

Disrupting Poverty: Literacy Finds a Way

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West CAP's mission is to take action against poverty by developing the social and economic assets of low-income families and their communities and by working to create a more just and sustainable society.

Stephanie has managed Adult Education programs at West CAP since 2009. These programs are Adult Literacy, Skills Enhancement, and Nursing Skills.



Shannon Mason Young, Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.

Wisconsin Literacy is a coalition of over 70 literacy agencies in Wisconsin supporting adult, family, health and workplace literacy.

Shannon has been involved with adult literacy since 2020, working to build the learning capacity of individuals and literacy organizations statewide.



What is Literacy?

Literacy is “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.”

National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, the statistics and research division of the U.S. Department of Education

Importance of Literacy

It's A Big Issue

Roughly **half of US adults** between 16-74 years old lack literacy proficiency

- That's 130 million people in the US
- 2.5 million people in Wisconsin

Gallup/B. Bush Foundation Sept 2020



Adults With Limited Literacy May Struggle To...

- Read a food label
- Use a bus schedule or map
- Balance a checkbook
- Get a driver's license
- Engage in their child's education
- Vote
- Understand directions on a prescription label
- Speak or read English

Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Proficiency Levels

Level 1 and Below: Difficulties using or understanding printed material. May be able to fill out short form but cannot draw inferences or combine multiple sources of text.

Level 2: Struggles to perform tasks with text-based information; may be able to relate multiple information across a couple of text, can compare and contrast and draw simple inferences; can navigate in digital spaces to find key information such as benefits of one product over another. Cannot make complex inferences or evaluation.

Level 3+: Proficient at working with information and ideas in text; can interpret, understand and synthesize information from multiple, complex texts. Can infer sophisticated meanings and complex ideas from written sources.

While Wisconsin scores better than the national average:

- 34% are at Level 2
- 15% of adults are at or below Level 1



U.S. Skills Map: State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Map of Percentage At or Below Level 1 Literacy

MAP FILTER

County State

Find counties

Literacy Numeracy

Percentages **i**
Select options below to filter data on the map.
Hover or tap on info icons to learn more.

