

Executive Summary from

ADULT LITERACY in Illinois

Results of the
National Adult Literacy Survey

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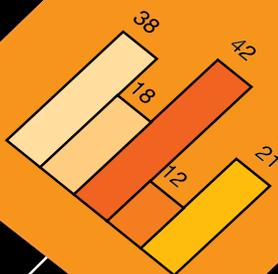


Table B3-14: Percentage of high school noncompletion among states born in the United States and foreignborn

State	Percent	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Alabama	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Alaska	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Arizona	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Arkansas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
California	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Colorado	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Connecticut	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Delaware	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
District of Columbia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Florida	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Georgia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Hawaii	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Idaho	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Illinois	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Indiana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Iowa	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Kansas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Kentucky	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Louisiana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Maine	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Maryland	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Massachusetts	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Michigan	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Minnesota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Mississippi	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Missouri	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Montana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Nebraska	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Nevada	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Hampshire	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Jersey	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Mexico	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New York	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
North Carolina	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
North Dakota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Ohio	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Oklahoma	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Oregon	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Pennsylvania	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Rhode Island	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
South Carolina	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
South Dakota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Tennessee	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Texas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Utah	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Vermont	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Virginia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Washington	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
West Virginia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Wisconsin	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Wyoming	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50

Table B3-15: Percentage of high school noncompletion among states born in the United States and foreignborn

State	Percent	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Alabama	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Alaska	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Arizona	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Arkansas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
California	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Colorado	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Connecticut	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Delaware	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
District of Columbia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Florida	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Georgia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Hawaii	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Idaho	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Illinois	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Indiana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Iowa	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Kansas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Kentucky	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Louisiana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Maine	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Maryland	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Massachusetts	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Michigan	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Minnesota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Mississippi	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Missouri	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Montana	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Nebraska	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Nevada	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Hampshire	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Jersey	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New Mexico	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
New York	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
North Carolina	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
North Dakota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Ohio	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Oklahoma	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Oregon	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Pennsylvania	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Rhode Island	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
South Carolina	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
South Dakota	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Tennessee	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Texas	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Utah	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Vermont	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Virginia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Washington	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
West Virginia	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Wisconsin	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50
Wyoming	10.0	100	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50

 Educational Testing Service

JANUARY 1994

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adult Literacy in Illinois

This executive summary presents a portrait of adult literacy in Illinois based on the results of the State Adult Literacy Survey, an important research project in which 12 states assessed the literacy skills of their adult populations. The project, conducted in 1992, is a component of the National Adult Literacy Survey, a large-scale study funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by Educational Testing Service.

Many past studies of adult literacy have tried to count the number of “illiterates” in this nation, thereby treating literacy as a condition that individuals either do or do not have. We believe that such efforts are inherently arbitrary and misleading. They are also damaging, in that they fail to acknowledge both the complexity of the literacy problem and the range of solutions needed to address it.

The Illinois State Adult Literacy Survey, like the National Adult Literacy Survey of which it is a part, is based on a different definition of literacy and therefore follows a different approach to measuring it. The aim of this survey is to characterize adults’ literacy skills in English based on their performance on diverse tasks that reflect the types of materials and demands they encounter in their daily lives.

To gather information on the literacy skills of adults in Illinois, trained staff interviewed selected individuals age 16 and older during the first eight months of 1992. These participants were randomly chosen to represent the adult population in the state as a whole. In total, nearly 1,700 adults in Illinois were surveyed, representing approximately 8.7 million adults statewide.

Each survey participant was asked to spend approximately an hour responding to a series of varied literacy tasks as well as questions about his or her demographic characteristics, educational background, employment, income, reading practices, and other areas related to literacy. Based on their responses to the survey tasks, adults received proficiency scores along three scales, each ranging from 0 to 500. The score points along these scales reflect varying degrees of skill in prose, document, and quantitative literacy. To provide a way to examine the distribution of performance within various subpopulations of interest, five levels of proficiency were defined along each scale: Level 1 (0 to 225), Level 2 (226 to 275), Level 3 (276 to 325), Level 4 (326 to 375), and Level 5 (376 to 500).

The full report offers a comprehensive look at the results of the Illinois survey. It describes the average literacy proficiencies and the levels of proficiency demonstrated by adults in this state, compared with individuals in the region and nation, and explores connections between literacy and an array of variables. Some of the major findings are highlighted in the pages that follow.

