



# National Coalition for Literacy

## 2021 Year in Review

As the new year begins, the NCL Board is looking back over the successes of 2021 and considering how to build on them for the important advocacy and awareness work that lies ahead. Here are some highlights of our advocacy initiatives from the past year:

- **Hill briefing:** In April, NCL partnered with VALUEUSA and ProLiteracy to provide a virtual Hill briefing entitled *Literacy to Leadership: Policies That Promote Adult Student Success*. Introductory remarks were provided by Senator Jack Reed (D-RI); Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA03), Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor; and Congressman John Yarmuth (D-KY03), Co-Chair, House Adult Literacy Caucus. The briefing speakers, including Kim Ford (CEO, Martha’s Table), Rachel DeVaughan (Deputy Executive Director, MS Community College Board), Carlos Vasquez (Adult Education Instructor, Catholic Charities NM), and HollyAnn Fresa-Moore (Principal, Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School), stressed the many ways that policy decisions can make a transformative difference in the lives of adult learners. The briefing elicited a lively chat exchange among the 200+ attendees; a video recording is available at <https://youtu.be/L-jBquG17VI>.
- **Senate HELP Committee and WIOA reauthorization:** In April, NCL submitted a memo to Chair Patty Murray (D-WA) and Ranking Member Richard Burr (R-NC) in response to the HELP Committee’s request for comments on workforce development and WIOA programs. NCL’s memo contained six recommendations:
  - Recognize the centrality of adult basic education to the success of workforce training and economic recovery efforts
  - Recognize that full and effective participation in the workforce requires the application of broader life skills
  - Amend deficit-based language that leads to deficit-based programming
  - Reorient adult basic education accountability and outcomes reporting toward a competency-based approach
  - Provide support for remote instruction models and the use of technology in adult education
  - Invest in research on evidence-based AEFLA program models

In providing these recommendations, NCL noted that they were designed to “improve the legislation so that it more fully realizes its essential purpose of ensuring equitable access to quality education and training for all adults.” NCL has continued to promote

these recommendations throughout 2021 in its work with Senator Reed's office on revised language for the WIOA legislation.

- **Digital Equity Act:** In June, NCL endorsed the bipartisan Digital Equity Act of 2021, which was introduced by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rob Portman (R-OH). The Act, which provides for a five-year federal investment in digital equity, was passed as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that was enacted by the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress and signed into law by the President on November 15. NCL had previously endorsed the Act in 2020 and has worked actively in support of its passage since then.
- **OCTAE and Department of Education interactions:** NCL participated in a series of invitation-only information-gathering sessions with OCTAE staff throughout the year. These sessions allowed NCL and other participants to update OCTAE on developments and activities in the field; the final session of the year was a face-to-face meeting with Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal.
- **National Reporting System:** In November 2020, NCL submitted comments on proposed changes to the National Reporting System. Our comments, which stressed the need to allow adult education programs to report outcomes for all learners across all types of measurable skill gains, aligned with those expressed by a number of our colleague organizations. OCTAE responded positively to these concerns, and in early 2021 issued a program memo providing revised guidance on outcome reporting in the pandemic environment.
- **Naturalization civics test:** In December 2020, NCL submitted a [letter](#) to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to express concerns about the development process, administration procedures, and preparation requirements for the revised naturalization civics test that USCIS released in November 2020. Similar concerns were expressed by many of our colleague organizations. USCIS responded positively, and in early 2021 announced that it would continue to use the prior version of the civics test.
- **Civil rights:** Throughout the year, NCL continued its collaboration with the [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) as the Hub for adult education, addressing concerns related to finalization of data from the 2020 Decennial Census and signing on to several other civil rights and human rights related communications throughout the year.
- **Conference presentations:** NCL Board members provided advocacy-related presentations at major conferences throughout the year, including the annual conventions of TESOL International, COABE, AAACE, and the National Literacy Summit hosted by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy in October.
- **AEFL Week:** NCL's 2022 [National AEFL Week](#) activities in September focused on the foundational role of adult education in solutions to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting recession and unemployment. In 2022, National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week will be observed from **September 18 to September 24**.
- **Organizational growth:** NCL completed its first full year with an Executive Director supporting the Board in its leadership role.

Every year, NCL actively pursues opportunities to promote adult education in policy-related matters. In 2022, we will

- Improve adult education’s visibility and messaging as a key influencer to ensure our purpose and contributions to the U.S. education system are understood by policy makers, stakeholders, and the field
- Increase awareness of the role adult education plays in digital equity, inclusive economic recovery, counteracting systemic racism, and social justice
- Promote broadening of the options for accountability in adult education
- Continue to work on organizational sustainability by increasing NCL’s membership base and securing external funding for our work

As always, we will conduct national public policy advocacy with Congress and keep our members connected with developments on Capitol Hill. NCL member organizations and individual friends will have opportunities to be involved in the national conversation on public policy through NCL’s semi-annual meetings, monthly public policy calls, conference panel discussions, and task groups.