At or Below Level 1 **i**

At Level 2 **i**

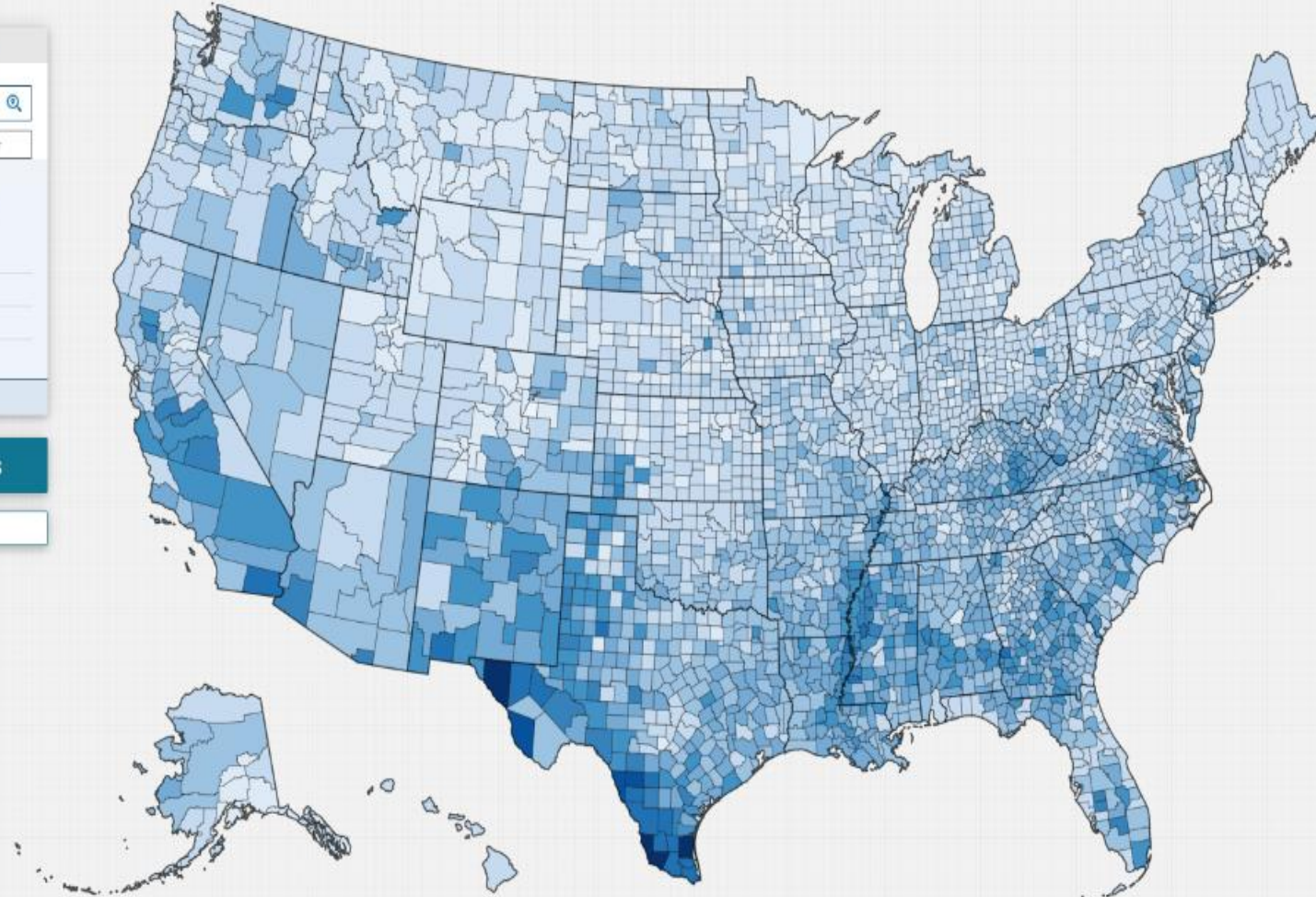
At or Above Level 3 **i**

Average Scale Score **i**

More Details ▾

Compare Counties

Download Data



<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>

Adult Education Is An Economic Catalyst

- \$129 billion gain in GDP when an adult moves from Level 1 to Level 2 literacy
- \$947 billion gain in GDP when an adult moves from Level 2 to Level 3 literacy
- \$1.4 trillion gain in GDP when we move everyone up to Level 3

Salary and job tenure correlate with reading, math, and computer skills

- The use of reading, math, and computer skills at work is associated with earning more and having more years of paid work.
- PIACC Level 1.7- \$0-\$20,000
- PIACC Level 2.0- \$20,000-\$34,000
- PIACC Level 2.3- \$35,000-\$45,999



