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2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy report turns attention to literacy programs in California libraries

SACRAMENTO - [California State Library \(CSL\)](#) literacy leaders announced today that they are pleased that the U.S. Dept of Education's 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) [report](#), the first update of the nation's adult literacy skills in more than 10 years, has turned the [nation's eye](#) toward the plight of people with low literacy skills and the role California libraries play in helping those people. California's libraries connect people to literacy.

Approximately 3.4 million adult Californians are at "below basic" literacy levels. They cannot read medicine labels, election ballots, the *TV Guide*, or a jury pool summons. They cannot read to their small children. California's libraries are the safe place to which these people turn for tutoring and support. Currently California's library literacy programs have over 5,000 adults on their waiting lists.

[California Library Literacy Services \(CLLS\)](#), a division of the CSL, enables Californians of all ages to reach their literacy goals and use library services effectively. CLLS leaders often describe the "below basic" group as the hardest to reach because those people:

- Hide their lack of literacy skills for fear of consequences at work, home and community;
- Are reluctant to come forward because of the stigma attached to low literacy skills;
- Believe that they cannot be helped. Since they didn't succeed with traditional schooling, they often feel that they cannot succeed elsewhere;
- Are unaware of the resources in their own communities to get the help they need.

Last year, people in this group found safe harbor in California library literacy programs. CLLS libraries served 20,014 adults in 780 communities through 103 public library jurisdictions.

State Librarian of California Susan Hildreth has identified early literacy as critical to California. To further expand literacy services in California libraries, Hildreth plans to commit resources to a statewide library initiative that will provide literacy programs to Californians of all ages.

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