



National Coalition for Literacy Response to OECD *Time for US to Reskill?* Report

On November 13, 2013, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development released *Time for US to Reskill? What the [PIAAC] Survey of Adult Skills Says*¹. In response, the National Coalition for Literacy urgently calls for increased public and private investment in adult education at the federal, state, and local levels. **The majority of adults with low skills will not benefit directly from Universal Pre-K or K-12 reform.** All of the following findings from the report support NCL's position.

Overall Findings

- In the US, one in six non-institutionalized adults, aged 16 to 65 years, has low literacy skills and one in three has low numeracy skills. (p. 11, 20) This means that about 36 million adults have low skills. (p.12, 33)
- A shared understanding of the size of the problem and the consequences of inaction are necessary to its solution. (p.14)
- Evidence on gaps in adult basic skills and the link with economic and social outcomes has been growing internationally and nationally. (p. 16)
- Skills are maintained and developed through practice. Adults who engage more in reading and numeracy practice at home, work, or in the community tend to have better skills. (p. 31, 32)
- Basic skills and educational attainment are mutually reinforcing, so those with higher levels of education tend to have better basic skills. (p. 28)
- Participation in adult education and training in the US is higher than in other participating countries, but low-skilled adults are less likely to participate. (p. 12, 25) Nevertheless, almost 40% of low skilled adults reported having participated in some form of adult education or training over the last 12 months. (p. 36)
- There is evidence of an unmet need for adult education. 18% of low skilled adults did not participate in adult education, **but said they would have liked to.** (p. 12, 37, 51)
- 36% of adults who did participate in adult education **said they would have liked to participate more.** (p. 37)
- **The Survey yielded no evidence that adult or post-secondary education in the US is weaker than in other countries.** (p. 43)

Investing in Adult Education Pays... For America's Workers!

- Most (63%) of low skilled adults in the US are employed, but adults with better skills, independent of their education level, are more likely to be economically active, employed, and earn higher wages. (p. 12, 24)
- 40% of low skilled adults have earnings in the bottom fifth of the distribution. (p. 35)
- Nine out of ten US workers reported that a person applying for their jobs today would need at least a high school education. (p. 30)
- Enhanced employability through basic skills education and career preparation could help low-skilled adults into a self-sustaining trajectory. (p. 48)
- While low-skilled jobs will remain in advanced economies, they will not be abundant, and they will often be bad, insecure jobs, with low wages and poor conditions. (p. 44)

Adult Education Pays... For Stronger Families and Future Generations!

- Adults in the US born to better educated parents tend to have stronger basic skills. (p. 32)
- The odds of being low skilled are ten times higher for low-educated adults born to low-educated parents than for higher-educated adults born to higher-educated parents. (p. 32)
- Socio-economic background appears to have a larger impact in the US than in other countries, so that skills deficits in the previous generation are readily reproduced in the current generation. (p. 33)
- Parental engagement in education helps improve children's school results and fosters positive attitudes and behavior. (p. 45)
- While a generation ago the US had one of the highest graduation rates in the world, completion rates have barely risen until the last decade. (p. 45)

Investing in Adult Education Pays... For Global Competitiveness!

- US adult skills do not compare well internationally. (p. 29)
- The acquisition of basic skills is in the interests of employers. (p. 13)
- Skills matter, and without action, the US will fall further behind other countries. (p. 43)
- To accept the relative decline in skills would not only mean accepting relative decline in the economic sphere, but also in other domains which depend on high levels of basic skills – in the arts and sciences and intellectual innovation, all areas in which the US has historically excelled. (p. 44)

Investing in Adult Education Pays... For an Informed Citizenry!

- 60% of adults with low skills believe that they lack influence on public (policy) decisions. (p. 24)

Investing in Adult Education Pays... For Safer and Healthier Communities!

- One third of adults with low literacy skills reported poor or fair health - four times more than those with higher skills. (p.24)
- Literacy skills are associated with voluntarism. (p. 24)

Adult Education Pays... For Fully Integrated Communities

- More than half of adults with low skills are black or Hispanic. Low literacy is more than three times more likely among blacks and Hispanics than whites. Therefore, concerted action is needed to help low-skilled groups in the interest of equity and social cohesion. (p.12)
- Low-educated adults in the US from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly likely to have low skills. (p. 32)
- The odds of having low literacy skills are about ten times higher for the foreign-born, particularly among those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, than for native-born adults from advantaged backgrounds. (p. 33)
- Adult learning programs should be adapted to diverse needs, and effectively coordinated. (p. 43)
- The US needs an approach that goes beyond simply responding to expressed demand, but emphasizes the need to reach out to those who may have weak skills, to raise awareness of the issues, and the scope for individuals to improve their skills through learning initiatives. (p. 52)

¹ http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/time-for-the-u-s-to-reskill_9789264204904-en