

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



2006 Legislative Agenda: An Overview

New York State has a literacy crisis. Resolving it is crucial to our future: New York's long-term prosperity and competitiveness in the global economy depends on a highly skilled workforce, not a workforce relegated to low wage jobs. Nearly one in five New Yorkers (19%) age 16 and over functions at the Below Basic level of prose literacy, according to the recently released New York State Assessment of Adult Literacy.¹ Another one in three (31 percent) function at the Basic level. That means *exactly half of all New Yorkers age 16 and above typically cannot perform many important daily tasks*, such as consulting reference materials to determine which foods contain a particular vitamin. Those at the Below Basic are even more in peril: they typically cannot do much more than locate readily identifiable information in short, simple texts.

New York's literacy performance is significantly worse than that of the U.S. as a whole. Nationally, only 14 percent of adults are at the Below Basic level, and 29 percent function at the Basic level. Among New Yorkers age 25-39, average literacy on all three scales lags significantly behind national averages. It is these New Yorkers who will serve as the backbone of the state's workforce over the next quarter century. They are also the parents of our current generation of school children.

Adults at the Basic level typically need GED preparation services, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Adults at the Below Basic Level typically need adult basic education (ABE) and English language services (ESL).² In New York State, over seven million adults could benefit from these State Education Department (SED) funded programs. Last year, only two percent of them—157,000—were enrolled.

New York is the third highest recipient of federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title 2 dollars, the principal source of federal funding for adult literacy services. Yet our state ranks 15th

¹ *Highlights From the 2003 New York State Assessment of Adult Literacy*, American Institutes for Research, December 2005. Available at <http://www.air.org/naal/>. The New York State Assessment of Adult Literacy (SAAL) was conducted in conjunction with the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), a national literacy assessment sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the US Department of Education. Both the NAAL and the SAAL measured literacy on three scales: Prose, Document, and Quantitative. They divided performance into four levels: Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient.

² *Key Concepts and Features of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, National Center for Education Statistics, December 2005, pp. 12-13.

among states in both spending per adult literacy student and state dollars contributed per student. New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Maine all do better—often, far better: Vermont invests over four times as many state dollars per student.³

The three primary sources of New York State funding for adult literacy education are Employment Preparation Education (EPE), which is available to school districts and BOCES; Adult Literacy Education (ALE), which is available to libraries, community-based organizations and colleges; and the Welfare Education Program (WEP). Together with federal funds, this state money puts the total current funding for adult literacy at \$142 million.

NYACCE is calling on the Legislature to take five modest steps that would dramatically improve the state's adult literacy performance:

- Reject the Governor's proposed cut to EPE and maintain funding at \$96 million;
- Increase ALE funding from \$3.34 million to \$10 million over the next 6 years;
- Create a new program, State Adult Literacy Education (SALE), which would provide an additional \$6.8 million to libraries, faith/community based organizations, and CUNY and SUNY colleges;
- Restore the \$3 million cut from WEP; and
- Amend the EPE funding formula and regulations so that school districts and BOCES can more effectively serve those in need.

Details of these proposals are included in the attached Legislative Agenda. For more information, please contact:

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³ *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act: Program Facts*, US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, December 2005.