

# Literacy Through the Lifespan

This report contains two briefs:

Adult Literacy in Delaware

Child Literacy in Delaware: Raising Readers from Birth Through Teens

Prepared for the Delaware Division of Libraries by:

Center for Community Research and Service

Institute for Public Administration

KIDS COUNT in Delaware



# Data Snapshot: Adult Literacy in Delaware

## INTRODUCTION

Adult literacy involves not only reading and writing, but also knowledge building and comprehension. When adults increase their skills in these areas, they are set up for success in other aspects of their lives. Economists from the World Bank noted that literacy skills for adults increase economic, social, and political participation, and extend these positive influences into the next generation.<sup>1</sup> Literacy can impact every facet of an adult's life including their educational attainment, ability to maintain a stable job and support their family, financial management skills, health and healthcare communication, and so much more.

There are various definitions for adult literacy. The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy defines adult literacy as an adult's ability to read, write, and comprehend. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the adult literacy rate is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement on their everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Their definition of literacy also encompasses 'numeracy,' the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. but for the purposes of this brief, the authors will focus on the first part of the definition.

### Adult Literacy

An adult's ability to read, write, and comprehend.

*The Barbara Bush Foundation for  
Family Literacy*

In Delaware, 20% of the state's adult population has a literacy level that places them at risk for not being able to use or understand print material.<sup>3</sup> Adults at this level range from being able to read short texts and perform short text-related tasks including filling out a form to being functionally illiterate.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this brief is to quantify and measure adult literacy in Delaware and to help determine what can be done to support adult literacy efforts throughout the state. Using data from the Delaware Division of Libraries and other sources this brief examines Delaware's adult population, participation in library services and adult literacy programs and other adult literacy indicators.

<sup>1</sup> Bendini, M. & Levin, V. (2019). *Striving for Universal Literacy*. The World Bank. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/striving-universal-literacy>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.) *Adult Literacy Rate (%)*. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/3200>

<sup>3</sup> Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. (n.d.). *U.S. skills map: State and county indicators of adult literacy and numeracy*. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019179/index.asp>

## WHO ARE DELAWARE'S ADULTS?

The literacy skills and needs of adults can vary greatly. Poverty status, English language proficiency, and access to education are just

a few of the many elements that may impact an adult's ability to read, write, and comprehend written materials. Below, Table 1 displays demographic and socioeconomic data about adults in Delaware in order to outline the population and their potential needs.

Table 1  
**Delaware's Population**

	Delaware	New Castle County	Kent County	Sussex County
<b>Total Adult Population</b>	753,564	435,516	135,938	182,110
<b>Adult Gender</b>				
<b>Female</b>	52.3%	52.2%	52.5%	52.1%
<b>Male</b>	47.7%	47.8%	47.5%	47.9%
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>				
<b>White</b>	68.8%	64.2%	66.2%	82.0%
<b>Black/African American</b>	22.2%	25.2%	25.7%	12.0%
<b>Asian</b>	3.9%	5.5%	2.0%	1.2%
<b>Other</b>	5.1%	4.1%	5.1%	4.8%
<b>Hispanic or Latino (all races)</b>	9.2%	10.4%	7.1%	9.2%
<b>Percent in Poverty (18-64)</b>	11.3%	11.0%	12.4%	10.8%
<b>Percent in Poverty (65+)</b>	6.6%	6.8%	8.0%	5.8%
<b>Percent with high school degree or higher (age 25 or older)</b>	90.3%	91.6%	87.4%	88.1%
<b>Percent who speak language other than English</b>	8.2%	9.5%	7.3%	5.8%
<b>Among those with other language, speak English less than "very well"</b>	26.8%	26.3%	28.1%	27.5%
<b>Adults at or below level 1 literacy</b>	20%	19%	22%	21%

Source: Literacy estimates from PIAAC, all other estimates from U.S. Census 2019 5-year estimates

Historically, racial and ethnic inequalities in education have led to gaps in educational attainment and opportunities, and these disparities are an important part of any literacy discussion. Two thirds of Delaware’s population (68.8%) identify as White, 22% as Black/African American, 4% as Asian, and 5.1% identify as another race. Among residents of any race, 9.2% of Delaware residents identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Poverty can have deep and lasting effects on literacy that continue to impact families throughout generations. Adults with the lowest literacy levels and lowest levels of education are significantly more likely to live in poverty,<sup>5</sup> and children who experience poverty have lower educational attainment and poorer employment outcomes,<sup>6</sup> ultimately continuing the intergenerational cycle of poverty and its impact on literacy. Throughout Delaware, younger adults are more likely to live in poverty than older adults. More than one in ten (11.3%) Delaware adults aged 18 to 64 live below the poverty level, compared to 6.6% of adults aged 65 or older. The majority of adult Delawareans have completed their secondary education: 90% of adults 25 and older have a high school degree or higher.

The ability to communicate in English can impact all forms of literacy from reading to health and financial literacy. In Delaware, 8.2% of adults speak a language other than English, and among these adults, more than one quarter (26.8%) report speaking English less than “very well.”

Overall, one in five (20%) Delaware adults are at or below level 1 literacy as measured by the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, presented in the sidebar on this page. Remaining at or below level 1 places these adults at risk for low literacy.



## DID YOU KNOW?

*Adults with level 1 literacy can recognize basic vocabulary, determine the meaning of sentences, and read paragraphs of text in print or digital format.*

*Within level 2, adults can make inferences from text, paraphrase, and use text to compare and contrast or reason.*

*Adults with level 3 literacy can utilize dense or lengthy texts to identify, interpret or evaluate information, disregard irrelevant information, and construct meaning from the text.*

*Level 4 literacy includes performing multistep operations to interpret and synthesize complex and lengthy texts, applying background knowledge, and evaluating evidence or claims within the text.*

*Within level 5 literacy, adults can search for and integrate information throughout multiple, complex texts, evaluate reliability of sources, make high-level inferences, and apply specialized background knowledge.*

Source: Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. (n.d.) What PIAAC Measures. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp>

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Education. (2002). *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Findings of the National Survey of Adult Literacy*. National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Ratcliffe, C. (2015). *Child Poverty and Adult Success*. Urban Institute.

## DISTRIBUTION OF ADULTS IN DELAWARE

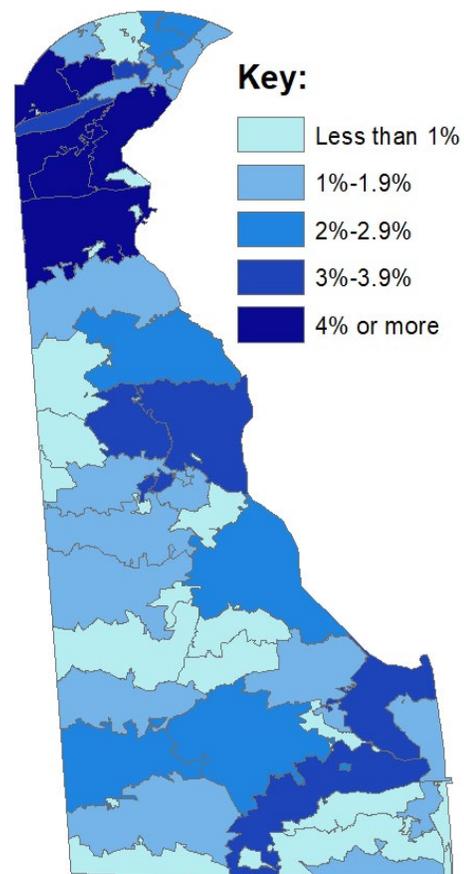
Delaware is a geographically diverse state and is home to urban and suburban neighborhoods, rural farming communities, and coastal beach towns. Residents living in different parts of the state may have varying literacy needs and face different challenges such as access to transportation, reliable internet, and proximity to services that may impact their literacy outcomes.

