



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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**More Than Half of Adult Tennesseans Perform at Low Literacy Level**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – More than half of adult Tennesseans can barely read a street map, find information in an article or calculate postage for their mail, a new study by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office of Research shows.

The study reports that 53 percent of Tennessee adults are classified in the two bottom rungs among five levels of adult literacy.

Level 2 adults, according to the Adult Literacy Survey compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, can locate an intersection on a street map, interpret instructions from an appliance manual and calculate the total costs of purchases from order forms.

Adults at Level 1, the lowest literacy rating, can perform only basic tasks such as adding amounts on a bank deposit slip, locating one piece of information in an article and finding a meeting time on a form.

"The negative effects of low adult literacy may be particularly detrimental in Tennessee where 53 percent of the population performs at the second lowest literacy level or below," according to the report prepared by Comptroller John G. Morgan's Office of Research.

The report found that Tennessee allocates less money to adult literacy programs than most Southeastern states, where spending ranges from \$2 million a year in Mississippi to \$241.9 million in Florida. Tennessee spent \$3.2 million on adult literacy programs in 2002, the latest year for which figures are available, along with a portion of \$4.1 million that the Department of Human Services gives the state Office of Adult Literacy (OAE).

The passing rate for Families First participants more than doubled when cash incentives of up to \$500 were offered, but that funding was dropped from the 2003-04 state budget, the report noted.

State prisoners who attend adult literacy classes perform better on literacy exams than do their civilian counterparts. The report found that 84 percent of inmates, who are required to take practice tests, pass the general equivalency exam (GED). That compares to a 64 percent passing rate among the state's general population, who were not required to take practice exams until 2003.

Inmates at three state prisons repair and refurbish computers that are then sent to public schools, but prisoners do not get to keep computers for their own use, the report said. It suggested that some of those computers remain in prisons, which have a high success rate with adult literacy classes.

The report suggests the General Assembly create tax incentives for businesses that conduct adult education courses for their employees. The report also recommends incentives for adult education teachers.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports>.