



Help Save The Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) of the United States

President's Budget For FY 2006 Drops Funds For Adult Education and Literacy By Two-Thirds: From \$575 million to \$200 million

The Adult Education & Literacy System (AELS) of the United States was formed in 1966 when the Adult Education Act (AEA) was passed by the U. S. Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. The AEA brought adult educators at the local, state, and federal levels together to work under an agreed to set of common rules and regulations that began the process of systematizing adult education in the United States. Since then the AEA has undergone numerous amendments and name changes. It was renamed the National Literacy Act in 1991, and in 1998 it was incorporated into the Workforce Investment Act as Title 2, The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

In 2005, over 3000 organizations operate under the rules and regulations of the AEFLA. These thousands of educational institutions make-up the Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) of the United States and they provide learning opportunities for some 3,000,000 adults yearly. For over 35 years this adult education system has helped millions of adults take steps away from the margins of society into the mainstream.

FOR AN AVERAGE COST OF LESS THAN \$360 PER STUDENT data from the U. S. Department of Education show that during 1996-2000:

- 18,588,289 adults enrolled in the AELS
- 1,408,046 obtained a High School Diploma or GED
- 907,387 were retained or advanced in a job
- 897,936 gained employment
- 823,400 entered other training
- 157,406 left public welfare assistance

No one knows how many millions of children's lives have been improved after their parents left the AELS better educated, more confident in helping their children prepare for and succeed in school, better able to secure health care for themselves and their families, and better prepared to contribute more to the social and political lives of their communities. But there are data from a variety of studies that confirm these multiple returns to investments in adult education and literacy development in the AELS.

Leave No Adults Behind!

On January 12, 2005 the White House posted a speech by President Bush in which he discussed his plans to take the No Child Left Behind initiative to the high school level (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050112-5.html).

Protect Children's Rights to Educated Parents! Ask Your Government Representatives to Support the AELS!

In his speech the President also said, "Out of a hundred 9th graders in our public schools, only 68 will complete high school on time." However, some 85 percent of adults 25 to 29 years old have completed high school. So somehow between the 9th grade and age 25-29 high school completion increases from 68 to 85 percent. To a large extent this reflects the fact that many high school dropouts go to the Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) programs and study to earn a high school diploma or GED equivalency certificate.

But on Monday, February 7, 2005 the President submitted his FY 2006 budget to the Congress and calling for a two-thirds reduction in the funding for the AELS. So if tens of thousands of high school dropouts turn to the AELS later on, they will find a marginalized education system that is funded at the federal level at less than \$75 per adult student. And in fact, it may not be there for them at all.

As our world grows increasingly complex, it is bad education policy to decide that simply because children grow up and become adults without having achieved high levels of basic skills, extensive knowledge, and a high school degree it is OK to cast them off and focus on saving the next, upcoming generation. It is bad policy because it not only reduces the overall health and productivity of our nation's adult work and parenting force, it promotes failure in the upcoming generation because undereducated parents are poorly prepared to provide for and transmit language and literacy skills to their children at home and hence influence their success in the K-12 system, including their likelihood of graduating from high school.

**In our Nation's educational system of the 21st century,
no adults should be left behind.**

Resources for Advocacy

- A one-stop site for learning how to advocate, how to contact government officials, and relevant laws, regulations, and rules can be found online at www.npaction.org
- Advocacy for adult education and literacy online at the Public Policy pages at www.wiki.literacytent.org/index.php/Main_Page
- National Coalition of State Directors of Adult Education: www.ncsdae.org
- Contacts for adult literacy advocacy at www.national-coalition-literacy.org
- Reports useful for advocacy available online at www.proliteracy.org
- Reports by Thomas Sticht at www.nald.ca under Full Text Documents searched by Author using S for Sticht
- Resources compiled by David Rosen at www.slri.org/rosen/advocacy/advocacydocs.html

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