



National Coalition For Literacy

American Library Association ◦ Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers ◦ Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee ◦ Commission on Adult Basic Education ◦ Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy ◦ GED Testing Service ◦ Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy and the Goodling Institute for Research, Pennsylvania State University ◦ International Reading Association ◦ Literacy USA ◦ National Center for Family Literacy ◦ National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy ◦ National Center on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania ◦ National Council of State Directors of Adult Education ◦ ProLiteracy Worldwide ◦ Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education ◦ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. ◦ Voice of Adult Literacy United for Education ◦ World Education

July 5, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As president of the National Coalition for Literacy, an organization comprised of providers and stakeholders supporting adult literacy in the United States, I am writing to urge you not to agree to the 66% cut in funding for the Adult Education and Family Literacy state grant program that has been proposed in the President's 2006 Budget recommendations and to agree in Subcommittee mark-up to the recommendation of the House of Representatives of level funding for adult education at \$569 million. We also ask that you provide level funding to adult education's companion program, Even Start at \$225 million, \$25 million more than the House mark.

If such a cut were to take place it would deny or abruptly terminate instruction in July of 2006 to approximately 500,000 out-of-school youth and adults attempting to complete their elementary and secondary education or learn the English language. (This number could increase to 625,000 if states reduce their required 25% match to correspond to the Federal reduction). Approximately one half of those whose instruction will be denied or terminated will be immigrants and refugees, primarily Latino, pursuing instruction in English.

Several rationales have been advanced by the Administration for this unprecedented cut. One is that Pell grants will somehow compensate for the drop in adult education funds. Pell grants, however, are made available only to students pursuing postsecondary education. Adult Education and Literacy programs are proscribed by statute from providing education at the postsecondary level.

A second rationale is that funds for English instruction to immigrants and refugees have been spared. Actually only the English Language/ Civics set-aside is held harmless. This program enrolls only 3% of the 2.7 million individuals served annually by the Adult Education and Literacy state grant program. Since almost one half of this 2.7 million are pursuing instruction in English, holding this small program harmless will do very little to cushion the effect of this proposed cut on individuals seeking to learn English.

Another argument offered by the Administration is that the increased effectiveness of secondary education resulting from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation will diminish the need for adult

education. Initially, at least, the reverse appears to be true. Adult education programs are experiencing an influx of recent dropouts unable to meet the escalating requirements of NCLB. Even if NCLB is eventually as successful as projected by the Administration, secondary school completers entering the workforce annually comprise only 2% of that workforce. Any effort to upgrade workforce skills to meet international competition will have to involve services to the existing workforce as well as to those just entering.

The Administration also attempts to justify this reduction in funding by a Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) evaluation of the Adult Education and Family Literacy program performed by the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This evaluation gave the program a "Results Not Demonstrated" rating. While we do take issue with some of the criticisms of the program contained in the evaluation (please see the enclosed analysis of the PART evaluation) what is most striking is the fact that all of the criticisms are directed at the conduct of the program at the Federal level. No remedial activity by state and local programs could in any way address the issues raised by the PART evaluation. Yet, as many as 625,000 deserving individuals are slated to pay the price for it.

The nation's Adult Education and Family Literacy program was one of the first Federal education programs to voluntarily adopt accountability measures. States have three to four years of data to document the success of this program. As reported by USDE, in the first three program years under WIA adult education achieved the following impressive outcomes for adults participating in the program:

- 1,509,475 adults enrolled in Basic or Secondary Education advanced one or more education levels (minimum grade level equivalent of 2 years per level);
- 1,169,696 adults enrolled in English language advanced one or more education levels of 6 possible levels;
- 547,590 adults earned a high school diploma or GED;
- 145,845 adults enrolled in postsecondary education or training;
- 421,862 adults were employed one quarter after program exit;
- 587,910 adults retained employment three quarters after program exit.

Continuation at least at current funding levels is crucial to the successful assimilation of our nation's immigrants and refugees, the ability of the nation's workforce to withstand foreign competition, the rehabilitation of offenders through education programs in correctional institutions, and increasing the capability of the nation's parents to help their children make the most of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Moreover, continuation of this program can result in savings of billions of dollars that, according to the American Medical Association, are needlessly expended annually because so many of the nation's citizenry lack the basic skills required to comprehend and follow guidelines to good health.

Please maintain the funding for the Adult Education and Family Literacy state grant program at its FY2005 level of \$569 million.

Sincerely,



Dale Lipschultz
President



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OMB'S "PART" (PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT RATING TOOL) ASSESSMENT CRITICIZES FEDERAL CONDUCT OF ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM – PUNISHES LOCAL PARTICIPANTS

THE CUTS AND THE CONSEQUENCES

The President's budget proposal for FY2006 calls for a 66% cut in the Federal appropriation for Adult Education and Literacy state grants.

Such a cut will require that approximately 500,000 adult students have their instruction denied or terminated as of 7/1/06. If States reduce their required 25% match to correspond to the Federal reduction, this number could rise to 625,000.

Half of the students who will have their instruction denied or terminated will be immigrants and refugees, primarily Latino, taking instruction in the English language.

THE FALLACY OF OMB'S "PART" ASSESSMENT

The Administration cites a "PART" assessment by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that assigned a "Results Not Demonstrated" finding for Adult Education and Literacy as the rationale for this unprecedented funding reduction.

The PART assessment lists nine criticisms of the Adult Education and Literacy Program.

- The program is criticized three times for setting percentage goals rather than numerical goals. This is a decision that was made at the Federal level. OMB demands that the States set numerical goals for each category of individuals served. This would require states and local programs to set quotas for which adults could enter programs. They would have a quota for the number of adults with goals such as pursuit of employment, pursuit of better employment, achievement of a secondary school credential, and entry into, retention in, and completion of training or postsecondary education. The law does not require that such quotas be set. Accordingly the Federal Department of Education has allowed State and local programs to enroll all eligible individuals – determining their individual goals upon enrollment. The Department then negotiates percentages to be attained by each State for each goal category.

The states have three to four years of data documenting their success in meeting their percentage goals. This difference of opinion as to what the law requires exists totally at the Federal level. State and local programs have no say in the matter; yet it is those programs that are being punished by a severe cut in funding.

- The program is also criticized for the lack of a strategic planning network, a lack of research, a lack of short term goals ,and a lack of an appraisal system to hold Federal managers accountable for grantee performance-all of these are Federal, not state responsibilities.
- The program was cited for having an accountability system that is not consistent with OMB's common measures. But the common measures are focused almost entirely on employment considerations. Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (Adult Education and Literacy) contains a broader set of purposes.

To sum up, the Federal Government has evaluated its own performance and has found it wanting. These findings provide no justification for denying education to one half million or more deserving individuals.

National Council of State Directors of Adult Education www.ncsdae.org and
National Coalition for Literacy www.national-coalition-literacy.org