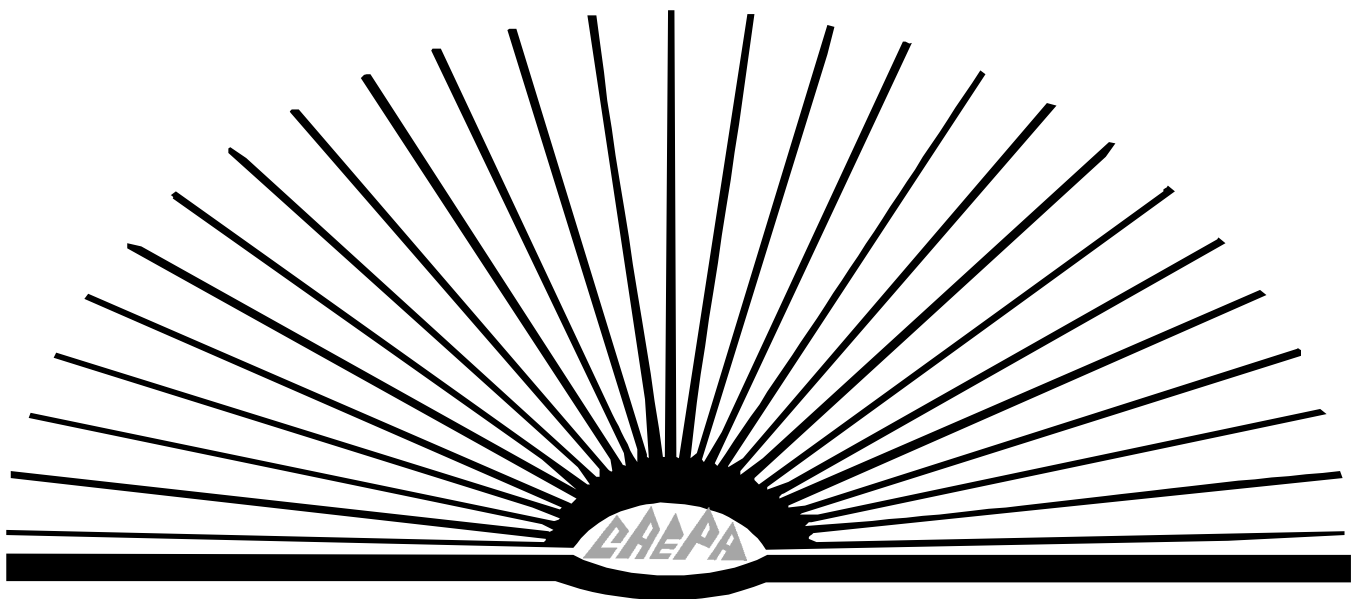


COLORADO  
ADULT  
LITERACY



THE COLORADO ADULT EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION — APRIL 2001

FACT BOOK

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With appreciation and thanks to those from the Colorado Department of Education who provided the inspiration and support for this project and were instrumental in collection of information.

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*We are a nation divided. On one side, adults have the skills and knowledge to find and keep good jobs, help their children in school and at home, and play active roles in their communities. Adults on the other side lack those skills and they and their families are falling further and further behind.*

—NATIONAL LITERACY SUMMIT 2000 STEERING COMMITTEE

# MEASURING LITERACY

According to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, literacy is defined as

*An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.*

—WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT OF 1998

Although the vast majority of Americans can read and write to some degree, the increased demands for functioning in a technological society require higher skills; therefore, this definition relates literacy to the ability to meet the requirements for today's world.

In order to discover the state of functional literacy in the United States, in 1992 the government conducted a survey of 26,000 adults ages 16 and older for three types of literacy: prose, document, and quantitative. A five-point scale was developed for each, and the results of the survey will be repeated in 2002. The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey's "The State of Literacy in America" (1998) reports that applying its findings to 1990 demographics 21 percent of Americans and 13.1 percent of Coloradans functioned at Level 1, the lowest of the five levels of literacy.

