



## **IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **NEW LITERACY REPORT FINDS WIDESPREAD LOW LITERACY IN GREATER HARTFORD**

A new literacy report released by the Greater Hartford Literacy Council today shows low literacy is prevalent across the 35-town region, with the largest concentration of low reading skills in the City of Hartford.

Findings of "*Take Action for Literacy: The Status of Literacy in Greater Hartford 2003*," the only comprehensive regional literacy report encompassing literacy needs from birth through adulthood, were released at the Literacy Council's quarterly luncheon held at the Village of Children and Families in Hartford. The theme for the event was *It Takes a Village to Raise Literacy Levels*.

"Because of its inclusiveness and breadth, *Take Action for Literacy: The Status of Literacy in Greater Hartford 2003* presents literacy within its proper and complex content," **said Greater Hartford Literacy Council Executive Director Carl Guerriere**. "It demonstrates that too many of our children, youth, and adults, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or income level, have serious literacy problems with grave consequences for our cities and towns, our region, and our state."

The Literacy Council recently completed its research that involved over 200 community participants from more than 140 organizations and departments in the state and region. Participants completed service provider surveys, attended focus groups, served on an oversight committee, and deliberated on key literacy issues in task forces over a period of months. The results of this input and other data gathered are the basis of the report.

Some of the current findings:

- Approximately 300,000 Greater Hartford adults, or roughly 41% of the adult population, are functioning below the literacy skill level needed to succeed in today's economy and society (based on the U.S. Department of Education's 1998 National Adult Literacy Survey – currently the best tool available to assess community literacy levels).
- Not all literacy/education services for children, youth and adults adequately and consistently produce gains in literacy skills.
- Roughly 34% of surveyed literacy providers report a waiting list for at least one of their literacy services, with an average waiting time of about three months.

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- The system of literacy services, especially literacy services for adults, out-of-school youth, and pre-school children, has historically been under-funded, under-staffed and unable to keep up with a demand for services that is growing and becoming more complex.
- Awareness of available services is generally low throughout the region. Focus group participants report that, “you need luck to find the right program” and, 32% of surveyed providers themselves report not knowing about other programs.
- About 43% of surveyed providers report conducting no public relations or literacy awareness activities due largely to a lack of funding.

According to the Literacy Council, the comprehensive scope of low literacy needs and issues presents challenges that exceed the capacity of any one organization. The Literacy Council is calling upon local corporate, community and political leaders to take action by supporting and implementing initiatives to address low literacy. **(See specific Stakeholder - Call to Action Recommendations on Page 8 of the Executive Summary).**

At the luncheon, **Thomas Phillips, President and CEO of the Capital Region Workforce Development Board** discussed the importance of literacy to the region’s economic growth, and announced a *new collaborative initiative*.

“Literacy is a critical part of the workforce development puzzle. It’s vital for a person’s self-sufficiency and plays an important role in overall economic development for Greater Hartford,” said Phillips. “Individuals who have issues with literacy have difficulties obtaining and maintaining gainful employment as well as advancing in their careers. For these reasons, we are supporting the work of the Literacy Council.”

“Literacy is the basic building block of learning. It makes sense that we would support this important study, given the effects of low literacy on the health and economic vitality of our community, and on our ability to recruit and retain a highly educated workforce,” **said United Technologies Corporation’s Manager of Corporate Contributions and Community Affairs, Krista Pilot.**

The Literacy Council began a three-year initiative called Community Literacy Enhancement Across the Region (CLEAR) in 2002. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, United Technologies Corporation, Travelers Foundation, and the Capital Region Workforce Development Board provided funding for the initiative. The initiative was designed to provide meaningful change in the provision of, planning for, and funding of literacy services in Greater Hartford. The report represents the culmination of the first phase of the CLEAR Initiative.

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“Everyone has a role to play is the main message,” said Guerriere. “It takes a village to raise literacy levels and in order to meet that challenge, we have to find new ways of working together.”

The Greater Hartford Literacy Council is a non-profit organization created in January 2001 to coordinate and advocate for literacy services from birth through adulthood by founding partners: Hartford Public Schools, the City of Hartford, Capital Region Workforce Development Board, and the Hartford Public Library. The Council encourages collaborations among organizations, branches of government, corporations, and others throughout Greater Hartford to address literacy-related issues and to maximize the effectiveness of literacy services.

*Copies of the Full Report will be available in August 2003. To obtain copies of the Executive Summary released today, contact the Greater Hartford Literacy Council at 522-7323 or visit their website [www.greaterhartfordreads.org](http://www.greaterhartfordreads.org).*

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