

# PRACTICE BRIEF

# A Shared Urban Agenda for Adult Literacy Collaboration

Context

Mission

Goals

Partners

## Towards Best Practices: A Collaborative Approach

A series of five Great Cities Summits, convened by the US Department of Education from 2010 to 2011, sought to spur new thinking that addresses distinct opportunities and challenges for adult education in large cities. The five selected urban areas are home to 10% of all US adults and over 20% of the nation's adult literacy needs.

Following the Summits, city teams have continued to work independently to pursue the value of a multi-city coalition—one that can develop consensus around promising literacy and workforce solutions and speak with a unified voice to strengthen the field.

**Adult Education Great Cities** is a collaborative forum of urban adult education and literacy stakeholders working together to advance the practices, policies, and impact of adult education as an essential strategy for individual, community, and national progress.

- **To advance exemplary and emerging practices** by sharing and documenting strategies on critical urban literacy issues.
- **To advance adult education policy** by concisely framing urban needs and opportunities.
- **To advance impacts** by joining city teams on specific initiatives that improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and evaluation of services, in collaboration with national advisory partners.

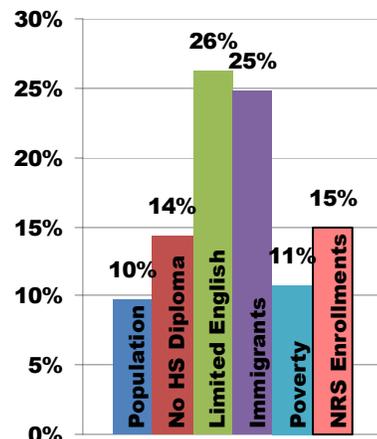
Initial advisory partners have included representatives of the Council for Applied and Experiential Learning, Jobs for the Future, and Literacy Powerline.

## Data Analysis

## 5 Cities Serve 15% Nation's Adult Literacy, But Practices and Measures Vary by State

Large urban systems provide an elevated share of national adult education services: based on National Reporting Service (NRS) data, five cities combined to serve about 15% of all U.S. students. However, the full impact of urban literacy services is not captured by NRS reporting due to state-by-state variations in delivery, funding, and outcome measurement.

**Share of US adult students.** The chart at right uses 2011 Census and NRS data to profile literacy target groups in five cities that participated in a series of national Great Cities summits: Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York. Combined, these cities are home to 10% of U.S. adults but serve 1.5 times their share of NRS enrollments. These service levels are consistent with the cities' share of adults without High School diplomas (14%), but under their share of persons who speak English less than "very well" (26%). Intensive urban literacy needs underlie the ongoing Great Cities initiative, which seeks to advance an urban focus in the design and adaptation of reform strategies.



Source: 2011 Census ACS

5 CITIES HAVE 10% OF US ADULTS, LARGER SHARES OF U.S. NEEDS

**Limitations on measurement across cities.** Data reflected in this brief does not fully reflect the total adult education population currently being served in the five cities. The National Reporting System provides common measures across a wide variety of state funding models and delivery systems, yet does not include all programs providing literacy services. In some cities, community-based organizations serve large shares or even the majority of adult learners. In Houston, where most services are provided outside of the NRS system, Great Cities team members have developed a database for non-federally funded programs to use to track learner information. This database will be piloted statewide in Texas in 2013 and may later be utilized by organizations in other states.

MEGA-STATES ENROLL 45% OF ADULT STUDENTS; 1 OF 3 ARE IN 5 CITIES



National Reporting Service (NRS) 2011-12 data for US; Cook County IL; Harris County TX; Los Angeles County CA; Miami-Dade County FL; and Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond Counties in NY. Mega-State map adapted from National Center for Education Statistics (2013). *The Nation's Report Card: Mega-States: An Analysis of Student Performance in the Five Most Heavily Populated States in the Nation* (NCES 2013-450). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept. of Education, Washington, D.C. For more information, see Great Cities Policy Brief (April 2013).