The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (1993) also found that those in Level 1 are much more likely to

- Live in poverty
- Receive welfare
- Be unemployed
- Earn lower salaries
- Be imprisoned
- Be a person of color
- Have low self-esteem
- Be a high school dropout
- Live in a rural or urban poor area

When data from the 1992 Adult Literacy Survey is applied to 1990 Colorado demographics, 45 percent of the population functioned in Levels 1 and 2 (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, cited in Center for At-Risk Education [CARE], 1999, p. 6).

The 1992 Adult Literacy Survey (Overview, p. 8) also found the following:

- Approximately 90 million adults who performed in Levels 1 and 2 did not necessarily perceive themselves as being "at risk."
- A third of the participants functioned in Level 3, demonstrating ability to "integrate information from relatively long or dense text or from documents" and to read a math word problem and determine what math operation to perform and what numerical information to use to solve the problem.
- About one fifth of the participants functioned in

Levels 4 and 5, which called on the ability to integrate and synthesize information and draw inferences from long and complex documents and text passages.

## SKILLS OF ADULTS AT LEVEL 1

<i>Can Usually Perform</i>	<i>Cannot Usually Perform</i>
Sign one's name	Locate eligibility from a table of employee benefits
Identify a country in a short article	Locate intersection on a street map
Locate one piece of information in a sports article	Locate two pieces of information in a sports article
Locate the expiration date information on a driver's license	Identify and enter background information on a social security card application
Total a bank deposit entry	Calculate total costs of purchases from an order form

*Source:* National Institute for Literacy [NIFL], 1998, "State of Literacy," p. 4.

# INDIVIDUALS MOST IN NEED OF LITERACY SERVICES IN COLORADO

This information was taken from 1990 census figures unless otherwise mentioned.

## FAMILIES AND LITERACY

- The parents of 72,000 preschool and schoolchildren whose lack of a high school degree places them at educational risk (Colorado's Adult Education Efforts, 1999, p. 15)
- Children from Colorado's 442,001 single-parent families (U.S. 1990 Census, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 9)

## NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

- More than 300,000 Coloradans who speak a language other than English in their homes, one-third of whom do not speak English very well (LaPlant, 1997, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 9)
- Thirty-four thousand refugees residing in Colorado in 1998, with 1,100 new refugees arriving each year (Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1996)

## LOW-INCOME ADULTS

- More than 270,000 Colorado adults (9.4% of the population) living in poverty in 1996/97 (Poverty, 1997, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 6).

## HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

- Two hundred and sixty thousand adult Coloradans who had not completed high school (Educational Attainment, 1996, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 6) (Table 13)
- A disproportionately high number of Hispanics, Blacks, and American Indians (*CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 10)

## INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

- More than 2,880,000 adults in Colorado with some kind of disability (FASTATS, 1994, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 7)

## INCARCERATED AND INSTITUTIONALIZED ADULTS

- Eleven thousand incarcerated adults (Colorado Department of Corrections [CDC], cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 10)
- More than 800 residents of Fort Logan Mental Health Institute and Colorado State Hospital (CDC, cited in *CARE Plan*, 1999, p. 11)

## HOMELESS ADULTS

- An estimated 13,320 homeless—most in the Denver area (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, cited in *CARE Plan*, p. 11)

## UNMET NEED FOR SERVICES IS GREAT

The need for literacy services in Colorado exceeds the supply (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 2).

- According to the National Center for education Statistics, only 7–10 percent of inmates with low literacy skills receive literacy education while incarcerated (Langley, 1999, p. 2).
- In 1998, of more than 76,000 Colorado preschoolers and schoolchildren with parents who did not graduate from high school, only one-third, or 26,000, had parents who participated in adult education programs (Colorado's Adult Education, 1999, p. 1).
- In 1996, only one-tenth of adult Coloradans needing literacy skills were served (Learning Lasts, 1997, pp. 9, 13).

