

*R-Ally: Research Allies for Lifelong Learning*

# **Incarcerated Adults with Low Skills: Findings from the 2014 PIAAC Prison Study**

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*Applying research to support adult educators and learners*

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## Overview

Overview

Research Questions

Characteristics

Current and Future Learning

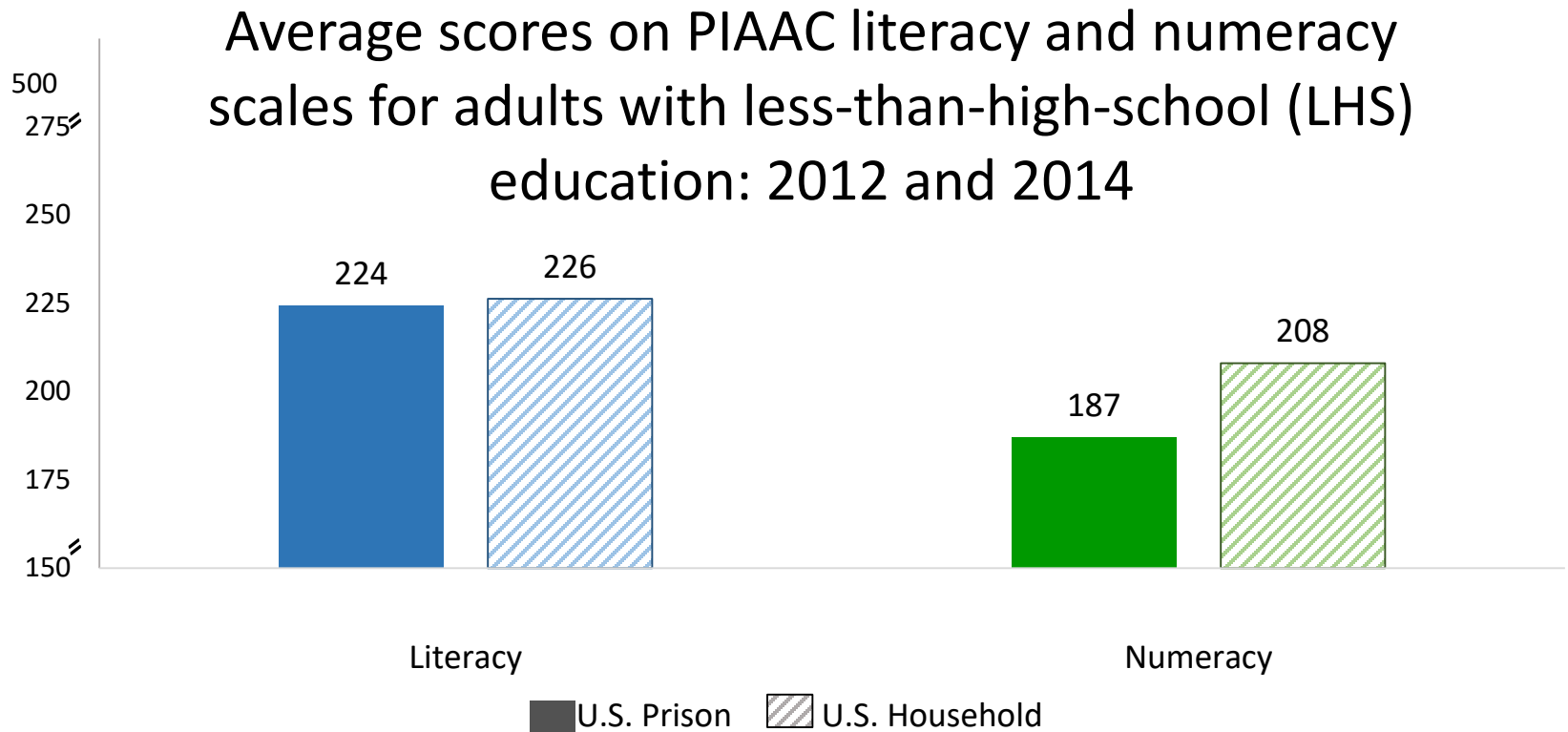
Implications for Practice

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## Overview: What We Know

- Prison population tends to be young and male
- Traditionally many leave high school early and have few job skills/opportunities
- Challenges include health concerns and learning disabilities
- Released to impoverished, stressed communities with limited employment opportunities
- If received, high school equivalence (HSE) credentials are a positive signal to an employer about adult ability and achievements

