

## **ADULT EDUCATION: SUPPORT AND ENHANCEMENT**

### **Background and Context**

Mayor Fenty's vision of quality education for all District of Columbia residents does not stop with children. Adult education is a critical component of the education continuum. The administration is committed to strengthening this continuum and acknowledges the inextricable relationship between the city's efforts to ensure that our children can read and the literacy services provided to their parents.

While adult education includes the higher education system and workforce training programs, the proposed recommendations below focus on adult literacy. The administration will develop comprehensive and aligned strategies to meet all adult education needs; both higher education and workforce training are addressed in separate goals of the Mayor's 100-day agenda.

The needs of adult learners who lack basic literacy skills vary greatly from adult learners at a university to learners in technical training programs. To address these specific needs, the District has focused increased attention in recent years toward literacy as a separate challenge. In 2003, the Williams Administration established the Lifelong Learning Initiative (Initiative), a city-wide adult and family literacy initiative. The Initiative's goal is to increase the literacy levels of District adults through coordination of public and private efforts. The Initiative includes the establishment of the Mayor's Adult Literacy Council (Council). The Council's role is to provide guidance and make recommendations to the Mayor and Council of the District of Columbia regarding policy and ongoing budgetary support for an adult education system in the District.

This Initiative provided the foundation for the current system of adult literacy services. Over the course of the past two months, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education met with adult literacy stakeholders and gathered information on the existing adult literacy system in the District. This included meeting with representatives from the State Education Office (SEO); State Education Agency (SEA) for adult literacy at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC); District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL); D.C. Literacy Education, Advocacy and Resource Network, Inc (DC LEARNS); and the Washington Literacy Council. From these meetings, the strategies below were developed to help bridge the gaps and strengthen existing adult literacy services in the District of Columbia. The strategies outlined support the Administration's commitment to ensuring that District residents, including English language learners, are literate. Furthermore, the recommended strategies help move the current adult literacy initiative towards becoming an integrated function of the District.

## Review of existing adult education offerings

	# OF PROGRAMS	# OF PEOPLE SERVED
State Education Agency Grantees	33 <sup>1</sup>	9,583 <sup>2</sup>
Additional Adult Literacy Programs <sup>3</sup>	28	N/A
<b>Estimated Total Number of Literacy Providers</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>N/A</b>

A list of programs by service type and geographical location is attached.<sup>4</sup>

## Identify Gaps and Develop Strategies for Supporting and Enhancing System

### 1) *Leadership*

The Mayor's Adult Literacy/Lifelong Learning Initiative is currently spearheaded by the State Education Office. Receiving the majority of local literacy dollars, the State Education Office is responsible for broad oversight of city-wide literacy concerns (early childhood to adult), from policy development to coordination of D.C. Government agencies engaged in literacy services. The State Education Agency at the University of the District of Columbia serves as the state agency for adult literacy and receives federal Workforce Investment Act funds for this purpose. In August of 2004, the SEO entered into an MOU with the State Education Agency at the UDC to manage the re-granting process. As a result, the SEO sub-grants over 90% of their local literacy dollars to the SEA for re-granting to local service providers. The SEA is responsible for standardization, evaluation, and data collection of services for funded programs.

While both the SEO and the SEA are committed to providing quality services to adult learners in the city, there is a need to unify and leverage public efforts around literacy. Under the current structure, accountability for the Initiative lies in the SEO, but enforcement and evaluation are conducted by the SEA at UDC. Moreover, state standards for adult education are not aligned with state standards for early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. This structure lacks the centralization of authority that is needed to ensure accountability and alignment of standards necessary to ensure a coherent,

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<sup>1</sup> SEA responses to the Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on Education, Libraries, and Recreation, FY2007 Budget Committee questions.

<sup>2</sup> Final 2006 SEA Report on the Mayor's Adult Family Literacy Initiative.

<sup>3</sup> DCPL District of Columbia Adult Education Directory. Includes adult basic education, English as a Second Language, GED, and external diploma programs.

<sup>4</sup> Program information is from the DCPL District of Columbia Adult Education Directory.

effective public education continuum. Empowering the SEO to act as the state agency for adult literacy will help guarantee that adult literacy is aligned with the early childhood and k-12 framework.

Strategy:

- The “District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007” will transfer authority for adult literacy state functions to the State Education Office.

## 2) *Coordination of Services*

The coordination of literacy services and information across the city, both among public agencies and across public and private domains, must be improved.

