

# Federal and State Cuts Threaten Adult Literacy Programs in New York City

*Information on the current and proposed cuts, the need for adult literacy services in New York City and State, and actions that will strengthen adult literacy programs.<sup>1</sup>*



*On May 4<sup>th</sup> of 2004, more than 250 New Yorkers lined up hoping to register for an opening in a class at Brooklyn College's English as a Second Language program. Students began arriving at 3 am for registration. Because of limited funds, only 100 could be accepted for the program. More than 150 were turned away.*

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<sup>1</sup> This information was collected and prepared by educators in the CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Program

## Who We Serve

The CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Program operates alongside dozens of community organizations, public libraries, and other groups that together provide literacy services to more than 50,000 adults in New York City. These students come from a wide range of backgrounds and most live in low-income and immigrant communities. Many are coming to classes to improve their English language skills. Others are preparing for the GED exam, including recent high school drop outs as well as older adults. Still others come to us to learn the basic reading, writing, and math skills they never fully developed in elementary and secondary school.



GED students at LaGuardia Community College's Adult Learning Center, Queens.

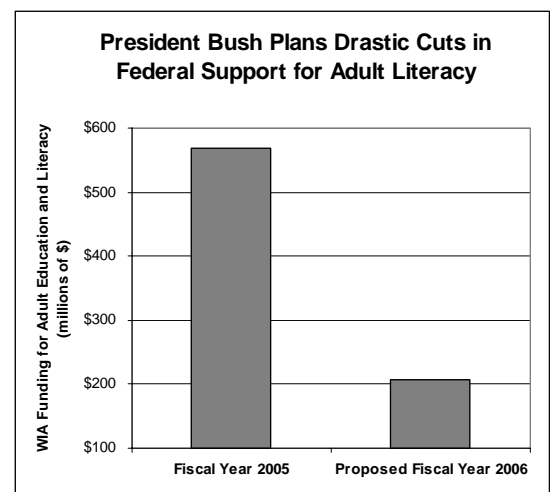
When adult students strengthen their reading, writing, math and English language abilities, the impact is profound. Better-educated adults are more likely to obtain higher-paying jobs, support their families more adequately, enroll in college, and access health care more effectively. They can also play a more active role in their children's education and serve as role models. Education also helps adults become full participants and leaders in their communities.

## Federal and State Cuts Threaten to Crush City Programs

President Bush has proposed slashing the federal budget for adult and family literacy in the **Workforce Investment Act** (WIA) from \$569 million to \$207 million. Until now, WIA has been the largest single source of adult literacy funding for CUNY and community-based organizations in the City and around the country. These cuts would eliminate classes for 3,600 of the 10,000 students now served in the CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Program. Statewide, estimates are that the cuts would eliminate classes for over 40,000 students.<sup>2</sup>

Bush has also proposed **consolidating adult literacy programs** in a block grant. If this happens, states could decide not to appropriate any funds for adult education. The sole focus could become job placement, eliminating the vital educational services provided by adult literacy programs. Thousands of low-income and immigrant adults would be deprived of opportunities to learn English, attain a GED, and continue in post-secondary education.

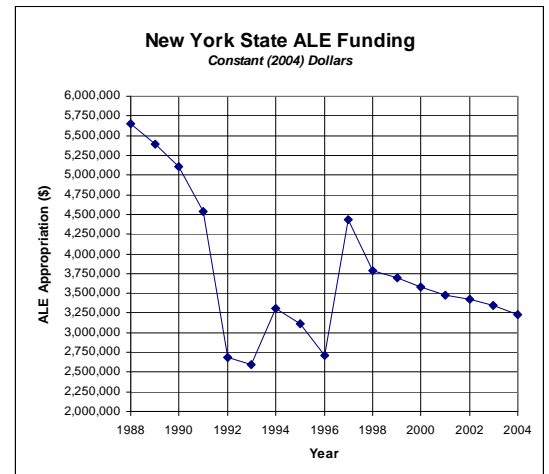
**EDGE** (Education for Gainful Employment) is another important source of federal money for many adult literacy programs, funneled through states to support educational services for low-income adults. Many New York State programs are in danger of losing a large portion of their EDGE funds due to a change in



<sup>2</sup> “President’s Budget Sabotages Pipeline of Skilled Workers”, from the Center for Law and Social Policy.

this year’s state budget. This change would bar the use of EDGE funds to support educational services for the working poor.

