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Literacy Day in New Mexico 2008 at the Capitol in Santa Fe

To mark International Literacy Day (ILD), the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy (NMCL) will celebrate Literacy Day in New Mexico on September 8, 2008 from 10:00am - 11:30am in the Rotunda of the Roundhouse with a press conference, the reading of a gubernatorial proclamation by First Lady Barbara Richardson, and a special guest speaker, John Corcoran (author of the memoir *The Teacher Who Couldn't Read* and the forthcoming *The Bridge to Literacy*). Members of the public and press are encouraged to attend.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established September 8 as ILD in 1966 to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities and societies around the world. Governor Bill Richardson has issued a proclamation, declaring September 8, 2008 as "Literacy Day in the State of New Mexico." Local literacy programs throughout the state have encouraged their mayors to declare Literacy Day in their communities as well, and will mark the day with their own celebrations.

John Corcoran spent much of his youth in New Mexico, including two years at St. Michael's School in Santa Fe during the late 1940s. Despite being functionally illiterate, he earned a high school diploma, went to college, and even worked for years as a high school English and history teacher—all before learning to read. At the age of 48, he began one-to-one, volunteer-based tutoring at a community literacy program and soon became a strong national public advocate for the cause of adult and family literacy in the United States.

Here in New Mexico, almost half of our adult citizens are functionally illiterate, reading at or below the 5th grade level, even some of those with high school diplomas or college degrees. Some have limited reading/writing skills, but lack the ability, for instance, to understand a bus schedule or fill out a job application. During the 2007-8 fiscal year, 6,447 individuals received literacy services funded by the NMCL through the Adult and Family Literacy Legislative Appropriation of the Dept. of Cultural Affairs/New Mexico State Library, grants, and donations; over half of those who enrolled in pre-GED studies completed them, and 6% of students on public assistance were able to leave public assistance as a result of enrollment in a literacy program. It is estimated that as many as 700,000 adults in New Mexico could benefit from literacy services.

It is well-documented that literacy programs increase both workers' productivity on behalf of their employers and the workers' earnings: If each of the adult students served by New Mexico literacy programs in the 2007-8 fiscal year increased their earnings by just one dollar per hour, their total annual income would increase by over \$10.75 million.

Located in Santa Fe, the NMCL is a statewide funding, training and professional development organization that provides training and technical assistance to over 90 local literacy programs around the state. Information about literacy in New Mexico, including the locations of local programs offering free, private, one-to-one tutoring and how you can volunteer to teach an adult to read, can be found on the NMCL's website (www.nmcl.org), by e-mailing info@nmcl.org, or by calling 800-233-7587.