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Estimate says 46 percent of NM adults are illiterate or functionally illiterate; coalition urges funding increase

By Rob Nikolewski on January 18, 2012

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The numbers are alarming.

The [New Mexico Coalition for Literacy](#) (NMCL) told reporters at a news conference in Santa Fe that it estimates nearly half of the state's adults (46 percent) are either illiterate or functionally illiterate — and the coalition is urging the legislature and Gov. [Susana Martinez](#) to add \$347,200 to its budget.

Given the high rate of high school dropouts in New Mexico, the startling statistics are probably not surprising but Lewis Lamar of the NMCL said there is hope for adults who do not read proficiently and emphasized that NMCL programs in cities and towns across the state offer one-on-one tutoring in English and Spanish and the coalition guarantees confidentiality.



“Our motto is, you read to understand but you write to be understood,” Lamar said.

A number of years ago, the NMCL had a budget of \$755,000 but when the state budget crisis hit, the coalition saw its funding cut by 11 percent and then last year, was in line to get its budget reduced to zero. “It was not because of ill will or malice or politics or anything like that,” NMCL executive director [Heather Heunermund](#) told [Capitol Report New Mexico](#). “The money simply wasn't there.”

Heunermund said \$325,000 was restored in last year's legislative session but the NMCL is asking for an additional \$347,200 this year to bring its budget up to \$672,200.

“What we desperately need is public support,” Heunermund said, adding that legislators in the Roundhouse “act at your will. So contact your lawmakers, let them know that you do support this cause. Give them a reason to work very hard to identify that funding.”

Heunermund said she's received verbal support from the state Senate and House as well as Gov. Martinez. At Wednesday's news conference, First Gentleman [Chuck Franco](#) spoke in favor of the NMCL, saying that adults who take literacy programs "not only better their children's lives, but their own as well ... and they become a mentor for the little ones. And that's our goal."

Here's more from Heunermund and Lamar, who spoke bluntly:

Also at Wednesday's news conference, a representative from [PNM](#) announced a \$20,000 grant to assist the coalition.

If you know someone who might be interested in the NMCL's adult literacy programs, call 1-800-233-7587. There are 25 locations across the state that offer one-on-one, confidential instruction. Here's the coalition's website: www.nmcl.org

Posted under [Capitol Report](#).

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- 1. *Dave*
9:20 pm on January 18th, 2012

This is great, but how about attacking the problem in third grade. Don't automatically promote those children who can't read. The "stigma" of being held back at 10 years old can be hard, but what about the stigma of not being able to read as an adult!

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