



# **Burlington County Literacy Needs Assessment Analysis**

*June 1, 2007*

**Prepared for the  
Burlington County Workforce Investment Board  
Adult Literacy Sub-Committee  
By  
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# **BURLINGTON COUNTY LITERACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **I. METHODOLOGY AND GOALS**

The Burlington County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) contracted with the Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) to design and implement a literacy needs assessment of Burlington County businesses and workforce training and placement agencies. The literacy needs assessment was conducted through a survey tool as well as key informant interviews with businesses located in Burlington County. WRI created multiple databases in Microsoft ACCESS and SPSS to compile general information on each business and agency as well as survey responses. The overall goal of the needs assessment is to provide Burlington County with a comprehensive understanding of the degree to which literacy affects both residents and target industries.

The survey was mailed to Burlington County businesses and training and placement agencies identified by the WIB and WRI. Six target industries were identified:

- Transportation
- Manufacturing
- Health Services
- Education & Training
- Hospitality & Restaurants
- Service Sector

To provide a comprehensive perspective on issues surrounding literacy in Burlington County, WRI undertook the following objectives:

- Assess resources available to businesses and residents that help address workplace illiteracy
- Provide an indication of the prevalence of illiteracy in the county workforce
- Identify businesses' needs for addressing workplace illiteracy
- Identify strategies that create community-wide solutions to combat workplace illiteracy

## II. RATIONALE FOR STUDY

We live in an age when we are surrounded by more information than ever before; no longer is information available just through newspapers, radio and television. The internet, email, and cell phones and text messaging provide new and increasingly necessary means of receiving and sending information. In order for communities to thrive and individuals to stay competitive in the job market, they need to be able access to these means of communication; a major barrier to this access is illiteracy. According to the predictive model used in the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), as of the year 2000, an estimated 16 percent of Burlington County residents ages 16 and over were illiterate. When considering residents who are marginally literate, meaning that they lack the skills required to be successful in the family, the workplace, and the community, the percentage increases to 42.

While there is a large body of rigorous research on effective instructional methods for early reading by schoolchildren and on the theoretical underpinnings of reading difficulties in the school years, there has been far less scientific study of literacy interventions with adult learners. Moreover, as industries and employment opportunities become increasingly linked to areas of technology, service delivery, and communication and less tied to manual, skill-based, or product-creation, the need for a workforce with high literacy increases, and it becomes apparent that businesses and resource centers need to focus efforts on reducing adult illiteracy rates. The first logical step in this effort is to determine the extent and effects of literacy issues in the county. To do this, WRI and the Burlington County WIB have evaluated businesses in target industries and training and job placement providers.

In order to better understand issues surrounding literacy in Burlington County, it is important to examine environmental factors and demographics that impact adult illiteracy, specifically population and economic indicators.

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### III. BACKGROUND

#### *Demographics*

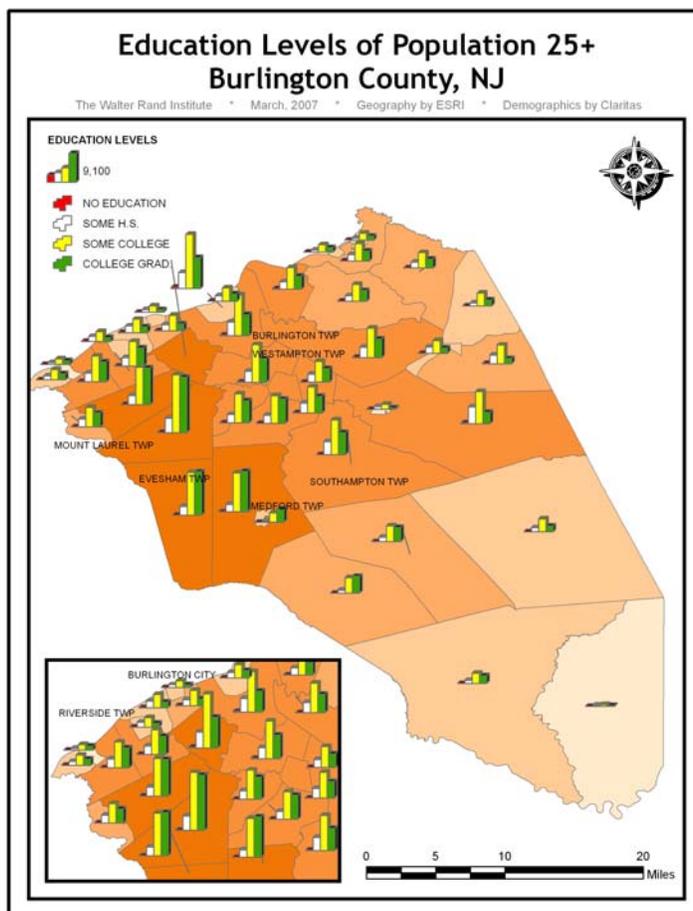
Burlington County is geographically the largest county in New Jersey, and has a population density of 527 people per square mile; New Jersey as a whole has a population density of 1,184 people per square mile. Two communities in particular, Willingboro and Pemberton were found to have the highest adult illiteracy rates in the county and are also two of the most populated and racially diverse municipalities in Burlington County. According to the American Community Survey conducted in 2004, 75% of county residents were Caucasian, while 14% were African-American, and 4% were Hispanic. Future estimates based on current trends indicate that the proportion of Caucasian residents in the county is expected to continue to decrease. In comparison to the state as a whole, 70% of New Jersey residents are Caucasian, while 13% are African-American, and 7% are Asian (The Hispanic population was not measured statewide in this survey.)