# LITERACY AND POVERTY

## LITERACY AND POVERTY

- Forty-three percent of adults at Level 1 live in poverty compared to four percent of those at Level 5 (NIFL, 1998, p. 5).
- Eighty-five percent of participants in adult education programs have annual incomes well below the national average of \$16,450 per family of four in the contiguous states (Colorado Components of Change, 1998, cited in *CARE Plan*, p. 6)
- More than 70 percent of adults at the lowest levels of literacy have no job or only a part-time job (Statistical Abstracts of the U.S., 1998, cited in *Impact of Literacy*, 1998, p. 1).
- In 1996, 50 percent of Colorado adults receiving welfare did not have a high school diploma or GED certificate (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 29).
- In 1998, those who did not graduate from high school or possess a GED earned \$6,000–\$7,000 less than those whose highest degree was a high school diploma (cited in *Impact of Literacy*, 1998, p. 1).

## LITERACY PROGRAMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In 1997, 14,537 participants in Colorado adult education programs benefited both themselves and their state (Economic Value, 1997, p. 1).

- One in five of the participants who entered the program underemployed (933 of 4,924) gained employment within a year.
- One in eight of the participants who entered a program employed (481 of 4,112) either kept a job that was in jeopardy or earned a promotion within a year
- One in ten participants who entered a program on public assistance (243 of 2,461) was removed from the welfare rolls within a year.

The following chart shows a conservative estimate of the monetary impact of 243 Colorado adult learners who left welfare and joined the workforce and 1,414 Colorado adult learners who report improved employment status in 1997 (The Economic Value, 1997, p. 2).

## NET GAINS IN MILLIONS

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Minimum Wage</i>	<i>High School Wage</i>
FICA & Sales Tax Revenues	\$3.0	\$8.1
Welfare Savings	+\$0.9	+\$0.9
Education Costs	-\$0.3	-\$0.3
<i>Total</i>	\$3.6	\$8.7

According to the 1992 National Literacy Survey, “Literacy can be thought of as currency in this society. Just as adults with little money have difficulty meeting their basic needs, those with limited literacy skills are likely to find it more challenging to pursue their goals—whether these involve job advancement, consumer decision making, citizenship, or other aspects of their lives” (Overview, p. 11).

# LITERACY AND FAMILIES

“One of the strongest predictors of an individual’s level of educational attainment—perhaps the strongest predictor—is the parents’ level of educational attainment. Of those who did not complete high school, 73 percent were raised by parents who never completed high school or earned a GED themselves” (Colorado’s Adult, 1999, p. 1).

- ♦ Low parental education attainment and poverty are risk factors for students enrolling in school not ready to learn (One Third of Colorado’s Children, 1999, p. 1).
- ♦ Nearly 40 percent of Denver’s new babies are born to high school dropouts. Also, 22.6% of Denver teen mothers have another child. (Seibert, 1999).

## BENEFITS OF LITERACY EFFORTS FOR FAMILIES

- ♦ As the education level of adults improves, so does their children’s success in school. Helping low-literate adults improve their basic skills has a direct and measurable impact on both the education and quality of life of their children (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 30).
- ♦ Children of adults who participate in literacy programs improve their grades and test scores, improve their reading skills, and are less likely to drop out (CARE Plan, 1999, p. 12).
- ♦ Adults participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater literacy gains than those in adult-only programs, are more likely to remain in the program, learn more and continue to learn, and report that their own education had a positive effect on their children’s education. (CARE Plan, 1999, p. 12).
- ♦ Children participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains than children in child-only programs (CARE Plan, 1999, p. 12).
- ♦ For every family that moves off ADFC through family literacy, the state saves \$4,328 per year (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 29).

Colorado’s 1998 GED graduates create a supportive educational environment at home (Lance and Bates, 1998).

- ♦ 17% got a library card for themselves or a child
- ♦ 16% discuss school matters with their children more frequently
- ♦ 15% started—or did better at—helping children with school work
- ♦ 14% acquired a home computer
- ♦ 11% began communicating—or communicating more—with their children’s teachers
- ♦ 11% report that their children’s attitudes toward school is more positive

A survey of 100 Colorado family literacy projects in the spring of 1999 revealed that (CARE, 1999, Colorado Family Literacy Project Survey):

