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SERVING NEW YORK CITY YOUTH, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES
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JEANNE B. MULLGRAV
Commissioner

November 7, 2005

Dear Community Member:

Prior to the release of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Comprehensive Literacy Services, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has developed a Concept Paper that presents the agency's approach to this important field. The Concept Paper encompasses three areas: services for adults through the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, including Adult Basic Education, Basic Education in the Native Language, and English for Speakers of Other Languages; literacy services for families with young school-aged children; and literacy services for young adolescents in grades six through eight. We invite your review and comment.

Over the past several months, DYCD has conducted focus groups and consulted with a range of providers, advocates, and experts to elicit input on best practices in the field of literacy services. DYCD has attempted to capture much of that input in the Concept Paper. Constructive feedback will continue to be an essential feature of this planning process as we develop and finalize the upcoming Comprehensive Literacy Services RFP. I thank you for your careful consideration of this Concept Paper and look forward to your comments.

Please send your comments, in writing, to the attention of:

Nancy Russell
Department of Youth and Community Development
156 William Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10038

Comments may also be emailed to: litcp@dycd.nyc.gov

Please note that we are only able to consider written comments received no later than 5:00 p.m. on November 23, 2005.

The Comprehensive Literacy Services Concept Paper is attached and will be posted on our website at www.nyc.gov/dycd. I urge you to distribute this Concept Paper to all who are interested in literacy services and to share with us your best thoughts regarding this solicitation.

Sincerely,

Jeanne B. Mullgrav

Department of Youth and Community Development Comprehensive Literacy Services

Concept Paper – November 7, 2005

Purpose of the RFP

The National Institute for Literacy supports the definition of literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.”¹ In an increasingly complex, knowledge-based society, such skills have become ever more important to enable a person to compete in the global economy and pursue learning throughout life. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) intends to seek qualified organizations to provide comprehensive literacy services to adults, adolescents, and families in New York City.

There is a great need for literacy services in New York City. An estimated 36 percent of all New York City adults have literacy proficiency at the lowest level, lacking the foundation to find and keep decent jobs, support their children’s education, and participate actively in civic life.² As noted in the New York City Department of City Planning’s 2004 report, *The Newest New Yorkers*, one in four New Yorkers reported problems with speaking English. After a focused effort to improve the reading and writing skills of New York City public school students, the number of fourth graders meeting New York State standards on the English Language Arts exam, given in February 2005, rose 9.9 points, to 59.5 percent. However, those gains were not evidenced in middle school. The percentage of eighth graders meeting state standards fell 2.8 percentage points in 2005, with only 32.8 percent meeting standards.³ In 2002-2003 only 4.4 percent of English Language Learners in New York City public schools met state and city reading standards.⁴ And only about half (54.3 percent) of New York City public high school students in the class of 2004 graduated in four years. Of those who did not graduate, 29.4 percent remained enrolled and 16.3 percent had dropped out by June 30, 2004.⁵

¹ National Institute for Literacy website, <http://nifl.gov/nifl/faqs.html>.

² Stephen Reder, “The State of Literacy in America: Synthetic Estimates of Adult Literacy Proficiency at the Local, State, and National Levels,” NIFL website, <http://nifl.gov/reders/reder.htm>.

³ David M. Herszenhorn, “A Gold Star for Schools: Overview; 4th Graders Post Big Reading Gains,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2005, Section A, p. 1.

⁴ “Keeping Track of New York City’s Children: A Citizens’ Committee for Children Status Report,” Citizens’ Committee of New York, 2005, p. 9.

⁵ “The Class of 2004: Four-Year Longitudinal Graduation and Dropout Report and 2003-2004 Event Dropout Rates,” New York City Department of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability, February 2005, p. 1. Available at <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/reports>.

