

SOLVING FLINT & GENESEE'S BASIC SKILLS CRISIS:



IMPROVED SKILLS LEAD TO A BETTER
LOCAL ECONOMY AND BETTER CAREERS

FLINT & GENESEE LITERACY & BASIC SKILLS NETWORK

SEPTEMBER 2013

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ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF THE CENTURY

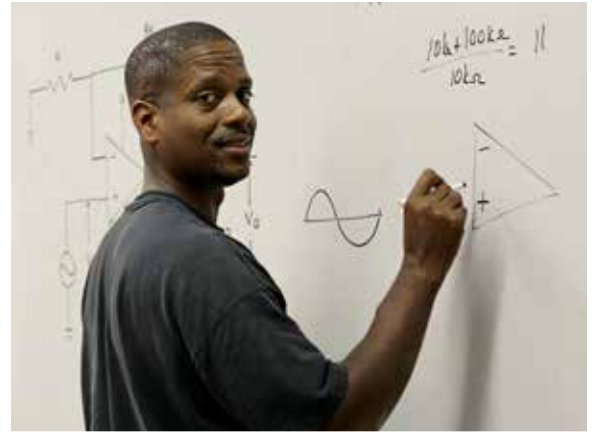
One in two working age adults in Flint and the surrounding suburbs lack the basic skills needed to meet 21st Century education, employment, and life requirements – a staggering figure.

The consequences are enormous. Men and women with low basic skills struggle to find jobs, let alone family-sustaining employment, in an era in which good jobs require higher level skills. Solid skills in reading, writing, math, and computer literacy are essential to attain a postsecondary degree or certificate and to enter nearly every career pathway that leads to good paying jobs.

If we confront and solve our enormous gaps in basic skills, Flint can return to being a center of economic growth and prosperity. If we fail to solve this challenge, our community faces the prospect that half of our workers and families will remain at high risk of being left behind as employment requirements continue to increase.

In Genesee County, just 1 out of 3 working age adults who didn't complete high school is employed (see Table 1). By contrast, 3 out of 4 who possess a bachelor's degree or higher have a job. That pattern tracks with national data: educational attainment correlates directly with employment and income. The proportion of the population employed rises with each step of attainment on the educational ladder.

A lingering result of the demise of the auto industry in Flint is that too many skilled workers in our community remain unemployed or underemployed. As a result, employers are finding they can attract a large pool of applicants when recruiting for new jobs within the county – often getting hundreds of applications for a few positions. This leads us to believe that as the economic recovery in our area continues, it will not take much new job growth to fully employ workers with strong basic skills and/or postsecondary degrees and certificates. Unfortunately, if we do not help those workers lacking these key foundational skills to acquire them, Flint and the surrounding area's economy will continue to struggle.



One in two Flint area working age adults lack basic skills needed for family-supporting employment.

CONFRONTING AND SOLVING

this crisis is essential to building a PROSPEROUS FUTURE in our COMMUNITY.

Table 1 Employment Rate 25-64 year olds

	Genesee County	Detroit MSA	Grand Rapids MSA	Lansing MSA
No high school	34%	40%	52%	48%
High school	54%	60%	66%	65%
Some college or associate's degree	66%	69%	75%	74%
Bachelor's degree or higher	77%	81%	83%	81%
Total	62%	67%	73%	73%

Source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Flint and Genesee County face a critical moment for creating prosperity.¹ Flint is undergoing a master planning process which has prioritized expanding quality education opportunities for all ages. Community members participating in the planning process identified “preparing Flint’s workforce for today’s jobs with education and training” as the number one way that we can reshape the Flint economy.

Their feedback tracks with numerous economic development studies that point to workforce skills as among the most important factors in building a prosperous, growing region. Initiatives are already underway in Flint & Genesee County to reengage disconnected youth, and to expand and improve early childhood education. Solving the basic skills crisis among adults is another crucial building block in ensuring that Flint area workers can succeed.

