



LITERACY in GENEVA

2022-2023

GENEVA | 2030 
Investing in our children. Cradle to career.

CONTEXT

Definitions of literacy are complex, highlighting different values and desired outcomes. Our definitions shape what practices are counted as literacy and our assessments, analysis of problems and areas of inequity, as well as our interventions.

The [International Literacy Association](#) defines literacy as: “The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context.” This definition prioritizes the importance of meaning-making and communicating across various types of texts and modalities for many purposes. Similarly, the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (UNESCO) has an expansive, digitally mediated definition of literacy:

Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world. Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is a part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills. Literacy skills themselves are expanding and evolving as people engage more and more information and learning through digital technology.

We see from this definition that more traditional definitions of literacy focus on decoding words from a written page while newer definitions focus on communication and contexts for skills.

The [World Literacy Foundation](#) defines literacy as “not only reading and writing but also the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective and productive performance within society” (p. 3). This organization is also interested in measuring illiteracy, which they define as the state of being unable to read and write. They also offer the concept of functional illiteracy which means that a person can perform basic reading and writing tasks but not apply them (for example: reading prescription labels, balancing a checkbook or filling out job applications). The WLF estimates the global price tag of illiteracy at more than \$1

trillion a year. In the U.S. alone, the economic and social expenses total an estimated \$300 billion. UNESCO declares the acquisition of reading and writing skills as "an inalienable human right," and they argue that [the commitment to provide the right of literacy to everyone has not been met](#), even in developed countries. These organizations argue that the impact of illiteracy is felt throughout society, measurable in income, education, economic mobility and health, and that illiteracy exacts a toll on individuals and families, taxpayers, school systems, health agencies, local economies, government, and civic involvement.

On the other hand, there are documented issues with institutional definitions and measurements of literacy that exclude legitimate practices of people marginalized because of their race, culture, and language. Research describes ways that cultural blinders keep US institutions from recognizing, valuing, and supporting valid literacy practices. Literacy interventions are susceptible to a host of problems that can lead to labeling children as “at risk” or illiterate, especially those stemming from standardized assessment and assessment washback such as:

1. using culturally destructive texts that do not connect to students’ lived experiences and perpetuate racial bias and discrimination ([Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019](#))
2. measuring engagement with written texts only instead of measuring students’ ability to engage with multimodal texts ([Lawrence & Mathis, 2020](#));
3. focusing on individual performance in a “closed system” instead of context-dependent communication ([Anson, 2008](#));
4. emphasizing standard academic English and positioning other dialects as inappropriate for learning ([Baker-Bell, 2019](#));
5. stressing writing in regimented genres for limited audiences for inauthentic purposes with an excessive instructional focus on structure ([Davis & Willson, 2015](#)).

To holistically support literacy and to strive toward our goal as Geneva 2030 to “transform systems that shape opportunity,” we as the Literacy Action Team both highlight the importance of expanding support for complex literacy practices while also recognizing and combating ways that literacy institutions offering services, supports, and assessments can ignore or marginalize certain

types of literacy practices that could instead be seen as valuable language resources.

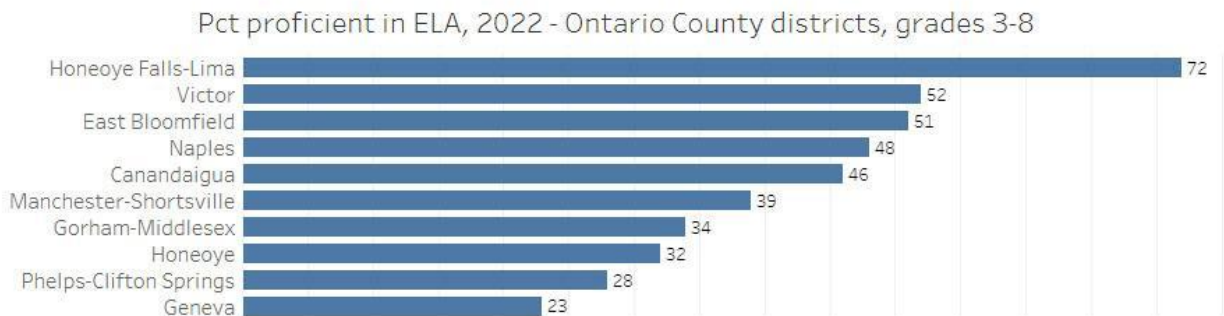
INDICATORS

Determining exact literacy rates is almost impossible. For example, standardized literacy tests may not capture the complex literacy practices of students due to their modality, text choices, vocabulary, and language. Written surveys don't capture the experiences of people who can't read or write, and shame and embarrassment may prevent people from saying they can't read or write.