Nationally, urban and suburban residents over the age of 16 were more likely to have read a book in the last year than their rural counterparts, and suburban residents were the most likely to have a library card (61%), followed by urban residents (59%), and rural residents (48%). Adult readers in different locations can also have different preferences when it comes to book format, which libraries may consider when evaluating which services are most useful to their patrons. For example, among those who read both print books and e-books, urban readers are more likely to prefer e-books for many reading activities, while rural readers have a greater preference for print books.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1 presents Delaware's adult population as the percentage of the total adult population aged 18 or older residing in each zip code. Delaware's population is largely concentrated in urban and suburban areas around the state's two largest cities, Wilmington and Dover, with some pockets of more highly populated zip codes along the state's coastline and in southeastern Sussex County.

Figure 1

### Percentage of Total Adult Population by Zip Code



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2015-2019 5 year estimates

Conversely, areas bordering Maryland in the southwestern part of the state, such as Bridgeville and Laurel, tend to be less populous. This figure emphasizes Delaware's geographically dispersed population and indicates the need for specialized literacy services.

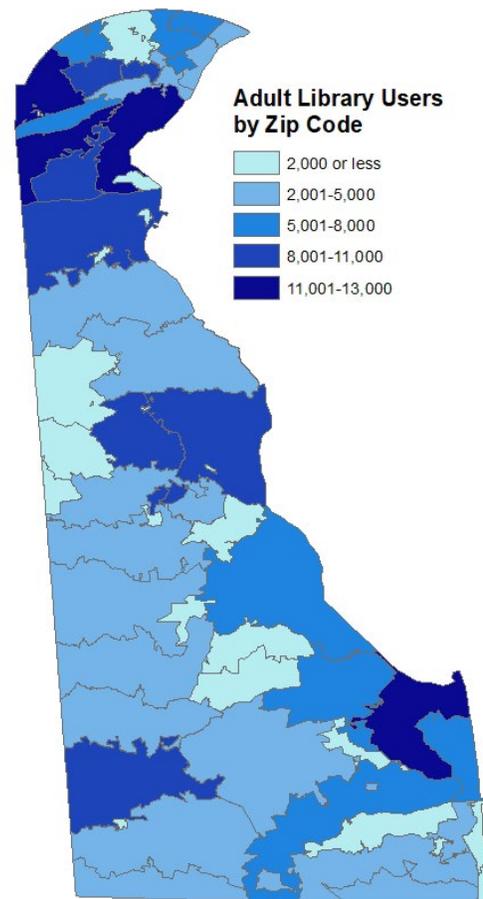
<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center. (2012). *Reading Habits in Different Communities*.

## ACCESS TO LITERACY AND LIBRARY SERVICES

Figure 2 displays the number of adult library users by zip code in fiscal year (FY) 2021, which ran from July 2020 to June 2021. Given that areas with a greater adult population are likely to have more library users, it is not surprising that the map presented in Figure 2 looks similar to Figure 1. As seen in Figure 2, Delaware's most populous zip codes tend to have the highest numbers of adult library users, and less populous zip codes tend to have the fewest adult patrons. The highest concentrations of adult library users are in New Castle County and in Kent and Sussex counties along the coast. Although there may be fewer library users in rural areas, rural libraries play a critical role in promoting literacy and offering services to their adult patrons. Nationwide, one in every ten visits to a rural library includes attending a library program.<sup>8</sup> In Delaware, rural libraries offered more than 2,800 programs in 2018, serving almost 44,000 attendees.<sup>9</sup>

Delaware's rural zip codes, particularly in southwestern Sussex County, tend to have lower levels of educational attainment than other parts of the state.<sup>10</sup> Research shows that individuals with lower educational attainment tend to have lower levels of literacy skills,<sup>11</sup> as such, libraries in these areas are a key resource for adults looking to increase literacy. In addition to programs and services offered directly through the library, libraries serve as informational hubs to

Figure 2  
**Adult Library Users by Zip Code, FY21**



Source: Delaware Division of Libraries

connect patrons with other services. The Delaware Division of Libraries also partners with organizations involved in adult literacy, adult education, and English language learning to ensure that all Delawareans have equal access to these services.

<sup>8</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services. (n.d.) *Rural Libraries in America*.  
[https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/rural\\_libraries\\_in\\_america\\_infographic\\_overview.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/rural_libraries_in_america_infographic_overview.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Frehill, L.M. (2020). *State Detail Tables: Rural Libraries in America*. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

[https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/rural\\_libraries\\_in\\_america\\_state\\_detail\\_tables\\_20200915.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/rural_libraries_in_america_state_detail_tables_20200915.pdf)

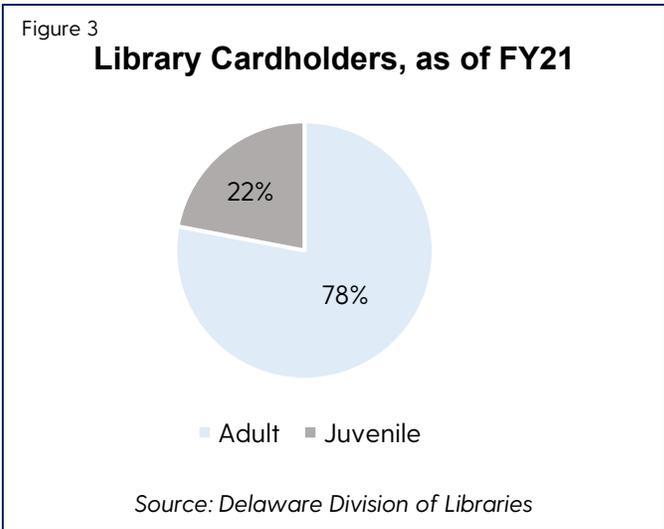
<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2015–2019 5 year estimates.

<sup>11</sup> Park, H. & Kyei, P. (2011). Literacy Gaps by Educational Attainment: A Cross-National Analysis. *Social Forces*; 89(3), 879–904.

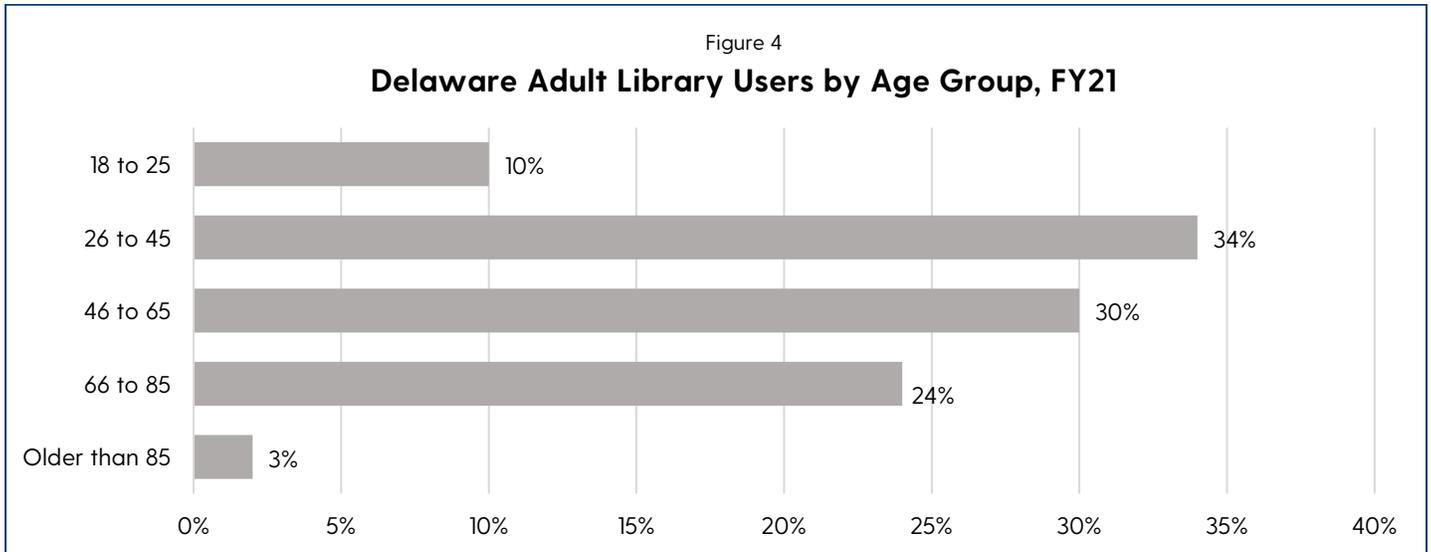
## ADULT LIBRARY PATRONS

Delaware libraries are a cornerstone for adult literacy across Delaware. In addition to offering books and e-books for all levels of readers, the libraries also offer access to technology, educational resources, and programming with partners in literacy throughout the state. While libraries are an important resource for individuals of all ages, the majority of library cardholders in Delaware are adults. As of the end of FY 2021, 78% of library cardholders were adults, compared to 22% who were juveniles, as shown in Figure 3.