**ALE** (Adult Literacy Education) is funding that comes directly from the New York State legislature for adult literacy. As is shown in the graph at the right, in 2004 dollars, ALE funding has lost almost half of its value since it was introduced in 1988. Further, ALE funds have not been available to New York City programs in recent years. Adult education programs in New York City, many of which received an 11% cut in their WIA funding this budget year, currently receive no ALE funds.



## A Population in Need

### In Need of Basic Education

The 2000 Census reports that more than 25% of New York City adults twenty-five years of age or older do not have high school diplomas. The numbers at right show the number of adults needing high school diplomas both in New York City and in the rest of New York State (ROS).

	Population ≥ 25 w/o a H.S. diploma in 2000
<b>NYC</b>	1,462,690
<b>ROS</b>	1,163,634

A similar problem exists for younger adults. Increasing numbers of drop outs and push outs are a population in need of our services. *The New York Times* recently reported the dropout figures shown at the right, revealing that adults in New York City are dropping out at about four times the rate of young adults statewide.<sup>3</sup>

	Estimated Drop-Out Rate
<b>NYC</b>	40-50%
<b>NY State</b>	12%

The Community Service Society (CSS) recently reported that one in six young people in New York City is “disconnected”—meaning they are neither working nor attending school. They add that about one-half of these 170,000 young adults are high school drop-outs. CSS has called for more attention to the educational needs of these young people, in addition to meaningful training and apprenticeship opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

### In Need of English Language Education

Using recent census data, New York City determined that there are approximately 1.5 million city residents who have significant problems speaking English. That means one out of every four adults in NYC needs English language classes. Literacy programs in New York City are estimated to serve only

<sup>3</sup> “City High School Students Lag in Regents Test Scores” by Susan Saulny; *New York Times*, December 17, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> “Out of School, Out of Work... Out of Luck?: New York City’s Disconnected Youth” by Mark Levitan of the Community Service Society.

45,000 of these adults. This means that for every adult student who gains a seat in an English class, there are another 33 adults who are not served.<sup>5</sup>

In the CUNY Adult Literacy Program the gap between funding and need is demonstrated by two-year waiting lists for ESL classes. Additionally, several programs turn away as many as 50 students a week who want to learn.

The table at right highlights the growing need for ESL services in New York City. The explosive growth of the immigrant population in the City makes it clear that there will be a massive need and demand for English language classes in the years and decades ahead.

	Foreign born pop. who entered in previous decade <sup>6</sup>
<b>NYC</b>	1,224,524
<b>ROS</b>	337,085

## Action

In order to match the enormous need for adult literacy services, legislators at all levels are asked to take the following positions in support of adult literacy education in New York City:

- **Oppose President Bush’s plan to slash adult literacy funding in WIA (Workforce Investment Act).** Fully fund these critical programs that train and prepare workers and parents to improve their lives and the lives of their children.
- **Oppose President Bush’s plan to consolidate adult literacy programs** into one job training block grant.
- **Support a return to previous EDGE language at the state level** that awards funding for education and achievements made by the working poor (those at or below 200% of poverty).
- **Support an increase in state ALE (Adult Literacy Education) funding** from \$3.23 million to \$5.5 million, and target that new funding to New York City where the needs are the greatest.
- **Support access to other avenues of state funding such as EPE** (Employment Preparation Education) that have not been available to CUNY or community-based programs. EPE or EPE-like funding would guarantee that all adult literacy programs have secure, ongoing resources to address the enormous unmet need.
- **Support an increase in funding for adult literacy from the City of New York.** New York City provides important funds to support adult education programs, but this funding has not increased in several years. An increase in City funds can help cushion threatened and already-instituted cuts from the state and federal governments.

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<sup>5</sup> “Proficiency in English Decreases Over a Decade” by Nina Bernstein; *The New York Times*, January 19, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> 2000 Census.