



Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation  
(LEARN) Act

*Presented to:  
Michigan House of Representatives -- Education Committee  
September 16, 2010*

Reps. Melton, Corriveau, Ball, Constan, Kennedy, Liss, Neumann and Rogers offered the following resolution:

**House Resolution No. 320.**

A resolution to memorialize Congress to enact the Literacy for All, Results for the Nation Act.

Whereas, Literacy development begins at birth and requires a sustained engagement and investment. The Literacy for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act, H.R. 4037, would provide aid to states and educational agencies for comprehensive planning to improve the literacy of students from birth through grade twelve. Discretionary grants would be provided to bridge America's learning gap by supporting text-rich learning environments to improve reading, writing, and academic achievement. The act would provide for competitive subgrants focused on early language and literacy development in children under the age of six and districts with the highest percentages of disadvantaged or low-performing students. The Secretary of Education would perform a five-year evaluation of initiatives funded through the act, thus making school districts and states accountable for the dollars they receive and programs they support; and

Whereas, According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), approximately 70 percent of fourth and eighth graders read below the proficiency level. Only one-third of secondary school students who enter the ninth grade can expect to graduate in four years with adequate skills needed to succeed in higher education and their place of work. These statistics are worrisome when 25 of today's fastest growing professions require higher than average literacy skills; and

Whereas, The LEARN Act would benefit Michigan, especially Detroit and other urban centers. Forty-seven percent of Detroit's adults are functionally illiterate and over 50 percent of displaced Detroit workers are literacy challenged. This low rate of literacy impacts the ability of Michigan's largest city to attract industries seeking professionals that are prepared for today's work environment. This challenge exacerbates joblessness, poverty, and crime; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives, That we memorialize Congress to enact the Literacy for All, Results for the Nation Act (LEARN); and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and the members of the Michigan congressional delegation.



## ISSUE BRIEF

March 17, 2010

**LEARN Act provides aid for state and educational agencies to combat illiteracy and to produce learning rich educational environments**

### AT A GLANCE: HR 4037 – LEARN Act

House Resolution 4037, the Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act seeks to establish a comprehensive literacy program. This literacy program would provide \$500 million in discretionary grants to states and education agencies to improve reading, writing and academic achievement. The LEARN Act seeks to bridge America's learning gap by supporting text-rich environments to combat illiteracy. This act impacts all levels of education from early learning through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The LEARN Act was introduced by Representative John Yarmuth of Kentucky and currently is in the House Committee on Education and Labor.

### The need for high-literacy skills

The LEARN Act comes on the heels of intense research and investigation on illiteracy and academic achievement. Addressing the needs of children and developing a comprehensive and efficient literacy program are underscored by the following points:

- Approximately 70% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders read below the proficiency level on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Between 1971 and 2008 the reading levels of 17 year-olds in America showed little to no improvement.
- Only 73.9% of secondary students graduate on-time with a diploma, meaning that approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate.
- These non-graduates cost the United States \$300,000,000,000 in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes. Furthermore, the individual non-graduate loses approximately \$240,000 in wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes.
- Only one-third of secondary school students who enter the 9<sup>th</sup> grade can expect to graduate in four years with adequate skills needed to succeed in higher education and their place of work.

Congress' research is focused on giving America's children quality education through high quality text-rich, language-rich, literature-rich learning environments. Literacy development begins at birth and requires a sustained engagement and investment. Low-income and minority students have additional barriers in literacy development and educational growth, disparately impacting their educational experience and life opportunities.

Twenty-five of the fastest growing professions require higher than average literacy skills. Teaching literacy requires combining reading and writing exercises that encourage complex thinking. Teachers play an instrumental role in developing the reading and writing of children who face developmental

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delays in literacy. Providing professional development to elementary, middle and secondary teachers and early childhood educators is essential to the understanding, differentiating the various literacy skills of students and providing instruction.

Providing aid to states to improve literacy and impact disadvantaged students

The LEARN Act awards grants to states for comprehensive planning to improve literacy for children from birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This proposed legislation would give the US Secretary of Education authorization to award \$500,000,000 in grants to states. LEARN Act grants may come in the form of a planning or implementation grant, but both grants can not run concurrently.