However, there are a number of indices that are traditionally used as proxies of literacy. We have examined Geneva statistics in the following areas:

ELA assessment scores

The state Department of Education tests students on English Language Arts (ELA) annually. The second gauges math skills. The chart below shows percent proficiency for Ontario County school districts in 2021-2022, grades 3-8. Geneva ranks at the bottom, with 23% proficiency.



Educational attainment

UNESCO notes, "Illiterate parents tend to have lower educational expectations and aspirations for themselves and for their children...When parents are uninvolved in their children's education, the latter are more likely to display behavioural problems, have poor grades, repeat school years and even discontinue their formal education."

According to the 2021 American Community Survey, published by the U.S. Census Bureau, there are an estimated 879 people aged 18 and older in Geneva who lack high school diplomas. That's 8.4% of the city's adult population. Of those over age 24, 4.6% have less than a ninth-grade education.

Language

In administering the 2021 ELA assessment tests, the state counted 120 students, grades 3-8, who were designated English language learners; 74 were tested and just 3% were marked proficient.

The Census Bureau estimates the number of people who speak a language other than English at home. Of city residents age 5 and over, 1,461 people - 12.4% of the population - speak a language other than English. The majority speak Spanish.

Health

An estimated 620 people in Geneva - 5% of the population - lack health insurance. Coverage can be difficult to obtain; scheduling medical appointments and navigating co-pays and co-insurances can be more difficult for the illiterate.

The repercussions of illiteracy begin even before birth. As the World Literacy Foundation observes: "Illiterate people, particularly mothers, are more likely to adopt poor nutritional and hygiene practices in their homes. This leads to a higher rate of disease, accidents and other health issues, which in turn raises demand for medical services and causes job absenteeism."

Technology

Illiteracy hinders computer use, a disadvantage that the pandemic has made painfully obvious.

In the early days of vaccine availability, it was nearly impossible to schedule an appointment without computer skills. In-person classes were canceled for the final months of the



2019-2020 school year at the Geneva City School District, with students having to attend remotely.

The 2021 American Community Survey estimates that 480 households in Geneva - 10.3% of total households - do not have computers.

Civic involvement

An inability to follow public events or understand government policies will likely result in less civic involvement and lower participation in elections. As UNESCO notes:

"Literacy involves not only reading and writing but also the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective and productive performance within society."

In the 2019 [Geneva mayoral election](#), a total 2,861 ballots were cast. The number of city residents old enough to vote, according to census counts, was 10,332. While this figure does not exclude non-citizens, who cannot vote, a ballpark turnout estimate is that two out of three eligible voters stayed home. Certainly, illiteracy is not the only reason for low turnouts, but it is a factor.

EXISTING SERVICES & SUPPORT

Geneva City School District

The Geneva City School District is a public school serving over 2,000 students grades PK through 12. The district is comprised of a high school, middle school and two elementary schools (grades Pre-K to 1 and grades 2-5).

The district employs several teachers with literacy certifications, although there are no faculty members devoted full-time to literacy intervention.

The district utilizes several literacy platforms during the school year and throughout the summer.

WONDERS – McGraw Hill literacy program for grades K-6

WIN (What I Need) Time – intervention to work on reading skills such as phonics.

LETRS – Training for educators, to teach language and literacy skills. GCSO has committed to providing LETRS training to every teacher grades K-5.

NOTE: States such as Mississippi have mandated that all teachers should be trained in the science of reading. NYS has not said that.

Teachers with literacy certification as of 22/23:

6 at West Street

9 at North Street

2 at the middle school

3 at the high school

Each school has an individualized library media center. The mission of the GCSO library media center is to encourage life-long learning, a love of reading, a sense of discovery, and effective use of information.

West Street Librarian: Kelly Fairley [Ms. Fairley](#)

North Street Librarian: Christine Joslyn cjoslyn@genevacsd.org

Middle and High School Librarian: Jonathan Porschet [Mr. Porschet](#)

genevacsd.org

Geneva Public Library

The mission of the Geneva Public Library is to inspire and support a lifetime of learning and creativity for the Geneva community.

