



NRS Fast Facts

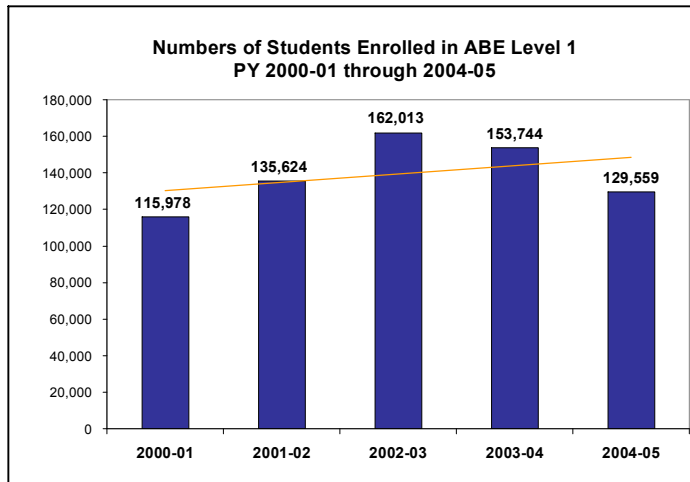
Characteristics of the Least-Literate Participants in Adult Basic Education Beginning Literacy Programs: 2001-2005

Background

Increasing adult literacy is a primary goal of the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) adult education programs. The performance of the least-literate participants in the beginning literacy programs is of particular importance. These participants have the lowest level of literacy skills, and therefore, often have the most difficulty meeting goals, such as finding and retaining employment or acquiring a diploma or GED. NRS Level 1 (beginning literacy) for Adult Basic Education (ABE) addresses the needs of these students. The National Reporting System (NRS) tracks the changing demographics of this low literate group. This FastFacts presents the national picture and state highlights of these changing demographics from program year (PY) 2000-01 through 2004-05.

NRS Data

Between 2000-2001 and 2004-2005, the number of participants in Level 1 ABE increased by about 12 percent to nearly 130,000 students and peaked in 2002-03 with over 160,000 students (see chart).

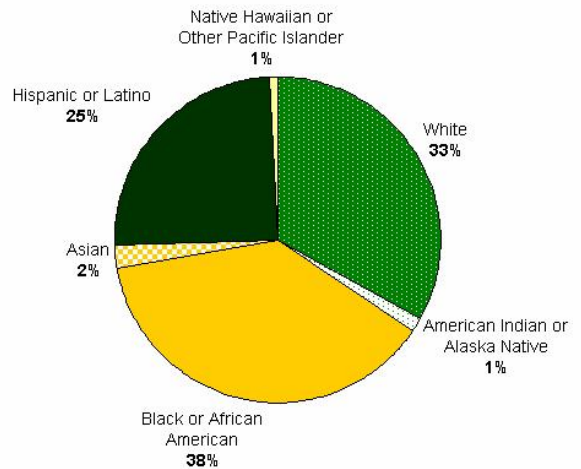


While the numbers of students attending any adult education class declined by 3 percent over this period, the program is serving slightly proportionally more

beginning literacy students. By 2004-05, about 5 percent of the program's students were Level 1 ABE.

Black or African American students accounted for the largest percentage of participants in Level 1 ABE classes, making up 38 percent of the population in 2004-05 (see pie chart). Whites followed at 33 percent.

Race/Ethnicity of Level 1 Adult Basic Education Participants PY 2004-05



Since the overall enrollment in Level 1 ABE increased 12 percent, it is not surprising that some race/ethnicity groups also increased significantly in number (see table). Hispanic or Latino students demonstrated the largest numerical increase while Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students showed the largest percentage increase.

	2000-01	2004-05	Change
Hispanic or Latino	22,688	32,091	+ 41%
Asian	3,192	2,705	- 15%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	757	1,164	+ 54%
White	42,547	42,935	+ 1%
Black or African American	42,267	48,962	+ 16%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,962	1,702	- 13%

State Highlights: 2001-2005

The states with the largest number of participants in the ABE Level 1 were usually the most populated states. Florida had the largest number of least-literate participants with over 45,000 students, accounting for roughly one third (35%) of all students in beginning literacy in the U.S. The seven states with the largest number of ABE level 1 participants in 2004-2005 were:

- **Florida:** 35% (45,542)
- **California:** 8% (10,754)
- **North Carolina:** 7% (9,372)
- **New York:** 5% (7,002)
- **South Carolina:** 5% (6,212)
- **Texas:** 4% (4,662)
- **Georgia:** 4% (4,405)

Although the above states contributed the most in number, a more informative statistic may be the states with the highest percentage of least-literate participants relative to their total number of adult education participants. Overall, 5 percent of participants in federally-sponsored adult education programs are taking the beginning literacy classes. The states with the highest percentage of participants in ABE level 1 were:

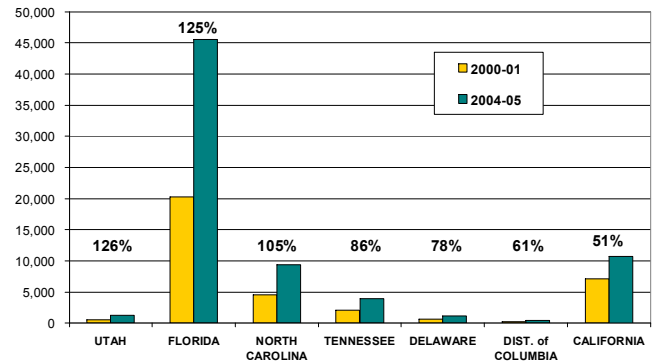
- **Delaware:** 18% (1,114)
- **Florida:** 13% (45,542)
- **District of Columbia:** 11% (398)
- **South Carolina:** 9% (6,212)
- **North Carolina:** 9% (9,372)

At the other end of the spectrum, the states with the lowest percentage of ABE level 1 participants were:

- **Colorado:** 1% (110)
- **Nevada:** 1% (84)
- **North Dakota:** 1% (20)
- **Illinois:** 1% (1,602)
- **California:** 2% (10,754)

Seven states saw their enrollment in Level 1 ABE increase by more than 50 percent in the last five years. The states with the greatest growth are presented in the chart (see below) in order of percentage growth. Florida saw one of the greatest percentage increases in addition to the largest numerical increase.

States with the Greatest Percentage Growth in Enrollment for Level 1 ABE PY 2000-01 and 2004-05



Data Limitations

While the data presented here offer a glimpse of trends of the beginning literacy population, it is also important to consider the limitations of comparing data across states. There is a dramatic range and variety of demographic characteristics between the states that are continually shifting, and those changes are continually affecting the make-up of adult education programs.

In addition, the 2000-01 data reflect the first year of NRS data collection. Improvements to the data collection process alone may account for increases or decreases in the data. For example, reducing duplicate counts may lower the reported number of participants, when in fact the actual number of participants did not change.

Resources

- To learn more about the National Reporting System, see the Web site at: www.nrsweb.org.
- To learn more about the adult education and literacy programs of the USED, go to the Department's web page:
- To see data from the National Center for Education Statistics on Adult Education, see the NCES Issue Briefs or linked reports at:

Contact Us

This Fast Facts was written by Natalia Pane and Taylor Dimsdale of the American Institutes for Research under contract ED-04-CO-0025/0001 with the U.S. Department of Education. For more information or additional copies, contact NRS at nrs@air.org.