

Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education
Gubernatorial Candidate Lynn Swann

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

- (1) In August I released my book entitled *A New Direction: My Plan for a Better Pennsylvania*. A full chapter of the book is devoted to the need of doing more to educate our young people. One of my principle goals is to ensure that all third graders are able to read and do basic math at the completion of the third grade. The statistics continue to be horribly daunting regarding the number of our young people who are unable to read at grade level, and some students cannot read at all. The best way to ensure that we do not have an adult literacy crisis continuing in our Commonwealth is to teach every child to read. But for those adults that are currently dealing with the problem of literacy, I will be devoted to helping those with the appropriate and necessary programs.

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?

- (2) Reading is at the very core of our society. And it is appropriate to label those who cannot read “at risk.” Those who cannot read generally earn significantly less in wages and have difficulty doing tasks that many of us simply take for granted. Many adults who cannot read are obviously forced to find employment that does not rely on it. Employers often know that one or more of their employees are unable to read, but stay silent. We need to form public/private partnerships with employers so they will have the ability and the resources to channel their literacy challenged employees into reading classes or programs. Literacy is often a silent problem. Those who cannot read often want no one to know. Therefore they do not want to seek assistance. We must do better to remove the stigma associated with literacy and stress the potential success rather than the current difficulty.

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?

- (3) Parents are instrumental in teaching their children to read. When a child’s mother and/or father cannot read a bed time story or check the homework, his or her ability to achieve is significantly impacted. Some, thankfully a small percentage, parents who cannot read believe that it simply doesn’t really matter. Those

parents will unfortunately not stress literacy to their children. But most parents want their children to learn, even if they are unable. But when they can't help their children sound out a word or look up its meaning, the child's growth is impacted. Teaching our adults to read is absolutely vital if we are to expect our children to do the same. Family literacy programs recognize the wonderful times when children actually push their parents to learn. But most of the time, parents are the ones who push their children and this is often only successful if the parent has the ability to read.

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?

- (4) The amount needed to be invested for adult literacy programs will change from region to region in the Commonwealth. I believe the state investment should match the amount needed to properly advertise and administer these programs. This is not an area where we can afford to not fully fund these programs. Governor Rendell and I have radically different perspectives when deciding on budget priorities. Governor Rendell believes Pennsylvanians don't mind financing anything he wants, I believe the resident of our state only want government to fund what it must. Adult education and literacy programs make the "must" list. I will work with educators and budget specialists to determine the amounts necessary in each region of the Commonwealth to offer proven literacy programs.

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?

- (5) As I noted above, not being able to read makes every one of life's tasks just a little more difficult. From simple things such as identifying street names to more complex projects such as reading the assembling directions for a child's new toy. But beyond daily chores, not being able to read can at times be a matter of life and death. Health Care providers must not make the assumption that every adult is able to read, even the most simplest of directions. We need public/private partnerships between health care providers and patients similar to those between employer and employee. Business must be willing to participate in compacts with state government to fund not simply literacy awareness campaigns but the programs themselves which likely should be held in places like hospitals and other medical facilities. Adults must be aware that when they cannot read, they have the potential of not simply making poor medical choices for themselves but for other family members as well.

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?

- (6) Ed Rendell continues to place more and more Pennsylvanians on waiting lists. Pennsylvanians cannot get into the state health insurance program, literacy programs, home and community health care services, and approximately 17,000 children cannot get the tutoring they need. These and other state waiting lists will not dissipate quickly. Hundreds of millions of dollars will be needed to begin to transition these people from waiting lists to receiving the needed services. As noted above, teaching our residents of all ages English is absolutely vital if we want to successfully move many people from unemployment and “underemployment” to jobs that pay family sustaining wages. Funding literacy programs is not something state government should do; it is something that state government must do.