Profiles of Adult Literacy in Illinois

- Twenty-one to 24 percent of the adults in Illinois demonstrated skills in the lowest level of prose, document, and quantitative proficiencies (Level 1). Though all adults in this level displayed limited skills, their characteristics are diverse. Many adults in this level were successful in performing simple, routine tasks involving brief and uncomplicated texts and documents. For example, they were able to total the entries on a deposit slip, locate the time or place of a meeting on a form, and identify a piece of specific information in a brief news article. Others did not perform these types of tasks successfully, however, and some had such limited skills that they were unable to respond to much of the survey.
- The composition of the Level 1 population differs in some important respects from the state population as a whole. For example, 18 percent of the Illinois residents who performed in Level 1 on the quantitative literacy scale were foreign-born. Just 38 percent had completed high school or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or attended postsecondary education. One-third were age 65 or older, and 30 percent reported physical or mental conditions that kept them from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities.

- Twenty-three to 27 percent of the Illinois respondents performed in the next higher level of proficiency (Level 2) on each literacy scale. While their skills were more varied than those of individuals in Level 1, their repertoire was still quite limited. They were generally able to locate information in text, to make low-level inferences using printed materials, and to integrate easily identifiable pieces of information. Further, they demonstrated the ability to perform quantitative tasks that involve a single operation where the numbers are either stated or can be easily found in text. For example, adults in this level were able to calculate the total cost of a purchase or determine the difference in price between two items. They could also locate a particular intersection on a street map and enter background information on a simple form.
- Individuals in Levels 1 and 2 were rarely able to respond correctly to the more challenging literacy tasks in the assessment—those requiring higher level reading and problem-solving skills. In particular, they appeared to have considerable difficulty with tasks that required them to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy texts or to perform quantitative tasks in which the individual had to set up the problem and then carry out two or more sequential operations.
- Approximately 30 percent of the survey participants in Illinois performed in Level 3 on each literacy scale. Respondents with skills in this level on the prose and document scales integrated information from relatively long or dense text or from documents. Those in the Level 3 on the quantitative scale demonstrated an ability to determine the appropriate arithmetic operation based on information contained in the directive, and to identify the quantities needed to perform that operation.
- Twenty to 23 percent of the respondents in Illinois scored in the two highest levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacy (Levels 4 and 5). These adults consistently demonstrated the ability to perform the most challenging tasks in this assessment, many of which involved long and complex documents and text passages.
- The average prose, document, and quantitative proficiencies of adults in Illinois were slightly (5 to 6 points) lower than those of adults living in the Midwest region, and approximately the same as those of adults nationwide. In all three populations—the state, region, and nation—average scores were either in the high end of the Level 2 range (226 to 275) or the low end of the Level 3 range (276 to 325).
- Older adults were more likely than middle-aged and younger adults to demonstrate limited literacy skills. For example, the average proficiencies of Illinois adults age 65 and older were 64 to 73 points (or more than one literacy level) below those of adults age 35 to 44.
- Illinois residents who were born in the United States performed far better in the assessment, on average, than did foreign-born individuals. The number of foreign-born adults in Illinois was too small to compare the proficiencies of those who had lived in the United States for different numbers of years. Nationwide, however, foreign-born adults who had lived in this country for more than a decade outperformed more recent immigrants by roughly 20 points on each scale.
- African American and Latino adults were more likely than White adults to perform in the lowest two literacy levels and less likely to attain the two highest levels. In the Illinois population, about one-third of the Latino individuals were born in this country, and their average proficiencies were comparable to those of African American adults.
- Illinois residents who reported having a physical or mental condition that kept them from participating fully in work or other activities were more likely than adults in the population as a whole to perform in the lowest levels on each literacy scale and less likely to reach the highest levels.
- The average prose proficiencies of men and women did not differ, but men displayed somewhat higher average document and quantitative proficiencies than women.