**Table 1: Burlington County Population Proportion by Ethnicity (1990 vs. 2000)**

RACE	1990	2000	% CHANGE
Caucasian	82%	76%	-7%
African-American	14%	15%	7%
Hispanic	3%	4%	33%

Based on the 2000 Census, the majority of Burlington County residents (92%) have obtained a high school diploma and two-thirds of those have earned a college degree or advanced degree. However, certain municipalities in Burlington County are affected by socioeconomic factors that are correlated with lower literacy levels.

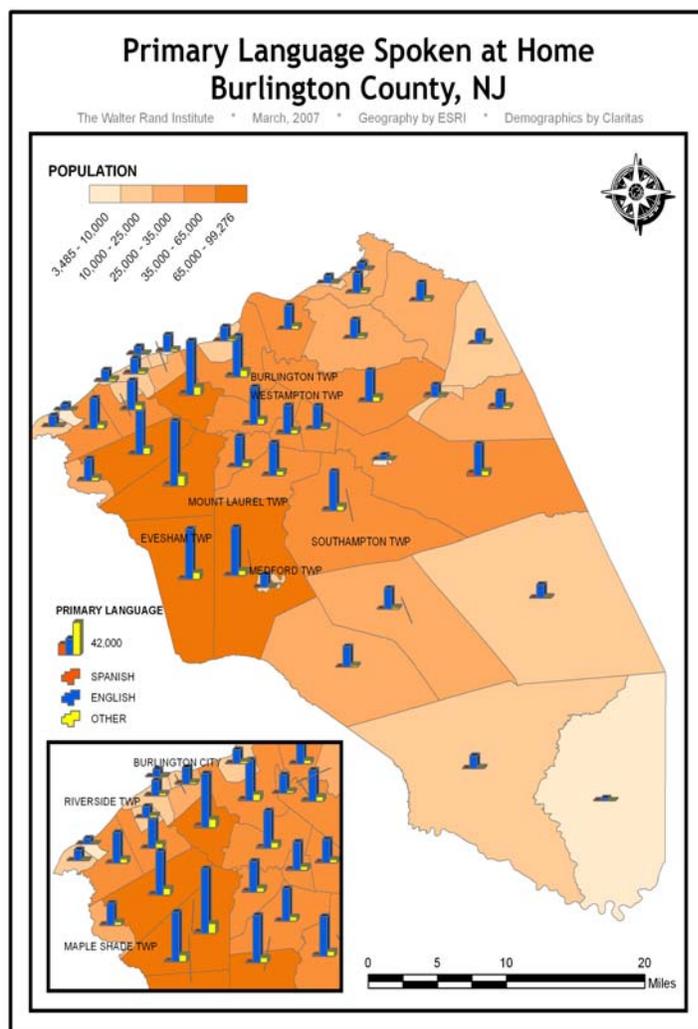
In 2000, 5% (19,280) of individuals and 3% (1,612) of families in Burlington County were living below the poverty level. In Willingboro, 6% of individuals and 4% of families were living below the poverty level, and in Pemberton, 9% of individuals and 6% of families were living below the poverty level. The municipalities of Pemberton and Willingboro had the highest level of poverty, and also the highest illiteracy rates.



## Literacy Proficiency

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) created the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) that contained a literacy proficiency scale with five levels, labeled numerically, 1 through 5. The NALS data reflects literacy not in the traditional terms of “literate” or “illiterate,” but by the creation of three literacy scales: prose, document, and quantitative. Level 1 adults have the lowest level of literacy, and the scale escalates in proficiency to level 5, the highest literacy level.

Adults with Level 1 literacy are able to complete tasks such as writing their own name, locating the expiration date on a driver’s license, and totaling a bank deposit entry. However, Level 1 adults have difficulty: locating an intersection on a map, identifying and entering background information on a social security card application, and calculating the total cost of purchases on an order form. While Level 1 adults are able to function in society, they are at a great disadvantage, as they do not have the full range of economic, social, and personal options that are available to Americans with higher literacy proficiencies.



The preceding map and following tables indicate that while Burlington County ranks favorably when compared to surrounding counties, the state, and the nation, certain sections of the county are more affected by adult illiteracy issues. The municipalities of Pemberton, Mt. Holly, Burlington City, Riverside, and Willingboro have high rates of primary languages other than English. Spanish and “Other” make up the largest portion other than English spoken at home for Burlington County residents. The municipalities with a high prevalence of primary languages other than English are also those most affected by illiteracy, and have higher rates of Level 1 and 2 adults.

