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ABSTRACT

In response to the National Goals 2000 Literacy initiative, literacy programs in New Jersey increased their efforts to meet literacy goals. In the summer of 1993, a needs assessment survey was conducted to determine the training and program development needs of adult education classroom teachers, teacher aides, substitute teachers, program coordinators, volunteer coordinators, counselors, and directors. The survey was mailed to 183 adult education programs funded through the New Jersey Department of Education and to all Literacy Volunteers of America-New Jersey Affiliates, Focus on Literacy, Project Read, and selected Job Training Partnership Act and Job Opportunities and Basic Skills/Family Development programs. A total of 332 responses were received. Data from the survey and the ongoing needs assessment conducted over the 2-year period, 1993-95 found that educators in adult basic education programs are requesting assistance, training, and materials in a number of broad areas of content, leadership, and practice. These areas include the following: adults with disabilities; technology; basic adult education and literacy; leadership; General Educational Development testing; English as a Second Language; and instructional models. (KC)

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# ADULT EDUCATION & LITERACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## NEW JERSEY 1995

**A Report on Local Demand  
for Professional Development and Training**

**Leo Klagholz  
Commissioner**

**Richard A. DiPatrì  
Deputy Commissioner**



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**ADULT EDUCATION & LITERACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT  
NEW JERSEY 1995**

**A Report on Local Demand  
for Professional Development and Training**

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# ADULT EDUCATION & LITERACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT NEW JERSEY 1995

## A Report on Local Demand for Professional Development and Training

### Introduction

As New Jersey moves forward into the future, our expectation is that by the year 2000...

“Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship...”

### **Goal No. 5 — The National Education Goals (1990)**

The New Jersey State Department of Education through its Adult Literacy Enhancement Center is striving to meet the needs of its adult residents with varied programs and services. The Department of Education currently provides educational services in adult basic skills, including English as a Second Language (ESL), and Evening Schools for Foreign Born residents. Also, approximately 700,000 of New Jersey adults need to improve their communication and computational skills to perform effectively on the job, succeed in life and realize the American dream. Toward this end, the Department of Education also provides preparation for the general educational development (GED) tests and programs at adult high schools.

Additionally, special programs such as New Jersey Youth Corps, Workplace Literacy, the Adult Literacy Volunteer Program and the Refugee Resettlement Program have been developed to assist special audiences with their own individual needs.

### Background

The Department of Education's Adult Literacy Enhancement Center continually strives to respond to the vast audience which it serves and to identify ongoing and new and emerging needs. The degree of need speaks for itself:

More than 1.5 million adults in New Jersey need high school diplomas.

New Jersey welcomes nearly 30,000 immigrants each year.

Over 15,000 youth drop out of New Jersey's high schools each year.

Approximately 50 percent of New Jersey's adults only function at the lowest levels of literacy defined in the National Adult Literacy Survey.

From a program leadership perspective, staff from the New Jersey State Department of Education work closely with the state's adult education teachers, counselors, coordinators and directors to: identify needs, design and implement programs in response to articulated needs and continually evaluate those efforts in order to provide the best possible programs and services for New Jersey's adults requiring help and support.

To that end, a comprehensive needs assessment was designed, implemented and reported on in 1993-94. The findings of this report were substantiated in 1995 using information obtained from various data sources. This report details the findings and recommendations of the needs assessments conducted to date.

## Adult Literacy in New Jersey: Challenge of 21st Century

A 1993 report of the New Jersey Council on Adult Education and Literacy has drawn attention to problems and issues associated with the adult education and literacy delivery system in the state. "*ADULT LITERACY in NEW JERSEY, Meeting the Challenge of the 21st Century*," released publicly on October 15, 1993, focused on the literacy needs of adults and the role of education in meeting those needs.

A forty-member bipartisan Council assessed the condition of literacy in New Jersey, including then current federal and state initiatives, before establishing priority areas targeted for improvements and formal recommendations.

