



## **Adult Education Pays... For Stronger Families and Future Generations**

On October 8, 2013, OECD released *Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills* from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). PIAAC was a survey of 5,000 adults aged 16-65 in the U.S. and 24 participating countries. The survey assessed literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments.<sup>i</sup>

The OECD Secretary-General stated, "What people know has a major impact on their life opportunities. The PIAAC study confirms that knowledge is destiny... Countries are making quite uneven progress in empowering new generations with better skills. Some countries have made impressive progress in equipping more people with better skills... Young... Americans are entering a much more demanding job market with similar literacy and numeracy skills as those who are retiring. This is scary."<sup>ii</sup>

A 2011 McGraw-Hill Research Foundation policy paper entitled *The Return on Investment From Adult Education and Training* asserts that adult education is "an investment in the future of our nation, as research shows that better educated parents raise better-educated, more successful children, who are less likely to end up in poverty or prison."<sup>iii</sup>

In 1998, The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education found that, "Children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill... most notably general verbal abilities, the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge. Children from poor neighborhoods, children with limited proficiency in English, children with hearing impairments, children with preschool language impairments, and children whose parents had difficulty learning to read are particularly at risk of arriving at school with weaknesses in these areas and hence of falling behind from the outset."<sup>iv</sup>

Today, it is generally accepted that the home and community environments of young children are recognized as important sources of learning opportunities for acquiring literacy and language abilities.<sup>v</sup> "Language and literacy development patterns are clearly established in early childhood... Parents can promote their children's language and literacy development in a myriad of ways supported by empirical literature."<sup>vi</sup> In fact, Whittaker and Pianta found in 2012 a "...positive relationship between number of hours that children and parents spend in literacy-related instructional services and child outcomes."<sup>vii</sup>

In a blog post about reducing intergenerational poverty, Professor Jack P. Shonkoff notes, "Achieving sustained prosperity in any society depends on building a strong foundation in all children in order to help them fulfill many roles: successful learners, healthy and productive workers, contributing members of their community, and effective parents of the next generation... One promising path is to focus on fostering the skills in adults that allow them to be both better parents and better employees."<sup>viii</sup>

School Superintendent MaryEllen Elia, in an interview by the Tampa Tribune in 2013 entitled *Parents Have Biggest Impact on Students' Success*, said, "If students see how important education is to their parents, and if the parents are constantly underscoring that, it makes a huge difference in the way students focus. If parents believe they can be successful, if they work together, then students believe they can be successful."<sup>ix</sup>

PIAAC findings confirm earlier large-scale studies connecting skills and employment. According to a 2006-2008 U.S. Census Bureau study, education levels had more effect on earnings over a 40-year span in the workforce than any other demographic factor, such as gender, race and Hispanic origin.<sup>x</sup> Other studies have gone on to confirm the corresponding relationship of family poverty and children’s educational attainment.

**Adult Outcomes by Poverty Status between the Prenatal Year and Age 5<sup>xi</sup>**

	<i>Income below the official U.S. poverty line</i>	<i>Income between one and two times the poverty line</i>	<i>Income more than twice the poverty line</i>
Completed years of schooling	11.8	12.7	14.0
Earnings (\$1,000s)	\$17.9	\$26.8	\$39.7
Annual work hours	1,512	1,839	1,963
Food stamps	\$896	\$337	\$70
Poor health	13%	13%	5%
Arrested (men only)	26%	21%	13%
Nonmarital birth (women only)	50%	28%	9%

Source: Duncan and Magnuson, 2011

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/publications.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> October 8, 2013, <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/launch-of-oecd-survey-of-adult-skills.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> McGraw-Hill Research Foundation, The Return on Investment from Adult Education and Training, <http://www.mcgraw-hillresearchfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/the-return-on-investment-from-adult-education-and-training.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> Center for Early Literacy learning, *Relationship Between Child Participation in Everyday Activities and Early Literacy and Language Development*, [http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellreviews/CELLreviews\\_v6\\_n1.pdf](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellreviews/CELLreviews_v6_n1.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Parecki, Andrea and Gear, Sabra, *Parent Participation in Family programs: Involvement in Literacy Interactions, Adult and Child Instruction, and Assessment*, 2013

<sup>vii</sup> Whittaker, Jessica, and Pianta, Robert, *Assessing Early Childhood Classrooms*, in Wasik, Barbara (Ed.), *Handbook of Family Literacy*, 2012, pp.401-416.

<sup>viii</sup> Shonkoff, Jack P., *Strengthening Adult Capacities to Improve Child Outcomes: A New Strategy for Reducing Intergenerational Poverty*, <http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/ExclusiveCommentary.aspx?id=7a0f1142-f33b-40b8-82eb-73306f86fb74>

<sup>ix</sup> Hillsborough Superintendent of Schools MaryEllen Elia, <http://tbo.com/news/education/parents-have-biggest-impact-on-studentsx2019-success-20130817/>

<sup>x</sup> *Education Impacts Work-Life Earnings Five Times More Than Other Demographic Factors*, US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb11-153.html>

<sup>xi</sup> The ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education, *Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward*, [http://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty\\_and\\_education\\_report.pdf](http://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty_and_education_report.pdf)