

Literacy Powerline's Facts & Stats

Children's and Family Literacy

The work of Padak and Rasinski (2003) reviewed the effectiveness of family literacy programs and showed the benefits to all the component parts of the programs: the children, the parents, the families and the communities of those involved, especially in terms of both school attendance and achievement. The research indicated that family literacy programs impacted children's motivation, social skills, attitudes and even health. One significant finding was adult learner persistence increased when parents were enrolled in family literacy programs as opposed to only adult education classes. Another was that families in family literacy programs reported improved relationships and increased parental involvement in their children's educational activities.



As for specific early childhood best practices, the work of Justice and Pullen (2006) demonstrates the value of programs that include story-telling, literacy related play activities and the use of teacher-guided phonological awareness. Learning from the best practices of successful programs both in the local area and in the region will help to identify the most effective program models.

However, not all reports describe the same level of success. The Even Start research over the years has been mixed; a 2005 study (St. Pierre, Ricciuti & Rimdzius) reported disappointing results especially in the areas of program intensity and quality. National Education Association research reports:

The family makes critical contributions to student achievement from preschool through high school. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background.

Reading achievement is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science. Reading aloud to children is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Talking to children about books and stories read to them also supports reading achievement.

When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically. Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters. The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.

Positive results of parental involvement include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

The outcomes of parental involvement have been documented in the following research: Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003).

- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003).
- Parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).
- Parent involvement increases support of schools (NMSA, 2003).
- Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005).
- Types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

Afterschool Programs

The National Institute for After School Programs reports that research shows after school programming has a critical effect on youth but only when programs are of substance and quality.



Some research shows that what is done after school has at least as much bearing on success for some students than what is accomplished in the school day (National School Board Association Report – Building and sustaining After School Programs). There is growing recognition that participation in afterschool programming is associated with better grades, work habits and task persistence and builds confidence, self esteem and improved attitudes toward school. Durdak and Weisberg (2007) reported in the Impact of Afterschool Programs That Promote Social and Personal Skills that it is vital to invest in quality afterschool programming.

There is a wide range of programming from sports through arts and culture to clubs and formal tutoring and mentoring but most do not infuse literacy activities deliberately in activities.

Out-Of-School Youth

Even though schools are working diligently to increase retention rates for both middle and high school students many do drop out. There is a great deal of research to increase retention and to recover students who have left school or have marginal attendance. The following strategies are those identified by NEA after a series of research reports.

National Education Association's 12 Dropout Action Steps:

1. Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21.
2. Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old
3. Make sure students receive individual attention
4. Expand students' graduation options through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools
5. Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools
6. Act early so students do **NOT** drop out
7. Involve families in students' learning at school and at home
8. Monitor students' academic progress in school
9. Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates
10. Involve the entire community in dropout prevention
11. Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out
12. Make high school graduation a federal priority



However students, as young as thirteen and as old as twenty-one who have dropped out of traditional education, need special assistance. These youth need access to high quality alternative education and training opportunities to equip them to compete in today's labor market.

In 1971, nationally male dropouts working full-time earned \$35,087. By 2002, this figure had fallen 35 percent, to \$23,903. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in its publication, *Occupational Outlook*, Winter 2004-2005, "when an occupation has workers with different levels of education, the worker with more education is better able to compete for the job (Moncarz, R. and Crosby, O. 2004-2005, p. 6)." The Outlook goes on to describe how individuals with a high school degree and some college or vocational training are more likely to be hired, to earn more when they start a job and over a lifetime, and to become supervisors.

Aron's work also notes, "Reconnecting youth requires collaboration and coordination among multiple youth-serving systems: these certainly include school and youth employment and training programs, but also child protective service systems, the juvenile justice system, and a variety of health and human services agencies, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment agencies, crisis intervention centers, runaway and homeless youth shelters, and others."

Adult Literacy and ESOL

The research in adult literacy reflects the fact that the traditional approaches in this field have not worked well. National estimates suggest fewer than five percent of those who could benefit from services are actually enrolled in classes, and persistence studies led by John Comings (Porter, Cuban, Comings and Chase (2005) found that the majority of adult learners who do attend programs fail to put in the number of hours needed to demonstrate success: 150 hours to achieve a grade level increase.



When programs are contextualized for learner needs there is definite improvement in results. The 2006 study by Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni and Deng researched various factors influencing the adult literacy classroom and concluded that teacher roles, contextualized instructional models and classroom norms all had an effect on the success of the participants. Unfortunately improving instruction can sometimes prove difficult; the Center for Adult English Acquisition notes in a 2005 study that because of the part time nature of most adult education instructors they do not have ready access to professional development.

Demand for ESOL programs nationwide has increased with the growing number of immigrants over the past ten years. A 2006 study by the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education notes that 78% of ESOL programs had waiting lists because they were unable to create additional capacity to serve the local need. Nationwide, over 90,000 people were unable to enroll because of lack of classes.

