

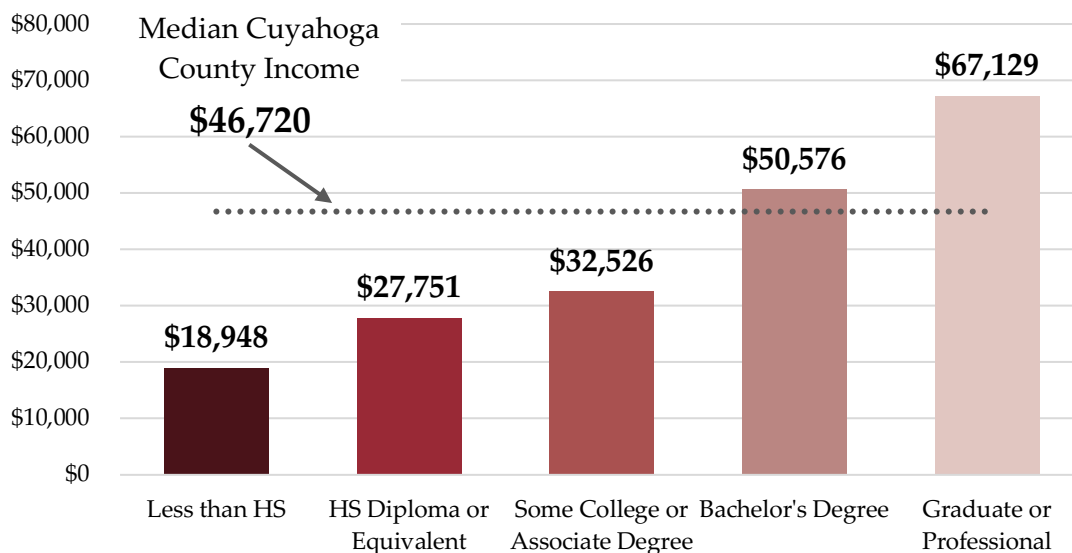
# Cuyahoga's Literacy Crisis

Data shows pervasive, county-wide challenge of young children and adults without the skills needed to succeed

Cuyahoga County's literacy crisis will persist for generations unless progress is accelerated in preparing young children for kindergarten and helping more adult residents secure at least a high school education.

Despite encouraging progress made through the collaborative efforts of literacy programs, funders and public officials, too many young adults and young children in Cuyahoga County are unprepared for the future. This not only limits their individual opportunity, but it weakens the current and future economic health of our county. Adults without a high school diploma earn nearly \$9,000 less per year than high school graduates. And most jobs require more than a high school diploma.<sup>i</sup>

## As Educational Attainment Rises, So Does Annual Income



An assessment of the state of literacy in Cuyahoga County done by The Literacy Cooperative found:

- 42% of all children enrolling in kindergarten in the 2018-19 school year weren't adequately prepared to succeed<sup>ii</sup>
- 10% of all adults, or 101,221 residents, didn't have a high school diploma as of 2017

- Nearly 40% of those without a high school diploma are ages 18-44<sup>iii</sup>

Children unprepared for kindergarten are less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade – a predictor of later success in school. And adults without a high school diploma lack the basic literacy and other skills required to access in-demand jobs that offer paths to prosperity.

Low literacy levels pervade all of Cuyahoga County. For example:

- More than half of Cuyahoga’s children unprepared for kindergarten are enrolling in suburban school districts<sup>iv</sup>
- More than half of the young adults (18-24) without a diploma live in the suburbs<sup>v</sup>
- 58% of adults (18-44) without a high school diploma live in the city of Cleveland<sup>vi</sup>

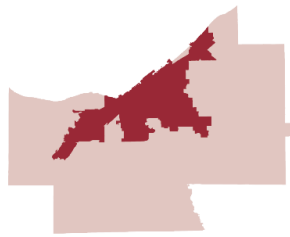
This assessment of the state of literacy in Cuyahoga County was prepared by The Literacy Cooperative, which was formed in 2004 to support literacy programs and to increase awareness of low literacy levels in the county.

We reviewed multiple data sets to assess the level of literacy and chose the indicators highlighted in this report because we and our partners believe they are the clearest indicators of adult and child literacy.

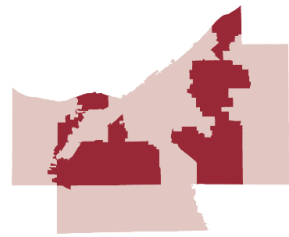
We produce this assessment, and other research, to help inform the decisions and policies of agencies, funders and policymakers.