The level of basic skills and educational attainment are important factors influencing labor force participation and earnings. As indicated in the *Digest of Education Statistics, 2002*, about 79 percent of adults 25 years old and older with bachelor's degrees participated in the labor force in 2001, compared with 64 percent of persons who were high school graduates. Only 44 percent of those who were not high school graduates were in the labor force. Research has also shown that there is a direct relationship between educational attainment and earnings. Average earnings increase from \$18,900 for high school dropouts, to \$25,900 for high school graduates, to \$45,400 for college graduates.⁶

Comprehensive Literacy Services

As described above, literacy services are clearly needed at all age levels, for both native and non-native English speakers. DYCD will seek to address this continuum of need by providing services for adults, families with young children, and adolescents living in New York City. DYCD will provide literacy services to adults through the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), a coordinated delivery system of literacy providing agencies⁷ that offer programs in Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL).

DYCD will also fund family literacy programs which aim to strengthen literacy proficiency in adults and their children. DYCD has funded family literacy programs since 2003 and has received national recognition from the National Center for Family Literacy and Toyota Motors, Inc.

DYCD will separately fund literacy programs that specifically address the needs of younger adolescents in grades 6-8. Middle and high school students have come to be known as the "missing middle" in terms of educational policy and funding. Standards-based school reform demands that students demonstrate the skills needed to give them access to college, postsecondary training, and good jobs. However, the resources and appropriate curriculum to enable them to acquire those skills are often lacking.⁸ Federal funding for education is concentrated on programs for elementary students and college assistance.⁹ DYCD programs will seek to help students in the "missing middle" acquire the literacy skills that will help them succeed in school and in their subsequent adult lives.

⁶ Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Eric B. Newburger, "The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings," U.S. Census Bureau, July 2002.

⁷ NYCALI includes 1) not-for-profit organizations in contract with DYCD; 2) the City University of New York; 3) the New York City Department of Education; and 4) the three public library systems (the Brooklyn Public Library, the New York Public Library, and the Queens Borough Public Library). NYCALI is funded and administered by the New York State Education Department in contract with DYCD.

⁸ Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers, "The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy," Educational Testing Service, April 2002, p. 19.

⁹ Alliance for Excellent Education Policy Brief, "The Graduation for All Act: Boosting Poor Graduation Rates with Literacy Coaches and Student Graduation Plans," updated February 2005, www.all4ed.org/publications.

NYCALI Programs

The purpose of NYCALI is to provide opportunities for adults and older youth with limited reading, writing, math, and English language abilities to improve their capacity to succeed as workers, family members, and community residents. The funding will support programs of instruction in ABE, BENL, and ESOL.

Programs are designed to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency and to pursue further education. ABE programs will provide instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. BENL programs are designed to raise the students' literacy level in the native language in order to facilitate acquisition of English-language skills. BENL programs must offer instruction that, at a minimum, provides students with a foundation in oral English language "survival" skills. ESOL programs will provide English language instruction.

Target Population

Individuals eligible to receive NYCALI instructional services are those who are at least 16 years old, not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law,¹⁰ and lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills or are unable to speak, read, or write the English language well enough to participate in education or training programs conducted in English. ABE programs will be intended for students reading below the 8.9 grade level (as measured on the Test of Adult Basic Education or TABE). BENL programs will be intended for individuals who have limited native language literacy skills and limited proficiency in English. ESOL programs will be intended for individuals whose primary language is other than English and who have limited proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, or writing the English language.

Program Elements

The model for ABE, BENL, and ESOL programs will contain the following:

- Classroom instruction of a minimum of six hours and maximum of 15 hours/week.
- An orientation program for all newly enrolled students prior to class placement.
- Class placement as a result of intake tests.
- Appropriate curriculum guidelines and teaching materials.

Staffing and Staff Development

Staff qualifications would include the following:

¹⁰ Under New York State law, children are required to be enrolled in school until the age of 17 unless the parent signs a release for them to leave school at age 16.

- Each program would engage a literacy program coordinator to supervise all operations of the literacy program. The literacy coordinator would have at a minimum a bachelor's degree and appropriate training and experience serving adult populations.
- Teachers and counselors would have at a minimum bachelor's degrees and appropriate training and experience serving adult populations.
- All instructional staff would possess appropriate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English. In addition, all instructional and counseling staff for BENL programs would be fluent and experienced in the language of instruction.
- Staff members that serve special adult populations, such as the hearing-impaired, would possess appropriate knowledge, training, and experience.