Different adult age groups may have varying literacy needs and interact with libraries in different ways. For example, young adult library users are more likely to utilize a library’s computers or internet connection and to use the library as a place to sit, read, or study. Adults 65 and older are particularly likely to rely on libraries to learn new technologies or research health care



information.<sup>12</sup> Figure 4 displays adult library users in Delaware by age group. Throughout the state, the majority of adult library users during fiscal year 2021 were 65 or younger. Most commonly, library users were aged 26 to 45, and least common were adult library users aged 25 or younger and users older than 85. Further analysis by age group may be helpful to clearly outline the needs of Delaware’s adult library users.



Source: Delaware Division of Libraries. Includes only registered adult library users with zip codes in Delaware.

<sup>12</sup> Horrigan, J. (2015). *Libraries at the Crossroads*. Pew Research Center.

## ACCESS TO LIBRARY BOOKS

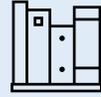
Books are a key building block for adult literacy, and access to books is an important component of enhancing literacy skills. The most effective library collections for adults include print and digital materials that meet the needs of adult learners and suit the resource needs of adult literacy educators.<sup>13</sup>

Through the state’s public libraries, Delawareans of all ages can access a variety of books to enhance literacy including fiction and nonfiction books for all levels of readers, English language learning books, reading and writing skills workbooks, and study manuals for tests including the GED and the GRE. The libraries enable access to books in a variety of formats, including print books, e-books, and audiobooks.

Delaware’s libraries have almost two million physical books in circulation, more than twice as many books as there are residents in the state.<sup>14</sup> Physical books may include print books or CD and MP3 copies of audiobooks. Delaware Libraries also offer two virtual platforms for cardholders to check out e-books and audiobooks: Overdrive, which enables users to check out books and read through the app or on a kindle e-reader, and Hoopla, which offers books and other media through an internet browser or a phone app. Overdrive offers over 737,809 e-books and audiobooks, while users can choose from 76,945 books on Hoopla.

In addition to access to books, access to technology is an important service to many adults. Not only does it enhance digital and technical literacy skills, free internet and

### Delaware Libraries Book Circulation



1,966,630

Physical Books



737,809

Overdrive E-books



76,945

Hoopla E-books

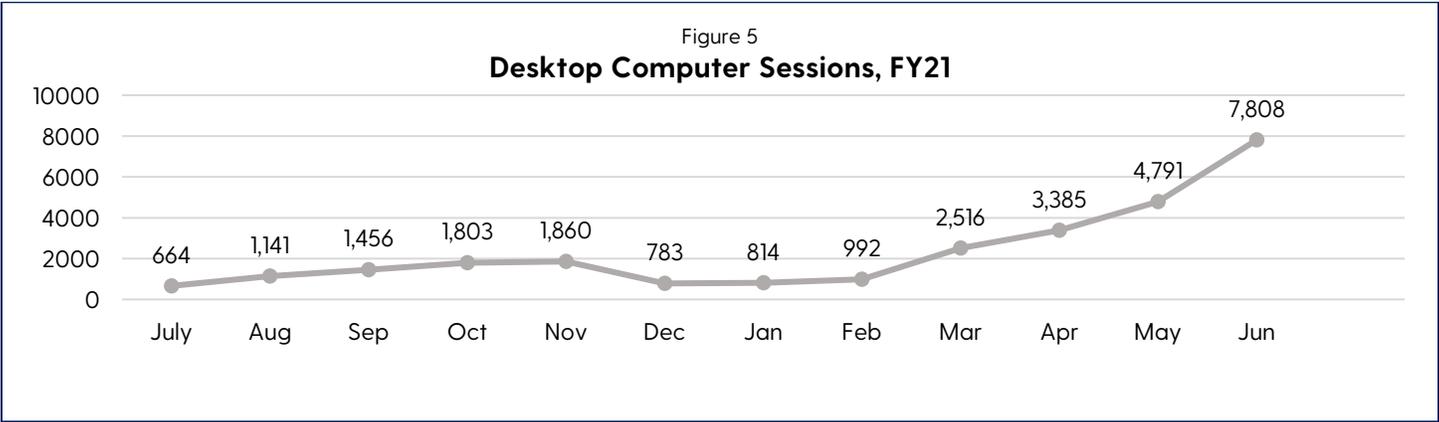


310 Chromebooks

computer access enables adults to connect with services and programs to supplement their reading and writing skillset. Most public libraries throughout Delaware allow patrons to check out Chromebooks for personal use, and there are 310 Chromebooks currently in circulation.

<sup>13</sup> ProLiteracy, the American Library Association, & the Onondaga County Library. (2014). *Adult literacy through libraries: An action agenda*.

<sup>14</sup> United States Census Bureau. *American Community Survey, 2015-2019 5 year estimates: Table DP05*. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>



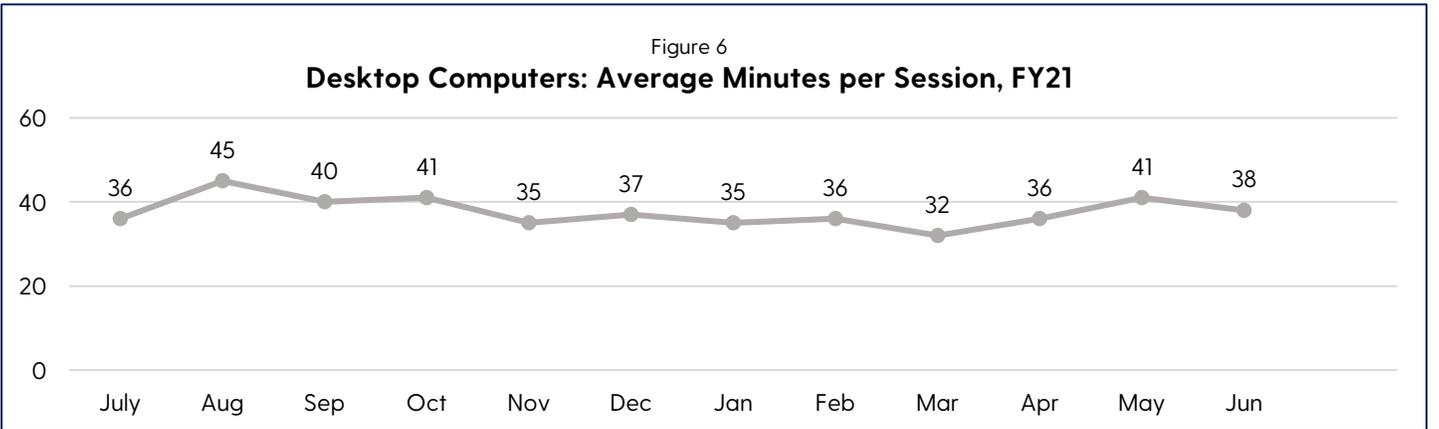
Source: Delaware Division of Libraries

## DESKTOP COMPUTER USE

Desktop computers are available at all public library locations, providing equitable access to the internet and to various technology resources. The availability of these computers enables adults who may not have access to reliable computers or internet at home to study, research, and connect with services they may need. Like many public services, libraries experienced closures and limited access throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that led to decreased desktop computer usage and fewer sessions overall. Figure 5 shows the number of desktop computer

sessions across all public libraries during fiscal year 2021. Starting in March, the number of sessions began to rise as restrictions were lifted, and there were more than 7,800 desktop computer sessions in June.