We intend to produce this assessment every five years.

## Adults without a High School Diploma

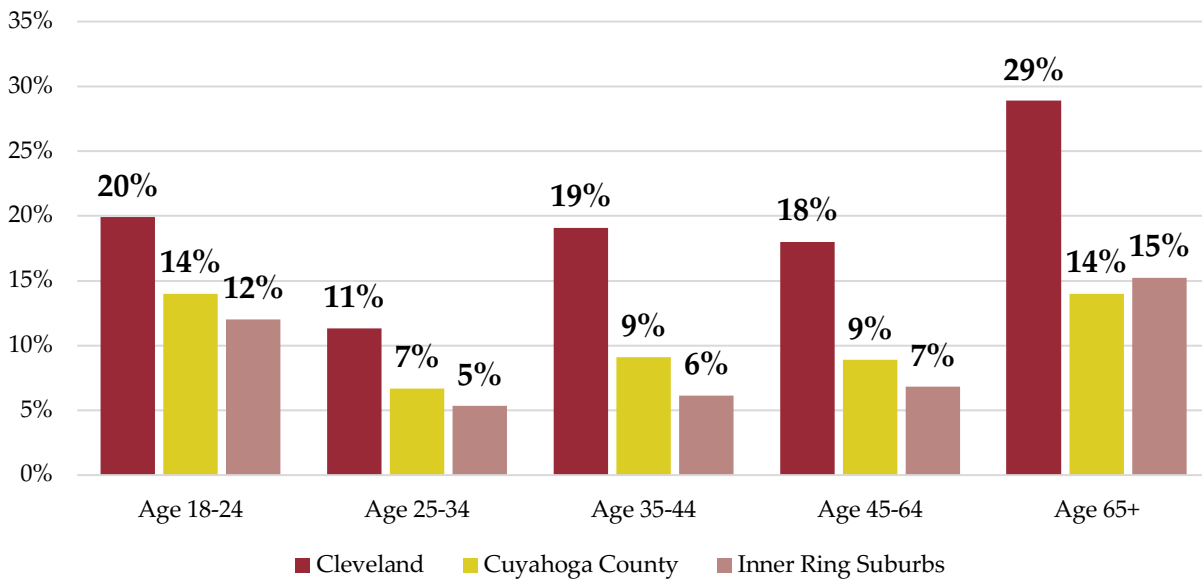


of those live in the City of Cleveland.



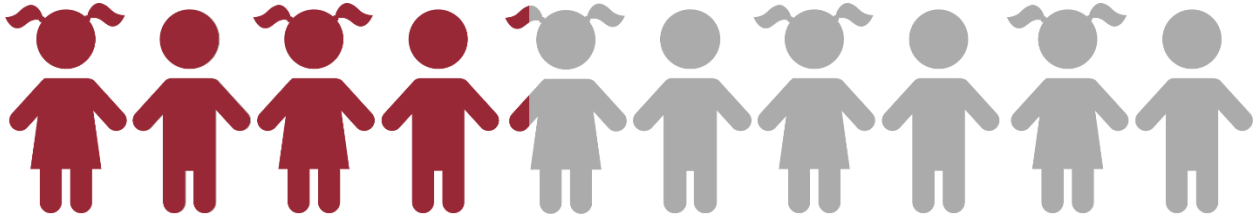
of those live in inner ring suburbs.

