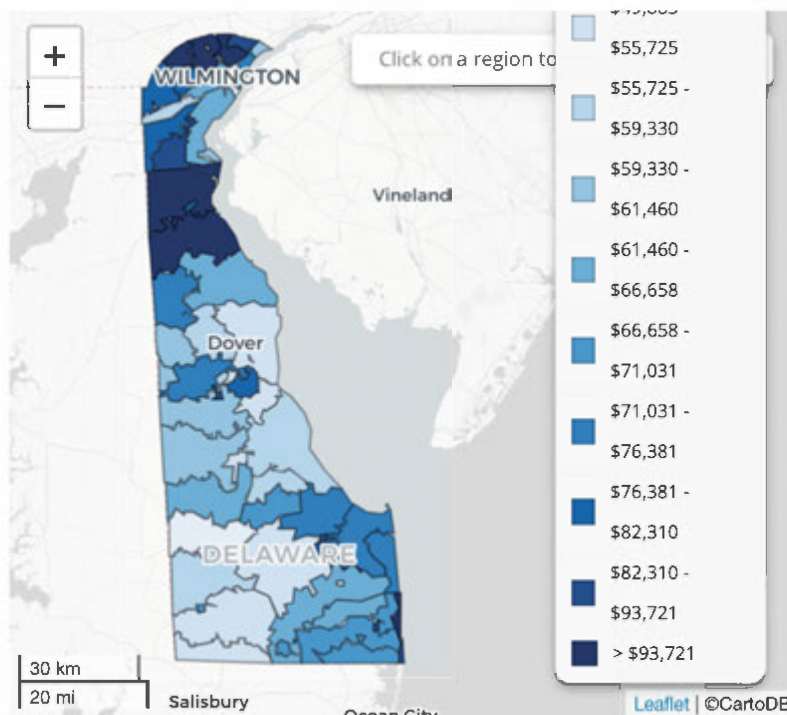
The definition of poverty used for these figures is identical to the one used by the Census Bureau- people who fall below the national poverty line, which is \$27,479 for a family of four<sup>17</sup>. Additionally, the state provides further clarification on the definition of poverty. If the total income for an individual falls below the relevant poverty threshold, that individual is considered living in poverty. The same holds true for families. The state clarifies, "The Census Bureau uses a set of dollar income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If the total income for a family...falls below the relevant poverty threshold, then the family (and every individual in it)... is considered in poverty<sup>18</sup>." **Please note that the child poverty rate of 17.33 percent is higher than the 13.69 percent poverty rate for families.**

<sup>17</sup>From the Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/data-view/poverty-data/poverty-data-map-tool/>

<sup>18</sup>From Equity Counts Data Center: <https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/wealth-creation>

## Median Household Income

As of May 9, 2023, the median household income for Delaware is **\$72,724**. **Figure 13** below details the spread of income across the state. As the map indicates, people who earn a higher income live mainly in the northern region of the state, followed by the southeastern region.



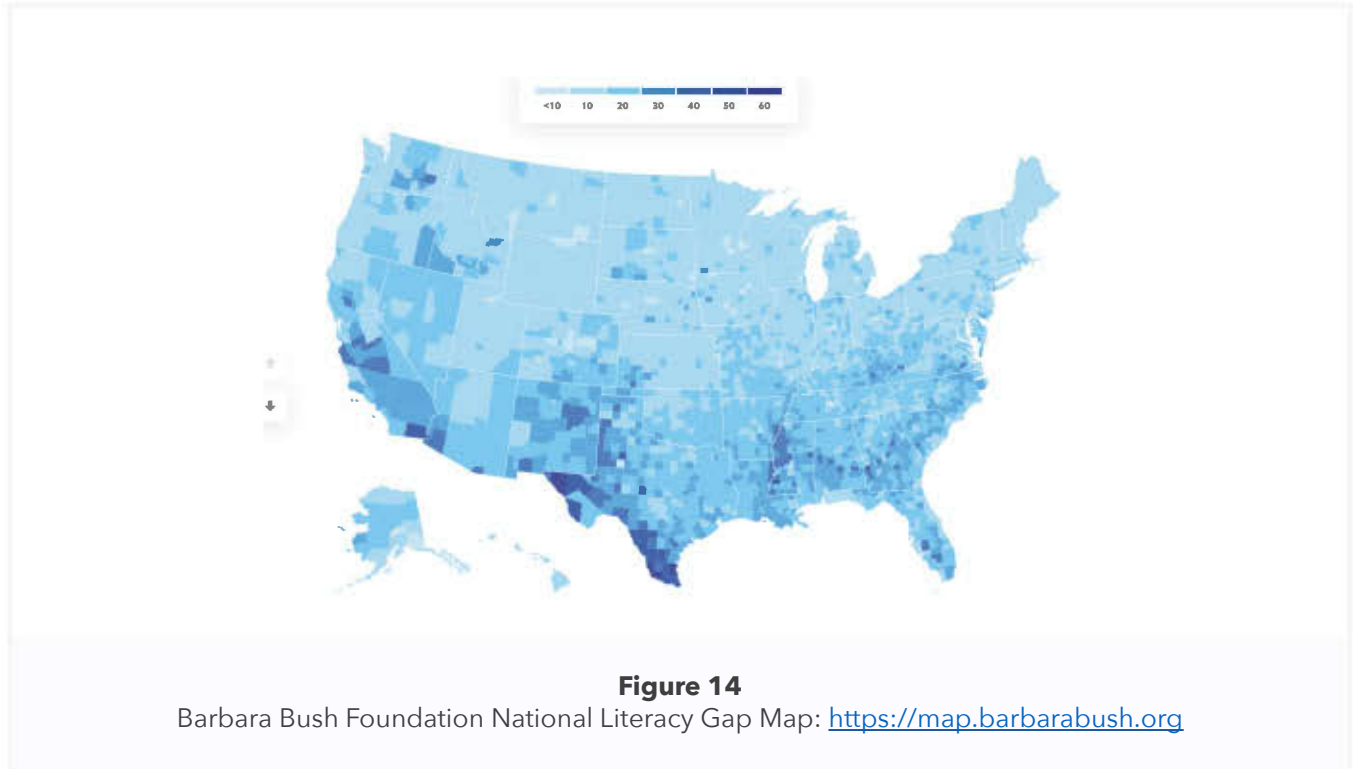
**Figure 13**

Map of Median Household Income in Delaware

[https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/wealth-creation#MEDIAN\\_HOUSEHOLD\\_INCOME\\_CENSUS\\_TOTAL\\_DOLLARS](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/wealth-creation#MEDIAN_HOUSEHOLD_INCOME_CENSUS_TOTAL_DOLLARS)

## CURRENT NATIONAL LITERACY METRICS

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy estimates that **low levels of adult literacy could be costing the U.S. as much as \$2.2 trillion a year and causing businesses to lose about \$225 billion in annual revenue**<sup>19</sup>. According to the Barbara Bush Foundation (2020), by bringing all adults to a sixth-grade reading level, an additional 10 percent of GDP would be generated in annual income for the country<sup>20</sup>.



**Figure 14** provides a map of literacy levels based on the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) scores. The PIAAC is a skills-based survey conducted in over 40 countries that measures proficiency in key information-processing components (literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving)<sup>21</sup>. Administered every ten years, the assessment is given to adults ages 16 to 65 and is designed to provide valid results for comparative analysis cross-culturally and internationally, despite linguistic differences. Lighter shades on the map indicate higher levels of literacy, while darker hues signify lower levels.

The assessment provides a more robust understanding of how education and training systems influence adult learning. However, it must be noted that although individual PIAAC assessments regularly take place via the Education and Skills Online Assessment, the last national assessment for adult literacy took place in 2003<sup>22</sup>. It could be posited that, based on current literacy metrics available at the state and county levels, these findings are relatively similar. However, recent data on literacy across the nation remains scarce.