Despite decreases in the number of computer sessions during the pandemic, the length of time per session remained relatively stable throughout fiscal year 2021. Figure 6 displays the average number of minutes per session on library desktop computers. On average, desktop computer users spent about 38 minutes per session throughout the year, with a high of 45 minutes per session in August and a low of 32 minutes in March.



Source: Delaware Division of Libraries

## STATE LITERACY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Partnerships are a key component of enhancing adult literacy and enable adults to reach the services they need to be successful. The Delaware Division of Libraries has partners throughout the community to connect adult library patrons to services.

### Literacy Delaware

Literacy Delaware works to improve the literacy skills of adults with limited literacy or English language skills. Offerings include English language instruction, group classes, and one-on-one tutoring. Literacy Delaware typically serves over 200 participants per year, including both adult basic education (ABE) students and English language learners.

Total adults served	223
Adults new to program	86
Adult Basic Education students	64
English language learning students	159

Source: *Literacy Delaware Annual Report, 2020*

### Adult Basic Education

Delaware's Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs focus on essential skills that can help Delawareans increase their ability to function in everyday life.<sup>15</sup> Classes take place in locations that are easily accessible to students including libraries, public housing facilities, community colleges, and online. Programming includes: basic reading, writing, and math skills, computer literacy, English as a second language, and life skills. As a result of the pandemic, some ABE programs were limited and enrollment was lower than in previous years. In fiscal year 2021, Delaware's ABE programs served more than 1,700 students.

Total number of adults served	1,708
Average attendance hours per student	74
Level completion rate	49%
Separation rate	35%

Source: *Delaware Adult Education Annual Report, FY21*

<sup>15</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2022, January 20). *Welcome to Adult Basic Education (ABE)/GED*. <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/2927>

## James H. Grove Adult High School

The James H. Grove Adult High School program enables adults of any age to receive their high school diploma. Courses are offered through six local agencies, four correctional institutions, and in a distance learning format.<sup>16</sup>

Total adults served	879
Number obtaining high school diploma	278
Average attendance hours per student	241
Separation rate	54%

Source: Delaware Adult Education Annual Report, FY21

## Prison Education

Through the Delaware Department of Education, adult education programs are offered at several correctional institutions throughout the state including courses in life skills, ABE courses, GED and high school diploma programs, and vocational training.<sup>17</sup> Research shows that adults incarcerated in prison score significantly lower on literacy tests than their counterparts outside of prison,<sup>18</sup> and completion of education programs has been shown to reduce recidivism rates and increase employment opportunities upon release.<sup>19</sup> Enrollment in prison education programs was impacted by the pandemic. From 2016–2020, a typical year had between 2,000 and 3,000 enrollees in prison education programs across several correctional institutions; due to the pandemic, there were just 860 enrollees in fiscal year 2021.

ABE/ESL level completion rate	27%
GED test pass rate	65%
High school graduation rate	28%
Life skills completion rate	92%

Source: Prison Adult Education Annual Report, 2020

<sup>16</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2022). *Delaware Adult Education: FY21 Annual Report*.

<sup>17</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2022). *2021 Annual Report: Prison Adult Education*.

<sup>18</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Highlights from the U.S. PIAAC survey of incarcerated adults: Their skills, work experience, education, and training*. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016040.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Davis, L.M., Steele, J.L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J.N.V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education*. RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted access to education and literacy services worldwide. Unfortunately, groups the most in need of literacy services were the most likely to be negatively impacted by the pandemic. Adults with lower levels of educational attainment and foreign-born adults were among the groups who were highly impacted by unemployment and loss of income during the pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the pandemic, many educational resources were moved online or postponed indefinitely. Literacy programs in Delaware, such as the Adult Basic Education program and the Prison Education Program had significant decreases in enrollment after the onset of the pandemic,<sup>21</sup> and college and university enrollment rates declined across the country in the fall of 2020.<sup>22</sup> In August 2020, 83% of Delaware households surveyed with an adult who planned to participate in post-secondary education reported that their educational plans had either been canceled or changed in some significant way.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these challenges, literacy efforts persisted throughout the pandemic and many programs adapted to offer safe alternatives. Literacy Delaware conducted tutor training

online and offered services such as their English conversation group through Zoom. Select classes from Delaware's adult basic education program are offered online, and James P. Grove adult high school also offers online courses. For adults looking to attain a GED, the GED test now offers an online version in addition to the in-person option as a result of the pandemic.

Delaware's public libraries offer many opportunities for distant or virtual access, during the pandemic and beyond. Delaware residents may sign up for library cards online and access content through several different online platforms. Libraries also offered curbside pickup, so patrons could select their books and pick them up without having to enter the library. In addition to books, libraries also offer access to adult literacy and educational resources such as Learning Express, which offers academic and career test preparation, and various virtual events including book clubs and writing workshops. While the pandemic may have disrupted adult literacy and education, Delaware libraries and other partners in adult literacy have developed innovative ways to deliver services to those who need them, and literacy services are now more accessible than ever before.

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<sup>20</sup> Kochhar, R. (2020). *Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession*. Pew Research Center.

<sup>21</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2022). *Delaware Adult Education: FY21 Annual Report*.

<sup>22</sup> Sedmark, T. (2021, March 25). *Fall 2020 College Enrollment Update for the High School Graduating Class of 2020*. National Student

Clearinghouse. <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/blog/fall-2020-college-enrollment-update-for-the-high-school-graduating-class-of-2020/>

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Household Pulse Survey: Measuring Social and Economic Impacts during the Coronavirus Pandemic*. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey.html>

## ADULT LITERACY IS FAMILY LITERACY

Adult literacy is a building block of family literacy. When parents have a strong foundation in literacy, they are better able to help develop literacy skills in their children and set future generations up for success. Research has shown that children whose parents have higher levels of educational attainment have higher reading scores.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, a mother's literacy level is the greatest indicator of her child's academic success.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, adult literacy and child literacy are strongly interconnected. These findings underscore the importance of approaching literacy by using methods that address the needs of individuals of all ages, from Delaware's youngest children to the state's oldest adults. According to the U.S. Department of Education, successful family literacy programs integrate interactive literacy activities involving both parents and children, training in parenting activities, literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and educating children to prepare them for success in school and life. Improving adult and child literacy levels can impact so much more than individual outcomes. Increasing literacy helps adults, children, families and communities create more successful futures.

### DID YOU KNOW?

*Successful intergenerational literacy programs integrate:*



*Interactive literacy activities involving both parent and child*



*Training in parenting activities*



*Literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency*



*Educating children to prepare them for success in school and in life*

Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2007). Family Literacy. [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/fl14.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/fl14.html)

This section of the report was prepared by staff from the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research and Service and Institute for Public Administration. For more information, please contact Becky McColl ([bmccoll@udel.edu](mailto:bmccoll@udel.edu)).

