

High GED scores, postsecondary education increase wages

Several recent studies have shown that GED scores (for passers and non-passers) and postsecondary education/training significantly affect earnings.

Regardless of race/ethnicity or gender, those who score in the upper ranges of the GED exams earn a higher income five years after attempting the GED than those scoring substantially lower on the tests. Study authors postulate some of this difference could be because those with higher scores have a GED, while those with much lower scores do not. (Source: *Do the Cognitive Skills of Dropouts Matter in the Labor Market?* Tyler, Murnane, and Willet, 1999. <http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/2000/tyler.html>)

However, 27-year-old male GED recipients do not earn as much on average as observationally similar high school graduates. Part of the explanation is that males with conventional high school diplomas are much more likely to complete significant amounts of postsecondary education. Those GED recipients who use the credential to gain access to college do reap significant returns in the labor market. (Source: *Who Benefits from Obtaining a GED? Evidence from High School and Beyond*, Murnane, Willett, and Tyler, 2002. <http://nber.org/papers/W7172>)

The returns for GED holders who receive postsecondary education and training are as large as for traditional high school graduates. However, GED holders do not typically pursue postsecondary education or on-the-job training, missing out on economic benefits. (Source: *The Economic Benefits of the GED: A Research Synthesis*, Tyler, 1998. http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/brief_tyler1.pdf)

Students who take CTE (career and technical education) courses at the postsecondary level will earn an average five percent to 15 percent more than other high school graduates with similar characteristics. Women earning an associate degree in a CTE field earn an average 47 percent more than women with just a high school diploma; for men, CTE associate degrees increase average earnings by 30 percent. (Source: *Earning, Learning, and Choice: Career and Technical Education Works for Students and Employers*, National Assessment of Vocational Education [NAVE], June 2004. www.ed.gov; search for "earning, learning")

According to Bureau of Labor statistics, those with a high school diploma, including those with a GED diploma, earn \$7,400 more a year than those who did not graduate from high school. This represents a 35 percent difference in median annual earnings. (Source: *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Spring 2002)

GED student recommends Web site

Student Joshua Stewart recommends the Test Prep Review site (www.testprepreview.com) as a good source for free, interactive practice for taking the GED Tests. The site contains specific self-assessments (e.g., for commas, graphs, reading for the main idea, etc.) and "self-improvement" links to online courses and resources.

More resources can be found on the student/learner page of Nevada's literacy Web site (www.literacynet.org/nevada). Click on "student/learner" (along the left), then on "GED."

College is possible!

Sponsored by the American Council on Education, the Web site www.collegeispossible.org contains much helpful information and resources, such as links to preparing for college, paying for college, and choosing the right college.

Low health literacy skills create disparities in care

A recent study from Educational Testing Service and the Harvard School of Public Health confirms previous research (see *Nevada Connections*, October 2003, page 2) regarding the effect of literacy on quality of health care. In their report *Literacy and Health in America*, authors Rima Rudd, Irwin Kirsch, and Kentaro Yamamoto conclude that literacy is one of the major factors linking health and education. Literacy contributes to existing disparities in health status, access to care, and the quality of health care for many individuals.

The most health-literate populations, comprising about half of adults, were those who are more well-to-do and have more than a high school education. They also use the library, vote, and tend to be healthier as a group.

Health literacy scale developed

The researchers created a health activities literacy scale (HALS) that includes 191 health-related tasks reflecting a progression along five levels of health literacy. The tasks include how well people use package labels on over-the-counter medicines, household goods, appliances, and cleaning products.

The researchers found that 12 percent or 23 million U.S. adults are estimated to have skills in the lowest level (Level 1) on the HALS, while an additional seven percent or 13.4 million are not able to perform even simple health literacy tasks with a high degree of proficiency (below Level 1). Those performing below Level 1 are about evenly divided between U.S.-born and foreign-born adults.

There is a mismatch. We misjudge people's skills on one hand and write very difficult materials on the other hand, not thinking about how people need to use the materials.

—Rima Rudd, co-author

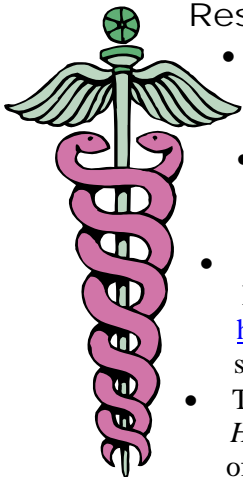
ABE/ESL students vulnerable

Results were particularly alarming for at-risk populations. For example, among adults who have not completed high school, almost half scored at or below the lowest literacy level. Similarly, almost half of adults over the age of 65 performed at or below the lowest level. On average, minority populations, including adults born outside the United States, scored significantly below white adults and adults born in the United States.

"Each day, millions of adults must make decisions, take actions, and consider issues that influence not only their own well-being but that of their family members and of their community," wrote Rudd. "These actions are not solely confined to traditional healthcare settings. They take place in homes, at work, and in communities across the country. We can only make improvements in health literacy if we pay attention to how people are expected to use health materials, not just to the way the materials are written."

