

2020-2021 Fiscal Year

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE



The California State Library's
**California Library Literacy
and English Acquisition
Services Programs**



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Report to the Legislature on the California Library Literacy and English Acquisition Services Program of the California State Library

State of California

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The report covers the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

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Executive Summary

Literacy programs in California's public libraries transform the lives of thousands of Californians and their families every year. They help adults gain basic literacy skills, achieve learning goals they set for themselves, and use library services effectively. They strengthen communities and help families grow and succeed.

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, adult literacy services were provided to 21,000 California adults and children in 44 counties and 104 of the state's 184 public library jurisdictions.

Pandemic-related closures and volunteer restrictions meant that 352 of the state's 1,130 library locations offered literacy services, only about 40 percent of the 2019-2020 numbers. One quarter of participants left the program, and 25 percent went "on hold." However, 122 community sites were opened, and many programs offered off-site services through virtual tutoring and programs. The state provided \$7.3 million in funding: \$4.8 million for adult literacy services and \$2.5 million for family literacy services.

Approximately 6,500 California adults received over 307,000 hours of free literacy instruction including tutoring and small group instruction. Of these, 52 percent were Latinx, 74 percent were women, and 59 percent were over 40 years of age.

In the past fiscal year, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the reach of library literacy programs by cutting off in-person services to those most likely to be affected by the digital divide. Nonetheless, many programs responded heroically by delivering tutoring via phone and digital devices, presenting programs virtually, and sometimes, literally delivering books and resources to the homes of learner families.

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year:

- 3,365 volunteer tutors and 460 other volunteers supported these local programs contributing \$6.86 million worth of volunteer hours.¹
- \$17 million in local funds matched the state's \$7.2 million investment² and 373 community agencies partnered with a library literacy program.
- 17,665 goals were met by learners who set at least one goal for themselves. Goals set include: learning the alphabet, reading a book, helping their children with homework, accessing community resources, or advancing their careers.

Since expanding services to include the families of adult learners in 2018, 68 library literacy programs provided family literacy and community outreach services to 5,279 families and 9,523 children.

Family literacy program staff helped adults develop their confidence and skills, learn how to select books, read to their children, and foster a love of reading. Staff members also helped adults strengthen their connections and communications with educators, healthcare professionals, and family members, and navigate the systems and services that affect their households.

1 The value of volunteer time was calculated using data from Independent Sector, which draws on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. 204,235 hours x \$33.61 = \$6,864,338: <https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2020/>

2 The State of California provides \$4.8 million for adult literacy services and \$2.5 million to support family literacy services.



2020-2021 California Library Literacy Services Summary

This graphic provides a summary of California Library Literacy Services programs and services conducted in the 2020-2021 fiscal cycle. While the State of California and the world at large were in the midst of a global pandemic, 104 library jurisdictions continued offering learning resources to thousands of adult learners and their families across California.



California Library Literacy Services: The Need

The need for library literacy programs in California is significant and ongoing:

- California has the lowest literacy rate in the nation. "Nearly 1 in 4 people over the age of 15 [in the state] lack the skills to decipher the words in this sentence. Only 77 percent of adults are considered mid to highly literate."³
- More than 43 million adults in the United States cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third-grade level. According to estimates released in 2020 by the National Center for Education Statistics, 28 percent of Californians have a literacy proficiency level that is at or below Level 1 – persons with "difficulties using or comprehending print materials," while 36 percent of Californians score at the most basic numeracy level.⁴
- The Barbara Bush Foundation estimates that low levels of adult literacy could cost the U.S. \$2.2 trillion a year. States with the lowest levels of adult literacy, such as California, would economically benefit the most by bringing all adult learners up to the minimum proficient level of literacy, including navigating digital texts and being able to compare information.⁵ Urban areas such as Los Angeles would benefit as well with growth of at least 10 percent of the current gross domestic product.
- Workers aged 25 and over who have less education than a high school diploma had the highest unemployment rate and lowest median weekly earnings of \$592 per week, which is three times less than those with the highest level of education.⁶
- The 2020 recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic saw adults with less than a high school diploma suffer the highest unemployment rate, compared to those at all other education levels.⁷ Many adults have sought career changes that require additional skills and training.
- Up to \$232 billion in annual health care costs is linked to low adult literacy skills. Low-literacy adults are more likely to use and return to emergency rooms, misunderstand prescription medicine labels, have trouble navigating health care and insurance, and have less knowledge of



3 <https://capitolweekly.net/california-shockingly-has-the-lowest-literacy-rate-of-any-state/>

4 <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019179/index.asp> ; <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>

5 The Barbara Bush Foundation report uses data for individuals scoring at Levels 1 and 2 on the PIAAC.

6 Career Outlook Data on Display. (2020, May). Learn more, earn more: Education leads to higher wages, lower unemployment : Career Outlook. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2020/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

7 Falk, G., Carter, J., Nicchitta, I., Nyhof, E., & Romero, P. (2020, December 7). Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic: In Brief. Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46554>.

preventive care and chronic disease.⁸

- 43 percent of adults with the lowest literacy levels live in poverty.
- Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72 percent chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to receive poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rates, repeat school years, or drop out.⁹

Fewer than 10 percent of the adults in need of reading help in the United States are receiving services.¹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic further affected programs by making in-person tutoring or attending classes more challenging.