There are at least ten government agencies and departments directly engaged in research, funding, service provision, or other activities related to literacy. These include: DCPL, Department of Employment Services (DOES), Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), UDC, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS), Department of Human Services (DHS), Serve DC, SEA at UDC, and SEO.

Additionally, there are over 60 community organizations that provide literacy services and activities in the District. It is important that a system of communication is in place to ensure that sound practices and effective strategies are being used and communicated.

Strategy:

- Establish a working relationship between the Mayor’s Adult Literacy Council, managed by the State Education Office, and the Mayor’s Adult/Family Literacy Stakeholder Group. The Stakeholder Group, currently convened by the SEA, is diverse in representation and comprised of public and private service providers. The Group’s role will be to share best practices, identify areas of need, and inform the Council’s work, acting as a resource for the Council and the public literacy system.

## 3) *Data Collection, Analysis, and Transparency*

Few reliable data exist on the current population served and the demand for services. The SEA at UDC has recently invested in the development of a web-based management information system, Literacy Adult Community Education System (LACES), which captures both demographic and outcome data on learners. This system is currently housed by a third party, with the SEO having limited access to the system.

Strategy:

- Transfer LACES hosting responsibilities to the District’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer, enabling SEO access to the system.

- Examine the relationship between LACES and EdSMP and align as needed.
- Examine the feasibility of collecting data from all service providers, regardless of funding source, including the feasibility of implementing LACES with additional providers.
- Support DC LEARNS' Credible Demand Estimate project that is underway to collect reliable data on the demand for literacy services in the District.
- Provide financial support for the District to participate in the next National Adult Literacy Survey, expected to be conducted in 2013.

4) *Program Quality*

The SEA developed program quality standards and performance measures and has adopted the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) adult learning content standards. Both the quality indicators and national standards have been implemented only with those service providers receiving funding from the SEA. This excludes over 30 providers, who may be unaware of local best practices and standards adopted by the District.

In October 2006, the SEO announced that DC LEARNS, the District's literacy coalition, had been selected to lead the development, design, and management of an Adult Literacy Professional Development Center scheduled to launch this year. The SEO will provide DC LEARNS with a one year grant of \$100,000 for the Center, with an additional \$100,000 in matching funds expected from the Fannie Mae Foundation. DC LEARNS has partnered with the Center for Literacy Studies' EFF Center for Training and Technical Assistance in order to provide support for the dissemination and implementation of EFF standards. This center will provide coordinated, standards-based professional development to any service provider, resulting in a more consistent level of quality among services and programs throughout the District.

Strategy:

- Ensure that data captured by LACES is aligned with program quality indicators and EFF standards.
- Explore role for the Mayor's Literacy Council in the promotion and dissemination of quality indicators and EFF standards to all literacy service providers.
- Assess feasibility of providing on-going support for the Adult Literacy Professional Development Center.

5) *Service System Capacity & Stability*

In FY06 the District invested \$7.7 million in local dollars in adult literacy through the SEO, SEA, DCPL, DC Office on Aging, and ServeDC. Since the launch of the

Initiative in 2003, over \$20 million in local and federal funding has been invested in the improvement of the District's low literacy levels.

Currently, the adult literacy strategy is driven by federal investments and priorities. It is imperative that the District develop a local specific strategy based on the needs of our residents. It remains unclear whether current programs are addressing the population of adult learners with the most need. According to the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey,<sup>5</sup> 61% of the District's adult population falls in the two lowest levels of literacy. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of adults are at the lowest level and typically cannot read well enough to complete an application, read a food label, or read a simple story. Twenty-four percent (24%) of adults are at the second lowest level of literacy and generally cannot perform higher-level reading and problem-solving skills. It is critical that the District appropriately align programmatic efforts to the learners with the most need. The District must strategically fund programs that are providing services to the 61% of learners at the two lowest levels of literacy.

Strategy:

- Evaluate impact of the Initiative since its inception and identify strengths and weaknesses in program and funding strategy used.
- Develop a long term strategy for addressing capacity needs that includes the following components:
  - Funding: identify funding formula for literacy providers and programs;
  - Replication: bring high-performing programs to scale;
  - Geography: identify strategic locations for services;
  - Programming: align programmatic efforts to data on learners; and
  - Non-English Speakers: address different needs of English language learners.
- Assess service providers to capture private investment.

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<sup>5</sup> Estimated data from the 2003 National Adult Literacy Survey are not yet available.