

# ProLiteracy Policy Update

A publication of ProLiteracy Worldwide

October 2004

## Presidential Candidates State Positions on Adult Literacy

Literacy President is a non-partisan, collaborative initiative among grassroots organizers, The Change Agent, Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE), and other national organizations. Earlier this year, Literacy President submitted questions related to adult literacy and basic education to George W. Bush and John F. Kerry. Their responses are repeated below in alphabetical order by candidate name. For more information about Literacy President, please go to [www.litpresident.org](http://www.litpresident.org).

### Responses from Presidential Candidate George W. Bush

October 12, 2004

#### 1. Access to Quality Programs

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that all adults in the United States have guaranteed access to quality adult education and literacy programs to improve their academic skills, regardless of income, location, age, and national origin?**

I believe that we must do more to assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the skills needed for employment and self-sufficiency. My Administration has supported a comprehensive agenda to accomplish this goal. These programs are part of an overall system of adult and worker training that ensures America has the best trained workforce in the world. The Adult Education State Grant program is an important program in this effort, as demonstrated by the \$34 million increase in funding since 2001.

#### 2. Full Funding

**What will you do to ensure full funding for adult education and literacy programs?**

I am committed to providing increased support for our education and job training programs. My 2005 budget includes \$590 million for Adult Basic and Literacy Education, including State formula grants, National Leadership Activities, and the National Institute for Literacy.

My budget requests \$6.7 million for the National Institute for Literacy, with the expectation that new authorization legislation would continue support for its communication and capacity-building activities. In addition, the budget provides \$9.2 million to continue high-priority research, demonstration, and evaluation initiatives funded under National Leadership Activities.

#### 3. Training/re-training for the New Economy

**Many U.S. workers function at low literacy levels. Some of these voters watch their jobs being "outsourced" to foreign countries, but are not being given adequate access to the training and education that will allow them to function in the new "global, knowledge-based economy." How would your administration re-focus priorities to address the disappearance of the American dream for the 90 million US citizens functioning at the two lowest literacy levels who cannot compete without additional education?**

My budget provides a record \$23 billion for job training and employment assistance — a 12 percent increase over 2001 levels. I have proposed reforming our job training programs to double the number of workers trained under them by giving governors the flexibility they need to meet their workforce and

adult education needs. I will consolidate the Workforce Investment Act's four major training programs into a single, flexible grant to states. By limiting the overhead expenses, we can ensure more funds are spent training workers rather than growing a bureaucracy. I will also encourage the use of Innovation Training Accounts which give workers more control over how and where their training dollars are spent, including the flexibility to use the funds for adult education classes. In addition, my Jobs for the 21st Century initiative includes \$250 million to help community colleges train workers in high-growth fields.

Finally, I am proposing a \$50 million Personal Reemployment Account pilot program. These accounts provide workers with additional flexibility in selecting the services needed to help them return to work. Eligible unemployed workers can receive \$3,000 to be used for whatever training and services they believe will help them get back to work, such as child care, adult education classes, or transportation. As an incentive, recipients can keep the balance of the account as a cash bonus if they find a job within 13 weeks.

#### **4. Intergenerational Literacy**

**Children need education. Those who do not get education now will become adults who need literacy skills. If you teach adults, they will help their kids. What are you willing to do to improve adult literacy programs?**

We must increase the focus of adult literacy programs on strengthening skills in basic reading, math, and English acquisition for adults who have weak literacy skills or want to earn their high school diploma or a GED. As a result, I have proposed a blueprint for key areas of change in current legislation including:

- Requiring States to establish more effective and accountable programs that set challenging expectations for students, use meaningful assessments, and align instruction to meet those expectations;
- Improving the performance accountability system;
- Enhancing the emphasis on research to build a stronger foundation of knowledge for improving adult education; and
- Strengthening partnerships with the One-Stop delivery system under Title I of Workforce Investment Act.

I will also continue to promote literacy programs through Head Start, Early Reading First, and Title I. I will develop a comprehensive web-based literacy tool for adults, which would be made available in public libraries, community colleges, and at social service offices, including Head Start Centers and One-Stop job centers. This literacy tool will increase adult literacy across the United States.

