

Community Capitalism Literacy Action Group Report of survey findings

1. Introduction and Summary

The survey reported here was undertaken on behalf of the Community Capitalism Literacy Action Subcommittee. As part of our information-gathering effort, we sought to collect input from teachers throughout Licking County about the tools they find most valuable in their literacy efforts, the deterrents to their programs' success, and the priorities they identify for program development.

Two strong themes emerge in the survey results. The first is that teachers view parents as their greatest ally in promoting and improving children's reading skills, but also as the resource in greatest need of development. Teachers assert that parents are often willing to support their efforts, but don't know what they should be doing. Teachers call upon parents to insure their children attend school daily, to read to their children, and to make sure that children have sufficient time, free of distractions, to practice reading.

A second theme is that teachers are concerned about declining resources and lack of consistency in approach within their schools. The loss of resources like Title I specialists, library access, and supported IATs are viewed with frustration by many teachers, particularly in light of what they view as rising (and perhaps unrealistic) expectations about both children's readiness for reading when they enter school, and their ability to advance through the curriculum.

Subsidiary findings include that adult illiteracy (or "under-literacy," as one teacher describes it) is a moderate concern, though very few teachers are aware of reading programs available for adults in their communities; and that ESL is not a widespread issue throughout the county, but is a very prevalent concern in the Licking Heights school district.

2. Method

Michele Doran contacted the leadership of school districts wherein at least 75% of schools are within Licking County borders. She sought permission to administer the survey and, where approval was granted, instructions from the district on how they wanted the survey administered. In some cases, she contacted school board offices, in the other cases the superintendent of the district. In some districts, such as the Johnstown-Monroe School District, superintendents went beyond approval to endorse the survey and distribute it to their teachers personally. In other instances, Michele was encouraged to send the survey out through school principals, or to send it directly to the district's teachers. Invitations to participate in the on-line survey were sent via e-mail. Respondents were asked to respond between Monday, April 13 and Wednesday, April 29.

3. Respondents

The survey was taken by 149 educators in Licking County.¹ These educators represented 19 schools in eight school districts. The distribution of responses is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Representation of schools and school districts among respondents.

School district	School	Number of responses
Granville (14)	Granville Elementary	14
Heath (36)	Garfield Elementary	16
	Heath City Schools	2
	Stevenson Elementary	18
Johnstown-Monroe (21)	Willis C. Adams	3
	Searfoss Elementary	2
	Oregon Elementary	5
	Johnstown-Monroe High School	11
Lakewood (15)	Hebron Elementary	14
	Lakewood	1
Licking Heights (14)	Licking Heights North	6
	Licking Heights West	6
	Licking Heights (unspecified)	2
Licking Valley (8)	Licking Valley Elementary	6
	Licking Valley Intermediate	2
North Fork (8)	Utica	8
Southwest (25)	Southwest Licking Kindergarten Center	8
	Etna Elementary	12
	Kirkersville Elementary	5
Unspecified		8
<i>Total</i>		<i>149</i>

Most of the respondents were elementary school teachers (especially serving the lower grades) or intervention specialists (ESL, Title I, Special Education, etc.).

Table 2. Respondents by Teaching Role

K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12	Intervention Specialist	Other	<i>Total</i>
24	25	21	11	15	10	5	9	20	3	<i>143</i>

4. Responses

The results reported below are organized by the questions posed. Each question is restated, followed by the results and a brief discussion.

¹ Not all respondents answered every question on the survey, so the total number of responses vary from item to item.

Q 4. “Are you seeing more, fewer, or about the same number of struggling readers in your classroom than you did 3-5 years ago?”

Very few respondents—just 6%--said the number of struggling readers had declined in the last few years. The remaining 94% of respondents were about evenly split, with 49% saying they were seeing the same number of struggling readers as in the past, and 45% reporting that they were seeing more struggling readers now.

There were variations in appraisals across districts. Teachers in Heath, Licking Heights and Southwest Licking Valley were most likely to report an increase in struggling readers, while Granville, Lakewood, Johnstown, Licking Valley and North Fork teachers reported unchanged numbers.

Table 3. Struggling readers today, as compared to the past.

	Granville	Heath	Johnstown	Lake-wood	Licking Heights	Licking Valley	North Fork	SW	Unsp.
More	4	22	4	3	9	2	2	15	3
Fewer	1	2	1	3	0	1	1	0	0
Same	9	10	14	8	5	5	5	10	0

Q 5. “What factors do you feel contribute to literacy issues with your struggling readers?”

The survey asked respondents to indicate factors that play a role in children’s struggles with literacy. Respondents could choose up to three factors, and there was clear coalescence in the results around the same three. Most respondents (90%) pointed to the **lack of support from parents/guardians**; close to three quarters (72%) identified a *lack of early literacy experiences*; and half pointed to *limited access to reading material in the home*. Factors identified less often by teachers were *conflicting demands on students’ time*, *students’ general attitude toward school* and *ESL issues*.

