



# 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

December 29, 2004

The Honorable Margaret Spellings  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ms. Spellings:

The National Coalition for Literacy represents numerous long-established adult education and literacy organizations. On behalf of our membership, we are pleased to offer our warmest congratulations on your nomination as Secretary of Education. We're counting on a continuing and strong commitment to adult education and literacy as you take up your new responsibilities at the Department of Education and look forward to working with you on our common goals.

In this first communication, we would like to tell you about two matters of special concern to the Coalition at this juncture, and I'm hoping that a group of national leaders in adult education and literacy might call on you after the first of the year to discuss these and related matters in more detail.

## 1. The National Institute for Literacy

As you may know, the National Institute for Literacy was originally established to serve the adult literacy world and it was only recently that early literacy was added to its agenda. While mindful of the important work NIFL is and will be doing in the area of children's literacy, the Coalition is on record as supporting both the continuation of NIFL and a strong, continuing program in adult education and literacy at NIFL. We also favor a permanent director who has a firm commitment to both adult education and activities for young people.

Thousands of professionals across the country view NIFL's continued role to be both substantively and symbolically important. Indeed, a good many of us worked very hard in the early 1990s to create the National Literacy Act and the NIFL in what was a true partnership between leadership groups in the field and members of Congress. We would like to stress again the high importance we give this set of issues. We will continue working as appropriate with Congress to clarify the issues and what is at stake, and we hope very much for your

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understanding and support.

## 2. The Importance of Keeping the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act within the Department of Education.

In the last couple of weeks, members of the Coalition have heard from several credible sources that representatives of the Department are discussing moving responsibility for the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor. Because this information has come from sources that are normally reliable, we want to take this occasion to inquire as to their accuracy and to express our views, indeed the views of all leadership groups in this field, as to the appropriate administrative location for federal adult education and literacy programming. Whenever this kind of move has been considered in the past, it has been discussed and quickly understood that programs, if placed under Labor, would end up disconnected from their broad range of educational purposes. Moreover, the purpose of adult literacy programs is not solely economic. Adult education and family literacy instruction is by definition educational in nature. By producing, measuring, and documenting learning gains, the program produces beneficial effects in a number of policy arenas. It prepares undereducated parents - or parents with limited proficiency in English - to better support the education of their children and to work with teachers to reach the goals of the No Child Left Behind legislation. It expends approximately half of all available federal and state funding for ESL instruction for immigrants and refugees, both employed and unemployed, and assists them in preparation for citizenship. Programs in penal institutions help ex offenders make a successful transition to life after incarceration. And family literacy programs empower parents, through their own advancement, to better support the learning of their children, which is so important to achieving the goals of No Child Left Behind.

At present, adult education and literacy programs are extending their secondary level credentialing programs, such as GED and adult diploma programs, to links with community colleges to provide a smooth transition into postsecondary education. Drop-out recovery programs are an integral component of many ABE programs. Moreover, public health officials are becoming increasingly aware of the connection between low literacy (and limited proficiency in English) and poor health maintenance, and they are working with adult educators to introduce vital health information into the adult education curriculum.

Adult education also plays a very important role in employment and training - for both employed and unemployed - and for welfare recipients, but it does so by providing educational services. It helps those who need training to reach requisite education and English proficiency levels for admission and, in some cases, is provided concurrently with skill training. Workplace literacy programs - operated in partnership with employers - allow those employers to upgrade the skills of their employees to remain competitive.

Common to all these roles is that the services provided are educational. They may be provided in a variety of social, economic, and educational systems, but the key service is instruction in basic and secondary skills or in English language programs that move adults along an education

continuum into college study and job training (often provided by colleges).

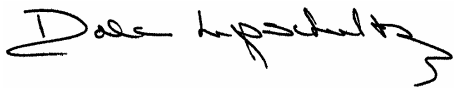
We believe now, as we have in the past, that the best place from which to administer these services is the Department of Education. That being the case, we would naturally oppose any initiative to move adult education out of the Department of Education and into the Department of Labor. We do recognize and support the right of states to decide which state agency should govern adult education and literacy, and we know that in a small number of cases (6), the state workforce agency has been chosen or been given a more active role. In a few, this placement appears to have been beneficial to adult education and literacy. At the federal level, however, we feel strongly that the manifold roles and goals of adult education and literacy can be most successfully pursued within the Department of Education, with its strong connections to state education departments, postsecondary institutions, and other entities at the state level.

In short, we would see a move to the Department of Labor as resulting in virtual destruction of an educational field that is growing in importance as the country faces the future, destruction that would have profound implications at the local, state, and national level.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in the near future to discuss the issues touched on above. We are optimistic about the future under your leadership and want to establish clear and productive channels of communication as early in your tenure as convenient for you. We understand that such a meeting may not be possible until after your confirmation hearing is successfully concluded. We are, therefore, sharing a copy of this letter with Assistant Secretary Sclafani with the hope and expectation that we will engage in this conversation with her during the period before you take up your new office.

Thank you so much for your attention. And again, we wish you our warmest congratulations on your nomination.

Cordially,



Dale Lipschultz  
President

cc: The Honorable Susan Sclafani  
Jane Oates  
Scott Fleming