In Burlington County, the mean literacy proficiency is 279 (Level 3), and 16% of residents 16 years of age and older fall into the lowest classification on the NALS scale (Level 1), while a total of 42% of county residents fall into the two lowest categories, (Levels 1 and 2). These percents compare favorably to the surrounding counties and

New Jersey as a whole. In New Jersey, the mean literacy proficiency is 269 (Level 2), and the proficiency percent at Level 1 is 21% and at Level 1 or 2 is 48%. In the United States as a whole, 21 to 23% of the population has literacy proficiency of Level 1, and at Level 1 or 2, it is 46 to 51%. A comparison of the literacy proficiency is available in the following table.

**Table 2: Literacy Level Averages (Counties, State, and National)**

AREA	MLP (MEAN LITERACY PROFICIENCY)	LEVEL 1 PROFICIENCY	LEVEL 1 OR 2 PROFICIENCY
Burlington County	279	16%	42%
Gloucester County	276	16%	44%
Camden County	270	21%	49%
New Jersey	269	21%	48%
United States	N/A	21 to 23%	46 to 51%

Five municipalities in Burlington County have a higher percentage of adult residents whose literacy level places them at either Level 1 or 2 than the state: Willingboro, Pemberton, Mount Holly, Burlington, and Southampton. Each of these, the municipalities have comparable population and economic demographics, and each of these five municipalities have proficiency percentages which indicate below state average literacy. Further value is added to the picture of literacy in Burlington county through examining those municipalities that show values above the state average, seeking answers to questions of best practices in alleviating illiteracy, root causes of literacy issues, and potential for improvement beyond already above average level. Municipalities in Burlington County for which data was available are shown in the following table.

**Table 3: Literacy Levels of Burlington County Municipalities**

MUNICIPALITY	MLP	LEVEL 1 PROFICIENCY	LEVEL 1 OR 2 PROFICIENCY
<b>Willingboro Twp.</b>	265	28%	52%
<b>Pemberton Twp.</b>	265	20%	52%
<b>Mount Holly Twp.</b>	266	22%	53%
<b>Burlington Twp.</b>	268	19%	50%
<b>Southampton Twp.</b>	269	20%	50%
Florence Twp.	272	14%	47%
Maple Shade Twp.	276	14%	44%
Delran Twp.	283	13%	39%
Springfield Twp.	289	15%	36%
Cinnaminson Twp.	289	13%	36%
Moorestown Twp.	297	14%	30%
Evesham Twp.	299	10%	28%
Mount Laurel Twp.	299	10%	27%
Medford Twp.	301	10%	27%

Demographic and literacy-specific information for the county provide important context for assessing literacy issues from the viewpoint of businesses and training and placement agencies. Combining the information gathered through census and other community surveys with the perspective of entities that understand literacy in a work and/or educational setting creates a more complete picture of literacy issues in Burlington County.