# ADULT EDUCATION GREAT CITIES

PRACTICE BRIEF  
JUNE 2013



CHICAGO ♦ HOUSTON ♦ LOS ANGELES ♦ MIAMI ♦ NEW YORK

An independent initiative building upon the national Adult Education Great Cities Summit

## Priorities for Urban Research, Shared Practices, and Project Impact

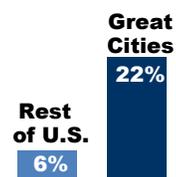
An emerging Great Cities coalition is positioned to facilitate and monitor multi-agency projects across and between cities, including the five urban teams formed during the initial federal summits. With lead agencies to coordinate local partners, targeted initiatives or grants that may benefit from an urban approach include national research, structured exchange of promising practices, and piloting or evaluating high-impact demonstration projects across diverse U.S. literacy systems.

### Urban priorities in relation to key demographics



Percent of adults without a High School diploma

### GED / Basic Skills



Percent of persons who "don't speak English well"

### English Literacy



Percent of persons living in poverty

### Career Pathways

**GED and Common Core Standards.** The new GED and other High School Equivalency tests aligned to Common Core State Standards provide both great opportunities and challenges for adult education. Urban demand in this area is expected to rise due to a new federal policy enabling undocumented young people to pursue U.S. education or military service, provided that they have a high school diploma or equivalency or are working towards that goal. While new standards will "raise the bar" to prepare adult learners for college and career paths, the GED doorway could become a closed gate without adequate professional development and capacity to meet adult needs.

The utility of cross-system collaboration is exemplified in New York City, where Great Cities team members have played a central role in developing effective urban strategies. The GED Campaign to Finish, a citywide initiative, was organized to encourage 17-24 year olds to complete the entire GED before their subscores expire. Great Cities collaborators have also played leadership roles in an advocacy group that encouraged the State Education Department to seek alternatives to the new GED test, and they are core members of an adult education Common Core Workgroup which is developing professional development strategies and materials to prepare adult education teachers to better align their instruction to the knowledge and skills demanded by the Common Core Standards.

**English and Immigration.** The renewed public awareness of comprehensive immigration reform will likely drive increased demand for adults to learn English as one prerequisite for U.S. citizenship. In major urban areas, where immigration and limited English proficiency needs far exceed U.S. averages, the demand for English and Citizenship classes already outpaces current offerings. This large scale of need is compounded by a significant number of immigrants who are non-literate in their native language, lacking basic skills and structures for learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

The experience of Los Angeles demonstrates the need for urban partnerships to leverage limited resources. Great Cities team members have pioneered native language literacy as a gateway to ESL since 2008, but new approaches are required due to the state's fiscal crisis. To date these include an English Literacy & Civics Collaborative of six community colleges; self-guided adult ESL programs at the public library system; and Citizenship Corners at over 70 libraries with English and Spanish information and resources, plus librarian training, created by municipal/federal partnership.

**Urban Career Pathways.** America's economic future requires dramatic increases in the number of workers with college degrees and/or postsecondary certificates of economic value. Adult education provides an entry point for those who did not complete high school, lack proficiency in English, or finished high school but are deficient in basic skills. Since many learn best by education relating to real-world goals, adult education has begun to fill this need through bridge and transition programs.

The scale and complexity of urban economies makes it critical to develop and share innovative pathway models that lead low-skilled adults from diverse populations into family-supporting jobs. In Chicago, Great Cities partners are working together to align curriculum, intake procedures and assessment tools so that students from community-based organizations can easily matriculate into sector-based bridge programs at community colleges. Miami's partnership is pursuing a multi-sector plan that fundamentally aligns both district and college adult education to the regional economic vision, to workforce goals, and to support systems and civic needs. Long-range strategies seek to transform all aspects of service, from student goals and data sharing to 21st-century adult curriculum reforms.

Source: 2011 American Community Survey (based on tables DP02 and DP03)