

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

By
Karen Scheid, Executive Director
Ohio Literacy Network

My name is Karen Scheid, Executive Director of the Ohio Literacy Network. I am here representing the Ohio Coalition for Adult Basic and Literacy Education. Our Coalition is extremely concerned about the proposed cut to line item GRF 200 509 (Adult Literacy) in the state budget. This reduction would not only hurt programs because of loss state revenues, **but would also result in a reduction of federal dollars for adult literacy services due to a maintenance of effort provision in the Workforce Investment Act, the legislation that authorizes federal funding for adult basic and literacy education.** The proposed reduction to \$7.387 million in FY 2002 and \$7.575 million in FY 2003 is considerably less than the required 90% maintenance of effort called for in the federal legislation. State funding for adult literacy was \$9.586 million last year. If these reductions remain at the current level, **Ohio would lose an additional minimum of \$2.5 million annually in federal dollars to which it is entitled.**

Adult basic and literacy education (ABLE) programs around the state are on the frontline helping our state's undereducated adults acquire the skills needed to be more effective workers, parents and citizens. They provide basic instruction in reading, writing, math, and computer use; help adults prepare for the GED; provide English instruction for those for whom English is not their native language; offer family literacy and workplace literacy programs. They have continually provided these services in an efficient, effective manner.

- The annual per student cost for individuals enrolled in ABLE programs is \$282.
- For every \$1 spent on ABLE, \$4.40 is returned to the economy in savings from public assistance and new or increased income to adult learners.

And the impact of ABLE programs is evident. Consider for example that

- Year 2000 U.S. Census information indicates that 85.6% of adult Ohioans have earned a high school diploma or GED. That's up from 75% in 1990. **Is this increase due to rising high school rates? No. According to the U.S. Department of Education the rate of high school students who graduate with a diploma in four years has stagnated over the years. In Ohio, the rate is 69.5%. Yet the percent of out of school Ohioans in the 18 to 24 years old category that have a secondary credential is nearly 90%. How is that possible? Well it's possible largely because of our programs and the role they play in preparing adults to learn the material need to pass the GED test.** Last year in Ohio nearly 15% of all secondary credentials earned were earned via the GED.

We all believe that education is the gateway to a better life. That is why we are all so concerned about how children perform in school. Children who struggle in school because they have difficulty with fundamental literacy skills typically fall behind their peers and eventually frequently leave school out of frustration or because of other situations that relate to lack of school success. Many of these young people find their way to our programs, **because they know that the impact of low literacy skills and undereducation does not diminish with time. If anything it intensifies. And, the impact of undereducation spreads far beyond the individual involved to his or her family and to society as a whole.** For example, consider that:

- Individuals who have not graduated from high school have two-third the earning power of high school graduates and two-fifths the earning power college graduates.
- 80% of individuals incarcerated in Ohio prisons do not have a high school diploma.
- Children who live in households with adults who have dropped out of school and are unemployed are 5 to 6 times as likely to drop out of school too. Yet when reading and overall educational levels of a parent improves, so does the academic performance of the child. **Indeed, one might suggest that the single most effective way to increase a child's success in school is to equip his parents to succeed in life. That is what our programs do.**

ABLE programs throughout the state have made good use of past funding to help our undereducated adults become equipped to:

- Benefit from future occupational training
- Move from welfare to work
- Strengthen families and break the cycle of undereducation

But there is no question that this state funding cut and the federal reduction that would necessarily accompany it will hamper our programs' ability to continue to provide quality services. **This cut is being proposed at a time when ABLE programs are in the thick of responding to numerous challenges.** Our programs are serving increasing numbers of learners that we categorize as *most in need*. These are students who enter programs reading below the sixth grade level. Last year nearly half of all ABLE students were in that category as compared to 37% only five year ago. It is estimated that at least half of these adults have disabilities that interferes with their learning. **These learners can be helped to learn and succeed with special and more intense instruction. Our paid and volunteer staff members need to be trained in methods that work with these adult students. And, that take resources.**

Also consider that:

- 11% of adult basic and literacy students are enrolled in ESOL services in their local ABLE programs. These programs help those new to our country acquire the English skills they need to assimilate to and advance in our society.
- Approximately 18% of Ohio births are to women who do not have a high school credential underscoring the need for family literacy initiatives that ensure parents and children acquire needed education.
- Individuals whom are less educated have less access to computers and the Internet. The digital divide between the better and less educated is evident and widening. Only 16% of

households headed by individuals with “some high school” owned computers as compared to 31% of homes of high school graduates and 69% of homes of college graduates. Our programs provide an introduction to computer use.

ABLE programs are in the business of narrowing the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Cuts in adult literacy funding will mean longer waiting lines at our programs, more closed doors for our adult learners, and less financial security for families. Traditionally, funding for ABLE programs has been small compared to that of other programs, but the positive impact of that investment on individuals, their families and our state has been tremendous.

While facts and figures tell one side of the ABLE, the more important testimony comes from the story of students. My colleague Mary Kern is going to continue with some of those stories.

Please **do not reduce funding for adult literacy.**