“One learner was struggling with being the mother of three children, working full time, attending tutoring sessions, and trying to ensure the health and welfare of her family. She believes that many of the strategies for interacting with her children that she has learned in our family literacy programs have helped her become a better mother and a better person. [H]er oldest son is no longer getting in trouble at school, she can now assist another child who was struggling in school, and she has gotten a promotion at work.”

— Opportunity to Read, Watsonville Public Library

Increasing a person's literacy benefits the individual, their family, and the wider community. Nationally:

- 1.5 million people with the lowest levels of literacy are incarcerated. A 1 percent increase in the high school completion rate of all men ages 20-60 would save the US as much as \$1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.
- A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her child's academic success.
- A 1 percent increase in average literacy rates yields a 1.5 percent permanent increase in the GDP or a \$2.3 billion dollar increase.¹¹



8 Vernon, J. A., Trujillo, A., Rosenbaum, S. & DeBuono, B. (2007, October). Low health literacy: Implications for national health policy. Health Sciences Research Commons. Washington, DC: George Washington University. Retrieved from http://hsrc.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/sphhs_policy_facpubs/172/

9 https://prolitteracy.org/Portals/0/pdf/PL_AdultLitFacts_US_flyer.pdf?ver=2016-05-06-145137-067

10 https://prolitteracy.org/Portals/0/pdf/PL_AdultLitFacts_US_flyer.pdf?ver=2016-05-06-145137-067

11 Literacy for All: Adult literacy through Libraries. (ALA, 2019)

The Value of California Library Literacy Services

California Library Literacy Services provides value for the learner, the taxpayer, the community, and the library. Library-based literacy programs are successful because they are based in trusted spaces at the heart of the community.

Public library literacy programs are an integral part of California's adult education landscape, reaching and engaging learners who are not served by other agencies. The welcoming, easy-to-access, people-centered, and information-rich library environment helps learners to flourish and achieve their literacy goals.

Located in rural, suburban, and urban sites, public libraries provide information-rich, welcoming environments where learners can flourish. Libraries provide a distinct set of resources including location, space, information, dedication to privacy and intellectual freedom, and dedicated and knowledgeable staff. Equity of access and lifelong learning are core library values.¹²

“The literacy program allowed us to keep in touch with some of our most vulnerable patrons, learners, and tutors, through the pandemic.”

— Library Director, Woodland Public Library

California's library literacy programs address the full spectrum of skills that are now considered to represent literacy: “listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate information.”¹³

“A tutor and learner participated in lessons regarding the upcoming primary elections. This was very impactful, as we learned that the learner had submitted her ballot shortly afterward, having voted in the United States for the first time.”

— Monrovia Public Library

California Library Literacy Services is the nation's first statewide library-based literacy program. Since 1984, California's library literacy programs have helped more than a quarter of a million learners and their families.

Californians served through this program are usually the lowest level, hardest-to-reach learners. Trained volunteers provide one-to-one or small group tutoring based on each individual's pace and goals.

¹² Literacy for All: Adult literacy through Libraries. (ALA, 2019)

¹³ <https://www.nala.ie/literacy>

Services are provided confidentially in the welcoming and supportive library environment—crucial qualities when working with adults who do not have the skills to attend and succeed in traditional classroom-based programs. Meaningful relationships develop from tutor-learner partnerships, and, in many cases, the volunteer's experience is almost as transformative as the learner's.



“Richard initially came to us as a requirement of his probation. His life before was filled with gang activity. He now participates in both group computer instruction and individual tutoring sessions. He understands the value of the services and has been seen helping others who arrive in the Literacy Department. He is bilingual and has assisted new learners with the apprehension that often accompanies the intake process.”

— San Bernardino Public Library

California Library Literacy Services' face-to-face tutoring model was hard hit during the pandemic. Half of tutors and learners found a way to continue, but half did not. Libraries closed for part of the period, meeting areas were not accessible, and participants avoided in-person meetings.

Regrowth will be helped by additional funding and a flexible funding stream that allows programs to direct funds and build capacity where needed. Many adult learners need or prefer the adaptability of remote tutoring, which increases educational opportunities in remote areas and outside regular library hours, and libraries must continue delivering virtual services and training volunteers to tutor in the virtual environment to address these needs. Other learners and tutors do not necessarily have the equipment and/or home internet connections to benefit from virtual tutoring, and libraries must rebuild and continue delivering their traditional, impactful face-to-face services to support those learners. Others are best served through hybrid literacy services that combine virtual and in-person tutoring, and libraries must tailor their programs to deliver those services, too.

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year:

- 104 library jurisdictions, with tutoring locations in 352 of California's 1,130 libraries, provided literacy services to adult learners and their families.
- 68 jurisdictions delivered family literacy programs to supplement their adult literacy tutoring programs
- 6,497 adult learners received tutoring.
- 5,279 families, including 9,523 children, received family literacy and community outreach services.

- 3,540 parents and caregivers and 9,639 children were served through Mobile Library Literacy Services.
- 3,365 volunteer tutors and 460 other volunteers supported these local programs.
- \$6.86 million worth of volunteer hours were contributed.¹⁴
- \$17 million in local funds matched the state's \$7.3 million investment.¹⁵
- 373 community agencies partnered with a library literacy program.