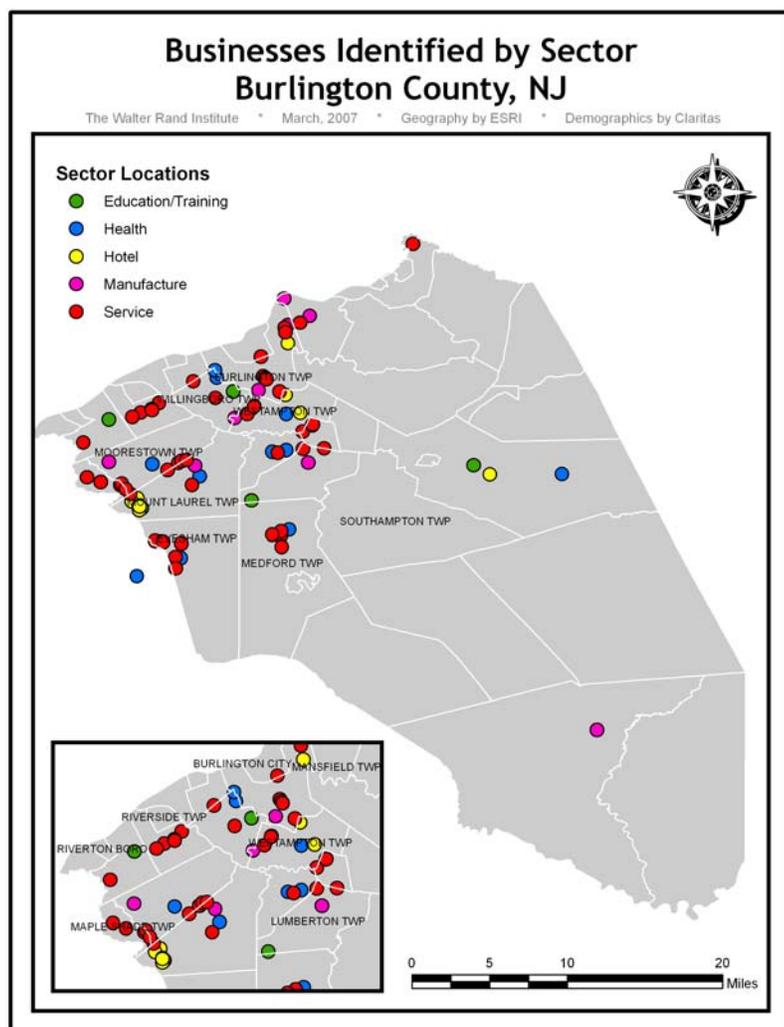
#### IV. PROFILE OF THE BUSINESSES

##### *Businesses Identified*

Of the six key industries identified, the service sector emerged as the most heavily represented business type in Burlington County (54%). Nineteen percent of the businesses in Burlington County are from the hospitality/restaurant sector. Health services comprise 12% of the county's total businesses. Manufacturing represents 7% of the business population in the county. Education and training totals 5%. Finally, transportation accounts for 3% of the total businesses in Burlington County. The map at right, shows that the majority of these businesses are located in the northwestern portion of the county. The municipalities represented by these businesses include: Mt. Laurel, Moorestown, Medford, Willingboro, Burlington City, Maple Shade, Westampton, and Lumberton.

##### *Responding Businesses*

Below is a list of the top employers in Burlington County. Three industries, manufacturing, health services, and the service sector, make up 94% of employees in the top 30 companies in Burlington County. Transportation, hospitality and restaurants, and education and training industries make up the other 6% of employees in the top 30 companies. Each of the six industry sectors is represented in this survey sample. The majority of the business respondents were from the service sector (47%), followed by health services (18%),



manufacturing (12%), transportation (12%), and hospitality and restaurants (11%). The 30 largest employers in the county employ nearly 32,000 people. We received survey responses from businesses employing a combined total of 12,326 individuals, making our survey responses representative of Burlington County businesses. Below is a list of the 30 largest employers and the number of employees they have.

**Table 4: Top 30 Largest Burlington County Employers**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1. Lockheed Martin, Moorestown	5,000	19.2
2. PHH Mortgage, Mount Laurel	4,500	19.2
3. Virtua Health System, Marlton & Mt. Holly	4,794	18.4
4. Commerce Bank, Burlington County	2,664	10.2
5. Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Browns Mills	1,405	5.4
6. Viking Yacht Co. Corp., New Gretna	1,350	5.2
7. Burlington Coat Factory, Burlington	1,103	4.2
8. Our Lady of Lourdes Health System, Willingboro	1,100	4.2
9. CVS Corporation, Lumberton	1,010	3.9
10. Medco, Willingboro	1,000	3.8
11. Automotive Resources International, Mt. Laurel	900	3.5
12. Computer Sciences Corp., Moorestown	890	3.4
13. Masonic Home of NJ, Burlington	670	2.6
14. Family Y of Burlington County, Burlington	560	2.2
15. Okidata, Mt Laurel	450	1.7
16. PNC Bank, Moorestown	446	1.7
17. McCollister's Moving & Storage, Burlington	376	1.4
18. Burlington County Times, Willingboro	356	1.4
19. Boscov's, Moorestown	340	1.3
20. PSE & G, Moorestown	332	1.3
21. Griffin Pipe Products Co., Florence	300	1.2
22. NFL Films, Mt. Laurel	275	1.1
23. CNT, Lumberton	275	1.1
24. WoodRiver/Seagull Lighting, Riverside	275	1.1
25. Opex Corp., Moorestown	270	1.0
26. AFG Industries Inc., Cinnaminson	250	1.0
27. ACME Markets, Moorestown	250	1.0
28. Sears, Moorestown	229	0.9
29. SBAR, Moorestown	213	0.8
30. The Evergreens, Moorestown	210	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,793</b>	

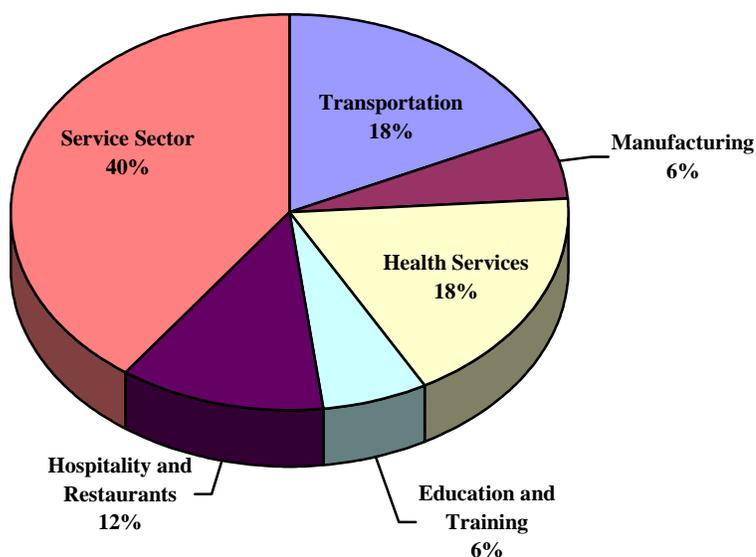
## V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Through the collection of data via surveys, key informant interviews, and focus groups, several key issues related to illiteracy emerged among Burlington County employers and training and placement agencies. This section provides information about the general findings of the analysis of this data.