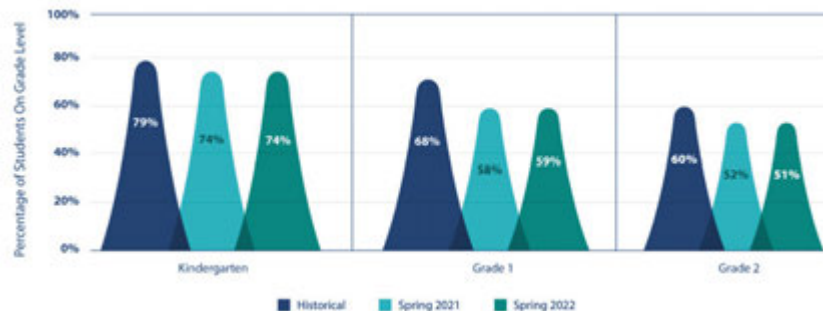
<sup>19</sup>From the Barbara Bush Foundation: <https://www.barbarabush.org/new-economic-study/>

<sup>20</sup>From the Barbara Bush Foundation: <https://www.barbarabush.org/state-and-city-literacy-snapshots/>

<sup>21</sup>From OECD Skills Surveys: <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>

<sup>22</sup>From National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/history.asp>

## Elementary and Middle School Literacy



**Figure 15**

National Percentage of Students on Grade Level in Kindergarten Through Second Grade  
[https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm\\_source=PartnerSocial\\_IRE-1381048&utm\\_medium=social\\_Display&utm\\_content=annual-research&utm\\_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp\\_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui\\_iouBoblHfjnl](https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm_source=PartnerSocial_IRE-1381048&utm_medium=social_Display&utm_content=annual-research&utm_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui_iouBoblHfjnl)

Curriculum Associates, a company dedicated to developing instructional and diagnostic materials for educators, conducted a nationwide study using a sample of nearly two million students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. **Figure 15** displays percentages of students on grade level from kindergarten through 2nd grade. As the graph shows, **deficits are noted in all three grades**. Curriculum Associates explains, “Explicit and systematic phonics instruction is core...Our research shows that in the foundational reading domain of phonics, **fewer students are on target for meeting grade-level expectations than before the pandemic**<sup>23</sup>.”

Only **67 percent of 3rd-grade students assessed in reading performed on grade level** in spring 2022, which is below the historical rate of **72 percent**<sup>24</sup>. We see in **Figure 16** that **percentages of students reading at or above grade level in grades 1 through 8 are still behind historical averages**.

<sup>23</sup> From *Areas of Concern in Foundational Reading*: [https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm\\_source=PartnerSocial\\_IRE-1381048&utm\\_medium=social\\_Display&utm\\_content=annual-research&utm\\_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp\\_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui\\_iouBoblHfjnl](https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm_source=PartnerSocial_IRE-1381048&utm_medium=social_Display&utm_content=annual-research&utm_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui_iouBoblHfjnl)

<sup>24</sup> From *K-12 Dive*: <https://www.k12dive.com/news/only-67-of-3rd-graders-performed-at-grade-level-in-reading-this-spring/631871/>





**Figure 16**

National Spring 2022 Percentages of Students on Grade Level in Reading

[https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm\\_source=PartnerSocial\\_IRE-1381048&utm\\_medium=social\\_Display&utm\\_content=annual-research&utm\\_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp\\_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui\\_iouBoblHfjnl](https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm_source=PartnerSocial_IRE-1381048&utm_medium=social_Display&utm_content=annual-research&utm_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui_iouBoblHfjnl)

The most significant variances occur in grades 1 through 3, which are critical educational periods for establishing the foundational reading skills necessary for long-term academic success. Although the pandemic exacerbated barriers to learning, it must be noted that this issue existed well before COVID-19; **less than half of middle school students were on grade level before the pandemic**<sup>25</sup>. In 2019, only one-third of all students in 4th grade were proficient in reading and mathematics, with even fewer Black and Latino students meeting the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) proficiency standards<sup>26</sup>.

The NAEP, also known as the Nation’s Report Card, is administered by the United States Department of Education and is infamous for its continual assessment of American students. The most common assessment is given to a sample of public and private school students in 4th and 8th grades bi-annually, with 12th-grade students assessed less frequently<sup>27</sup>. These assessments provide a snapshot of student proficiency across a range of subjects, of which reading and writing are paramount.

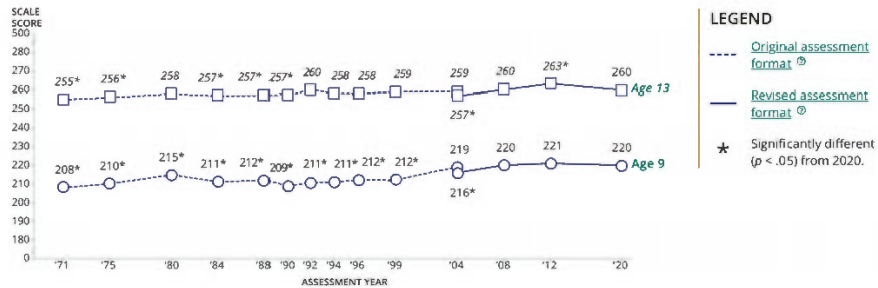
The NAEP also monitors the academic performances of a sample of 9-, 13-, and 17- year old students exclusively in reading and math through lesser-known tests known as Long-Term Trend (LTT) Assessments. Unlike the NAEP assessments, which are based on grade level, the LTT assessments are based solely on a student’s age. The LTT assessments have been conducted and results analyzed, for over five decades, providing a longitudinal understanding of academic performance across a student’s educational journey.

<sup>25</sup>From the State of Student Learning 2022: [https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm\\_source=PartnerSocial\\_IRE-1381048&utm\\_medium=social\\_Display&utm\\_content=annual-research&utm\\_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp\\_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui\\_iouBoblHfjnl](https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm_source=PartnerSocial_IRE-1381048&utm_medium=social_Display&utm_content=annual-research&utm_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui_iouBoblHfjnl)

<sup>26</sup>From the State of Student Learning 2022: [https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm\\_source=PartnerSocial\\_IRE-1381048&utm\\_medium=social\\_Display&utm\\_content=annual-research&utm\\_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp\\_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui\\_iouBoblHfjnl](https://stateoflearning.curriculumassociates.com/?utm_source=PartnerSocial_IRE-1381048&utm_medium=social_Display&utm_content=annual-research&utm_campaign=7015b000005aG9B&ppcp_platform=adroll&fbclid=IwAR1pErbCvALXZL5LmSxJ8t4PjDv7fWwtsww99uKcuAJgui_iouBoblHfjnl)

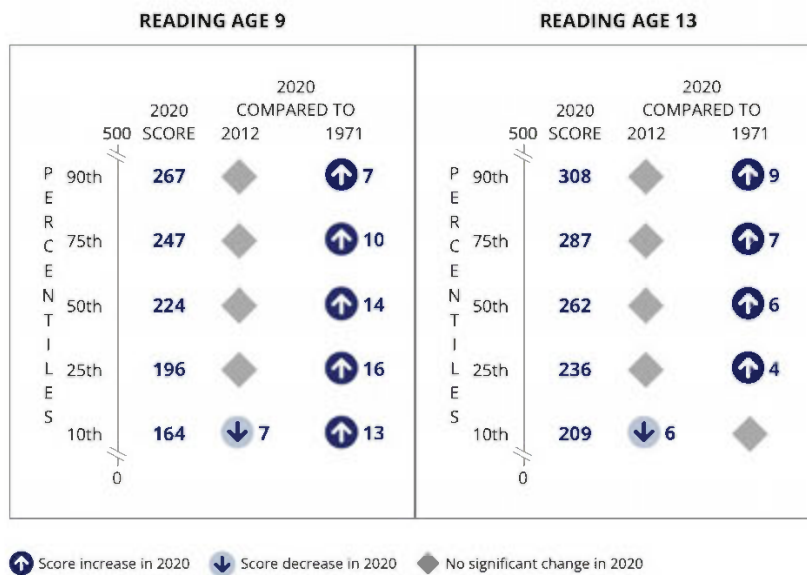
<sup>27</sup>From Healthy People 2030: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/data-sources-and-methods/data-sources/national-assessment-educational-progress-naep#:~:text=Thepercent20Nationalpercent20Assessmentpercent20ofpercent20Educational,dopercent20inpercent20variouspercent20subjectpercent20areas.>

As **Figure 17** shows, the most recent average scores for 13-year-olds in reading were significantly lower in 2020 compared to the last LTT assessments conducted in 2012. The score matches that of students from 1992.



