

Adult Literacy Rates in Indiana: 1992 and 2003

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A recently published report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) seeks to provide educators and policymakers a more comprehensive view of the nation's literacy by providing estimates for the percentages of adults lacking literacy skills. The NCES report is based on the survey results of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), which interviewed over 18,500 adults, and the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which interviewed over 24,000. The surveys were conducted by the NCES to measure the English literacy skills of the nation's adults (ages 16 and older). The following tables and figures utilize these recently produced estimates which provide policymakers and educators a more comprehensive view of the proportion of adults lacking literacy.

Indiana ranks among the best states in terms of the smallest percentage of residents aged 16 and

older lacking Basic prose literacy skills. In 1992, 10% of the estimated adult population in Indiana lacked these literacy skills, whereas in 2003, only 8% lacked Basic literacy skills. This decrease in the adult illiteracy rate occurred at the same time as an increase in the total estimated adult population, which increased 6.4% between 1992 and 2003. These two figures combined demonstrate that the estimated number of adults lacking Basic prose literacy skills in Indiana decreased 15% between 1992 and 2003.

Background

While the 2003 NAAL and the 1992 NALS were designed to provide direct estimates of literacy proficiency for the nation as a whole and for major population subgroups, neither survey was designed to provide policymakers or educators with estimates of the percentages of adults in the country or a state at the lowest literacy level. For this reason, NCES began to produce

these percentages using statistical models, which are referred to as indirect estimates.

The 2003 NAAL and the 1992 NALS produced direct estimates for three literacy types (Prose, Document, and Quantitative) which were then broken into four performance levels (Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient). To produce the indirect estimates, the NCES chose to examine the percent of adults lacking Basic prose literacy skills. Adults who lack these literacy skills range anywhere from not being able to understand any written information in English to being able to locate easily identifiable information in short prose texts. Adults who were not able to complete the assessments because of a language barrier were included in the NCES indirect estimates as lacking Basic prose literacy skills, whereas in the 2003 NAAL and the 1992 NALS direct estimates they were excluded.

TABLE 1. Overview of State Data for the Percentage of Adults (16+ Years) Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills

Year	Lowest	Highest	Median	Indiana
1992	7% (IA, WA)	25% (MS)	13%	10%
2003	6% (MN, NH, ND)	23% (CA)	11%	8%

TABLE 2. Percentage of Adults (16+ Years) Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills in Indiana and Neighboring States

1992			2003		
State	Percentage	Rank	State	Percentage	Rank
Indiana	10%	10th	Wisconsin	7%	4th
Wisconsin	10%	10th	Indiana	8%	11th
Michigan	12%	19th	Michigan	8%	11th
Ohio	12%	19th	Ohio	9%	15th
Illinois	15%	31st	Kentucky	12%	28th
Kentucky	19%	44th	Illinois	13%	31st

Summary

- While both the NAAL and the NALS made direct estimates of literacy proficiency, they did not provide estimates on the percentages of adults at the lowest literacy level. The NCES completed these indirect estimates and included them in the 2003 NAAL report; this data is represented in the following tables and graphs.
- The median percentage of adults lacking Basic prose literacy skills dropped two percent from 1992 to 2003; likewise this percentage dropped two percent in Indiana between 1992 and 2003, from 10% to 8%.
- Using the NCES estimated adult populations for Indiana, the total number of adults lacking Basic prose literacy skills decreased 15% between 1992 and 2003.
- In 2003, Indiana ranked 11th in the nation for the lowest percentage of adults lacking Basic prose literacy skills. In 2003, Indiana ranked 2nd among neighboring states, with Wisconsin having a lower percentage.

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults (16+) Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills - 1992



Figure 2. Percentage of Adults (16+) Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills - 2003



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