This report, and the framework for a Flint & Genesee Basic Skills Collective Impact strategy, result from 18 months of work by 26 community organizations. The workgroup was convened by Mott Community College President Richard Shaink, who saw the enormity of the issue from the college’s own experience (69.4% of entering freshmen in 2011 were recommended for one or more developmental courses before starting their regular programs). The central conclusion of this workgroup was that solving the basic skills crisis requires an unprecedented partnership among many organizations, new approaches to improving basic skills, and both creatively leveraging existing resources and obtaining additional resources to meet the huge need.

As a result, in June 2013, eleven partners committed to be the founding members of the Flint/Genesee Literacy & Basic Skills

Network and began asking others to join and to begin actions to meaningfully improve basic skills in Flint and Genesee County.

This report lays out the scale of the basic skills crisis we face and provides an overview of the current capacity among the agencies that work with learners with low basic skills. Most importantly, it defines the scale of improvement required to bring this crisis under control. The report outlines a strategy for how we can align and expand the efforts of multiple organizations to make a scalable impact on this crucial issue during the next several years.

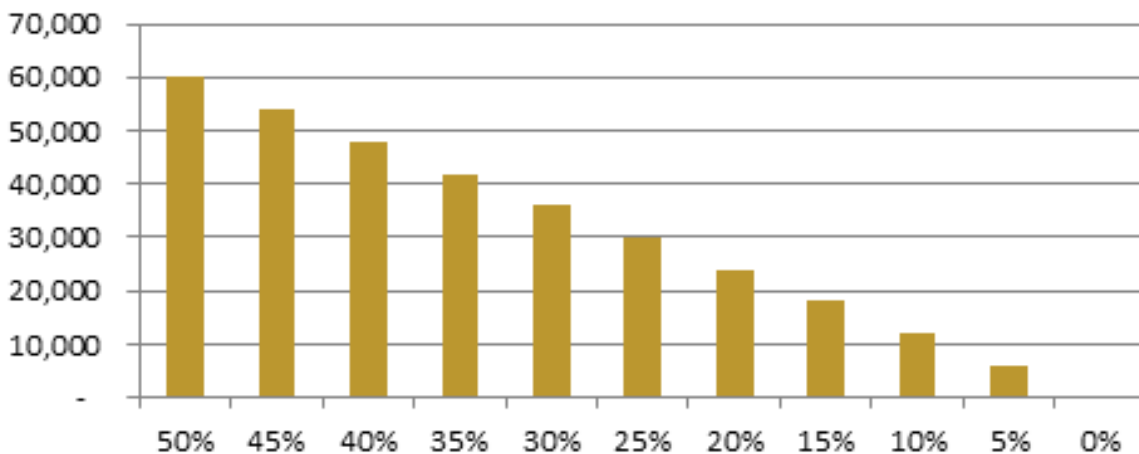
Nationwide, an estimated 25% of working age adults possess low basic skills. Reaching that rate in the Flint area will require us to cut the current 51% rate in half – helping 30,000 people to move from weak basic skills to strong foundational skills.

That’s an enormous, mind-boggling scale of improvement. If we muster the creativity, commitment and resources to tackle the basic skills challenge over the next several years with the tenacity required, we have an opportunity to become a national leader among urban centers, nearly all of whom face comparable basic skills gaps.

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW), a national non-profit policy organization, was asked to perform this study to help the community understand the scale of the Flint and Genesee basic skills gap and paths to solving this vexing challenge. The report was made possible by support from Mott Community College and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

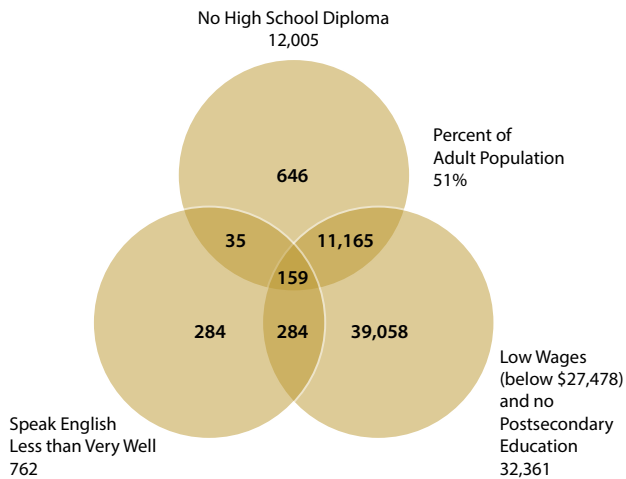
1 Imagine Flint Vision and Goals Workshop, March 9, 2013.