This summer we began a program to train Head Start parents. The Head Start Parent-Mentor Training Program is helping parents enhance their children's language and literacy skills and helping them learn how to mentor other parents to do the same with their children. This stresses the importance of supporting parents and families in rearing their children and reflects the Administration's commitment to helping parents enhance their children's growth and development. Over 1,200 parents participated in the training, which they considered helpful and were excited to share with other parents. Head Start's goal is to train 3,000 volunteer parents, who will in turn train thousands more. Training for Hispanic/Latino parents was conducted in Spanish, and Spanish-speaking parents reported that they learned a lot and were honored to have received their instruction in Spanish.

#### **5. National Adult Literacy Initiative to Address Issues of the Working Poor**

**Since it is the goal of this nation to create "new" jobs, employ the "working poor" in "better" jobs as an ongoing goal of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Welfare Reform) and to help colleges and universities manage their growing adult student population seeking new skills, what steps would you propose as a national adult literacy initiative to help address these issues?**

Welfare reform has been an unquestioned success. Millions of Americans have moved from welfare to work. In fact, welfare rolls are at their lowest levels in 34 years. Now Congress must reauthorize compassionate welfare reform, so that even more men and women can know the pride of independence, self-reliance, and strengthened families. Education and job-skills training are vital tools to help people get

back on their feet. That is why I have proposed significant reforms to the major Federal worker training programs to double the number of workers receiving job training, ensure those programs work better for America's workers, and close the skills gap so every high-growth job is filled with a well-trained American worker. Welfare assistance must be a step up to a better life, not a way of life in itself. By encouraging work, we will help more Americans provide for themselves and their families and give them an opportunity to succeed in every facet of their lives. I look forward to strengthening our successful welfare reform law and enhancing our job skills and training programs consistent with these principles.

In addition, the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education adds the following two questions. We would be pleased to publish your answers to these, as well.

## **6. Health Literacy**

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that all adults in the United States have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health care decisions?**

Limited health literacy is a serious problem involving poor reading skills and difficulty with numbers, which can translate into difficulty understanding dosages, taking prescriptions, reading food labels, and filling out informed consent forms. I am committed to preparing all children to read and succeed and giving adults the basic education necessary for every aspect of society, including the workplace and the doctor's office. Achieving health literacy also includes doctors and health care providers presenting information in a simple, user-friendly way. Last year, the Federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the American Medical Association, and the American Hospital Association launched a campaign to help educate physicians and patients about the importance of effective communication. My initiative on health information technology will also help by automating many bureaucratic and administrative tasks in doctors' offices so that doctors have more time to spend with patients and ensure that patients understand the complex health issues facing them.

## **7. English for Speakers of Other Languages**

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that immigrants have opportunities to learn the English language and civic participation roles so they are able to realize the opportunities and fulfill the responsibilities of living in this country?**

The Institute for Education Science, in the Department of Education, is conducting research on the most effective instructional techniques for children and adults learning English as a second language. I will also develop a comprehensive web-based literacy tool for adults, which would be made available in public libraries, community colleges, and at social service offices, including Head Start Centers and One-Stop job centers. This literacy tool will increase adult literacy across the United States.

## **Responses from Presidential Candidate John F. Kerry**

September 7, 2004

### **1. Access to Quality Programs**

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that all adults in the United States have guaranteed access to quality adult education and literacy programs to improve their academic skills, regardless of income, location, age, and national origin?**

Education is the key to opportunity, essential to a strong America. I believe that our country is strengthened when all of our people have the opportunity to succeed. Since my first term in the Senate, I have voted for investments in adult education and fought Republican attempts to cut these investments. John Edwards and I will strengthen education and lifelong learning in America so that everyone has the opportunity to get ahead and succeed in the economy of tomorrow.

### **2. Full Funding**

**What will you do to ensure full funding for adult education and literacy programs?**

I strongly support funding for adult education and literacy programs. People of all skill levels need access to high-quality education. I will also work to modernize financial aid rules to benefit more adults who seek continuing education.

### **3. Training/re-training for the New Economy**

**Many U.S. workers function at low literacy levels. Some of these voters watch their jobs being "outsourced" to foreign countries, but are not being given adequate access to the training and education that will allow them to function in the new "global, knowledge-based economy." How would your administration re-focus priorities to address the disappearance of the American dream for the 90 million US citizens functioning at the two lowest literacy levels who cannot compete without additional education?**

Progress should bring prosperity for all, not just for those who are already successful.