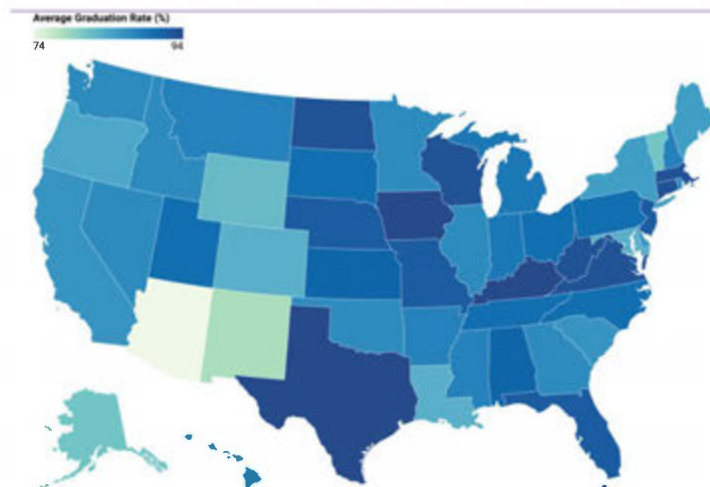
**Figure 17**  
National Trend in NAEP LTT Reading Average Scores for 13-Year-Old Students  
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ltt/?age=9>

One could argue the pandemic affected these scores; however, a downward trend is evident prior to 2020. As **Figure 18** shows, the 2020 reading scores for both 9- and 13-year-olds performing at the 10th percentile were lower compared to the previous LTT assessments in 2012. No significant growth was noted for any percentile compared to 2012. The data shows that, *despite educators' intent and efforts, students' literacy performance is either stalled or on a decline.*



**Figure 18**  
National Changes in NAEP LTT Reading Scores for Selected Percentiles by Age Group  
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ltt/?age=9>

## High School Literacy



**Figure 19**

National High School Graduation Rates for 2020 Graduates

<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/articles/see-high-school-graduation-rates-by-state>

The average high school graduation rate for the United States is currently **85.3 percent**<sup>28</sup>. **Figure 19** shows rates across the nation, with lighter hues indicating lower rates and darker shades indicating higher rates. Despite the high national percentage, numerous studies indicate that high school graduates are ill-equipped for higher educational or career pursuits.

According to data released by American College Testing (ACT), the national average ACT composite score for the high school class of 2022 was 19.8, **the lowest average score in more than three decades**, marking the 5th consecutive year of declining scores<sup>29</sup>. **Over 40 percent of high school seniors failed to meet any of the ACT college-readiness benchmarks**<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, a recent College Board study found that well over half of the students polled who recently entered college were not prepared for their coursework, regardless of how well they performed in high school<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup>From Think Impact: <https://www.thinkimpact.com/high-school-statistics/>

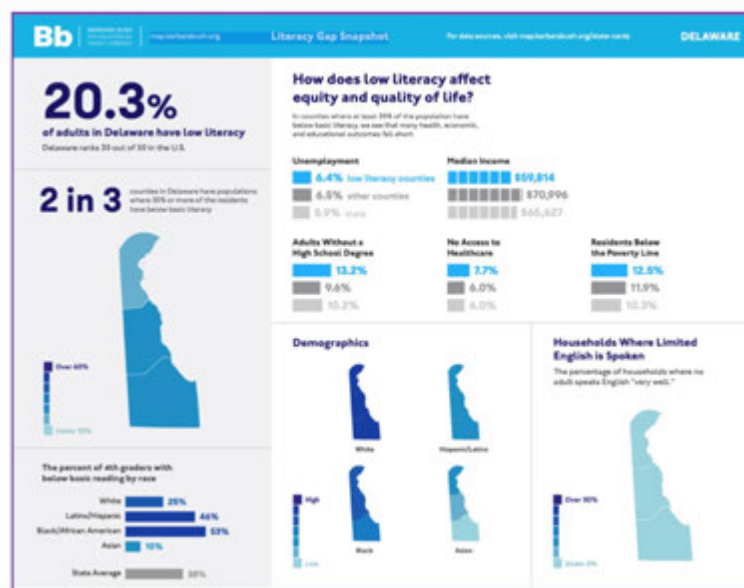
<sup>29</sup>From the ACT Newsroom: <https://leadershipblog.act.org/2022/10/GradClassRelease2022.html>

<sup>30</sup>From the National Review: <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/high-school-graduate-act-scores-drop-to-30-year-low/>

<sup>31</sup>From Public School Review: <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/are-high-school-graduates-ready-for-college-studies-are-dismal>

## CURRENT STATE LITERACY METRICS

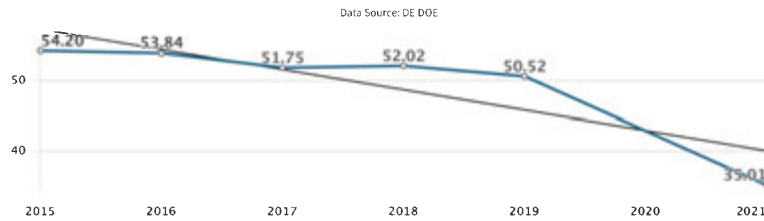
*There is significantly limited data related to literacy in Delaware, particularly concerning adult literacy, and virtually no data exists for any age group about the impact of low literacy levels in Delaware.* The Literacy Gap Snapshot of Delaware provided by the Barbara Bush Foundation (refer to **Figure 20**) reveals that **20.3 percent of adults in Delaware have low literacy levels**, reading at or below a 6th-grade proficiency. According to this limited research, in counties where at least 20 percent of the population lacks basic literacy skills, we see intimate correlations between poverty and social determinants of health, including educational, economic, and health outcomes.



**Figure 20**

Barbara Bush Foundation Literacy Gap Map Snapshot of Delaware:  
<https://map.barbarabush.org/assets/cards/BBFLL-Literacy-Card-DE.pdf>

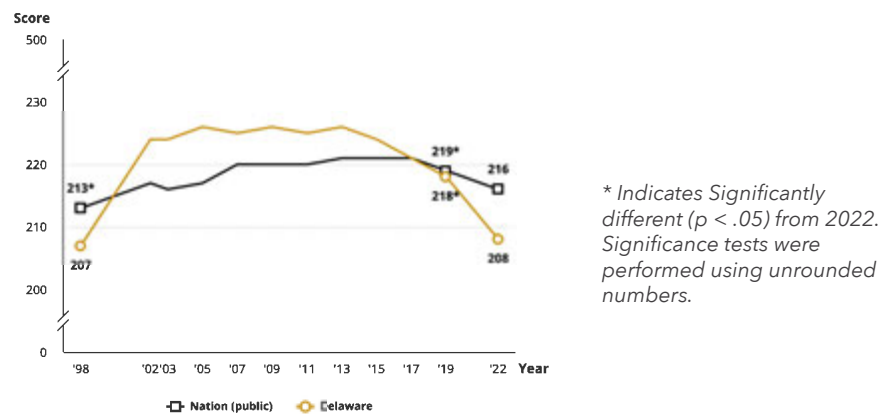




**Figure 21**

Percentage of Delawarean Third Graders Who Read at Grade Level  
<https://scorecard.clearimpact.com/Scorecard/Details/77921>

We see in **Figure 21** that **the percentage of 3rd graders in Delaware who read at grade level has steadily declined from 2015 to 2021**. According to The Delaware Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, My Healthy Community, **only 40.01 percent of 3rd graders, 41.65 percent of 8th graders, and 47.10 percent of 11th graders are currently proficient in English Language Arts in the state**<sup>32</sup>. Please note that this figure does not include students who have dropped out of high school; for the 2021-2022 school year, **1,083 students** enrolled in grades 9 through 12 permanently left school, which is **2.5 percent** of the student population, which is an increase from the previous school year's rate of **1.4 percent**<sup>33</sup>.