Every 6,000 Residents Who Increase Basic Skills Lowers the Percentage with Low Basic Skills by 5%

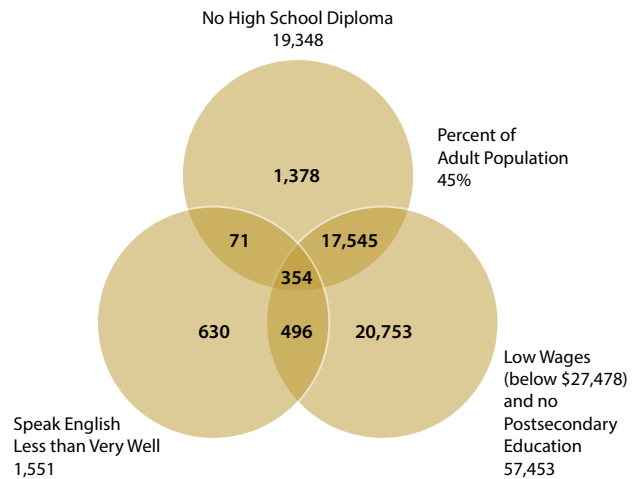


THE SCALE OF THE CRISIS

33,326 Flint Adults (18-64) Need Improved Basic Skills



59,532 Flint and Flint Suburbs Adults (18-64) Need Improved Basic Skills



Various estimates of the scale of need for basic skills improvement in the region convey a crisis-level order of magnitude:

- In the City of Flint, 51% of individuals aged 18-64 need improved basic skills.
- In Flint and the surrounding suburbs, 45% of adults aged 18-64 (59,532 individuals) need improved basic skills. By contrast, Michigan statewide estimates using the same methodology are that 33% need improved basic skills. A comparable national study concluded that 25% need improved basic skills nationwide.
- The most recent national study of literacy rates was conducted in 1992 by the National Institute for Literacy. It estimated that 35% of adults in the City of Flint were functionally illiterate, referring to the inability of an individual to use reading, speaking, writing, and computational skills in everyday life situations.² Generally, those adults who score at Level 1 (on a scale of 1 to 5, lowest to highest) have difficulty performing such everyday tasks as locating an intersection on a street map, reading and comprehending a short newspaper article, or calculating total costs on an order form.
- A review of the first-time student's placement test results at Mott Community College in the fall of 2011 revealed that 69.4% of the 3,522 students tested placed at the developmental level in one or more areas (reading, writing, and math)
- Of the Mott entering freshmen who were placed in developmental courses, 8.5% were under 18 years of age; 42.4% were 18-19 years of age; 30.9% were 20-29 years of age; and 18.2% were 30 years of age or older. Basic skills gaps can be found at all ages.
- Two-thirds of adults with basic skills gaps possess a high school diploma or GED; this could reflect the need to refresh skills acquired years earlier and then not used, and/or skills never adequately acquired in the first place.
- These figures are aggregates and communicate a region-wide issue. We also know some neighborhoods within the city have more significant concentrations of adults who are functionally illiterate and/or lack educational credentials.

² The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 2008, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED416407.pdf>. Data from 1993 survey.