Adopting the definition of literacy utilized by the National Adult Literacy Survey (National Center for Educational Statistics, September 8, 1993), "*Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential*," the Council considered three distinct aspects of literacy:

*Prose literacy*: the knowledge and skills required to understand and use information from texts that include editorials, news stories, poems, and fiction;

*Document literacy*: the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in materials that include job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphs; and

*Quantitative literacy*: the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials; for example, balancing a checkbook, calculating a tip, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest from a loan advertisement.

Using 1990 census data on educational attainment in New Jersey, the Council learned that more than 1.5 million adults are without high school diplomas and approximately 50 percent of the state's adults only function at the two lowest levels of literacy as defined in the National Adult Literacy Survey.

The Council's recommendations regarding the adult education and literacy delivery system include:

1. Assess the way literacy programs are organized at the state level with an eye toward restructuring them consistent with a producer-consumer model ("producer" state agencies being the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and all other state agencies the "consumers").
2. Develop a joint strategy to foster greater cooperation between public and private providers of literacy services.
3. Provide funding to assist the private not-for-profit literacy agencies.
4. Improve advertising about the availability of literacy funding.
5. Investigate the possibility of creating a less restrictive funding system to simplify adult education and literacy program administration.
6. Create a state system for literacy information and technical assistance.
7. Coordinate with the Governor's Council on Volunteerism and Community Service to improve the use of literacy volunteers and mentors.
8. Utilize new technology to improve the entire adult education and literacy system.
9. Establish literacy as an important priority of the soon to be established Workforce Investment Boards (county level workforce readiness decision-making bodies).
10. Develop a model to better serve the special populations involved in adult literacy programs, including persons with learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and non-English speakers.
11. Explore the possibility of establishing special incentive or mini-grant programs to support the development of better quality materials for the adult learner.
12. Encourage the State Department of Education to advise district boards of education to work closely with adult education centers to more closely integrate activities with K-12 programs.

## **State Plan for Adult Education Required Under the Adult Education Act, PL 100-297: Goals and Activities**

The Adult Education Act (PL 100-297), as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1992 (PL 102-73), was designed to assist states to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment, to expand and improve the existing system for delivering adult education services including delivery of such services to educationally disadvantaged adults, and to encourage the establishment of adult education programs that would: (1) enable adults to acquire the basic educational skills necessary for literate functioning; (2) provide adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to benefit from job training and retraining programs and obtain and retain productive employment so that they might more fully enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship; and (3) enable adults who so desire to continue their education to at least the level of secondary school completion.

Section 353 of the Act allotted funds specifically for training professional teachers, volunteers and administrators, with particular emphasis on training full-time professional adult educators, minority adult educators, educators of adults with limited English proficiency, and for training teachers to recognize and more effectively serve illiterate individuals with learning disabilities and individuals with reading ability below the fifth grade level.

Section 356 of the Act established State Literacy Resource Centers to stimulate the coordination of literacy services, enhance the provision of state and local literacy services, and serve as a link between those who provide literacy services and the National Institute for Literacy for the purpose of sharing information, data, research, and expertise and literacy resources.

Grants to states under the Adult Education Act are used in accordance with State Plans which include commitments by the states to use federal dollars to meet needs identified through comprehensive assessments, of adult education and literacy needs, and of the capability of existing programs and institution to meet those needs.

In response to New Jersey's needs and the requirements of the Act, the State Plan for the New Jersey Adult Education Basic Grant Program included components which described and provided for the fulfillment of literacy needs of individuals in the state, set forth measurable goals for improving literacy levels, retention in literacy programs, and long-term learning gains of individuals in the state and described a comprehensive approach for achieving those goals, including the development of indicators of program quality. Goals, activities, outcomes and resource allocations were detailed in Section 6 of the State Plan.

### **National Literacy Act of 1991, PL 102-73.**

As mentioned above, the National Literacy Act contained major provisions which, through amendments to the Adult Education Act, established State Literacy Resource Centers and the National Institute for Literacy. The purpose of the Institute is to improve and expand the system for delivery of literacy services. The Institute is authorized to: assist other federal agencies to improve literacy services; conduct basic and applied research; assist federal, state and local agencies to improve their literacy policies; provide training and technical assistance to literacy programs throughout the country; collect and disseminate information; review and make recommendations with regard to reporting requirements and performance measures; and provide a toll-free telephone line for providers and volunteers.

