

*"If a child cannot read, they cannot succeed. Our young people must become proficient readers. All of them. That's why I declared a literacy emergency in Delaware and have proposed historic investments for classroom literacy. I applaud the Delaware Literacy Alliance, the Delaware Division of Libraries, and Literacy Delaware for building Delaware on its foundation. Let's continue helping students turn the page toward a brighter future together."*

MATT MEYER  
Governor of Delaware



## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

### DELAWARE IS FACING A LITERACY CRISIS.

Earlier this year, Governor Matt Meyer declared a literacy emergency, bringing to light the urgent need to address declining reading proficiency across the state. This call to action underscores the importance of our collective efforts to ensure that every Delawarean has access to the literacy skills necessary to thrive.

At the Delaware Literacy Alliance, we are responding to this crisis with targeted initiatives aimed at fostering literacy across all age groups:

- Learning Upgrade Pilot:** In partnership with the Laffey-McHugh Foundation, we are implementing a pilot program utilizing the Learning Upgrade platform. This initiative aims to provide innovative, technology-driven literacy instruction to learners, enabling them to enhance their reading and comprehension skills.

- Health Literacy Collaboration:** We are proud partners of the Health Literacy Council of Delaware, promoting health literacy statewide. By ensuring that health information is accessible and understandable, the Health Literacy Council empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes.

#### **Advocacy Committee Formation:**

Recognizing the need for systemic change, we are establishing a new Advocacy Committee, led by Chris Kenton. This committee will focus on influencing policy and advocating for resources to support literacy programs throughout Delaware.

As we head toward Literacy Month, we are reminded that everyone has a role to play in advancing literacy and advocating for it as an equity initiative. Literacy is the foundation for personal and community well-being, and we as leaders are committed to keeping it at the forefront of our work. These initiatives represent our determination to tackle the literacy emergency through innovative programs, strategic partnerships, and strong policy advocacy.

**We invite you to join us in this mission. Your support and involvement are vital as we work together to create a more literate and equitable Delaware.**

With determination and hope,

*Dr. Annie Norman, Co-Chair  
Cindy Shermeyer, Co-Chair  
Delaware Literacy Alliance*

# 90 DAYS IN: SECRETARY MARTEN'S VISION FOR TRANSFORMING DELAWARE SCHOOLS

by Delaware Secretary of Education Cindy Marten



As I reach the milestone of my first 90 days as Delaware's Secretary of Education, I want to take a moment to share some reflections on what our state has accomplished so far—and share

where we're headed next. This role is a great honor and a tremendous responsibility, and every day I am reminded of the incredible potential within Delaware's education system.

***Our vision is ambitious but clear: to create a world-class birth-to-graduation continuum that guarantees every student—regardless of zip code or background—has access to a high-quality early start and a K-12 education system that prepares them to graduate ready to thrive, whether that means pursuing higher education, serving in the military or stepping confidently into the workforce.***

One of our most urgent challenges is reversing the long decline in literacy and numeracy test scores. In my first three months, we have developed a plan to inject more than \$30 million in resources toward addressing this literacy emergency. This includes \$8 million for locally supported literacy programs tailored to meet the unique needs of each community. We have also invested \$1.5 million to hire, train, and deploy a cohort of literacy coaches, following a model that proved successful in Mississippi. Coaches are already working closely with local schools and educators to build capacity and improve reading outcomes.

None of this progress would be possible without our talented teachers. Recruiting and retaining outstanding educators remains a cornerstone of our work. We've committed \$75 million to raise teacher pay, with starting salaries to begin

at \$60,000 or more. This will make Delaware competitive with surrounding states for the first time in many years. We're also expanding residency programs to grow local teaching talent as well as increasing pathways for paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification. Thanks to these efforts, teacher vacancies have already begun to decrease across all three counties.

Creating a positive classroom climate is equally critical to student success. Following the passage of Senate Bill 106 and a \$500,000 investment outlined in the 2026 budget, every district and charter school in Delaware will have policies restricting or banning cell phone use during class. Schools that have adopted these bans are already seeing more focused and engaged learning environments.

At the heart of our approach is a commitment to equity—investing where the need is greatest. On the funding front, we are pursuing a new funding model that gives local schools more control to address their unique priorities.