For all but two districts, low parental support topped the list of teachers’ concerns; Lakewood teachers in the survey were more likely to cite the lack of early literacy experiences. But Table 3 suggests some noteworthy variation in responses pattern across districts:

- Although ESL concerns were cited by only 9 respondents overall, eight of the nine were in Licking Heights district.
- Most Granville teachers saw “conflicting demands on students’ time” as a significant problem. This issue appears to be greater in Granville than elsewhere.
- Poor student attitude was identified by about half or more of the teachers in Heath, Johnstown, and Licking Heights.

Table 4. Sources of literacy issues.

	Granville (14)*	Heath (36)	Johns- town (21)	Lakewood (15)	Licking Heights (14)	Licking Valley (8)	North Fork (8)	SW (25)	Unsp.
Parental support	11	34	18	11	11	8	7	25	8
Early literacy experiences	8	22	15	14	9	6	7	21	4
Reading materials	3	17	12	8	10	3	5	12	4
Student time	11	8	5	5	6	3	2	11	3
Student attitudes	3	16	10	0	6	3	3	7	
ESL	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0

*Number in parentheses is total number of teachers responding from the district.

Respondents were able to add comments alongside their responses to this question, and nineteen used this opportunity. Although these responses are numerically few, they may point to additional issues of importance; had we offered these factors among the prompted list, more teachers might have included these among their selections.

- Three teachers identified rising expectations regarding children’s preparation and readiness for reading; one wrote, “Children [are] expected to come to school with prior knowledge that they do not have and it is no longer being taught.”
- Three respondents pointed to insufficient school resources, either with regard to teaching materials or services. One wrote, “When I used to seek help for students, it was better received/followed up on/ and treated as urgent. Now it is a ‘joke’ in our building that ‘Don’t you know? We can no longer help kids? There isn’t an IAT (intervention assistance team) process.’”

Q 6. “Which of the following is most vital to your effectiveness in your literacy program: Individual literacy tutors, classroom volunteers, volunteers for special projects, or increased support in the home?”

In response to this question, teachers could choose only one answer. Most (70%) chose **increased support in the home**. The distant second, identified by 30% of respondents, was individual literacy tutors for struggling readers. The table on the following page reports responses by school district:

Table 5. Factors that contribute to literacy program effectiveness

	Granville	Heath	Johns-town	Lakewood	Licking Heights	Licking Valley	North Fork	SW	Unsp.
Literacy tutors	3	7	7	6	4	2	2	8	2
Class Vols	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0
Other vols	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Support at home	9	27	13	9	10	5	6	15	5

Respondents could again bypass the prompted answers and provide their own. Eleven respondents used this “Other” option, most of them to assert their need for expanded reading intervention. The following are representative:

- “Title I Reading teacher in the classroom during language arts.”
- “Greater access for all students to classroom libraries; early one-on-one intervention for struggling readers.”
- “District change in policy toward retention in early grades Kdg-2.”

Q 7. “Which of the following would you identify as the priority for development to assist you in your literacy program: individual tutors, classroom volunteers, volunteers for special projects, or increased support in the home?”

While the previous question asked teachers what factor was most vital to their effectiveness, this question asked what factor they would prioritize for development. Seventy-four teachers (54%) pointed again to **support in the home**, and 54 (39%) identified individual literacy tutors as their priority. These responses were spread proportionately across districts.

Twelve teachers provided an individual answer to this question, and these answers tended to focus on the in-school experience:

- “Classroom libraries and training for teachers how to use them most effectively.”
- “Competent and qualified assistance that is more than 30 minutes once a week.”
- “Differentiated interventions used in the regular classroom.”
- “More small group time with students for just reading.”
- “More materials”; “more training.”

Q 8. Which of the following most impeded the effectiveness of your literacy program: lack of financial resources, state or federal requirements, or lack of follow-through at home?”

Again, teachers point to parents and guardians: 75% of teachers said the greatest impediment to their program’s effectiveness was **lack of follow-through at home**. Lack of financial resources

were identified by only 21% of teachers, and onerous state or federal requirements by only 7%. These responses were distributed proportionately across districts.

Nine teachers crafted their own responses to this question. A theme that emerges in their answers is that there are differences of opinion about how to work with struggling readers, and that these inconsistencies may be detrimental. Examples of these comments are below:

- “Not a set program throughout the building.”
- “Lack of knowledge and consistency between grade levels.”
- “Administrative support: new IAT process doesn't work.”
- “Convincing the teachers and administration to adapt their teaching of reading philosophies to the aforementioned [direct instruction] and scientific, research-based methods.”

Q9. “Considering your interactions with parents/guardians, how significant is adult illiteracy in the community your school serves?”

This question used a five-point rating scale, wherein “1” meant adult illiteracy was not significant, and “5” meant it was highly significant. The average across all respondents was **2.9**. Responses to this answer were explicitly location-specific, however, so the responses are most useful when disaggregated by district. Table 5 indicates that teachers see the greatest concern in the Licking Heights, Hebron and North Fork districts.

