Service Sector Workers’ Skills

Findings from PIAAC and
Implications for Educators

PIAAC Conference
December 7, 2018
We start with people.
Why this project?

• Get hard data on foundational skills gaps in key service sectors

• Identify notable employer interventions and partnerships to support upskilling

• Determine effective policy levers to bring successful approaches to scale
PIAAC data analysis: Workers with low basic skills

- Ages 16 – 64
- Employed
- Work in retail, accommodations and food services, or health and social work
- Work in non-high skill occupations
- Performed at Level 2 or below on literacy and numeracy and at Level 1 or below for PS-TRE
Overview of findings

LOW SKILLS ARE PREVALENT AMONG SERVICE WORKERS

- **Low Literacy**: 62%
- **Low Numeracy**: 74%
- **Low Digital Problem-Solving Skills**: 73%

*Note: Number does not include the 20% of individuals who did not take the digital portion of the test.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Overall service sector</th>
<th>Retail</th>
<th>Accommodation &amp; food service</th>
<th>Health &amp; social work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 16-24</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25-34</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 35-44</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 45-54</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 55-64</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (may not sum to 100 due to rounding)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A plurality of workers with low skills are white.

- White: 46%
- Black: 20%
- Hispanic: 26%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 5%
- Other: 4%
Educational attainment

Most low-skilled workers have at least a high school diploma or equivalent:
- 65% with a high school diploma or equivalent
- 24% with a bachelor’s degree or equivalent
- 6% with an associate’s degree
- 4% with a graduate degree
- 1% with less than a high school diploma
Most low-skilled workers have been with their employer for at least 3 years.

- 42% Less than 3 years at current employer
- 22% Between 3-5 years at current employer
- 36% At least 6 years at current employer
Despite their skill gaps, many workers regularly need to use reading, writing, and math on the job.

- **Read directions, instructions**: 73%
- **Read letters, memos, emails**: 59%
- **Write letters, memos, emails**: 36%
- **Fill in forms**: 51%
- **Calculate prices, costs, budgets**: 50%
- **Use computer**: 55%
A MAJORITY OF WORKERS ARE CONTINUING TO LEARN NEW THINGS ON THE JOB

- LEARN NEW THINGS EVERY DAY: 32%
- LEARN NEW THINGS ONCE A WEEK: 22%
- LEARN NEW THINGS AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH: 15%
- LEARN NEW THINGS LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH: 8%
- NEVER LEARN NEW THINGS: 23%

NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.
MORE THAN 1 IN 3 WORKERS ARE REGULARLY TEACHING PEOPLE ON THE JOB

- 25% Teach people every day
- 23% Teach people at least once a week
- 15% Teach people at least once a month
- 14% Teach people less than once a month
- 15% Never teach people
NEARLY 1 IN 4 LOW-SKILLED WORKERS ARE SUPERVISORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervising</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 people</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 people</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 24 people</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 99 people</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 or more people</td>
<td>2%</td>
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</table>
AMONG WORKERS PURSUING FORMAL EDUCATION, A LARGE MAJORITY IS FOCUSED ON BASIC-SKILLS OR MIDDLE-SKILLS CREDENTIALS

- **53%** HIGH SCHOOL CREDENTIAL / OTHER NON-DEGREE
- **24%** ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE
- **19%** BACHELOR'S DEGREE
- **4%** GRADUATE DEGREE
MOST WORKERS PURSUING DEGREES DID SO FOR JOB-RELATED REASONS, BUT NOT NECESSARILY THEIR CURRENT JOB

- Job-related reasons: 69%
- Non-job-related reasons: 31%
What does this mean for educators?
In the classroom

• Learners are workers and workers are learners

• Learners often pursue education because of their career goals

• Individuals’ skill gaps are an invisible drag on their productivity
For researchers

• **Not enough is known** about how skill gaps and the costs of individual coping mechanisms affect workers’ career advancement

• Are low skills keeping people **stuck**, or are lower-skilled workers more **loyal**? Both?
For policy advocates

- **Integrated Education and Training (IET)** and other models can upskill adult learners for high-demand occupations

- **Employer-based upskilling** programs can be taken to scale through public policy

- **NSC** offers numerous free state and federal policy resources to use in your community
A non-reader was a highly skilled employee in his department, but was unable to be promoted until he came to adult education.

He learned the accommodations necessary to write memos, place orders, and read messages and instructions.

Eventually, he learned to read and received his promotion to supervisor.

-- Adult educator
Contact National Skills Coalition

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