Education and Training

- Illinois residents with relatively few years of education were more likely to perform in the lower literacy levels than those who completed high school or some postsecondary education. As a result, average proficiencies rise steadily across the entire range of education levels.
- Differences in the average years of schooling completed by adults in various subpopulations tend to parallel the observed differences in literacy proficiencies. Older adults in Illinois (age 65 and older) had completed less schooling, on average, than younger adults (11 years, compared with 12 to 13 years, respectively). White adults had completed more schooling, on average (13 years), than African American (11 years) and Latino adults (10 years). Adults born in the United States had finished more years of schooling in this country (13 years, on average) than those born abroad (9 years).
- Foreign-born adults who had lived in the United States for more than a decade were less likely than those who moved here more recently to have attended secondary school or a college or university before coming to this country.
- On each literacy scale, the average scores of school dropouts in Illinois who had studied for a GED or high school equivalency diploma were approximately 50 points higher than those of dropouts who had not participated in such a program. The vast majority of GED program participants in Illinois were between the ages of 25 and 54.
- Illinois residents who were enrolled in school or college at the time of the survey had higher literacy proficiencies, on average, than adults who were not enrolled in an academic program. Most enrollees nationwide stated that their goal was a four-year college degree.
- Eighty-three percent of the adults in Illinois reported having completed at least some of their precollegiate or collegiate education in the state.
- Less than 10 percent of the survey respondents in this state said they were currently or previously enrolled in a course to improve their basic skills. Individuals who had enrolled in such a course had lower average proficiencies than the total state population. These data suggest that individuals who need help in improving their literacy skills are more likely than those with higher proficiencies to be involved in programs designed to provide such assistance.
- When respondents were asked to indicate the best location for taking a course or training program, the sites most often selected were a local community college (51 percent) and a university (15 percent). Illinois adults who said they would prefer to take a course at a local community college demonstrated higher average proficiencies on each literacy scale (281 to 287) than individuals who preferred taking a course at a local public school (267 to 270) or at a library, church, community center, or adult education center (242 to 250).
- About half the adults in Illinois said that qualifying for a better job would be a reason for enrolling in a course or training program. Forty-two percent said that a lack of time or interest would be the reason most likely to keep them from enrolling.
- Approximately one-third of the employed adults in Illinois reported needing training in the use of computers in order to be more productive in their jobs. Smaller percentages reported needing training in reading (9 percent), arithmetic (11 percent), and other areas. In each dimension of literacy assessed, individuals who said they needed training in reading demonstrated far lower proficiencies, on average, than those who needed training in other areas.

Employment, Economic Status, and Civic Responsibility

- Employed adults were less likely than adults who were unemployed or out of the labor force to perform in the lowest levels on each literacy scale and more likely to attain the highest levels. On

each scale, 32 to 43 percent of the employed adults in Illinois performed in Levels 1 and 2, compared with approximately 60 percent of the unemployed adults and roughly two-thirds of those out of the labor force. Conversely, 28 percent of the full-time workers attained Level 4 or 5, compared with half as many of the unemployed adults and those not in the labor force.

- Illinois residents who reported being in professional, technical, or managerial positions in their current or most recent jobs had higher average literacy scores than those in other types of occupations, including sales or clerical, craft or service, or laborer, assembler, fishing, or farming positions.
- On each literacy scale, adults who performed in the higher levels had worked more weeks in the past year, on average, than individuals in the lower levels. Among Illinois residents, those in the three highest literacy levels reported working an average of 34 to 45 weeks in the past year, compared with only 17 to 18 weeks for individuals performing in Level 1.
- Across the scales, Illinois adults with proficiencies in Level 1 reported median weekly earnings of \$227 to \$244. In contrast, those in Level 3 earned about \$350 to \$385, while those in Level 5 earned between \$587 and \$707. Similarly, the median annual household income reported by adults in the highest proficiency levels was far higher than that of adults in the lowest levels.
- Nearly three-quarters of Illinois residents designated as either poor or near poor demonstrated skills in Levels 1 and 2 on each literacy scale; in contrast, 34 to 42 percent of those designated not poor performed in this level. As a result, the average literacy scores of poor and near poor adults are considerably lower than the scores of adults who were not in poverty.
- Among Illinois residents, voting appears to be unrelated to literacy proficiency. On all three scales, the average literacy proficiencies of state residents who said they had voted in a recent election were no higher than those of nonvoters. In contrast, voters in the national population outperformed nonvoters.