<sup>24</sup> The Aspen Institute. (2014). *Gateways to Two Generations*. <https://ascend-resources.aspeninstitute.org/resources/gateways-to-two-generations/>

<sup>25</sup> National Institutes for Health. (2010, October 25). *Improving mothers' literacy skills may be best way to boost children's*

*achievement*. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-boost-childrens-achievement>



AUGUST 2021

# KIDS COUNT in Delaware Data Snapshot

## Raising Readers from Birth through Teens

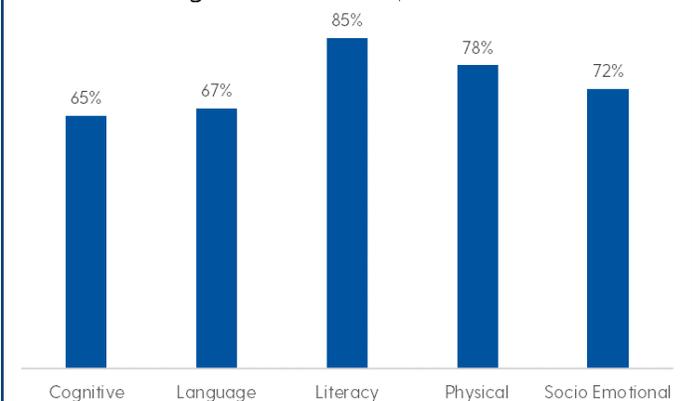
### READING THROUGH THE YEARS

Access to books is a foundational building block to early literacy formation. Books and their surrounding environment, when nurtured optimally, allow children to develop reading skills which relate to confidence in school and serve as predictors for life success. High literacy and comprehension skills can open doors for kids to have access to more educational opportunities and job opportunities, leading to economic mobility and poverty prevention. Dolly Parton's Imagination library starts early literacy formation at birth, universally working to reach all Delaware's babies to enroll them in the program. Delaware's children are assessed for true reading comprehension and language acquisition in third grade. Benchmark outcomes also exist: developmental milestones to be achieved and Kindergarten readiness at the state level, shown in Figure 1. Youth graduate high school and go on to college or to earn a credential and develop reading skills during each of these transitions. Supporting kids at each point in the journey (through maximizing connections to books) leads to a greater level of success for each outcome. The literacy partners across the state can continue to support children and adults throughout the lifespan, impacting results through innovation surrounding book access.

Figure 1

### Early Childhood Experiences Shape K-12 Readiness

Kindergarten Readiness, Delaware 2019



Source: Delaware Department of Education

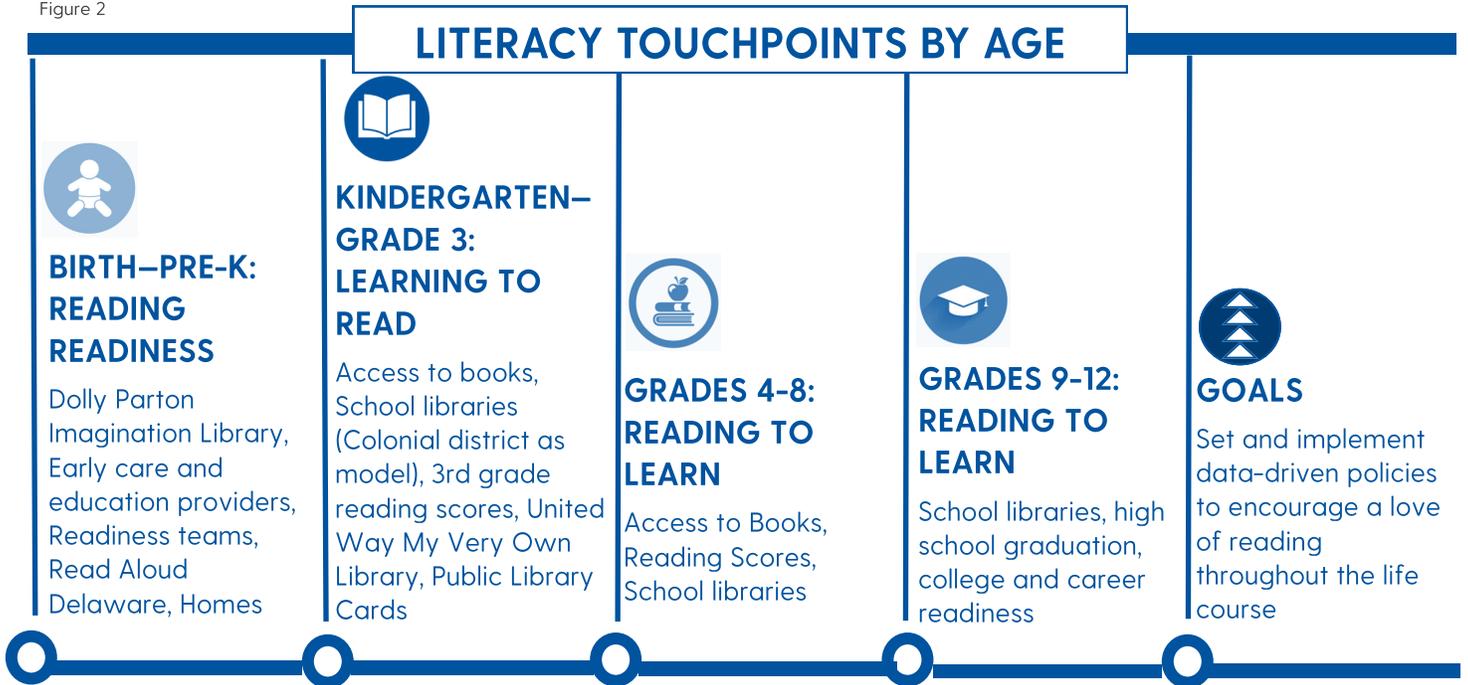


**The Delaware Communities of Excellence Collaborative** focuses on developing a comprehensive literacy ecosystem that promotes equity and impacts Delawareans for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life in Delaware.

# Literacy: Birth through Teens

Throughout this brief, the Literacy Touchpoints by Age are highlighted using the icons noted within the timeline (Figure 2).

Figure 2

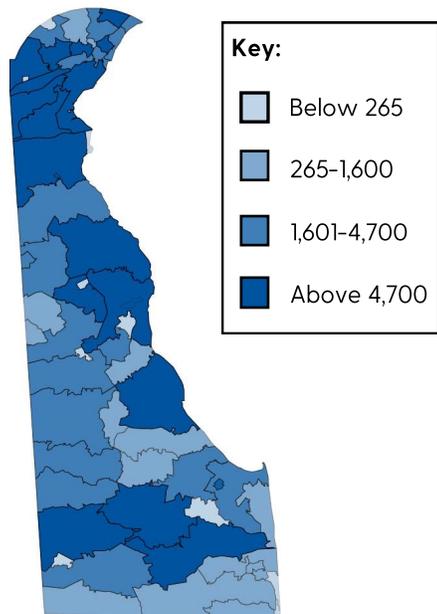


## DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN IN DELAWARE

Figure 3

### Child Population Distribution

Number of Children Ages 0-17 by Zip Code, 2015-2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

### Where are Delaware's Children?

Figure 3, to the left, shows the geographic distribution of children ages 0-17 in Delaware. Population density increases with color darkness. As the literacy touchpoints are considered, an understanding of where children are most concentrated per Zip Code is critical. Working together to ensure programming exists to support literacy for all youth across the state will nurture Delaware's literacy.

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# Literacy: Birth through Teens

## ACCESS TO BOOKS

Books are tangible and quantifiable, distributable, and easily collected. In an ideal world, every child would have the opportunity to experience a book flood. Analysis of the historic Early Childhood Longitudinal Study<sup>1</sup> found stark differences between the number of books owned by children of high socioeconomic status versus those of lower socioeconomic status: lack of literature material in the home was associated with lower socioeconomic rank, for children in the study. Unfortunately, many young people live in book deserts, without the ability to experience the joy of ample reading material. Libraries serve to aid in creation of book floods for Delaware's children. Access to a large variety of quality books has the ability to positively shape a child's environment and vocabulary; excellent collections include books with a variety of characters and solutions. Promoting inclusivity by celebrating diversity is just one of the many powers held by books. Though access to books lays the foundation there's a world that surrounds books. The context surrounding each book is complex; each is surrounded by relationships and interactions.

