

**Georgia Council on Literacy Meeting  
October 17, 2023**

**Minutes of Meeting**

**I. Welcome**

Adrian Epps, Dean of Bagwell College of Education, Kennesaw State University

Dean Epps opened the meeting at 10:05 with a greeting and insight into what the Bagwell College of Education has been working toward and the responsibility that we collectively share for improving education.

Dayle Burns, First Lady of the House of Representatives

Mrs. Burns spoke on six key points relating to education and literacy including the importance of education reform, professional development, retention at early ages (Kindergarten rather than later years) and focusing on the needs of the students in our classrooms.

**II. Chairman's Remarks**

Scott Johnson, Chair, Georgia Council on Literacy

Chairman Johnson welcomed everyone, spoke on the importance of the Council's work, approved the minutes of the August 7<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, and agreed upon the meeting agenda. Due to scheduling conflicts of speakers, the agenda was rearranged to allow Dr. Carey Wright from Mississippi to present ahead of Bill Peek from Deloitte.

**III. Mississippi's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy**

Dr. Carey Wright, Former Mississippi State Superintendent of Education

Dr. Wright shared Mississippi's efforts toward education reform, the state's adoption of the Science of Reading, the reading improvements experienced after training all educators on the Science of Reading, and resources created to aid teachers, educators, and families.

She discussed the state's legislation:

- Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013
- Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act of 2013

Dr. Wright focused on the role of literacy coaches and the Mississippi Department of Education's decision to hire and train coaches at the state level and deploy them to districts. She shared that they currently have coaches for early childhood, mathematics, digital learning, and school improvement. She also discussed the role of Professional Development Coordinators.

#### IV. **The State of Literacy in Georgia**

Bill Peek, Partner, Deloitte

Mr. Peek shared the findings of Deloitte's analysis of the state of literacy in Georgia.

- 1 in 10 adults have low literacy skills.
- Low literacy is a multi-generational problem and without intervention, it will have lasting effects on the state of Georgia.
- 56% of third graders cannot read proficiently.

He also discussed Georgia's workforce and economic development. He shared Deloitte's findings that 58% of adults with low literacy skills are employed in the construction, manufacturing, retail, and restaurant industries. The military does not enlist any low literate adults.

He shared a case study of Mississippi and the ways that Georgia can use their progress as a guide.

Finally, he spoke on the recent literacy legislation passed in Georgia:

- Senate Bill 48, Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program (2019)
- Senate Bill 211, Georgia Council on Literacy (2023)
- House Bill 538, Georgia Early Literacy Act (2023)

#### V. **State Data and Analysis**

Caitlin Dooley

Dr. Dooley spoke on the recent 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Georgia Milestone Assessment and Lexile score trends.

She noted:

- There has been little to no recovery since the pandemic in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade readers below the level of proficiency.
- There has been some upward trend in 5<sup>th</sup> graders since the pandemic.
- In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the number of students who are proficient or above has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic level.

She discussed the Lexile framework and the role of the midpoint in Lexile scores-- as an indicator of student readiness.

#### VI. **Marietta City Schools' Experience**

Grant Rivera, Superintendent, Marietta City Schools

Superintendent Rivera shared the details and the timeline of Marietta City Schools' efforts and progress.

He shared Marietta's experience with hiring Science of Reading- "facilitators"- (or coaches) and the role of reading specialists.

In Marietta, every student in grades 1-5 has a 90-minute reading block with individualized levels of intervention. Any student not on grade level is placed into a reading block with a student to teacher ratio of 1:10.

Dr. Christina Wagner, of Marietta, spoke more on data surrounding structured literacy both in Marietta and Georgia as a whole. She shared her school's experience of rallying around the idea of literacy, the Science of Reading, and pedagogy. Under that new approach, her school saw an increase from 63% to 82% proficiency at the third-grade level based on Georgia Milestone results. Dr. Wagner went on to share more detail on Marietta's literary approach and the results they have seen.

Special attention was given to A.L. Burruss for that school's growth. Allison Taylor, a first-grade teacher at A.L. Burruss, shared the difference between predictable vs. decodable text and the improvements she has seen since making the switch to the Science of Reading.

**VII. Council Working Group Reports**

Stephanie Westhafer, B-5 Working Group

Amy Denty, K-3 Working Group

Matt Arthur, Teacher Training and Professional Development Working Group

Cayanna Good, Community Working Group

Working group members shared the ongoing efforts taking place in their respective groups.

**VIII. Council Member Activities**

Ellen Wiley, a member of the Georgia Council on Literacy, shared progress of the new working group on hearing and vision in efforts to improve hearing and vision for all students.

