

# Contents

## 1 Summary and Policy Options, 1

What Is This Study About? 3

**What** Is “Literacy” 3

Who Are the Learners and What Do They Need? 5

**What** Problems Do Literacy Programs and Providers Face? 9

**What** Is the Impact of Federal Efforts? 11

How Could Technology Make a Difference? 14

Policy Issues and Options, 16

Building a Base of Technology for Literacy, 17

■ Improving the System, 21

Experimenting With New Alternatives, 25

Rethink the Federal Role, 26

## 2 The Changing Character of Literacy, 29

Findings, 30

What Is Literacy? 30

■ Defining Basic Skills, 32

■ Beyond the Basics: Changing Views of Essential skills, 33

■ So What Skills *Do* People Need? 39

Demographics of Adult Literacy, 41

■ School Completion Rates, 41

■ Tests of Literacy Skills, 45

■ Literacy Target Groups, 47

■ seeking Better Information, 56

Literacy Needs: Growing or Shrinking? 56

## 3 Adults as Learners, 61

Findings, 61

Literacy in Everyday Life: Adults With Low Literacy Skills, 62

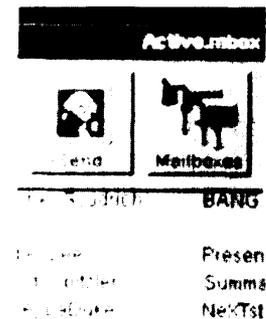
Profiles of Diversity, 63

■ Competence and Strength, 65

■ Strategies for Literacy, 69

Learning in Adulthood 69

Adults Seeking Learning Opportunities, 76



- The Decision to Participate in Adult Literacy Education, 78
  - The Importance of Motivation, 81
  - Why People Do Not Participate, 82
- Meeting Adult Learner Needs: The Role of Technology, **84**
- Reaching Learners Outside of Classrooms, 85
  - Using Learning Time Efficiently, **85**
  - Sustaining Motivation, 86
  - Individualizing Instruction, 88
  - Providing Access to Information Tools, 89
- Conclusions, 89

#### **4 The Literacy System: A Patchwork of Programs and Resources, 93**

- Findings, **93**
- The Delivery System, **94**
- Who Provides the Funds? **94**
  - Who Administers Programs and Provides the Services? **99**
  - Who Is Being Served? **107**
  - What Kinds of Instruction Do They Receive? 109
  - Who Are the Teachers? 115
- New Emphases in Literacy Programs, 115
- Workplace Literacy, 115
  - Family Literacy, 119
  - Programs for Incarcerated Adults, 121
- Policy Implications, 126

#### **5 The Federal Role in Adult Literacy Education, 127**

- Findings, **127**
- Growth of the Federal Role in Adult Literacy, 129
- Historical Perspective, 129
  - The Modern Federal Role Takes Shape, 129
  - Public Awareness, “Bully Pulpit,” and National Leadership, 131
  - Congress “Discovers” Adult Literacy: 1986 to the Present, 132
- Current Federal Role, 133
- The Number of Federal Literacy Programs, 135
  - Agency Roles, 136
  - Federal Dollars, 137
  - New Emphases, 142



- Definitions of Services, 144
- Target Populations, 144
- Administrative Entities and Service Providers, 146
- Services and Activities, 147
  - Accountability Requirements, 148
- Evaluation Requirements, 149
- Encouraging Technology Use, 150
  - Federal Provisions for Technology, 150
  - State and Local Reaction to Federal Technology Policy, 153
- Coordination Among Adult Literacy Programs, 154
  - Federal Requirements, 154
  - State and Local Impact, 155
- Federal Policy Issues, 157
  - Programs and Dollars, 157
  - Services, Quality, and Capacity Building, 157
  - Target Groups, 158
  - Technology, 158
  - Coordination, 158
- Conclusion, 159

## 6 Improving the System: Promising Roles for Technology, 161

- Findings, 161
- Recruiting, Retaining, and Serving Learners, 162**
  - Recruitment Issues and Strategies, 162
  - Retaining Learners Long Enough to Meet Goals:
    - The Problem of Attrition, 164
    - Serving Learners: Balancing Supply and Demand, 168
- Instructional Issues, 169
  - Curriculum: What Works? 169
  - Helping Teachers, Administrators, and Volunteers Do Their Jobs, 170
    - Evaluation and Assessment, 177
- Administrative Issues, 179
  - Funding, 179
  - Mandated Programs, 180
    - Lack of Central Focus and Problems of Coordination, 181
- A Final Note, 188

## 7 Technology Today: Practice vs. Promise, 189

- Findings, 190



- Access to Technologies for Literacy, 190
  - Access to Computer Hardware, 190
  - Access to Other Hardware, 192
  - Availability of Computer Courseware, 194
  - Availability of Other Courseware and Programming, 196
  - An Untapped Base of Technology, 196
- Uses** of Technology, 200
  - General Findings About Technology Use, 200
  - Benefits and Limitations of Technologies for Literacy, 204
  - The Promise Unfulfilled, 205
- Barriers to Use of Technology, 213
  - Funding Barriers, 213
  - Market Barriers, 216
  - Information Barriers, 219
  - Institutional Barriers, 219
- Conclusions, 221

## **8 Looking Ahead to a Future With Technology, 223**

- A Look Into the Future: Three Scenarios, 224
  - Carla King: Moving Ahead With a Changing Industry, 224
  - Dave Decker: Changing a Life, Starting a Future, 226
  - Tina Lopez: Family Support Through a Multipurpose Literacy Center, 228
- Questions Raised by the Scenarios: How to Create a Future for Literacy, 231
  - Hardware Advances, **231**
  - **Networking** Advances, 236
  - Software Advances, 237
  - Issues of Access and Equity, 239
- Conclusions, **242**

## **APPENDIXES**

**A List of Boxes, Figures, and Tables, 243**

**B Major Federal Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Programs, 246**

**C Key Coordination Provisions in Literacy Laws and Regulations, 249**



D Glossary, 252

E List of Acronyms, 256

F Workshop Participants, and Reviewers and  
Contributors, 258

G Contributing Sites, 265

H Contractor Reports Prepared for  
This Assessment, 268

INDEX, 269