The network of State Literacy Resource Centers was funded to promote greater efficiency at the state and local level through the coordination of services. Specific efforts include activities which: (1) improve and promote the diffusion and adoption of state-of-the-art teaching methods, technologies and program evaluations; (2) develop innovative approaches to the coordination of literacy services within and among states and with the federal government; (3) assist public and private agencies in coordinating the delivery of literacy services; (4) encourage government and industry partnerships with small businesses, private nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations; (5) encourage innovation and experimentation in literacy activities that will enhance the delivery of literacy services and address providers to improve literacy policy and programs and to improve access to such programs; (6) provide emerging problems; (7) provide technical and policy assistance to state and local governments and service training and technical assistance to literacy instructors in reading instruction and in selecting and making the most effective use of state-of-the-art methodologies, instructional materials and technologies, such as, computer-assisted instruction, video tapes, interactive systems and data link systems, or assessing learning styles, screening for learning disabilities, and providing individualized remedial reading instruction; or (8) encourage and facilitate the training of full-time professional adult educators.



The Adult Literacy Enhancement Center (ALEC) located at the Academy for Professional Development in Edison fulfills a portion of the State Literacy Resource Center mission, while the State Employment and Training Commission addresses components identified through an interagency agreement with the State Department of Education.

### **National Adult Education Goal for the Year 2000.**

In 1990, the President and the Governors through the National Governors Association established an initial six national education goals to be met by the year 2000. The fifth goal states: *"By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."*

The comprehensive provisions of the National Literacy Act of 1991, (PL 102-73) authorize federal programs and leadership activities consistent with the national literacy goal, and define the term literacy for the purposes of the Act: *"... 'literacy' means an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential."*

New Jersey's Progress Report on the National Education Goals for the Year 2000 described the objectives designed to meet the adult literacy and lifelong learning goal: (1) every major American business will be involved in strengthening the connection between education and work; (2) all workers will have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skill, from basic to highly technical, needed to adapt to emerging new technologies, work methods, and markets through public and private educational, vocational, technical, workplace, or other programs; (3) the number of quality programs, including those at libraries, that are designed to serve more effectively the needs of the growing number of part-time and mid-career students will increase substantially; (4) the proportion of those qualified students (especially minorities) who enter college, who complete at least two years, and who complete their degree programs will increase substantially; and, (5) the proportion of college graduates who demonstrate an advanced ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems will increase substantially.

### **New Jersey's Program Quality Indicators: Measures and Standards**

The Adult Education Act establishes the federal role in supporting basic skills instruction to educationally disadvantaged adults through the funding of local instructional programs for adults in an array of areas including adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE) and English as a Second Language (ESL).

The Act also promotes quality in state and local programs through requirements for program evaluation and accountability. Amendments to the Act, embodied in the National Literacy Act of 1991, further require that program indicators be established by which state and local programs receiving federal funds can evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

In the winter of 1993, adult education program directors and staff, as well as adult literacy volunteer organization coordinators and literacy volunteers, in conjunction with personnel from the New Jersey State Department of Education initiated the development and adoption phase of New Jersey's indicators of program quality. They also sought to identify measures which would determine the quantitative level of program performance. The next phase of this process involved establishing performance standards defining levels of acceptable attainment for each of the indicators.

During the winter of 1993-1994, the adult education community again came together in a developmental cycle to begin the process of establishing performance standards. A steering committee initiated the first drafts of the document, which detailed standards for each of the indicators identified under:

- Educational Gains
- Recruitment
- Program Planning
- Support Services
- Retention
- Curriculum & Instruction

Roundtables were hosted to again seek the input of the adult education community in New Jersey. The preliminary drafts were revised a number of times based on the suggestions received. In the spring of 1994, the performance standards document, in a final draft form, was mailed to all adult education directors and staff as well as literacy volunteer organization coordinators and literacy volunteers for their review and critique. Public hearings were also held on the performance

standards to afford all interested educators the opportunity to comment. After the public hearings were completed, the performance standards were shared with the New Jersey State Board of Education and with the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission, prior to their formal submission to the United States Department of Education's Office of Adult and Vocational Education.