Looking ahead, my priority is to transform Delaware as well as support districts and charters every step of the way. The journey ahead is challenging, but the momentum is strong. I am inspired every day by the dedication of Delaware's educators, families, and community partners. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our students. Together, we will build a brighter future for Delaware.

# WHY LITERACY MATTERS— AND WHY DELAWARE NEEDS YOU

*By Monterey Luckey, Deputy Director, Delaware Workforce Development Board*



Literacy isn't just a cause I care about—it's the thread that runs through every chapter of my life. Before I became an educator, I spent years in the corporate world, where my job was to make complex

information clear and accessible. Whether it was reviewing business requirements, simplifying vendor contracts, or creating plain-language guides for my teammates, I saw firsthand how vital strong reading and communication skills are—not just for success at work, but for dignity, confidence, and independence.

That's why I've dedicated myself to building pathways to college, careers, and independent living, especially for those who are underemployed, unemployed, living with disabilities, or navigating life's transitions. I've witnessed the transformation that happens when someone unlocks the power of literacy: doors open, dreams ignite, and potential is realized. But I've also seen the heartbreak when those skills are out of reach—when opportunities slip away and futures are put on hold.

## Literacy is the Foundation for Everything

This isn't just about education. Literacy is the foundation for mobility, self-advocacy, and lifelong success. Whether someone is finishing high school, changing careers, or raising a family, strong literacy skills are the key to navigating life's challenges and seizing its opportunities. When we talk about preparing people for jobs, we're really asking: Can they learn? Can they communicate? Can they grow?

My personal mantra is "Legacy Minded. Sustainability Driven." Because at some point, every one of us needs the skills to care for ourselves and others—and to leave something better behind.

## Delaware's Challenge—And Our Opportunity

Right now, Delaware faces a challenge we can't ignore: nearly 130,000 adults in our state read below a third-grade level. This isn't just an individual struggle—it's a barrier to economic growth, better health, and vibrant communities. Employers want to hire, but too many jobs go unfilled because people lack the basic reading, writing, or digital skills to succeed. This is a crisis we can solve—if we act together.

## Progress Is Possible—And Happening

The good news? Change is already underway. Across Delaware, educators, workforce professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders are joining forces. Literacy programs are being woven into career coaching, GED classes, reentry services, and even food banks. We're seeing innovation, flexibility, and real results. But we can't stop now.

## How You Can Help—And Why It Matters

We need to keep literacy at the heart of every conversation about jobs, equity, and economic growth. This isn't just about filling positions—it's about building lives of purpose, stability, and hope. Every Delawarean deserves the chance to discover their "why"—and to build a future they're proud of.



*I believe in Delaware's spirit. I've seen what's possible when we listen, when we invest, and when we stand together. We were the First State—let's lead the way in literacy, too.*

Will you join us? Roll up your sleeves. Lend your voice, your time, your support. Together, we can open doors for thousands of our neighbors and build a stronger, brighter Delaware for everyone.

# EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH INNOVATION: LAUNCHING THE LEARNING UPGRADE PILOT

As Delaware responds to a statewide literacy emergency, the Delaware Literacy Alliance is taking bold steps to explore innovative solutions to long-standing barriers in adult education. One such effort is the launch of the **Learning Upgrade Pilot**, a strategic partnership between the Delaware Literacy Alliance and the Laffey-McHugh Foundation.

*This pilot project is designed to answer a critical question: Can technology help more Delawareans access the literacy support they need more quickly and effectively?*



