

Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education

Governor Edward G. Rendell

1. As Governor, will you make adult education and family literacy one of your top three educational priorities?

Adult education and family literacy are already among my top education priorities. That is why I created the \$8 million Move Up initiative to provide intensive adult literacy education – giving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) participants the ability to succeed in the workplace and play a greater role in their own children’s literacy development. I am pleased that more than 3,200 adults in the 23 counties with the greatest needs were able to benefit from this literacy program last year.

The importance of family literacy is also one of the reasons that I have championed Head Start and other proven early childhood education programs since taking office. Before I became Governor, Pennsylvania was one of nine states that failed to fund pre-kindergarten. Now, my \$40 million investment in Head Start is making it possible for 5,800 additional low-income children and their families to take vital early first steps towards academic success.

2. A recent government survey indicates that 93 million individuals nationally are at risk at home, at work and in the community because of low levels of literacy. In PA, since less than 4% of those in need are served, what new investment in adult education will you make to increase access for the unemployed, new immigrants and other at risk populations in order to keep our state competitive?

My \$8 million Move Up initiative is the equivalent of a 44% increase in adult and family literacy funding. Move Up includes assistance for TANF recipients who are not yet fluent in English, who need help preparing for a GED, and who have family-focused literacy needs. I am committed to continuing Move Up, while making improvements to better serve adults and working to comply with the federal TANF reauthorization that unfortunately narrows the scope of allowable education and training activities that count towards work participation.

Community colleges are an important asset in our adult literacy system, and I have increased community college funding by a total of \$55 million since taking office. The new funding system that I championed gives community colleges unprecedented flexibility to invest in adult literacy programs and provides an incentive for the community colleges to focus on workforce development training in occupations that are in demand and that pay family-sustaining wages. In addition, my Administration decided to use nearly \$1.8 million in federal funding to develop a system to support adults in basic literacy programs transitioning to postsecondary education and training.

Many adults who are already in the workforce but need to strengthen their job skills have too often been unable to do so because of a lack of adequate financial aid. I successfully called on PHEAA to provide \$10 million a year for adults to go back to college so they can receive

training and education for high-demand, well-paying jobs. This program benefited nearly 3,000 adults during its first year in existence and I look forward to even more working Pennsylvanians participating in the coming years.

I will continue to seek out ways to expand our services to reach additional adults while maintaining a fiscally responsible balanced budget.

3. Children who do not succeed in school now will become adults who lack literacy skills. Then, as parents, they will not be able to support their children's learning. Without strong parental support for education, children of these individuals may also be left behind. What do you see as the role of adult education and family literacy programs in addressing this intergenerational literacy issue?

Children's learning and adult literacy are linked. That is why so many of the programs that my Administration has championed have strong parent and family literacy components.

For example, I called for the first-ever state funding to expand the federal Head Start program to reach additional low-income children, and we are now providing \$40 million in state Head Start Supplemental Assistance resources. This is a program that addresses the needs of the whole child – integrating health, nutritional, emotional, and social services along with preparing children and their parents for academic success in school.

Last year, the federal government cut Even Start by 56%. But because the state provides additional resources for this valuable program, we were able to avoid the significant impact felt in many other states. As a result, families are still able to benefit from a comprehensive family literacy program.

To ensure that all family literacy programs are high-quality and effective, my Administration's Department of Education continues to invest in and focus on professional development that includes training, technical assistance and materials for community partners and parents across the Commonwealth. The Department also provides a clearinghouse of parent involvement materials to help school districts engage parents in their children's learning.

4. The current average state investment in adult education and literacy is less than \$500 per adult learner. Many of these adult learners were not successful in schools where more than ten times that much per student is the norm. What do you believe the state investment per adult learner should be?

My Move Up program provides more than \$2,500 per adult learner. Nevertheless, although I understand how difficult it is to run programs on such a modest investment, our fiscal realities make it difficult to dramatically increase funding because of the tough budget choices that the state must make in order to preserve essential services. While we should find fiscally responsible ways to expand services to additional adults and families, the question we must also address is *how* those services are delivered. Simply replicating the resources or strategies from

elementary and high school is not a sound model; after all, the adults we are working to help often did not succeed in those environments the first time. That is why I have directed my Departments of Education, Welfare and Labor & Industry to work together to ensure that all of our programs are designed to meet adult learning needs and styles, and to provide information and resources on effective adult learning strategies to all service providers.

5. The American Medical Association estimates that \$74 billion in annual health care costs is attributable to the effects of under-education and limited proficiency in English. For example, parents are not always able to read or understand prescription instructions for themselves and their children. What will you do to address health literacy?

We must address health literacy as part of our work to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have access to quality health care. Our adult literacy programs include health literacy. I also created an Office of Health Equity to directly address issues like this that contribute to the Commonwealth's health disparities, and my Department of Health provides information to the public in multiple languages to the greatest extent possible. In addition, this year's Pennsylvania Rural Health Care Conference included sessions specifically focused on improving health literacy.

In order to meet our fundamental responsibility to ensure that all children have access to quality health care, I am calling for the General Assembly to pass the legislation needed to enact my plan to Cover All Kids that was funded in this year's budget so that every one of our 133,500 children who are presently without health insurance receive the health care they need. For initiatives like this to be successful, we must also address barriers like health literacy that could keep families from taking full advantage of available services and care.

One of the ways that we can expand health care to Pennsylvanians who are currently uninsured is by improving quality and reducing costs in the existing health care system. Ensuring that literacy and language do not prevent quality care is an important step towards this goal.

6. Do you believe that adult education and literacy services (including English language learning and family literacy) should be available to all residents who need and seek those services? If so, are you willing to support an increase in funding that would eliminate waiting lists for these services?

Since taking office, I have worked to expand adult education and literacy services – particularly for those who are seeking to enter the workforce – and to make these services more efficient and effective. I will continue to seek out all available federal resources that would allow us to reach more Pennsylvanians, and I hope that we can work together to identify other creative funding opportunities – such as additional resources from PHEAA's investment earnings – in order to reach adults who need education and literacy services.