In addition to the traditional borrowing of literary materials, the library also organizes an array of interactive programs for youth and adults. The library also works in collaboration with and hosts several non-profit literary groups such as Geneva Reads and Literacy Volunteers Ontario-Yates.

The Children's Room features books, graphic novels, videos, music and games. The library organizes youth programs such as STEAM nights, Girls who code, story hours, "Baby Lapsit", messy story hour, teen D&D, and summer reading challenges.

[Geneva Public Library](#)

(315) 789-5303

Geneva Reads

The Geneva Reads mission is to inspire a culture of lifelong reading by providing books and creating shared experiences through dynamic community collaboration. The vision is a future where Genevans of all ages enjoy an enhanced quality of life through literacy and the love of reading. Geneva Reads develops, collaborates and hosts numerous literacy experiences in the community.

- Book distribution to every child from birth to age 4 at each well-child visit to Finger Lakes Medical Associates and Finger Lakes Community Health Geneva Reads at WIC
- Free books are given to Geneva's K-2 students at the annual Book Fest. Students also spend time at 30 or more literacy stations at which they connect to books through art, activities and games;
- Book distribution throughout the year at all UPK sites in the city which includes 18 titles with activity bags for families -business owners and other community residents and workers read the book to the students prior to distribution;
- I PAWS to Read program at West Street School's Tiny Panthers Family Fun Nights twice each month where volunteers listen to children in pre K, K and 1st grade read leveled texts to volunteers;
- As part of the Community Read, each K-5 student gets a free copy of a book matching the theme of the current year's event.
- Gently used books are distributed weekly at the Farmers Market;

- Books are given to teachers, handed out at festivals, events, churches, community baby showers, holidays and summer programs.

[Geneva Reads](#)

asgenevareads@gmail.com

Boys & Girls Club

The Literacy Academy at Goodman Street serves children grades 1-3 in an after-school program and serves 5-year-olds who have graduated from kindergarten during the summer program. Literacy Academy assists kids with reading up to grade 3 level and starts building leaders through their Character and Leadership program, where they can further implement both Literacy and Character and Leadership when they graduate Goodman Literacy Academy and begin their journey through Carter Road Club where they can join Torch Club and Keystone.

[Goodman Street/Literacy Academy](#)

The Carter Road club collaborates with Geneva Reads, Hobart and William Smith Colleges and Geneva 2030 to provide literary programming to families, toddlers and teens. This includes enhancing toddler time with books and providing college age tutors weekly to work with teens as well as during Saturday Academy.

[About the Carter Road Club | Boys & Girls Club of Geneva \(bgcgeneva.org\)](#)

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning

America Reads HWS Tutor Corps program

America Reads is a federally funded work-study program that places college and university students in the community to tutor K-12 students in literacy. Each semester HWS student tutors go into schools and afterschool programs to read with local elementary students. The tutors meet one or two times weekly for about an hour in one-to-one reading relationships.

HWS Tutor Corps at the Boys and Girls Club

Each semester HWS students visit the Carter road and Goodman street clubs weekly to engage with youth. The tutoring program is mentor focused while engaging youth in homework help and academic improvement.

[HWS Community Engagement and Service Learning](#)

Peter Budmen

[315-781-3825](tel:315-781-3825)

serve@hws.edu

Finger Lakes Community College

High school equivalency and English as a second language courses are provided through the college's Adult Basic Education programs.

Kathleen Guy

Adult Literacy Education Coordinator

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(585)785-1431

Literacy Volunteers Ontario-Yates

The mission of Literacy Volunteers Ontario – Yates, Inc. (LVOY) is to provide adults the literacy skills needed to reach their full potential as individuals, parents, workers and citizens. LVOY uses highly qualified, committed tutors who are trained in student-centered learning. Tutoring is specifically geared to each student’s particular learning style with realistic and attainable goals that are mutually set.

LVOY provides free, flexible one-on-one tutoring specific to reading, writing and/or speaking English to adults age 18 or older. LVOY will work one-on-one with adults on their own personal goals, including studying for a GED, obtaining US citizenship, etc.

info@lvoy.org

585-282-7318

Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES

Adult Education Literacy program

Wayne Finger Lakes BOCES offers flexible schedules to meet literacy needs in the community. The Adult Education Literacy program is for adults twenty one and older.