Ten to thirty hours of staff development activities would be required annually, depending on prior experience of staff and hours worked per week. Among others, DYCD and the New York State-funded Regional Adult Education Network are available resources for staff development.

Program Outcomes

The contractor would collect and report on data related to the mandated federal Core Indicators and related outcome measures for the National Reporting System (see Attachment, p. 11). All participants would be measured for literacy gains with the expectation that they would advance one or more educational levels from start to end of the program year. As appropriate, other outcomes would include entry into the workforce, job retention, attainment of a GED, enrollment in post-secondary education or training, retention in the program, and participant satisfaction with program services.

Family Literacy

The Family Literacy Program will address the educational and individual needs of parents and their school-aged children through an integrated set of activities that address and enhance adult basic education, children's education, parent and child interactions, and parent knowledge of child development and parenting strategies. Through this program, parents will become full partners in the education of their children. The partnership will be designed to improve a broad range of competencies related to literacy, such as basic language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), communication within the family, parental understanding of child development and positive parenting skills, workplace skills, and strengthened relationships between parents and their children's schools.

Target Population

Family literacy services will be intended for families in which the parent(s) have limited English-language and/or literacy skills. Parents will be 16 or older with a child or children aged 5-8.

Program Elements

The program model for family literacy services will contain the following elements:

- All programs will operate during the school year. If the program is school-based, all youth participants would attend that school.
- School-based programs will establish a linkage agreement with the host school. Center-based programs will be encouraged, but not required to establish linkage agreements with the schools attended by participating youth. Linkage agreements would address issues such as use of space, curricula, and interaction between program staff and school personnel.
- Program components will include:
 - Adult Literacy (ABE and/or ESOL)
 - Literacy, language, life, and job skills.
 - Contextualized curriculum.
 - Children's Education
 - Enhance children's academic knowledge and performance.
 - Reinforce and augment, rather than repeat, school-day instruction.
 - Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time
 - Instruction in strategies for parents and children to improve literacy skills together, such as learning games, homework help, reading together.
 - Parent Resource Time
 - Encouragement and support for parent interaction with child's school, parenting skills, accessing health and other benefits, general family support.
- Recommended weekly minimum hours:¹¹
 - 6 hours of adult education instruction
 - 3 hours of children's education
 - 4 hours PACT time instruction
 - 2 hours Parent Resource Time

¹¹ Alternative program schedules will be considered with appropriate justification

Staffing and Staff Development

Key staff would be appropriately trained in areas such as adult basic education, childhood education, multi-cultural family counseling, and case management. Each instructional staff member would receive a minimum of ten hours of staff development annually.

Program Outcomes

The contractor would track and report to DYCD progress toward outcomes related to each program component: educational gains for parents and children, workforce related outcomes, increased parental involvement in children's education, and improved parenting skills. The contractor would deliver ongoing assessment services to evaluate progress toward outcome achievement and work with family members to develop a plan for achieving family goals.

Adolescent Literacy Program

The purpose of the Adolescent Literacy Program is to help youth in grades 6-8 develop the strong literacy skills that are critical for academic success. As children reach middle school age and demands for literacy proficiency become markedly greater, students need to go beyond word decoding and strengthen their abilities to comprehend what they are reading. Programs would employ multiple strategies to improve not only reading, but also writing, listening, and speaking skills. Instructional strategies would promote motivation and engagement in reading and writing. Strategies would also address decoding skills, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

In addition to funding organizations proposing complete and separate adolescent literacy programs, DYCD would support organizations proposing to add literacy components to existing programs. Programs may be school-based or center-based.

Target Population

Adolescent Literacy Programs will be intended for youth in grades 6-8 who are reading below grade level. Programs would focus specifically on those students who achieved Level 2 (below standards) on the city or state English Language Arts exams in 2005. In 2005, 40.9 percent of New York City sixth-grade students, 33.6 of seventh-grade students,¹² and 56.8 percent of eighth-grade students¹³ scored at Level 2, representing a very high proportion of the approximately 200,000¹⁴ students enrolled in middle school.