WEST CAP

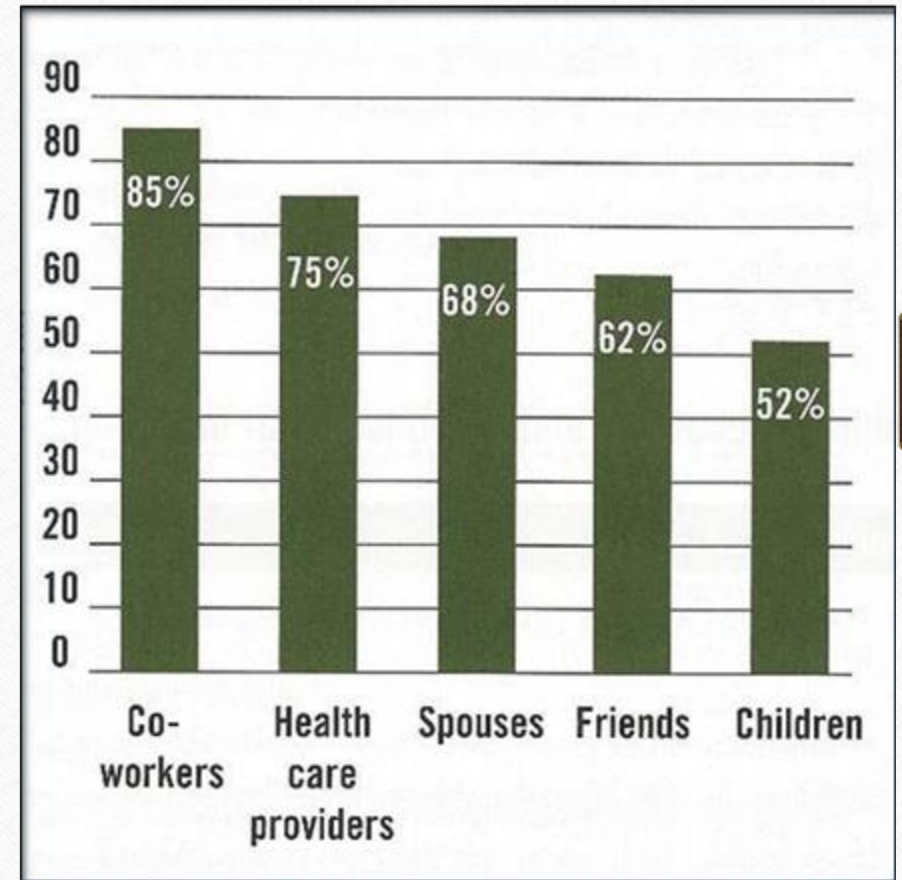
Adult Education Programs

We strive to help people become self-sufficient - starting with combatting poverty. West CAP recognizes that literacy and adult education is a big part of obtaining self-sufficiency.

A Silent Issue

Adults struggling with low-literacy rarely share that information with others.

- 85% of adults with low-literacy don't tell their coworkers
- 75% don't tell their doctors
- **68% don't tell their own spouses**



Comprehension

- A person often moves on if they cannot understand information out of embarrassment or frustration
- Trauma can affect a person's ability to comprehend materials
- Program materials and procedures can sometimes be a barrier for a person to receive services

Plain Language is

communication your audience understands the first time they read or hear it.

It is defined by results. Your audience can:

- find what they need,
- understand what they find, and
- use what they find to meet their needs

Using Plain Language

Using Plain Language in your communications will:

- Motivate your readers to act quickly and accurately
- Reduce the time you spend prompting readers, clarifying questions, and correcting errors
- Save time and money by getting your message across faster

[Home \(plainlanguage.gov\)](http://plainlanguage.gov)

Most Important Information First

- What do your readers need **to do**?
- Why is this important **to them**?

Example

Does this look like a document your clients would understand?



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Andrea Palm, Secretary

EMERGENCY ORDER #12 SAFER AT HOME ORDER

WHEREAS, in December, 2019, a novel strain of the coronavirus was detected, now named COVID-19, and it has spread throughout the world, including every state in the United States;

WHEREAS, on January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern;

WHEREAS, on March 12, 2020, Governor Tony Evers declared a public health emergency to direct all resources needed to respond to and contain COVID-19 in Wisconsin;

WHEREAS, Governor Evers designated the Department of Health Services as the lead agency to respond to the emergency and directed the Department to take all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent and respond to incidents of COVID-19 in Wisconsin;

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, President Donald Trump proclaimed a National Emergency concerning COVID-19;

WHEREAS, as of March 23, 2020, 332,930 people around the world have tested positive for COVID-19, including 33,404 in the United States and 416 in Wisconsin;

WHEREAS, as of March 23, 2020, within the past 72 hours, positive COVID-19 cases have risen in the United States from 15,219 to 33,404 (119% increase) and have risen in Wisconsin from 206 to 416 (102% increase). Five Wisconsinites have passed away as a result of COVID-19. Public health officials estimate that the actual number of Wisconsinites infected with COVID-19 is significantly higher and likely present in every county in the state;

WHEREAS, at the current growth in the number of people infected, the number of people needing medical care due to COVID-19 will significantly exceed the amount of available healthcare resources;

WHEREAS, the entire State of Wisconsin – including residents, businesses, community organizations, and government – need to take all possible actions to reduce further spread of COVID-19 to save lives;

Plain Language

Here it is as a simple question and answer format using Plain Language.



Safer at Home Order

Governor Tony Evers declared a **Stay at Home** order.