<sup>1</sup>Neuman, Susan B. and David K. Dickinson, ed. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research, Volume 2*. New York, NY: 2006, p. 31

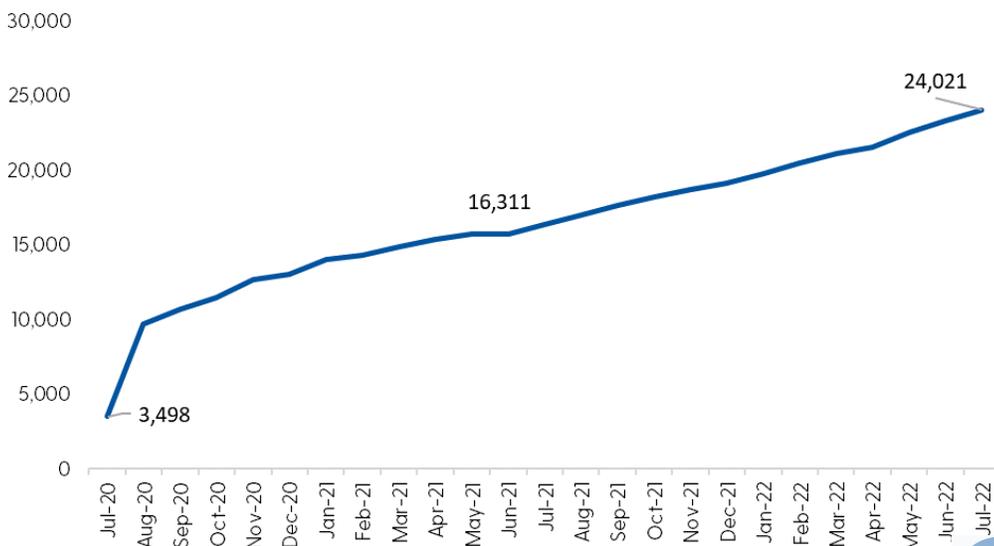
**Book Flood:** All children - regardless of their zip codes and identities - deserve ongoing access to an ever-changing stock and flow of high-interest, age appropriate books. For more information, please visit:

[EndBookDeserts.Com](https://endbookdeserts.com)

These interactions are dictated by factors such as poverty status, the culture of reading surrounding a child, and the understanding that literacy is a vital skill. Kids steer through the world of books on their own; they must be taught how to develop the skill of reading and use it towards success. At-home development is very important to growing the love of reading in a child. Though we recognize that part of the equation, this brief focuses more on the access to books and how the libraries fit into and support the greater landscape of youth literacy as well as what gaps exist. The library creates the environment to grow a love of reading, even when a home may not be able to. Community partners are needed to continue toward an effective book flood. One supportive program is the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, in which 19,093 children were enrolled in December 2021. One-third of Delaware's kids ages 0-4 are registered, which shows the program's tremendous reach in the state in just over a year. Trends are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

**Dolly Parton Imagination Library**  
Total Registration, July 2020–January 2022



Source: Delaware Division of Libraries



### The Dolly Parton Imagination Library

In Delaware's Imagination Library program, children ages birth up to their 5th birthday receive a FREE book in the mail each month. The purpose is to instill the habit of reading and create the library habit, too!

For more information, check out:  
<https://lib.de.us/imagination/>

# Literacy: Birth through Teens

## SMALL STEPS

Creating habits to make reading enjoyable begins with adults in an infant's life. While any interaction with books is better than none, a recommended goal is 20-30 minutes per day. Parents, supported by additional family members can also partner with early care providers and other community-based service organizations to reach the goal together. The building blocks are listed in Figure 5. Public and school libraries provide books, but emphasis of the importance of using these entities as resources must surround the adults in each child's life.

What if you read 4 picture books a day with your child in the first 5 years?

Figure 5

Age	Days	x 1 book per day	x 4 books per day (20 to 30 minutes)
Birth to 1	365	365	1,460
2	365	730	2,920
3	365	1,095	4,380
4	365	1,460	5,840
5	365	1,825	7,300
<b>5 Year Total</b>	<b>1,825</b>	<b>1,825</b>	<b>7,300</b>

Source: Delaware Division of Libraries

## PATHWAYS TO BOOKS

School libraries serve an important role in the educational landscape of children, as they are situated within one of the most consistent structures present in a young person's life. Particular attention paid to borrowing rates and circulation of materials across all grade levels, shown in Figure 6, can be beneficial to fostering literacy over time. School and public libraries both impact kids, and a coexisting and a supportive approach between both is necessary.

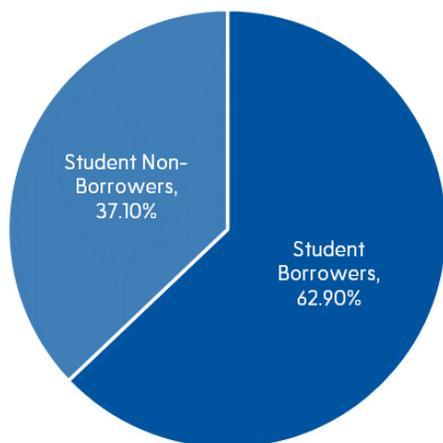
## THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

In 2020, 269 child care centers had reached a Delaware Stars Level 4 or 5 Quality Rating. Delaware's Stars for Early Success, a product of the University of Delaware's Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Education, is a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) administered by the Delaware Department of Education. To achieve a Level 4 or 5, a center must provide all attendees with opportunities to engage in a variety of interest areas, consisting of dramatic play, reading, blocks, math manipulatives, music, science, and sensory materials. This goal situates reading within a child's daily routine, laying the foundation for lifelong literacy. Furthermore, high quality centers have multicultural and inclusive materials available, reflective of the children and community to promote diversity.

Figure 6

### Elementary (KN-5th) School Library Usage

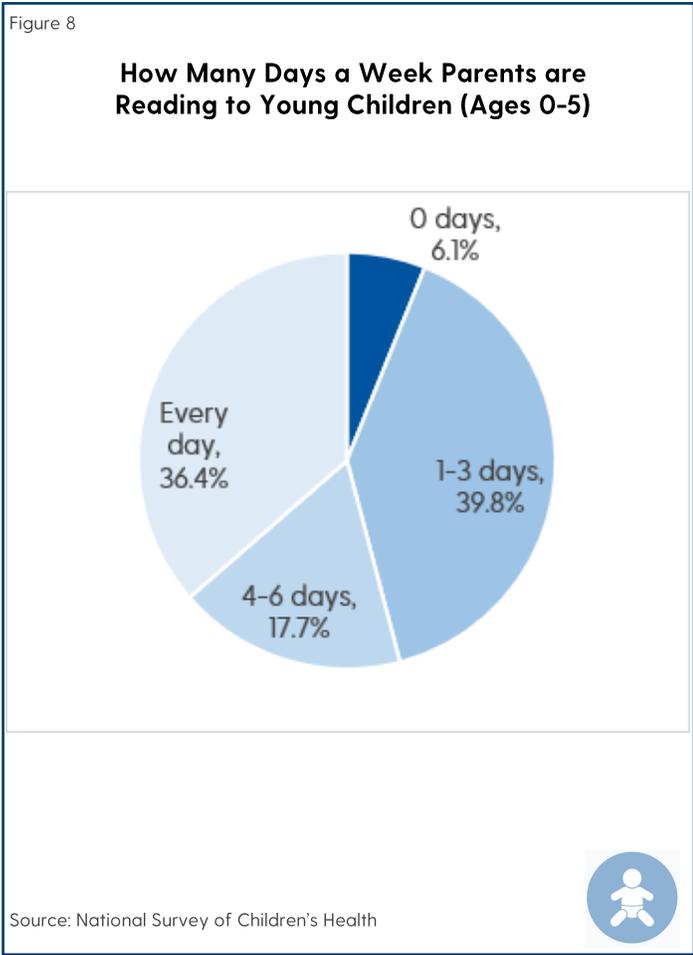
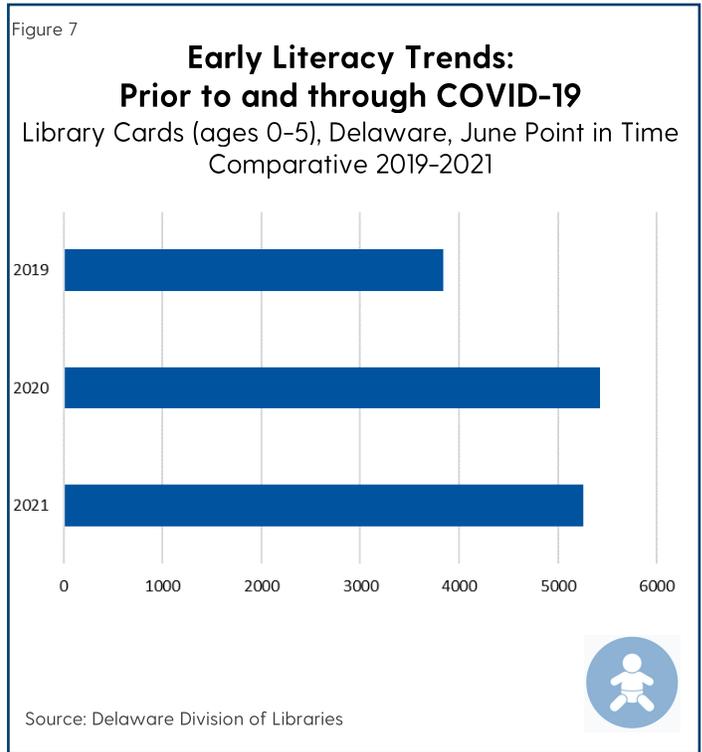
Colonial School District 2017-18