¹² New York City Department of Education Press Release, May 18, 2005, www.nycenet.edu.

¹³ New York City Department of Education Press Release, June 1, 2005, www.nycenet.edu.

¹⁴ New York City Department of Education Statistical Summaries, www.nycenet.edu.

Program Elements

The proposed program model for the Adolescent Literacy Program may comprise activities which would range from explicit literacy instruction to activities that foster literacy through the visual and expressive arts and other spheres of interest. Programs would include the following elements:¹⁵

- A minimum of five hours per week, during out-of-school hours, of explicit literacy instruction for each individual using a one-on-one tutoring or small group format, with a maximum of five participants/group. Programs would meet on at least three days; weekend days may be included. Explicit literacy instruction may be supplemented by a variety of activities that allow participants to explore interests while building literacy skills (drama, art, recreation, health and relationships, music, journalism, career exploration).
- A climate of respect and high expectations.
- An environment for literacy that differs from the school environment and provides a wide range of formal and informal learning settings, such as book discussions, story dramatization, vocabulary-building activities, creative writing, journal writing, collaborative writing, reading and writing to conduct research.
- Initial and periodic assessment to both pinpoint skills and evaluate progress. DYCD will require a common instrument to be used by all programs to assess participants. Depending on the choice of instrument, it may also serve as the diagnostic tool.
- Development of an individualized educational plan for each participant.
- Strategies that increase phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, and writing skills.
- Strategies tailored to the needs of English-Language Learners (more intensive vocabulary instruction, peer instruction).
- Opportunities for self-directed learning as a means to strengthening participants' motivation to read, develop the habit of reading and writing, and build identities as readers.
- Text-based collaborative learning, which involves students interacting with one another around texts that vary in terms of content, format, style, and levels of difficulty.
- Computer-assisted instruction as a tool to facilitate reading comprehension and create opportunities for collaborative work and social interaction.

¹⁵ See also, Gina Biancarosa and Catherine E. Snow, "Reading Next—A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy: A Report from Carnegie Corporation of New York," Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004, pp. 12-22.

- Collaboration with students' schools.
- Opportunities for parent involvement in planning program activities and assessing student progress.
- Transition strategies to assist students as they move on to high school and face more intensive, varied, and complex reading and writing demands and increased homework.

Staffing and Staff Development

The staff would include certified middle-school teachers and/or literacy coaches with master's degrees in reading to provide instruction and/or supervise instruction by tutors. Tutors, whether paid or volunteer, would have appropriate skills and receive pre-service training and in-service support. An on-site youth counselor is recommended. Instructional/counseling staff would be required to attend a minimum of ten hours of staff development activities annually.

Program Outcomes

The contractor would track and report progress toward outcomes to DYCD. Outcomes would be related to educational gains, improved motivation and engagement in reading and writing, improved school attendance, and retention in the program. It is expected that program participants would make significant progress (at least 8-10 months) toward increased grade level achievement in reading and writing in the program year. **DYCD invites respondents to recommend an assessment instrument for measuring participant achievement.**

Evaluation

It is anticipated that an outside evaluator will be engaged to assess the effectiveness of the Adolescent Literacy Program. A common assessment instrument will be used to measure participant achievement in all programs.

Common Elements of All Literacy Programs

Experience

DYCD anticipates that selected contractors and key staff would have at least three years of experience in the last five years in providing literacy services to the proposed target population.

Support Services

The contractor would provide the appropriate setting and support services and work collaboratively with schools, businesses, and community organizations to insure that participants have access to comprehensive services and a continuum

of instruction to meet their educational, personal, and career goals. As appropriate, the contractor would:

- Develop referral arrangements for GED instruction and testing.
- Assist students with transitions as they move from one educational setting to another or to a work setting.
- Make individual or group counseling available either directly or through referral.
- Provide career counseling either directly or through referral.
- Provide information and referral services, entitlement assistance, and advocacy.
- Meet regularly with other literacy providers in the geographic area.

