

Executive Summary from ADULT LITERACY in Louisiana

Results of the
National Adult Literacy Survey

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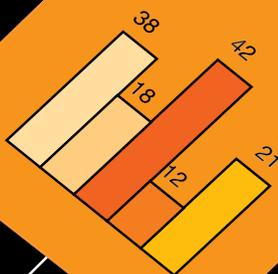


Table B3.14: Percentage of high school graduates among states born in the United States and foreignborn

State	Percentage	Sample Size	95% CI	90% CI	99% CI
Alabama	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
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Arizona	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Arkansas	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
California	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Colorado	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Connecticut	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Delaware	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
District of Columbia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Florida	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Georgia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Hawaii	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Idaho	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Illinois	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Indiana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Iowa	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Kansas	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Kentucky	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Louisiana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Maine	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Maryland	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Massachusetts	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Michigan	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Minnesota	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Mississippi	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Missouri	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Montana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Nebraska	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Nevada	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Hampshire	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Jersey	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Mexico	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New York	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
North Carolina	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
North Dakota	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Ohio	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Oklahoma	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Oregon	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Pennsylvania	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Rhode Island	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
South Carolina	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
South Dakota	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Tennessee	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Texas	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Utah	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Vermont	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Virginia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Washington	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
West Virginia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Wisconsin	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Wyoming	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0

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State	Percentage	Sample Size	95% CI	90% CI	99% CI
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Arkansas	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
California	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Colorado	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Connecticut	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Delaware	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
District of Columbia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
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Georgia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Hawaii	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Idaho	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Illinois	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Indiana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Iowa	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Kansas	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Kentucky	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Louisiana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Maine	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Maryland	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Massachusetts	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Michigan	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Minnesota	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Mississippi	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Missouri	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Montana	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Nebraska	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Nevada	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Hampshire	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Jersey	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New Mexico	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
New York	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
North Carolina	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
North Dakota	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Ohio	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Oklahoma	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
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Vermont	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Virginia	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
Washington	10.0	1,000	7.0-13.0	6.0-11.0	4.0-16.0
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 Educational Testing Service

MAY 1994

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adult Literacy in Louisiana

This executive summary presents a portrait of adult literacy in Louisiana based on the results of the State Adult Literacy Survey, an important research project in which twelve 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 Louisiana 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 Louisiana, 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 1,200 adults in Louisiana were surveyed, representing approximately 3.1 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 Louisiana 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 Louisiana

- Twenty-four to 26 percent of the adults in Louisiana 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, 35 percent of the Louisiana residents who performed in Level 1 on the quantitative literacy scale had 0 to 8 years of education, compared with 11 percent of the entire state population. Further, individuals in the lowest level of quantitative literacy were also much less likely (27 percent) than those in the state population as a whole (65 percent) to have completed high school or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or to have attended a postsecondary institution.

- Twenty-eight to 32 percent of the Louisiana 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 repertoires were 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 sometimes, but not consistently, 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 require 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 Louisiana 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 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.
- Twelve to 16 percent of the respondents in Louisiana 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 literacy proficiencies of adults in Louisiana (257 to 263 across the scales) were comparable to those of adults living in the South. The average prose and document scores of adults in the state, however, were lower than those of adults nationwide. In all three populations—the state, region, and nation—average scores were in the Level 2 range (226 to 275).
- Older adults were more likely than middle-aged and younger adults to demonstrate limited literacy skills. Nationwide, for example, average prose scores rise from 271 among 16- to 18-year-olds in Louisiana to 289 among 35- to 44-year-olds, before declining across the older age groups.
- Ninety-eight percent of the adults in Louisiana were born in the United States. Native-born individuals performed far better in the assessment, on average, than foreign-born individuals. The number of foreign-born Louisiana residents is too small to provide reliable proficiency estimates. Nationwide, however, between 49 and 52 percent of the foreign-born adults performed in Level 1 on each literacy scale, compared with 17 to 20 percent of the native-born adults.
- There are no significant differences in literacy proficiency between foreign-born adults nationwide who have lived in the United States for one to five years and those who have lived here for six to ten years. In all three dimensions of literacy, however, foreign-born individuals who have lived in this country for more than ten years had higher average proficiencies than those who have lived here for one to five years.
- On average, the literacy proficiencies of African American adults in Louisiana were lower than those of White adults. On the prose scale, for example, the average score of White individuals in the state was 280, which lies in the low end of the Level 3 range. For African American residents, it was 223, which lies in the high end of the Level 1 range. These differences in performance are accompanied

by differences in years of education; on average, White adults in Louisiana had completed more years of schooling (12 years) than African American adults (11 years) or Latino adults (10 years).

- Louisiana residents who reported having physical or mental conditions that keep 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, document, and quantitative proficiencies of men and women in Louisiana did not differ. This contrasts with the national pattern, where men's average document and quantitative scores were higher than those of women.