The indicators of program quality and the measures and standards of performance will form the gestalt of all adult education programs in the state. It is only through the implementation of agreed upon indicators and standards that we will achieve our desired goal of developing and implementing quality adult education programs in the state which respond to the needs of all of New Jersey's citizens.

#### **Previous Research: Adult Education Needs Assessment Survey Report, 1994.**

In the summer of 1993, a needs assessment survey instrument was developed by staff of the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center to ascertain the training and program development needs of adult education classroom teachers, teacher aides, substitute teachers, program coordinators, volunteer coordinators, counselors and directors.

The survey contained 14 statements, questions and prompts covering a wide range of topics, including years of service in adult education, years of service in present position, location of job site, preferred hours available for training to types of training needed, current subjects taught, needs in the area of general education development (GED) testing, instructional models and, topics in the area of English as a Second Language (ESL), etc. In addition to check-off responses, the survey participants could provide additional information, suggestions and areas of perceived need on the survey instrument itself.

#### **Methodology.**

The 1993 survey was mailed to 183 Adult Education Programs funded through the New Jersey State Department of Education:

- 128 programs offering a variety of program services including Adult Basic Skills;
  - General Educational Development (GED) test preparation
  - Evening School for Foreign Born Residents
  - New Jersey Youth Corps Adult High School
  - Workplace Literacy or Basic Skills for the Disabled Adult
- 8 programs offering only Evening Schools for Foreign Born Residents;
- 17 offering only Adult High School Services;
- 5 offering only Workplace Literacy;
- 4 offering only New Jersey Youth Corps;
- 7 offering only General Educational Development (GED) Preparation; and
- 14 offering only Basic Skills to the Disabled.

The survey was also mailed to all Literacy Volunteers of America-New Jersey Affiliates, Focus on Literacy, Project Read and Selected JTPA and JOBS/Family Development Programs.

Respondents were encouraged to make extra copies of the survey for adult educators who were not presently on the mailing list of the New Jersey State Department of Education. A total of 332 responses was received. No follow-up was conducted for non-respondents.

In addition to the 1993-94 survey, needs data were gathered at the 1995 Adult Education Conference and Directors' Institute, *Rethinking Adult Education: Creating New Approaches to Literacy*, via the Workshop Evaluation Form and the General Conference Evaluation Form. The specific prompts are presented below:

**Workshop Evaluation Form:** Specific components of this workshop which should be expanded into more comprehensive training to further meet my needs include (please list):

**General Conference Evaluation Form:** Specific topics or workshops which should be expanded into more comprehensive training to further meet my needs include (please list):

Field based needs were also identified by staff of the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center and central office staff in an ongoing capacity through their work with educators across the state and through repeated requests received for technical assistance, support, materials and training.

### **Results in Brief.**

The data from both the formal needs assessment survey and the ongoing needs assessment conducted over the two-year period, 1993-1995, substantiate the fact that adult educators across the state are requesting assistance, training and materials in a number of broad areas of content, leadership and practice which are delineated below:

**Adults with Disabilities:** Ongoing issues continued to be identified in the area of assessment, diagnosis and provision of services for adults with special needs; the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); the provisions of vocational rehabilitation legislation; testing accommodations for the GED and HSPT; and materials and methods for teaching adults with disabilities.

**Testing, Measurement and Evaluation Issues:** Concerns ranged from specific topical areas subsumed under GED testing and preparation to issues related to the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) and the Special Review Assessment (SRA) Process for adult students. Continuing comments centered on portfolio assessment, test motivation and assessment issues related to the TABE, ABLE, NYS Place and Maculaitis Tests. Foreign transcript evaluation also was identified as an area of need.

**English as a Second Language (ESL) Issues:** Given the complex issue surrounding language instruction for non-native speakers of English, ESL concerns emerged as a continuing need. Topics of interest include: placement testing, reading for the non-literate ESL students, materials and methods, the multi-level classroom and integrating speaking, listening, reading and writing. Teacher training in this area is a continuing need as well as cultural diversity.