TODAY'S REALITY: A SEVERE LACK OF CAPACITY

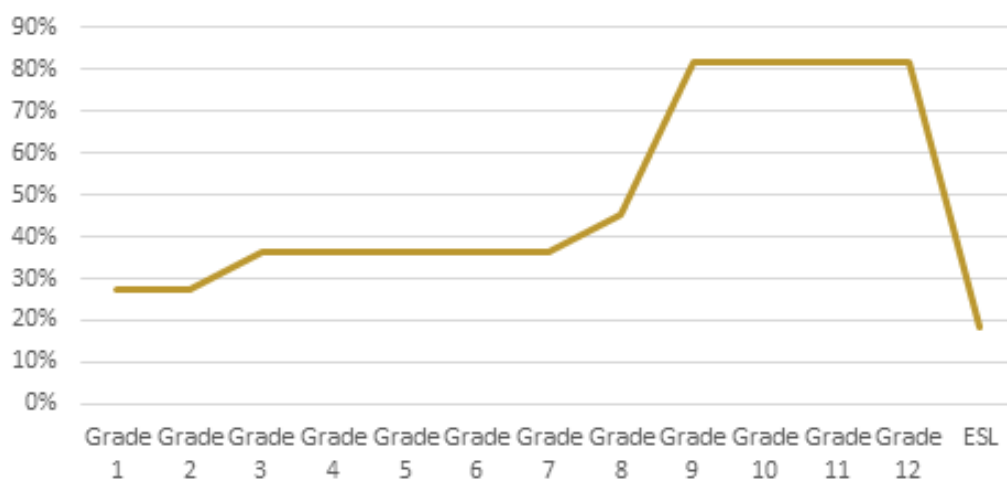
CSW conducted outreach to Genesee County basic skills providers to identify existing local adult learning resources and the challenges they face. CSW contacted local providers to learn more about their capacity to improve adults' basic skills, asking about the skill levels they serve, how they assess and instruct learners, how they structure their programs, their relationships with partner organizations, and what they would need to grow their capacity. Their responses are critical to the analysis that follows.

- 1. Demand for improved basic skills is vastly greater than current service levels can provide.** Our current knowledge of capacity in the region indicates that very limited resources are being cobbled together to address the region's overwhelming demand. Conservatively, fewer than 10% of those in need receive any services whatsoever each year. And many of these 10% do not necessarily receive services over any significant period of time or achieve any learning outcomes, so the number of learners actually improving their skills each year is much lower.
- 2. Consistent funding is the greatest challenge.** All programs struggle to identify and maintain sources of funding. State and federal funding for basic skills improvement have shrunk substantially during the past decade. Securing appropriate funding would allow programs to address technology needs, hire additional personnel, and provide incentives for participants to encourage more consistent participation.
- 3. Low level learners are underserved.** We know that 35% of adults in the City of Flint are functionally

illiterate, referring to the inability of an individual to use reading, speaking, writing, and computational skills in everyday life situations. Only 27% of the programs surveyed provide services for learners at these very low levels. That's a result of federal and state adult education funding priorities with limited resources emphasizing services to learners closer to the level of solid basic skills.

- 4. Digital literacy is lacking.** Only 36% of programs surveyed reported offering digital literacy instruction. Digital literacy is a crucial skill for today's workforce. Further, GED testing is expected to become electronic-only in 2014. Instruction in digital literacy is crucial for today's learners.
- 5. Programs struggle to assure completion and postsecondary success.** While most programs maintain relationships with postsecondary partners to ensure learner transitions from basic skills to postsecondary education are seamless, very few low-level learners ever make these transitions, and fewer still ever complete postsecondary education.

Percentage of Programs Surveyed Serving Learners at Each Grade Level



6. The vast majority of programs are not offered in intensive formats that are shown to yield quicker results. Current programs seldom feature intensive, accelerated instructional methods that make it possible for adults to quickly improve their skills along a pathway to advanced credentials. One key barrier to offering more intensive programs is the ability of students to participate in these programs with a closer to full-time focus, which generally requires a range of supportive services and financial supports. Approaches that allow learners to work while engaged in learning—like transitional jobs programs, paid internships—provide financial supports so workers can focus on their studies, while also providing work experiences that provide useful context for workers’ studies. Unfortunately, these programs are few and far between.

7. The vast majority of program content is not related to employment. The majority of the programming offered is not related to individuals’ occupational interests or future employment in key sectors. Most programs also lack meaningful connections to employers which can provide on-site learning opportunities, financial support for learner activities, connections to employment opportunities, and concrete feedback on skill-building curricula. Employer engagement is critically important to developing contextualized curricula that demonstrate clear connections between basic skills development and future employment, which is recognized as having tremendous impact on learner retention in programs.

