

# The Washington Post

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## To improve child literacy, teach the adults

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Governors and education leaders are correct that a focus on early childhood education, changing family dynamics and support for low-income students can improve child literacy across the country [[“State officials meet to focus on improving child literacy,”](#) news article, June 5]. Equally important, however, is the need to improve adult literacy, because a parent’s level of reading skill is the greatest determinant of a child’s academic success.

In Montgomery County, [one in seven adults](#) (131,000 individuals) has limited English proficiency, and [approximately 58,000 adults](#) lack high school diplomas. Twelve percent of students in the county’s public school system are enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages classes and are likely to have parents who speak and read little or no English.

As cited in the article, the Casey Foundation found that “students who aren’t reading at grade level before starting fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of school.” We see evidence of this every day, working with adult students who all read and write below a fourth-grade level.

If we are to improve child literacy, it is imperative that we simultaneously work to stop the cycle of adults who cannot read and write and, therefore, are unable to help their children do their homework, study for exams, apply to and get into college, and ultimately become contributing members of our society. Increased funding for adult literacy programs is essential if efforts to eradicate child illiteracy are to be successful.

**Marilyn Block, Potomac**

The writer is president of the Literacy Council of Montgomery County board.

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