Senior Literacy



Reading is a skill that helps maintain mental acuity into old age and is especially important to develop in those who have limited literacy. As life expectancy increases and as seniors become a larger proportion of our population, literacy skill development for seniors will continue to take on greater importance. A study by Roman (2004) of adult learners notes that older learners experience more shame about their limited skills, which many have effectively hidden for much of their lives. Aging brings increased stress on many levels, and low literacy only makes those problems worse. A United Healthcare,

Secure Horizons study reports that, "at the individual level, low literacy was reported to be associated with greater shame and frustration, greater poverty and unemployment, poorer health and health care access, and greater risk of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias associated with cognitive decline."

In a 2003 literacy test, seniors (65+) scored far below any other adult age group in a 2003 literacy test. Their score of 214/500 was significantly lower than teenagers, young adults and those in middle age. Part of this result can be explained by the fact many seniors grew up in a time when educational opportunities were less available; another reason is that mental skills, including literacy skills, can decline with old age.

Learning Disabilities and other Disabilities

According to the 2003 NAAL survey, 6 percent of adults reported they had been diagnosed or identified as having a learning disability. These adults had lower prose, document and quantitative literacy levels than average. In fact, a Department of Labor report suggested that as many as 70% of adult learners have some kind of learning barrier that prevented them from succeeding in a traditional educational setting.

Correctional Literacy

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. One in every 100 Americans 16 and older is behind bars (2.6 million in 2006); about 43 percent of whom do not have a high school diploma and 56 percent have very limited literacy skills.

When released back into society, this population has an extremely difficult time getting jobs due to their prison records, but for those without sufficient education and literacy skills finding employment is nearly impossible (Executive Summary, Report of the National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008). Research suggests that education in prison is a major way to increase employment rates for those released and reduce their likelihood of committing future crimes. The 2003 NAAL report indicated that 19% of inmates had achieved a GED while incarcerated and a further five percent were enrolled in programs that might lead to a GED.

In all categories, prose, quantitative and document, literacy levels were lower for those incarcerated than for those who were not.

Workforce Literacy

'Workers who were skilled with their hands and could reliably work in repetitive and sometimes physically demanding jobs were the engine of the old economy. In today's New Economy, knowledge-based jobs are driving prosperity...jobs held by individuals with at least two years of college' (2007 State New Economy Index).

The skills needed to get and keep jobs are referred to as workplace literacy, or Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) when taught in the context of language acquisition. In *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming the Crisis in the U.S. Workforce* (2008), the research on workforce literacy is summarized bluntly: "America's workforce is compromised by a lagging K-12 education system, a significant increase in immigration from non-English speaking countries, and an adult education system that is now obsolete and ill-equipped to meet the 21st century needs."

Health Literacy

Research by the Institute of Medicine and *Healthy People 2010* identifies the range of health issues that are impacted by those with limited literacy. In addition, many people with higher literacy in reading and writing still lack essential health knowledge and skills necessary for a healthier life. The 2003 NAAL executive summary, *The Health Literacy of America's Adults*, notes that 53% of adults surveyed had intermediate levels of health literacy and 14% had below basic levels. Only 12% were deemed proficient. "Health literacy is of concern to everyone involved in health promotion and protection, disease prevention, and early screening, health care maintenance and policy making." (Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Financial Literacy

Research highlighting Americans' alarming lack of financial skills has led to action in recent years at the highest levels of government. The current mortgage crisis highlights many of these issues. In 2002, the U.S. Treasury established an Office of Financial Education because of the growing concerns about low financial literacy not only among those with limited literacy skills, but among the general population as well. In 2003 Congress created the Financial Literacy and Education Commission through the Financial Literacy and Education Improvement Act of 2003, which was followed by the National Strategy on Financial Literacy in 2006 and the President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy. Despite the federal government's policy to help keep America competitive and assist people in understanding and addressing financial matters, there is still a widespread lack of financial literacy among the American people.

Computer Literacy

Computer literacy is the knowledge and ability to use computers and technology efficiently. The term can also refer to the comfort level someone has with using computer programs and other applications that are associated with computers.

A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age (2004) reported that more than 65% of households own a computer and with the price of computers becoming cheaper year by year access is rapidly increasing. However, the digital divide highlights the fact that those who do not own or have access to computers are often those with the fewest skills and

resources. Therefore those who might benefit most from this powerful tool to increase their skills are often the very people for whom it is least accessible.

Additional Resources

The [National Institute for Literacy](#) offers a large selection of useful literacy statistics. [The National Center for Educational Statistics](#), the [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#) and [No Child Left Behind](#) have statistics available as well.

Source: <http://www.literacypowerline.com/pages/resources/facts-stats>