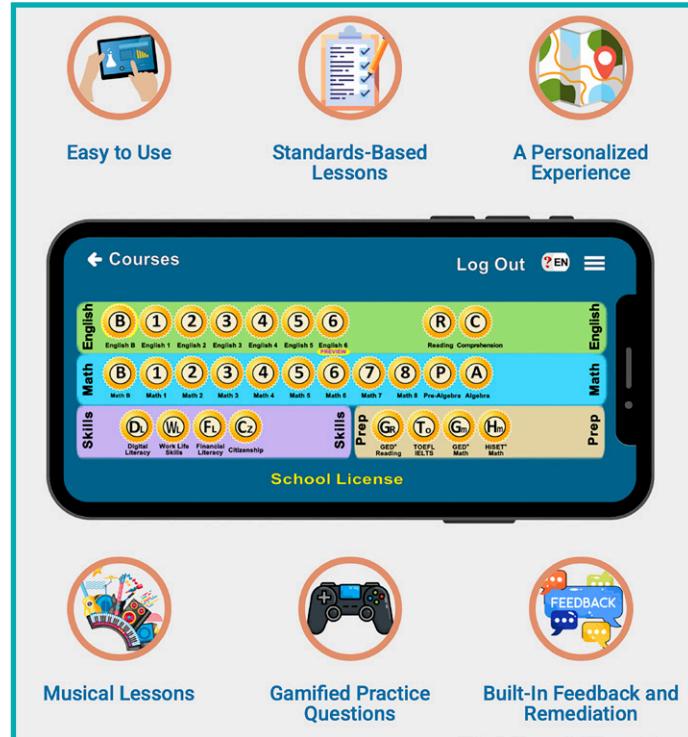
## About the Pilot

The Learning Upgrade Pilot is a targeted research initiative designed to evaluate a low-cost, mobile-friendly digital literacy platform. **Learning Upgrade** provides personalized, interactive lessons that help learners enhance their reading, comprehension, and foundational skills at their own pace. Its user-friendly interface and real-time feedback also allow educators to track progress and identify learning gaps early.

**The pilot focuses on learners aged 16 to 30**, especially those pursuing job readiness or career launch pathways—two groups most affected by long waitlists for traditional literacy programs in Delaware.

We're working to answer three core questions:

- Can Learning Upgrade help overcome barriers to accessing adult education classes?
- Can this tool reduce waitlists for literacy programs in Delaware?



- What literacy levels does Learning Upgrade best support, and in what conditions?

## Pilot Sites & Community Partners

This effort is possible thanks to a shared commitment across sectors. Four sites are currently participating:

- **Funded by the Laffey-McHugh Foundation:**
  - ▶ Latin American Community Center (LACC)
  - ▶ Literacy Delaware
- **In-kind pilot sites:**
  - ▶ Sarah Pyle Academy
  - ▶ Delaware First Health

These partners are helping us test how well Learning Upgrade fits into diverse learning environments and supports students with a range of needs.

Together, we're committed to making sure that *every Delawarean has a clear path to literacy*—and with new tools like Learning Upgrade, that path may soon be more accessible than ever.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP CLOSE THE LITERACY GAP IN DELAWARE?

By Caroline O'Neal, CEO, Reading Assist

**"We learn to read through third grade, and read to learn after that."**



At [Reading Assist](#), we're proud to support Delaware's youngest readers in reaching that crucial milestone, alongside their incredible educators and families.

Across the country, we're facing a literacy emergency, and not just for our youngest learners. And here in the First State, each of us has a role to play. While recent headlines about shifts in federal funding have raised concerns, we remain energized by the progress being made—and deeply committed to the work ahead.

*This school year, we saw 2,300 students across the region, and 90 percent hit foundational benchmarks at the end of the year, including 83 percent of kindergarten students testing on grade level.*

Recently, we visited Lewis Dual Language Elementary School with the New Castle Chamber of Commerce. At Lewis, we partner closely with school leaders and literacy specialists to support Kindergarten through 4th grade students. When we began in September 2024, 92 percent of the 42 students we worked with needed intensive services. By the Spring, that number dropped by half with several weeks of tutoring left in the year. These are the kinds of breakthroughs that change trajectories.

This progress is driven by our dedicated tutors, who reflect the rich diversity of our state. From an 18-year-old student at Howard High School exploring a potential career in education to a 76-year-old "restless retiree" eager to give back, our tutors embody what it means to invest in our communities.

We recently saw even more reason for hope at the [Delaware Teachers Pathways Showcase](#), where we heard about the strong educator pipeline growing here in Delaware. Secretary Marten underscored what we know to be true: literacy must be the foundation of every great education.

Delaware has a long history of coming together to tackle hard problems. But when it comes to supporting our youngest learners, we must do more.

**As a mom of two young readers, I know how hard it can be to figure out where to start. So here's how you can help:**

- **Parents and caregivers:** Explore books with your children, especially over the summer. Visit your local Delaware library. Read recipe cards, maps, magazines, and storybooks. Every word counts.

