



For Immediate Release
February 9, 2023

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Bipartisan Senate Caucus Launched to Address Adult Literacy

Sen. Susan Collins and Sen. Jack Reed Honored as Caucus Co-Chairs at Launch Celebration

Washington, D.C. – February 9, 2023 – The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) and Engage celebrated the launch of a new U.S. Senate Caucus on Adult Literacy today with a breakfast honoring caucus co-chairs, Sen. Susan Collins (ME) and Sen. Jack Reed (RI).

More than 54% of adults in the U.S. struggle with low literacy skills, reading and writing below the adult equivalent of a sixth-grade level. About 43 million Americans – nearly one in five adults – read below a third-grade level. This persistent, multigenerational challenge not only impacts income, workforce agility and quality of life for families nationwide, but also imposes significant costs on society.

- **Economic Impact:** A 2020 Gallup study commissioned by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy estimated that the U.S. economy is losing \$2.2 trillion in GDP annually due to low adult literacy.
- **Healthcare Costs:** Low health literacy costs our economy between \$106-\$238 billion per year.
- **Digital Skills Gap:** A growing digital literacy gap could cause 76% of Black Americans and 62% of Hispanic Americans to be shut out or under-prepared for 86% of jobs in the U.S. by 2045.
- **Multigenerational Impact:** A study by the National Institutes of Health found that a mother's education level is the single greatest determinant of her children's future academic success.

Senators Collins and Reed marked the launch of the caucus by participating in a fireside chat moderated by Steve Clemons, founding editor at large of Semafor.

“When adults lack proficiency in literacy, they are denied the dignity and opportunity to realize their full potential,” said Senator Collins. “Improved literacy rates will empower millions of Americans who struggle to read with greater economic and social mobility. These individuals can also pass along these skills to their children through the pastime of reading together, which can help prepare young people for a lifetime of

success. By taking a whole community approach and working directly with involved stakeholders, this caucus will help identify and advance solutions for improving adult literacy in the United States.”

“Adult education is vitally important. It can be the difference between earning a family-sustaining wage and struggling to make ends meet. Through the caucus, we hope to raise awareness about the acute need for adult education programs and build bipartisan support for meeting the needs of adult learners,” said Senator Reed.

In addition to the co-chairs, Senators Bill Cassidy (LA), Ben Ray Lujan (NM), Lisa Murkowski (AK), Alejandro Padilla (CA), Tina Smith (MN) and Todd Young (IN) will serve as founding members of the U.S. Senate Caucus on Adult Literacy.

Engage and ALL IN partnered to support the launch of the U.S. Senate Caucus on Adult Literacy with the goals of raising awareness of this pressing issue and promoting common sense solutions at the federal and state levels.

“At Engage we understand that a woman’s economic security is determined by many factors, such as literacy, over the course of her life,” said Engage founder Rachel Pearson. “If a woman has low literacy skills, she will experience greater difficulty securing gainful employment, accessing necessary health care, and investing in the development of the next generation. I’m confident this caucus will flourish under the leadership of Senators Collins and Reed in advancing adult literacy in our country.”

ALL IN was conceived and convened by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy to spur action around and implementation of the [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#).

“Literacy is inextricably linked with so many of the most critical challenges we face as a nation – from equity and economic mobility to national security and public health,” said British A. Robinson, president and CEO of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. “With the launch of this caucus, we’re thrilled to see leaders from both sides of the aisle come together to elevate and address this issue at the national level.”

In addition to Robinson, Dr. Meghan McBride, alumni advisor to the Coalition on Adult Basic Education, and Deborah Kennedy, president of the National Coalition for Literacy, represented ALL IN’s Coordinating Council at the launch event.

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About ALL IN: The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network is a collective action initiative that has convened thought leaders from the adult literacy field and beyond to carry out the [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#). ALL IN’s efforts are driven by its vision: a country where every adult can easily access high-quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital and numeracy skills – regardless of who or where they are. To learn more, visit www.allinliteracy.org.

About Engage: Engage is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting women's economic security through bipartisan, commonsense solutions. Engage views the journey of a woman’s economic security holistically as “a thread” across her entire life, during which factors within and outside her control determine her ability to achieve economic security. Among these factors are education, caregiving, saving for retirement, family, work, health, and so much more. For more information on Engage, please visit www.engagewomen.org.