Although about 6,500 adults with low literacy skills received tutoring in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, 79 of the 104 California Library Literacy Services programs still had waiting lists. There weren't enough volunteers and resources to help at least 1,895 Californians who came to this state's libraries eager to learn to read and write.

“M.W. came to Shasta Literacy at the age of thirty-three for help completing her high school diploma. She started working with a tutor right at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and they were able to continue meeting outdoors while the library was closed. In December of 2020, she earned her diploma. She had this to say to us, ‘You guys are my first step, so thank you so much!’ Now that she has her diploma, she can receive college financial aid ... She wants to major in Psychology.”

— Shasta Public Libraries

Staff and volunteers in library literacy programs provide one-to-one and small group tutoring that is inclusive, learner-driven, family-oriented, and community- and volunteer-focused. Library literacy programs often recruit learners to work as program volunteers and staff or ambassadors for their libraries and their literacy programs.

Library literacy services programs rely on human interaction, and face-to-face meetings between learners and tutors are central to all literacy programs. When the pandemic shut down library services across the state in March 2020, literacy programs responded by developing new means to address the needs of adult learners.

14 The value of volunteer time was calculated using data from Independent Sector, which draws on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. 204,235 hours x \$33.61 = \$6,864,338: https://independentsector.org/resource/vovt_details/

15 The State of California provides \$4.8 million to support adult literacy services and \$2.5 million to support family literacy services.

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

For a face-to-face program like California Library Literacy Services, shutdowns and social distancing posed enormous challenges. Some learners and tutors were discouraged and stepped away from the program for the duration. Others used digital tutoring, but these methods increased equipment, training, and learning resource costs for many programs.

Fully half of tutors and learners, however, found a way to continue tutoring and learning. Using technology, the mail, and other means, tutors and learners remained in touch by sending reading materials and completed lessons back and forth. Some programs reported observing how adult learners mastered digital videoconferencing platforms and learned to support distance learning for their children.

“Right now, my kids are doing virtual learning, and I’m so glad for this program because I practiced and read a lot! Virtual learning is hard, and it’s new. You need to ‘download this’ and ‘be able to read that.’ I am glad I was able to adjust quickly because now I can read.”

— Parent, San Diego Public Library

Approximately one-fourth of tutors and learners went “on pause” until in-person tutoring could resume, and another 25 percent stopped working on the program or lost contact. Some learners and tutors found that the stay-at-home orders and health precautions precluded them from continuing, or led to other life changes, including needing to move from a community, adapt to job loss and financial challenges, and support their children’s at-home schooling.



Libraries report many individual successes amidst these challenges, as exemplified by a story from Tuolumne County: “One learner was able to navigate the vaccination system and DMV auto registration because of the work he was doing with his tutor.”

Some tutoring volunteers have found additional ways to help by working with local organizations to distribute thousands of bags of food to families and creating take-home family literacy packs. In Redwood City, volunteers from the incarcerated learner program have created tote bags for groceries and supplies, and incarcerated learners have created crafts to support family literacy programs.

“For one learner, participation in parent programs have helped her feel confident. She has blossomed and now plays a pivotal role in helping other students in her literacy classes who are struggling. She has also learned new skills such as communication with email, creating professional presentations, accessing the internet for research, and meeting using Zoom technology.

“These tools and resources have helped this mother help her children who have been impacted by the pandemic protocols. This was new and scary for her at first. However, gaining knowledge about these new resources and understanding how to use them allowed her the ability to help her children and communicate with her school.

“She has metamorphosed from being shy and often embarrassed of her lack of computer and literacy skills to a confident young woman who believes that her dreams of furthering her education and owning her own business are attainable. In addition, she believes that she can advocate for her children’s future and facilitate their success through education because she feels confident enough to help them and, more importantly feels like she can ask the right questions to get the help she needs.”

— Stanislaus County Library



Despite the added costs and the need to reinvent how services are provided, some libraries reported a few “silver linings” during the pandemic-related library closures and social distancing restrictions.

“Due to the pandemic, many of our students have been laid off. Krista was one of these and so she had to look for a job after being with the same company for 15 years. She reached out to her tutor and requested help with creating a resume. Krista now has a new job and she loves it!”

— Santa Fe Springs City Library

As Carlsbad City Library states, “Remote learning has allowed tutoring pairs to continue instruction during periods of extended vacation, childcare issues, and mobility challenges.” Santa Clara City Library reports, “The positive outcome is that learners, tutors, and staff have learned or strengthened digital literacy skills. Even post pandemic, we believe there is opportunity that some tutors and

learners will prefer to meet virtually, as they have the flexibility to meet from home, and are not faced with transportation or childcare constraints.”

“One pair was only able to meet in person a few times before the pandemic. For them, the transition to remote learning had many upsides. Being home on Zoom, they don’t have to worry about disturbing others. Since they know only the two of them could hear what is said, they laugh loudly if they choose, and they are not self-conscious about being in public ... and they don’t have to deal with the stress of traffic.”

— Los Angeles Public Library

Programs also used the “pandemic pause” in library use to develop staff skills, share best practices, and strengthen networks with other library literacy programs across the state.