Source: Colonial School District

# Literacy: Birth through Teens

Delaware Libraries are structured to support children and families via multiple channels to literacy. Through an intricate system of library card profiles, programming on a coordinated calendar, circulation, and timely technology offerings, there is potential to continue growing early literacy support in Delaware. Collaboration across libraries offers added opportunity. Through enhancement of these established entities, libraries can multiply the children served with each coming year. By capitalizing on the use of data systems and standardizing operation of systems, value will be added. This, partnered with greater community engagement, holds bold opportunity for Delaware. Enhanced community partnership can strengthen library programs further, efficiently using what's already existing.



## PRIOR TO, THROUGH COVID-19

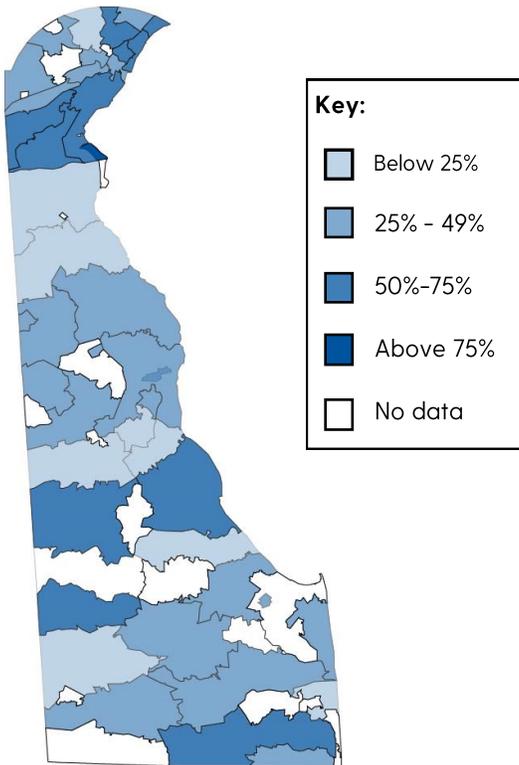
As Delaware's kids of all ages continue to adapt to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly important for community supports to be in place to meet their needs. Literacy is foundational to success, and by championing access to quality reading materials for children, Delaware's Libraries have the opportunity to fill that gap in learning experienced by children this school year. Assessing the number of library cards held by young kids across the state gives us insight into that accessibility.



# Literacy: Birth through Teens

Figure 9

## From Learning to Read to Reading to Learn Third Graders Below Reading Proficiency by Zip Code\*, 2019



Source: Center for Community Research & Service analysis of Proficiency Scores, Delaware Department of Education. Note: Zip Code refers to zip code where school is located, not the zip code where child resides. Definition: Level 1 students and Level 2 students combined are included in "below proficiency."



## BENCHMARKS

Just as Kindergarten Readiness marks a milestone for kids, Delaware's children are assessed for true reading comprehension and language acquisition in third grade. The map in Figure 9 shows the distribution of students below reading proficiency, by Zip Code, throughout the state. It can be seen that in the areas with the two shades of darkest blue, more than 50% of Third Graders were below reading proficiency in 2019. High school graduation is the final youth-related benchmark in a child's life; Delaware rates are featured in Figure 10.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Level 1 student demonstrates **minimal understanding** of English language arts and literacy knowledge and skills needed for success in college and career, as specified in the Common Core standards.

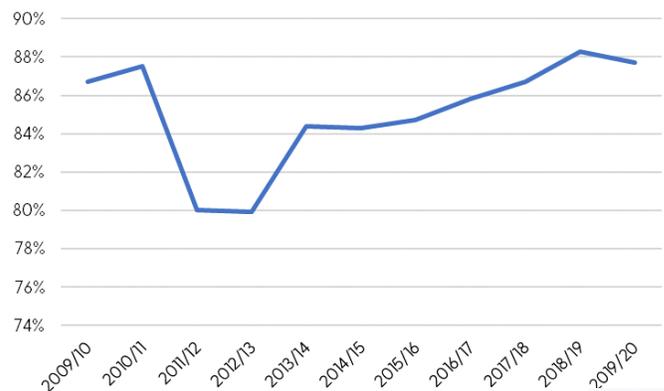
The Level 2 student demonstrates **partial understanding** of and ability to apply the English language arts and literacy knowledge and skills needed for success in college and career, as specified in the Common Core Standards.

The Level 3 student demonstrates **adequate understanding** of and ability to apply the English language arts and literacy knowledge and skills needed for success in college and career, as specified in the Common Core State Standards.

The Level 4 student demonstrates **thorough understanding** of and ability to apply the English language arts and literacy knowledge and skills needed for success in college and career, as specified in the Common Core State Standards.

Figure 10

## High School Graduation Rate Delaware, 2010-2020



Source: Delaware Department of Education



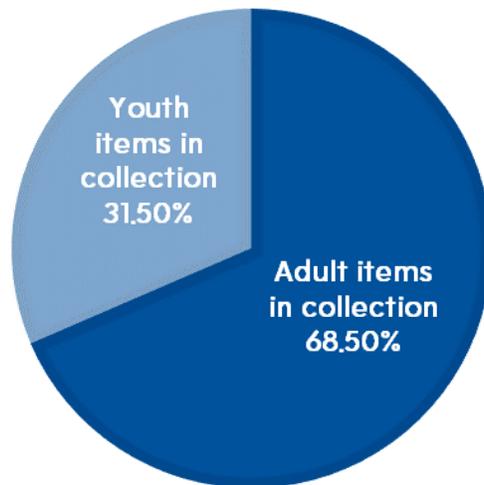
# Literacy: Birth through Teens

Maintaining a grand assortment of books through collection (detailed in Figure 11) can offer many choices of literature for children and adults to choose from, allowing a natural process of exploration and discovery. To access this circulation, children need library cards, a datapoint referenced within this brief in the context of adult readers. To reflect the diversity of the populations served by libraries, books in circulation celebrate numerous cultures, traditions, and ways of life. This promotes inclusivity and creates a unique environment for children; it is not often that one can place themselves in another's shoes through one story, just to have another adventure waiting on the next shelf. Circulation of library materials allows kids to take this experience home and immerse themselves in it in their daily life; through this, each library has the potential to create new supports and interactions surrounding books. Optimal circulation of high-quality children's material, paired with increased library card profiles for our youngest readers, is critical to nurturing Delaware's early literacy. This love of reading can be shared throughout the family. As parents model good reading habits, those are passed to children.

