

BREAKING

BARRIERS

A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIR OF THE DELAWARE LITERACY ALLIANCE

Dr. Annie Norman, State Librarian of Delaware

A Statewide Commitment to Literacy

Literacy is the foundation on which opportunity is built for individuals, families, and communities. In Delaware, we see its impact everywhere: in the confidence of a child learning to read for the first time, in the resilience of adults gaining new skills to reenter the workforce, and in the collective strength of communities that value learning at every age.

Yet across our state, too many Delawareans still face barriers to building those skills. Some struggle to access current age-appropriate books, some lack internet connectivity or devices, and others face language barriers. The Delaware Literacy Alliance is committed to changing that reality and ensuring that literacy is not a privilege but a promise.

Libraries: Gateways to Lifelong Learning

From the library perspective, we understand the transformative power of literacy. Delaware's public libraries are trusted spaces where everyone—regardless of age, income, or background—can discover the joy and empowerment that come from reading and learning.

Libraries provide early literacy programs, tutoring, digital literacy workshops, workforce development resources, and connections to vital community services. Libraries are often the first place people turn when they want to improve their lives, and the ripple effect is profound: stronger families, better health outcomes, and more resilient communities.

Delaware Libraries are the backbone for the Delaware Literacy Alliance, because libraries are grounded in

the power of collaboration, when schools, libraries, nonprofits, government agencies, and community-based organizations are connected to make literacy support welcoming, accessible, and effective for all.

Protecting the Freedom to Read

This year marked a powerful step forward with the signing of House Bill 119, the Freedom to Read Act, which protects students' right to access a wide range of books in school libraries.

At a time when book challenges and restrictions are rising nationwide, Delaware has chosen a different path—affirming that every child deserves the freedom to explore diverse perspectives, ask questions, and see themselves reflected in what they read.

The freedom to read is not just an educational issue; it's fundamental to democracy. When young people can engage with new ideas, challenge assumptions, and think critically, they become active participants in shaping our shared future.

Moving Forward Together

As Co-Chair of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, I am proud to support a statewide network of educators, librarians, employers, community leaders, and advocates who believe in the power of literacy to transform lives. Together, we are building innovative partnerships, championing policy solutions, and expanding access to literacy resources across the lifespan, and across generations.

I invite all Delawareans to join us in this work—by volunteering, partnering, advocating, or simply reading with a child. Because when every person has the tools to learn, connect, and thrive, our entire state grows stronger.

LITERACY IS A FOUNDATIONAL SKILL TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

By Kate Dupont Phillips, Executive Director, Healthy Communities Delaware



basic needs for health and safety, lifelong learning, belonging, and civic muscle.

Literacy is a foundational life skill that enables people to know and navigate their world. It also supports them in understanding, accessing and improving Vital Conditions in their own communities.

"Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world. Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills. Literacy skills themselves are expanding and evolving as people engage more and more with information and learning through digital technology."

(UNESCO, 2024. *What you need to know about literacy.*)

Opportunities to learn literacy skills across a lifetime are not only a part of the Lifelong Learning Vital Condition, but influence every other Vital Condition. Literacy is necessary to navigate life successfully—to read a bus schedule, to understand a medical

The Vital Conditions for Well-Being are the things that we all need, all the time, to thrive and reach our full potential—humane housing, meaningful work and wealth, a thriving natural world, reliable transportation, basic needs for health and safety, lifelong learning, belonging, and civic muscle.



prescription, to obtain and retain a meaningful job, to interpret and pay your bills, and to find and navigate community resources. Being able to read, write and communicate also gives us the individual knowledge and confidence to ask questions, share our perspectives and advocate for ourselves and our communities.

Investments in literacy are necessary to enable every Delawarean to engage in society and reach their full potential. We need to advocate for high-quality universal Pre-Kindergarten programs, which help children with the foundational literacy skills they need to be successful. We also need to invest in programs that help adults learn to read, write and communicate, as well as the supports to read and speak English, or to learn what they may not have in their K-12 education. This two-generational approach can address the current challenges of literacy as well as create thriving families and stronger communities. Connect with [First State Pre-K](#) and [Literacy Delaware](#) to learn about how you can help.

LITERACY IS LIBERATION, BUT ONLY IF WE ACT

By Michelle Taylor, President and CEO, United Way of Delaware



Our children cannot read, and there's nothing more urgent than changing that.

We've heard the statistics. We've felt the heartbreak. But then life gets busy, and we move on. Meanwhile, the crisis deepens.

Reading is more than a skill. It's a lifeline. A child who can't read becomes an adult who can't navigate a job application, a prescription label, or a note from their own child's teacher.

In Delaware, only one in four fourth graders reads on grade level. That means that most of our kids are at risk of stepping into adulthood unprepared and unheard.

That's why I'm inviting you to join me in a community conversation. Not a panel. Not a presentation. A community conversation about action steps we can and must take together.

