



Literacy

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The “Table-it” Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- Take five minutes to review the [Executive Summary](#) and walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the Brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what “lens of care” did you wear when reviewing this Brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the Brief? What matters?

Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- [Less than 40%](#) of fourth graders in public and non-public schools were reading at or above grade level in 2019. In large cities, less than 30% met that threshold.
- In 2018, the United States ranked [13th](#) out of 79 countries and regions for reading levels; the United States ranked 37th for math.
- In 2020-21, the United States spent \$190 billion dollars in emergency funding through the Elementary and Secondary Schooling Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to offset the learning loss that students experienced during the pandemic. [ESSER](#) is 11 times annual Title 1 spending and nearly five times total K-12 spending in 2019-20.

Let's discuss

Below are questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** What are the adult and student literacy rates in your community? Are there opportunities to get involved, either in promoting legislation or participating in volunteer programs?
- **Government:** Though the federal government sets national benchmarks, curriculums for literacy are determined at the state level. Find out how your local school board is addressing literacy rates. Does your state follow a phonics-based approach to teaching literacy? How does your state meet the needs of the most vulnerable children?
- **Business:** Several private-sector organizations focus on increasing literacy. The [National Literacy Directory](#) maintains a database of opportunities. In what ways can you get involved with these organizations?

Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Talk to neighbors, friends, and family about their experiences with literacy in the school system. How has the pandemic affected literacy rates in their schools?
2. **Explore legislation related to literacy in your community.** The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains [databases](#) to track state-level education legislation.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Look up your state's department of education.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on literacy, and their vision for how to increase literacy rates. You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a Government tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed in your local newspaper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [Financial Literacy](#)
 - [Healthcare](#)
 - [K-12 Education](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [influencing policy](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.