**Figure 22**

Average Fourth-Grade Reading Scores for Delaware with National Comparison  
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010DE4.pdf>

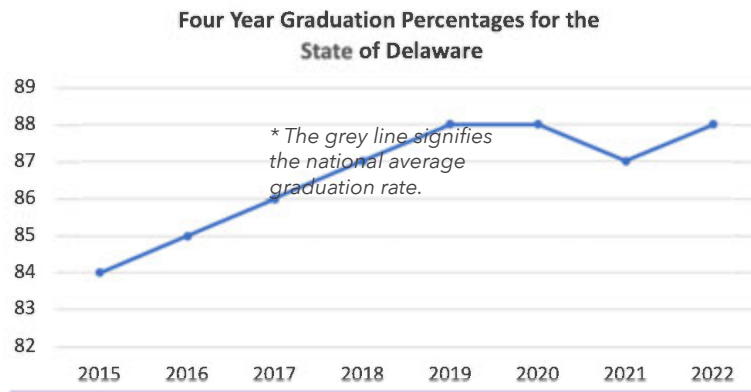
We see in **Figure 22** that the average reading scores in 2022 for 4th graders in Delaware are **8 points lower than that of the nation for the same year. Additionally, the 2022 average score is 10 points lower than the previously recorded year, 2019**. In 2022, the percentage of 4th-grade students in Delaware who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 25 percent; the national average for the same year was **32 percent**<sup>34</sup>. The percentage of Delaware's 8th-grade students who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level in 2022 was **24 percent**, while the national average was **29 percent**<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>From Equity Counts Data Center: [https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/education#THIRD\\_GRADE\\_SCHOOL\\_DISTRICT\\_SBSA\\_ELA\\_PCTPROFICIENT\\_PERCENT](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/education#THIRD_GRADE_SCHOOL_DISTRICT_SBSA_ELA_PCTPROFICIENT_PERCENT)

<sup>33</sup>From the State of Delaware Dropout Summary: <https://doewebmaster.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FinalDrop-outReport21.22.pdf>

<sup>34</sup>2022 State Achievement-Level Results, Fourth Grade, from the NAEP Report Card: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/achievement/?grade=4>

<sup>35</sup>2022 State Achievement-Level Results, Eighth Grade, from the NAEP Report Card: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/achievement/?grade=8>



**Figure 23**

Four-Year Graduation Rates for Public High School Students for Delaware from 2015 to 2022  
[https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/data-dictionary/indicators/SCHOOL\\_DISTRICT\\_4\\_YEAR\\_GRADUATION\\_RATE\\_PERCENT](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/data-dictionary/indicators/SCHOOL_DISTRICT_4_YEAR_GRADUATION_RATE_PERCENT)

We see in **Figure 23** the 4-year high school graduation rates for public schools in Delaware. The most current graduation data released by the Delaware Department of Education comes from the 2020-2021 school year. From that year, of the 10,727 senior-level students, **9,335** graduated with a regular diploma; the graduation rate was **87.02 percent**<sup>36</sup>. The current graduation rate shows a slight decrease from **87.70 percent** in 2020<sup>37</sup>; however, it is slightly higher than the national average of **85.3 percent**<sup>38</sup>.



**Figure 24**

Percentage of Delawarean High School Graduates Who Are College and/or Career Ready  
<https://scorecard.clearimpact.com/Measure/Details/100152967>

Such a high graduation rate would seemingly indicate an adequate level of proficiency for most students, but this is not the case, as evidenced by **over 50 percent of Delaware graduates enrolling in community college requiring remedial courses, the majority of which will not obtain a degree**<sup>39</sup>. As we see in **Figure 24**, the percentage of Delawarean high school graduates prepared for college or a career has steadily decreased.

<sup>36</sup>From the 2020-2021 Delaware Graduation Summary Statistics: <https://doewebmaster.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FINALGraduation-Summary-Report-20-21.pdf>

<sup>37</sup>From Equity Counts Data Center: [https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/education#THIRD\\_GRADE\\_SCHOOL\\_DISTRICT\\_SBSA\\_ELA\\_PCTPROFICIENT\\_PERCENT](https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/portals/ecdc/locations/state/education#THIRD_GRADE_SCHOOL_DISTRICT_SBSA_ELA_PCTPROFICIENT_PERCENT)

<sup>38</sup>From Think Impact: <https://www.thinkimpact.com/high-school-statistics/>

<sup>39</sup>College Success Report: State of Delaware: <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/161/17collegesuccess.pdf>



## LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A three-pronged approach to elicit feedback was used for this study. First, key informant interviews were executed at the state and national levels. This process included soliciting participation from literacy champions as well as frontline educators, influencers, and benefactors of literacy services throughout the communities within the state and country. Questions were developed with general inquiries for all interviewees and specific questions posited based on the participant's sector and job position. All questions were vetted and approved by the Delaware Literacy Alliance.

A similar method was used to guide targeted focus groups which were held to deepen our understanding of literacy issues as they relate to direct literacy providers and key organizations that support learners. These groups allowed for open, transparent discussion and uncovered impactful perspectives.

In addition to the focus groups, an online community-based survey was curated by key stakeholders and launched through multiple channels to gather input directly from the community at large. These three approaches helped provide a holistic understanding of the current literacy landscape within Delaware, particularly as it relates to more significant national initiatives.

## PHASE ONE: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The interviews conducted included national- and state-level leadership. The national stakeholders we interviewed illuminated current literacy landscapes and endeavors across the United States, thus providing a foundational and replicable standard. Our audit of national literacy cohorts reinforced our current understanding and helped guide thoughts around future efforts toward advocacy and legislative policy and programming and awareness to ensure the efficacy and sustainability of emerging strategies. A total of **40 national and state interviews were completed**. A list of both national and state interviewees can be found in **Appendix C**. State interviewee sectors included legislative offices, the Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Division of Libraries (DDL).

Below, we share poignant quotes that help frame the experiences and observations of many within the literacy landscape.

**“We need to create excitement and movement** around unpacking literacy from a national perspective and defining it from a more holistic perspective.”- Dr. David Rosen, Co-founder, Open Door Collective.

**“The lack of a comprehensive literacy plan** is only increasing the percentage of adults incapable of succeeding in the current and future work and economic environments in the state and nation.”- Sloane Kaiser, Community Engagement Associate, Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank.

“[The] problem is clearly significant; what we’re doing now is insufficient, and I **honestly have no clue what the state does (if anything) to address adults who need**

**literacy assistance once they leave the K-12 education system.”**- Laura Sturgeon, Delaware Senator, Fourth Senate District.

“A gap in the DOL system is that people come in for assessments based primarily on their own interests and desires. Often not considered is that individual’s ability to read and/or do basic math.” Karryl Hubbard, Delaware Secretary of Labor.

**“We need to address literacy as a root cause.** Currently, we view things upstream (starting with school). [We believe] literacy issues for children are the fault of teachers, and literacy issues for adults are their own fault. Actually...it’s a societal issue-” - Dr. Rita Landgraf, Director, Partnership for Healthy Communities, University of Delaware.

“Although school and public libraries are critical to growing readers and lifelong learners, ironically, they have been overlooked and excluded from literacy initiatives. The literacy problems persist while Delawareans fall further behind. This time, Delaware Libraries are leading the collaboration, contributing their professional expertise so Delaware can become The State That Reads!” - Dr. Annie Norman, State Librarian.

“If you don’t get a student by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade academically, **they will struggle for life.**” - Nello Paolli, Jr., Youth Committee Chair, Delaware Workforce Development Board. “The older generations have that [community] connection, but not younger parents/youth. So many of the parents are younger and struggle with literacy for themselves...There is a breakdown of community structure within black and

brown communities, **so those in need are really struggling alone.**"- Nakia Fambro, Principal, Christina Adult Education and Literacy Program.

