



BUILDING READERS, BUILDING FUTURES

By Secretary Cindy Marten, Delaware Department of Education



If you walk into a third-grade classroom in Delaware right now, you can see the future taking shape in real time.

A student sounding out a difficult word for the first time.

A teacher noticing confusion and adjusting instruction in the moment.

A principal in a classroom listening closely to student talk and coaching for stronger implementation.

A literacy coach helping teachers internalize tomorrow's lesson before students ever walk through the door.

This is what literacy improvement actually looks like.

Not a slogan.

Not a single program.

Not one more initiative layered on top of exhausted educators.

It looks like stronger teaching, stronger leadership, and stronger systems working together around students every single day.

As of Spring 2025, about 38 percent of Delaware third graders were reading on grade level. That is unacceptable. It is why Delaware named this moment what it is: a literacy emergency.

And it is why we are acting with urgency, clarity, and alignment.

As a former elementary teacher and reading specialist, I know this work deeply. I have taught children to read. I have worked alongside teachers studying student work, adjusting instruction, and trying again the next day. I have also led large systems through instructional change. I know there are no shortcuts here.

We cannot tutor our way out of weak core instruction.

We cannot improve outcomes through fragmentation.

We improve outcomes by strengthening what happens between students and teachers in classrooms every day.

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That is the focus of Delaware's [Early Literacy Plan](#) and [Delaware Department of Education's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

Across Delaware, 4,105 educators are now engaged in professional learning and coaching aligned to the Science of Reading. More than 38,000 students are experiencing stronger Tier 1 instruction supported by the skillful use of high-quality instructional materials and more consistent instructional practices across classrooms.

This work is not about purchasing programs and hoping for results. It is about disciplined and skilled implementation.

Teachers are learning how to internalize lessons and respond to student needs using data in real time. Principals are strengthening instructional leadership through the Early Literacy Leadership Academy. Districts are aligning coaching, curriculum, professional learning, and assessment systems so educators are not pulled in competing directions.

This is what it looks like when a plan moves from paper to practice.

In Indian River School District, leaders are building expertise across every elementary school through Early Literacy Leadership Academy training and AIM Pathways professional learning. In Colonial School District, leaders are aligning coaching cycles, professional learning, and instructional materials so that what teachers plan, what they teach, and how they are supported all work together in service of student learning.

These are not isolated bright spots. They are examples of what statewide coherence can look like.

That coherence matters.

For too long in education, good people have often worked hard in disconnected ways. Schools, nonprofits, tutoring organizations, libraries, afterschool programs, and community partners all trying to help children, but often without shared strategy, shared measures, or shared accountability.

Delaware is working differently.

Schools must own the core work of teaching children to read. That responsibility belongs inside classrooms through strong instruction, strong leadership, and support for educators.

Community organizations and literacy partners also have an essential role to play. The Delaware Literacy

Alliance is helping align libraries, nonprofits, family organizations, and literacy partners around a common statewide goal so that students experience a stronger culture of reading beyond the school day as well.

That work matters deeply.

Children benefit when families have books at home. They benefit from summer reading programs, tutoring supports, mentoring relationships, afterschool opportunities, and literacy-rich community spaces.

But these efforts must align to and reinforce the work happening in schools, not compete with it or distract from it.

This is how we build an actual literacy ecosystem around children.

Not isolated programs.

Not competing initiatives.

Not fragmented efforts chasing separate outcomes.

One statewide strategy.

One shared responsibility.

One clear focus on results for students.

Delaware's strategic plan offers a simple promise: Start with students. Build for impact.

That means measuring what matters.

It means supporting teachers relentlessly.

It means being honest about where we are and making necessary changes when outcomes don't improve.

And it means staying focused long enough to see real results.

The next phase of Bridge to Practice grants is now underway, expanding support for educators and deepening implementation across the state. We will continue measuring progress closely, learning from the work, adjusting where needed, and building stronger conditions for teaching and learning.

Because literacy changes everything.

When students learn to read well, they gain access to every subject, every opportunity, and every future pathway that follows.

And when a state gets literacy right, everything else becomes more possible.

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF STATE ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT OF DR. ANNIE NORMAN

*State Librarian of Delaware and Director of the Delaware Division of Libraries
Served 40 years at the Division, 24 years in role as Director*



The Delaware Department of State announced the retirement of public servant Dr. Annie Norman, effective August 1, 2026. Dr. Norman has held the position of State Librarian of Delaware and Director of the Delaware Division of Libraries since 2002.

"A society that cannot read is a society that cannot succeed," said Governor Meyer. "Thanks to the decades of service from Dr. Annie Norman, people all across our state have been given the greatest gift imaginable, the ability to learn without anyone else's help. Annie, the people of our state owe you an immense debt of gratitude for the work you have done, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for creating a space where every Delawarean can learn and grow."

"Dr. Norman is the definition of public servant and has changed the trajectory of Libraries in our state," said Delaware Secretary of State Charuni Patibanda-Sanchez. "She's a systems-thinker, focused on encouraging innovative programming and partnerships to foster an environment that supports literacy across the lifespan. We are so proud — and so lucky for — the work and passion that Annie has done for our state. We are excited for her as she enters her next chapter and wish her a joyful retirement."

"It has been my great honor and pleasure to serve with Delaware Libraries on behalf of Delawareans! We appreciate the support of the Department of State to continuously elevate libraries, and in turn, to champion Delawareans in learning and renewal throughout their lives," said Dr. Annie Norman.

Over the years, with the support of each Administration and the General Assembly, as State Librarian, Dr. Norman steered Delaware's libraries in collaboration, expansion, and improvement of services on behalf of Delawareans.