### Percent of Adults Without a High School Diploma, by Age Group

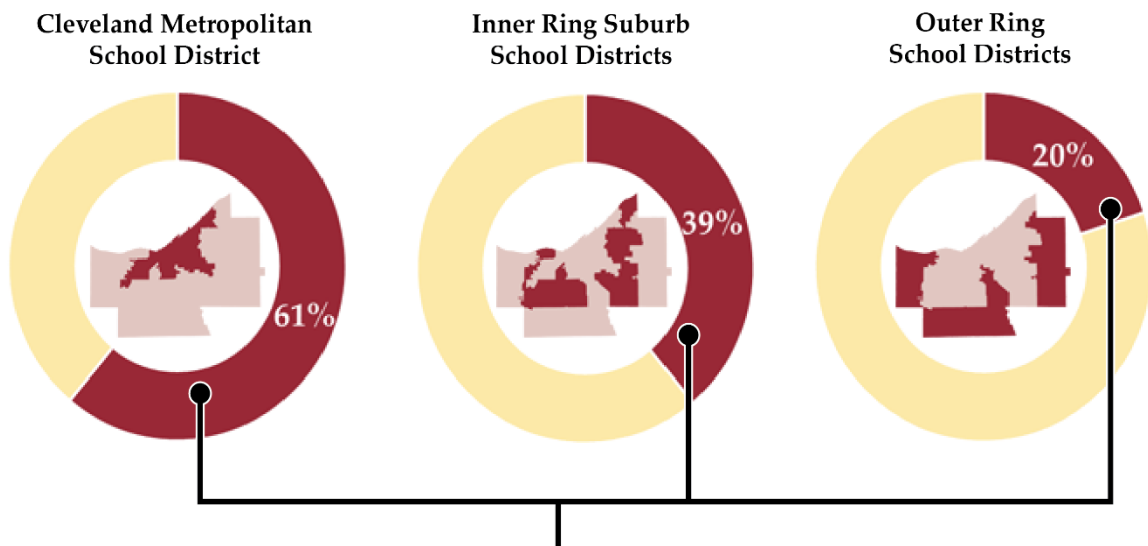
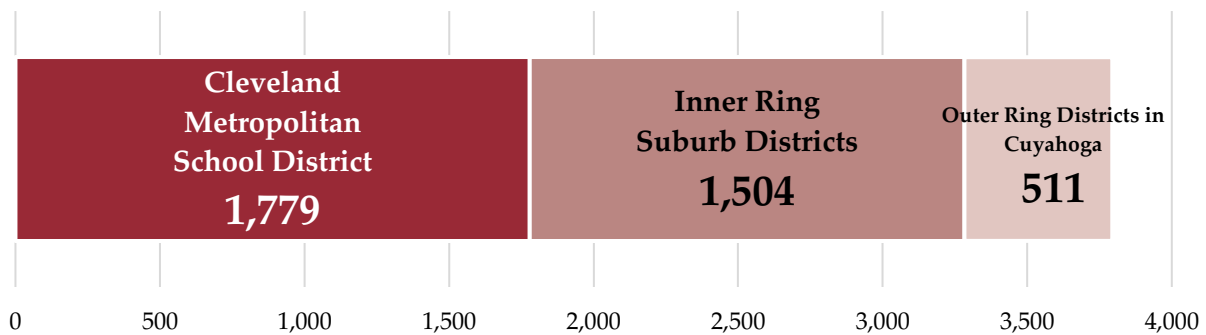


## Kindergarten Readiness (2017-2018)

**42%** of incoming kindergarten students in Cuyahoga County are “not on track”



Number of incoming kindergarten students who are “not on track”



Percent of incoming kindergarten students who are “not on track”

viii

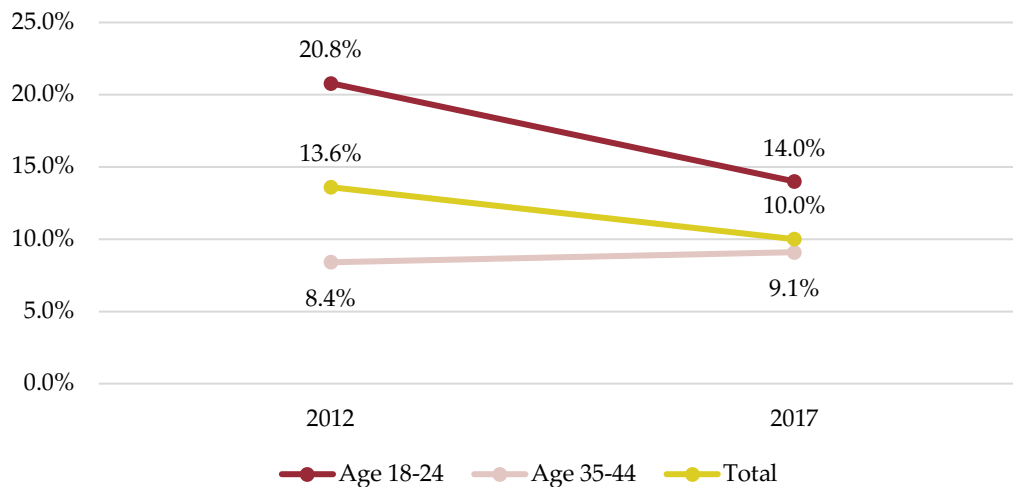
# Literacy Progress

## Adults

Significant but insufficient progress has been made over the last five years to improve the literacy levels of Cuyahoga adults. For example:

- The percentage of adults without at least a high school diploma or equivalent has fallen to 10% from 13% in 2012
- Among young adults (18-24) the decline has been more dramatic, dropping more than six percentage points since 2012, to 14% from nearly 21%

**Change in Percent of Adults Without a High School Diploma, 2012 to 2017**



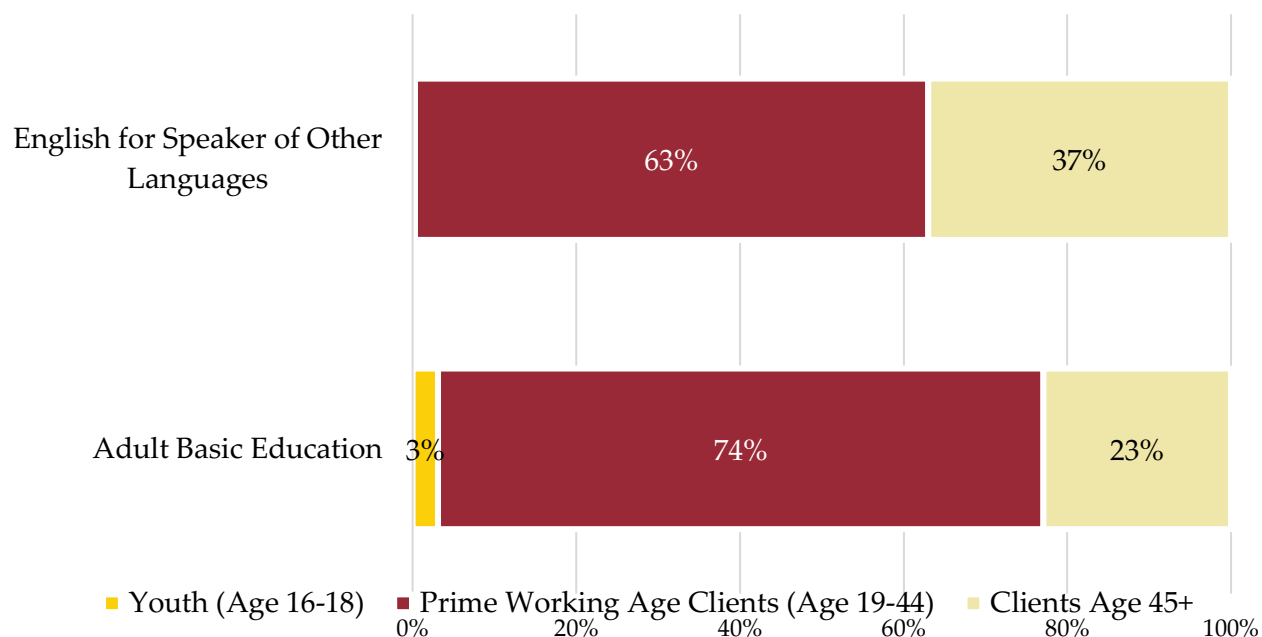
But those improvements are countered by an increase in the percentage of adults age 35-44 without a diploma from 8.4% to 9.1%<sup>ix</sup>.

The most common way for adults to obtain their high school equivalency is through the State of Ohio's Aspire program, which is offered through three organizations in Cuyahoga County at more than 60 locations. Other options like the Adult Diploma Program offer an alternative to students by allowing them to enroll in short-term training and completing a WorkKeys assessment to receive a high school diploma equivalency upon successful completion. All of these options are opportunities that need to be marketed to adults to enroll them into classes. Although these options are readily available and are provided at no cost to participants the number of Cuyahoga adults enrolled in the Aspire program fell to 3,126 in FY 2018 from 4,264 in FY 2014. There were a combined total of 342 adults that received their high school equivalency through Aspire or the Adult Diploma Program in 2018 program year. The number

of adults obtaining the equivalent of a high school diploma will need to increase by more than tenfold annually in order to substantially advance literacy levels in the next five years.

