

Literacy, Lifelong Learning & Workforce Development

I. The Critical Questions:

- A. What are the current characteristics of our workforce and pipeline of workers?
- B. What are the workforce requirements of Corporate America now and in the future?
- C. What is the economic impact of not addressing literacy?
- D. What can Workforce Boards do to implement solutions?

“How our country deals with the realities of the Information Age will have enormous impact on our democratic way of life and on our nation's ability to compete internationally. Within America's information society, there also exists the potential of addressing many long-standing social and economic inequities. To reap such benefits, people---as individuals and as a nation---must be information literate. To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Producing such a citizenry will require that schools and colleges appreciate and integrate the concept of information literacy into their learning programs and that they play a leadership role in equipping individuals and institutions to take advantage of the opportunities inherent within the information society. Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.”¹

II. The Facts: Literacy, the Here and Now:

A. Definition:

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the National Literacy Act of 1991 define literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in

¹ Presidential Committee on Literacy, Final Report, ALA January 10, 1989

the family of the individual and in society." This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual's ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy.

Level 1 individuals usually can:	Level 1 individuals usually cannot:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sign their name ➤ Total a bank deposit slip ➤ Locate a piece of information in a sports article ➤ Locate the expiration date on their driver's license 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Locate eligibility from a table of employee benefits ➤ Locate two pieces of information in a sports article ➤ Total costs from an order ➤ Locate an intersection on a street map ➤ Understand an appliance warranty ➤ Fill out a government benefits application

B. Population/ Statistics

Adults/ESL

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) 1994-98, found that for the United States population aged 16-65:

- 14.0% of the native-born population, aged 16-65, was at prose literacy level 1, compared to 63.7% of the second-language foreign born.
- 27.3% were at prose level 2, compared to 17.0% of the second-language foreign born.
- 35.0% were at prose level 3, compared to 13.5% of the second-language foreign born.
- 23.7% were at prose level 4/5, compared to 5.9% (unreliable) of the second-language foreign born.

In the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey, 29% of respondents at prose Level 1 reported not being able to read compared to 3% at Level 2. 23% of respondents at Level 1 reported getting help from family members or friends on everyday literacy tasks involving printed information, compared to 8% at Level 2.

Newspapers

According to the 1999 National Household Education Survey, 50% of the population aged 25 and over read a newspaper at least once a week, read one or more magazines regularly, and had read a book in the past 6 months.

Offenders

US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics 2001 report:

The total adult correctional population includes incarcerated inmates as well as probationers and parolees living in the community. On December 31, 2000, there were:

- 3,839,532 men and women on probation,
- 725,527 on parole,
- 1,312,354 in federal and state prisons, and
- 621,149 in local jails.

In 1997, state prison inmates' educational levels were:

- 14.2% had an 8th grade education or less;
- 28.9% had some high school education;
- 25.1% had a GED;
- 18.5% were high school graduates;
- 10.7% had some college education; and
- 2.7% were college graduates or had advanced degrees.

Wage Earners

In 2000, median earnings of workers age 25 and over with a:

- master's degree were \$55,300;
- bachelor's degree were \$46,300;
- associate degree were \$35,400;
- some college, no degree were \$32,400;
- high school diploma were \$28,800; and
- some high school, but no diploma were \$21,400.²

Learning Disabilities

The National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992, found that the average prose literacy proficiency level of the general population was 272 (Level 2). The average prose literacy level of adults with self-reported learning disabilities was 207 (Level 1).

- 58% of adults with self-reported learning disabilities were in prose Level 1;
- 22% in Level 2;
- 14% in Level 3;
- 4% in Level 4; and
- 1% in Level 5.

Welfare Recipients

In the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), the average annual household income of the total adult population

² ([U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001](#))

- at prose literacy Level 1 was \$15,480, compared to \$8,520 for welfare recipients;
- at prose literacy Level 2 was \$25,010, compared to \$9,540 for welfare recipients;
- at prose literacy Level 3 was \$35,020, compared to \$11,710 for welfare recipients; and
- at prose literacy Level 4 was \$45,610, compared to \$15,820 for welfare recipients.

Children

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that of the children who were read to at least three times a week as they entered kindergarten:

- 76% had mastered the letter-sound relationship at the beginning of words, compared to 64% of children who were read to fewer than 3 times a week,
- 57% had mastered the letter-sound relationship at the end of words, compared to 43% who were read to fewer than 3 times a week,
- 15% had sight-word recognition skills, compared to 8% who were read to fewer than 3 times a week, and
- 5% could understand words in context, compared to 2% who were read to fewer than 3 times a week.

Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. less than high school maternal education) are closing gaps in basic skills (i.e., recognizing their letters and counting beyond 10). However, these same children lag further behind their more advanced classmates when it comes to gaining more sophisticated reading and mathematics knowledge and skills (i.e., recognizing words by sight). In fact, the gap has widened.³

III. Workforce Skill Requirements

The education and training requirements of the 2000-2010 projected total job openings, due to growth and net replacement are:

- 69.8% of jobs will require work-related training
 - 42.7% short-term on-the-job training;
 - 15.1% moderate on-the-job training;
 - 6.5% long-term on-the-job training; and
 - 5.55% work experience in a related occupation.

