



TESTIMONY
BY
LITERACY NEW YORK

PRESENTED TO
FISCAL COMMITTEES OF THE NEW YORK
STATE LEGISLATURE
HEARING ON
THE FY 2016 - 2017 EXECUTIVE BUDGET

JANUARY 27, 2016
ALBANY, NEW YORK

LITERACY NEW YORK

***2016-17 Budget
Recommendations***

Literacy New York endorses the 2016-17 Executive Budget that includes Adult Literacy Education (ALE) funded at \$6.293 million.

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Literacy New York urges the Legislature to increase the budget appropriation for Adult Literacy Education to \$10 million from the current level of \$6.293 million.

My name is Janice Cuddahee. I am the Executive Director of Literacy New York (LNY), a statewide organization that has been providing adult literacy education, English language learning, and nonprofit management technical assistance and professional development since 1974. LNY, and the volunteer literacy network, targets and serves students at the lowest literacy levels who face multiple learning barriers. LNY serves these students through a professional literacy instruction model developed by state and national experts, and enhanced by local community providers. Our approach – accommodating adult learners through flexible instruction that matches their schedules, pace and individual learning abilities – enables these students to transition to high school equivalency classes, post-secondary education, and the workforce.

LNY, and local literacy organizations, work with the Labor Department, Workforce Investment Boards, Educational Opportunity Centers, BOCES, Veteran Service agencies, and state, regional and local employers to help students with job placement services and employment. LNY connects with Mental Health Associations, Rural Health Centers, hospitals, Office for the Aging and others to support adult and health literacy tutoring and special projects. LNY partners with libraries, colleges, universities, community colleges, and many others to assist adults to improve their lives through literacy.

At Literacy New York, we believe Literacy Leads: to Employment, to Independence, to Opportunity. Literacy transforms lives. Literacy strengthens every community across New York State. For over 40 years, LNY has been an advocate for New York adults in need of literacy services.

Among the roles that Literacy New York performs is to serve as a Statewide Technical Assistance Center under the Adult Literacy Education program. In that role, LNY provides technical assistance to over 40 local, community providers throughout New York State. With our support and assistance, these providers offer professional and accountable adult basic education and English language instruction to more than 3,500 adults at the lowest literacy levels.

Adult Literacy Education Program Funding

I want to thank members of the Legislature for your continued support of Adult Literacy Education (ALE) funding. In 2015-16, with your support, the ALE Program was funded at \$6.293 million.

While this amount is still below the peak 2008-2009 funding levels (\$7.04 million), these funds keep the program level with the current year. We are grateful that the 2016-17 Executive budget includes continued funding of \$6.293 million for the Adult Literacy Education program. That amount allows community-based program providers a level of consistency in funding that is vital to their operations.

We urge you not only to ensure that \$6.293 million is included in the adopted State Budget but also to increase funding beyond that amount. We will present our reasons to support that request. We further ask that you include provisions in the appropriation for any additional funding to allow current recipients of Adult Literacy Education funding to compete for a portion of those additional funds. This added provision would allow currently funded programs the opportunity to expand services to meet the growing needs in their communities.

Across New York, there are over 2.7 million adults (over 16 and out of school) without a high school credential, according to the New York State Education Department (NYSED). There are over 2.3 million adults who do not speak English well or at all. Incredibly, fewer than 115,000 adults

and out of school youth are annually served in all NYSED funded adult education programs – only 4% of the target population.

Local, community providers in Buffalo, Syracuse, Watertown, Kingston, Tompkins County, and many others have “waiting lists of students” seeking services. These programs do not have the budgets or staff – volunteer and paid – to recruit, train, and support instructors and volunteer tutors to meet the needs. For New York’s economy and all of our citizens to move forward, we must address the critical need for expanded adult literacy and education services.

In light of the needs we see, Literacy New York (LNY) urges the Legislature to increase the Adult Literacy Education (ALE) budget appropriation from the current \$6.293 million to a new level of \$10 million for the 2016-17 fiscal year. Our request recognizes the significant need that LNY and local programs – upstate, Long Island, and New York City – are seeing in their communities. ALE funding is instrumental in enabling adult literacy education providers across the state to offer adult basic skills, literacy, numeracy, health literacy, family literacy, and workforce education. Conversely, insufficient funding hampers our capacity to provide these services through our volunteer and community-based programs.

Need for Adult Literacy Education

Literacy New York and programs similar to ours in New York City exist because there is a need to foster and strengthen literate communities throughout NYS. For more than 25 years, LNY and a network of over 40 local, community providers have utilized ALE funding to build more literate communities in urban centers like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Binghamton, Albany, Middletown, Yonkers and Hempstead – and in rural areas of Chenango, Essex, Franklin, Wayne, Wyoming and other counties across the state of New York.

Annually, more than 6,500 volunteers in the ALE-funded network provide basic literacy and English Language Learning to a diverse cross-section of learners (3,500 upstate and over 4,500 in New York City) at the lowest literacy levels. According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 19% of New York’s adults lacked Basic Literacy skills. In Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, New York City, and in rural counties like Franklin, Washington, and Lewis, “lacking Basic Skills” percentages range between 14% and 36%.

The *New York Profile of Adult Learning* (Nat. Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2010) shows 22.8% of all working-age adults in New York have basic education challenges “the state must address.” Research and U.S. Census data clearly show that employees with a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma earn significantly more (approximately \$10,000 annually) than workers without these credentials.

