

****AS IF GIVEN LIVE****

STRENGTHENING RESEARCH IN ADULT EDUCATION

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I am pleased to introduce the bipartisan Strengthening Research in Adult Education Act with my colleague, Senator Young. We are in urgent need of identifying and disseminating innovative and effective methods for supporting adult learners. Our legislation will ensure that there is a strong research base to improve the teaching provided for, and the learning of, adults seeking to advance their literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy skills.

The most recent data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies show an urgent need for action in adult education with an estimated 19 percent of adults ages 16-65 in the United States performing at the lowest levels of literacy; twenty-nine percent at the lowest levels of numeracy; and 24 percent at the lowest levels of digital problem solving. This is a dire situation. These are essential skills for postsecondary education and the workplace. Beyond their value in the labor market, these skills are also correlated with health and civic participation, making adult education critically important to the health and well-being of our people, our economy, and our democracy.

In Rhode Island, it is estimated that nearly 82,000 working age adults have less than a high school education. Over 55,000 have limited English proficiency. Yet, we are reaching just over 5,000 through the current adult education program. Clearly, we need more resources and innovative, research-based ways to reach more people.

The Strengthening Research in Adult Education Act will support the key reforms to adult education in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act by ensuring that adult education is included in our national education research priorities. Specifically, the Strengthening Research in Adult Education Act will amend the Education Sciences Reform Act to require the Institute for Education Sciences and the National Center for Education Statistics to collect data and carry out research on: successful state and local adult education and literacy activities, the characteristics and academic achievement of adult learners, and access to and opportunity for adult education, including digital literacy skills development, in communities across the country. It will also ensure that the Institute of Education Sciences draws on the expertise of adult educators when developing policies and priorities. Finally, the legislation would require that at least one research center would focus on adult education.

These straightforward amendments to the Education Sciences Reform Act will go a long way to strengthening the research base that will support the improvement of adult education across the country. I was pleased to work with the adult education community, and particularly, the Coalition of Adult Basic Educators and the National Coalition for Literacy in developing this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support the Strengthening Research in Adult Education Act and to work with me to ensure that its provisions are included in the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act.