## PHASE TWO: FOCUS GROUPS

Although we were originally slated to conduct six focus groups, a total of **8 focus groups were conducted** to solicit information from specific populations within organizations and society at large. The additional groups were added to ensure targeted feedback from vital sectors of the community at large. Participants represented all counties and spanned an array of communities and demographics throughout the state. Focus group categories were as follows:

1. **Librarians/Library System Personnel**
2. **Early Childhood Programs**
3. **High-need Community Based Organizations**
4. **Workforce Development Organizations & Members**
5. **Disability Community Organizations & Members**
6. **Bilingual/English as a second language & Members**
7. **Adult Education Programs & Members**
8. **Justice Impacted Residents**

Focus groups consisted of a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 10 participants, and they lasted approximately 60 minutes. During this time, participants were asked a series of vetted questions; a consultant moderated the conversation while another took notes. All participation was anonymous unless specifically requested otherwise. Below

are a few substantive quotes that help conceptualize the discussions from these focus groups.

**[The] assumption is that how kids present dictates what they're able to learn, which is incorrect.**"- Disability Community Member.

"[I am] currently working with entrepreneurs, referring them to technical services. I run into the issue of individuals not catching on to the programs that are currently available because **they lack the basic knowledge and digital literacy skills to navigate the program processes.**"- Workforce Development Focus Group Member.

"It's very difficult, as **people in the situation we help** with are often reluctant to seek help; they're just out in the world doing the best they can. They don't want to be stigmatized."- Adult Literacy Program Volunteer.

"When I came to this country, my parents were looking for something better for the family. But I sat in a corner by myself in class, and I had anxiety because I didn't understand what anyone was saying...**The teachers never took me out of English as a Second Language classes, even through high school.** When I took a test to enter college, I wasn't at the necessary level...I was embarrassed and overwhelmed, and I ended up dropping out." - Literacy Delaware Participant.

**"There were no literacy resources for inmates while I was in the Delaware prison; there were no libraries or books on the premises.** There was no use of computers. The Pennsylvania facility offered services and opportunities, but... that was not the case in Delaware."- Justice Impacted Citizen.





## PHASE THREE: COMMUNITY RESIDENT SURVEY SUMMARY

An online survey was designed to capture community members' perspectives on Delaware's literacy landscape. It aligned with several nationally recognized literacy and equity surveys and solicited information directly from residents. It was written at a 5th-grade reading level and reviewed by both co-chairs prior to dissemination. The survey was distributed through multiple channels, including the Delaware Division of Libraries, Sussex County Health Coalition, United Way of Delaware, and several nonprofit organizations via the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement. A copy of the survey can be found in **Appendix D**.

**Our research of historical and archived state data showed that this type of survey has never been conducted within Delaware.** Future efforts may need to deploy different data collection methods, which are typically more costly than online surveys, to access more diverse respondents and increase participation from across the state. This data serves as a benchmark for future literacy assessments and progress. These results form a beginning point to learn how needs across different populations vary, if at all, regarding literacy practices.

## PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

Although there were **139 participants**, this effort yielded **73** completed surveys from respondents who live in Delaware. Only completed surveys were used for the data calculations. Respondents tended to self-identify as female (**83.65 percent**) and Caucasian or European American (**61.90 percent**). The majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34 (**23.58 percent**), with those aged 55 to 64 following (**22.64 percent**). The vast majority of respondents selected English as their primary language (**97.17 percent**).

The majority of respondents have completed a level of education higher than high school graduation or equivalency; most (**46.23 percent**) stated they earned a master's degree, with those achieving a Bachelor, Trade School, or certification program following (**23.58 percent**).

*We recognize that certain populations that would significantly impact the response metrics are not included in this survey. By the very nature of survey access, self-selection, and literacy level requirement for participation, state residents with lower literacy and/or limited technological access and/or skills are unintentionally precluded from participation.*

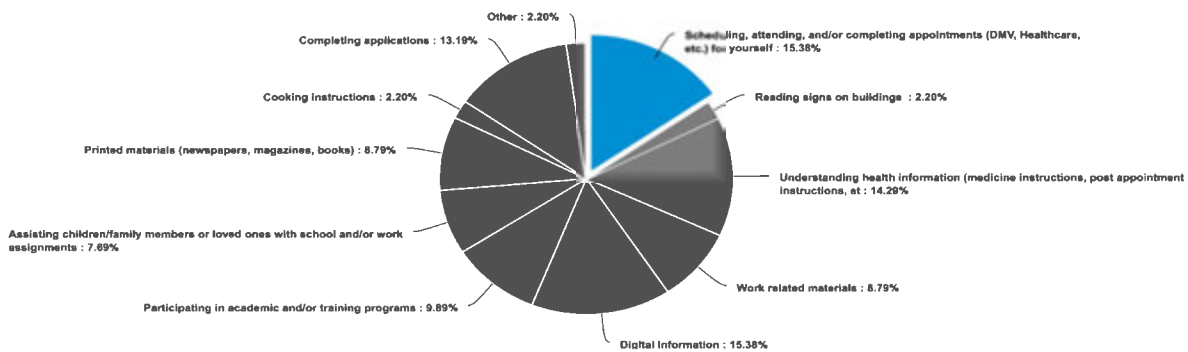
*Additionally, financial constraints limited our level of immersion in communities across Delaware. Although this limitation resulted in the exclusion of residents directly, we believe the service providers who participated in the survey provided a measure of inclusion of community voices indirectly, as did member inclusion in focus groups. It is our recommendation that a deeper dive into population demographics and literacy mapping take place across the state. This would provide a more accurate conceptualization of the literacy efforts and needs across the age and education continuum. Admittedly, our processes are currently limited.*

*We ask the reader to keep these facts in mind, and we recommend future efforts include more diverse avenues for information solicitation.*



## SURVEY FINDINGS

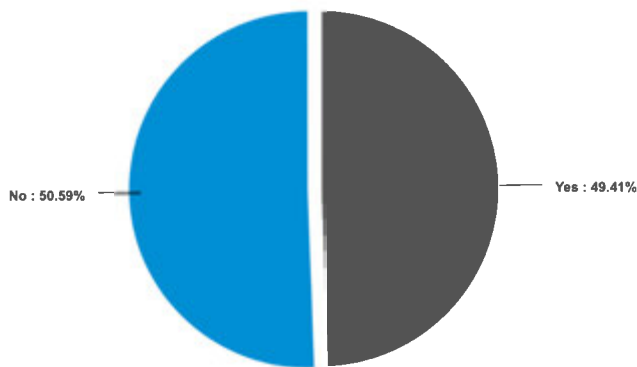
Given the high levels of education participants achieved, it is unsurprising that over **99 percent** of them believe they have a good understanding of what the term “literacy” means. Despite this, over half the participants (**59.62 percent**) stated they, or someone they know, have experienced difficulties with reading, writing, and comprehending information in daily routines (such as around the job or for general living purposes).



