

FAST FACTS

Recent Statistics from The Library Research Service

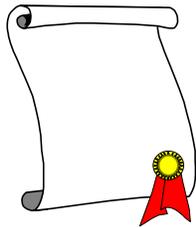
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THE COSTS OF ILLITERACY TO COLORADO

Like the extent of illiteracy, the human and financial costs of the problem to Colorado can be estimated only conservatively.

The Extent of Illiteracy in Colorado



There is a high, proven risk of illiteracy among Coloradans who are age 25 or over and who are not high school graduates. According to the 1993 study, **Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey**, over 90 percent of those who do not reach high school and over 75 percent of those who do not complete high school score at the lowest levels for three major types of literacy (prose, document, and quantitative).

Of Coloradans age 25 and over in 1990, 84.4 percent were high school graduates. Nine Colorado cities--Arvada, Aurora, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Lakewood, Littleton, Longmont, and Westminster had higher percentages of high school graduates, averaging 89.3 percent. The nine remaining Colorado cities--Englewood, Grand Junction, Greeley, Loveland, Northglenn, Pueblo, Thornton, and Wheat Ridge--had lower percentages of high school graduates, averaging 79.9 percent.

The contrast between these two groups of cities on statistics relating to major social issues is dramatic and consistent.

Illiteracy and Poverty

Illiteracy is associated with poverty. In 1990, Coloradans whose incomes fell below the poverty line averaged 13.4 percent of the population in cities likely to have higher rates of functional illiteracy. Cities where illiteracy was less prevalent averaged only ten percent of the population living below the poverty line. So, illiteracy may increase the chances of living in poverty by at least one-third.



Illiteracy and Homelessness



Illiteracy is associated with homelessness. In 1990, two out of every 1,000 Coloradans were homeless in cities likely to have higher rates of illiteracy. In cities with lower illiteracy rates, only one out of every 1,000 Coloradans was homeless. Thus, illiteracy may at least double the chance of being homeless.

Illiteracy and Unemployment

Illiteracy is associated with unemployment. In 1990, the annual unemployment rate was 5.2 percent for Colorado cities likely to have higher rates of illiteracy. Cities where illiteracy was less extensive averaged only 4.2 percent unemployment. Thus, illiteracy may increase the chance of being unemployed by at least one-fourth.



Illiteracy and Crime



Illiteracy is associated with crime. In 1990, Colorado cities likely to have higher rates of illiteracy reported an average of 7,569 serious crimes per 100,000 residents. Cities with lower illiteracy rates reported an average of 6,373 serious crimes per 100,000 residents. So, illiteracy may increase the chance of serious crime by one-fifth.

Illiteracy and Public Welfare

Illiteracy is associated with costly public welfare programs. For Colorado cities where illiteracy was more prevalent, the costs of public welfare programs constituted 3.7 percent of total local government expenditures during 1990-91. For cities likely to have lower illiteracy rates, such costs constituted only 1.2 percent of local government spending. Thus, illiteracy may more than triple the burden of public welfare to local governments.



Illiteracy and the Family



Illiteracy is associated with children having children. Colorado cities where illiteracy is more widespread averaged 9.9 percent of births to mothers under age 20. Cities likely to have lower illiteracy rates averaged 7.6 percent of births to mothers under age 20. So, illiteracy may increase the chance of underage mothers by one-third or more.

Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, **County and City Data Book 1994: A Statistical Abstract Supplement** (12th edition).