



National Coalition for Literacy

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National Coalition for Literacy Honors Leaders in Literacy

Lawmakers and change makers recognized for their efforts

Washington, D.C. --- The National Coalition for Literacy (NCL) gathered on Capitol Hill last Thursday to present the 2015 Literacy Leadership Awards, an annual tradition that recognizes individuals and organizations that have made extraordinary contributions to improving adult education and literacy in the U.S. and raising public awareness of this critical issue.

For more than a decade award recipients have been recognized by NCL for their deep and sustained individual or organizational commitment to supporting underserved adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills. 2015 Awardees include:

- The Honorable Phil Roe, U.S. Representative of Tennessee, for his leadership as the Republican co-chair of the House Adult Literacy Caucus;
- The Honorable Michael A. Nutter, Mayor of Philadelphia, for his efforts in raising awareness of adult literacy and expanding opportunities for adult learners in the city of Philadelphia;
- Kavitha Cardoza, Special Correspondent at WAMU, who highlighted the current adult literacy crisis facing communities across the country in a groundbreaking four-part radio series; and
- The Adult Numeracy Network (ANN) and its late co-founder, Mary Jane Schmitt. Since 1994, ANN been the leading national voice advocating for and providing professional development for improved adult numeracy instruction.

“I am honored to be recognized by the National Coalition for Literacy,” said Representative Roe, co-chair of the House Adult Literacy Caucus with Representative Rubén Hinojosa of Texas, who was an honoree in 2008. “Adult education is an important part of our economy, and it’s important to remember the contributions adult learners bring to our workforce and communities. I am proud to be recognized alongside individuals like Mayor Michael Nutter, Kavitha Cardoza and Mary Jane Schmitt, and I am glad our commitment to adult education extends past party lines.”

Mayor Nutter delivered remarks by video. “This Literacy Leadership Award means so much to me personally,” he said, “because I’ve been an advocate for adult learners during all of my time as mayor since 2008. One of my main priorities has been to raise educational attainment for all Philadelphians, which includes adults not in school. There is clearly a direct correlation between our city’s high poverty rate and the low adult literacy rate. Helping adult learners increase their literacy skills ultimately helps them support themselves and their families.”

Cardoza told the crowd that she felt compelled to begin reporting on adult literacy when she realized that her reporting on education was incomplete without it. “You can’t talk about education in the U.S, without talking about adult education,” she said.

Mary Jane Schmitt was involved with adult numeracy—the intersection of the adult education and mathematics education fields—for over thirty years. In 1994, she co-founded the Adult Numeracy Network (ANN). She also founded and directed the Adult Numeracy Center at TERC—a constellation of projects contributing to innovative research and development in adult mathematics education. Lynda Ginsburg, Senior Research Associate at the Center for Math, Science and Computer Education at Rutgers University, noted that Schmitt was a “tireless advocate and activist at the state, national and international levels for the improvement of adult numeracy instruction.”

Ginsburg thanked NCL for “acknowledging the important work of raising the quality of math education for adult learners so they are well prepared for further education, for workplace opportunities, and for supporting their children's math learning.”

“The diversity of this year’s awardees are a good representation of the different kinds of leadership you see involved in adult education across the U.S. It’s going to take all of us—political leaders, journalists, educators, and others—to build a greater understanding of the adverse impact that low skills has on families across the country and on our economy overall,” said Jeff Carter, Director of Adult Education Initiatives at Digital Promise, and President of the National Coalition for Literacy. “Millions of these adults are ready to work on improving their skills—we just need to provide them with the opportunity and resources to do so. I’m extremely grateful to our 2015 award winners and their efforts to shine a light on these individuals.”

According to the most recent data from the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an estimated one in six American adults—roughly 36 million people—lack basic literacy proficiency. Nearly one in three are unable to solve basic math problems. Nearly two-thirds of these adults are employed, but most struggle to find stable employment at a family-sustaining wage. Yet across the country, prospective adult learners remain on waiting lists, sometimes for more than a year.

The 2015 Literacy Leadership Awards were made possible by a grant from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation.

About the National Coalition for Literacy

The National Coalition for Literacy (NCL) (<http://national-coalition-literacy.org>) is a coalition of the leading national and regional organizations dedicated to advancing adult education, family literacy, and English language acquisition in the U.S.

About the House Adult Literacy Caucus

The House Adult Literacy Caucus (<http://national-coalition-literacy.org/house-adult-literacy-caucus/>) aims to bring attention to the adult literacy issue and promote local, national, and global adult literacy initiatives. The caucus calls attention to the connections between adult literacy and national priorities like economics and health.