

# DELAWARE LITERACY ALLIANCE STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

*Dr. Annie Norman, State Librarian of Delaware  
& Cindy Shermeyer, Executive Director, Literacy Delaware*



**We are delighted to come together in this edition of our newsletter, fueled by our shared passion for literacy and our unwavering commitment to the success of all Delawareans.**

As co-chairs of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, we are inspired by the progress we have made thus far, but we recognize that there is still much work ahead of us. Following our recent and highly productive strategic planning session on May 31st, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the energy and enthusiasm that filled the room during our gathering. We are truly inspired by the dedication and invaluable contributions of each one of you.

During our strategic planning session, we delved deep into the challenges that literacy poses for our state, acknowledging the persistent nature of this issue. We recognized that despite our collective efforts and the remarkable initiatives, services, and programs we have implemented over the years,

literacy rates in Delaware still fall short of where they need to be. This realization spurred us to approach the problem from a fresh perspective.

What sets our approach apart this time is our unwavering commitment to inclusivity and collaboration. We firmly believe that addressing literacy requires a holistic approach that encompasses all age groups and all major life categories. By inviting stakeholders from across the educational, health, workforce, and environmental sectors, both from government and nonprofit organizations, we aim to create a comprehensive system that will pave the way for literacy success throughout one's entire life.

Guided by tested methods and expertise from Baldridge, LEAN and rooted in a collective impact framework, we are determined to make the state of Delaware, a true Community of Excellence. Our



strategic planning session served as a launching pad for this ambitious endeavor, providing us with a roadmap to align and integrate our services effectively. We recognize that meetings alone are not enough; the real work lies in identifying what truly works and ensuring that the sequence of services leading to literacy is available, appropriately connected, and operating at full capacity throughout the state.

*As we navigate this path, we also celebrate the power of libraries in our mission. The consolidation of public, academic, and special libraries into a single system has already demonstrated the transformative impact we can have on literacy.*

Furthermore, we are delighted to announce that school libraries are now able to connect to this initiative as well, closing the gap and ensuring access for all children, even those who may not have the opportunity to visit a public library.

While our strategic planning session marked an important milestone, we are keenly aware that there is much work ahead to create a cohesive and impactful system. Your involvement and dedication are crucial in making this vision a reality. We urge you to spread the word, inviting

your friends and colleagues to join our efforts. Together, we can create a system that will bring about a literate Delaware.

In closing, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to each of you for your active participation, insightful ideas, and unwavering passion during our strategic planning session. The momentum we generated on May 31 is just the beginning of an exciting journey toward literacy success in Delaware.



# Inspiring Action :

## QUOTES ON LITERACY IN DELAWARE

**"The lack of a comprehensive literacy plan is only increasing the percentage of adults incapable of succeeding in the current and future work and economic environments in the state and nation."**

—Sloane Kaiser, Community Engagement Associate, Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank

*"A large hole in the DOL system is that people come in for assessments based on their interests, but they don't take into consideration the person's ability to read and/or do basic math."*

— Karryl Hubbard, Delaware Secretary of Labor

**"If you don't get a student by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade academically, they will struggle for life."**

—Nello Paolli, Jr., Youth Committee Chair, Delaware Workforce Development Board

**"We need to create excitement and movement around unpacking literacy from a national perspective and defining it from a more holistic perspective."**

—Dr. David Rosen, Co-founder, Open Door Collective

**"[The] problem is clearly significant; what we're doing now is insufficient, and I honestly have no clue what the state does (if anything) to address adults who need literacy assistance once they leave the K-12 education system."**

—Laura Sturgeon, Delaware Senator, Fourth Senate District

*We need to address literacy as a root cause. Currently, we view things upstream (starting with school). [We believe] literacy issues for children are the fault of teachers, and literacy issues for adults are their own fault. Actually...it's a societal issue."*

—Dr. Rita Landgraf, Director, Partnership for Healthy Communities, University of Delaware

# CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING IN LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING

*Nicola Wedderburn, Executive Director, International Literacy Association*



## INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

**The International Literacy Association (ILA) is a professional membership organization of more than 300,000 literacy educators, researchers, and experts across 128 countries. Through our work, we support literacy professionals and educators from every corner of the world.**

ILA's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) is reflected in our mission to improve the quality of literacy learning across the globe in ways that are respectful, responsive, and ethical.

In May, educators and school leaders from across the United States and from as far away as Trinidad and Tobago came together for a DEIB event ILA developed in partnership with Delaware State University (DSU), held at DSU's Dover campus. The program focused on teaching and learning practices that create spaces where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

The importance of being seen was a common thread throughout the one-day event. During her keynote, Jahsha Tabron, a DSU alumnus and Delaware's 2022 Teacher of the Year, declared that being seen was what students needed more than almost anything else.