An additional challenge is finding faculty who have both industry expertise and experience working with low-level learners. These skills are not typically found in the same person, making professional development critical to expanding faculty members’ industry knowledge so they can develop and deliver contextualized curricula, or their ability to work with low-level learners requiring highly-specialized instructional approaches.

8. Programs lack capacity to provide adequate supportive services for learners. Low-income and low-skilled adult learners require a range of supports to ensure they can participate in education and training (like transportation, childcare, food and shelter, disability services). Current programs lack the internal capacity to offer these services to learners and require stronger, integrated partnerships with other community-based organizations that can be useful to seamlessly providing a full range of supportive services.



- 9. Programs are not equipped to address learning disabilities that are prevalent among low-skilled learners.** Adult learners with literacy levels below the fifth grade, and especially those at low levels who possess high-school diplomas, very frequently face undiagnosed learning disabilities and/or require adaptive instruction to address learning differences. Currently, programs are not equipped to accurately diagnose these challenges, and, even more concerning, many of them lack the internal capacity and specialized services necessary to address these challenges.
- 10. Enrolling learners in the correct program is challenging.** While the majority of programs surveyed reported the referral services, it is clear that programs struggle to identify which programs are best suited for individual learners or have capacity to enroll individuals in a timely manner. In order for referrals to be effective, better understanding across programs of services offered and open enrollment periods is necessary.
- 11. Available resources through libraries are underused.** While libraries surveyed offer self-paced, e-learning programs and assistance from personnel, these resources are not often used by learners. Libraries lack capacity to publicize these offerings or consistently assist learners in their use.

Each of these challenges present an opportunity for organizations and partnerships to improve this system and better prepare adults for lifelong learning and family-sustaining careers.

ACHIEVING THE SCALE OF IMPROVEMENT NEEDED

A coalition has formed of organizations committed to solving the Flint area's basic skills crisis. The Flint & Genesee Literacy and Basic Skills Network is launching an ongoing collaboration to align and improve literacy resources, services and results. Network members believe that no one organization can solve this enormous challenge alone, and that it will require a community-wide network of partners to succeed.

The challenges outlined in this report can feel overwhelming. But if we tackle them with smart strategies and a sustained, community-wide commitment, we can substantially increase the number of adult workers in the Flint area with strong basic skills.

The first key step in dramatically improving basic skills in our community is to build understanding and commitment across multiple stakeholders to the scale of change needed to impact our basic skills challenge at scale. Network members believe aiming at large-scale improvement over the next several years is essential.

**We ask the community to join with us in setting a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal:
By 2020, 30,000 Flint area residents with low basic skills will develop strong basic skills.**

Reaching this goal would cut the percentage of workers with low basic skills to 25%, bringing Flint into alignment with the nationwide average. We have an opportunity to become a national leader among urban centers, nearly all of whom face comparable basic skills challenges.

Reaching 30,000 people during the next seven years is a big goal, requiring services to be offered at a scale far greater than what is currently provided. Network members are committing to the journey to do the work required to make a large scale impact. But we need the collaboration of everyone to achieve success. If we make a sustained commitment and muster the needed resources and offer diverse, effective learning opportunities and supports, we can make a life-changing difference for thousands in our community.

Think of the scale this way: for every 6,000 men and women who move from low to strong basic skills, we lower the community-wide average by 5 percentage points.

Increasing the basic skills of 30,000 Flint area residents during the next seven years requires community-wide collaborative action. The Network's strategy is based on the Collective Impact framework being used to undertake large-scale change in a number of communities across the country.



Imagine **FLINT**
IN 2020,
with **30,000** more
WORKERS who've built
STRONG basic
SKILLS.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective Impact calls for

- a) commitment to a shared goal;
- b) use of common measures;
- c) aligning services among multiple agencies to help reach the shared goal;
- d) active, highly visible communication about the goal and progress towards it; and
- e) an organization that serves as the “backbone” to provide support to the collaborating partners.

The founding partners of the Network have committed to this Collective Impact strategy. Mott Community College has agreed to serve as the initial backbone organization that will support the Network’s efforts.

