



To your health

October is Health Literacy Month, a time when advocates raise awareness about the importance of understandable health communication.

The need is huge: The American Medical Association reports that 46% of American adults are functionally illiterate in dealing with the health care system. Functional health literacy is worse among the elderly and patients who report overall poor health. Thus, the population most in need of health care is least able to read and understand information needed to function as a patient. As a result, many adults have difficulty reading and understanding directions for taking medications, do not know how to complete medical consent forms, and have problems dealing with the intricacies in accessing health care and with a variety of other health-related issues.

Here are some resources that may help adult educators working on health literacy:

A **Health Literacy Curriculum** for beginning to low-intermediate ABE learners is available at <http://healthliteracynetwork.org/curriculum/index.html>. The curriculum was developed and researched over a five-year period, then enhanced and organized by veteran adult educator Meg Schofield. It is designed to provide important health information to adults, while simultaneously providing effective literacy skills instruction.

“There are 18 sections in the curriculum, each providing subject-related vocabulary, sight words, graphics, reading activities, phonics activities, and supplemental activities. All can be printed and used in the classroom, and there is a downloadable instructors’ manual, as well,” said Claudia Bianca-DeBay, Nevada’s NV CASAS Trainer/Resource Specialist. “It is thorough, easy for teachers and students to use, and especially user-friendly for the learner.”

The California Health Literacy Initiative at <http://cahealthliteracy.org/>, a central resource for health literacy information and training, hosts presentations and resources for adult educators, health professionals, and literacy students.

Nevada Connections, April 2009, lists additional resources, including seven Web sites students can use to practice their communication skills regarding health issues.

Fast facts about health literacy

- Health Literacy is often defined as the ability to read, understand, and act upon health-related information.
- Research studies show that persons with limited health literacy skills:
 - are more likely to skip important preventive measures such as mammograms, Pap smears, and flu shots. These patients enter the health care system when they are sicker than those with adequate health literacy skills.
 - are more likely to have chronic conditions and are less able to manage them effectively.
 - make greater use of services designed to treat complications of disease and less use of services designed to prevent complications.
 - exhibit higher rates of hospitalization and use of emergency services.
- Low health literacy may also have negative psychological effects. One study found that those with limited health literacy skills reported a sense of shame about their skill level. As a result, they may hide reading or vocabulary difficulties to maintain their dignity.

Source: www.health.gov/communication/literacy/quickguide/factsliteracy.htm



What Congress sees about adult education

The National Council of State Directors of Adult Education recently released *The Blue Book*, a resource for legislators and stakeholders, showing demographics and impact of adult education programs by state. Information is based on 2007-2008 NRS (National Reporting System) data and the Grant Awards Table for 2008. Nevada's page reflects data for the federally funded (AEFLA) programs only; it does not include data for the Adult High School programs.

The introduction includes this overview of adult education for the nation:

- Adult education programs serve 2.5 million of the 93 million who could benefit from services. There are waiting lists in 40 of the 42 states surveyed.
- Reportedly, half of the adult students have a learning disability. They have average or above intelligence, but process information differently than many others, which might explain why they were not successful in school as children.
- Nearly half of the students are English language learners. One-third are adult secondary students seeking a GED or diploma. The remainder come to adult education to qualify for a job or to keep a job, to help their children with homework, and if a senior, for help with personal finance, personal health literacy, Medicaid, and Medicare.
- Providers include schools, community colleges, community based organizations, non-profits, universities, housing developments, libraries, and others. This diversity links adult education with a number of other support services in the community and at work.
- Eighty percent of adult education teachers are part-time, mainly because most students can commit only part of their day to learning. Work, community, and family responsibilities consume much of their available time. Part-time teachers bring a richness from their other professions, but significant professional development is required to provide them with the skills they need to respond to the learning needs and levels of adult learners.
- Adult education programs are successful in meeting their performance measures as identified in the federal law and negotiated each year with the Department of Education. Those measures include: educational gains in reading, math, and/or English; completion of secondary education; transition to postsecondary education; employment; and retaining employment.

The full *Book* can be accessed from www.ncsdae.org/.



ESL Resources

The CAELA (Center for Adult English Language Acquisition) Network provides assistance to professional developers, teachers, administrators, and others across the country who work with adults learning English. The project is funded by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), U.S. Department of Education. Resources of special interest to practitioners include:

- ✓ Briefs and Digests — downloadable summaries of current evidence-based information on issues related to adult English language acquisition.
- ✓ *Network News* — a free electronic newsletter, published quarterly and featuring updates about resources and information of interest to practitioners working with adult ESL students.
- ✓ The ESL Resource Database — categorizes and annotates over 200 documents of interest to teachers, administrators, students, and researchers.