## Significance: PIAAC Skills Comparison (Carr, 2016)



## PIAAC Prison Study Sample

- 1,319 incarcerated adults age 18-74 completed an extensive Background Questionnaire
- 1,270 adults also took assessments in:
  - literacy
  - numeracy
- “Adults with low skills” – limited to LHS (ISCED Level 2 or below) N = 400



## Research Questions

1. What are the demographic and background **characteristics and assessed skill levels** of incarcerated adults with less than high school education attainment?
2. How do those characteristics and assessed skill levels differ **by gender and from the general population**?
3. What **role does learning currently play** in the lives of incarcerated men and women?
4. What are the **future learning goals** of incarcerated men and women?

## Variables and Analyses

- In addition to **assessed literacy and numeracy skills**, multiple variables were employed
  - Gender, age, parental education, region, employment, marital, prior education, and health
  - Current study and attendance, use of learning strategies, reasons for participating, future goals and reasons
- Characteristics were examined **descriptively** via crosstabs
- Effect sizes for percentage differences : 95% confidence threshold of twice the standard error

## Characteristics in PIAAC

Characteristic	All LHS Incarcerated Adults (%) [95% CI]
Gender	92.4 male
Age	
25-34 years	35.7 [30.7, 40.7]
<b>Parents' Highest Education is LHS</b>	
Mother	38.0 [32.4, 43.6]
Father	40.6 [33.6, 47.6]



## Characteristics in PIAAC

Region of USA	All LHS Incarcerated Adults (%) [95% CI]
Northeast	9.4 [7.4, 11.4]
Midwest	17.6 [12.6, 22.6]
South	49.4 [44.2, 54.6]
West	23.6 [19.4, 27.8]
Employed FT	44.8 [40.0, 49.6]
Employed PT	14.8 [11.2, 18.4]
Unemployed	23.5 [19.3, 27.7]
Never / Previously Married	85.6 [81.8, 89.4]

## Characteristics in PIAAC

Background Characteristic	All LHS Incarcerated Adults (%) [95% CI]
Grade Completed (Mean)	8.8
Age of Highest Education Level	
Up to Age 15	40.8 [34.4, 47.2]
16 to 19 Years	55.8 [49.2, 62.4]
Top Reasons for Leaving School	
Did Not Like School	18.1 [14.3, 21.9]
Wanted to Work	16.6 [13.0, 20.2]
Incarceration	17.5 [12.9, 22.1]

## Characteristics in PIAAC

- Two-fifths of LHS incarcerated women report **fair or poor health (39.2%)**, vs. 26.8% of men
- Also **20.4%** of LHS incarcerated adults had vision difficulties and **15.2%** had hearing difficulties, twice the rates of LHS adults in general population
- High rates of **learning disabilities (37.1%)**, four times the rate of the general population

## Current Learning

**Current Learning (top reasons are job after release or increase knowledge and skills)**

**All LHS Incarcerated Adults (%) [95% CI]**

**Currently Pursuing Formal Education**

36.4 [31.4, 41.4]

**Basic Skills Tutor or Class**

45.4 [40.0, 50.8]

**GED Preparation**

55.9 [50.9, 60.9]

**Gained HSE Credential in Prison**

5.4 [2.6, 8.2]

**Awarded PSE Certificate or Diploma**

2.2 [0.8, 3.6]

## Future Learning

**Future Learning (top reasons are job after release or increase knowledge and skills)**

**All LHS Incarcerated Adults (%)  
[95% CI]**

**Want More Education**

**69.7 [63.3, 76.1]**

**Want HSE Credential**

**60.9 [53.5, 68.3]**

**Want PSE Credential**

**26.8 [22.4, 31.2]**

**Want Associate Degree (or Higher)**

**9.7 [6.7, 12.7]**

## Implications for Practice

- Without at least a high school education, incarcerated and re-entering adults are left **educationally vulnerable**
- Both correctional and re-entry education programs need to:
  - **fully assess** entering learners for skills and any unmet learning needs
  - review the instructional and support services for **adults with LD**
- Prison officials have an opportunity to:
  - review **adult participation in basic skills programming** and
  - to identify ways **more incarcerated adults can participate** in programming
- As adults re-enter society, re-entry service providers must be prepared to **respond to LHS adults' external, family, and community circumstances**

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## **Contact Information**

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