**Figure 25**  
Areas in Which Participants Experienced Difficulties Comprehending Information

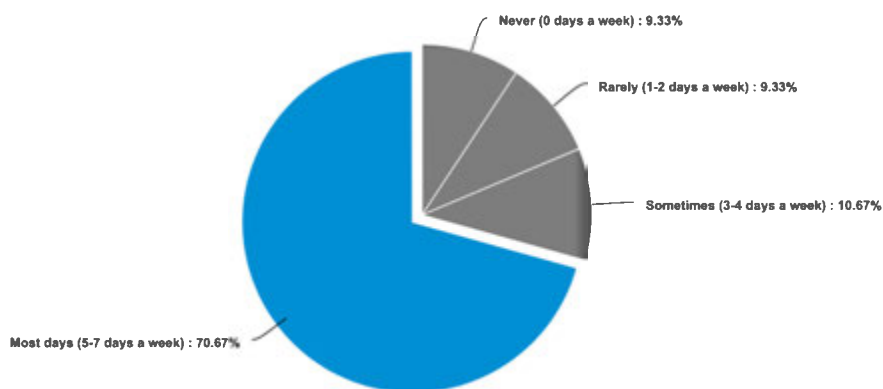
### Areas in Which Participants Experienced Difficulties Comprehending Information

As seen in **Figure 25**, the primary area of difficulty selected by participants was tied at **15.38 percent** by “digital information” and “scheduling, attending, and/or completing general life appointments.” Other highly selected areas include “understanding health information” (**14.29 percent**) and “completing applications” (**13.19 percent**). These areas coalesce with digital literacy in some capacity in that a measure of technological comprehension is needed to navigate the devices and software often necessitated by the processes themselves. Additionally, **37.95 percent** of participants selected they experience some form of trouble with technology in their daily life, ranging from cellphones and other technical devices to kiosks and healthcare portals. *To ensure a measure of true equity across Delaware, our efforts must include digital accessibility that is integrated with digital literacy skills improvement.*



**Figure 26**  
Percentage of Participant Employers That Offer Opportunities to Increase Literacy

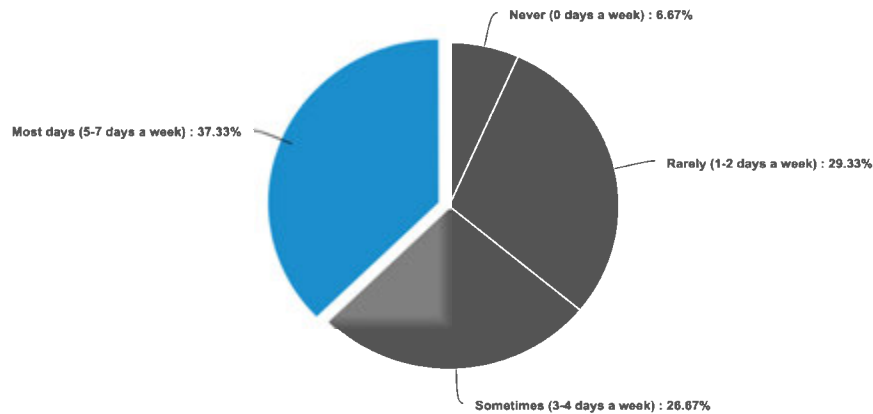
Many of the participants selected that they currently work for a company or organization that has education and/or literacy as a primary focus of their work (**52.69 percent**). Given the current data available explicating the workforce composition of the state, we know this is not an accurate depiction of career and job spread for Delaware. Equipped with this truth, it is more intriguing to note that even in this subset of the state’s population, where most participants work within literacy-focused fields, only slightly more than half (50.59 percent) of the employers offer programming, resources, or opportunities to increase employees’ literacy or digital literacy skills (see **Figure 26**). Participants did indicate most of their employers are willing to pay tuition, registration, exam fees, books, or any other costs associated with the educational programs, resources, or skill development (**54.05 percent**). This speaks to the concept of extraneous instruction and programming as a preferred method of professional development for employees, particularly those who already have shown their acumen via higher education achievements.



**Figure 27**  
How Often Participants Read for Work

As **Figure 27** shows, results indicated that many participants (**70.67 percent**) must read in some capacity for their work most days of the week, followed by “sometimes,” around 3 to 4 days a week (**10.67 percent**).





**Figure 28**  
How Often Participants Read for Entertainment

Many participants in the survey read for entertainment notably less than they do for work, with **62.67 percent** reading four days a week or less and **36 percent** stating they read for entertainment less than two days a week (see **Figure 28**). With so much reading required in the workplace, the number of participants who do not frequently engage in reading outside of work is plausible. However, it is important to note that the participants in this study are of higher literacy levels; the disengagement with reading outside of work in this caliber of residents could possibly be correlated with the intensity with which they engage in reading for their occupation. Future efforts could dissect the correlation between occupation and literacy level, and engagement.

These findings align with national benchmark data. Once again, we recognize the limitations, given the minute responses coupled with the caliber of participants. **Future efforts should focus on expanding the participant pool to reflect Delaware resident demographics more realistically and accurately assess literacy needs across the state.**





## STRATEGIC SOAR ANALYSIS

PMG Consulting applied the **SOAR** methodology to solidify the underlying themes pertinent to Literacy in the state of Delaware. What emerges from a synthesis of the information provided are elevated areas by which goals can be formed through a community-based convening to discuss findings. The final phase includes using the SOAR analysis to drive the final goal formation and objectives for the committees of the Delaware Literacy Alliance. These recommendations, strategies, goals, and objectives will serve as the foundation of the Delaware Literacy Plan.

This analysis accompanies the qualitative and quantitative research findings and gives voice to the mission and desired outcomes agreed upon by the Delaware Literacy Alliance. It is our hope and expectation that these findings will guide the state-level work.

## SOAR DEFINITION

SOAR is an acronym standing for **Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results**. The SOAR analysis process focuses on organization or community strengths and how those strengths can be leveraged to create, enhance, and accelerate opportunities in both organizations and the general literacy landscape of Delaware. The tool is used to consolidate and synthesize information to guide the goal-setting process. While Strengths and Opportunities focus on the present situation, the Aspirations and Results sections focus on the desired future environment and outcomes we seek to create.

We focused on high-level themes in the SOAR analysis for this report due to the richness of data; a more detailed SOAR analysis can be found in **Appendix E**.

# HIGH-LEVEL SOAR ANALYSIS

## STRENGTHS What are we doing well?

- Delaware's size, landscape variety, and ethnic diversity make it a great microcosm of the United States. As such, it is easier to conduct pilot projects, incorporate best practices, and observe an impact on various communities and populations.
- There is growing momentum within the state around the Science of Reading, as evidenced by recent legislative actions:
  - **House Bill 304** mandates the creation of a state list of universal reading screeners and literacy intervention approaches aligned with components of evidence-based reading instruction (specific for grades K-3).
  - **Senate Bill 4** requires the adoption and maintenance of a state-approved list for evidence-based reading instruction curricula for grades K through 3.
- The state has a well-connected library system; funding is now available to connect school libraries to ensure equity of access and equity of choice for students to diverse, current, and quality literacy resources and materials.
- Delaware has a high concentration of expertise in providing literacy support through educational leaders, key stakeholders, and motivated community members.
- There is well-defined programming and strong organizational support for early literacy.
- The Department of Education has a literacy plan encompassing kindergarten through third grade.
- Delaware's literacy data for kindergarten and adult literacy is largely aggregated, not based on individual results.
- Several statewide programs provide books to children in the early years of life; some involve reading assessments, such as Book Nook.

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## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### **What can we seek to accomplish?**

- Further, elevate literacy as a priority in Delaware. Doing so will increase awareness and acknowledge literacy as an equity issue. This presents an opportunity to recognize its significance as the root cause of larger-scale issues such as poverty, workforce pipelines, and health concerns.
  - By generating momentum and addressing literacy at its core, we can proactively tackle these challenges and ensure the sustained growth of the literacy initiative while creating a lasting positive impact in our communities.
- Increase funding and capacity in all areas of literacy. This will enable us to enhance our efforts, reach a wider audience, and make a more significant impact on literacy outcomes.
- Align early literacy programs and break down of silos to foster collaboration and synergy.
- Destigmatize low literacy among adults by shifting the perception from viewing them as culprits to recognizing them as individuals who may not have received the necessary support from the educational system.
  - By reframing the narrative, we can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that encourages adults to seek education and empowers them to overcome literacy challenges, promoting life-long learning and personal growth.
- Enhance education and clarity regarding the terminology used in adult literacy, including terms such as adult basic education and adult foundational education. By improving our understanding and specificity in this area, we can effectively communicate and address the diverse needs of adult learners.
- Expand and enhance adult literacy programming across the state. Expanding adult literacy programming presents a valuable opportunity for greater impact, exemplified by organizations like Literacy DE, which currently serves as the state's sole provider of adult foundational skills. While their efforts are commendable, reaching less than 1 percent of adults in need highlights the potential to extend services and support to a larger portion of the population.
- Foster a culture of understanding and support, aiming to reduce the stigma associated with low literacy.
- Shift our efforts from a reactive to a proactive approach, with a stronger emphasis on early intervention and comprehensive support beyond elementary education.

