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***'RIGHT TO READ' SPONSORS ANNOUNCE AMBITIOUS
SUMMER PLANS FOR LITERACY REFORM DISCUSSIONS***

SPRINGFIELD – State Senate Majority Leader Kimberly A. Lightford (D—Maywood) and State Representative Rita Mayfield (D—Waukegan), along with numerous education stakeholders, are excited to announce a collaboration-filled summer of literacy discussions. Recent literacy policy efforts sparked robust, productive conversations among state, local, and national experts, who have agreed to meet throughout the spring and summer to discuss literacy policy with an eye toward inclusion of all student groups and cohorts.

“Most other states have taken steps to improve literacy outcomes. Some have showed outstanding results, but others don’t seem to have moved the needle. We have an opportunity to learn from other states, emulate their successes, avoid their pitfalls, and make Illinois’ literacy plan the most equitable and inclusive in the country,” said Lightford.

“Finally, after years of advocating for reading reform legislation, there is a groundswell of momentum among parents, teachers, and advocates like I’ve never seen before in Illinois,” said Mayfield. “There is a tremendous urgency to get this done, and I’m hopeful that deliberative, expedited, inclusive planning will produce a comprehensive policy and effective implementation.”

With about one-third of Illinois’ 4th grade students reading below a “basic” level, stakeholders agree that the time has come for Illinois to develop a comprehensive literacy plan that ensures all students have access to reading instruction that meets their needs. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has been an active participant in negotiations so far and will convene stakeholders and local and national experts over the summer to build on the important work initiated during the spring legislative session.

Several factors have independently converged that make this an ideal time for the literacy conversation:

- In late 2020 and early 2021, the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus discussed early literacy as a component of its [“education pillar,”](#) but ultimately decided the issue would benefit from further work.
- The [Illinois Early Literacy Coalition](#) was created soon thereafter.

- Later in 2021, the delegate assembly for the [Illinois Association of Schools Boards](#) voted in favor of a resolution to enhance literacy instruction education for pre-service teachers.
- Also in late 2021, [The Reading League](#) launched its Illinois chapter.
- This year, a newly created [National Committee for Effective Literacy](#) (NCEL) released a report arguing that implementation of literacy policies in other states have had detrimental impact on English Learners. The Latino Policy Forum elevated the NCEL report findings in Illinois to ensure English Learner best practices are integral to evolving state literacy conversations.
- The Illinois Right to Read Act ([SB 3900](#) (Lightford) and [HB 5032](#) (Mayfield)), filed in early 2022, passed House and Senate committees unanimously with the promise that negotiations would continue, ensuring that any new literacy policies would be effective for all student populations and cohorts.

Dr. Claude Goldenberg, Professor Emeritus at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education who authored [this response](#) to the NCEL report, is among several national experts in literacy and bilingual education who have offered to support the state in its quest to improve student literacy. Goldenberg said: “Illinois is at the forefront of a type of conversation about literacy policy that we hardly ever see. Rather than continuing the needless conflicts of the past—and still present in most of the country—parents, advocates, policy-makers, and educators are working to identify common ground as well as outstanding issues and questions needing further investigation. The common ground definitely exists. It’s just a matter of people taking the time and making the commitment to identify and build on it. I’m very optimistic about what’s happening in Illinois, more so than I have been about literacy policy just about anywhere else in a very long time.”

Other stakeholders echoed that optimism. “I am beyond thrilled that ISBE has agreed to convene a broad group of stakeholders to come together around literacy,” said Pam Reilly, an instructional coach at Plano SD 88, the 2014 Illinois Teacher of the Year, and a member of the Illinois Early Literacy Coalition. “Developing a comprehensive literacy strategy for Illinois is important, but since effective implementation is even more important, I’m glad to see ISBE leading this process and inviting all voices to the table.”

“We appreciate the engagement and inclusion in discussions about how best to prepare Illinois teachers to support all students on their journey to literacy,” said Dr. Jason Leahy, Executive Director of the Illinois Principals Association. “Providing a balance between rigorous preparation and encouraging more individuals to enter the field of education is a priority of ours as these discussions continue.”

“Addressing literacy is fundamentally an issue of equity. Our Coalition includes parents, teachers, and advocates who fight every day to get children the type of reading instruction they desperately need, and for many of them, that means expensive outside tutoring that would be cost-prohibitive for most families. There is a dire urgency for Illinois to act. I’m encouraged this collaboration will ensure whatever policy solutions are enacted will work well for all Illinois students and the professionals who will implement the changes in classrooms,” said Jessica Handy, Policy Director at Stand for Children Illinois, which is a co-founder of the Illinois Early Literacy Coalition.

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