Education and Training

- Louisiana 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. In the national population, older adults had completed less schooling, on average, than adults in the other age groups (11 years, compared with 12 years or more, respectively).
- When Louisiana adults who had not received a high school diploma were asked to indicate their main reason for leaving school, 20 percent said it was to go to work or join the military. Ten percent said they left school because of pregnancy, and approximately one-quarter said their main reason for leaving was a family or personal problem. The remainder cited other reasons.
- On each literacy scale, the average scores of school dropouts who had studied for a GED or high school equivalency diploma were higher than those of dropouts who had not participated in such a program. Most (77 percent) of the GED program participants in Louisiana were age 25 or older.
- Louisiana residents were asked whether they would be willing to pursue a GED if their employers permitted them to attend classes during work hours. Twenty-three percent said they would, while 5 percent said they would not. The remainder (72 percent) responded that the survey question did not apply to them—presumably because they were not employed or had already earned a high school diploma or GED.
- Eight percent of the Louisiana residents were enrolled in school or college at the time of the survey, and these individuals had higher literacy proficiencies, on average, than adults who were not enrolled in an academic program. Nationwide, 38 percent of those enrolled in an academic program reported that their goal was a four-year college degree.
- Nine percent of the survey respondents in this state said they were currently or previously enrolled in a program to improve their basic skills. There were no significant differences in proficiency between individuals who were enrolled in such a course and those who were not.
- When asked to indicate the reasons why they might enroll in a course or training program, approximately two-thirds of the respondents in Louisiana said they would enroll in order to qualify for a better job, to improve job related skills, or to earn a diploma, degree, or license.
- Given a list of potential reasons for not enrolling in a course or training program and asked to indicate the main reason, 37 percent of the Louisiana adults said that lack of time or interest would prevent them from enrolling. Twenty-two percent said that an inability to pay would be their primary reason.

- Thirty-one percent of the state residents said they needed training in the use of computers to increase their job productivity, while smaller percentages (7 to 11 percent) reported needing training in other areas, such as reading, arithmetic, problem solving, and team work.

Employment, Economic Status, and Civic Responsibility

- Full- and part-time employees in Louisiana performed comparably on all three literacy scales. These groups demonstrated significantly higher average prose, document, and quantitative proficiencies than those who were unemployed or out of the labor force.
- Louisiana 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 labor, assembly, fishing, or farming positions.
- Survey respondents in the state were asked whether they had ever been passed over for a job or promotion because they did not have a high school diploma, because they did not speak, read, or write English well enough, or because they did not do arithmetic well enough. Eight percent of the employed Louisiana residents said they had been denied job opportunities for one or more of these reasons, and these individuals had lower average literacy proficiencies than residents who had not been denied job opportunities for these reasons.
- On each literacy scale, individuals who performed in the higher levels had worked more weeks in the past year, on average, than individuals in the lower levels. Louisiana residents with proficiencies in Level 1 reported working an average of only about 16 to 18 weeks a year, compared with an average of 31 to 42 weeks for adults in Levels 3 through 5.
- Across the scales, Louisiana adults with proficiencies in Level 1 or 2 reported median weekly earnings of \$200 to \$273. In contrast, those in Level 3 earned \$304 to \$332, and those in Level 4 earned between \$385 and \$422. Similarly, the median annual household income of adults in the highest proficiency levels was far higher than that of adults in the lowest levels.
- Twenty-four percent of Louisiana residents were classified as poor or near poor, based on household size and income. Approximately three-quarters of this population demonstrated skills in the two lowest levels on each literacy scale, compared with less than half of those who were not poor. As a result, the average literacy scores of poor and near poor adults are far (52 to 67 points) lower than the scores of adults who were not poor.
- Roughly three-quarters of the eligible voters in Louisiana reported having voted in a state or national election in the past five years. On all three scales, the average literacy proficiencies of voters were higher than those of nonvoters.

Language Use and Literacy Practices

- Eighty-nine percent of the adults in Louisiana reported that they learned only English before beginning school. Nationwide, individuals who learned another language as children, either in addition to or instead of English, demonstrated lower proficiencies in the assessment than adults who reported having learned only English.
- Most survey respondents in Louisiana said they understand (98 percent), speak (98 percent), read (93 percent), and write (91 percent) English well or very well. In each dimension of literacy, adults who said they do not read or write English well had average scores that were approximately 100 points lower than the scores of those who said they do.
- Virtually all survey respondents in Louisiana reported getting some or a lot of information about current events, public affairs, or government from television or radio. Eighty 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.

- Forty-three percent of the adults in the state said they read a newspaper every day, and another 44 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 Louisiana respondents said they do 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 14 percent of the adults in Louisiana said they had not read any books in English 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.
- Slightly more than one-third (38 percent) of the adults in Louisiana reported that they never use a library, and another 29 percent said they do so only once or twice a year. Conversely, 19 percent said they use a library monthly, 12 percent reported doing so weekly, and 2 percent said they use a library every day. In general, individuals who reported frequent use of the library outperformed less frequent users.
- Virtually all Louisiana residents said they watch some television every day, although 14 percent said they spend no more than an hour on this activity. Forty-five percent of the state's residents reported watching four or more hours of television each day. There were large proficiency differences between adults who watch the most television and those who watch the least.
- There are very large differences in average prose proficiency between Louisiana 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

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

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

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: Readers 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.

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