Table 6. Teacher appraisals of adult illiteracy in local community.

	Gran-ville (13)*	Heath (36)	Hebron (12)	Johns-town (20)	Lake-wood (13)	Licking Heights (14)	Licking Valley (8)	North Fork (8)	SW (25)	Unsp. (6)
1	9	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
2	2	11	3	5	4	1	2	3	9	0
3	1	12	4	10	4	9	4	5	7	4
4	1	3	3	3	3	2	2	0	5	1
5	1	5	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	1
<i>Avg.</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>3.5</i>

* Number in parentheses shows the number of respondents for this question.

Q 10. “Are you aware of any adult literacy programs available to help support parents/guardians of your students?”

Few teachers responded to this question. The following programs comprise the answers provided:

- Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Jersey Baptist Church: ESL
- Adult Basic Literacy Education/C-TECH (3)
- Reynoldsburg UM Church: ESL for adults

Q 11. "Please feel free to share any other comments concerning literacy issues in Licking County."

The following is a comprehensive list of the comments provided by teachers. The comments are grouped by general themes.

1. Comments focused on parents and their role:

- I don't think parents are necessarily illiterate so much as under-literate. I would like to start a program to help parents teach their kids to read. *(Utica ES)*
- I don't think parents of pre-school children are aware of the vital importance literacy is to their child prior to coming to school. *(Hebron ES)*
- I feel a little guilty regarding my answers above, so I wanted to stress these are important issues for my struggling readers, not in general. Parental interest and support, particularly from the mother, in literacy and education has been shown to be one of the most important factors for success. *(Etna ES)*
- I hope that other Johnstown teachers take the time to fill out this survey. I feel that the parents are supportive and expect their children to learn at school and home; however, I teach a gifted cluster of students. *(Oregon ES)*
- If parents realized how important reading and rereading and rereading and rereading was for their child, then this practice would show an improvement in their child's level. We also need books that can be sent home and kept at home for practicing there. Books I send need to come back. I don't send a new one until the previous one comes back, so some children don't get all the practice needed to improve. I send single pages home with a poem or a story or sentences to practice but not sure these are practiced as much as books are. *(Licking Heights West ES)*
- Many parents want to help, but do not know how to effectively work with their children. Parent support is almost always the difference between children who succeed in school and children who don't. *(Searfoss ES)*
- Many residents are highly educated, but still may not give adequate time to their children. *(Etna ES)*
- Our current population has the means to support their children but they don't necessarily know how to do this. *(Granville ES)*

2. Comments focused on institutional approaches to, or resources for, literacy programs:

- I believe if we hit this earlier on in education, our percentage of struggling readers will drop dramatically. *(Hebron ES)*
- I think with the new expectations for kindergarten, we need all day, every day kindergarten to effectively teach the requirements to our students. I also feel that preschool experiences would boost our literacy program tremendously. Preschool in the public schools would be awesome! *(SWL Kindergarten Center)*
- The most important issue concerning literacy in Licking County is the lack of quality pre-kindergarten opportunities for low-income families. *(Hebron ES)*

- The whole language movement developed by Ohio State is OK for natural readers, although it certainly has not helped their spelling. Disadvantaged children, struggling readers, and dyslexic children cannot learn to decode and comprehend using whole language methods. They must be taught using the aforementioned approach, which is also a great method for teaching spelling and the etymology of words. This basic knowledge will come in handy in later grades as words become more complicated. (*Granville ES*)
- Time is the major issue. It is a challenge to effectively extend my high readers which teaching working with my low readers to progress. (*Licking Heights North ES*)

3. Comments related to children's motivation and engagements:

- I have a concern about the importance that is placed on education. With many struggling readers, school attendance is a big issue. I have heard teachers say that if they would just come to school, they would be able to learn and make good progress. Reading at home every night is a problem for many students. (*Kirkersville ES*)
- Because children are so involved in other activities, there can often be little time to sit and read with your child. It is not a priority. (*Granville ES*)
- The overwhelming resources that compete with our children's time and interests (TV, video games, etc.) are a major problem. (*Granville ES*)

4. Comments related to resources and supports in the larger community:

- If we could get people to volunteer to just have someone for our children to read to or to read to the children, I feel that we could make more of a difference. (*Garfield ES*)
- Our school has lost its use of the Bookmobile. We have a small school collection of books, but it could only become a "library" with the direction of a professional to serve our school for more than the current 15 minutes per month. We need a person to select, buy, repair, inspire, display, read, and serve all 300 young kindergarten readers and excite them about reading. Some of our children are coming into school not knowing how to turn the pages of a book, let alone know the front from back and top from bottom, and have never been read to. We could do more with our registration process to demonstrate how to read to children. The public library could set up a display at registration and screening and register the children for library cards and talk about the importance of reading in the home. Some communities have itinerant readers to take/give books into the homes of at-risk families and read to the children. It would be great if our community had physicians who would discuss the importance of reading to young children and give them books at their check-ups. (*Southwest Licking Kindergarten Center*)

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