Language Use and Literacy Practices

- Most Illinois residents (87 percent) reported speaking only English before beginning school, and these individuals displayed higher average proficiencies than adults who reported having spoken another language either in addition to or instead of English.
- Virtually all survey respondents in Illinois said they understand (98 percent) and speak (96 percent) English well or very well; slightly smaller proportions described themselves as reading (92 percent) and writing (90 percent) English well or very well. In each dimension of literacy, these adults had average scores that were considerably (120 to 140 points) higher than the scores of those who said they do not speak, understand, read, or write English well.
- Illinois residents who learned a language other than English before starting school were more likely to say they understand (88 percent) or speak (78 percent) that other language well or very well than to say they read (68 percent) or write (64 percent) it well or very well. Adults who said they do not read or write their other language well demonstrated higher proficiencies in English than those who said they do.
- Approximately one-third of the Illinois residents who learned a language other than English before starting school said they had enrolled in a class to learn to read and write or to speak and understand English as a second language. Those who had completed a reading and writing course had higher average proficiencies than those who had not.
- Virtually all survey respondents in Illinois reported getting some or a lot of information about current events, public affairs, or government from nonprint media—that is, from television or radio. A smaller percentage (85 percent) said they get much of their information from print media, such as

newspapers or magazines. Those who get some or a lot of information from print media earned higher average scores in the assessment than those who do not.

- About half (53 percent) of the adults in the state said they read a newspaper every day, while another 33 percent said they do so at least once a week. Six percent reported never reading a newspaper, and their average prose, document, and quantitative proficiencies were far lower than those of newspaper readers.
- Twenty-one percent of the Illinois respondents said they did not read any magazines in English on a regular basis. Their average literacy scores were considerably lower than the scores of those who read at least one or two magazines regularly. Approximately 20 percent of the adults in Illinois said they had not read any books in the past six months, and their scores were considerably lower, on average, than the scores of those who had read at least one book.
- One-third of the adults in Illinois reported that they never use a library, and another 31 percent said they do so only once or twice a year. In general, individuals who reported frequent use of the library outperformed less frequent users.
- Virtually all Illinois residents said they watch some television every day, although 19 percent said they spend no more than an hour on this activity. Nearly one-third of the state's residents reported watching four or more hours of television each day. Individuals who watch the most television had lower average proficiencies than those who watch the least.
- There are very large (approximately 100-point) differences in prose proficiency between Illinois residents who read and write prose frequently, either for their personal use or for their jobs, and those who do not. Similarly, the average document proficiencies of individuals who use documents every day are far higher than the scores of individuals who never use these materials. Finally, in the dimension of quantitative literacy, adults who said they frequently use mathematics outperformed those who rarely or never do so.

Reflections on the Results

In reflecting on the results of this study, many readers will undoubtedly seek an answer to a fundamental question: Are the outcomes satisfactory? That is, are the distributions of prose, document, and quantitative proficiency observed in this survey adequate to ensure individual opportunities for all adults, to increase worker productivity, or to strengthen America's competitiveness around the world?

Because it is impossible to say precisely what literacy skills are essential for individuals to succeed in this or any other society, the results of the State and National Adult Literacy Surveys provide no firm answers to such questions. As the authors examined the survey data and deliberated on the results with members of the advisory committees, however, several observations and concerns emerged.

Perhaps the most salient finding of this study is that surprisingly large percentages of adults performed in the lowest levels (Levels 1 and 2) of prose, document, and quantitative literacy. In and of itself, this may not indicate a serious problem. After all, the majority of adults who demonstrated limited skills described themselves as reading or writing English well, and relatively few said they get a lot of assistance from others in performing everyday literacy tasks. Perhaps these individuals are able to meet most of the literacy demands they encounter currently at work, at home, and in their communities.

Yet, some argue that lower literacy skills mean a lower quality of life and more limited employment opportunities. As noted in a recent report from the American Society for Training and Development, "The association between skills and opportunity for individual Americans is powerful and growing.... Individuals with poor skills do not have much to bargain with; they are condemned to low earnings and limited choices."¹

¹A.J. Carnevale and L.J. Gainer. (1989). *The Learning Enterprise*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

The data from this survey appear to support such views. On each of the literacy scales, adults who were unemployed or out of the labor force demonstrated far more limited skills than those who were employed, and those who earned low wages displayed far lower proficiencies than those who earned high wages. Adults who rarely or never read displayed lower average proficiencies than those who were at least occasional readers. Moreover, the average literacy scores of individuals who received food stamps and who were poor or near poor were much lower than those of their more affluent peers.

