

# The New York Association of Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE)



## 2006 Legislative Agenda

### **1. Reject the Governor's proposed \$6 million cut to the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) program.**

More than seven million adults in New York State function at the Basic or Below Basic level of prose literacy, according to the recently released State Assessment of Adult Literacy (SAAL). Last year, adult literacy programs funded by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) provided classes to 157,486 of these New Yorkers – a mere 2% of those in need of services.

Decreasing the EPE funds available to school districts and BOCES would place greater limits on the number of adult students that these providers could serve, and would decrease the overall capacity of the state's adult literacy delivery system at a time when it desperately needs to be expanded.

### **2. Increase Adult Literacy Education (ALE) funding from \$3.34 million to \$5 million for this fiscal year, and incrementally by \$1 million in subsequent years until the level of funding reaches \$10 million.**

Nearly three million adults in New York State function at the Below Basic level of prose literacy, according to the SAAL. Last year, only 51,525 of these New Yorkers (less than 2%) were served by the beginning level basic education and English language literacy classes funded by the NYSED.

Adult learners at this level require more time and a greater investment of resources to build their foundation skills. Yet unless they are supported in the development of their reading, writing and English language skills, most of these adults will be unable to fully support their children's education, enter vocational training programs, or find and keep jobs that will enable them to achieve self-sufficiency.

### **3. Support the creation of the State Adult Literacy Education (SALE) program proposed by the Regents. Appropriate \$6.8 million in new funding for SALE, rather than diverting \$6 million from the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) program as the Regents have proposed.**

More than 3.5 million adults in New York City function at the Basic or Below Basic level of prose literacy. Last year, adult literacy programs funded by the NYSED provided services to 61,673 of these New Yorkers -- less than 2% of those in need.

While libraries, community-based organizations, and CUNY colleges typically have long waiting lists for their adult literacy classes, current funding constraints make it impossible for these providers to expand their services. SALE will provide an additional \$6.8 million in adult literacy funding to libraries, faith/community based organizations, and CUNY and SUNY colleges, enabling these providers to better meet the demand on their programs.

### **4. Restore the \$3 million that was cut last year from the Welfare Education Program (WEP).**

Approximately 70% of mothers on public assistance function at the lowest levels of literacy, according to the State of Literacy in America. Assuming this proportion is also true of NYS, there are approximately 240,000 heads of household on public assistance in need of literacy services.

The Welfare Education Program provides the state component of the funding that supports Education for Gainful Employment (EDGE), an education and employment preparation program specifically designed to meet the needs of adults on welfare. Without a restoration of the \$3 million, it is likely that EDGE will be eliminated as of January 1, 2007.

**5. Amend existing policy to allow EPE programs to better serve populations in need.**

- **Increase the minimum contact hour reimbursement rate for EPE from \$3.40 to \$5.95.**

The current formula for calculating contact hour rates creates a challenge for school districts and BOCES who provide adult literacy classes in the more affluent areas of the state. These providers receive the lowest reimbursement rates, yet face the highest payroll and program costs. This disparity results in overcrowded classes, and a lack of adequate services for educationally disadvantaged adults in these communities.

NYACCE recommends amending ED 3602 (24)(e) to read “The aid ratio shall be expressed as a decimal to three places without rounding but shall not be less than **seventy** percentum.” This change would lead to an \$8.4 million increase in funding to EPE-providers whose current reimbursement rates are below \$5.95 per contact hour, but would not require any additional funding to EPE beyond the \$96 million appropriated this year.

- **Lift the cap on the portion of EPE funds (EPE II) that can be used to provide education and training to high school graduates with reading and/or math skills below an 8.9 grade level.**

Prior to the implementation of rigorous high school graduation standards in New York State, many students received high school diplomas without having acquired the skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary education or the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. These adults need to build their reading, writing, critical thinking, and numeracy skills in order to fully achieve their potential. No adult should be penalized and denied access to adult education simply because they played by the rules and were “passed on” in high school.

- **Allow EPE programs to carry over unexpended funds from one fiscal year to another.**

Present fiscal regulations require all EPE funds to be spent and goods received prior to June 30<sup>th</sup> of each fiscal year. Most districts must have all accounts closed four to six weeks prior to that date for accounting purposes. However, programs are unable to calculate the total contact hours they generate until after June 30<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, many providers lose the ability to expend the funds they earned for the services they provided from the end of May through the end of June.

Many EPE providers must return EPE funds that were appropriated but not spent. This policy creates a Catch-22 by diminishing the ability to expend funds, which in turn is perceived as a lack of need for these funds. Proposals are then made to cut funds because funds were not fully expended.

NYACCE recommends that EPE programs be permitted to carry over unexpended funds from one fiscal year to another in the same manner as other state aided and categorical funded programs. EPE is currently the only such program that is denied the ability to carry over funds.

- **Provide a viable funding source for out-of school youth, ages 18 to 20, who do not have a high school diploma and are discouraged from attending traditional high schools, to cover costs incurred when they attend adult programs.**

Out of school teenagers, 18 to 20, are not eligible to generate EPE funds when they attend adult literacy classes. Equivalent Attendance Aid is insufficient to cover associated costs. Additionally, many home school districts will not enter COSERs to reimburse literacy providers the meager funds that are available.

The implementation of the New York State standards is causing a major enrollment increase in this population according to program reports. Many students are turned away because there are insufficient funds to recoup associated costs.

Many of these young adults have no other place to continue their education because it is not feasible for them to return to a high school setting.

NYACCE recommends that EPE funding should be extended to allow school districts and BOCES to generate funding for this age group and/or increase the Equivalent Attendance aid formula.

- **Amend current policies that create disruptions in the flow of funding and the provision of services when there are delays in the state budget approval process. Additionally, allow NYSED to return to the practice of processing reimbursement for services three times a year to increase access to appropriated funds.**

NYACCE recommends restoring the three-payment system to improve the cash flow to school districts and BOCES. Currently the first payment is received in May when the program year is almost over. The three-payment system would allow for reimbursement after each four-month period with payments made in February, June and October.

NYACCE recommends removing the cap on the first payment (April payment under the current law) to improve the cash flow to school districts and BOCES. The current law allows only \$25 million to be paid out in the first fiscal year with the balance of the first period claim and the full second period to be paid in October. This means that programs operate the entire year on approximately 25% of their funding.

**NYACCE represents the professionals who utilize federal, state and local resources to meet the educational and training needs of individuals, families, employers and communities.**

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