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UNH City Fiscal Year 2020 Budget & Policy Priorities **Adult Literacy**

Adult Literacy – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), High School Equivalency Preparation (HSE), Basic Education in Native Language (BENL)

Funding History

- FY2019-2020 Preliminary: \$0
- FY2018-2019 Adopted: \$12m (\$4m council; \$8m administration; none baselined)
- FY2018-2017 Adopted: \$12m (\$6m council, \$6m administration; none baselined)

Challenge and Opportunity – New York City is currently home to 2.2 million adults that lack English proficiency and/or a high school diploma. Due to these barriers to economic success, many are stuck in low-wage, low-skilled jobs where at best, they struggle to get by, and at worst, are subject to exploitative practices. In fact, nationally, Spanish-speaking English learners lose approximately \$3,000 per year in earnings as a direct result of inadequate English skills. Unfortunately, there is no universal system of adult literacy in New York City, with many immigrants and other adults stuck on long waiting lists for services. A 2015 survey conducted by the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) found that there were at least 15,000 individuals on waitlists for adult literacy classes.

NYC responded to this crisis with a \$12 million investment in the FY2017, 2018 and 2019 adopted budgets, resulting in services for thousands of adult learners. However, this funding has not been baselined, and every year these students are at risk of losing the ability to learn English and work towards a high school equivalency diploma. Yet, when immigrants and other adult learners are able to access adult literacy services, the benefits are clear: increased English proficiency means parents can help their children succeed in school, communicate with medical, police, and other professionals, and more readily participate in the social and civic opportunities in their communities. In addition, when New Yorkers are able to earn a high school equivalency diploma there is a net economic benefit of \$324,000 to the City over the course of their lifetime due to their higher rates of employment and earnings and decreased utilization of social services.

This challenge has been exacerbated by recent changes in federal policy under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which made it harder for New York to serve immigrants that lack a documented status &/or have extremely limited English skills. As the federal administration continues to attack immigrant communities, **New York City has the obligation to stand up and not only defend their security and liberty, but also support pathways to opportunity that lead to stronger families and communities. The ability to read, write and speak English is the most foundational skill for success in our City.**

UNH recommendation: Baseline \$12m for community-based adult literacy programs and establish a Citywide Adult Literacy Task Force to develop recommendations for strengthening and better coordinating services.

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