

For Immediate Release

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Friday, September 8, 2006, marked the 39th annual observance of “Literacy Day” in New Mexico and “International Literacy Day” throughout the world. Since 1967, the day has been set aside to focus attention and efforts on improving the literacy skills of adults and children worldwide. The observance is sponsored annually by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This year is especially significant because it is the third year of the “Literacy Decade,” as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003, which aims to increase literacy levels by a rate of fifty percent by the year 2015.

In the United States, the decade-long effort is being coordinated by the National Coalition for Literacy under their National Literacy Summit Initiative. The Initiative’s ten-year goal is to improve our nation’s system of adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services by the year 2010. Its Action Agenda (*From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy*) was developed through grass roots consensus building, and is a blueprint for community action nationwide (the action agenda and background information about the initiative can be found at http://www.national-coalition-literacy.org/summit_initiative.html).

Closer to home, Literacy Day will be celebrated by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy and local literacy programs throughout the state. The Governor has issued a proclamation, declaring Literacy Day in the state of New Mexico. Mayors have been encouraged to declare Literacy Day in their local communities as well.

Low literacy in New Mexico continues to be a persistent problem, with one in every five adults reading at or below a 5th grade level. One in four adults lack a high school education, and nearly half (46%) of all adults have literacy skills at the two lowest levels identified in the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. At these levels, adults exhibit some reading and writing skills, but lack the skills needed to understand a bus schedule or write a simple letter. Furthermore, it is estimated that two-thirds of all jobs require literacy skills beyond level two.

The economic impact of low literacy is significant. In terms of income, the average monthly earning for individuals without a high school education is \$492, which is less than half the income of those with a high school education and less than one-quarter the income of individuals with a college degree. In addition, the completion of a high school education by parents is considered the best predictor of whether or not their children will be raised in poverty. Research has shown that helping adults improve their literacy skills has a direct and measurable impact on the educational success of their children.

Literacy efforts in New Mexico are coordinated by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy, a statewide organization located in Santa Fe, that provides training and technical assistance to over 90 local literacy programs around the state. Information about literacy in New Mexico, including the locations of local programs and how you can volunteer can be found on the Coalition's website: www.nmcl.org, by writing to info@nmcl.org, or by calling 1-800-233-7587.

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