**Curriculum and Instruction:** Materials and methods for use with adults in the basic skills classroom were identified by many adult educators as an ongoing need. An array of identified needs in this area include: prescriptive teaching, competency-based education, experiential learning; putting instructional theory into practice and peer tutoring and cooperative learning.

**Leadership:** Adult educators continued to request information and training in areas related to requirements for monitoring, performance indicators and standards and issues related to the New Jersey Administrative Code for adult high schools and for adult education programs in general. In times of diminishing resources, adult educators are also seeking methods to maximize and leverage resources as well as methodologies to link with other social service agencies and service providers.

**Technology:** Technology is an overarching issue which continually emerged as a need. Topics identified ranged from distance learning, to computer-aided instruction, identification of hardware and software, funding alternatives from private sector sources, use of the internet and program sharing with Adult Literacy Enhancement Center resources.

### **Principal Findings**

The findings from the on-going needs assessment bring to the fore the critical areas which must be addressed by the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center in the form of:

- Professional staff development programs for adult educators;
- Materials and resource development;
- Dissemination of proven programs and practices;
- Technical assistance; and
- Interagency networking.

**Principal Finding No. 1**

**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Adults with Learning Disabilities**

As is pointed out by the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, understanding the complex needs of adults with learning disabilities has become a critical issue. The needs of adults with disabilities in adult basic education, GED, and ESL programs are many. In some cases, these adults who are in our classrooms now were in school prior to the time when services were available for special needs students, prior to the advent of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, PL 94-142 reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), PL 99-457.

The network of potential service providers to this population is far reaching and includes special educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, higher education professionals, as well as adult and vocational educators joined most recently by other literacy agencies and program providers. Through the provisions of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and most recently through the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), PL 101-336, there is a strong national mandate that people with disabilities be accommodated, served and provided with basic opportunities for education, health care, housing, vocational training and jobs.

Voices from the field sound the message that providing services and support for adults with learning disabilities is an area of highest need. Topical areas of interest include:

- Accommodations for physical and mental handicaps;
- Testing accommodations for the GED and the HSPT;
- SRA process for disabled adults;
- Screening and diagnosis to determine the likelihood of learning disabilities;
- Intervention methods appropriate for use with adults with suspected learning disabilities;
- Staff training to use screening and intervention methods; and
- Identification of materials for use with learning disabled adults.

**Principal Finding No. 2**

**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Technology**

Technology continues to emerge as a need in adult literacy and training. As we move toward the year 2000, we must continually strive to apply emerging technologies to maximize service delivery to our client populations.

Topical areas of need in the technology area include:

- Technology for educators who need to adopt and implement technology into their adult literacy programs and who need to: (1) identify appropriate technologies; (2) purchase appropriate hardware and software; and, (3) obtain training in the application of technology;
- Application of technology for use with special need populations;
- Development and implementation of staff development and training on technology implementation and use;
- Application of technology for teaching and learning; and
- Administrative uses of technology.

**Principal Finding No. 3**

**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Basic Adult Education and Literacy**

There is a continuing need to implement effective teaching practices and materials to meet the needs of adults enrolled in adult basic skills classes (reading, mathematics and writing) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs as well as for those adults enrolled in Evening Schools for Foreign Born residents. Availability of materials for use with students preparing for the general educational development (GED) tests also continues to rank high among the list of concerns of adult educators. The topical areas of the GED which educators need to focus on include:

- Writing skills and essay preparation;
- Social studies;
- Science;
- Interpreting literature and the arts; and
- Mathematics.

**Principal Finding No. 4**

**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Educational Leadership**

Continuing concerns have been raised by New Jersey adult educators in the area which umbrellas educational leadership. Requests for information and technical assistance have been made in the following areas:

- Requirements for monitoring;
- Performance indicators and standards;
- New Jersey Administrative Code for adult high schools and for adult education programs;
- Leveraging of resources; and
- Linkages with other social service providers.