Literacy is not the only factor that contributes to how we live our lives, however. Some adults who were out of work or who earned low wages performed relatively well in the assessment, while some full-time workers or adults who earned high wages did relatively poorly. Thus, having advanced literacy skills is not necessarily associated with individual opportunities.

Still, literacy can be thought of as a currency in this society. Just as adults with little money have difficulty meeting their basic needs, those with limited literacy skills are likely to find it more challenging to pursue their goals whether these involve job advancement, consumer decision making, citizenship, or other aspects of their lives. Even if adults who performed in the lowest literacy levels are not experiencing difficulties at present, they may be at risk as the nation's economy and social fabric continue to change.

Beyond these personal consequences, what implications are there for society when so many individuals display limited skills? The answer to this question is elusive. Still, it seems apparent that a nation in which large numbers of citizens display limited literacy skills has fewer resources with which to meet its goals and objectives, whether these are social, political, civic, or economic.

If large percentages of adults had to do little more than sign their names on forms or locate single facts in newspapers or tables, then the levels of literacy seen in this survey might not warrant concern. We live in a nation, however, where both the volume and variety of written information are growing and where increasing numbers of citizens are expected to be able to read, understand, and use these materials.

Historians remind us that during the last 200 years, our nation's literacy skills have increased dramatically in response to new requirements and expanded opportunities for social and economic growth. Today we are a better educated and more literate society than at any time in our history.² Yet, there have also been periods of imbalance—times when demands seemed to surpass levels of attainment.

In recent years, our society has grown more technologically advanced, and the roles of formal institutions have expanded. As this has occurred, many have argued that there is a greater need for all individuals to become more literate and for a larger proportion to develop advanced skills.³ Growing numbers of individuals are expected to be able to attend to multiple features of information in lengthy and sometimes complex displays, to compare and contrast information, to integrate information from various parts of a text or document, to generate ideas and information based on what they read, and to apply arithmetic operations sequentially to solve a problem.

The results from this and other surveys, however, indicate that many adults do not demonstrate these levels of proficiency. Further, the continuing process of demographic, social, and economic change within this country could lead to a more divided society along both racial and socioeconomic lines.

Already there is evidence of a widening division. According to the report *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!*, over the past 15 years the gap in earnings between professionals and clerical workers has grown from 47 to 86 percent, while the gap between white collar workers and skilled tradespeople has risen from 2 to 37 percent. At the same time, earnings for college educated males 24 to 34 years of age have increased by 10 percent, while earnings for those with high school diplomas have declined by 9 percent. Moreover, the poverty rate for African American families is nearly three times that

²L.C. Stedman and C.F. Kaestle. (1991). "Literacy and Reading Performance in the United States from 1880 to the Present," in C.F. Kaestle et al., *Literacy in the United States: Read and Reading Since 1880*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. T. Snyder (ed.). (1993). *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

³U.S. Department of Labor. (1992, April). *Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance*. Washington, DC: The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). R.L. Venezky, C.F. Kaestle, and A. Sum. (1987, January). *The Subtle Danger: Reflections on the Literacy Abilities of America's Young Adults*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

for White families.⁴ One child in five is born into poverty, and for minority populations this rate approaches one in two.

In 1990, President Bush and the nation's governors, including Governor Clinton, adopted the goal that all of America's adults be literate by the year 2000. The responsibility for meeting this objective must, in the end, be shared among individuals, groups, and organizations throughout our society. Programs that serve adult learners cannot be expected to solve the literacy problem alone, and neither can the schools. Other institutions—ranging from the largest and most complex government agency, to large and small businesses, to the family—all have a role to play in ensuring that adults who need or wish to improve their literacy skills have the opportunity to do so. It is also important that individuals themselves come to realize the value of literacy in their lives and to recognize the benefits associated with having better skills. Only then will more adults in this nation develop the literacy resources they need to function in society, to achieve their goals, and to develop their knowledge and potential.

⁴National Center on Education and the Economy. (1990, June). *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages! The Report of The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. p. 20.