



## **Adult Education Pays... For Safer and Healthier Communities**

On November 13, 2013, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released *Time for US to Reskill? What the [PIAAC] Survey of Adult Skills Says*.<sup>i</sup> The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (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>ii</sup>

Commenting on the initial release of the PIAAC findings, OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría said, “Proficiency in basic skills affects more than earnings and employment. In all countries, adults with lower literacy proficiency are far more likely than those with better literacy skills to report poor health, to perceive themselves as objects rather than actors in political processes, and to have less trust in others.”<sup>iii</sup>

As part of a supplement to the original PIAAC findings, the *U.S. PIAAC Prison Study*, which is currently underway, will sample 1,200 inmates aged 16 to 74 in state, federal, or private prisons. Inmates will take the same assessments in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments, but the background questionnaire will ask about activities in prison, such as participation in academic programs and ESL classes or experiences with prison jobs.<sup>iv</sup>

Pending the prison study findings’ release in early 2016, information about incarcerated individuals was reviewed in other sources. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, “every school day, nearly 7,000 students [in the US] become dropouts. Annually, that adds up to about 1.2 million students who will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled. Lacking a high school diploma, these individuals will be far more likely than graduates to spend their lives periodically unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in and out of the prison system”.<sup>v</sup>

In a university study, 16- to 24-year-old high school dropouts were 63 times more likely to be institutionalized than those with a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>vi</sup>

Lower educational attainment is directly associated with increased arrest and incarceration rates, particularly for men.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2010, federal, state, and local governments spent more than \$260 billion on the criminal justice system.<sup>viii</sup> The national average for educating a student is \$12,643 per year while the annual state average cost to house an inmate is more than double that amount, at \$28,323.<sup>ix</sup>

≈◇≈

Health literacy is “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “Limited health literacy affects people of all ages, races, incomes, and education levels, but the impact of limited health literacy disproportionately affects lower socioeconomic and minority groups. It affects people’s ability to search for and use health

information, adopt healthy behaviors, and act on important public health alerts. Limited health literacy is also associated with worse health outcomes and higher costs”.<sup>x</sup>

The PIAAC survey indicated that adults in the US with low literacy skills reported poor or fair health four times more often than those with higher skills.<sup>xi</sup> This proportion is double the average ratio observed across participating countries.<sup>xii</sup>

In two studies of people with diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma, researchers found that literacy skills were the strongest link between patients and their knowledge of their disease, even when other factors such as education level were taken into consideration.<sup>xiii</sup>

Without clear information and an understanding of prevention and self-management of conditions, people are more likely to skip necessary medical tests. They also end up in the emergency room more often, and they have a hard time managing chronic diseases, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.<sup>xiv</sup>

“Inadequate health literacy costs the U.S. health care system an estimated \$30 billion to \$73 billion annually,” according to the National Academy on an Aging Society.<sup>xv</sup>

Two decades of research “indicate that today’s health information is presented in a way that isn’t usable by most Americans” concludes HHS. “Nearly 9 out of 10 adults have difficulty using the everyday health information that is routinely available in our health care facilities, retail outlets, media, and communities”.<sup>xvi</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/time-for-the-u-s-to-reskill\\_9789264204904-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/time-for-the-u-s-to-reskill_9789264204904-en)

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

<sup>iii</sup> OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría, October 8, 2013, <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/launch-of-oecd-survey-of-adult-skills.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national\\_supp.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_supp.asp)

<sup>v</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief, Nov. 2011 <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HighCost.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Andrew Sum et al, The Consequences of Dropping out of High School, 2009

[http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/files/resources/consequences\\_of\\_dropping\\_out\\_of\\_high\\_school.ashx](http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/files/resources/consequences_of_dropping_out_of_high_school.ashx), p. 9.

<sup>vii</sup> Caroline Wolf Harlow, *Education and Correctional Populations* Jan. 2003.

<sup>viii</sup> T. Kyckelhahn, *Justice Expenditures and Employment Extracts, 2008*, <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4679>

<sup>ix</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, *Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings*, 2013, <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SavingFutures.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> US Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, 2010 <http://www.health.gov/communication/HLActionPlan/>

<sup>xi</sup> OECD, *Time for the US To ReSkill?*, p. 24.

<sup>xii</sup> OECD, *US Country Note Survey of Adult Skills First Results* <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Country%20note%20-%20United%20States.pdf>, p. 7.

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://nnlm.gov/outreach/consumer/hlthlit.html>

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> The Council on State Governments, Health Literacy Fact Sheet,

<http://www.csg.org/knowledgecenter/docs/Toolkit03HealthLiteracy.pdf>, p. 2.

<sup>xvi</sup> National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy <http://www.health.gov/communication/hlactionplan/>.