**Principal Finding No. 5**

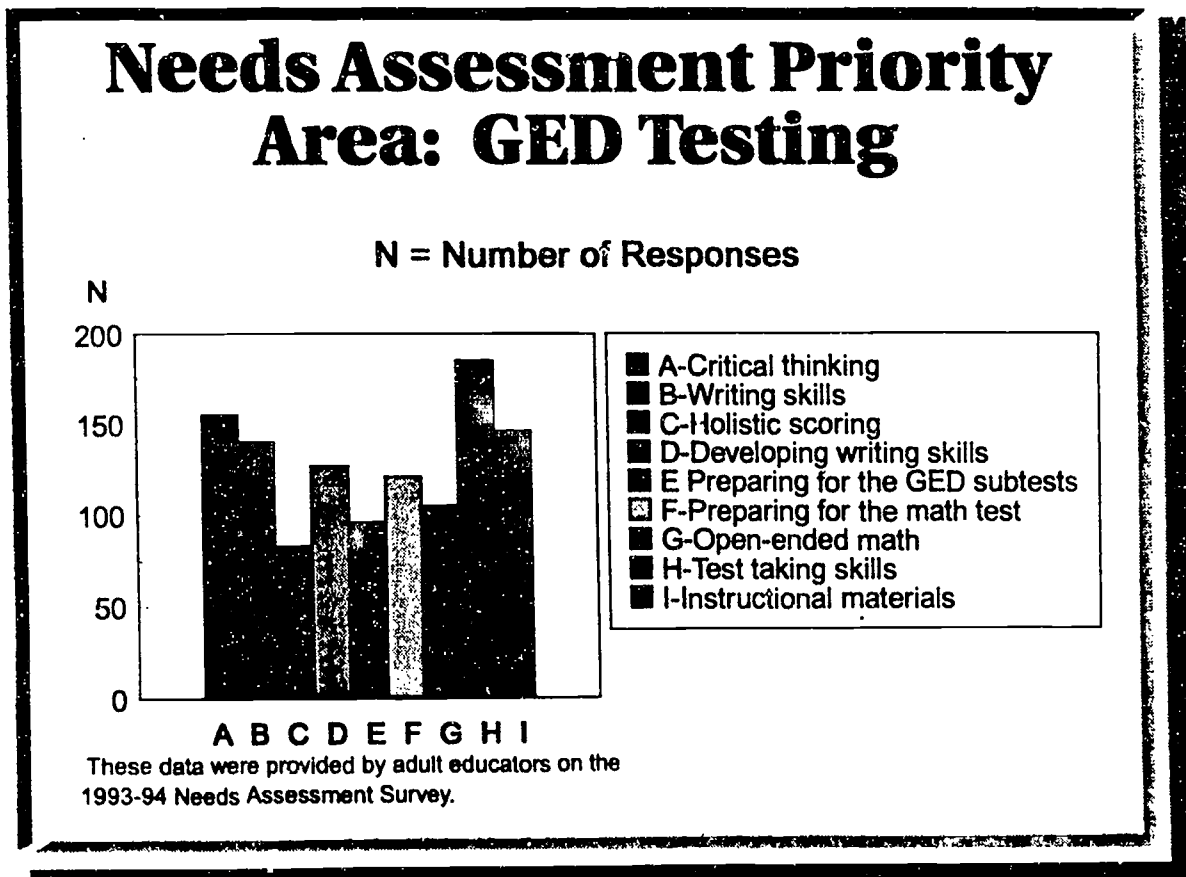
**Needs Assessment Priority Area: GED Testing**

Preparation of adults to take the GED is an ongoing concern for adult educators. This topic continually emerges as a priority need area. Various subtopics have been identified which range across a broad spectrum of topics including:

- Critical thinking;
- Writing skills;
- Holistic scoring;
- Developing writing skills;
- Preparing for the GED subtests;
- Mathematics subtest;
- Open-ended math;
- Test taking skills; and
- Instructional materials.

The graphical display presented below highlights in chart form the number of adult educators who selected each of the options as a need area.