- Expand and enhance family programming with an inter-generational approach to literacy. By recognizing the value of engaging families in literacy initiatives, we can create a supportive and enriching environment that promotes a lifelong love for learning.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive statewide literacy plan that encompasses the entire journey of literacy across a person's lifespan.
- Expand and enhance digital skills training offerings. By recognizing the growing importance of digital literacy in today's world, we can empower individuals across the age continuum with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in a digital society.
- Strengthen literacy audits and testing across various fields, including workforce, health, justice involved, and community organizations. By implementing comprehensive and standardized assessment measures, we can gather reliable and consistent data on literacy levels for individuals of all age groups.
- Further explore the economic aspects low literacy presents. This research may create an opportunity to understand its impact on the state and lead to advocacy efforts for increased investment.

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## ASPIRATIONS

### What goals can we work towards achieving?

#### *Delaware will:*

- Embrace and promote literacy as a core pillar in the framework of equity.
- Establish a group of literacy-focused champions that drive funding and momentum around literacy.
- Elevate literacy as a critical component that help address key issues (poverty, workforce, health, etc.) through coordinated partnerships with legislators and policyholders as advocates.
- Understand the intersection of vital conditions within communities and Social Determinants of Health relating to literacy.
- Develop and deploy a comprehensive, intergenerational, statewide literacy plan.
- Prioritize literacy programming and resourcing across the lifespan, including continued support to school libraries through the integration of their inventory with the Delaware Library Catalog.

- Generate funding that increases the capacity, networking, and literacy support services across the lifespan.
  - Design pathways to incorporate best practices in policy and programming for literacy.
  - Form a paid adult service cadre dedicated to adult literacy learners.
  - Develop comprehensive workforce training that includes universal literacy assessments and supports for experiential learning.
  - Construct a mechanism that provides access to partner resources for the auditing of materials for appropriate grade-level reading in everyday life (job applications, health forms, etc.)
  - Scale and expand online and digital literacy skills training.
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## RESULTS

### How do we know we're succeeding?

- Literacy is seen as an immediate and critical need in the state.
- Programming across the lifespan is aligned and well-integrated, thus reducing siloes.
- Adult basic/foundational education is scaled and expanded into workforce training.
- There is a notable increase in literate candidates within the state's workforce pipelines.
- The state has decreased family and child poverty levels and improved health outcomes across the age continuum that can be attributed to the increase of literacy learning and opportunities offered throughout Delaware.
- There is a wide service array and network to provide literacy support services.
- There is sufficient funding to provide literacy support services across the lifespan and the state.
- The Delaware Literacy Alliance is institutionalized.
- ***Delaware is a 100percent literate state***

**Figure 29**  
High-level SOAR analysis.



## HIGH LEVEL, UNIVERSAL RECOMMENDATIONS

*PMG Consulting recognizes the crucial need to view this work within an equitable and inclusive lens.*

*The most encompassing goal and recommendation is to ensure equitability, cultural sensitivity, diversity, and inclusion in all processes.*

*When reviewing, please keep in mind this vital perspective.*

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**Establish legislative policy that elevates literacy across the lifespan as a priority and provides consistent funding for Delaware's literacy initiatives.**

- Institutionalized policy would ensure the longevity and continual elevation of literacy across the state by setting standards, providing suggested interventions, and thus prioritizing literacy through institutionalizing it with attached funding.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**Establish a universal communication strategy to include an online platform and statewide campaign that creates awareness, shares information, and provides education elevating literacy across the lifespan as one key underpinning for equity.**

- A unified platform for anchor partners to align around is key to producing consistent unified messaging.
- A communication platform provides the most efficient method of ensuring alignment as well as providing accurate and current information to the widest audience.
- A comprehensive communication campaign is imperative to ensure culturally sensitive engagement with promotional messaging and materials are produced and distributed.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**Increase the capacity within the Delaware Literacy landscape to service every Delawarean with low literacy that requires support and programming to meet their literacy goals.**

- Organizations involved in literacy work identified capacity (i.e., funding, staff, time, resourcing, etc.) as a critical issue, resulting in large waiting lists and literacy service deserts. In addition, there is a lack of awareness about the services that are available. The development of accessible quality programming is a significant need that should be addressed.
- Strategic alignment and placement of key partners and the utilization of organizational staff, including librarians, adult education programs, etc. Partnering with teaching/education programs in Delaware as a workforce strategy to streamline limited services is key.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**Delaware will chart pathways toward desired literacy outcomes using curated current and future data to make sound decisions on policy, programming, and practices across the literacy ecosystem.**

- This goal speaks to the relative lack of alignment of resources and the use of data surrounding literacy in the state. The Delaware Literacy Alliance will work to advocate for consistent and uniform data collection within partner organizations and groups. Data will allow policymakers and funders to understand the impact of a shift in legislative and organizational policy and procedures for a more equitable and literate Delaware.

## **GOAL 1: Institutionalize Collaboration through the formalization of the Delaware Literacy Alliance**

### **Objective 1**

### **Formalize Operations**

- Adopt 2024-2029 Strategic Plan for Delaware focused on literacy across the lifespan.
- Delaware Literacy Alliance advisory council to create initial core goals and objectives that align with the adopted 2024-2029 strategic plan and landscape analysis.
  - Develop organizational bylaws.
  - Implement board structure based on bylaws.
  - Create an agreement with a fiscal agent and define fiscal operating procedures.
  - Outline and develop formalized membership levels; recruit and onboard membership.
- Create a resource development plan.
  - Initiate fundraising policies and procedures
  - Create a pitch deck
  - Curate a list of potential donors
- Develop internal and external communication strategies that align around partners' common goals (i.e., language and messaging)
  - Create a centralized communication platform
  - Launch robust website
  - Create informational packet

### **Objective 2**

### **Formalize Delaware Literacy Alliance committee infrastructure**

- Select and prioritize committees to be formed based on identified needs from statewide plan and landscape analysis. The statewide plan will serve as the basis for committee action plans. Suggested:
  - Advisory Council
  - Early Learning Task Group
  - Adult Literacy Task Group
  - Health Literacy Council of Delaware Task Group
  - Environmental Literacy Task Group
  - Financial Literacy Task Group(Please note: Digital Literacy will be included as a subcomponent within each subcommittee's work as an underlying strategy.)

- Select Chair through strategic recruitment.
- Mutually establish mission and purpose for each committee.
- Build out committee action plan and initial goals using 2024-2029 strategic plan and landscape analysis findings as a baseline.
- Establish meeting cadence, create agenda/minutes templates, other supporting documentation as needed.
- Develop metrics and data dashboard for each subcommittee.
- Committee Chairs report progress and needs to Delaware Literacy Alliance Advisory Board.

<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Integrate collaborative processes to produce Awareness, Advocacy, and Access using the Delaware Literacy Alliance structure</b>
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- Using internal infrastructure (advisory board, committees, task group, etc.) and external infrastructure (CBOs, legislators, schools, etc.), align programming and build capacity to carry out statewide plan around key areas
- Use external infrastructure (CBOs, legislators, schools, libraries, etc.) to align programming and build capacity to carry out statewide plan around key areas

<b>GOAL 2: Increase awareness around literacy in Delaware.</b>	
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<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Elevate literacy as a key driver for equity by creating a statewide culturally sensitive awareness campaign</b>
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- Design and launch a statewide Literacy Awareness Campaign
  - Map out plan and resources required to form and launch campaign
  - Procure funding
  - Procure vendor
  - Align campaign with communication build-out for Delaware Literacy Alliance
  - Set plan for roll out and launch
- Initiate a robust campaign with universal/targeted programming and messaging that:
  - Ensures alignment with current awareness campaigns (i.e., Department of

Education, Reach Out and Read, Get Delaware Reading, Delaware Libraries, etc.)