New York State’s Bridge to College and Careers Program offers a model career pathways strategy to improve adult learner success. However, very low-skilled adults will not benefit from the career pathways opportunities without strong foundational reading, numeracy, English language, digital and other literacy skills. With over four decades of experience, Literacy New York and the network of local providers is uniquely qualified to meet the needs of adult students at the very lowest literacy levels, assist them to transition to career pathway opportunities, and achieve greater economic, social and personal self-sufficiency.

The lack of literacy skills is the thread that weaves through so many of today's societal issues including poverty and high dropout rates in schools. Children whose parents are literate are five times more likely to succeed in the classroom than children whose parents cannot assist them and share in their learning. This means that investments in Adult Literacy Education have corresponding benefits in children's academic performance levels.

Low skills are a real barrier to understanding basic health, financial, consumer and digital literacy concepts that all of us in this room take for granted. Statewide, 221,105 or 37 percent of low-income working families (earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level) include one or more adults who speak English less than well.

The New York State Community Action Association's *New York State Poverty Report (2015)* shows the direct link between educational attainment and poverty: 29.3% of New York's adults 25 and over with no high school diploma live in poverty versus 15.1% of adults 25 and over with a high school diploma. For adults with post-secondary education, the percentages of those living in poverty are much smaller: 10.8% for those with an Associate's degree and 5.3% for those with a Bachelor's. Literacy is the foundation of education. **Helping low-skilled adults gain the basic education and English language skills needed to transition to higher education has enormous benefits for New York's families, communities, and economy.**

Benefits of Adult Literacy Investments

“Literacy Leads to employment, to independence, and to opportunity.” Literacy changes lives and communities. An additional investment in Adult Literacy Education – increasing the budget appropriation to \$10 million from the current level of \$6.293 million – would enable the existing, cost-effective, statewide, volunteer-based adult literacy network to grow. It would enable the network of non-profit providers to professionally train and support thousands of new literacy tutors that would serve thousands more adult learners in need of basic skills. The additional funding could enable local programs to provide services to over 5,000 additional adult learners.

ALE provides the critical core funding to enable LNY and local agencies to continue to provide adult literacy services. “Even though the number of adult New Yorkers with limited basic literacy skills – and the number of immigrants with limited English proficiency – has skyrocketed over the past two decades,” says the Center for an Urban Future, “New York State's adult education funding has remained level.”

LNY believes, along with the Center for an Urban Future, that “New York has an opportunity to make adult education a vital component of a larger vision to serve adult learners, employers and the state economy. The state must seize that opportunity.”

We urge your support of a \$10 million appropriation for the Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

For over 40 years, Literacy New York has worked tirelessly to ensure that Literacy leads to employment, to independence, and to opportunity for every New York adult. **We know – literacy transforms lives, and – Literacy Leads to a better New York.**

In Cobleskill, literacy leads to employment

“John went to the local literacy office looking for someone to help him study for his High School Equivalency – New York’s TASC test. He was referred by his employment counselor at Workforce Development. John is middle-aged and has a bad back, so a job with lots of physical activity is out. John needed his High School Equivalency diploma in order to apply for higher paying, non-manual labor jobs.

John was placed with a volunteer tutor and diligently worked with her. He wanted to sit for the TASC exam in 3 months...a challenging, but not impossible goal. John sat for the exam in December (3 and 1/2 months after beginning his study) and passed. He was hired for a 30 hour per week, better paying job and is now considering continuing his education.”

In Kingston, Ulster County, literacy leads to independence

“Eric grew up here but dropped out of school in 8th grade. When he was 32 he lost his leg in a motorcycle accident. His attorney realized he was having trouble reading and suggested he come to Ulster Literacy for a tutor. We matched him with Brenda, and after two years of working together, Eric was reading at an 11th grade level.

He passed a promotional exam at work, got married, and had his first child. Now, he speaks at local high schools during prom season about the dangers of texting and driving - which is how he lost his leg. Next for Eric: he’s applying to community college with the help of his tutor.”

In Syracuse, literacy leads to opportunity (and a Student of the Year Award!)

“Josette (originally from Haiti) wanted to learn English well enough to achieve these goals:

1. To get a job. She negotiated the online application processes for 6 companies and got a job in the fitting room at Marshalls. Her skills have improved so much that she now fills in handling customer questions.
2. To understand her children's teachers. Last week she attended a principal/parent meeting.

Now, at her tutoring sessions, she is clearly able to relate entire discussions in much improved English. Josette is on to new goals!”

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to thank you for your continued support of **Adult Literacy Education (ALE)**. Literacy New York’s mission and goal has always been to **Build More Literate Communities** throughout New York State and to help individuals, families and communities succeed. With only 4% of adults in need of basic literacy skills currently being served in State Education Department-funded programs, there is a tremendous amount of work to be done and investment required.

Again, to re-affirm our request to you as you finalize your Legislative Budget proposals: *we are asking that the appropriation to the Education Department for the Adult Literacy Education program be increased to a new level of \$10 million annually which will allow over 5,000 additional New Yorkers to be served by local programs.*

Literacy Leads: to Employment, to Independence, to Opportunity. Literacy transforms lives, and strengthens New York communities.

As always, please consider Literacy New York a resource to you and your communities. We urge you to visit the local literacy program in your community. For contact information, visit <http://literacynewyork.org/index.php/lny-affiliates/affiliates-by-region.html>

Please contact me directly if you need additional information or resources.

Thank you.