

**Testimony of
Dale Lipschultz
Before the
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Dale Lipschultz. I am the President of the National Coalition for Literacy, which represents a wide segment of the adult education and family literacy community. NCL members include the nation's major providers of and commentators on adult education and literacy, family literacy, and English as a Second Language. NCL organizational members represent adult learners, teachers, trainers, tutors, libraries, research institutions, and professional development experts. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you NCL's position on funding for Adult Education and Even Start programs for FY 2007.

Adult Education programs play a key role in many important federally funded programs. Too often, the importance and the contribution of adult education is unrecognized. For adults striving to make the transition from welfare-to-work, adult education can open the door to opportunity, employment, and independence. For high school dropouts, adult education programs can be the bridge to obtaining a GED, entering job training programs, enrolling in higher education classes, and ultimately, finding employment. For parents with low literacy skills, adult education programs help them attain the skills they need to their support the children's education. Without parental support the full potential of *No Child Left Behind* may not be realized. For our newest citizens, English as a Second Language and civics courses provide the pathway to success at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Adult education programs are the

pathway to the American dream. And finally, for the unemployed and underemployed adult education programs offer opportunities to master the complex skills needed to obtain and retain employment in today's high tech society. These are a few examples of the power of adult education and the ways in which it contributes to the success of existing government programs.

The recently released National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL, National Center for Educational Statistics, December, 2005) clearly identifies the need for adult education programs and services. The NAAL report found that 93 million adults (45% of the adult population) have difficulty "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." This is a large segment of our population. Their needs cannot be ignored nor can their potential.

Currently, the adult education system can only serve 3 million individuals annually. This is achieved by combining state, federal and local dollars. We know that throughout the United States, there are individuals looking for adult education services and programs, waiting lists are growing, and opportunities are being lost.

It's a known fact that businesses need a well-trained workforce and the strength of our economy depends on a skilled, educated workforce. The NAAL report found that 51 percent of adults at *Below Basic*, the lowest prose literacy level, were not in the labor force in 2003. In fact, only 35 percent of the individuals at the *Below Basic* level were employed full time. Similarly, 38 percent of adults at the *Basic* level of prose literacy were not in the labor force. We must address the educational needs of this large segment of the population if our nation is to remain competitive in the global economy and if the

President's competitiveness initiative is to succeed. This cannot be accomplished without additional and substantial financial investment in adult education programs.

For new citizens and recent immigrants, English language instruction paves the road to education, employment, and the American dream. Currently, individuals enrolled in ESL programs constitute almost half of all adult education participants. Many more non-English speaking adults are waiting for the opportunity to enroll in an ESL program. While Hispanics represented slightly more than 1/10 (12 percent) of the total NAAL population, more than 1/3 (39 percent) of these adults tested *Below Basic* in prose literacy. According to the report, the percentage of Hispanics with *Below Basic* prose literacy increased 9 points between 1992 and 2003; the percentage with *Below Basic* document literacy increased 8 percentage points.

In addition, scores for adults who spoke Spanish or Spanish and another non-English language before starting school dropped 17 points from 1992-2003 for prose and document literacy. Without access to adult education ESL programs, many of these individuals will not achieve their full potential at home, at work, and in the community. Without adult education, their children may not succeed in school, their employment may be limited, and they will be unable to fully contribute to their community.

The NAAL also found that literacy was lowest across all three scales for adults who did not complete high school. These adults made up the largest group with *Below Basic* prose, document and quantitative literacy. For example, over 60 percent of adults without a high school diploma had *Below Basic* quantitative literacy.

There is a dropout epidemic in America. Civic Enterprises noted in their recent report, "The Silent Epidemic", that almost one third of all public high school students –

nearly one half of all Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans – fail to graduate from public high school with their class. A high percentage of these students leave school with less than two years to complete their high school education.

Many of these high school drop-outs enroll in adult education programs to prepare for and pass the GED test. The NAAL states that average prose, document and quantitative literacy for adults who passed the GED exam were not significantly different from adults with a high school diploma. This means that high school dropouts who enroll in adult education programs and pass the GED exam have the same opportunities as high school graduates.

Mr. Chairman, you can see that adult education programs are already helping millions of Americans. But there are millions of adults waiting for literacy services and looking for a hand up, not a hand out. Our goal is to increase access to adult education services. In order to provide the needed services and programs, adult education needs a substantial increase in funding

The National Coalition for Literacy proposes a funding level of \$700 million for adult education programs for 2007. We fully understand the economic demands and budgetary constraints of these challenging times. We would appreciate any additional funds that would help us reach this goal.

The National Coalition for Literacy also represents family literacy programs. As such, we were very disappointed to see the proposed elimination of funding for the Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Family literacy programs such as Even Start provide quality services to individuals who might not otherwise participate in adult education programs. The

education level of adults participating in Even Start programs is generally 9th grade or below. In fact, without opportunities for their children to learn and succeed in school, many of these adults would not enroll in a literacy program.

In addition, this population is also economically disadvantaged. Over 80 percent of Even Start families have an income below \$15,000 and more than 40 percent of these families have an income below \$6,000. The Coalition encourages you to return Even Start funding to \$225 million. We must continue this very necessary program in order to reach and serve our nation's most at-risk families.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage you to ensure that adult education pedagogy and practice continues to be based on sound research. Last year, the National Center for Education Research decided not to continue funding a national research and development center on adult literacy. This decision dealt a severe blow to the adult education field and our research institutions. The current center has provided the field with a body of knowledge that has reshaped curriculum development and instructional practices, advanced professional development, and developed effective service models. Thanks to this groundbreaking research, our teachers are better trained and our students are better educated.

We know that our country has 93 million adults who could benefit from adult literacy services. We should be expanding rather than eliminating opportunities for research in adult literacy. New and additional research will inform educational practices and improve the outcomes for all adult learners. We encourage you to provide additional funding for the National Center for Education Research and encourage the National Center to use these funds to support a research center in adult literacy.

Thank you for allowing the National Coalition for Literacy to share our position on funding for adult education, family literacy programs, and an adult literacy research center. These essential educational programs play a vital role in keeping our citizens prepared and our nation strong and competitive.