### *Businesses*

#### *Who completed the survey?*

The service sector represents the largest number of survey respondents (40%), followed by health services (18%), transportation and logistics (18%), restaurants and hospitality (12%), manufacturing (6%) and education and training (6%).



Survey responses represent approximately 12,000 employees working in all six sectors. All of the responding businesses reported that at least half of their employees live in Burlington County and 42% reported that three-quarters or more of their employees live in Burlington County.

#### *What types of literacy requirements and screenings exist among employers?*

While most businesses surveyed agree that workplace literacy is an important issue for Burlington County, few have any formal process or tool for assessing the literacy levels of applicants or existing employees.

Of the businesses that responded, 80% have some type of literacy-related hiring requirements. These range from the ability to speak and write in English, to satisfactory completion of an in-house assessment to high school diploma or GED attainment.

Half of the businesses surveyed do not provide any literacy screening during the recruitment and hiring processes, and none of the respondents reported offering employee literacy training or making referrals to outside agencies.

### ***Where are literacy issues most prevalent?***

Of the six sectors identified, health services and hospitality/restaurants reported having the most issues with employee illiteracy.

The extent of literacy issues varies greatly among departments and areas within businesses. Areas most affected include food services, housekeeping and environmental services and warehouse/factory workers.

### ***What is the impact of illiteracy?***

The majority of employers do not know the percentage of applicants who are unable to meet employment requirements due to literacy issues. However of those businesses that did provide a percentage, most reported approximately 10% of their applicants are unable to meet company employment requirements as a result of literacy challenges.

A majority of businesses reported that employees in their company are affected by illiteracy issues and that these issues affect the individuals' ability to perform their jobs. The same is true for promotion; most employers stated that illiteracy issues interfere with their employees' ability to advance within the company.

Most of the responding businesses were unsure of the impact of English as a Second Language (ESL) on illiteracy issues, nor the percentage of the workforce impacted by ESL issues. Of the reporting businesses, 28% claimed ¼ of the literacy problems within their businesses could be attributed to ESL.

Large, multi-site businesses reported that literacy issues are affecting how well employees can adapt to changing communication methods, such as email, and that they believe this challenge will grow in the near future.

### ***What do businesses know about the WIB and the One-Stop?***

Few of the human resource and personnel directors that completed the survey have a clear understanding of the Workforce Investment Board, its mission or the services provided through the One-Stop.

## ***Training and Placement***

### ***Who completed the survey?***

Two thirds of the agencies completing the survey provide placement services only. These agencies typically place specific technical positions and one responding agency offers general placement.

The remaining one-third of responding agencies provide training services. They provide literacy training, GED/high school diploma certification, and specific skills training.

The training programs provided by these agencies typically last 3 to 6 months and serve anywhere from 8 to 255 students annually.

### ***What types of literacy requirements and screenings exist among agencies?***

Most agencies did not respond to the question regarding what kind of literacy screening they have in place for clients entering training. Those that did reported that they rely on prescreening by a referring agency.

Literacy requirements vary among the agencies; however, some of the requirements mentioned were a fourth grade reading level, 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, and another agency responded their requirements depend upon the training program.

### ***What is the impact of illiteracy?***

Training agencies were asked what percentages of their students have literacy issues that impact their ability to *enter* a training program as well as *complete* a training program. While a number of agencies did not respond to the question, for those that did, responses varied greatly, reporting less than 10% to more than 75% of students having difficulty entering and completing training due to literacy issues.

Similar variation was found among agencies that provide job placement services. When asked what percentage of their clients they have difficulty placing due to literacy issues, responding agencies reported illiteracy affecting anywhere from less than 10% to more than 75% of clients being placed in jobs.

For most responding agencies, literacy issues related to English as a Second Language (ESL) was a minor issue.

## **VI. DETAILED FINDINGS**

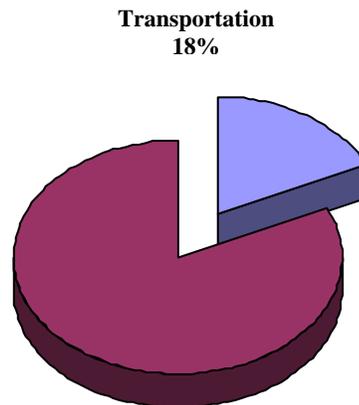
### ***By Industry***

#### **Transportation**

##### ***Industry Snapshot***

WRI received survey responses from transportation businesses that employ a combined total of approximately 850 individuals. Overall the transportation industry employs approximately 8,000 individuals in Burlington County.

## Survey Respondents by Sector



Representatives from this sector are located primarily in the northwest portion of Burlington County.

A majority (67%) estimated that half of their employees live in Burlington County, while 33% estimated 3/4 or more of their employees live in Burlington County.

All of the companies within the transportation industry reported that 75% or more of their employees are full-time employees and 25% or less are part-time or temporary employees.