Copies of *Literacy and Health in America* can be downloaded from www.ets.org/research/pic. Hard copies are \$15 from the Policy Information Center, ETS, MS 19-R, Rosedale Rd., Princeton, NJ 08541-0001; 609/734-5594; pic@ets.org.

Resources



- The Health and Literacy Special Collection, a product of the National Institute for Literacy's LINCS project, provides curricula, links to organizations, and other resources. Go to www.nifl.gov/lincs, click on "Collections" along the top, then on "Health and Literacy."
- The Patient Education Institute has posted more than 165 slide shows, complete with sound and pictures, at <http://www.medlineplus.gov/>. Each show explains a disease, procedure, or condition in easily understood language.
- The chart *Teachers' Concerns About Incorporating Health Into Adult Education*, by Joan LaMachia and Elizabeth Morrish at <http://www.sabes.org/resources/fieldnotes/vol10/f04conc.htm>, provides tips for handling sensitive health issues with students.
- The video *In Plain Language: The Need for Effective Communication in Medicine and Public Health* provides an overview of functional literacy and health. It includes first-hand experiences of adults with low literacy, discussions with professionals about the impact of low literacy on health and on patient interactions, and tips on communication strategies for working with people with low literacy skills.

The video is available in VHS and DVD (\$10 each) from the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). Call Caye Caplan at 617/482-9485 or order online at <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/>. Click on "order NCSALL publications," then on "NCSALL videos."

Book reviewer recommends from experience

In his review of *Legacy of the Blue Heron* by Harry Sylvester (*MPAEA Journal of Adult Education*, Spring 2004), Kourtland Koch wrote, “As an adult who has learning disabilities including dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, I would recommend that individuals with learning disabilities read this book ... and that their family members and friends read it, too.”

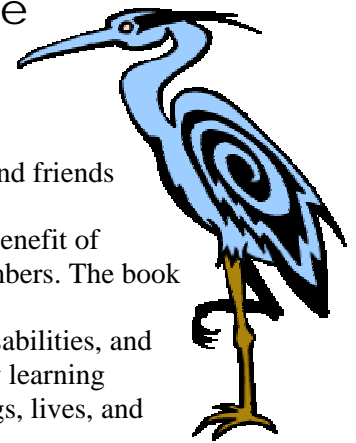
Legacy of the Blue Heron is Sylvester's life story, humbly and simply told for the benefit of individuals with learning disabilities and their parents or spouses and other family members. The book is also insightful for teachers, educational administrators, and counselors.

Harry Sylvester studied blue herons, who were thought to be nothing but mud feeders. As he studied the birds, he realized they exhibited a grace and beauty all their own. Sylvester felt that, as an individual with learning disabilities, he was indeed much like these birds — easily under appreciated and misunderstood, but a person who had true value, possessed unique skills, and could make a meaningful contribution to his world.

Sylvester repeatedly makes the point that one in ten people suffer from learning disabilities, and he provides an understanding of how learning disabilities affect individuals' feelings, lives, and relationships.

The appendices offer valuable information about the definitions of learning disabilities, laws providing services and accommodations for students and employees, and ways to access services and receive necessary accommodations to become successful. The author provides contact information for many organizations devoted to meeting the needs of individuals with learning disabilities.

Koch, an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at Ball State University, noted, “The reader should gain from this book an understanding of learning disabilities, the affects of learning disabilities, and the importance of proper evaluation and diagnoses of learning disabilities.”



Funds available

“at home”

The Home Depot Foundation offers grants of \$5,000 to \$25,000 to non-profits for programs focusing on projects to help at-risk youth, including efforts to increase job readiness training. Deadlines are the 15th of October, January, April, and July. Contact:

www.homedepotfoundation.org, 866/593-7019.

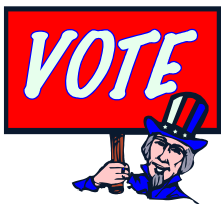
Also, local Home Depot stores may consider requests for product or cash donations up to \$1,000.

Looking for ... whatever

An article in Issue 3 of *The Learning Edge*, an interactive literacy newspaper

(<http://thewclc.ca/edge/issue3>), shows and tells how to search the Internet using Google. The article outlines some of the common conventions used on web pages and shows how to follow links. All text is read aloud and highlighted as it's read. Graphics are simple and clear.

The user-friendly *Learning Edge* was designed for adults with low literacy skills. Four issues have been published; each includes a health feature as well as other life skills pieces.



The Easy Voter Guide website (www.easylvoter.org/nevada/index.html) provides non-partisan information on political parties and candidates for the 2004 elections, along with simply written instructions on how to register and vote.

**Educators are driven by passion, fueled by enthusiasm,
and maintained by the love of learning.**

—Linda McCullough, State Supt. of Public Instruction, Montana