- **Business owners and operators:** Join us for [one of our two corporate service days this summer](#) and learn how your team can help address literacy challenges in your community.
- **Public officials:** Keep going. Delaware has led the way on the Science of Reading, high-impact tutoring, and wraparound supports like mental health services and coaching. Your continued advocacy makes this work possible.
- **School and district leaders:** Let's connect. We'd love to partner with you through professional learning, staff coaching, or direct student support.
- **Striving readers:** Keep going! Keep exploring. And when it gets tough, don't give up. Delaware has your back.

Together, we can make sure every child in our state has the support they need to become a confident reader and lifelong learner.



## DELAWARE HELPS WIN KEY COURT BATTLE TO RESTORE AMERICORPS FUNDING

Delaware played a leading role in a successful multistate lawsuit to block federal cuts to AmeriCorps. Led by Attorney General Kathy Jennings and supported by partners across the state, including the Delaware Division of Libraries, the court victory restores AmeriCorps programs and protects more than \$1 million in grant funding for Delaware communities.

### Among the nine Delaware organizations impacted are:

- **Reading Assist (\$305,370)**
- **Literacy Volunteers Serving Adults Northern Delaware (\$129,330)**
- **Children's Beach House, West End Neighborhood House, WeProsper Family Organization, Leading Youth Through Empowerment, TeenSHARP, Family Promise of Northern New Castle County, and Spur Impact Association.**

AmeriCorps funding helps sustain vital programs in literacy, youth development, education, and public health. The Delaware Division of Libraries joined other advocates in underscoring the urgent need for these services across the state.

While this is an important win for Delaware, many of the supported programs are concentrated in the northern part of the state. This highlights an ongoing opportunity to expand access to critical services in rural and downstate communities, ensuring all Delawareans benefit from these vital investments.

This ruling ensures that AmeriCorps members can continue serving Delawareans of all ages, connecting people to opportunity, supporting literacy, and building stronger communities.



**AmeriCorps**

# ADVANCING LITERACY THROUGH POLICY AND ADVOCACY

By Chris Kenton



I'm honored to join the Delaware Literacy Alliance as a new advisory board member and to chair a new Policy and Advocacy Subcommittee. In this role, I'm committed to working alongside this

incredible team to ensure that every Delawarean, regardless of age, background, or socioeconomic status, has the opportunity to become a proficient and confident reader.

***Our collective goal is clear: make literacy a foundational pillar of individual and community success across the state. To achieve this, we must embrace evidence-based policy, cross-sector collaboration, and sustained investment.***

As we build out this new policy and advocacy subcommittee, we're setting our sights on several critical areas:

## Early Literacy and Grade-Level Proficiency

We aim to ensure that 90% of Delaware third graders are reading at or above grade level by 2030. This requires expanding access to high-quality early childhood education and literacy-rich Pre-K programs, particularly in low-income and rural areas.

## Adult and Workforce Literacy

Strengthening adult literacy rates is key to workforce readiness and civic engagement. Our vision includes developing targeted programs for adult learners, with a focus on job-related literacy,

digital literacy, and English as a Second Language (ESL) support.

## Educator Preparation and Professional Development

Every educator deserves the training and tools to teach literacy effectively. We will work to support statewide professional development grounded in the science of reading and structured literacy instruction.

## Community and Library Engagement

Literacy doesn't stop at the classroom door. We're committed to fostering a culture of reading and lifelong learning by partnering with libraries, community centers, and nonprofit organizations to deliver family literacy events, tutoring, and outreach.

## Data-Driven Accountability and Equity

To track our progress and ensure equitable outcomes, we plan to establish a centralized literacy data system. This system will allow for disaggregated reporting by race, income, and geography, guiding policy decisions and ensuring transparent governance.

In the coming months, we'll be forming this policy committee, inviting stakeholders from across the state to join us in shaping these priorities. We're also exploring funding opportunities, including potential partnerships with Delaware-based and national organizations. By aligning our funding goals with these partners' missions, we can amplify our impact and ensure sustainability.

I'm grateful to be part of this work and excited to collaborate with so many dedicated champions for literacy. Together, we can make Delaware a national leader in literacy and learning.

# 90%

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# 2030



*The Delaware Literacy Alliance is powered by PMG Consulting, in service of a more literate and equitable Delaware.*