I believe that the private sector is the engine of economic growth and job creation, and that the government's responsibility is to create an environment that will promote private sector investment, foster vigorous competition, and strengthen the foundations of an innovative economy. Companies can keep jobs in America without sacrificing competitiveness. I will fight for American jobs - creating new ones and protecting existing ones by cutting taxes for companies that create jobs here at home and ending tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas; by cutting costs and taxes to make American businesses more competitive; and by investing in the good-paying jobs of tomorrow to make sure that people of every age learn the skills they need to be successful - today and in the future.

While the Bush Administration has proposed more than \$1 billion in cuts to worker training over the last three years, I will fight to expand training and lifelong learning by expanding training as part of the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, supporting regional skills alliances, and protecting training conducted at community colleges.

### **4. Intergenerational Literacy**

**Children need education. Those who do not get education now will become adults who need literacy skills. If you teach adults, they will help their kids. What are you willing to do to improve adult literacy programs?**

Parents who can read are parents who can gain steady employment and help their children with their homework. I have consistently supported initiatives that expand opportunities for adult education. Programs such as those supported by the National Even Start Association are critical to ending intergenerational poverty by providing family literacy education to children and parents in low-income areas.

President Bush's proposed FY 2005 budget cuts all funding for the Even Start program. We are in the midst of an extraordinary crisis—nearly one-third of our children are not even graduating from high school. This loss of human talent is a clear and present danger to the future of our economy and our nation. Instead of cutting programs that help children learn to read, we must build a stronger America by giving all young people the opportunity to achieve their potential. I am committed to increasing achievement not only for the more than 1 million young people who do not graduate each year, but for the much larger group of 6 million students who are at risk of dropping out or graduating without the skills they need.

In order to make sure that no child suffers from the limitations of illiteracy, I will create an Education Trust Fund that will fully fund No Child Left Behind, which President Bush has underfunded by more than \$26 billion. I will strengthen middle schools through mentoring and college partnerships, and strengthen high school education, by promoting smaller schools and more challenging high school curricula, with literacy education for students who have fallen behind. My plan will require young people to do their part by supporting states that can revoke driver's licenses from students who drop out. It will enforce the provisions of NCLB which require full disclosure and accountability for graduation rates.

## **5. National Adult Literacy Initiative to Address Issues of the Working Poor**

**Since it is the goal of this nation to create "new" jobs, employ the "working poor" in "better" jobs as an ongoing goal of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Welfare Reform) and to help colleges and universities manage their growing adult student population seeking new skills, what steps would you propose as a national adult literacy initiative to help address these issues?**

I strongly support adult literacy initiatives so that all Americans have the tools they need to succeed. To ensure that the working poor can make a decent living, I also support raising the minimum wage to \$7.00 per hour, expanding the earned income tax credit, and ensuring low-cost access to health care together with expanded child care.

In addition, the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education adds the following two questions. We would be pleased to publish your answers to these, as well.

## **6. Health Literacy**

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that all adults in the United States have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health care decisions?**

Our nation still struggles to close disparities in health care access, care, and outcomes. The tremendous gains that we have witnessed in science and medicine have benefited millions of our citizens, but too often they are out of reach for our most vulnerable populations. We need to do more to train health professionals who serve on the front lines of the medical field, so that they are equipped with the necessary skills to best serve their patients. I will work to eliminate health disparities by expanding health insurance to 95 percent of Americans and every American child, improving language access programs in medical facilities, and ensuring access to quality care through greater disease management and prevention efforts. The need is great and the time is now to improve the health of those Americans who have been left behind.

## **7. English for Speakers of Other Languages**

**What should be the commitment of the federal government, if any, to ensure that immigrants have opportunities to learn the English language and civic participation roles so they are able to realize the opportunities and fulfill the responsibilities of living in this country?**

I strongly support expanded English language and civics education so that immigrants can assume all of the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. I would place these efforts in the context of a responsible reform of our immigration laws that honors our tradition as a nation of immigrants and makes America safer and stronger.