**IX. Deal Center Report on Screeners**

Council Member, Lindee Morgan, shared a psychometric analysis of the 16 universal reading screeners approved by the Georgia State Board of Education on July 19, 2023.

Dr. Morgan shared the analysis of each screener. A full report will be published in the next several months.

**Council Action:** Johnson recommended that the Deal Center report should be shared with the State Board of Education, the Georgia Department of Education, and all school systems in Georgia.

**X. Closing Comments**

Miranda Williams, Georgia Literacy Coach, Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Scott Johnson, Chairman, Georgia Council on Literacy

The next Council meeting will be held virtually on Nov. 15, 2023, 10 a.m. – Noon.

\*Jeanne Seaver requested that public comment be allowed at all meetings moving forward. The request was granted.

**XI. Adjournment**

Chairman Johnson adjourned the meeting at 2:03pm.

**XII. Public Comment**

09:57:20 From Dr. Metashar Dillon To All Panelists:

Greetings and Thank you

10:07:48 From ALBurruss To All Panelists:

Hi! Has the meeting started? We can't hear anything.

10:38:32 From Robert Costley To All Panelists:

If up to two retentions are being recommended for requirements, the state needs to think about the math of that. Two retentions puts 16 year olds walking in middle schools with 13-14 year olds. 20 year olds in high school hallways with 14-15 year olds. This also means that middle schools will never have flexibility to retain ever again. It is easy to say retention is the solution but we have already been through that cycle. The discipline and safety issues and climate issues alone are concerning. People forget that cute kids who are retained in elementary end up often an angry drop out risk in high school. Finally, retention is awful if the kid simply just repeats the grade and does the same thing for another year. Targeted interventions are proven by the research to be far more effective.

11:55:54 From Ellen Zhang (she/they) To All Panelists:

Yes please. Disaggregated data would be wonderful

12:04:41 From Ellen Zhang (she/they) To All Panelists:

Is there something unusual about middle schoolers that explain that larger drop for 8th grade?

Jeanne Seaver requested that public comment be allowed at all meetings moving forward. The request was granted.

**Dyslexia Awareness Month**

I'm Tina Engberg, the State Leader for Decoding Dyslexia Georgia and I'm excited to see the Council continue this life-changing work for children in Georgia! Our Senior intern Harrison Purcell is holding the 2023 Proclamation from Governor Kemp announcing that October is Dyslexia Awareness Month in Georgia. I won't read it, but would like to share a few key thoughts.

As many as 1 in 5 people worldwide have characteristics of dyslexia, and yet most people with dyslexia will never discover that this specific learning disability is the source of their

struggles with reading. This is why evidence-based structured literacy instruction for ALL KIDS is essential for helping students with dyslexia as well as others who will struggle to read without proper instruction. Structured literacy benefits all students, no matter where they are in their K-12 education.

While there are many excellent examples in the media of people with dyslexia finding great success in life and making a large impact, there are a multitude of people for whom dyslexia is a tragic source of shame and hardship, and many never know that unidentified dyslexia underpins their struggles.

Screening for reading difficulties early and taking immediate, informed action is essential. Waiting to see if a child miraculously learns how to read, write and spell is crippling for students and costly not only for districts, but society at large. No student in Georgia should ever leave school unable to read.

Please be clear about your mission for serving children and ask questions where you lack information. We are here to inform and educate and happy to speak with you any time. Tina Engberg

State Leader, Decoding Dyslexia Georgia

Proclamation Text 2023

A Proclamation

Dyslexia Awareness Month

Whereas: Dyslexia is a learning disability characterized by difficulties related to reading, writing, spelling, and processing written language, and is the most common form of learning disability; and

Whereas: Dyslexia is genetically-based, neurological in origin, and a specific learning disability which affects up to one in five people regardless of race, gender, age, or socioeconomic status; and

Whereas: Literacy and numeracy are vital skills for academic success, as research shows students who read on grade level by third grade largely outperform their peers, and children with dyslexia who receive early identification and are offered evidence-based reading instruction by first grade will have less difficulty learning to read; and

Whereas: Dyslexia is a lifelong condition, but can be substantially remediated with early identification, effective instruction, and assistive technology training. Raising awareness of dyslexia and its signs and symptoms can better equip students, parents, and educators to address the problems it presents, both in school and at home; and

The State of Georgia joins individuals with dyslexia and their families, along with dedicated agencies, parent advocates, and organizations across our great state, in spreading awareness of dyslexia; now

Therefore: I, Brian P. Kemp, Governor of the State of Georgia, do hereby proclaim October 2023 as DYSLEXIA AWARENESS MONTH in Georgia.