

Institute for Literacy Studies Funding Builds Crossroads for Social Change

In recent months, the Institute for Literacy Studies (ILS) received over \$760,000 from the Office of the Mayor and the City and State Education Departments to advance the work of its programs—the Adult Learning Center, the New York City Mathematics Project, and the New York City Writing Project. By providing direct and professional-development services for learners of all ages—teachers and students alike—staff of Institute programs equip them with intellectual and practical resources that move their educational, occupational, and civic aspirations forward. “We hope that every person can read, write, and understand mathematics, master new technologies, and gain confidence in their own special talents. In a city as diverse as New York, we are especially committed to serving high-need populations, large numbers of whom have been disheartened by socio-economic realities, immigration status, disability, and/or prior academic or personal experiences,” says ILS Interim Director Anne Campos.

About 700 adult students from Bronx neighborhoods surrounding Lehman College enroll in the Adult Learning Center’s (ALC) free Basic Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and High School Equivalency diploma classes every year. ALC students represent a mix of Latino/a, African, Asian, and European heritages; many are recent immigrants. Funding this year propels the ALC’s food justice initiative, a special educational opportunity that integrates students’ content-area learning with exposure to food justice issues affecting the City and Nation. Through literacy-based and STEM-related classroom instruction and hands-on work in the Lehman College Edible Garden and Corbin Hill community food cooperative, students are able to progress towards their college and career goals, improve their diets, and participate more actively in widespread discourse about the relationships among nutrition, health, and prosperity. According to Dr. Jaye Jones, ILS Director, “One of our guiding principles is to combine educational and community resources so that students can apply what they discover to their personal, learning, and occupational goals. When education is participatory, real social change is possible.”



ILS Director, Dr. Jaye Jones

Photo credit: Ashleigh Cassemere-Stanfield



MP Director, Suzanne Libfeld

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From its beginnings in 1989, the New York City Mathematics Project (NYCMP) has worked throughout the metropolitan area to make the value, beauty, and power of mathematics accessible for all students. Through its emphases on deepening content knowledge as a means to developing problem-solving skills, the NYCMP promotes active involvement in student-centered teaching and learning. “By working closely and over time with individual teachers in their classrooms, teams of teachers within a school, and networks of educators, the NYCMP seeks to improve their knowledge by broadening their exposure to a range of mathematical tasks and problem-solving strategies,”

says NYCMP Project Director Suzanne Libfeld. “When teachers can draw upon a rich instructional repertoire, students are more able to actively make observations, assemble, analyze and synthesize information, and draw their own conclusions.” In recent months, the NYCMP has immersed teachers in professional development that focuses on use of a visual approach to teaching mathematics known as model drawing. Students are taught how to use rectangular bars to represent the relationship between known and unknown numerical quantities. “What makes model drawing so effective is that it enables students to represent word problems and number relationships in order to solve increasingly complex problems.” On May 21st, the NYCMP will host its 25th Annual Conference at Lehman College. Keynote speaker and a nationally-known professor of mathematics, Dr. Eric Milou, will talk about connecting formative assessment techniques and technology, tools that provide teachers with essential insights into student learning.

Jane Higgins, Project Director of the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP), notes, “The Writing Project understands that learning is not a neat, mechanical, linear process. We appreciate that it is messy, personal and aspirational, which is why we work first and foremost from a set of beliefs about the “humanness” that teachers and students bring to their engagement with us. We honor what we believe is both the beauty and the strength of any meaningful endeavor by promoting openness to and respect for varied perspectives and capacities. Two nationally-known advocates for a more equitable and just world will serve as keynote speakers at the NYCWP’s annual Teacher-to-Teacher Conference at Lehman College on April 2nd. Dr. Kylene Beers, a former middle school teacher, translates her understanding of the challenges that struggling readers face into research, writing, speaking,



WP Director, Jane Higgins
Photo credit: Mallory McMahon

and teaching that results in publications on topics ranging from *When Kids Can’t Read/What Teachers Can Do* to *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice*. Marlon Peterson is a national social and criminal justice advocate, writer, organizational trainer, community organizer, and educator who spent 10 years in NY State prisons. He is also the 2015 recipient of the Soros Justice Fellowship. He speaks on subjects such as “ChildSafeZones,” areas where no one has to carry a gun—not even the police,” to “Beyond Reform of Law Enforcement.” This coming summer, the NYCWP will implement a program focused on the writing of argument. To help teachers expand students’ understanding of themselves and their roles in the world, the NYCWP will engage teachers in activities that promote use of this kind of writing in classrooms across the curriculum. As Higgins notes, “argument writing plays a part in students’ identity development, their educational and occupational progress, and their lives as participants in a democratic society. As the common language of academic writing, successful college writers know how to make a claim and support it with evidence.”