What does it mean?

- You must **stay home**.
- Do not leave your residence (the place where you live).
- You must follow **social distancing**. (More information below)

For how long?

- Wednesday, March 25 at 8:00 a.m. - Friday, April 24 at 8:00 a.m.
- The end date can change.

Can I leave my home for any reason?

You can leave for **essential activities**. You can go to a:

- grocery store
- pharmacy
- clinic (appointments or urgent care -- call the clinic first)
- hospital (appointments or emergency room -- call first)
- restaurant (ONLY drive-through or take-out)
- bank drive-through
- school (for free meals or learning supplies)
- hardware store
- motel, hotel, or shelter (if your home is not safe)

You can also:

- exercise outside: walk, run, bike, and hike (follow social distancing)
- take care of family members or friends who need help.
- take food or supplies to family members or friends who need help.
- follow custody agreements and transportation schedules for your children.

If you are an employee at an essential business, you can go to:

- work
- childcare

More Plain Language Examples

PROGRAM INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE

Applicant:

In order to process your recent application for enrollment, it is important that we have all required documentation to verify address, income, and general eligibility requirements.

It has come to our attention that we cannot process your application because it is incomplete, missing proof of current address. Our office must verify your address with a current lease, utility bill or medical bill in order to move forward with the application verification process and finalize your enrollment.

So that we may assist you promptly, please fax necessary documentation to the number listed below the signature line as soon as you are able.

PROGRAM INSTRUCTIONS AFTER

[Name],

Please fax proof of your address to 111-222-3333.

You can fax a:

- lease,
- utility bill, or
- medical bill

After you fax proof of your address we can complete your application.



Using Plain Language

School Flyer Before

- As the weather turns colder, it is important that students arrive to school with weather-appropriate outerwear. Children who don't bring winter boots, jacket, snow pants, gloves, and hat will not be permitted to go outside for recess."

School Flyer After

Families,

Please send your child to school with:

- winter boots
- a jacket
- snow pants
- gloves
- a hat



Your child **must** have these 5 items to play outside during recess.

Practice

In an effort to ensure sufficient staff coverage, approval of vacation time will take into account department workload and the number of vacation requests for a specific date. Vacation requests will be approved according to the date the request was made. Seniority will not influence the decision to approve or deny vacation requests. Employees are encouraged to request vacation time as early as possible.

Practice

Request your vacation as soon as possible.

If you submit your request early, there is a better chance we can approve it. Seniority does not affect your vacation request.

