

SPEAKERS' BUREAU TALKING POINTS

Georgia Council on Literacy

Current Environment for Literacy Improvements

Significant literacy legislation passed during the 2023 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

Senate Bill 211, sponsored by Sen. Billy Hickman, created the Ga. Council on Literacy. This is a 30-member council, appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House. The Council's primary role is to monitor and report on the implementation of requirements in a companion bill, HB 538, requiring Georgia to adopt policies based in the science of reading.

House Bill 538 includes requirements for school systems and educational institutions including:

- Public school systems must adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned with the science of reading.
- School systems must adopt universal reading screeners to detect students with significant reading deficiencies.
- State Board of Education must adopt formative reading assessments for grades 1 and 2.
- Requires teacher training in the science of reading in B-5, K-3, and at the university level.

The Council is meeting every other month in locations throughout Georgia. You can find a schedule at www.GOSA.Georgia.Gov.

The Council is also responsible for ensuring that communities are engaged in literacy improvements.

Currently, several working groups are not only working on the implementation of the statutory requirements of HB 538, but also working on other literacy initiatives. For example, exploring ways to ensure all students have access to hearing and vision screenings multiple times during their educational career and ensuring that all students who need a diagnostic hearing/vision test receive that follow up exam.

Communities are engaging in innovative ways to address literacy improvements from birth through adult years. Businesses in several areas are taking the lead (e.g., Shaw Industries and Mohawk in Whitfield Co.).

Georgia mayors are also taking a lead in communities (e.g., Macon). County commissioners have just come on board through the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia to create awareness about the need for a more literate Georgia.

We all have a role in literacy improvements!

Workforce and Economic Development

Businesses, chambers of commerce and policymakers are getting behind the council's work. Besides caring about individual lives, they know that literacy skills are foundational to all learning and work.

Georgia's future economy depends on a more literate citizenry.

Here are the facts:

- The 2022 data for third grade reading reveals that 56% of the state’s students are not “ready” for fourth grade.
 - The implication of low literacy in third grade is that these students are more likely to drop out of high school, have poor health and live in poverty.
- A 2017 Deloitte study found that over 1 million adults are low literate.
 - Low literacy is a generational cycle. If these adults have children, they are less likely to read to their children and those children will not receive the language nutrition they need as developing young learners. And the cycle continues.
 - The Deloitte study also found that low literacy costs Georgia \$1.3 billion annually in lost revenue and social services.
 - As Georgia’s hospitality and restaurant business is replaced with AI and robotics, we have increased needs for literate adults for the workforce.

Engagement in the Literacy Movement

You can make a difference. Writing a check is not always the way to pitch in.

Other ways:

- Begin a movement in your community. Engage stakeholders from all walks including public safety, healthcare, political leaders and, of course, schools and educators.
- Allow employees paid time off to tutor in the local school.
- Create awareness among employees about the need to talk and read to babies and children. Language nutrition is a precursor to reading skills.
- Let employees know that they can seek help from the Technical College System of GA that offers free of charge GED courses and reading courses (and many are online).
- Share information about reading on social media and other media outlets.
- Partner with faith-based organizations to share information about the importance of reading and talking to children.

Closing

If you have questions about any portion of this presentation, please contact Georgia’s Literacy Coach, Miranda Williams, Miranda.williams16@gosa.ga.gov.