Figure 11

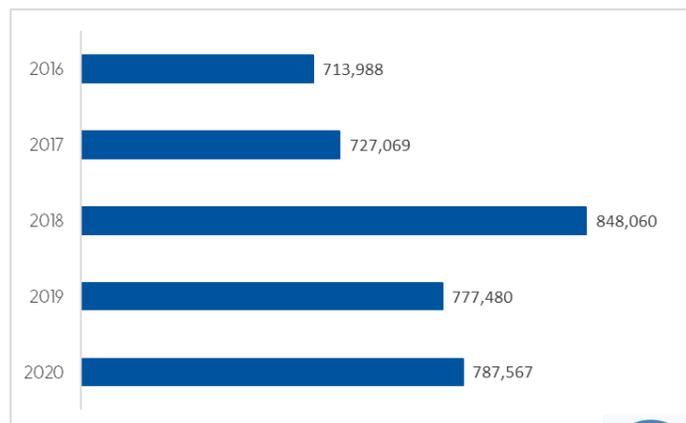
## Library Materials Collection

Delaware, Fiscal Year 2020



## Youth Items in Collection

Delaware, Fiscal Years 2016 to 2020



Source: Delaware Division of Libraries



# Literacy: Birth through Teens

## PIVOTS AND INNOVATION

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought disruptions to all aspects of life, especially education. Data have begun to show that widening disparities in educational outcomes by income and race/ethnicity which have long plagued our system, have begun to show. The hardship of COVID-19 was and continues to be felt most by our children and families who are most vulnerable. Of paramount concern is the need to nurture social connections and rich curricular and extracurricular involvement for our students. Delaware's public libraries, along with partner organizations, worked tirelessly to innovate and support kids. Methods were altered to meet the needs of Delaware's communities. This innovation was seen across the state by additional supporters of literacy. United Way of Delaware

**Of paramount concern is the need to nurture social connections and rich curricular and extracurricular involvement for our students.**

began use of learning pods to support student learning while physical school buildings were closed and, along with Read Aloud Delaware, shifted their volunteer reading program to an online platform. The state expanded internet access toward digital learning. Delaware's Readiness Teams developed, disseminated, and shared findings on their 2021 Family Survey to ensure understandings of families' true experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically reflections on Wi-Fi accessibility and virtual learning. Delaware's Books, Balls, and Blocks programming pivoted their methods to ensure continued developmental screenings took place during the pandemic. Delaware's Public Library System partnered with the Department of Education to increase offering of E-Books through Overdrive. The Hoopla online system was also enhanced with additional youth books.



This section of the report was prepared by staff from KIDS COUNT in Delaware. For more information, please contact Erin Nescott ([eplynch@udel.edu](mailto:eplynch@udel.edu)).

## RECOMMENDATIONS: LITERACY THROUGH THE LIFESPAN

As Delaware continues to adapt to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly important for community supports to be in place to meet the literacy needs of children and adults. When literacy needs are met, families and communities are given tools they need to succeed.

Literacy begins in childhood, and the sphere that surrounds each child at home, at school, and in the community is full of opportunity. Understanding the role that each of us plays in supporting children, and their reading journeys, will lead to the best results for Delaware's youth. Growing literacy in an equitable manner depends on a comprehensive approach of both access to information as well as enrichment activities like family engagement and public investment. As children grow into adults, literacy can have far reaching impacts on both individuals and families. The ability to write, read, and communicate effectively can prepare an adult for success in all aspects of their life, and create an environment that fosters literacy skills in future generations.

Delaware has a diverse population with a wide range of goals and requirements when it comes to adult and family literacy, and there is no one single solution to increase literacy levels for entire families. Offering multi-generational literacy services and continuing to involve parents in their children's literacy goals is vital to ensuring that literacy efforts will be impactful among all Delawareans.

To effectively address child and adult literacy in Delaware, a three-step approach is

suggested. The first step to address building a literacy foundation is to create a multi-generational literacy action plan. This plan would use current resources (highlighted in this brief) as a baseline for services offered. After reviewing current resources, members of the action plan team would work to identify community and state specific literacy needs and determine ways they could be addressed to get the most impact and increase literacy for all ages.

The action plan would include goals that are measurable and that would have an impact on increasing literacy in areas of need. For example, a quantifiable goal for early literacy would be for a community to achieve 100% library card registration for their youngest constituents. The action plan team would also identify and recruit literacy experts and advocates to provide feedback on library offerings, create offerings based on needs, and provide services. This plan would use other state models that are considered successful programs such as the *National Action Plan for Adult Literacy*<sup>1</sup> from the Barbara Bush Foundation and *Houston's Adult Literacy Blueprint*.<sup>2</sup>

As a second step, in conjunction with creating a literacy action plan, Delaware could continue to expand community and state partners to increase the availability and accessibility of literacy programs both in person and online. Establishing a foundation of literacy takes a significant amount of time and effort that may be a challenge for many families, especially those with working adults or limited transportation options. Transportation is unfortunately a barrier to equitable access of library services, and the ability of residents to travel and access libraries and literacy services is essential to keep in mind as planning needs vary throughout the state.

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<sup>1</sup> The Barbara Bush Foundation. (2021). National Action Plan for Adult Literacy. <https://www.barbarabush.org/reports>

<sup>2</sup> The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation & Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy. (2021). Houston's Adult Literacy Blueprint. <https://www.houstonadulthoodliteracy.org/>

Continuing to offer literacy services online and in accessible physical locations can help ease this burden for adults and families looking to expand their skills. Additionally, the Delaware Division of Libraries should continue to build upon their partnerships like Literacy Delaware, ABE, Delaware Readiness team, dual generation centers, the United Way of Delaware, Read Aloud Delaware, and the Delaware Department of Education. Through these partnerships, it is recommended that data are continually added to the established inventory as new sources are identified.

The third step involves designing a marketing and social media initiative to spread the word about adult, child, and multi-generational programs offered. This initiative could either build upon current initiatives such as the “Recipe for Success” early literacy marketing materials or involve creating a new comprehensive strategy. Ensuring Delawareans of all ages have knowledge of the programs available to them and their families is key to participation.

This three-step strategy is based on Delaware’s current infrastructure and examples of literacy strategies from other states and cities. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to addressing literacy, creating a comprehensive strategy involving planning, programming, and marketing is a start to expanding access to literacy throughout Delaware.

## **Acknowledgements:**

**Delaware Division of Libraries** provides leadership and support for the timely development of Delaware’s libraries, to ensure convenient access to, and encourage use of current information, resources, and reading material by all Delawareans. Members of the Delaware library community are unified in the values of service, access, and excellence, and are committed to the vision of progressive libraries and the transformational impact they have on the people who use them.

**The Delaware Communities of Excellence Collaborative** focuses on developing a comprehensive literacy ecosystem that promotes equity and impacts Delawareans for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life in Delaware.

The research was supported by the Delaware Division of Libraries, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the State of Delaware, and the University of Delaware. We thank them for their support, and acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these organizations.

## **Contributors**

### **KIDS COUNT in Delaware**

Janice Barlow, Director & Policy Scientist

Erin Nescott, Assistant Policy Scientist

*KIDS COUNT is a national and state-by-state effort of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the well-being of children in the United States. KIDS COUNT in Delaware, a project of the University of Delaware Center for Community Research and Service, is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives for all children by providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being.*

### **Center for Community Research and Service**

Rebecca McColl, Assistant Policy Scientist

*Located within the Joseph R. Biden Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware, the Center for Community Research and Service works to create more just and equitable communities and enhance the wellbeing of underserved populations in Delaware and beyond.*

### **Institute for Public Administration**

Kelly Sherretz, Policy Scientist

*The Institute for Public Administration (IPA) is a research and public service center in the Joseph R. Biden Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. IPA addresses the policy, planning, and management needs of its partners through the integration of applied research, professional development, and the education of tomorrow's leaders.*