

Adult Education for the Homeless 1995 Report Executive Summary

Prepared for the California Department of Education Youth, Adult, and Alternative Education Services Division by CASAS

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Introduction

When the McKinney Homeless Act became law in 1987, Section 702 established a Statewide Literacy Initiative. This enabled the California Department of Education (CDE) to provide financial assistance to develop and implement literacy and basic skill remediation for adult homeless individuals.

The CDE contracted with CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) to provide assessment and data collection for the funded agencies. From 1989 - 1995 the basic skills of the students were assessed. Assessment data and demographic information were collected together. While this program ended years ago, the data collected may still be pertinent today. Ten agencies from around California participated in this data collection.

All students in the program took an initial assessment, a CASAS Appraisal Test. There were options for reading and math for English speaking students or reading and listening for English as Second Language students. The appraisals were a valuable tool in determining which of the students actually needed basic skill instruction. Linking this information to demographics; gender, age, ethnic background, native language, years of education, and highest degree earned enabled the agencies and the state to better understand and serve the homeless students.

One interesting result taken from the data is that each year, the English speaking homeless students generally scored high (above a CASAS 230) in reading, but had much more mixed results in math. This indicates that most of the homeless students were able to function in reading at or above a high school entry level but were much more deficient in math skills. The CASAS Appraisals and data collection were a valuable means of assisting the agencies in working with this population. When the funding ended, many of the agencies continued to use the Appraisals and some are additionally using the CASAS pre-and post-tests to monitor students' progress.

Nine agencies funded by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Act participated in the 1995 California program to provide literacy services to the adult homeless population. The agencies are: Berkeley Oakland Support Services, Catholic Social Service of Sacramento, Contra Costa County Office of Education, Episcopal Community Services of San Francisco, Mary Lind Foundation from Los Angeles, Riverside County Department of Community Action, Santa Clara Adult Education Center, Whittier Adult School and Vietnam Veterans of California in Santa Rosa. Since 1989, the California Department of Education has contracted with CASAS to provide assessment and other services as needed to implement the basic literacy provision of the McKinney Act. The services provided by CASAS include training for coordinators and

instructors, providing assessment materials, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing final reports.

The purpose of the data collection is to obtain reliable demographic and initial reading and math information on a sample of the adults enrolled in this federally funded program. The nine sites collected data samples between January 1 and December 1, 1995. During this time, data were collected from a total of 1,589 learners. Agencies were responsible for obtaining a representative sampling of their clients and providing an accurate estimate of how many clients they served in the education program during the calendar year.

Learners' basic reading and math skills are assessed at intake with either the CASAS Employability Competency System (ECS) Appraisal or the CASAS Life Skills Survey Achievement Tests or both. In some instances non-native speakers are assessed with the CASAS ESL Appraisal. A small sample was post-tested for learning gains after 80-100 hours but there was not a sufficient number to report.

Summary of Demographic Profile

Gender

A very large number, 69 percent, of this population were male and 31 percent were female. This has remained somewhat constant over a six year period. Age

The largest group, 38 percent were from 30-39 years of age, while 34 percent were over 40 years of age. The population under age 30 was 28 percent. Ethnic Background

The 1995 Adult Homeless Education sample was predominately Caucasian (45%), with 34 percent African-American and 12 percent Hispanic. American Indian and "Other" accounted for the final 9 percent. Native Language

The great majority (91%) of the participants reported English as their native language. Another seven percent were speakers of Spanish and the remaining two percent reported a variety of languages. Years of Education Completed

These data indicate a population that is relatively well educated. The homeless learners reported that 59 percent of them had twelve or more years of education. However, 41 percent had not completed 12 years of education and 15 percent had fewer than 10 years of education. Highest Degree Earned

Thirty-four percent of the population sampled had not earned any type of educational degree. Those holding high school diplomas or GED certificates were 49 percent of the sample. The remaining 17 percent indicated some other type of degree.

Assessment Results

Reading

Reading assessment results were derived from the CASAS ECS Appraisal, CASAS ESL Appraisal or a CASAS Survey Achievement pre-test. The mean reading score for this group was 234 on the CASAS Scale indicating that on average, those sampled had reading skills at or above

a beginning high school level. However, 11 percent scored below 200, 10 percent scored from 200-214, 14 percent from 215-224, and 10 percent from 225-229, indicating a need for basic reading literacy or ESL instruction for 45 percent of these learners. When separating the reading scores for those whose language is other than English, the scores are lower and demonstrate a large need for ESL instruction. A significant number, 79 percent scored below the 230 literacy benchmark, and 34 percent scored below the 200 level. Reading assessment data for 1995 are fairly consistent with reading appraisal scores reported in 1993 and 1994.

Math

Participants' math skills were assessed using the CASAS ECS Appraisal or a CASAS Math Survey Achievement pre-test. The average math score for those sampled was 218, a significant sixteen points below the average reading score. Most of this population could benefit from basic math instruction; 22 percent scored below 200, 25 percent were in the 200-214 range, 21 percent scored from 215-224, and nine percent scored from 225-229. Less than a fourth (23%) scored 230 or above, indicating fewer learners with math skills at or above the high school level.

Comparison with ABE/321 Population

California's federally funded adult basic education learners show some significant differences from the homeless adult education population. The background of the homeless participants is predominately male and English speaking with approximately one-third having no diploma or degree. The ABE/321 adult learners are over 50 percent female, 90 percent limited English proficient, with over one-half having no diploma or degree.

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