Connecting educational programs to one another to ensure efficient and effective transitions from basic skills education to postsecondary education and training requires strong relationships among community-based organizations, basic skills providers, and postsecondary institutions. These partners currently provide services in the area, care deeply about these issues, have trust and relationships in the community, and are trying to overcome similar challenges individually. The opportunity here is to provide the leadership, time, resources and space needed for these partners to work together to ensure alignment among them that creates clear pathways that articulate from low basic skills to postsecondary education.

Effective programs also require faculty who can align basic skills training with the skills learners will need to move on to occupational training and who can contextualize basic skills training to the occupational content and employment opportunities learners will encounter as they continue their studies and move into careers. These institutions can often share their areas of expertise among themselves using a framework where each partner sees themselves as providing specialized services along well-connected pathways that connect learners to a full range of services.

Leveraging Our Collective Resources and Services to Maximize Impact

Recognizing that no one organization can address this crisis alone, the network will strive to operate as an integrated network of services. Partners will work to identify opportunities to leverage funding, staffing, and facilities to improve our collective capacity. Partners will also work together towards raising additional resources.



No one organization can
SOLVE THIS CRISIS alone.
As a **NETWORK**, we can
RAISE needed **RESOURCES**
and leverage funding, staff and facilities
to **SUCCEED** in IMPROVING
basic skills for thousands who
need that **HELP**.

Network members have identified the following priority opportunities for improving literacy and basic skills through collective action:

Common Assessment & Advising

Community partners are willing to create a system for common assessment and advising services to improve referral services and support learners. This comprehensive system would allow information to be shared among partners, not done separately at each agency, so that all entry-points would be knowledgeable about the instructional services available in the community. The system would provide a basis for individual learning plans that are connected to career planning.

Non-Traditional Service Portals

Partners understand that since one of every two residents in Flint and the surrounding suburbs are in need of improved basic skills, a more robust effort to reach potential learners is necessary. Partners envision using non-traditional methods to engage potential learners, including use of TV, news, and other local media; library resources; and technology, including smart phone apps and web-based services for learning in non-educational settings.

Networks of Support

Partners recognize the need for individuals to be immersed in supportive social networks in order to successfully improve their skills and gain family-supporting employment. Creating a culture in which friends and relatives are engaged in supporting learning efforts is a crucial strategy to helping learners succeed. Face-to-face, multi-generational support groups and social media groups should be employed to this end.

Agile Delivery

Creating learning opportunities that are tailored to the needs, goals, and pace of each individual is critical. Programs should offer contextual basic skills delivered to meet “just in time” needs through flexible modes of delivery.

Smooth Transitions at Entry and Exit Points

Focusing on improving organizations’ ability to place learners in programs and transition from one program to the next is critical. Provide learners with navigational help to identify the right opportunities for them, and provide holistic supportive services for the individual so that learners are not dropped from the system.

Preventive services

Programs and policies typically target parents and children separately, limiting their impact on the family as a whole. Dual generation strategies that connect early childhood strategies and adult learning strategies should be considered so that the network would be able to treat the family as a unit, and offer additional services to address barriers including childcare, transportation, income supplements, and peer support networks.

Success Stories

The network will build momentum with incremental success stories and facilitate peer learning and networking among service providers to accelerate the adoption of promising practices to address key issues.

Restoring a Sense of Hope

We can reduce crime rates in the community in an era in which too many have experienced violent crimes, including murders of family and friends. We can build success that makes it possible for people to gain and hold good jobs and stabilize families. By helping people who’ve hit every wrong door succeed, we can break a culture of hopelessness.

CONCLUSION

While the level of need for literacy and basic skills education is huge in Flint and the surrounding areas, the momentum under-way to address this crisis gives us hope. By working together to address this challenge, the Flint & Genesee Literacy and Basic Skills Network can create opportunity at the scale necessary to meet the needs of individuals and families in the region.



APPENDICES

Percentage of population at Level 1¹ Literacy²

Area	Percentage
Genesee County	23%
Beecher CDP	40%
Burton City	16%
Fenton township	4%
Flint City	35%
Flint township	17%
Grand Blanc township	10%
Mount Morris township	28%
Michigan	8%
Nation	13.8%

Source: The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 2008, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED416407.pdf>. Data from 1993 survey.