- ♦ 39 percent of the families reported increased reading time
- ♦ 39 percent of the families reported acquisition of library card
- ♦ 34 percent of the families reported increased participation in school activities
- ♦ 44 percent of the parents reported increased self-esteem
- ♦ 39 percent of the parents reported acquisition of a job or better job
- ♦ 39 percent of parents reported improved spoke English/ESL performance
- ♦ 33 percent or parents reported the pursuit of further education
- ♦ 38 percent of children reported increased reading
- ♦ 22 percent of children reported starting school at grade level and progressing from grade to grade

# LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

“Eighty percent of the workforce of 2005 is working today, and while K-16 education reform and renewal is vital to our health as a nation, it is not enough to meet employers’ needs for adequate workers today. The demand for qualified workers must be met to ensure Colorado’s continued economic vitality” (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 9).

- Workers who lack a high school diploma earn a mean monthly income of \$452 compared to \$1,829 for those with a bachelor’s degree (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).
- The cycle of poverty, child abuse, and drug use is “nearly impossible to break without the salary a diploma brings” (Seibert, 1999).

Those entering the workforce with lower literacy skills receive fewer training opportunities than those with higher level literacy skills.

- Workers with higher levels of education are the ones more likely to be chosen to receive employer-sponsored training, making it difficult for less educated workers to remedy their deficiencies (Berryman, 1995).
- According to the National Alliance of Business, companies spend about \$30 billion a year on remedial education, but most goes to assist employees with high skills; only about one-quarter of businesses spend any money on basic education (White Paper, 1999).

“The three most critical challenges facing the American economy are the impending labor shortage; the shift to an information-based economy; and the demand for a more educated work force” (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 30).

- Workers who lack literacy skills cause American businesses to lose an estimated \$140 to \$300 million in productivity each year according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).
- Over 60% of frontline workers in the goods-producing industry have difficulty applying information from a text to a required task (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).

- More than 40 percent of the U.S. workforce and more than 50 percent of high school graduates do not have the basic skills to do their jobs. Even college graduates suffer from the skills gap: 16 percent have inadequate basic skills (Bloom and LaFleur, 1999).
- Between 1992 and the year 2000, 89% of the new jobs were predicted to require post-secondary literacy and math skills (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 29).
- Adults who quit high school—and even more so, those who fail to begin it—are much less likely to have computers or to use them at home, school, or work, putting them at a disadvantage for employment (Functional Illiteracy, 1999, p. 1).
- Only 6.3 percent of individuals without a diploma have internet access compared to 48 percent of college-educated individuals (Reddy & Green, 2000, p. 5).

## BENEFITS OF LITERACY FOR THE WORKPLACE

“Better educated and trained workers are less likely to quit, are less likely to be laid off, and experience shorter unemployment spells if they are, all of which improve their long-term earnings” (Berryman, 1995).

*Benefits to Employers* (Bloom & LaFleur, 1999)

- A 15 to 20 percent increase in productivity
- Improved capacity to use new technology in the workplace
- Reduced error rate
- Increased quality of work

*Benefits to Employees* (Bloom & LaFleur, 1999)

- Higher wages
- Improved job security
- Promotions
- Heightened job satisfaction and self-esteem

# LITERACY AND THE PRISON POPULATION

Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) says that in the battle against crime, “the starting direction is education” (Prison-Based Education, 1997).

- Only 51 percent of prisoners have completed high school or its equivalent, as compared with 76 percent of the general population (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).
- Eleven percent of prisoners self-report having learning disabilities, compared with three percent of the general population (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).
- The average reading levels of inmates nationwide is below the fifth grade (Langley, 1999).
- Seventy percent of prisoners scored in the two lowest literacy levels of the National Adult Literacy Survey. This means that while they have some reading and writing skills, they are not adequately equipped to perform tasks like writing a letter, explaining an error on a credit card bill, or understanding a bus schedule (NIFL, *NIFL*, 1998).
- Only 4 to 7 percent attained the two highest literacy levels on the scales (ETS Research, 1996).

## EDUCATION IMPROVES INMATES' CHANCES OF SUCCESS ON RELEASE

- A national study show that prison education programs lead to substantial savings, higher productivity and employment levels for released inmates, and improved security within prisons (Prison-Based Education, 1997).
- Classes in anger management, effective communication skills, and parenting are being implemented in prisons throughout the country to help ensure that, once released, prisoners will have the tools necessary to function in today's society (Langley, 1999).