- 70 training opportunities were held that included topics such as equity, diversity and inclusion, effective tutoring workshops, outcomes-based curriculum development, and statewide networking calls for a total of approximately 93 hours of additional training with approximately 2,450 literacy staff and volunteers in attendance.
- Out of 400 participant survey responses:
 - › 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed they learned something by attending the training.
 - › 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed they felt more confident in what they had learned.
 - › 86 percent agreed or strongly agreed they intended to apply what they learned.
 - › 82 percent agreed or strongly agreed that applying what they learned would help improve library services to the public.
- \$410,083 in funds and in-kind support were invested in the professional development and continuing education of the California Library Literacy Services community.

Evaluating Progress: Focus on the Learner

California Library Literacy Services are planned, implemented, and evaluated using a learner-centered framework known as “Roles and Goals.” The framework helps staff and volunteers identify the goals that learners want to accomplish with their improved literacy skills; deliver learner-centered instruction; track, acknowledge, and celebrate progress; and evaluate the program’s impact.

“T. has made great progress in her learning and was able to meet many of her stated goals this year, despite the hardships brought on by the pandemic and library closure. She recently shared with her tutor that her granddaughter picked out a book for her to read to her, and T. was able to read the book with great confidence!”

— Sutter County Library



Goal setting empowers learners and reflects best practices in adult education. It helps learners reflect on what brought them to the program, define what they want to work on, take ownership of their instruction, focus on what's important to them, stay motivated, and build self-confidence. Goal-setting within the framework helps learners achieve success in their major life roles as community members, workers, family members, and life-long learners.

At the core of the Roles and Goals framework is a belief that literacy “involves listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate information,”¹⁶ and that literacy is “understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written text to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”¹⁷

“Sarah has been enrolled in our program over the last two years. She has flourished with the commitment of her tutors, who have instilled lifelong learning as a central theme in their tutoring sessions. She has gained employment, a driver’s license, and citizenship, and enrolled in a community college over the past two years. She has a growing family who she also incorporates in our family literacy workshops.”

— Yolo County Library

The goals included in the “Roles and Goals” framework range from learning the alphabet to reading a book, sending an email, searching the Internet, interviewing for a job, paying bills, accessing community services, reading a medicine label, and helping a child with homework. Together with their tutor, learners select a goal or goals from the framework, which can be as simple as getting a

16 <https://www.nala.ie/literacy>

17 <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016040.pdf>

library card or as challenging as becoming a citizen or preparing for a new job, or work to develop their own goals. The framework puts the adult learner first, respects the reasons for seeking help, promotes learner persistence, helps programs and volunteers listen to learner aspirations, and supports learners of all experiences and learning differences without pigeonholing them into a fixed curriculum.

Even in this most challenging year, 61 percent of the learners who set at least one goal for themselves achieved their goal, including:

- 61 percent learned the alphabet, letters and sounds
- 65 percent read a book, newspaper, or magazine
- 74 percent used a new technology skill
- 62 percent were able to help with their children's education by sharing a book, helping with homework, or interacting with teachers or schools
- 49 percent met a job-related goal such as writing a resume or locating job opportunities on their own, and 28 percent got a new job
- 74 percent accessed community services and resources

“One learner has been working on a letter to the Fairfield Housing Authority all year. It’s a very emotional letter for her to write because it is about discrimination she feels she faced when seeking housing assistance in 2019. When she complained to them back then, she was told to write a letter outlining her complaint, but that was not something she felt she could do. Through her hard work during our lessons together she was finally able to complete a first draft and then a final draft of the letter. This week she was to send the letter”

— Sacramento Public Library

Adults enrolled in library literacy programs also have the opportunity to take part in supplementary programs that support their progress and are funded, in part, by the State Library using federal Library Services and Technology Act funds:

- The statewide [COVID Diaries](#) writing project and workshops help learners develop their reading and writing skills by reflecting on their experiences during the pandemic.
- [Learner leadership](#) trainings and networking provide learning opportunities, social connections, and practice in speaking and facilitation
- Tutor/learner conferences offer trainings from experts, best practices, and sharing of accomplishments
- The [Key to Community](#) project helps learners become more engaged in their communities, develop leadership and meeting facilitation skills, and be better prepared to participate in local, state, and national elections.

“Juan’s first goal was passing the written driver’s license test. He had failed this twice and was very anxious to succeed. We immediately started working by using the handbook and practice tests. Within weeks, he came to our meeting and proudly announced that he had passed! This increased his motivation and progress. Shortly thereafter, he got a new full-time job with good benefits and more recently he applied for a higher position and composed his own resume.”

— Ventura County Library

Family Literacy

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, 68 library literacy programs delivered family literacy services to:

- 1,525 families that included adults enrolled in California Library Literacy Services
- 2,611 children in those families.
- 3,754 families that included eligible adults but who are not yet enrolled in California Library Literacy Services¹⁸
- 6,912 children in those families.



Family literacy programs provided 69,378 books to families to help them build home libraries and provided 39,884 learning kits to help them continue learning at home.

California Library Literacy Services saw a significant increase in family literacy programming, outreach efforts, and the number of families served between the 2017-2018 fiscal year and the 2020-2021 fiscal year because of the state’s additional investment in family literacy.

Family literacy services help learners succeed in the roles they play in their families as caregivers,

parents, and advocates. Family literacy services focus on adult learners and their family members—older and younger generations alike. Families take part in programming, are connected to one another and community resources, and are given materials to take home and keep.