[Join us here.](#)

At United Way of Delaware, we've made early literacy a priority for more than 20 years. Programs such as Get Delaware Reading, Reading Angels, My Very Own Library, and Help Me Grow have helped thousands of families. But it's still not enough.

Too many children still aren't getting the reading instruction they need. Parents are overwhelmed and under-supported. And too many of us still think literacy is just a school issue, not a community one.

We can't let today's students become adults who can't read.

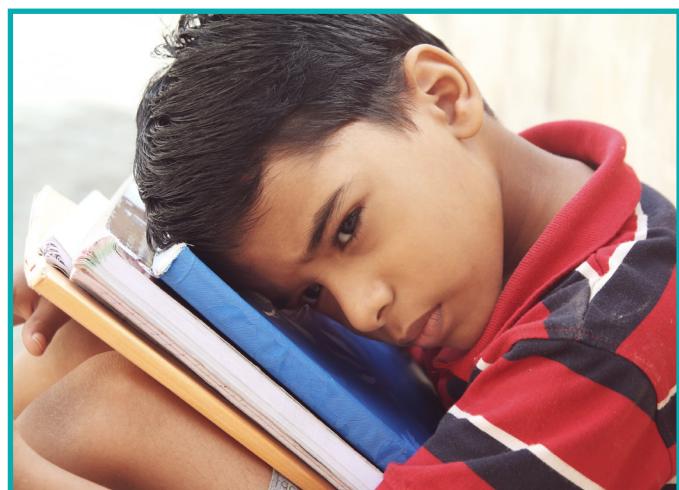
We can change this story. But only if we act.

START HERE:

- **Join the Zoom conversation on October 1.**
[Join us here.](#)
- **Volunteer to read with a child.**
- **Donate to proven literacy programs.**
- **Advocate for early education funding.**

What makes this time different?

YOU. ME. US.



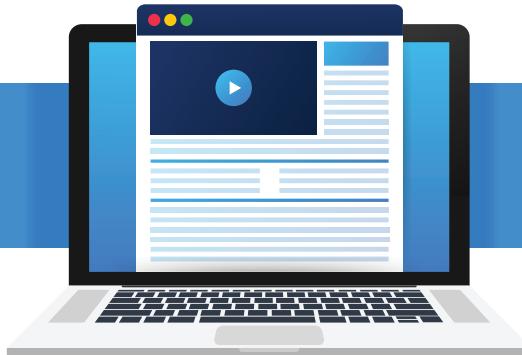
1 in 4
fourth graders reads on grade level



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

CELEBRATING LITERACY MONTH: DELAWARE'S PROGRESS AND SUCCESSES

September was National Literacy Month, and the Delaware Literacy Alliance is proud to look back on a month filled with learning, collaboration, and advocacy. Together with our partners, we highlighted the importance of literacy across the lifespan and showcased the strength of Delaware's literacy community.



Financial Literacy Networking Webinar

One of the month's early highlights was our Financial Literacy Networking Webinar, which brought together over 60 participants from across the state. Educators, community leaders, and advocates connected to share ideas and resources, building stronger collaborations for advancing financial literacy. The enthusiastic participation underscored the momentum in Delaware around ensuring every resident has the tools to make informed financial decisions.

Exploring the Science of Reading

We also hosted an inspiring webinar on the **Science of Reading**, where participants gained practical strategies, tools, and ideas to help children become confident, lifelong readers. Attendees explored:

- Research-based strategies that support children in learning to read
- Approaches to support children before kindergarten and throughout the elementary years
- Ways to connect classroom learning with home and community supports

This event proved valuable for educators, parents, librarians, and literacy advocates—reminding us of the collective power we have to strengthen reading outcomes across Delaware.

Identifying Low Literacy: A Facilitated Training with Dr. Susan Domanico

On September 30, more than 65 participants joined a virtual training led by **Dr. Susan Domanico**,

focused on identifying and supporting individuals with low literacy. The session provided attendees with practical strategies to recognize common indicators of low literacy and to engage in sensitive, compassionate conversations with those seeking help.

Through interactive discussions and breakout sessions, participants shared insights. They contributed ideas for the development of a pilot screening guide designed to help professionals better identify and support individuals facing literacy challenges.

This engaging and collaborative event represented another important step in Delaware's statewide effort to build awareness, strengthen resources, and promote equity in literacy access for all.

Governor's Proclamation

We were also honored by a **Governor's Proclamation** recognizing Literacy Month in Delaware on September 22. This proclamation highlighted the importance of literacy for workforce development, education, and health, and it served as a powerful reminder of the role literacy plays in strengthening our communities.

LOOKING AHEAD

The successes of Literacy Month 2025 are just the beginning. As we move forward, the Delaware Literacy Alliance remains committed to championing literacy, building partnerships, and creating opportunities for all Delawareans to thrive.