Verbal Communication

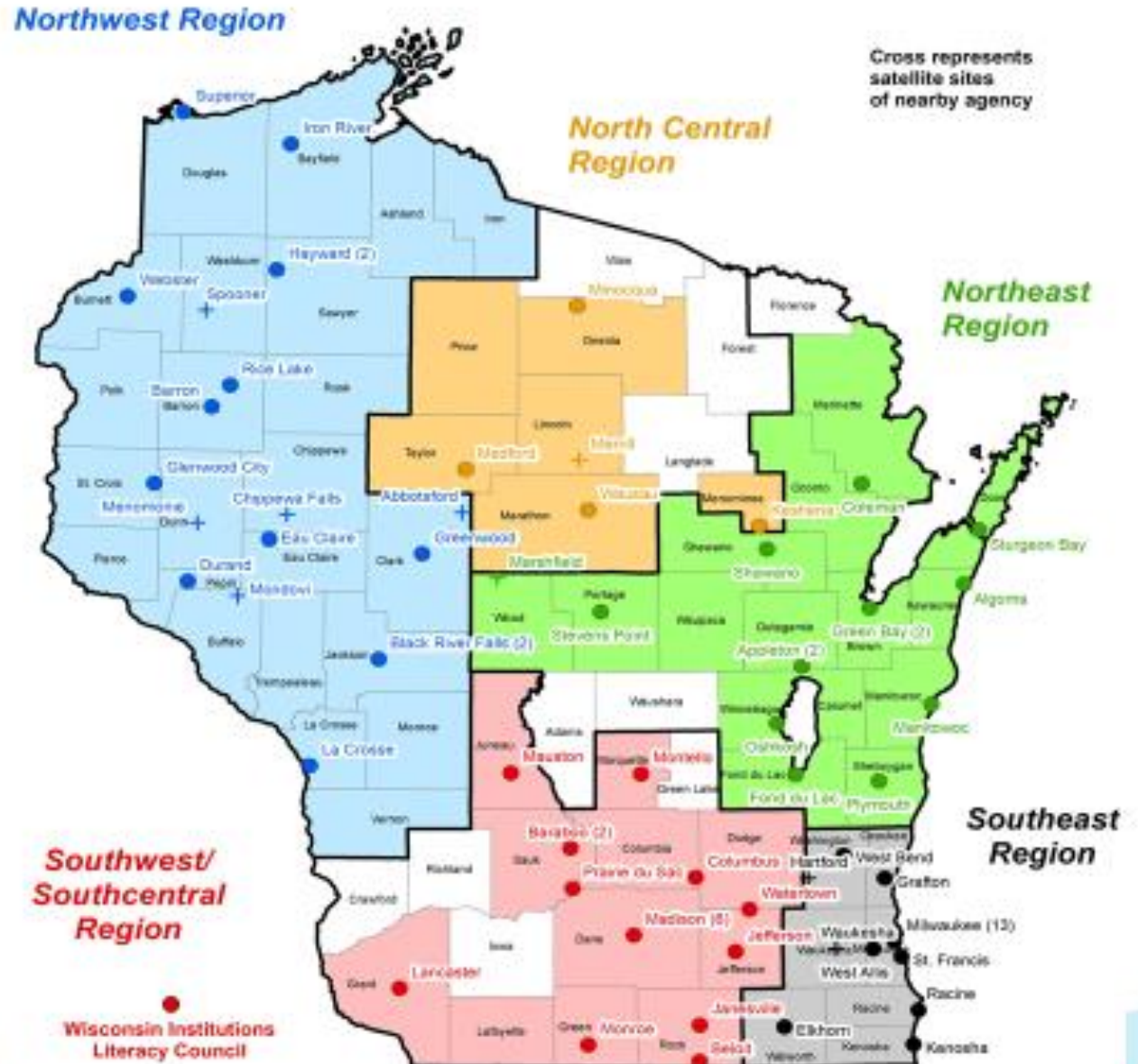
- Plain language pertains to oral communications
- Ask open ended questions to check for comprehension

Who is Wisconsin Literacy?

- Supporting our **members and their communities**
- **Government** – advocating and providing a statewide voice for adult and family literacy efforts
- **Workforce** – connecting learners with employment skills and workforce partners
- **Health literacy** – reducing barriers to understanding health information and services

Wisconsin Literacy is a coalition of over 70 literacy agencies in Wisconsin supporting adult, family, health and workplace literacy.

[Find Literacy Programs : Members : Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.](#)



Who We Serve

Nearly 16,000 Adults in Wisconsin:

- Working multiple low wage jobs
- Immigrants and refugees
- 86% from communities of color
- Learning English
- TANF-eligible
- Barriers to accessing job opportunities
- Working toward GED
- Barriers learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia, autism

Who We Serve

Our learners have:

- previous work and life experience
- not succeeded in traditional classrooms
- advanced degrees in their native country but little or no English
- little or no formal education

Most come because they just want to **find a job, receive a promotion, get their GED, or help their children in school.**

Literacy Services Can Include:

- GED studies
- English Language skills
- Literacy skills
- Computer Literacy
- Health Literacy
- Work Readiness Skills
- Citizenship classes
- Math/Numeracy
- Online Learning Resources

How Can You Best Serve Clients?

- Use Plain Language
- Refer clients to local literacy programs
- Collaborate with literacy programs/nonprofits doing this work
- Be patient - Literacy is a long game!

Literacy Disrupts Poverty

- Improves employment opportunities
- Increases access to employment search supports
- Breaks generational cycle of poverty

Wisconsin Literacy and West CAP

Thank you

We are here to help you develop partnerships with your local literacy agency to increase services to clients on their path to self-sufficiency.

Contact Us



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