Research has shown that **the single most significant factor influencing a child’s early educational success is an introduction to reading and being read to at home prior to beginning school.**

When adults read to children and discuss story content, ask open-ended questions about story

18 English-speaking adults, age 16 and older, and not concurrently enrolled in high school.

events, explain the meaning of words, and point out features of print, they promote increased language development, comprehension of story content, knowledge of story structure, and a better understanding of language—all of which leads to reading success.¹⁹

“For our book club, we read about a young girl and her grandmother who overcome a language barrier, strengthening their relationship and improving their literacy skills. In the story the granddaughter labels furniture and other items around the house in order to help her grandmother learn English words. One of our family literacy participants really resonated with this scene. She ended up taking this activity in the book and practicing it in her own life, labeling different items around her home. This learner has three grandchildren, one of whom is on the autism spectrum, and found that this was a rewarding activity not only for herself but also for her grandchildren.”

— San Luis Obispo City-County Library

A mother’s reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children’s future academic success, outweighing factors such as family income and neighborhood.²⁰ Children of less-educated parents are much more likely to become low-skilled adults. U.S. adults with low levels of education who have parents with low levels of education are 10 times more likely to have low skills than those who have higher-educated parents.²¹

Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72 percent chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to receive poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rates, repeat school years, or drop out.²²

In California in 2019, 68 percent of California’s fourth graders scored “below proficient” in reading.²³ On the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading scale, which ranges from 0 to 500, the average score of fourth-grade students in California was 216—lower than the average score of 219 for public school students in the nation. The average score of eighth-grade students in California was 259—also lower than the average score of 262 for public school students in the nation.²⁴ New

19 <https://ferstreaders.org/resources/fifty-top-literacy-statistics>

20 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2010, October 25). Improving mothers’ literacy skills may be best way to boost children’s achievement. National Institute of Health. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-boost-childrens-achievement>

21 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (2015, February). Making Skills Everyone’s Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/making-skills-summary.pdf>

22 https://proliteracy.org/Portals/0/pdf/PL_AdultLitFacts_US_flyer.pdf?ver=2016-05-06-145137-067

23 <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2019/pdf/2020014CA4.pdf>
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2019/pdf/2020014CA8.pdf>
<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5116-fourth-grade-reading-achievement-levels?loc=6&loct=2#detailed/2/6/false/1729,871,573,36,867,38,18,16,14,13/1185,1186,1187,1188/11560>

24 <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2017/pdf/2018039CA8.pdf>

studies indicate that the pandemic created additional challenges, with about a third of young children now “missing reading benchmarks,” with significantly higher percentages in economically challenged areas.²⁵

Although the pandemic made it more difficult for families to gather in person, expanded virtual programming meant that services reached more people. As one library reported, “The shift to a hybrid model opened up an opportunity for adults and families that were unable to reach our programming in person. The changes developed into a stronger program with long lasting impacts for families and residents.” Online services, however, require a significant investment in digital technology, learning resources, and training as well as access to high-speed broadband, which necessitates ongoing budget increases for programs. CLLS experience with unexpected changes such as the pandemic also add to the need for flexible funding so that libraries can shift funds to newly developed services.

Family literacy programs include storytimes, games, music, and conceptual learning activities to help adult learners support their children's education and development. Program staff help adults develop their confidence and skills and learn how to select books, read to their children, and foster a love of reading. Virtual programming, home deliveries, and use of mobile messaging services to deliver family learning options provided creative ways for families to connect with each other and their libraries during the pandemic. “It's good to connect with others even just through the screen,” one family told the Read Santa Clara program.

“I take turns reading the books with my teenager. He and I read aloud together. My baby loves the books. I tell him the colors and shapes ... When I help my baby, I learn how to slow down and be patient. Just being active with him is good. I don't worry if I get things right or not. I used to try to finish a book but now I just read a couple of pages, I know it's OK.”

— Family Literacy Parent, Sonoma County Library

Staff also help adults strengthen their connections and communications with educators, healthcare professionals, and family members, and navigate the systems and services that affect their families.

Mobile Library Literacy Services

In some communities, family literacy programs are provided to families with children ages 0-5 using specially outfitted vehicles that visit low-income housing developments, migrant work camps, local day care centers, Head Start programs, and recreation centers in hard-to-reach and underserved communities. Staff and volunteers model reading behaviors for parents and caregivers as well as lend and give away books so learning can continue at home to help children develop positive experiences with books prior to entering school.

25 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/us/pandemic-schools-reading-crisis.html>, accessed 17 April 2022.

The state's eight Mobile Library Literacy Services programs served 13,179 people in addition to those previously reported as adult and family literacy participants, including 3,540 parents and caregivers and 9,639 children, and made 841 site visits to community locations during the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

English Language and Literacy Intensive Services

English Language and Literacy Intensive Services was created by the state and at one time had a dedicated state funding stream. The program currently remains an "option" that local literacy programs can invest in using both state and local dollars.

English Language and Literacy Intensive programs complement the education children receive at school and include a variety of fun, library-based experiences, such as educational games, field trips, storytimes, homework help, and other activities. The programs also:



- Connect parents with English-as-a-Second-Language programs to support their own acquisition of English;
- Help parents become actively involved in the formal and informal education of their children;
- Introduce children and their parents to a variety of children's literature; and
- Help acquaint families – many of whom are new to the U.S. – with the public library and other local resources.