Adult Literacy Office 315-332-7317

or toll free at 1-800-527-1765

Saturday Academy – Weekend program emphasizing literacy, with HWS students serving as tutors.

CASE STUDY: Detroit

In 2022, with many students having fallen far behind during the pandemic, the Detroit school board approved a multi-million-dollar contract with a local nonprofit called Beyond Basics to provide [literacy tutoring](#). Covid relief money helped pay for the project, along with settlement of a federal "right to read" lawsuit. The contract calls for Beyond Basics to reach 1,500 students in 10th and 11th grades.

Other components of Detroit's plan include:

- A contract for nearly \$1 million with a company providing literacy intervention for students in grades K-3 as well as students attending the district's virtual school.
- A volunteer program called Let's Read, which connects adults with K-3 students.



In addition, the city has launched a ["Skills for Life"](#) program for Detroiters to receive training and education. Participants will be paid, and will divide their time between training and work, improving city neighborhoods.

Transportation and child care are provided. The three-year initiative will invest up to \$75 million, funded through the city's allocation of American Rescue Act (ARPA) funds.

POTENTIAL SUPPORT FOR EXPANDED PROGRAM IN GENEVA

Federal and state government

Americorps

Dollar General Literacy Foundation *

Nora Roberts Foundation *

Provides literacy grants to organizations around the country, including \$3,000 to Geneva Reads in 2019.

* See Appendix

APPENDIX – Recent grants to Upstate NY literacy projects

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

GRANTEE	CITY	AMOUNT
Barker Public Library	Barker	\$2,000
Belfast Central School District	Belfast	\$2,000
Belfast Central School District	Belfast	\$3,000
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Northtowns	Buffalo	\$2,000
Boys & Girls Club of East Aurora	East Aurora	\$1,000
Champlain Children's Learning Center	Rouses Point	\$2,000
Cherry Valley-Springfield Central School District	Cherry Valley	\$3,500
Coalition on Adult Basic Education	Cicero	\$150,000
Elma Primary School	Elma	\$3,100
Fort Hunter Free Library	Amsterdam	\$1,500
Gerard Place	Buffalo	\$10,000
Glenn Curtiss Elementary School	Hammondsport	\$3,000
Golden Opportunity	Ithaca	\$2,000
Greece Central School District	Greece	\$2,000
Harley School	Rochester	\$3,000
Hunter Elementary School	Tannersville	\$3,000
Jamestown City School District	Jamestown	\$3,000
Kerhonkson Elementary School	Accord	\$2,000
Lagrange Association Library	Poughkeepsie	\$1,500
Literacy New York	Cobleskill	\$5,000
Literacy Volunteers	Binghamton	\$9,850
Literacy Volunteers	Troy	\$5,000
Literacy Volunteers of America Mohawk Hudson	Schenectady	\$5,000
Literacy CNY	Syracuse	\$8,000
Marbletown Elementary School	Stone Ridge	\$2,500
Mont Pleasant Middle School	Schenectady	\$3,000
Montgomery County Literacy Project	Amsterdam	\$5,000
Niagara Charter School	Niagara Falls	\$2,000
Owego-Apalachin Central School District	Owego	\$3,000
Pavilion Central School District	Pavilion	\$3,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$60,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$60,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$50,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$39,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$89,000
Sauquoit Valley Central School District	Sauquoit	\$3,000
Sherburne-Earville Central School District	Sherburne	\$2,500
Southern Tier Traveling Teacher	Wellsville	\$7,500
Children's Center	Morrisville	\$1,500
Ulster Literacy Association	Kingston	\$5,000
Warrensburg Central School District	Warrensburg	\$2,000
Christmas House	Elmira	\$3,000
Literacy Volunteers	Binghamton	\$3,000
HP Alliance	Binghamton	\$3,000
Geneva Reads	Geneva	\$3,000
Glens Falls Area Youth Center	Glens Falls	\$3,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$3,000
Learning Disabilities Association of Central New York	East Syracuse	\$3,000

Nora Roberts Foundation

GRANTEE	CITY	AMOUNT
Literacy Volunteers	Binghamton	\$3,000
HP Alliance	Binghamton	\$3,000
Geneva Reads	Geneva	\$3,000
Glens Falls Area Youth Center	Glens Falls	\$3,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	Syracuse	\$3,000
Learning Disabilities Association of Central New York	East Syracuse	\$3,000