### *Literacy Issues in the Transportation Sector*

- A majority of the transportation industry reported that illiteracy is a problem in their industry, and that illiteracy affects employees' ability to perform their jobs. However, a majority of the businesses did not identify it as an issue affecting promotion opportunities.
- Two-thirds of respondents reported that 10% of job applicants are not eligible for employment due to illiteracy issues, while 33% are unsure of the percentage.
- Warehouse workers were identified as a specific department affected by illiteracy.
- Most responding businesses were not able to estimate the percentage of illiteracy that can be attributed to ESL among their employees.

### *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- Two-thirds of responding companies within the transportation sector reported that their companies have some form of screening or assessment during the application process; the remaining one-third does not.
- None of the responding employers in the transportation sector offer literacy training, while only one makes referrals to literacy training programs.
- All of the employers within the transportation sector feel it is important for the county to provide literacy services, with 67% agreeing that it is "very important".

## Manufacturing

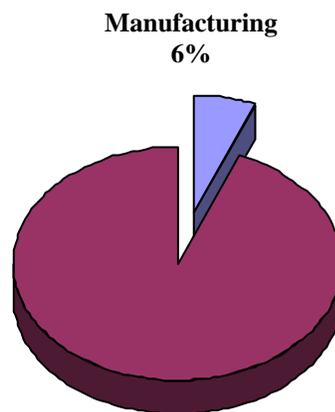
### *Industry Snapshot*

The manufacturing industry is the third largest business sector in Burlington County. Five of the top 30 employers in the county are classified as part of the manufacturing sector.

Despite repeated follow-up attempts and dissemination of the survey using multiple methods, WRI received only one response from businesses in this sector. The response yield for this sector totaled approximately 20 employees, while the manufacturing sector employs over 20,000 individuals in Burlington County. It is necessary to keep this low response rate in mind and weight statistics accordingly, though this low response rate in itself may be telling as to the approach that businesses have toward literacy issues.

Survey responses indicate that a substantial portion, at least three-quarters, of employees are Burlington County residents.

### Survey Respondents by Sector



### *Literacy Issues in the Manufacturing Sector*

- Employee performance is affected by illiteracy, but promotion was not.
- Approximately 5% of the workers are affected by illiteracy.
- The manufacturing sector did not identify specific departments with literacy issues.
- Employers are unaware of how much of the illiteracy problem could be attributed to ESL.

### *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- No specific screening process exists for applicants, however all applicants must speak and write in English

- No internal or external literacy training is in place, because ‘employees do not need training’.
- Employer feels it is important for the county to provide literacy services.

## Health Services

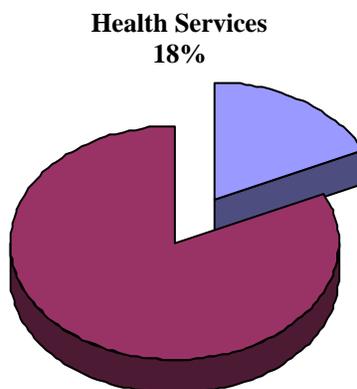
### *Industry Snapshot*

WRI received survey responses from health services businesses that employ a combined total of approximately 4,700 individuals. This sample includes the third largest employer in the county, which employs nearly 4,000 people. Approximately 18% of the workforce literacy survey respondents are from the Health Services sector.

Employers reported at least half of their employees live in Burlington County.

Most of the employers reported that at least half of their employees are full-time. One-third of employers reported more than at least 3/4 of their employees are part-time, one-third reported less than half are part-time, and the last third reported less than 1/4 are part-time employees. Two-thirds of the employers reported that less than 25% of their workforce is temporary, while one-third did not respond.

### Survey Respondents by Sector



### *Literacy Issues in the Health Services Sector*

- One-third of the respondents reported their employees’ job performance is affected by illiteracy, and two-thirds reported that their employees’ chance of promotion is impeded by illiteracy.
- Environmental services, food services, and housekeeping were mentioned as the departments most affected by illiteracy.
- All respondents did not know or did not answer the percentage of employees with illiteracy issues that could be attributed to ESL.

## *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- Two-thirds of employers have a mandatory screening process for applicants, but most did not respond as to whether or not they have a mandatory literacy requirement; one-third reported using an in-house assessment.
- Most employers do not offer literacy training, and one-third do not refer to outside training, while two-thirds are unaware of referrals.
- Employers do not refer to outside trainings because they are not aware of services; furthermore, two-thirds are neutral as to whether or not the county should offer literacy services.

## **Education and Training**

### *Industry Snapshot*

WRI received survey responses from education and training businesses that employ a combined total of approximately 750 individuals. The education and training sector employs approximately 1,500 individuals within the county.

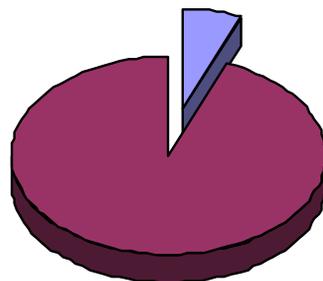
Respondents reported that 75% of their employees live in Burlington County.

More than 75% of the companies' employees are full-time, while less than 25% are part-time or temporary.

Six percent of the respondents overall were from the education and training sector.

