Literacy is the ability to understand, use, and respond appropriately to written texts.

**Figure L.** Average scores on PIAAC literacy for U.S. adults ages 16 to 65, by selected population groups: 2012/14 and 2017

NOTE: The PIAAC literacy scale range from 0 to 500. There are six levels of proficiency for literacy (from below Level 1 to Level 5). At literacy proficiency level 2 adults can be considered nearing proficiency but still struggling to perform tasks with text-based information. All differences highlighted in this brochure are average score differences between 2012/2014 and 2017, are based on unrounded estimates, and are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Unemployed adults are those who during the reference period were without paid work, were available for work, and actively seeking work. Fair or poor health is a self-reported health status. Non-native refers to adults who were not born in the United States. Less than high school diploma refers to adults who have not attained a high school diploma or credential. High school diploma refers to adults whose highest level of educational attainment is a high school diploma or credential.


**Scores increased for:**
- **Unemployed** adults from 259 to 271: 12 points
- Adults with **fair or poor health** from 242 to 250: 8 points
- **Non-native**-born adults from 239 to 249: 10 points
- **Hispanic** adults from 236 to 251: 15 points
- Adults with **less than a high school diploma** from 229 to 238: 9 points

**Scores decreased for:**
- Adults with a **high school diploma** from 262 to 258: 4 points

**No measurable difference for:**
- Overall for U.S. adults (ages 16-65), and by sex, age

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is an international, large-scale study of adults’ skills in literacy, numeracy, and digital problem solving. This publication highlights several key results for U.S. adults ages 16-65 from the U.S. PIAAC 2017 data collection in comparison to the combined U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014 results. For more detailed results, see the U.S. PIAAC 2017 Web Report: nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_results.asp

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