## EDUCATION REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF RECIDIVISM

- A Virginia study of 3,000 inmates found that 40 percent of those who did not participate in correctional education programs were reincarcerated, compared to 20 percent of those who did (Haigler, 1994).
- A 1996 Ohio study of 18,062 inmates recorded a 14 percent reduction in recidivism for inmates who received a GED in prison (Haigler, 1994).
- Despite a near 80% rearrest rate for juvenile offenders, that rate is reduced by 20% or more when juveniles are involved in quality reading instruction programs (Prison-Based Education, 1997).
- New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, and other states all report significantly lower recidivism for inmates involved in prison-based education programs, rates ranging from 15.5% to as low as 1% (Prison-Based Education, 1997).
- Eighty-nine percent of crimes are committed by repeat offenders. Each time an offender leaves the prison system and stays out, the taxpayers will save approximately \$22,000, the cost to house inmate for one year (Langley, 1999).

## COLORADO INMATES

- The Colorado Department of Corrections reports a total state prison population of over 11,000 in 1996 (CDC, cited in CARE, *Plan*, 1999, p. 10).
- From 1992 to 1996, an average of 39 percent of the total state correctional population was released each year (CDC, cited in CARE, *Plan*, 1999, p. 10).

Gina Davis of the Sussex Correctional Institution in Delaware says, “When the time is right, and the right attitude is there, incarcerated adults are the hungriest of learners” (Langley, 1999).

# HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Although high school graduation and completion rates have been improving over the past five years, they remain significantly lower for Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics. This is particularly alarming for Hispanics, whose numbers account for 57% of the growth in Colorado's school population from 1995 to 2000.

### MINORITIES DROP OUT AT HIGH RATES

(The Changing Face of Functional Illiteracy, 1998)

- Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans have the highest rate not completing high school.
- Almost half (48 percent) of Hispanic adults in Western states had not received a high school or GED diploma in 1996.
- Rates of illiteracy are converging for younger Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in Western States.

### RECENT COLORADO HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS ARE MOTIVATED TO COMPLETE GEDS

(How Colorado Dropouts, 1998)

- More than one-quarter of dropouts earn a GED certificate within two years of when they should have graduated.

- By 1992, of Colorado eighth graders who dropped out of school between 1988 and 1992 earned a GED: 29% earned a GED; 16% completed high school; 24% were working on a diploma or GED; and only 32% were still dropouts six years later.

Dropouts who earn a GED pay taxes (How Colorado Dropouts, 1998, p. 3).

### COLORADO GED GRADUATES & ESTIMATED INCREASED TAX REVENUES, 1993-97

Year	Colorado GED Graduates		Cumulative Increases (millions of dollars*)		
	Number	Cumulative	FICA (15.3%)	Sales Taxes (5.65%)	Total
1993	6,983	6,983	\$10.4	\$3.9	\$14.3
1994	7,056	14,039	\$13.3	\$5.0	\$18.3
1995	7,525	21,564	\$20.4	\$7.7	\$28.1
1996	8,126	29,690	\$28.1	\$10.6	\$38.7
1997	8,168	37,858	\$35.8	\$13.5	\$49.3

\*1998 dollars.

### COLORADO GRADUATION RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Race/Ethnicity	Graduation Rates		No. and % of School Population		Population Growth
	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995-2000*
American Indian	244 (49.2%)	321 (62.6%)	7,033 (1.1%)	8,701 (1.2%)	1,668 (2.5%)
Asian	990 (79.6%)	1,288 (85.2%)	16,713 (2.6%)	20,932 (2.9%)	4,219 (6.2%)
Black	1,396 (66.7%)	1,693 (69.1%)	35,772 (5.4%)	40,967 (5.7%)	5,195 (7.6%)
Hispanic	4,195 (60.0%)	5,172 (65.0%)	120,678 (18.4%)	159,600 (22.0%)	38,922 (57.0%)
White	25,584 (82.4%)	30,450 (85.3%)	476,083 (72.5%)	494,308 (68.2%)	18,225 (26.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,409 (77.4%)</b>	<b>38,924 (80.9%)</b>	<b>656,279 (100%)</b>	<b>724,508 (100%)</b>	<b>68,229 (100%)</b>

Source: Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 1995 and 2000.

