



December 18, 2015

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

As your administration prepares the FY2017 preliminary budget, the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) urges you to ensure a robust investment in community based adult literacy is made. Specifically, to address the crisis of 1.7 million New Yorkers who lack English proficiency, a high school diploma or both, **we request that \$16 million in new investments – enough to support 13,300 students—be dedicated to adult literacy programs** including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Basic Education in Native Language (BENL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency preparation (HSE).

As educators, program managers, advocates and allies from over 40 community based organizations and the CUNY and library systems, we believe in the fundamental right for every New Yorker to be able to learn to read and write in English, earn a high school diploma or its equivalent, and move on to additional career and education opportunities. We firmly believe this goal speaks to your vision of a City less divided by those who have, and those who do not. Individuals that lack English proficiency and/or a high school diploma are employed at lower rates—and when employed, earn less than similarly positioned workers. **Much as pre-kindergarten is the foundation that makes possible the future success of young children, so too does adult literacy serve as a springboard to greater community integration and opportunity.**

Your recent remarks at the National Immigrant Integration Conference were rightly well received, as New York has been a true leader in building safe and inclusive communities for all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status. From the municipal identification program to limiting cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agents, to creating health care opportunities and legal assistance for the undocumented, New York City is leading the way among American cities with large immigrant populations.

However, as a community of providers that work daily with these very immigrants, we know that all roads to success for this community lead through English proficiency. English proficiency means the ability for a Chinese-American mother living in Flushing to be able to communicate with her children's teachers at school. It means the construction worker living in Sunset Park and hailing from Mexico can communicate with police officers if stopped. And for countless others, as it has often been observed, it means the difference between washing dishes and waiting tables. In short, building healthy, strong and vibrant communities requires that the immigrants living in those communities are able to effectively integrate socially, civically and economically.

Agudath Israel of America
Arab American Family Support Center
Bronx Works
Brooklyn Public Library
Catholic Charities
Chinatown Manpower Project
Chinese-American Planning Council
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Community Service Society
Cypress Hills Local Development Corp
The Doe Fund
Edith & Carl Marks Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst
Fifth Avenue Committee
Fortune Society
HANAC
Institute for Immigrant Concerns, Inc.
International Center of CCCS
Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House
Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island
Jewish Community Center of Staten Island
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
LaGuardia Community College,
Adult Community Learning
Lehman College Adult Learning Center
Literacy Assistance Center
Literacy Partners
Lutheran Family Health Centers Adult and Family Education
Make the Road New York
Neighborhood Family Services Coalition
New York Immigration Coalition
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation
NYC College of Technology Adult Learning Center
New York City Employment & Training Coalition
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow
Phipps Community Development Corporation
Queens Community House
Riverside Language Program
Shorefront YM-YWHA
Turning Point Brooklyn
UAW Region 9A Education Fund
Union Settlement Association, Inc.
UJA - Federation of New York
United Neighborhood Houses
University Settlement Adult Literacy Program
YMCA of Greater NY

The **New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL)** is comprised of teachers, managers, students, and allies from community-based organizations, advocacy groups, public libraries, and colleges in the City University of New York. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services to current students and other adults who require it. NYCCAL believes that being able to read and write, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker and the cornerstone to an equitable and just society.

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Today, New York City's investment in community based adult literacy services through the Department of Youth and Community Development is millions of dollars short of the level of investment made under the former administration. While we appreciated your decision to baseline a number of key council adult literacy initiatives in the City's FY15 budget, **the decision in FY16 to eliminate over \$6 million in adult literacy programming through DYCD and CUNY has been devastating to thousands of individuals in the community we serve.** This action eliminated the capacity of providers to serve over 6,300 immigrants and adult learners – at a time when wait lists for these classes is estimated to be at least 14,000—and many programs do not maintain wait lists (or cap them) to avoid perpetrating false hope.

This disinvestment in the fundamental ability for people to speak and read English comes at a time when the State too has reduced system capacity. **In fact, according to a recent Center for an Urban Future report, despite the NYS immigrant population growing by 386,000 people between 2005 and 2013, over the same time frame state-funded ESOL seats have declined by 32%, with less than 3% of eligible New Yorkers served.**

While it is notable that under the leadership of the Office of Workforce Development the City is looking to invest in bridge programs as part of the Career Pathways plan, it is critical that it not lose sight of the fact that the vast majority of adult learners—and demand for classes—is at the lowest literacy levels. As the City moves forward with Career Pathways, parallel and meaningful investments must be made in a literacy system oriented toward foundational literacy and numeracy skills required for social navigation and success.

Finally, it is important that New York City take a long-term view towards the education of the 1.7 million New Yorkers lacking English proficiency and/or a high school diploma. It is likely that pressure from the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will make it harder to use federal pass-through funds to serve the undocumented and those with the lowest skills. In addition, given the likelihood of future federal executive actions on immigration to bring more New Yorkers out of the shadows and into the mainstream, the long-term success of individuals guided through the application process with legal support will ultimately lie with their ability to take advantage of their new protected status. Without English proficiency and access to basic skills, thousands of monolingual immigrants will still find themselves isolated and at the mercy of unscrupulous employers as recently evidenced in the nail salon industry.

New York City is at a crisis point—a city where over 25% of its adult population does not have the language skills or credentials needed to succeed will forever struggle to make an appreciable dent in social and economic stratification. The New Year presents an opportunity to craft a real plan to support these New Yorkers—and to make a down payment on the plan. We urge you to develop such a vision and include \$16 million for new community-based adult literacy programs in the FY2017 preliminary budget.

Sincerely,

New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy