

Issue 7 – Literacy: A Foundational Necessity

Issue Overview

How important is literacy? For many, literacy is considered a fundamental human right. It is the basis for any individual’s ability to learn. It is more than just being able to read, but rather one’s ability to use written information to function in modern society.

Having a population with high literacy skills also helps a city, region, state, and the country as a whole. Regions with strong literacy skills generally have increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality rates, and overall economic growth.

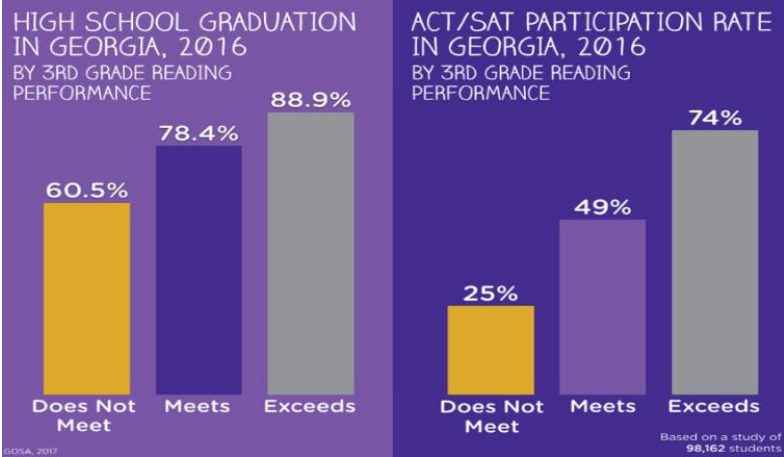
In general, education level is a significant determinant of individual income. However, studies have recently shown that literacy has a positive impact on earnings, beyond the impact of the quantity of schooling. Education is viewed as the great equalizer and mobilizer of upward mobility in American society, and a solid foundation in literacy is the primary driver in overall education success.

Significance for Georgia

To address the needs of its citizenry, Georgia has embarked on a series of education reforms to transform its public education system. The goal is for every student who graduates from high school to be successful in college and/ or their chosen career, and is competitive with their peers throughout the country and the world. The full potential of these reforms can only be realized if students are building on a solid foundation of literacy.

The importance of reading on grade level by the end of third grade and its link to academic success has been widely publicized in the past few years. As summarized by the Get Georgia Reading Campaign: The end of third grade marks the critical time when children shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Children unable to make this shift face serious barriers for future learning, because they can’t grasp half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum and beyond, including math and science. As a result, these children fall even further behind.

Third Grade End of Grade Reading Assessment by Exceeds, Meets, and Does Not Meet.



In addition to student literacy, adult literacy is an important consideration that Georgia must also focus on with greater urgency. There is a proven relationship between adult illiteracy, poverty, and educational outcomes for children. Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. In Georgia, 20% of the adult population lacks basic literacy skills.

Action Steps for Georgia

The current skill level of Georgia’s workforce does not meet the growing needs of the state’s ambitious plan for its economic development. A focus on the literacy of all the state’s citizens by addressing the factors that impact literacy in young children and increasing access to literacy programs for adults would significantly close the skills gap facing our state.