\*Extrapolated from 1995 and 2000 data from CDE.

## OLDER ADULTS

The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey Findings for Older Adults (Executive Summary, 1992):

- Seventy-one percent of adults age 60 and older (compared to 41% of adults under age 60) demonstrate function at the lowest two levels of prose literacy.
- Sixty-eight percent of older adults (compared to 42 percent of adults under age 60) function at the lowest two levels of quantitative literacy.
- Eighty percent of older adults (compared to 44 percent of adults under age 60) function at the lowest two levels of document literacy.

### BENEFITS OF LITERACY FOR OLDER ADULTS

- Regardless of age group, literacy proficiencies tend to increase as level of education increases.
- Older adults who reported that they regularly use the public library outperformed those who said they do not.
- Older adults who are equipped with strong literacy skills are more likely to participate in civic activities and less likely to need assistance with everyday literacy tasks than are those with limited skills.

## LITERACY AND HEALTH

The National Coalition for Literacy reports that adults with low levels of basic skills are more likely to experience the following health concerns (Reddy & Green, 2000, p. 5):

- Poor health outcomes
- Problems negotiating health care system
- Problems managing chronic illness
- Higher health care costs for themselves and their insurers

### REPORTED HEALTH BENEFITS TO 1996 COLORADO GED RECIPIENTS (Lance & Bates, 1998, p. 15)

- 30% reported doing more to prevent poor health
- 17% reported receiving medical and dental check-ups more regularly
- 15% reported taking children for medical check-ups and inoculations more regularly
- 14% reported missing fewer days of work due to illness

# WHO IN COLORADO IS SERVED BY FAMILY AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS?

During FY 2000, 13,743 individuals participated in Colorado adult education programs with twelve or more contact hours, down from 15,846 in 1999 (CARE, 2000 and 2001).

## ETHNICITY OF ADULTS SERVED BY CARE IN 2000 (CARE, 2001)

- 432 American Indians or Alaskan Natives
- 844 Asians or Pacific Islanders
- 883 Blacks not of Hispanic origin
- 7,530 Hispanics
- 4,054 Whites not of Hispanic Origin

## STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS UPON ENTRY INTO ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM IN FY 1999 AND 2000\*

	1999	2000
Disabled Adults	377	292
Adults in Rural Areas	2,910	1,113
Adults in Urban Areas	12,409	12,630
Employed Adults	5,348	5,906
Unemployed Adults	4,840	4,114
Adults Not in the Labor Force	5,658	3,723
Adults on Public Assistance	2,034	2,105
Incarcerated Adults	293	N/A
High School Dropouts	14,595	N/A

*Source:* CARE, 2000, 2001.

\*Number may be duplicated.

## PARTICIPANT ACHIEVEMENTS FY 1999 AND 2000\*

	1999	2000
Obtained an Adult High School Diploma or GED	1734	1275
Entered Other Academic or Vocational Program	720	651
Received U.S. Citizenship	74	55
Registered to Vote or voted for the first time	122	70
Gained employment	1151	1124
Were removed from Public Assistance	57	120
Secured employment retention or obtained job advancement	496	413
Reported Reading more to their children	319	376
Reported greater involvement in their children's schooling	370	311

*Source:* CARE, 2000, 2001.

\*Number may be duplicated.

# RESOURCES FOR FAMILY/ADULT LITERACY IN COLORADO

As of January 2000, Colorado had 32 Adult/Family Literacy Programs, down from 35 in FY 1999 (CARE Plan, CDE, 1999, 2001).

Adult education programs operate on lean funds in Colorado. A comparison of 1996 funds per student shows:

Community College System	\$1500
K-12 System	\$4000
Adult/Family Literacy Programs	\$229*

\*In 2000, the cost rose to \$400 per student (CARE, 2001).