More than 3 in 4 Aspire clients in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs enter with a grade reading level below 5<sup>th</sup> grade, which leads to challenges searching for and being hired for employment that pays a living wage. Of those clients who were below a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, in both ESOL and ABE programming, more than 2 in 3 are considered “prime working age,” meaning that an improvement in their literacy could likely help them transition to more meaningful, sustainable employment that would help to eliminate the gap in qualified workers.<sup>x</sup>

### Age Group of Aspire Clients Who Began With a Grade Reading Level Below 5th Grade, by Aspire Program Type



#### Children

Significant progress is also being made with Cuyahoga’s youngest children. The number of children enrolled in quality pre-kindergarten programs increased nearly 36% to 6,851 in 2017-18 from 5,055 in 2015-16.<sup>xi</sup>



Cuyahoga's enrollment  
in Pre-K increased by 36%

Students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs are more likely to be prepared for kindergarten. And the number of pre-school children receiving books (through Imagination Library) in the county has increased by more than fourfold, from 1,198 in 2015-16 to 5,681 in 2017-18.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Accelerating Literacy Gains**

The improvement in literacy in Cuyahoga County demonstrates the value of a coordinated, collaborative approach that has been guided by The Literacy Cooperative. This assessment clarifies and amplifies the need to expand the level of collaboration and to strengthen our shared commitment if we are to end the literacy crisis.

The Literacy Cooperative and our partners believe a two-generation approach is necessary to accelerate improved literacy in Cuyahoga County.

In 2018, more than 30 stakeholders volunteered to create a working committee to promote Two-Generation (2Gen) policies, practices, and programs in Cuyahoga County. 2Gen approaches offer whole-family interventions that meet the needs of children, their caregivers, and the family as a unit and operate from the understanding that adults want to help their children succeed and want opportunities for success in their work and lives as well. This committee, comprised of parents, concerned citizens, and staff from human service, educational, and funding organizations, has been working to outline next steps to achieve those ends.<sup>xiii</sup>

Community change requires shared commitment. In Cuyahoga County, 2Gen approaches need a strong network of community organizations that are committed to changing the landscape of economic and social inequalities. This can be achieved through the following actions:



Involving **parents and family members** to be part of our **planning** process



Expanding **inter-agency knowledge** among all **service providers** (site visits and sharing)



Implementing formal **referral strategies** and **shared databases** among **all organizations** providing services to children, adults or families



Incubating a **2Gen programming pilot** and tracking results, scalability and sustainability

These strategies will yield 2Gen implementation to benefit Cuyahoga County families and offer a framework for the working committee's actions. The Literacy Cooperative would advocate for funder support for incubating and evaluating pilots and braiding of funding for scalability and sustainability.

The Literacy Cooperative engages partners from early childhood and adult education into the 2Gen planning. As part of our deep dive we will strategize with these partners to determine what additional partnerships and opportunities are available to assist in increasing their success in enrolling children and adults into their programs. We will encourage 2Gen partnerships for programming and piloting.



- 
- <sup>i</sup> Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2017 inflation adjusted dollars) *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*
- <sup>ii</sup> Ohio Department of Education KRA Language and Literacy Scores 2018-19
- <sup>iii</sup> S1501 Education Attainment 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimate for Cuyahoga County
- <sup>iv</sup> Estimate by The Literacy Cooperative based on Ohio Department of Education 2018-19 KRA scores and district FY 19 October Headcounts. Note not all kindergarten students take the KRA.
- <sup>v</sup> S1501 Education Attainment 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimate for Cuyahoga County and Cleveland, Ohio
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>viii</sup> Data for Inner and Outer-Ring Districts are estimates compiled by The Literacy Cooperative based on Ohio Department of Education 2018-19 KRA scores and district FY 19 October Headcounts.
- <sup>ix</sup> Calculations by The Literacy Cooperative from *S1501 American Community Survey 5-year estimates* for 2012 and 2017
- <sup>x</sup> All Aspire data is from the combined performance reports for Cuyahoga County sites, FY 14-18. Adult Diploma results are from the High School Diploma Program Administrator, Adult Diploma Options Program, Ohio Department of Education. For a statewide overview of the ASPIRE Program, standards, and performance expectations, see: <https://www.ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference>
- <sup>xi</sup> UPK Fact Sheet, Rev. 1-11-18. Available at: <http://investinchildren.cuyahogacounty.us/en-US/children-prepared-school.aspx> and from PRE4CLE Annual Report 2018. Note that an additional 993 children are in lower quality and 1,545 in unrated preschools.
- <sup>xii</sup> Track the growth of DPIL on The Literacy Cooperative web site at: <http://www.literacycooperative.org/2gen/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> See The 2GEN Call for Action on The Literacy Cooperative web site at: <http://www.literacycooperative.org/2gen/>