**FIGURE 1**



**Principal Finding No. 6**

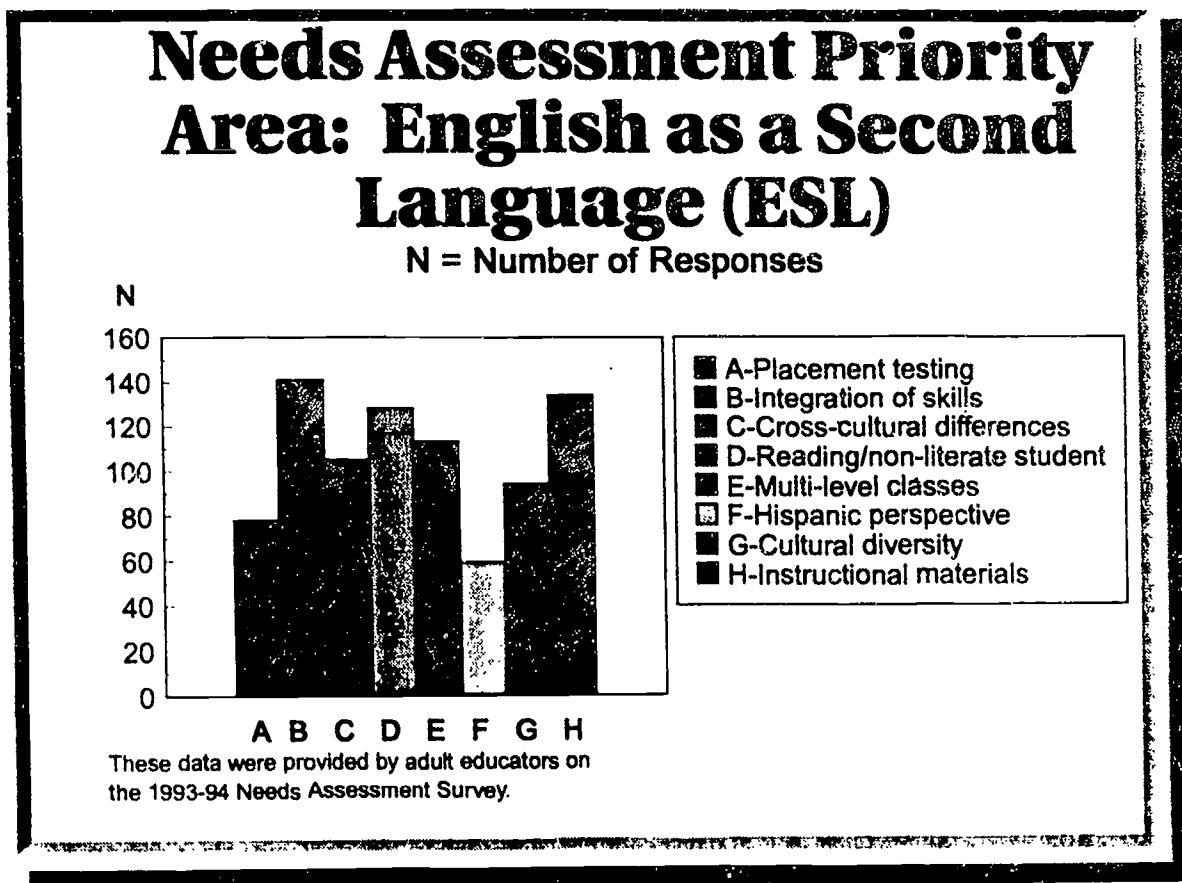
**Needs Assessment Priority Area: English as a Second Language (ESL)**

Given the demography of New Jersey and the continual in-migration of non-native speakers of English, the fact that ESL emerges as a priority area comes as no surprise. The analysis from the needs assessment conducted in 1993-94 distilled the following categories of need in the ESL areas listed below:

- Placement testing;
- Integration of skills;
- Cross-cultural differences;
- Reading for the non-literate ESL student;
- Multi-level classes;
- Latino perspective;
- Cultural diversity; and,
- Instructional materials.

The graphical display presented below highlights in chart form the number of adult educators who selected each of the options as a need area.