### **Survey Respondents by Sector**

**Education and Training**  
6%



### *Literacy Issues in the Education and Training Sector*

- Less than 5% of employees have illiteracy issues that affect their ability to perform their jobs or be promoted according to respondents.

- Respondents are unaware of what percentage of the illiteracy problem could be attributed to ESL.

### *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- None of this sector's respondents have a screening process for applicants or minimum literacy requirements.
- None offer any internal literacy training, nor do they refer to outside literacy training; however, they do feel it is important for Burlington County to offer literacy services.

## **Hospitality and Restaurants**

### *Industry Snapshot*

WRI received survey responses from restaurants and the hospitality industry that employ a combined total of approximately 300 individuals. The hospitality and restaurant sector employs approximately 13,000 individuals within the county, making this a small sample of the industry.

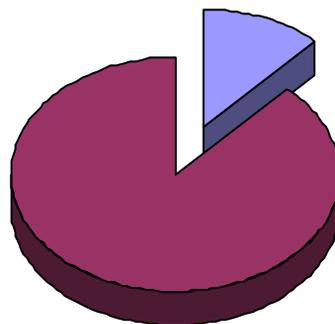
All of the responding companies reported at least half of their workforce lives in Burlington County.

Half of the respondents reported more than 75% of their employees are full-time, less than 25% are part-time, and none reported temporary workers. The other half of respondents reported less than ¾ of their employees are full-time, less than half are part-time, and less than one-fourth are temporary workers.

Approximately 12% of the respondents are from the Hospitality and Restaurant sector.

### **Survey Respondents by Sector**

Hospitality & Restaurant  
12%



### *Literacy Issues in the Hospitality and Restaurant Sector*

- Employers reported that between 5 and 25% of their employees' job performance and ability to be promoted are affected by illiteracy issues.
- Within the hospitality sector, food services and housekeeping are the departments mentioned that are most affected by illiteracy.
- Respondents reported that 50% of the illiteracy problem can be attributed to ESL.

### *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- Half of the respondents have a screening process for applicants and minimum literacy requirements. Some literacy requirements included: holding a high school diploma or GED, satisfactory performance on an in-house assessment or test, and ability to speak and write in English.
- Employers indicated that none of their applicants are unable to meet literacy requirements.
- Half of the respondents offer internal literacy training and sent employees to external training about 5 times in the past year, while the other 50% do not and reported the reason was lack of awareness of services and past difficulty utilizing services.
- Half of the respondents feel it is very important for Burlington County to offer literacy services, while the other half feel it is unimportant.

## **Service Sector**

### *Industry Snapshot*

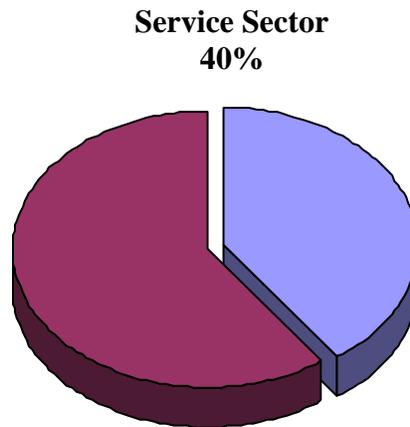
WRI received survey responses from service sector businesses that employ a combined total of approximately 2,600 individuals. The service sector is made up of retail stores and banks. This sector as a whole employs approximately 6,500 individuals within the county.

All of the responding companies reported at least half of their workforce lives in Burlington County.

Respondents varied in terms of their employment structure (i.e. how many full-time, part-time, temporary employees).

Approximately 40% of the respondents are from the service sector.

## Survey Respondents by Sector



### *Literacy Issues in the Service Sector*

- Most service sector employees do not have mandatory screening processes for applicants nor do they have minimum literacy requirements.
- Most employers are also unaware of how many applicants are unable to meet the company's employment standards due to illiteracy.
- Two-fifths of respondents reported that illiteracy does affect their employees' job performance, while one-fifth reported it does not, and two-fifths did not know.
- Forty percent of the respondents reported that illiteracy affects their employees' ability to be promoted, while another 40% said illiteracy does not affect promotion, and 20% did not know.
- One-fifth of the respondents reported that 5% or less of their employees are not promoted due to illiteracy, while another 20% reported 10 to 20% of their employees can not be promoted due to illiteracy issues.
- Of the responding employers, the majority stated 10 to 20% of literacy issues among their employees can be attributed to ESL.

### *Literacy Screening & Trainings*

- Most service sector employees do not have a mandatory screening process for applicants or have minimum literacy requirements.
- Of the responding employers, the majority does not offer literacy training nor do they refer to literacy training programs.
- The majority of responding employers think it is important for the county to offer literacy services.

## Training and Placement Agencies

### *General Findings*

The extent to which agencies' clients are affected by illiteracy varies widely.

Most of the agencies did not respond as to what types of training they offered, however out of those that did respond all of them offer specific skill training.

Agencies responding indicated that they provide training programs lasting less than three months and as long as 6 months.

Responding agencies varied in size, with annual enrollments ranging from 8 to 255.