"We tend to notice everything we think [students] are missing instead of the wonderful things they are coming with," Tabron said. "We don't need to change our students to see their assets and visualize their success. We don't need to change students to teach them. We don't need them to fit into our boxes. We need to get them to see themselves and be proud of themselves and live and grow beyond their boxes, so they don't continue to fit into small expectations."

Several key themes emerged throughout the day.

- **DEIB is essential for all students.** When children see themselves represented in the texts they read and the lessons they learn, it creates a sense of belonging that leads to higher engagement and student achievement.
- **DEIB is not a one-size-fits-all approach.** There is no single way to build inclusive sites of belonging. Creating spaces where all students feel welcome and respected requires educators to be intentional in their planning, taking the needs of their particular students into the equation.

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- **DEIB starts with teachers, not students.** Educators must begin by recognizing their own privilege and biases as they not only impact what happens inside the classroom but also in the larger school community. Adults need to feel seen, heard, and valued by their colleagues, too, and self-awareness is an important first step.
- **Books can help put the B in DEIB.** Many speakers shared how children's and young adult literature can be a powerful tool for promoting DEIB by giving students access to cultures and perspectives different from their own as well as reflect their lived experiences. Several presenters referenced the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, whose scholarship on books serving as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors is included in ILA's Children's Rights to Read initiative.

*If you are interested in learning more about how literacy can advance DEIB, ILA offers a bevy of no- and low-cost online resources. Access them at [literacyworldwide.org](http://literacyworldwide.org), where you can learn more about how ILA is working to ensure children's rights to read and rights to excellent literacy instruction.*

Better yet, join us in this work! Information on how to become a member of our global organization and get involved as a volunteer can be found on our [website](#) as well.

Together, we can ensure that every child everywhere has access to the education, opportunities, and resources needed to read.

## SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE

### “THE TRUTH ABOUT READING” REACHES 300 ATTENDEES

*Leslie McGowan, Operations Coordinator, Literacy Delaware*



Over 300 attendees joined Literacy Delaware as we hosted six screenings throughout the state of the documentary film *The Truth about Reading: The Invisible Crisis Hiding in Plain Sight*.

While the film illustrates the painful reality of life for individuals impacted by illiteracy, it also reminds viewers that the issue affects not just a few struggling readers but countless children and adults and weakens the very fabric of our society.

Each screening was followed by a panel discussion comprised of Literacy Delaware learners, tutors, and various professionals and experts in the field. One panelist, Kathy Seeman, a Dyslexia Specialist, spoke about the intersection of literacy and trauma.

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"We are traumatizing our students by not teaching them to read with the correct instructional methods. It is called Reading Trauma. Students who struggle to learn to read can and do experience PTSD at the same intensity as a combat veteran."

In the film, Lacey Robinson of Unbound Ed said we must be "audacious and bold" to solve the literacy crisis." Literacy Delaware echoed this sentiment and challenged attendees to find their way to support by raising awareness, advocating, and getting involved in their local community.

Every social issue we face today has its roots in low literacy. Addressing the adult literacy crisis is paramount if we are working towards a more equitable Delaware. Christiana Care held an open screening as part of its Health Equity Network Sessions. Greg O'Neill, Director of Patient Family Education, sat on a panel to discuss health literacy and spoke about the teach-back technique used in healthcare settings. "Teach-back is a best practice for health literacy. It is very powerful as both an assessment of a person's need and an intervention to meet that need. Without teach-back, there is no good way to measure someone's understanding of their health."



*Literacy Delaware is grateful to the Corcoran Foundation for granting us the opportunity to show this powerful documentary and raise awareness about the literacy crisis. This event would not have been possible without the support of the Delaware Division of Libraries, Read Aloud DE, Reading Assist, Delaware Readiness Teams, the Delaware Literacy Alliance, Carl M. Freeman Foundation, the Delaware Community Foundation, Christiana Care, Sussex County Health Coalition, Friends of the Dover Library, and Walmart.*

## SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE

# ADULT LITERACY AND LEARNING IMPACT NETWORK (ALL-IN) RELEASES NEW PAPER ON MULTIPLE LITERACIES

*Sarah Cacicco, Executive Director, ALL-IN*

### ALL IN White Paper Synopsis

**Literacy skills activate human potential. They give individuals the power to communicate, make informed decisions, and access resources and opportunities.**

Literacy represents, for most people, the ability to read and write, but reading, writing, and numeracy serve as gateway skills to multiple *literacies* that interconnect and enable long-term prosperity. This includes civic, digital, financial, health, information, and oral literacy,

among others, all of which correlate to strong foundational literacy skills.

Despite the critical need for multiple literacy skills, rates of literacy access and attainment have not kept pace with technological advancements. Today, more than half (54%) of adults in the United States struggle with foundational reading, numeracy, and digital problem-solving skills, which include the ability to access and interpret information in digital environments to perform practical tasks, like entering personal information in a form.

