

Literacy Statistics

The U.S. is 125th in Literacy among all countries according to World Atlas

World Atlas. (2018, September 14). List of Countries By Literacy Rate. (<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-highest-literacy-rates-in-the-world.html>)

U.S. ranked 31st out of 35 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries in standardized tests.

<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa.html>

Low literacy is said to be connected to over \$230 billion a year in additional health care costs according to the [American Journal of Public Health](#),

United Nations. (2019). *Sustainable Development Goals: 2019 Report*. (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>)

Low literacy costs the U.S. at least \$225 billion each year in non-productivity in the workforce and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.

National Council for Adult Learning. (2015). *Adult Education Facts That Demand Priority Attention*. (<http://www.ncalamerica.org/AdultEDFacts&Figures1215.pdf>)

Children whose parents have low literacy skills have a 72% chance at reading at the lowest levels themselves, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research

National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)

1 in 3 children in 4th grade are below the basic reading level in the United States.

<https://online.regiscollege.edu/blog/child-illiteracy/>

80% of low-income 4th graders never reach reading proficiency.

<https://www.aecf.org/blog/low-reading-scores-show-majority-of-us-children-not-prepared-for-future-s#:~:text=Casey%20Foundation%20finds%20that%2080,future%20educational%20and%20economic%20success>

Around 40% of 4th graders are working below the NAEP Basic level in reading, the largest percentage since 2002. Fourth graders scoring below NAEP Basic likely cannot recognize a reason for a character's action implied in a story. About a third of 8th graders nationwide are failing to hit the NAEP Basic benchmark in reading — the largest percentage ever.

<https://www.nagb.gov/news-and-events/news-releases/2025/nations-report-card-decline-in-reading-progress-in-math.html>

Each year 1.3 million 4th graders in the U.S. read below basic levels, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

<https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2021025>

According to a 2023 Wall Street Journal article, the Nation's Report Card federal reading test showed that reading scores for 4th graders dropped from 35% in 2019 to 33% in 2022, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Randazzo, Sara, and Scott Calvert. "More States Threaten to Hold Back Third-Graders Who Can't Read," The Wall Street Journal, August 17, 2023.

<https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/more-states-threaten-to-hold-back-third-graders-who-cant-read-19f9765>

130 million adults in the United States struggle to read basic sentences.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2023/09/09/literacy-levels-in-the-us/70799429007/>

Students who don't meet proficient reading standards by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school

<https://www.aecf.org/blog/poverty-puts-struggling-readers-in-double-jeopardy-minorities-most-at-risk> and <https://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy>



High school graduation can be reasonably predicted by knowing someone's reading skill at the end of 3rd grade.

<https://www.ccf.ny.gov/files/9013/8262/2751/AECFReporReadingGrade3.pdf>

More than two-thirds of children in the U.S. reported at least one traumatic event by age 16, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma#:~:text=More%20than%20two%20thirds%20of,Community%20or%20school%20violence>

According to the National Institute for Literacy, 70% of welfare recipients score low in literacy.

<https://www.literacyforallfund.org/facts#:~:text=Of%20adults%20with%20the%20lowest,educational%20scores%20and%20higher%20earnings>

About 50% of the 2 million immigrants that come to the U.S. each year lack high school education and proficient English language skills.

Center for Immigration Studies, National Commission on Adult Literacy
<https://cis.org/Immigrant-Literacy-Self-Assessment-vs-Reality>

A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success, according to National Institute of Health

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-boost-childrens-achievement>

Prison:

75% of state inmates read below lowest levels

Bureau of Justice

85% of *Juvenile* offenders read below 3rd grade

Department of Education

60% of young men entering prison in the U.S. cannot read at a 3rd grade level.



<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2013/02/19/prison-data-court-files-show-link-between-school-truancy-and-crime/#:~:text=Of%20182%20boys%20and%20young,when%20they%20were%20booked%20in>

75% of state prison inmates did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Education and Correctional Populations
<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>

95% of those incarcerated are reintegrated into our communities. Research shows that inmates who are educated are 43% less likely to return to prison.

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Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

The National Center for Education Statistics' latest survey of adult skills. The survey was previously administered in 2017, when 19% of U.S. adults ranked at the lowest levels of literacy. In 2023, that figure increased to 28%, a change that NCES Commissioner Peggy Carr called "substantial" in a news conference announcing the survey Monday. The [Survey of Adult Skills](#), includes more than two dozen countries, most of which are members of the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#).

In 2023, 28% of U.S. adults ranked at the lowest levels in literacy. The latest survey of adult skills: The survey was previously administered in 2017, when 19% of U.S. adults ranked at the lowest levels. NCES Commissioner Peggy Carr called this "substantial".

From the NCES [Survey of Adult Skills](#)



About 50% of the 2 million immigrants that come to the U.S. each year lack high school education and proficient English language skills. This severely limits their access to jobs, college, and citizenship and increases their vulnerability to living in poverty.

Center for Immigration Studies, National Commission on Adult Literacy
<https://cis.org/Immigrant-Literacy-Self-Assessment-vs-Reality>

Research shows that children who do well despite serious hardship have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.

Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child