When asked what percentage of their students live in the county, one-third of the agencies responded 'Don't know', one-third reported half of their students live in the county, and the remaining third estimated  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their students live in the county.

The most common response to the question regarding how agencies assess literacy was that they use prescreening by a referring agency as their tool for literacy assessment. Most respondents left this question blank.

When asked about required literacy level for training programs, answers ranged from no minimum requirements to a 4<sup>th</sup> grade literacy level to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade literacy level, and 'depends on the program'.

Most responding agencies did not indicate or answered 'don't know' to the question of what percentage of clients do not complete training due to literacy issues. Those that did answer stated 10 – 20% of clients are unable to complete training because of literacy issues.

When agencies were asked what percentage of students has illiteracy issues that impact their ability to be placed in a job, half did not answer or answered 'don't know.' Of those that did answer, responses ranged significantly, from less than 10% to 75% of clients unable to be placed in jobs due to illiteracy issues.

One-third of agencies reported that less than 10% of their students have literacy issues that are attributable to ESL, while another third of agencies reported 25% of their students literacy issues can be attributed to ESL. Finally, 17% of agencies reported 75% of their students' illiteracy issues can be attributed to ESL. The remaining 17% of agencies did not respond to the question.

Most agencies did not report whether or not they offer literacy assistance to students, however responding agencies reported that they refer students to other agencies or schools.

Half of the agencies reported that they never refer students for literacy training, while 17% reported making 5 or fewer referrals in the past year, another 17% reported making 10 or more referrals in the past year, and the last 17% did not respond to the question.

When agencies were asked why they did not refer students to literacy services, the majority (67%) did not respond, while the remaining third reported that services are not applicable to students' needs.

Half of the agencies reported that it is 'very important' for Burlington County to offer literacy services, while 17% reported it is not very important at all, and the remaining 33% did not answer the question.

## **VII. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

### ***Who was Interviewed***

Interviews were conducted with individuals representing several key areas of human resources and management in order to get a variety of perspectives on literacy issues impacting businesses and what approaches are being used to address these issues. Specific positions of those interviewed include Directors of Training, Recruiters, Manager of Food Services and Labor Relations Specialist. Several key issues regarding literacy emerged in the course of these interviews.

### ***Identified Literacy Issues***

Masking – Those interviewees responsible for training and recruiting discussed applicants and employees hiding literacy issues in the process of hiring and during trainings. They acknowledged that is difficult for them to identify individuals who may have literacy issues because they have found effective ways of “getting around” their literacy barriers, particularly in group settings. It was also noted, however, that these issues often come to light when the employee is on the job.

ESL – ESL was identified as one of the major literacy issues by every interviewee. Those who have been in their positions for more than five years identified it as a growing issue. One individual also felt it was important to note that those with ESL issues are diverse and speak a variety of languages. Several interviewees identified this as the key literacy issue that they face, but cautioned that it is the “more easy to recognize” than other issues. One interviewee indicated that the business for which they work has provided ESL trainings, but that the business has not institutionalized these trainings at this point and does not hold ESL trainings as a part of routine training.

Technology – Several of the interviewees discussed businesses' increasing reliance on technology and the ways in which it is connected to literacy. The increasing use of technology is both highlighting illiteracy among employees and increasing the level of literacy required for certain positions. This was identified as a growing issue that will need to be addressed by businesses and entities such as the WIB.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This assessment indicates that many employers in Burlington County recognize literacy as an issue for the county, and believe it is important for the WIB to provide literacy related services to the workforce. While very few businesses reported high levels of literacy issues among their employees, and many do not know the extent of issues in their workforce, responding businesses indicated a clear sense that literacy challenges are affecting their employees as well as job applicants.

Few of the respondents indicated that they have a complete understanding of the Work Investment Board and the types of services it provides; however, most were interested in learning more about WIB.

### *Opportunities for the WIB*

Through the surveys and key informant interviews, members of the business community identified several key ways in which the WIB could assist them.

- *Referrals* – Several agencies and businesses feel the WIB could assist them by providing referral information for literacy services.
- *Employer education on literacy* – Survey responses indicate that many employers are unsure of the extent to which literacy issues are affecting their employees and applicants, and information gleaned from key informant interviews further confirmed this. The Literacy Committee could provide information about spotting literacy issues as well as how to discuss these issues with employees in a sensitive and effective manner.
- *Specific literacy trainings* – Several respondents indicated an interest in training that integrates literacy and technology as well as ESL-focused literacy trainings.
- *Increased outreach* – Many respondents felt the WIB should do more outreach to businesses about the services available through the WIB and the One-Stop Career Center, literacy related and otherwise. Particularly in key informant interviews, there was a theme of human resource professionals seeing the WIB in a positive light, and as a potential resource, but a lack of awareness of the specific services the WIB provides.

Overall, this assessment has identified a business community that is ripe for outreach. There is a sense of the issue of illiteracy, but very little specific information about the extent or the causes, few formal methods for assessing the workplace in terms of literacy issues, and a lack of knowledge regarding resources that are available for those employees needing assistance and services. This situation presents significant opportunities for the WIB and the Literacy Committee.