Recently released Brief: *Teaching Pronunciation to Adult English Language Learners*, which reviews features of English that can have an impact on teaching and learning English pronunciation. The Brief looks at current research on how adults learn English pronunciation and describes ways for teachers to teach pronunciation more effectively. Go to www.cal.org/caelanetwork/, click on "resources," then on "Briefs and Digests" to download this and other helpful publications.

Report looks at preparing students for labor market

In July, the President's Council of Economic Advisers released *Preparing the Workers of Today for the Jobs of Tomorrow*, outlining how the U.S. labor market is expected to grow over the next few years. The report includes information on likely shifts and changes in the labor market, skills and training that will likely be most relevant in growing occupations, the importance of worker flexibility, and how the construction and manufacturing sectors are expected to rebound as a result of the Recovery Act.

According to the report, well trained and highly skilled workers will be best positioned to secure high-wage jobs, thereby fueling American prosperity. Occupations requiring higher educational attainment are projected to grow much faster than those with lower education requirements, with the fastest growth among occupations that require an associate's degree or a postsecondary vocational award. The report lists these key attributes of a well-trained workforce and an effective education and training system:

Employers value workers who can think critically and solve problems. Many highly-paid occupations require workers with good analytic and interactive skills.

Occupations that employ large shares of workers with postsecondary education and training are growing faster than others. While expected growth in construction and some manufacturing industries would create job opportunities at all skill levels, workers will be better positioned for good jobs if they acquire additional training and education. Occupations that have grown recently require more formal postsecondary schooling than occupations that have declined.

The U.S. post-high school education and training system provides valuable skills to those who complete programs in high-growth fields. However, it could be more effective at encouraging completion and responding to the needs of the labor market

Elements of a more effective system include: a solid early childhood, elementary, and secondary system that ensures students have strong basic skills; institutions and

The report notes that adult basic education, GED and English language programs are critical because they help American adults and immigrants improve their basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and English language proficiency. It cites Washington state's I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education Skills Training) program as one that appropriately "blends basic literacy skills and occupational training in a more effective approach to teaching adults who need both basic skills and job skills."

programs that have goals that are aligned and curricula that are cumulative; close collaboration between training providers and employers to ensure that curricula are aligned with workforce needs; flexible scheduling, appropriate curricula, and financial aid designed to meet the needs of students; incentives for institutions and programs to continually improve and innovate; and accountability for results.

Given the dynamic nature of the U.S. labor market and ongoing technological change, worker flexibility is key. In 2003, for example, a quarter of American workers were in jobs that were not even listed among the Census Bureau's Occupation Codes in 1967, and technological change has only accelerated since then. Environmental-related occupations — which are expected to experience tremendous growth over the next decade — did not exist in comparable data prior to 2000. As we build a new foundation for economic growth, the nation's workers will be better prepared for ever-changing opportunities if they have strong analytical and interpersonal skills. High-quality education and training is the best way to prepare the workers of today for the jobs of tomorrow.

To access the Executive Summary and full report, visit www.whitehouse.gov/ and search for the report.

Get an MIT education — from home, for free

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) offers courseware online through its OpenCourseWare (OCW) program (<http://ocw.mit.edu/>). Nearly all MIT undergraduate and graduate course content (e.g., lecture notes, exams, and videos), is available to anyone — online, at no charge.

Because OCW is not a credit-bearing or degree-granting initiative, there is no registration or enrollment process nor are there prerequisites to use the materials. The site does not provide access to MIT faculty.



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NIFL enhances Web content

The National Institute for Literacy has redesigned its Web site (www.nifl.gov) and added several new features:

- ✓ A description of Learning to Achieve, the Institute's learning disabilities training program. (Note: Two Nevadans, Noreen Tabb-Martin [702/646-5699] and Linda-Schneider-Erger [lschneider@tmcc.edu, 775/829-9033] attended a week-long training in August and gave it an A-plus!)
- ✓ The updated and revised Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles (ASRP) project provides research-based assessment strategies to improve reading instruction for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) learners.
- ✓ The new Professional Development page includes a link to a one-hour, self-paced online course that introduces users to information about scientific research. It will help educators develop the ability to determine which research findings can be applied in their educational practice and are most likely to have a positive impact.

GED newsletter debuts

In August, GED Testing Service® published the inaugural edition of *The Community*, a monthly newsletter for GED testing professionals and adult educators. According to the Service's Marketing & Public Relations Unit, "By opening the lines of communication with this community, we hope to provide information, updates, and ideas that might be helpful in your every-day work. We also hope to learn more about how you think the testing program can grow and change to better serve adult learners."

The premier issue includes pieces about closing out the 2002 Test series; content changes and framework for each of the content area assessments on the GED Test, 5th Edition; an Examiners corner; and many more meaty articles. Each issue will also include a sampling of local news stories from around the nation. All subscribers to *The Community* are invited to submit links to news stories in their neighborhoods.

Subscribe at www.GEDtest.org/thecommunity.

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