



## Literacy – Why Verizon Cares

Improving basic literacy skills in the United States is among the Verizon Foundation's major priorities because of its enormous impact on education, health and economic development. Here in the United States, more than 30 million American adults have basic or below average literacy skills.

However, Verizon's focus on literacy extends well beyond teaching non-readers to read. We are challenged to help people achieve a new literacy that encompasses the complex skills and contextual learning necessary for educational attainment and job success in the 21st century.

Here are the facts and challenges:

- Only 31 percent of eighth graders and 34 percent of twelfth graders meet the National Assessment of Educational Progress standard of reading "proficiency" for their grade level.<sup>1</sup>
- In a typical high-poverty, urban school in America, approximately half of incoming ninth-grade students read at a sixth- or seventh-grade level.<sup>2</sup>
- The average literacy skills of U.S. adults ages 16-65 are "mediocre" when compared to 19 other highly industrialized countries.<sup>3</sup>
- Between 1996 and 2006, the average literacy level required for all American occupations rose by 14 percent.<sup>4</sup>
- In the 21st Century, Americans need to be better educated to fill new jobs and more flexible to respond to the changing knowledge and skills requirements of existing jobs. Lifelong skills development must become one of the pillars of the new economy.<sup>5</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Education expects the literacy gap in America will produce a shortage of 12 million qualified workers in the next decade.

Verizon is affected by the crisis in literacy directly – as an employer, as a competitive corporation and as a corporate citizen. Like every employer in America, we need skilled workers. And in our business as a leading communications company in a fiercely competitive industry, the literacy skills we require in our workforce grow more complex every day. Across America, we see an ever increasing need for a new literacy that goes far beyond reading and writing to broad competence in critical thinking and information communications literacy, which are requisites for this country to remain a leader in the world economy and for America to drive social and economic change.

1. National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002

2. Balfanz, 2002

3. A Human Capital Concern, 2004

4. Barton, 2000

5. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003

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## How Verizon Helps

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Verizon fulfills our commitment to literacy by leveraging our technology, employee volunteers, celebrity spokespersons, philanthropic investments and innovative technology to increase literacy achievement and build more literate communities. We take a focused approach to improving literacy by funding strategic nonprofit partners and programs that target teachers, grass roots community outreach, and the use of technology and online learning. We support and encourage programs and practices that produce measurable results and that can be expanded and replicated on a larger scale.

**ONLINE EDUCATION:** Technology is more than a tool for literacy improvement and learning. Technology is the new literacy – transforming the way we learn, live and work. The Verizon Literacy Network (VLN) is a free, online resource that leverages technology to deliver needed and valued training and information to anyone interested in improving lifelong literacy – at home, in the classroom or in the community. With content developed and approved by literacy experts such as the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), the American Library Association and ProLiteracy Worldwide, VLN is designed to empower teachers, volunteers, parents, caregivers and students of all ages with resources and training to improve and support lifelong literacy achievement. Visit VLN at <http://literacynetwork.verizon.org>.

**TEACHER TRAINING:** Today's classroom teachers must relate to students who may be at many different levels of literacy and English language proficiency. Verizon believes that training teachers in literacy instruction is a key to improving literacy. For example, through the "Loras for Literacy" program, the Verizon Foundation is helping Loras College develop an enhanced curriculum for early childhood and elementary school teachers to enable them to teach basic literacy skills to all children. The program focuses on enhancing literacy skills of elementary school students, as well as the teaching skills of their faculty.

**MEASUREMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT:** Verizon is committed to supporting programs that work – evidence-based practices that produce measurable outcomes. The Verizon Life Span Literacy Matrix is a unique resource that identifies relevant literacy outcomes at each level of the life span, the appropriate measures and recommended research-based practices that are proven effective in realizing those outcomes. Developed by the National Center for Family Literacy with the American Library Association, Georgetown University, the National Coalition for Literacy and ProLiteracy America, and available online at the Verizon Literacy Network, this resource allows programs and individuals to understand, support and measure achievement at each stage of literacy development to further lifelong literacy and learning.



**COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY:** Literacy does not begin or end in the classroom. Parents, extended family and community all play a role. That's why Verizon teamed with Scholastic and the National Council of La Raza in an innovative national Latino early literacy initiative – *Lee y serás* – that empowers families and communities to foster children's literacy development. Through community collaboration, culturally-sensitive materials and powerful, interactive online resources, *Lee y serás* equips caregivers, educators and Latino families with resources for Latino children, preparing them for reading, learning and life.



For more information on Verizon's literacy initiatives, visit the Verizon Foundation at <http://www.verizon.com/foundation>.