Colorado adult education programs provide services by partnering with other organizations: Colorado community colleges, libraries, Colorado Department of Education, workforce literacy groups, and other community and private organizations.

## SOURCES OF FUNDING IN COLORADO

Strategies Colorado adult/family literacy programs use to insure sustainability of projects (CARE, 1999):

Local contributions	34%
Fundraising projects	23%
Grant proposals	44%
Other sources	11%
Marketing of program services	8%

Adult/family literacy programs depend on a high number of part-time employees and volunteers for staffing and they suffer a reported 60% turnover rate (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 19).

## STAFFING OF ADULT/FAMILY LITERACY SERVICES

	1998	2000
Full time staff	177	170
Part time employees	403	380
Volunteers	621	635

Source: CARE, 2000, 2001.

*To meet the needs of its citizens and its work force, Colorado needs to allocate increase funding to adult and family literacy efforts:*

Colorado is one of only six states in the nation that does not support adult literacy with state funding (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 9).

In 1999, 43 percent of Family Literacy Projects that were discontinued cited reduced funding as the reason.

Increased funding could help market adult/family literacy services to the many who do not participate in adult education but would benefit from the services (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 13).

Volunteers are essential to every adult basic education program, but it is difficult to build a reliable quality educational system with largely untrained volunteers. The adult basic education field has difficulty attracting long-term, career-oriented teachers because of a lack of appropriate and adequate wages and quality of teaching environments (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 13).

While a 1996 opinion poll shows that Colorado citizens overwhelmingly support allocation of state funds for adult basic education (Public Opinion, 1997, p.1), its legislators remain hesitant to support adult literacy efforts with state funds (Learning Lasts, 1997, p. 8).

According to a 1997 report to Governor Romer (Learning Lasts, 1997, pp. 7-8):

*Adult education programs obtain important returns on investment with minimal expenditure. . . . Colorado's current reluctance to provide the adult population with basic education will be, if it is not already, a severe hindrance to its ability to compete in the increasingly global marketplace.*

# THE FUTURE OF ADULT/FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS IN COLORADO

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Colorado leads the nation in percentage of adults with college degrees as it has for seven of the last ten years. Also, it ties with Iowa for the rank of sixth in the nation in percentage of high school graduates (Ames, 2000).

A high graduation rate, however, is not enough to meet the needs of citizens (especially those at risk) in our fast-growing technological society. The Overview of the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey reminds us that even though “we are a better educated and more literate society than at any time in our history,” there have been periods of imbalance where “demands seemed to surpass levels attainment” (p. 11–12). According the U.S. Department of Labor, the rapid technological growth in our society has created a need for all individuals to become more literate and to develop advanced skills (cited in Overview, p. 12).

According to research in adult cognitive skill development, it takes long hours of instruction to meet the needs of low literate adults: “Becoming highly literate requires thousands of hours of reading and instruction because it means developing broad bodies of knowledge” (Sticht, p. 2). Nonnative speakers of English can be expected to take 500 to 1,000 hours of instruction to be able to function on the job for those who are already literate in their native language, more for those who are not (Adult ESL).

While Family/Adult Literacy programs have helped many improve their lives, the need exceeds the supply. The report “Learning Lasts a Lifetime” (1997) identifies the need for additional funding for staff, outreach, and coordination among workforce, education, and welfare programs to strengthen adult education in Colorado.

The National Coalition for Literacy issued the following call to action (Reddy & Green, 2000):

*By 2010 a system of high quality adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services will help adults in every community make measurable gains toward attaining their goals as family members, workers, citizens, and lifelong learners.*

To accomplish that goal, the Coalition recommends Federal in the amount of \$1 billion to Adult/Family Literacy providers and that states allocate an amount equal to 50% of federal funding to assure (1) quality services for adult students, (2) ease of access, and (3) sufficient resources to support quality and access (Reddy & Green, 2000, p. 6).

According to the National Literacy Summit 2000 Steering Committee (Reddy & Green, 2000, p. 3):

*Now is the time to deal with this growing divide, and to focus on the education of adults. Our society and economy grow more complex with every passing day, and all adults in the U.S. must have opportunities to continue learning throughout their lives.*

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