



**Literacy Services of Wisconsin and  
Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services  
Merge to Strengthen Adult Education and  
Workforce Development Services**



**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why are Literacy Services of Wisconsin (LSW) and Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services (MALS) merging?**

Both organizations wanted to be positioned to face three key strategic issues: higher demand for services than the local marketplace delivers, complexity of student needs, and increasing competition for philanthropic and government funding along with rising expectations of those funders. Additionally, both LSW and MALS needed to address changes to the operating environment, including recently revised GED tests and the implementation of the new federal law, the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, which provides a new framework to build on the power of collaboration and innovation to improve and develop the Wisconsin workforce.

**How will the merger affect operations?**

The plan is to keep all six LSW and MALS locations operating with the current staff team and volunteer roles. This multi-location model adds value to the community, especially for those who lack transportation.

**How will this affect LSW and MALS employees?**

All current program and administrative staff members will retain their jobs, except one five-hour per week bookkeeper.

**How will this affect donors and volunteers?**

Donors will see the impact of their contributions increase as our combined organization realizes cost efficiencies, as shared knowledge and expertise improve program reach and effectiveness, and as a more diversified funding model improves organization sustainability. Volunteers will have more opportunities to get involved while enjoying the shared organizational culture and values that, for decades, have made LSW and MALS rewarding places to share their skills, time, and energy.

**Why is literacy education needed in Milwaukee?**

Unfortunately, current data on literacy education is lacking (<http://bit.ly/WPRLiteracy>), but as the second most impoverished city in America, the most segregated U.S. city, and the home of the highest black male incarceration rate, research indicates that Milwaukee's need for adult literacy education is tremendous and will grow in the future:

- An estimated two in five adults are at the lowest levels of literacy, meaning they read at or below the 4th grade level ([National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003](#); NAEP 2013, <https://nces.ed.gov/naal/>)
- Just 58% of Milwaukee high school students graduate each year. The 42% who don't graduate equals 4,000 to 5,000 people (DPI District Report Card 2015-16).
- Undereducated adults experience high rates of low-wage employment and unemployment
- Up to 20% of the population have learning disabilities (International Dyslexia Association 2008 Fact Sheet), but urban school systems are rarely equipped to provide the remediation services required to overcome those challenges
- Between 2000 and 2010, 46.6% of the change in Milwaukee's population was due to immigration (<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-wisconsin>), highlighting a dramatic increase in the number of non-native English speakers and the need for ELL services in our community

### Why will the merger work?

- **Commitment** – Our board and staff have a shared vision and deep commitment to make this merger a success. This commitment was forged through a comprehensive strategic planning process started in July 2016. All involved have the passion, energy, and motivation to sustain, improve, and grow these important programs for adult learners in our community.
- **Relationships** – These strong organizations were built through solid relationships with funders and program partners. Many of the original founding organizations are still actively involved with and providing support for both LSW and MALS. Both organizations have developed important partnerships with other educational and workforce development agencies, which will provide access to a wider range of service options for those we serve.
- **Momentum** – LSW is generating promising momentum after celebrating its 50th anniversary, successfully completing the largest challenge grant in the organization's history to increase the endowment fund, publishing an award-winning book in honor of the learners and volunteers who created LSW, and winning a competitive grant from Impact100 Greater Milwaukee to create a new construction-focused High School Equivalency Diploma program.
- **Leadership** – Strong leadership within both the board and staff positions the merged organization for success. Executive Director Ginger Duiven was selected as a Harvard Business School Club Scholarship winner in 2016, while MALS Interim Executive Director and Program Director Holly McCoy leads the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network of Milwaukee. The LSW Board of Directors led by President Mary Tobin of Oracle; President-Elect Dave Hanson of Reinhart, Boerner, Van Deuren; Secretary Kevin Scott of DeWitt, Ross, Stevens; and Treasurer Josh Palleon of BMO Private Bank are joined by ten other leaders from diverse fields.