**FIGURE 2**



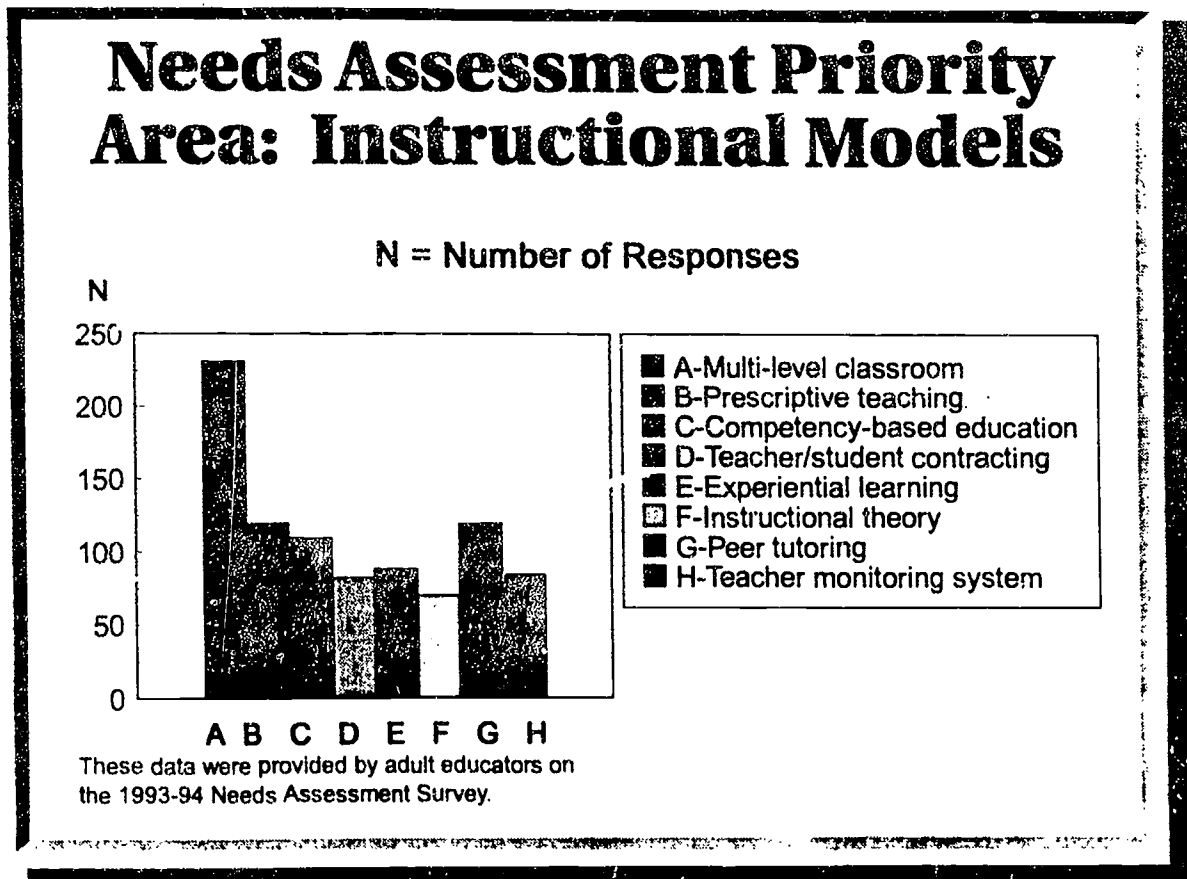
**Principal Finding No. 7**  
**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Instructional Models**

As with educators in the K-12 arena, adult educators are always seeking ways to maximize their instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of their students. In the adult classroom this need is even more paramount given the diversity of the clientele. The assessment data validated the need in the instructional models area and the following categories emerged:

- Multi-level classroom;
- Prescriptive teaching;
- Competency-based education;
- Teacher/student contracting;
- Experiential learning;
- Instructional theory;
- Peer tutoring; and
- Teacher monitoring system.

The graphical display presented below highlights in chart form the number of adult educators who selected each of the options as a need area.

**FIGURE 3**



**Principal Finding No. 8**  
**Needs Assessment Priority Area: Selected Issues**

A wide variety of areas in the category of support services were also identified by educators as priority needs. These included:

- Child care;
- Employment and training;
- Student support groups;
- Community resources; and
- Career counseling.

The graphical display presented below highlights in chart form the number of adult educators who selected each of the options as a need area.

**FIGURE 4**