This act directs the Secretary of Education to award grants to states to implement their comprehensive literacy plans for such children through:

(1) Competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) or early learning programs for specified activities that support early language and literacy development in children from birth through kindergarten entry;

(2) Competitive subgrants to LEAs that have the highest numbers or percentages of disadvantaged students and students reading or writing below grade level for specified activities to improve the literacy of students in kindergarten through grade 12, including the provision of family literacy services; and

(3) Additional state activities that include providing technical assistance to subgrantees, coordinating literacy programs and resources throughout the state, disseminating information on promising literacy programs, and enhancing the credentials of literacy instructors.

To further the grant's impact on disadvantaged students, implementation grants allotments will be awarded according to a state's share of disadvantaged students. States that win grants from the LEARN Act; will be required to set-up State Leadership Teams to execute, assess and to ensure high-quality literacy programs and literacy achievement.

Finally, the LEARN ACT requires the Secretary of Education to perform a five-year national evaluation of the implementation and effect of the initiatives supported by it. Technical assistance and information on literacy instruction to educational entities are also requirements of the Secretary.

The Secretary may withhold funding from states and subgrantees and states to subgrantees for failure make significant progress in improving student literacy.

**Moving Forward**

Michigan's urban centers are enduring education overhaul in theory and implementation. Michigan's largest school district, Detroit Public Schools also a Title 1 school district, has long struggled with illiteracy. Illiteracy's grip on the City of Detroit has caught the attention of many groups from both the

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private and public sector. Detroit's literacy challenge, disparately impacts Michigan's largest municipality's ability to attract industries with professions that require higher than average literacy skills. This challenge exasperates poverty, joblessness and crime. Forty-seven percent of Detroit's adults are functionally illiterate. Over 50% of displaced workers in Detroit are literacy challenged.

The LEARN Act gives states the opportunity to provide books, technology, and language building skills and programs to disadvantaged students. This comprehensive approach to literacy covers all aspects of learning and literacy, from birth to graduation.

Michigan Forward supports the LEARN Act and encourages passage through both houses of Congress and its signing into legislation.

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## FACT SHEET: The LEARN Act

Bill Number: H.R. 4037

Introduced on: November 6, 2009

House Resolution 4037, the Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act seeks to establish a comprehensive literacy program. This literacy program would provide \$500 million in discretionary grants to states and education agencies to improve reading, writing and academic achievement. The LEARN Act seeks to bridge America's learning gap by supporting text-rich environments to combat illiteracy. This act impacts all levels of education from early learning through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Addressing the needs of children and developing a comprehensive and efficient literacy program is critical in building academic achievement. Recent studies by Congress and the Detroit Public Library underscore the impact of illiteracy:

### National:

- Approximately 70% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders read below the proficiency level, according to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Between 1971 and 2008 the reading levels of 17 year-olds in America showed little to no improvement.
- Only one-third of secondary school students who enter the 9<sup>th</sup> grade can expect to graduate in four years with adequate skills needed to succeed in higher education and their place of work.

### Detroit:

- Forty-seven percent of Detroit's adults are functionally illiterate.
- Over 50% of displaced workers in Detroit are literacy challenged.
- Twenty-five of the fastest growing professions require higher than average literacy skills.

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE LEARN ACT

- ✓ Addresses the need to establish a comprehensive literacy program. The program should develop literacy in America's children using high quality text-rich, language-rich, literature-rich learning environments.
- ✓ Provides federal funding for state and local education agencies to create and implement literacy development programs.
- ✓ Awaits action in the US House Committee on Education and Labor. This legislation was introduced by Representative John Yarmuth (D-KY) and has 19 co-sponsors, including Representative John Conyers (D-MI).
- ✓ Gives states the opportunity to provide books, technology, and language building skills and programs to disadvantaged students. This approach to literacy covers aspects of learning and literacy, from birth to graduation.

Michigan Forward supports the LEARN Act and encourages passage through both houses of Congress and signing into legislation as written.

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