### **LSW Background**

Literacy Services of Wisconsin is a leading provider of adult education services since 1965, operating under the mission “to educate, motivate, and inspire engaged adults to achieve greater independence and transform their lives.” The organization was founded when members of First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Christ Presbyterian Church, and North Shore Congregational Church heard an international literacy leader issue a call to start an adult literacy program in Wisconsin. Today, it uses a proven-effective, one-on-one model of instruction that matches each student with a specially trained tutor to ensure that teaching is individualized, meaningful, and successful. Adult students define their goals, set targets, and become fully invested in the educational process.

Over a half-century of experience allows LSW to continually improve and strengthen our services. In 2016, that included:

- 450 adult learners served through a one-on-one learning partnership with a trained tutor
- 492 volunteers, including 357 weekly tutors
- New partnership with WRTP/BIG STEP to prepare adults for careers in construction and manufacturing
- Budget: \$754,000
- Staff: 10

### **MALS Background**

Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services was founded in 1983 by the presidents of three of the area's leading Catholic educational institutions: Alverno College, Cardinal Stritch University, and Mount Mary University. The impetus grew out of the startling results of a study entitled "Milwaukee 2000," which found that in 1983, one in six of the city's adults were functionally illiterate. Members of the School Sisters of St. Francis, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, and the School Sisters of Notre Dame collaborated with educators and volunteers to build and support Milwaukee Achiever's mission, and their support continues today.

MALS impact included:

- 750 adult learners served through classes, mini-labs, and one-on-one tutoring
- 150 volunteer tutors
- PI 5.09 HSED classes serving adults at North Division High School, ResCare, and Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
- Collaborative learning partnership with MATC, which provides resources to students within their neighborhoods and mobilizes education efforts through a learner-centered approach
- Budget: \$576,000
- Staff: 10

### **What services will the new Literacy Services of Wisconsin provide?**

- **Workforce Development** – As an extension of our customized approach to meeting learner needs, we partner with businesses to provide adult education programs that serve their employees. Programs are created and delivered directly for each business through various class structures and specifically tailored training programs.

LSW aims to be the link between basic education and the workforce needs that drive economic growth, especially through these offerings:

- Bilingual Medical Interpreter Program provides introductory training for dual language professionals looking to work within the healthcare field
- Warehouse Worker and Forklift License program offers an overview of the skills required to work in a warehouse environment and provides hands-on training for those looking to drive a forklift
- Math preparation for individuals seeking careers in construction and manufacturing, and for the Accuplacer, an exam used by the technical college system and many of the construction trades
- **General Educational Development (GED®) Preparation** – Students work one-on-one with a dedicated tutor and in mini-labs to study extensively in five testing areas: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and Wisconsin’s required civics test. The individualized approach focuses on the needs of each unique student, and the duration of the preparation is dependent on the availability, starting level, attendance, and motivation of the students.
- **Pre-GED (Adult Basic Education)** – Students can access learning via mini-labs, one-on-one tutoring, and small group classes. This program provides skill building in reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing, and math for those whose goal is to earn a GED or High School Equivalency diploma.
- **PI 5.09 High School Equivalency Diploma Program** – The hallmark program of Milwaukee Achiever provides adults seeking a high school credential with a competency-based course focusing on real world skills. PI 5.09 learners are assessed through their performance within the class and projects, rather than standardized testing. The PI 5.09 program is a holistic approach to learning which incorporates career readiness and health. Students are required to take the Accuplacer, a college entrance exam, at the end of the course.
- **English Language Learning** – Focused on the needs of non-native English speakers from more than 50 countries, our ELL programs offer one-on-one instruction and classes in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Students also work to achieve goals such as employment, housing, acquiring a driver’s license, and U.S. citizenship.
- **Wilson Reading System®** – The hallmark program of Literacy Services, the Wilson Reading System® delivers multisensory phonics instruction for adults with learning disabilities and/or in need of intensive remediation. Our specially trained tutors deliver this evidence-based curriculum utilizing a range of special materials and specific procedures, to help students become successful at reading and spelling. Students are continually evaluated on their progress, including assessments at enrollment and regular intervals thereafter.
- **Computer Skills & Digital Learning** – All our core academic programs include instruction in basic computer skills and provide opportunities for digital learning.

### **What is the best way to contact LSW with further questions?**

Questions regarding the merger can be directed via email to [info@literacyservices.org](mailto:info@literacyservices.org) or via phone at 414-344-5878.