Eight libraries have elected to use their California Library Literacy Services funds to work with schools to boost the literacy skills and test scores of California schoolchildren who strive to improve their English. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, these programs served 932 children and 820 parents and caregivers with supportive literacy services that focus on learning and the joy of reading and provide families with an important connection to their children's development and education.

English-as-a-Second-Language Services

Libraries have consistently reported demand for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) services, but California Library Literacy Services funding has been restricted to English-speaking adult learners and could not be spent on ESL tutoring. One bright light for the future is the state budget's inclusion of one-time funds for library ESL services starting in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

About 44 percent of Californians speak a language other than English at home, and half of those

speak English “less than well.” In 2019, 27 percent of California’s population was foreign-born, more than twice the rate in the rest of the country. About half of all children in the state have at least one parent who is an immigrant.²⁶

Data from the U.S. Census and Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), finds “immigrants are over-represented among low-skilled adults in the United States—accounting for 33 percent of adults with low literacy skills and 24 percent of those with low numeracy skills while comprising only 15 percent of the overall U.S. adult working-age population.”²⁷

Demand for ESL services is high, but the opportunities for learning have decreased for many years, fluctuating according to available funding. Adult schools and community colleges reduced class offerings in the 2007-2009 recession, and some have never rebounded. Formal class offerings also struggle with retaining students. All English language learners differ, whether by educational background, motivation, availability, or family and work circumstances, and educators may severely underestimate the time and effort required to master English.²⁸

Considering that more than one in five California adults speak English “less than well,” the number of those actually served addresses only a fraction of the need. Before the recession, about 550,000 English language learners were enrolled in ESL classes in California public institutions.²⁹ Changes in funding formulas and other factors led to a remarkable decrease in enrollment to 96,000 ESL learners in 2012-2013—a decline of more than 80 percent. Although enrollments rebounded to 257,049 students in 2018-2019, ESL programs in adult schools and community colleges today are serving less than half of what they did 15 years ago.³⁰

Even before the 2021-2022 start of ESL funding for library literacy programs, public libraries acknowledged community demand, and some provided services. During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, 42 libraries who participated in the California Library Literacy Services program used local funds to provide ESL programs for 2,541 adults whose first languages include Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, Punjabi, and Arabic, among others.

With the new state funding, public libraries are applying their successful outcome-based, one-to-one tutoring model to offer ESL services and increase the number of California adults who receive ESL literacy support to enhance their work skills, lifelong learning, family roles, and community participation. Thirty-two libraries applied to provide ESL services with State Library funding in 2021-2022 and 17 will join the group for 2022-2023.

26 “Quick Facts California,” United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA/PST045219>. “CSII Quick Facts,” USCDornsife Equity Research Institute, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://dornsife.usc.edu/csi/quick-facts/>

27 Batalova, Jeanne and Fix, Michael, “Through and Immigration Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States”, Migration Policy Institute, February 2015, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>

28 <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/12/19/problems-accelerated-learning-esl-opinion>

29 Arturo Gonzalez, California’s Commitment to Adult English Learners: Caught Between Funding and Need,” Public Policy Institute of California, 2007, https://www.ppics.org/content/pubs/rb/RB_407AGRB.pdf

30 <https://www.calpassplus.org/Launchboard/Adult-Education-Pipeline.aspx>, accessed April 13, 2021.

Partnerships and Programming

Reflecting the libraries in which they are based, California Library Literacy Services are collaborative programs that are embedded in their communities.

Library directors report that their literacy programs bring new families to the library, strengthen community relations, and help libraries address community needs and align with community aspirations.

In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, library literacy programs partnered with 373 community agencies to deliver literacy services. Partnering agencies included adult schools and community colleges, Head Starts and other early learning organizations, homeless shelters and housing authorities, jails and juvenile justice departments, faith-based organizations, local businesses, and non-profit organizations.

“During the challenging year of 2020-2021, I’m proud of how our adult literacy services have actually expanded. We’ve been able to reach a larger population of adult learners that has increased our enrolled learners and our overall literacy presence throughout the county. This has also been true for our community partnerships ... We had a huge increase in numbers when our services went virtual in the 2020-2021 fiscal year.”

— Riverside County Library System

Library literacy programs and their partners shared space, provided resources and instruction to one another's communities, and provided supportive referrals to one another's services.

Statewide, libraries are partners with California's network of adult education providers because of the role library literacy services play in helping adults develop the reading and writing skills they need to benefit from adult and community college education or reach other personal employment, community, or family goals. However, different jurisdictions report varying levels of communication and cooperation with their local adult education providers.

“A student referred by Probation needed to get his California Driver’s License in order to keep his permanent full-time job. He was expecting his third child so needless to say he was very overwhelmed but trying his best. He studied with his tutor faithfully. Even though he had reading, vocabulary and spelling challenges, he was able to achieve his goal! He passed the written portion of his test and his family were very happy and proud.”

— Siskiyou County Free Library

Within the library literacy community, program coordinators participate in regional networks in which they share training opportunities and exchange effective practices and ideas. Statewide training, facilitated by online learning opportunities, has fostered the sharing of expertise.