- Please note: It will be important to:
  - Understand current literacy programming in the landscape across the age continuum and use the working infrastructure to accelerate promotion and adoption while mitigating redundancy and overlap in messaging.
  - Demonstrate the linkages between higher level social determinants of health issues and literacy across the lifespan and diverse learners.
  - Demonstrate how literacy affects all facets of life and one’s ability to be successful within them.
  - Include language that reduces stigma and provides an equity lens
- Create informational/promotional materials to be shared across state sectors
  - Use multimedia platforms to message to a broad range of stakeholders and access points to include online, social and written. Use anchor organizations such as: state agencies, community based organizations, legislators, and funders to promote messaging and distribute.
- Host a statewide conference to include national, state, and local professionals.

**GOAL 3: Advocate for more comprehensive literacy reform to promote equity for all Delawareans**

**Objective 1**

**Create an advocacy committee for the Delaware Literacy Alliance**

- Identify advisory council members, as well as legislative and funding champions to serve as champions on the advocacy committee.
- Create an advocacy agenda and have the advisory council adopt it.
- Set a two year plan around advocacy for literacy.

**Objective 2**

**Set a legislative and policy agenda that will identify state level best practice policies and advocate for legislative change in the literacy ecosystem**

- Evaluate national, state, and local legislative and organizational policies and practices surrounding literacy as a best practice guide.
- Create a white paper for the following groups:
  - Pre-School
  - K-12
  - Adult
  - Workforce
  - Special Populations, to include Disability Community, English Language Learners, Justice Impacted, and others.



<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Work with state leadership to embed literacy policies across the Delaware state service lanes</b>
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- Evaluate current state Departments role with regard to literacy in their policies and practices to include:
  - Department of State/Division of Libraries
  - Department of Education (DOE)
  - Department of Labor (DOL)
  - Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
  - Department of Public Health (DPH)
  - Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNREC)
  - Others
- Use national, state, and local best practices to determine appropriate organizational and or legislative policies and practices that support access to appropriate levels of prevention and interventive services.
- Create evaluation to track progress and shifts in legislative policies and practices.
- Provide technical assistance with implementing organizational and state, legislative, and organizational policy changes.

**GOAL 4: The Delaware Literacy Alliance will curate informational and educational tools through its part-ners and professional organizations to support the adoption of literacy best practices**

<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Delaware Literacy Alliance will spearhead the identification and uptake of culturally sensitive literacy best practices in early child, K-12 and adult educational sectors</b>
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- Research gaps and needs through the Delaware Literacy Alliance infrastructure.
  - Identify key partners in the adoption and deployment of literacy information, resources and tools.
  - Curate and launch a community toolbox of informational and educational materials to support community awareness, education and engagement.
- Collate national and local best practices
- Provide access to materials and resources for all Delaware educators and literacy stakeholders
  - Develop templates, resources, and supports that help organizations and direct

consumers skill, upskill or enhance current programs in literacy.

- Identify quality training geared towards providers appropriate for sectors
- Work with groups like Open Door Collective, Barbara Bush Foundation, and International Literacy Association to support up to date materials and education
- Task each committee to create sector specific training plans

**GOAL 5: Develop a comprehensive system to identify, triage and place individuals with low literacy into accessible and appropriate interventions that support and promote higher levels of literacy attainment**

**Objective 1**

**Develop universal and targeted access strategies through state and local providers to meet the needs of Delaware residents with low literacy across the age continuum**

- Identify populations that need expanded literacy intervention and support.
- Create a coordinated system of care for the literacy needs of Delaware. Formalize a unified assessment, triage, referral, and program service array for literacy in Delaware.
  - Please note: (Nashville’s GOAL Collective model as an example)
- Advocate for expanded and enhanced quality programs through funding

**Objective 2**

**Scale and initiate programming to meet the needs of low literacy individuals and ensure geographic access using place based and digital strategies to reach consumers in need**

- Understand current access to programming based on geographic and social determinants of health needs
- Understand current wraparound services that support the highest need areas
- Evaluate best practice wraparound services in other geographic areas
- Use aligned network of partners to fill service area gaps (place based or digital)
- Scale, enhance or initiate programming that meet the identified needs
  - Early child -Work with committee to develop plan
  - K-12 -Work with Educational Committee in DOE to provide community based strategies
  - Adult-Work with Adult committee to develop plan



## NATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

The next section of this report is a compilation of best practices from literacy initiatives across the United States, including the Nashville GOAL Collective and the Chicago Literacy Group. These initiatives have demonstrated success in implementing innovative approaches to improve literacy outcomes for individuals in their respective communities. By highlighting their best practices, we aim to provide actionable insights to improve literacy rates and promote lifelong learning for Delawareans. The best practices in this section cover a range of topics, including family engagement, community partnerships, and targeted interventions for at-risk populations. Each initiative has its unique approach, but all share a commitment to evidence-based strategies and collaborative problem-solving.

### Science of Reading

The Science of Reading is a highly regarded methodology used to teach reading and has been widely adopted by numerous stakeholders in the literacy ecosystem.

It compiles conclusive and empirically supported data to inform and guide our understanding of the literacy journey. According to the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (IMSE) Journal, the Science of reading's comprehensive research has evolved to provide us "with the information we need to gain a deeper understanding of how we learn to read, what skills are involved, how they work together, and which parts of the brain are responsible for reading development."

This research informs best practices and approaches for teaching foundational literacy skills and discredits numerous methods previously used in literacy instruction due to a lack of evidence. As a result of its robust literacy analysis, an increasing number of educators and literacy professionals across the United States endorse strategies that align with the Science of Reading. As David Kilpatrick, Professor Emeritus of Psychology for the State University of New York at Cortland and school psychologist, states, "We teach reading in different ways; [students] learn to read proficiently in only one way."

## Collaborative Partnerships

- The Nashville GOAL Collective partners with various organizations, including schools, nonprofits, and government agencies, to share resources and best practices. By working collaboratively, they are able to leverage their collective expertise and make a greater impact.
- The Chicago Literacy Group has developed strong partnerships with local organizations, schools, and businesses to increase the impact of their work and reach more individuals in need of literacy support.
- The International Literacy Association is an international professional organization created to connect literacy research and practice in an effort to continuously improve the quality of literacy instruction worldwide. Created in 1956, the ILA supports over 300,000 literacy educators, researchers, and experts across 128 countries.
- The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) is composed of national thought leaders from the adult literacy field and associated sectors, with a collective charge to carry out the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy. The organization's efforts are driven by its vision of a country where every adult can access high-quality, effective support for improving their literacy skills, regardless of who or where they are.

## Data-Driven Decision Making

- The Nashville GOAL Collective uses data to inform its decision-making processes. They analyze data from various sources, including student assessments and surveys, to identify areas of improvement and track progress toward their goals.
- The Chicago Literacy Group is committed to using data to identify gaps

and challenges in the literacy system, which they believe is critical to designing effective programs and services. The organization collects data to track the progress of its programs and services and make adjustments as needed to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community. By using data in this way, the Chicago Literacy Group is able to create evidence-based programs and services that are tailored to the needs of the community, which in turn leads to more effective and impactful interventions.

## Professional Development/ Educational Best Practices

- The Chicago Literacy Group understands the value of investing in professional development for their staff and volunteers. Their motto, "LEARN and LEAD," reflects their belief that reflection, learning, and strategic planning are key components to developing strong leadership skills. To promote this best practice, CLG offers various workshops and Summer Institutes that are tailored to leaders in the field of literacy education. In addition, they partner with schools and districts to provide leadership coaching support to administrators and coaches. By providing these opportunities for ongoing professional development, CLG ensures that its staff and volunteers have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality literacy programming.



# ATTACHMENTS

**Appendix A- State Literacy Rate Rankings**

**Appendix B- Delaware Literacy Alliance Members**

**Appendix C- National and State interviewees**

**Appendix D- Community Survey Responses**

**Appendix E- Detailed SOAR Analysis**

**Appendix F- Literacy Through the Lifespan: Delaware Division of  
Libraries Report**

**Appendix G- Mapping Delaware's Basic Needs Report**

**Appendix H- Key Sector Considerations**