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### About ALL IN



The Adult Literacy & Learning Impact Network

The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) is a new collective impact initiative formed by national thought leaders across the adult learning ecosystem. ALL IN is charged with carrying out the goals of the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy (NAP), a multisector, multiyear initiative designed to drive inclusive, collective action to increase adult literacy nationwide. We are working to transform the conversation about literacy, reduce the stigma associated with meeting literacy needs, and support millions of adults in the United States in achieving greater economic, health, education, and life outcomes over the next five years and for generations to come.

*About 43 million Americans—nearly one in five adults—read below the adult equivalent of a third-grade level, making it difficult to comprehend everyday texts, such as news articles on unfamiliar topics, medical information, or email communications from a school or agency to support children and family literacy.*

The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) just released a new white paper, *Investing*

*in Multiple Literacies for Individual and Collective Empowerment*, to raise awareness about the challenges of supporting adult literacy in our current system, recognize opportunities for impactful learning experiences, and galvanize multi-sector engagement to address this collectively. Reviewers include experts across education, nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors, including leaders from Business Roundtable, Intel, Jobs for the Future, World Education, and the National Governors Association.

[Check out the full report here.](#)

## SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE

# EMPOWERING DELAWARE'S READERS: UNITED WAY'S MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO LITERACY AND LEARNING

*Dan Cruce, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Delaware*



**Literacy has long been a core issue for United Way of Delaware (UWDE). At UWDE, our goal is to ensure every Delaware child reads on grade level by the end of third grade.**

We work with parents and early readers in numerous ways through our *My Very Own Library* program, partnering with *Nemours BrightStart*, and *BookNook*. In addition, we also support adult learners through our *Stand By Me* program.

UWDE launched *Get Delaware Reading* in 2018 and has since partnered with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the Delaware Department of Education, numerous school districts, and key community partners. Specific areas of focus for *Get Delaware Reading* include School

Readiness, Chronic Absences, Summer Learning, Home Libraries, SEL Programming, and family engagement.

*My Very Own Library* (MVOL) is a literacy initiative that helps students build their own home libraries while fostering their love of reading. In cooperation with Scholastic, MVOL provides students with new, free books to build home libraries. During the 22/23 school year, MVOL served 8,744 students in school districts throughout Delaware. Through MVOL Book Fairs, more than 87,400 books were distributed.

MVOL hosted seven Virtual Author Engagement opportunities that gave students access to professional writers who read to them online. Through this initiative, 1,080 books were distributed. We also conducted 25 family literacy events in person and virtually to engage, encourage and support whole families to become better readers.

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**WATCH** **NOW**

To learn more about  
[Meet Very Own Library,](#)  
[watch the video here.](#)

An important partner in UWDE's literacy work is *Nemours BrightStart!*, a program for children at risk for reading failure and their families.

*During COVID, our partnership came to a halt while even more students fell behind in building reading skills. We re-established the partnership in the summer of 2021 with a pilot program reaching students attending various child-care centers in Wilmington.*

During that pilot, we saw students achieve tremendous growth, which led us to expand our partnership into schools, providing support to 80 students attending Stubbs Early Education and Dual Generation Center.

Another UWDE initiative is *BookNook*, an online learning platform designed to enhance K-8 literacy skills through one on one and small-group guided reading instruction and high-impact tutoring. UWDE has invested in this platform since the Summer of 2022. It is currently being used by 13 of our Learning Pods and other

partners across the state. To date, 641 students are enrolled in *BookNook*, and registration numbers are increasing as we prepare for summer programming. Last year, *BookNook* enrolled 488 students and saw a three-point increase in reading levels among 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students in a one-month period.

For the summer of 2023, we launched a new service through our free, confidential Delaware 211 (DE211) helpline that connects people in Delaware to essential resources throughout the state in multiple languages. We launched a comprehensive search function on our DE211 [website](#) that helps parents find summer camps for children with varied needs and interests.

We also continue our numerous out-of-school programs with the 27 Learning Pods we helped establish statewide during COVID. Summer learning loss is a constant concern to us at UWDE, and we offer our gratitude to our many community-based partners who work diligently with youth in the summer months.

***We invite you to join us, partner with us, and invest in us as we fight the good fight to win the literacy challenge. If you're interested, please feel free to reach out to me at [dcruce@uwde.org](mailto:dcruce@uwde.org).***



**Watch a short video  
highlighting one  
family's love for  
their local library!**

**WATCH** **NOW** 

## BOOK FLOOD!

**All school libraries are invited  
to join the Statewide Delaware  
Libraries Catalog!**

The Delaware Library Catalog is an infrastructure of more than 70 libraries sharing 2.5 million items for the benefit of Delawareans. This initiative, under the leadership of Representative Valerie Longhurst enables school libraries to [join and participate](#).