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One in Five Florida Adults Lacks Basic Literacy Skills

More than 2.6 million adults in Florida— or 20 percent of those 16 and older — lack even the most basic reading skills, according to estimates released Thursday by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Florida, with its large immigrant population, has the third lowest adult literacy level of all the states, behind California and New York. The state experienced a 33% increase over ten years in the percentage of people who fall in the lowest literacy skill level, with rates ranging from a low of 7 percent in St. John's County to 52 percent in Miami-Dade.

The findings come from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), a survey of more than 19,000 Americans ages 16 and older. The 2003 survey is a follow-up to a similar one in 1992.

“This issue is not going away. Employers are increasingly expecting workers to have at least a GED or high school diploma.” said Greg Smith, Executive Director of the Florida Literacy Coalition. “There are few things that contribute to one’s quality of life more than literacy. Whether you’re completing a job application or reading to your child for the first time, there is a certain dignity that comes with having the basic reading and writing skills that allows you to navigate through life.”

Nationally about 14.5 percent, or 32 million adults older than age 16, lack what the report calls "basic prose literacy" or the ability to read, in English, materials arranged in sentences and paragraphs. While these individuals may be able to do very simplistic activities such as signing a form, they are not able to perform many everyday tasks such as understanding a doctor’s written instructions or using a television guide to find a specific program.

NCES engaged in a complex analysis that took into account NAAL data results as well as U.S. Census data in areas such as income, immigration, ethnicity and educational

attainment. Users of the results need to be aware that the margins of error associated with these model-based estimates of adults lacking basic prose literacy are significant.

“Hopefully we will see these study results prompt a call to action at a time when educational resources have been getting scarcer.” Smith added, “There is a critical need for volunteer literacy tutors throughout the state. A few hours a week can really make a difference in a person’s life.”

To access the study, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/overview.aspx> . This site provides estimates for all states and counties in the continental United States and allows users to compare adult literacy rates by state or county and trace adult literacy rates over time.

About the 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.

As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida’s Adult Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy providers. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.

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