

LITERACY

Quality of Life

Literacy is instrumental in an individual's development at a personal, family, and community level. Illiteracy affects an individual's ability to access employment, healthcare, educational, social, political, and economical opportunities and services. An individual with poor literacy skills is more likely to live in poverty than individuals who can read well. Literacy is the core of all education. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, in the US alone, adult illiteracy carries an estimated price tag of more than \$17 billion per year as a result of lost income and tax revenue, welfare, unemployment, crime and incarceration, and training cost for business and industry.

National Adult Literacy Survey– ProLiteracy

Defining Literacy

The NAAL and SAAL define literacy as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” Results are reported on three literacy scales:

- *Prose Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts). Prose examples include editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials.*

- *Document Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from*

About the Indicator

National level data for this indicator comes from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) who survey adults 16 years of age and older every ten years in the following areas: prose, document and quantitative skills. In 2003, 19,714 individuals were surveyed to measure their ability to perform literacy tasks similar to those that they encounter in their daily lives; including health literacy skills and life skills.

State-wide data for this indicator comes from the New York State Assessment of Adult Literacy (SAAL), administered in New York in 2003-early 2004.

non-continuous texts in various formats). Document examples include job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug and food labels.

- *Quantitative Literacy: The knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative literacy tasks (i.e., to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials). Examples include balancing a checkbook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining from an advertisement the amount of interest on a loan.*

National Assessment of Adult Literacy

2003 Literacy Levels: Percentage of Adult Population- New York vs. National

	Below Basic	Basic	Intermediate	Proficient
Prose: New York	19%	31%	40%	11%
Prose: Nation	14%	29%	44%	13%
Document: New York	13%	26%	52%	9%
Document: Nation	12%	22%	53%	13%
Quantitative: New York	24%	35%	31%	11%
Quantitative: Nation	21%	33%	33%	14%

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Table 1. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy of adults in New York and the nation, by educational attainment: 2003

Educational attainment	Prose		Document		Quantitative	
	New York	Nation	New York	Nation	New York	Nation
Still in high school	260	262	257	265	261	261
Less than/some high school	194	206	213	208	212	211
GED/high school equivalency	244*	260	247	257	260	266
High school graduate	254*	262	254	258	266	269
Vocational/trade/business school	251	268	234*	267	263	279
Some college	276*	287	271	280	286	295
Associate's/2-year degree	284	298	280	291	284*	306
College graduate	299	314	293	303	314	323
Graduate studies/degree	314*	327	306	311	325	332

* Significantly different from the nation.

Source: 2003 State Assessment of Adult Literacy and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Educational Attainment and Literacy

The significant differentiation in average scores demonstrates a direct correlation between educational attainment and literacy level. This correlation could be critical for Allegany County residents due to the low number individuals with higher education experience. Although 83.2% of Allegany County residents are high school or higher, only 17.2% have a bachelor's degree or higher. New York State high school graduates or higher is similar at 79.1%. Yet, those obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher is significantly higher at 27.4%.

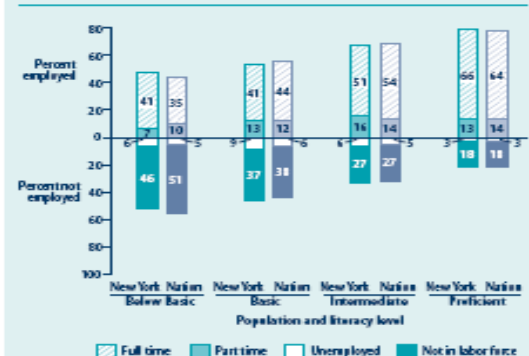
US Census 2000

Educational Attainment	Allegany County	New York State
Less than 9th Grade	4.8%	8%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	12.0%	12.9%
High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	39.6%	27.8%
Some College, no degree	16.2%	16.8%
Associate degree	10.2%	7.2%
Bachelor's degree	8.7%	15.6%
Graduate or Professional degree	8.5%	10.7%

Employment & Literacy

Similar to adults in the nation, the average literacy of adults in New York employed full time was significantly higher than the average literacy of adults who were not in the labor force. Among adults in New York with Below Basic prose literacy, the majority were either not in the labor force or were not employed full time. Allegany County's unemployment rate is 5.7% compared to New York State's rate of 4.9%.

Figure 1.2. Percentage of adults in New York and the nation in each employment category, by prose literacy level: 2003



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: 2003 State Assessment of Adult Literacy and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.