

The Literacy Landscape in the Beltway & in Business



The underestimated and misunderstood scale of adult literacy challenges in the United States poses a common concern for policymakers and employers. Despite a shared priority to address the issue, challenges include identifying and handling learning differences, varied state policy approaches, availability of development programs, funding allocation, and political polarization.

Policy Influencers

Current Misconception of the State of Adult Literacy


 **94%** think recent efforts have been effective

 **83%** think U.S. rates are better than other OECD countries

 **93%** think rates have improved in the past 3 – 5 years

Perceived Obstacles to Improving Adult Literacy Rates

 **Addressing learning differences**

 **Low awareness of the scale of the issue**

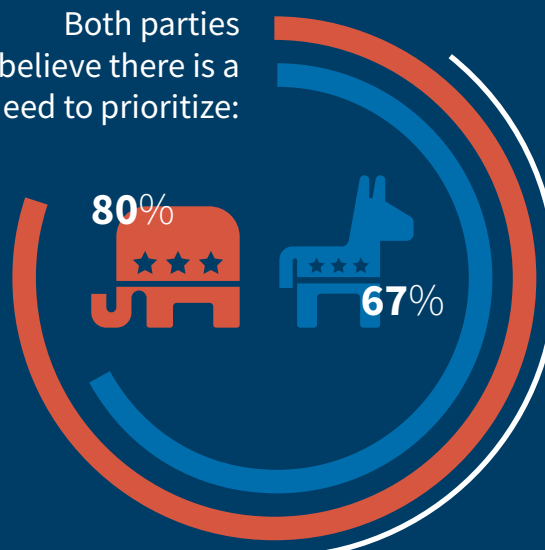
 **States handle the issue differently**

 **Significant investment, limited funding**

 **Political polarization of the issue**

Prioritizing Adult Literacy Policy

Both parties believe there is a need to prioritize:



 **94%** think rates have at least a moderate impact on the U.S. economy

Factors Driving the Prioritization:



The interdependence with every other major issue



The economic case for improving adult literacy



Increasing workforce shortages

“ Sometimes it’s [not having enough] time because you have kids a full-time job... it’s very challenging. I already let my job know to not schedule anything on Monday and Wednesday because I am taking classes. ”

– Adult Learner, Focus Group Participant

Employers

Understanding the Impact of Adult Low Literacy in the Workplace



\$46B

in estimated revenue lost over the next year



40%

say it is a widespread problem in their organization



1 IN 3

say their average employee does not have the literacy skills needed to do their job well

Providing Effective Support for Adult Learners



99%

recognize adult literacy is an issue for their employees



87%

say they should be involved in providing literacy services



42%

offer literacy trainings

Addressing the heart of the issue

Working Together to Solve Adult Literacy



93%

would be interested in partnering with other employers

85%

would be interested in partnering with local organizations

Promoting the Funding of Adult Literacy Programs



87%

would likely fund an adult foundational education initiative

Factors that Drive Funding:



Improved performance and quality of work



Talent development and retention



Bottom line improvement

“In my job, I had a lot of offers in different positions that I wouldn’t take because I didn’t trust myself. Learning made me get a better job. Before [improving my literacy skills], I got many offers as a manager, and I didn’t take it.”

– Adult Learner, Focus Group Participant

Literacy is today’s greatest crisis and greatest opportunity to address problems at their source. But to solve the problem, we need to see the problem. We all have a part to play in solving adult literacy.

To learn more about ALL IN’s work to carry out the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy, head to allinliteracy.org.

Learn More ▾



SCAN ME

ALL IN commissioned FTI Consulting to conduct an online survey of 500 employers across the United States between October 18–24, 2023, to understand their perceptions of adult literacy as a national issue and inform ALL IN’s upcoming awareness-raising campaign. This survey included a focus on industries that typically tend to employ more people who exhibit low English literacy than others, e.g., logistics & transportation, retail & consumer goods, wholesale & distribution, and food & beverage/restaurants.

FTI also conducted an online survey of 200 D.C. policy influencers specializing in education, labor and employment, financial services, and military/defense among other policy areas between November 2–9, 2023.

*The definition of adult literacy used in this research is: Literacy is the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts to participate in society, achieve goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.

To complement these quantitative findings, FTI conducted a focus group of adult learners and in-depth interviews with experts in adult education.