



# **Read and Believe**

CITY  
OF **NEWARK**  
Mayor Ras J. Baraka

**Read & Believe (RB)** arises from a bold vision of citywide change embraced across the community. It imagines a city that takes on literacy as a communal cause, with a sense of urgency as well as a spirit of promise. It seeks to build literacy not only as a skill essential for survival, but also as a value and culture that must be revived for Newark’s residents to reclaim their futures and the future of the City. Achieving these goals involves the traditional approaches of a literacy campaign as well as the development of a continuum of resources and opportunities that span the lifespan of an individual and bring together the resources of the City.

Read and Believe was developed with participation and input from the following community partners: Programs for Parents, New Community Corporation, United Vailsburg Service Organization, Ironbound Community Corporation, La Casa de Don Pedro, Urban League of Essex County, Newark Teachers Union, United Way of West Hudson and Essex County, Newark Literacy Campaign, Newark Public Library, American Federation of Teachers, Scholastic, First Book, Department of Health and Community Wellness, Foundation for Newark’s Future, and Believe in Newark Foundation.

### **WHY “COMMUNITY” LITERACY?**

The city of Newark faces an enormous literacy challenge in its school-age population as well as within the adult community. Over half of all students (56%) score partially proficient on NJ ASK and HSPA standardized literacy tests. That percentage spikes when one looks at economically disadvantaged students; almost 90% of the students who score partially proficient come from economically disadvantaged families. These literacy statistics place Newark in the bottom 6% of all districts in New Jersey. The statistics for adults paint a similar portrait, with some estimates placing over half of adults in the lowest ranking for literacy. The National Institute for Literacy ranks Newark as having the fifth highest rate of illiteracy in the nation, with 52% of adults 17-years or older categorized as functionally illiterate.

The literacy gap is tied directly to an opportunity gap and has financial, social, and civic consequences for individuals as well for Newark as a whole. For an individual, literacy is well known to be one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of poverty and to lead to success in career and life. For communities, literacy is a leading indicator of community wellness correlated with indicators across a multitude of sectors: health, economic development, crime, employment and community institutions. Increasing literacy means improving our city.

### **THE STRUCTURAL AND PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS OF READ AND BELIEVE**

RB will establish the following components.

**I. Literacy Commission** to establish a leadership network that supports a citywide focus on literacy. It will include broad representation of community members to build leadership from the onset. The literacy commission will focus on coordinating the efforts of partner organizations and work to ensure a clear and on-going focus that provides opportunities for participation of all the city’s institutions and interested individuals across the continuum of literacy services and components of the effort.

**II. City Campaign** that focuses on infusing the City with positive messages and images about literacy for all ages and creates multiple platforms for Newarkers to tell stories about the role of books, words, and writing in their lives. It will incorporate social media as a literacy tool and as a family engagement mechanism as well as a tool for spreading the message, including a webpage

currently under construction. Literacy will be integrated into city-wide initiative focused on youth, health, and public safety.

**III. Strategic Programs and Initiatives** that meet Newark's literacy needs in four key areas:

***A. Capacity Building***

RB will focus on three core areas of capacity building that are essential to achieving and sustaining outcomes. They are 1) training program staff to deliver high quality literacy programs to children in out of school settings; 2) training for families about literacy; and 3) recruiting and training community literacy volunteers.

***B. Establish a community-based continuum of resources and opportunities from birth through high school and beyond***

RB will establish a programmatic framework aimed at disrupting the trajectory of illiteracy by providing resources and opportunities that research shows have a positive impact on the acquisition of literacy. This includes early childhood education, a focus on reading by grade 3, engaging opportunities for struggling middle school and high school readers.

***C. Systems integration of literacy across community sectors, city departments, and existing programs***

Because literacy levels are educational indicators that are correlated with every other indicator of individual and community wellbeing (poverty, crime, health, employment, civic engagement, and neighborhood conditions) RB will take a systems approach to addressing literacy. RB will work with the Department of Health and Community Wellness, Model Neighborhood Initiative, My Brother's Keeper, Newark Public Schools, and After-School and Summer Feeding Programs.

***D. Support for existing programs and strategies***

There are a significant number of strong organizations and programs currently focused on addressing literacy in the community. Their work ranges from early-childhood and family literacy to after-school programs to GED and bilingual programs for adult. Their efforts will benefit greatly from a coordinated partnership with each other and the Mayor's Office in order to increase awareness across the city about existing programs and provide an opportunity for organizations to share best practices and engage in problem solving together.

At the end of four years the Newark will have:

1. A strong leadership body positioned to sustain literacy as a public priority.
2. Prominently displayed and vibrant messaging and images of Newarkers engaged in literacy activities.
3. Well-trained staff and volunteers in programs that work with youth and families outside of school.
4. An integrated continuum of literacy programs that provides access to books, literacy activities, training, and information from zero through high school and beyond.

## GOALS FOR A CITY WIDE LITERACY EFFORT

### READ AND BELIEVE

- Residents know about Read and Believe
- Promote language rich dialogue in public spaces
- Promote reading on multiple platforms
- Increase knowledge of the importance of literacy for success in school and beyond
- Increase in literacy behaviors for youth and adults
- Increase volunteers

### PROVIDERS

- Implement framework for collaboration
- Collective goals
- Strategic Coordination
- Information Sharing
- Shared resources and funding

### CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Children and families have more access to books and print material
- Children and families have access to resources that support family literacy
- Parents receive information about literacy from a variety of sources
- Parents understand the health and developmental significance of literacy
- When out-of-school, youth engage in literacy related activities
- Children and youth are excited and talk about books and reading
- Positive outcomes in oral language and early literacy skills
- Book knowledge, comprehension and print knowledge increases

### ADULTS

- Connect their personal literacy to that of their children and the community
- Express a desire to continue education
- Take steps to continue their education
- Support their children (and others desire to read)
- Adults talk about what they are reading
- View themselves as lifelong learners