Poverty Rate for the Population 25 Years and Over for Whom Poverty Status is Determined by Educational Attainment Level

Subject	Flint Total	State Total	National Total
Less than high school graduate	43.6%	29.2%	27.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	29.2%	15.2%	14.2%
Some college or associate's degree	32.1%	12.2%	10.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	9%	4.5%	4.4%

Source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2011 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)

Subject	Flint Total	State Total	National Total
Less than high school graduate	\$11,757	\$17,171	\$18,794
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	\$21,428	\$24,625	\$26,699
Some college or associate's degree	\$21,243	\$30,229	\$32,321
Bachelor's degree	\$38,623	\$46,188	\$48,309

Source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

- 1 Generally, those adults who score at Level 1 (on a scale of 1 to 5, lowest to highest) have difficulty performing such everyday tasks as locating an intersection on a street map, reading and comprehending a short newspaper article, or calculating total costs on an order form.
- 2 The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels, 2008, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED416407.pdf>. Data from 1992 survey.

FLINT & GENESEE LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS NETWORK FOUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

Baker College
 Christ Enrichment Center
 City of Flint
 Flint Area Reinvestment Office
 Flint Genesee Job Corps
 Flint Public Library
 Flint/Saginaw Odyssey House Inc.
 Genesee District Library
 Genesee Intermediate School District

Genesee/Shiawassee Michigan Works
 Kettering University
 Metro Community Development
 Mott Community College
 Resource Genesee
 Rotary International
 United Way of Genesee County
 University of Michigan - Flint



RESOURCE GUIDE



Baker Pathways Adult Education

Baker College
1050 W. Bristol Rd.
Flint, Michigan 48507
810-766-4300
Services: GED preparation, GED testing, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education,

Beecher Adult & Alternative

1149 Klein
Mt. Morris, MI 48458
810-591-9734
Services: GED preparation, GED testing, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education

Bendle/Carman-Ainsworth Adult Education

G-3329 Burnell Avenue
Flint, MI 48504
810-591-2880
Services: GED preparation, GED testing, Adult secondary education

Center for Higher Educational Achievement

517 East Fifth Avenue
Flint, MI 48503
810-553-2140
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education

Christ Enrichment Center

322 East Hamilton Avenue
Flint, MI 48505
810-239-9425
Services: Adult basic education

Family Literacy Center

311 Higgins St.
Lapeer, Michigan 48446
810-664-2737
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education, English as a second language

Flint Genesee Job Corps Center

2400 North Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48505
810-232-9102 ext. 115
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education, Developmental education

Flint Odyssey House

529 Martin Luther King Avenue
Flint, MI 48502
810-733-2462
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education, Developmental education, Postsecondary remediation



Flint Public Library

1026 East Kearsley Street
Flint, MI 48502
810-249-2038
Services: Basic computer classes, books for GED prep, books for literacy tutors and students (New Reader Collection)

Genesee County Literacy Coalition

1110 West Patterson
Flint, MI 48504
810-238-4773
Services: Training for literacy tutors

Genesee District Library System (19 locations)

Headquarters Library
G-4195 W. Pasadena Avenue
Flint, MI 48504
810-732-0110
Services: Basic computer classes, resume classes, books and online sources for GED preparation.

Mt. Morris Consolidated Schools

3400 N Jennings Rd
Flint, Michigan 48504
810-591-9508
Services: GED preparation, GED testing, Adult secondary education

Mott Adult High School

G-3284 Mackin Road
Flint, MI 48504
810-760-7765
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education, English as a Second Language

Mott Community College Workforce & Career Development

709 North Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48503
810-232-2555
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, Adult secondary education, Developmental education, English as a Second Language, Postsecondary remediation

New Paths

765 East Hamilton Avenue
Flint, MI 48505
810-233-5340
Services: GED preparation

St. Luke N.E.W. Life Center

3115 Lawndale
Flint, Michigan 48504
810-239-8710
Services: GED preparation, Adult basic education, English as a Second Language

For more information contact
Mott Community College
Workforce & Career Development
810-232-2555 | workforcedev@mcc.edu

