



# New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy

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## **Hundreds of New Yorkers Rally to Urge Mayor Bloomberg and NYC City Council to Restore Funds to Literacy, GED and English Classes**

### **7,000 Adult Literacy Students to Lose Classes**

*New York, NY.* Nearly 1,000 students, teachers, and advocates rallied outside of City Hall today to urge Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council to restore funding for adult literacy, GED, and English classes. The students and supporters from across the City, joined by numerous City Council members, were brought together by the New York City Coalition of Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), an umbrella advocacy group dedicated to preserving and promoting access to literacy services in the City.

According to the coalition, if passed in its current form, the Mayor's budget would eliminate \$6.5 million in funding for literacy and immigrant services, ending classes for 7,000 for New Yorkers seeking to improve their English skills and their chances of landing or keeping a job in a tight economy. The proposed cuts come on top of 7,000 seats already lost over the past two years since the Administration eliminated baseline funding for DYCD's program. The cumulative cuts threaten the loss of 80% of community-based adult literacy program capacity since 2010.

**Council Member Sara M. González (D- Brooklyn)**, told demonstrators she understands the need for adult literacy: "I have championed the cause of adult literacy for years now chiefly because I have personally witnessed the empowerment that these programs deliver. Adult literacy programs have improved job prospects for the huge influx of immigrants in my District. The program has also provided adults the tools to continue their higher education and made parents better partners in their children's academic success. I am proud to have secured millions of dollars in City funds for these programs and will continue to do so with the support of my colleagues, advocates, and the thousands of New Yorkers who depend on adult literacy services."

Among the many City leaders to join González in calling for restorations to the City's adult literacy programs was **City Council Immigration Committee Chair Daniel Dromm (D-Queens)** who stated "Immigrant and low-income New Yorkers need to be given the opportunities and the resources necessary to fully participate in our society and pursue the American dream. That is why we must ensure that funding for adult literacy services is restored to the City's budget. Simply put, adult literacy equals success. We cannot accept a budget where these communities do not get their fair share of tax dollars and a fair shot at achieving that success."

**Council Member Deborah Rose (D- Staten Island)** added: "On Staten Island alone, we will see nearly \$200,000 in adult literacy cuts and over \$330,000 in immigration services. Thousands of New Yorkers will be hurt without the benefits of English language instruction and GED classes. Well I'm here today with you to fight back against all of these cuts- to fight back to ensure all of New York City's residents get their chance at an education!"

At stake in the budget negotiations are three critical literacy programs: the Department of Youth & Community Development's (DYCD) Adult Literacy Program, and two popular council initiatives- the Adult Literacy Services Initiative and the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI). Unless the Mayor or City Council acts to restore the funding, all will receive zero city funding in the coming fiscal year. NYCCAL is calling for the restoration of \$5.2 million for DYCD's program, \$1.5 million for the Adult Literacy Services Initiative, and \$4.0 million for IO.

One of the rally's organizers, **Kevin Douglas of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH)**, said "In a city with 1.2 million working adults lacking a high school diploma, and over 3 million foreign born residents, many working day and night to keep NYC running, it is shameful that Mayor Bloomberg has chosen to not include these community based literacy services in the budget. Just a few short months ago during the launch of the City's Immigrant Heritage Week, the Mayor stated he was committed to promoting the well-being of immigrants in our city-- we hope he makes good on those words by funding literacy and immigrant services."

**Sierra Stoneman-Bell of the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC)**, also organizing the rally, added, "At a time when New York City most needs a skilled workforce and engaged citizenry, it is bad policy to target community-based adult literacy programs with such deep and disproportionate cuts. For thousands of New Yorkers striving to make ends meet, these programs are local gateways to further education, economic advancement, and civic participation. We are counting on the Mayor and the City Council to invest in the people of this city and keep the promise of opportunity for all."

These sentiments were echoed by the personal testimony shared by students and educators -- many in their native tongue- to urge the City not to cut their lifelines to brighter futures:

"As a professional immigrant, English classes have contributed in my work towards accomplishing my goals. I have improved in my communication skills and that helps me feel like a part of the country and be able to become a member of the workforce." - **Manuel Quintero, Student, Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island**

"Loss of funding for our English and ESOL job readiness classes, where almost 50% of the students are young adults ages 19 to 24, would mean an abandonment of this population who are critical to tomorrow's workforce." -**Marjorie Parker, Deputy Executive Director of Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT).**

"I feel that education is important because I want to be successful. I want to become somebody and be able to provide for myself" **Brittany Middlebrook, Student, FEGS Bronx Youth Center**

"As an immigrant it's very hard to survive in the U.S. because of language barrier. I've got through this barrier by the Adult Literacy ESL program. There are many immigrants like me who need such program for their better life. Actually they are valuable resources for the U.S." -**Yin Thein, Student, Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island**

"The ESOL class helped me get my job and my next goal is to move to a GED class and then college!" **Ana da Silva, Student, Fifth Avenue Committee**

"Investing in adult literacy and English classes costs little compared to the huge dividends in terms of New Yorkers' ability to climb the economic ladder toward better jobs and better lives. These programs are a worthwhile investment for New York," said **Julie Quinton, Director of Adult Literacy at Make the Road New York**

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