

*For Immediate Release*

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## **Study Shows Millions of American Adults Continue to Lack Basic Literacy Skills**

The 2003 National Adult Literacy Survey (NAAL) released today showed that tens of millions of adults lack basic literacy skills and that Americans have made very few advances in literacy since the study was last conducted in 1992.

The NAAL assessment measured how well individuals 16 years of age and older performed tasks using printed materials similar to those they would use in their daily lives - newspapers, tax forms, job applications, and reading maps and graphs. Skills were rated in five levels: **non-literate in English, below basic literacy, basic literacy, intermediate literacy, or proficient literacy.**

The survey determined 30 million adults (14%) have below basic skills. While these individuals may be able to do very simplistic activities such as signing a form, they are not able to perform many simple everyday tasks such as using a television guide to find a specific program. An additional 63 million adults (29%) have basic literacy skills, 95 million (44%) are in the intermediate category, and 28 million (13%) are considered to have proficient literacy skills. Approximately 11 million, mostly immigrant adults, fall into the non-literate in English category. Americans did make gains in handling tasks that involve math, such as calculating numbers on tax forms or bank statements. But even in that area, many adults showed only enough skills to perform simple daily activities.

“This national study clearly shows that a large number of adults lack the basic skills that many people take for granted,” said Greg Smith, Executive Director of the Florida Literacy Coalition.

One finding that may have a significant impact on Florida, is the high percentage of Hispanic adults who fall into the below basic category. This population, which represented 12% of the NAAL study participants, accounted for 39% of the adults with below basic skills.

“This study shows that many Americans are being left behind because of limited literacy skills,” said Smith. “This fact has tremendous implications for our economy and the general quality of life of our citizens.”

The study also reported a strong correlation between literacy abilities and employment — 35 percent in the below basic category have full time jobs, compared to 64 percent in the proficient category.

Individuals who have below basic skills average less than half of the median weekly income of adults who function at the proficient level. These individuals are also much more likely to be unemployed than adults in the intermediate and proficient levels.

Age was also an important factor. Adults 65 and older recorded the lowest average literacy skills. Overall the literacy level for this population increased between 1992 and 2003.

The study also highlighted the fact that only 13% of the adult population function at the proficient literacy level. Sample tasks of this level included comparing view points in two editorials and computing and comparing the cost per ounce of food items. Seventy percent of adults with college degrees read below the proficient level in prose literacy.

“Given that there has been little change over the last decade in the number of adults with poor reading and writing skills, the time is right to refocus our efforts locally and nationally on the importance of offering quality, low cost literacy instruction to adult in need,” said Smith. “The increased focus on reading in Florida in recent years will hopefully help us to buck this national trend.”

For additional information visit:

National Center for Education’s Statistic’s NAAL News <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/>

ProLiteracy International [www.proliteracy.org](http://www.proliteracy.org)

### **Florida Literacy Coalition**

Established in 1985, The Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida.

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