Literacy coordinators also collaborate with local library staff to provide programming that supports and enhances the work of the library literacy program. For example:

- **Career Online High School:** Enables adult students to earn a high school diploma and a career certificate through the library while gaining real-world career skills.
- **California Libraries Learn:** Supports library staff in professional development, encourages growth and innovation in programming and services, builds a learning culture, and focuses on inclusion, diversity, equity and belonging.
- **Early Learning:** Enhances library staff skills in serving young children ages 0-5, their families, and their caregivers.
- **Lunch at the Library:** Provides summer meals and enrichment programs for children in communities where at least 50 percent of children and teens are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school lunches.
- **Summer @ Your Library:** Helps libraries provide high-quality summer reading programs for the whole family.

Policy Considerations

“Providing adult literacy instruction is key to enabling the Ventura County Library to carry out its mission to enrich lives and strengthen communities. Teaching people to read empowers them to be successful in their career and educational goals and to be able to fully participate in today’s world ... It is vital that state funding increase to meet new demands.”

— Library Director, Ventura County Library

California Reading Readiness Council

Creating a California Reading Readiness Council charged with increasing reading skills among all Californians would better coordinate statewide – and national – efforts to create stronger readers. Coordinating efforts will help with the work needed for pandemic recovery and capacity building, and support emerging readers at all levels.

Such a council would strategically marshal existing reading and literacy resources and could be tasked with developing an action plan that, over the next decade, cuts the number of non-readers and low-literacy Californians in half. The Readiness Council could coordinate the pandemic recovery effort and address changes needed for program effectiveness.

Membership in the council should include the adult education community, specifically through existing Adult Education coalitions, which include representatives from community colleges, school districts, and county offices of education as providers of adult basic education, secondary education, and English as a Second Language services. Other key partners are relevant state agencies such as the Department of Education, the California Community College Chancellor's Office, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Department of Social Services, the Employment Development Department, and the State Library.

“Learners who improve their reading and writing become regular library patrons and literacy tutors become more invested library supporters.”

— Library Director, Upland Public Library

Other representation could come from literacy and early learning related organizations, such as First 5, ProLiteracy, First Book, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Reach Out and Read, United Way, and community-based organizations that serve local literacy needs. Members should also include volunteer agencies and literacy and reading-related foundations, such as AmeriCorps, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Dollar General Literacy Foundation as well as community colleges, public libraries, and universities.

“Alanna and her daughter, Cora, have been in our family literacy programming for three years and have grown so much in that time. When little Cora was first brought to our classes three years ago, she was non-verbal at the age of 2. She was scared of the other children in our class, as she didn’t have any siblings or cousins at home and Alanna had come to the area not knowing anyone. Over time through our model storytimes, our talks and advice to Alanna, and the connections she made with the other moms in the group, both mother and daughter really came out of their shells.

“When the pandemic hit, Cora regressed a bit, and Alanna was worried. She reached out to Family Literacy staff. We made sure to include them in our virtual storytimes and gave the children and adults opportunities just to talk and share what they were going through. With continued reading time, our program, and some educational toys we supplied our families with, Cora came back out of her shell and started to flourish.

“Cora is now 5, is very expressive, and can read at almost an end-of-Kindergarten level. This past term (July 2020-June 2021) was very hard on

all the families we worked with, but our adult learners stuck with us and were able to continue to grow their children’s development even through these difficult times. Over the course of our virtual programming which included guest ‘teachers’ from our partners, Alanna learned strategies to reduce their family food waste, started planting a small garden on her balcony at home, and even opened her first bank account, all while starting a savings account for a family trip they hope to be able to take someday soon. Alanna and Cora read together every day.”

— South San Francisco Public Library

Flexible Funding and Improved Measurement of Outcomes

One key takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic was that library literacy programs need flexibility between the three funding streams that make up CLLS: adult literacy services for English speakers, family literacy, and English-as-a-Second-Language services. Depending on community needs, such as the demand for parents to support children through home and distance education, programs want to shift funds rather than be locked into a rigid formula. Joining all three areas of funding into a single pool, and empowering libraries to make informed local decisions, will strengthen library literacy services, serve adults and their families, and be responsive to communities.

Purchasing or developing a single reporting software for use by all California Library Literacy Services programs to track data and manage volunteers would provide a more comprehensive -- and accurate -- display of outcomes. As programs respond to the pandemic and recovery capacity, developing improved data collection will provide tools for analysis and improvement.

For local literacy programs, staff time would be freed to work with learners, prepare tutors, develop community partners, and conduct outreach. Literacy coordinators would be equipped with not just comprehensive data from their own programs but comparative data from other jurisdictions to aid in local decision-making and to gauge program impact.

Similarly, state oversight becomes more efficient because of consistent data that can be easily aggregated, used to assess program results, and allow more precise targeting of needs and identification of programs that need the most support.