³ [National Academy Press 1998 and Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children 1998.](#)

- 20.9% will require a bachelor's degree or higher, and
- 9.3% will require an associate's degree or postsecondary vocational award.⁴

A comparison of the literary requirements of projected high-growth occupations in 2005 (for example, math, computer, and other natural scientists), with declining occupations (such as fabricators, assemblers, and inspectors), found the following:

- the weighted mean proficiency requirement for new jobs in projected high-growth occupations is 301 (Level 3);
- the weighted mean proficiency for lost jobs in declining occupations is 252 (Level 2)⁵

A number of national and state organizations in the U.S., including the National Governor's Association, have identified Level 3 proficiency as a minimum standard for success in today's labor market. Findings from the International Adult Literacy Survey indicate that only half of the U.S. adult population 16-65 years of age reached Level 3.⁶

Small business owners in the "Voices from Main Street: Assessing the State of Small Business Workforce Skills" thought that the following skills were very important:

- 86% - verbal communication skills
- 77% - interpersonal skills
- 62% - math skills
- 59% - written communication
- 52% - basic business skills
- 46% - financial accounting
- 43% - mechanical ability
- 41% - computer skills
- 18% - Internet knowledge

⁴ ([Hecker, 2002, p83, Table 6](#))

⁵ ([Sum, 1999, p94, Table 3.14](#))

⁶ ([Sum, 2002, p.11, Table 5](#))

- 18% - science⁷

V. Economic Impact

Corporate Concerns

The National Association of Manufacturers 2001 members' survey asked employers about the most serious skill deficiencies of current hourly production employees. They found that:

- 59.1% of employers stated poor basic employability skills (attendance, timeliness, work ethic, etc.);
- 32.4% poor reading/writing skills;
- 26.2% inadequate math skills;
- 25.0% an inability to communicate;
- 23.7% poor English language skills;
- 22.1% an inability to read and translate drawings/diagrams/flow charts;
- 22.0% an inability to work in a team environment; and
- 12.3% poor computer/technical skills.⁸

The Educational Quality of the Workforce National Employer Survey, 1994, found that establishments were engaged in the following training activities:

- 25.1% in literacy/numeracy training;
- 47.5% in tuition reimbursement;
- 51.5% in computer literacy;
- 51.5% in Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) or diversity/sensitivity;
- 54.9% in team work or problem solving;
- 62.7% in executive development;
- 65.3% in line supervisory skills;
- 68.3% in sales or customer service;

⁷ ([American Express, Small Business Services, p12](#))

⁸ ([National Association of Manufacturers, p11, Figure 4](#))

- 68.5% in cross-training;
- 68.5% in production or equipment;
- 73.9% in new worker orientation;
- 76.1% in new methods/procedures; and
- 81.2% in health and safety.

Also in 1994:

- Less than 20% of employers in the business services, retail, or construction sectors offered literary, numeracy, and basic education training;
- More than 50% of employers in utilities, finance, insurance, and primary metals offered this type of training.⁹

The national average cost of serving an adult student in literacy education is \$365.00 per year

The cost to house a prisoner in a correctional institute is \$16,000 per year

A 1% reduction in recidivism saves taxpayers \$1.5 million per year¹⁰

VI. How Can Workforce Boards Respond?

- Evaluate accessibility of resources in the community:
 - Public should have access to appropriate literacy services as necessary to increase their personal quality of life as well as to increase their ability to be an active, productive member of society. Existing literacy programs provide a broad range of services targeted to a diverse range of populations.
- Bring about Public Awareness:
 - There must to be a greater public awareness that services are available, culturally appropriate, inexpensive and welcoming. Potential clients need to be educated that an increase in literacy proficiency is directly connected to increased employment opportunities and to an increase in overall quality of life. The stigma associated with participating in a literacy program must be mitigated and eventually reduced through a broader understanding of literacy competency.

⁹ ([Lynch, p12](#))

¹⁰ Nevada White Paper on Literacy 2003

- Appropriate Data for Determining the Needs:
 - lack of consistent data makes it difficult to accurately measure outcomes across programs and across geographic boundaries. It is important that data be collected to demonstrate that literacy needs are critical and that literacy programs and services create quantifiable improvement. Data is also necessary to demonstrate the economic impact of low literacy proficiency.

- Develop an Integrated Regional Delivery System
 - Literacy programs and services are sponsored by a wide range of agencies both public and private with funding streams from multiple departments within the state organizational system. It is difficult for both providers and clients to stay abreast of available services.
 - Ensure that a broad range of culturally appropriate services is available in every community.

- Create incentives for businesses to participate and allow/encourage their employees to participate in literacy programs.
 - An often overlooked target population for literacy efforts is the business community. Employees with higher literacy proficiency are more efficient and effective and increase company productivity. It is often necessary to reach potential literacy clients at their place of employment. Private/public partnerships have shown great promise for increasing the overall level of literacy in the State of Nevada. Incentives are an effective means of encouraging business owners to take a proactive stance.¹¹

¹¹ Nevada White Paper on Literacy 2003