Staffing and Staff Development

The contractor would create full-time positions wherever possible and appropriate in order to encourage program continuity and quality instruction and to provide staff access to benefits such as paid leave and health insurance.

Literacy programs must insure that services are provided by qualified instructors and overseen by administrators knowledgeable in successful literacy practices. Research has demonstrated that professional development leads to improved reading ability for students.¹⁶ Programs would incorporate high-quality ongoing professional development to insure that instructors are familiar with strategies that have been proven effective in teaching literacy to adults, adolescents, and children. Methods of maximizing motivation and engagement must be incorporated in literacy programs for adolescents.

In addition, program staff would hold regular meetings to review progress, exchange information, and share instructional strategies. Program directors are also expected to attend periodic meetings sponsored by DYCD to share best practices and address issues that may arise in the course of delivering literacy programming.

Cultural Sensitivity

All program staff, including volunteers, must provide services in a manner sensitive to the characteristics of the target population. Materials and curricula should reflect the lives, experiences, and interests of the participants.

Funding Levels and Competition Pools

It is anticipated that funding for comprehensive literacy services beginning July 1, 2006 would total up to \$11.2 million. The breakdown by program type is as follows.

¹⁶ Michael L. Kamil, "Adolescents and Literacy: Reading for the 21st Century," A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York (Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education), p. 25.

Funding for NYCALI programs will total up to \$7.5 million. It is anticipated that there will be ten competition pools for NYCALI programs. In each of the five boroughs there will be separate competitions for ABE programs and for ESOL/BENL programs.

Funding for Family Literacy programs will total \$2.8 million. DYCD anticipates awarding 20 contracts. There will be one competition pool for these programs, but DYCD plans to award programs in each of the five boroughs.

Funding for Adolescent Literacy programs will total \$1.0 million. DYCD anticipates awarding 5-8 contracts serving 150-200 adolescents overall.

Planned Method of Evaluating Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated pursuant to the evaluation criteria set forth in the RFP which will include: quality and quantity of successful relevant experience, demonstrated level of organizational capability, and quality of proposed program approach.

Procurement Timeline

It is anticipated that DYCD will release an RFP for this procurement by the end of December 2005. The proposal submission deadline will be approximately one month from the release of the RFP. DYCD anticipates entering into three-year contracts for programs to begin July 1, 2006.

Comments

Please provide written comments to DYCD at the following address no later than November 23, 2005.

Nancy Russell
Department of Youth and Community Development
156 William Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10038

Submissions may also be emailed to: litcp@dycd.nyc.gov

Attachment

Core Indicators and Outcomes for NYCALI Programs

The contractor would collect and report on data related to the mandated Federal Core Indicators and related outcome measures for the National Reporting System.

Core Indicator #1: Improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking the English language, numeracy, problem-solving, English language acquisition, other literacy skills.

Definition: Educational gain: Learner completes or advances one or more educational levels from starting level measured on entry to the program.

Core Indicator #2: Placement in, retention in, or completion of, postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement.

Definition: Entered employment: Learner who is not employed at the time of entry and who has a main or secondary goal of obtaining employment obtains a job by the end of the first quarter after exit quarter.

Definition: Retained employment: Learner remains employed in the third quarter after exit quarter.

Definition: Placement in postsecondary education or training: Learner enrolls in a postsecondary educational or occupational skills training program that does not duplicate other services or training received, regardless of whether the prior services or training were completed

Core Indicator #3: Receipt of a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

Definition: Learner obtains certification of attaining passing scores on the General Education Development tests or obtains a diploma, or state recognized equivalent, documenting satisfactory completion of secondary studies (high school or adult high school diploma).

Additional Outcome Measures

- Student retention: The percent of learners who remain in the program for sufficient time to be post-tested.
- Customer Satisfaction: Degree to which students express satisfaction with programs they are receiving or have received from their NYCALI provider based on their responses to Customer Satisfaction Surveys.