Appendix A: Financial Awards

2020-2021 Fiscal Year – California Library Literacy Services Awards

*English Language and Literacy Services (ELLI) and Mobile Library Literacy Services (MLLS) are supported by local funds only

Library Literacy Program	Adult Literacy	Family Literacy	ELLI	MLLS	Grant Total
A.K. Smiley Public Library	X	X			\$68,686
Alameda County Library	X				\$123,990
Alameda Free Library	X				\$32,452
Altadena Library District	X				\$23,577
Amador County Library	X				\$31,427
Azusa City Library	X	X			\$42,500
Beaumont Library District	X				\$26,794
Benicia Public Library	X				\$25,590
Berkeley Public Library	X				\$56,568
Beverly Hills Public Library	X				\$29,695
Brawley Public Library	X	X		X	\$47,662
Burbank Public Library	X				\$26,012
Butte County Library	X	X		X	\$83,501
Calaveras County Library	X				\$34,940
Camarena Memorial Public Library	X				\$36,859
Camarillo Public Library	X				\$25,150
Carlsbad City Library	X	X			\$58,716
Chula Vista Public Library	X	X			\$71,332
City of Commerce Public Library	X	X	X		\$54,398
Colton Public Library*	X	X	X		\$63,834
Colusa County Library	X	X		X	\$38,652
Contra Costa County Library	X	X			\$91,443
Corona Public Library	X	X			\$68,102
Covina Public Library	X	X			\$55,834
Del Norte Public Library	X				\$26,988
Downey City Library	X				\$42,008
Escondido Public Library	X	X			\$83,821
Fresno County Public Library	X	X			\$134,304
Glendale Public Library	X				\$59,154
Glendora Library & Cultural Center	X				\$25,638

Library Literacy Program	Adult Literacy	Family Literacy	ELLI	MLLS	Grant Total
Hayward Public Library	X	X			\$91,185
Hemet Public Library*	X				\$31,752
Humboldt County Library	X	X			\$59,673
Huntington Beach Public Library	X		X		\$58,141
Imperial County Free Library	X				\$25,882
Imperial Public Library	X	X			\$36,200
Lake County Library	X	X			\$59,221
Lassen Library District	X	X			\$85,351
Lincoln Public Library	X	X			\$28,907
Livermore Public Library	X				\$39,250
Lodi Public Library	X	X			\$89,757
Lompoc Public Library	X	X			\$60,541
Los Angeles Public Library	X	X			\$222,850
Mariposa Public Library	X				\$22,832
Merced County Library	X	X			\$78,061
Monrovia Public Library	X	X			\$82,972
Monterey County Free Library	X	X		X	\$78,859
Monterey Park (Bruggemeyer) Library	X				\$38,264
Napa County Library	X	X			\$108,511
National City Public Library	X				\$42,192
Nevada County Library	X	X			\$50,453
Newport Beach Public Library	X				\$45,000
Oceanside Public Library	X	X			\$44,254
Orange County Public Library	X	X			\$145,621
Orange Public Library	X				\$37,638
Placentia Library District	X				\$32,144
Placer County Library	X	X			\$71,785
Pleasanton Public Library	X				\$50,247
Plumas County Library	X	X	X		\$48,608
Porterville Public Library	X				\$24,855
Rancho Cucamonga Public Library	X				\$26,006
Redwood City Public Library	X	X	X		\$244,902
Richmond Public Library	X	X			\$132,544
Riverside County Library *	X	X			\$85,680
Riverside Public Library	X	X			\$62,027
Roseville Public Library	X				\$27,333
Sacramento Public Library	X	X			\$98,345

Library Literacy Program	Adult Literacy	Family Literacy	ELLI	MLLS	Grant Total
Salinas Public Library	X	X			\$159,664
San Benito County Free Library	X	X			\$56,612
San Bernardino County Library	X				\$102,796
San Bernardino Public Library	X	X	X		\$85,775
San Diego County Library	X				\$43,655
San Diego Public Library	X	X			\$159,756
San Francisco Public Library	X				\$53,885
San Jose Public Library	X	X			\$161,190
San Leandro Community Library	X	X			\$115,753
San Luis Obispo City-County Library	X	X			\$120,271
San Mateo County Libraries	X	X			\$86,515
San Mateo Public Library	X	X			\$88,970
Santa Barbara Public Library	X				\$50,993
Santa Clara City Library	X	X			\$78,924
Santa Clara County Library	X	X			\$111,190
Santa Fe Springs City Library	X		X		\$32,163
Santa Maria Public Library	X	X			\$78,797
Santa Monica Public Library	X	X			\$58,926
Santa Paula (Blanchard) Public Library	X	X			\$68,433
Shasta Public Libraries	X	X			\$64,803
Siskiyou County Free Library*	X	X			\$56,000
Solano County Library	X	X			\$107,347
Sonoma County Library	X	X			\$72,834
South San Francisco Public Library	X	X	X		\$96,663
Stanislaus County Library	X	X			\$275,615
Stockton-San Joaquin County Public Library	X	X		X	\$34,470
Sutter County Library	X	X			\$83,429
Tulare County Free Library	X	X			\$144,828
Tuolumne County Library	X	X			\$47,960
Upland Public Library	X				\$27,099
Ventura County Library	X				\$51,966
Watsonville Public Library	X	X			\$58,220
Willows Public Library**	X	X			\$54,056
Woodland Public Library	X				\$60,145
Yolo County Library	X	X			\$60,681
Continuing Grants Total					\$7,167,854

New Libraries

Libraries in the 3rd year

Library Literacy Program	Adult Literacy	Family Literacy	ELLI	MLLS	Grant Total
Long Beach Public Library	X	X			\$117,625
Los Angeles County Library	X				\$34,521
New Libraries Total					\$152,146

