

City Council Statement on Literacy

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In a white paper, titled "The Adult Literacy Crisis," I read that there are nearly 2 million adults in the State of Virginia who struggle with basic or below basic literacy. Contrary to popular belief, illiterate adults are not high school drop-outs, incarcerated or living on the outskirts of society. There are many functional illiterate adults who have jobs, high-school degrees or GEDs, own homes and live just as we all do, but they struggle with the simple task of reading instructions on a subway map or a medicine bottle.

The causes for adult illiteracy are various and complex, and there isn't any one root cause... but there are environmental factors that increase the chances that many of our youth here in Alexandria will grow into that population of illiterate adults who will earn less, sometimes living below the poverty line and not have access to health and community services.

Over the years, the City of Alexandria has various sponsored programs such as the Alexandria Tutoring Consortium and activities managed by the Campagna Center which are doing great things with the City's youth. As a resident of Alexandria, I am grateful that the City has continued to support these literacy programs. But there is always more that can be done.

For nearly a decade, the Nu Xi Zeta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority has continued to serve the needs of Alexandria organizations, including many youth programs.

One such program is The National Education Association's Read Across America... an annual reading motivation and awareness program that calls for every child in every community to celebrate reading on March 2, the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss.

The Alexandria Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, hosted its first Read Across America event, on Saturday March 14, 2009 at the

James M. Duncan Library with the purpose of encouraging children and parents not only to read but to read together. We will again host Read Across America day on Saturday March 13, 2010 at the Duncan Library, providing parents and children the opportunity to engage in storytelling and hands-on activities to encourage reading 365 days a year.

The more resources we pool in our community, the more positive impact we will make on the success of youth to build a better Alexandria where we are improving their ability to obtain better jobs, pursue further education, and contribute to this community.

By working together we're meeting the wide spectrum of needs in Alexandria. Our organization has made an earnest commitment to serving the needs of our community and we look forward to working with the City of Alexandria on the issue of youth literacy.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak this morning.

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