



National Coalition For Literacy

21st Century Approaches to Adult Literacy

Opening Remarks by Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, NCL President

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us to discuss 21st C approaches to adult literacy. My name is Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, I am a Principal Researcher at the American Institutes for Research and serving as the volunteer President this year of the National Coalition for Literacy.

The Coalition is made up of over 20 member organizations. In the grand tradition of volunteer work in literacy, we are a volunteer organization, donating our time to advance and promote adult education, family literacy, and English language development by fostering collaboration and advocacy at the national level among public and private organizations.

I'd like to thank our hosts, the Co-chairs of the House Adult Literacy Caucus, the Honorable Dr. Phil Roe and Honorable Ruben Hinojosa. We greatly appreciate them and their staff, especially John Martin and Rosa Garcia, for making this event happen today as well as raising awareness of the importance of the issue of adult literacy among their colleagues through the Caucus. They will be joining us when they can this afternoon and we will stop and welcome them and thank them again as they come in to make their remarks.

I am going to take a moment to set the stage and introduce our speakers today.

As all of us in this room are aware, our country faces an economic crisis as the recession continues across the country. Unemployment remains stubbornly near 10% - and up to 15% for those without a high school diploma -, job creation is at a trickle, inflation for everyday items like gasoline and food is putting the squeeze on disposable incomes, poverty rates are on the rise, and local and state budgets are cutting community services and programs.

As I have said in other events, Literacy is a policy lever. There is an undeniable and strong correlation between rising literacy rates and improvements in all of the social challenges just mentioned. As adults improve their literacy, they are eligible for more jobs. As they improve their literacy, adults are more likely to be engaged in their communities as volunteers, more active in their children's education, and more likely to vote. Investing in adult literacy is an investment in families, communities, and our national economy.

Over the next 10 years, 45% of our job openings are projected to be in what's called middle skill occupations that require a high school diploma, certifications and some college. These jobs are often good first rungs on a career ladder for adults entering with low skills. But *all* jobs are requiring more and more proficiency with technology. You can't even apply for work or log in at the start of the shift anymore without some digital literacy.

Today we have an opportunity to focus on ways to reach and engage more adults in literacy and education with creative media and new community partners, and to talk about the difficult policy work of aligning systems in order to pave the way for future learners.

We cannot take our eyes off the priority to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. This act funds the federally funded state administered adult education system as well as much of the workforce development system. This system



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is running at full capacity with a waiting list of over 160K potential students, and is shrinking due to state and local budget cuts. If we are to realize the innovations that we will hear about today, and pave the way for a 21st century approach to adult literacy and education, worker preparation and retraining, and bringing more adults into and through postsecondary education, then we must update the funding mechanism to incentivize change and bring more partners to the table.

The Co-chairs I'd like to introduce our speakers today.

Jennifer Foster, Senior Director for Adult Education and Family Literacy/State Director for GED Testing in IL will talk to us about the work they've accomplished in IL through the Shifting Gears work funded by the Joyce Foundation.

Steve Reder, Professor at Portland State University will be speaking about his work through the Commerce Department to bring digital literacy to communities around the country.

And **Alex Quinn**, Project Director, Education Development Center, Inc., presenting TV411's new NSF-funded initiative, TV 411's What's Cooking?, a video web-based educational program to teach math and science.