As Delaware Libraries celebrate their [125th Anniversary](#), the Delaware [Library Catalog/Consortium](#), also celebrates its 20th year:

- Under Dr. Norman's leadership, the Delaware Library Catalog/Consortium was launched and has expanded to all Delaware public libraries, academic libraries, many school libraries, and special libraries sharing over 4 million items on behalf of Delawareans statewide.
- The Delaware Division of Libraries supports the statewide library technology infrastructure including all public library technologies, the Delaware Library Network, Wi-Fi, public access computing, catalog, electronic collections, program calendar, and more, under Dr. Norman's leadership — a program that was integral as our state was managing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Under her tenure as Director, more than 2 dozen library buildings have almost doubled in size overall and are designed to deliver state-of-the-art services through the robust shared technology infrastructure supported by the Delaware Division of Libraries. This included American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding in 2022 that directly funded the match for projects at nine Delaware Libraries — including new buildings for the Selbyville Public Library, the Harrington Public Library, and the Duck Creek Regional Library, among other critical construction projects.

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- Dr. Norman is the founder and Co-Chair of the [Delaware Literacy Alliance](#) alongside Secretary of Education Cindy Marten. The organization aims to address the significant literacy gap in our state and reinforce the role Libraries and other state and community programs have in the solution.
- A successful statewide launch of [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#) — a program that provides free books for all Delaware children ages birth to five — and providing registration through partnerships with hospital systems to ease the registration lift for parents and guardians.
- Delaware Libraries Social Innovation Team, first formed as Job Centers with federal funds and a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, also expanded the capacity to support Entrepreneurs and innovators through maker technologies and events where people can enthusiastically learn about and experiment with technology and DIY activities and now added [Delaware Libraries Teleservices](#).
- The Social Innovation Team collaborates with Delaware Partners which links over 300 organizations and growing, virtually and in libraries, to expand the reach and capacity to meet Delawareans' needs across all subject areas, including job training, social services support, Teleservices, and much more!

Dr. Norman has been State Librarian of Delaware for nearly 25 years.

AWARDS AND EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Appointed by President Biden to the National Museum and Library Services Board.
- Inducted into the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women in March 2016.
- Recipient of the Delaware Library Association Distinguished Librarian Citation.
- Delaware Division of Libraries received the Delaware Quality Award of Merit and the Delaware Library Association Institutional Award in recognition of performance excellence principles and practices.
- Annie is a charter member of the popular Delaware Library Book Cart Drill Team, the Bronze World Champions for 2007.
- Annie received her Doctorate of Education in Innovation and Organizational Leadership from Wilmington University, and is the recipient of the Audrey K. Doberstein Award for Leadership for her dissertation entitled Librarians' Leadership for Lifelong Learning.
- Her Master's degree in Library Science is from Drexel University and she is a member of Beta Phi Mu, the international library and information studies honor society.



MOVING LITERACY FORWARD IN DELAWARE

By Emily Hershman, Delaware Division of Libraries



Moving back to Delaware as an adult gave me a rare gift: the chance to reintroduce myself to the community I was raised in.

I am so honored I got to meet my neighbors while in the Office of Governor Carney: traveling to schools to see Opportunity Funding in action, watching state agencies implement trauma-informed practices, and helping to launch Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which delivers free books monthly to Delawareans ages 0–5.

The thread running through all of it is something Governor Markell always said: we're a state of neighbors. We care about each other. And we're fortunate to be small in size but outsized in impact. We can get every changemaker to the table in an instant. I watched it happen during COVID-19.

I see the Delaware Literacy Alliance as the convener for every party invested in closing the literacy gap: Delaware Libraries, the Department of Education, state agencies, workforce partners, healthcare institutions, and nonprofits. But we need more seats at the table. Fragmented efforts aren't an option. We simply don't have the time.

Delaware Secretary of Education Cindy Marten has created a literacy action plan that is clear, ambitious, and attainable if we all work together. Now it's on all of us to harness that energy and move.

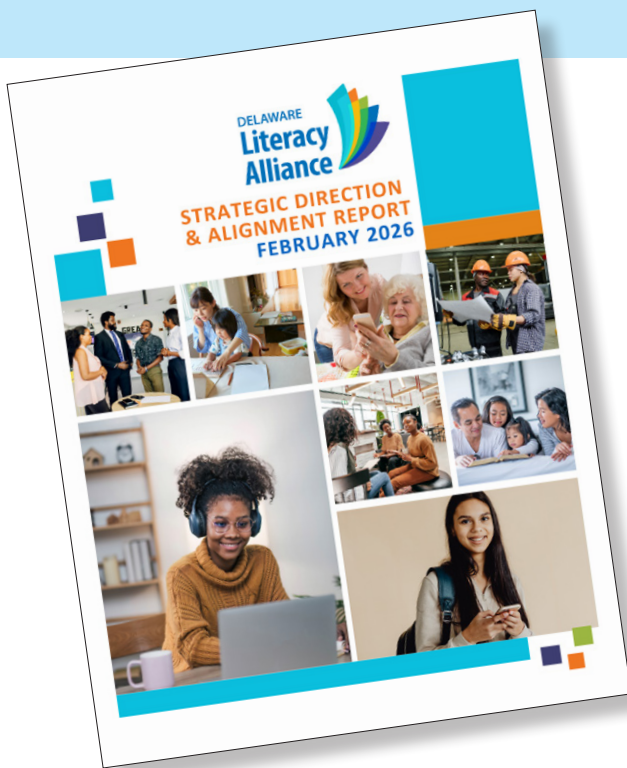
One of the pillars of the plan focuses on community and family engagement. This is where the Alliance can step in and step up. Educators, paraprofessionals, pediatricians, and direct service providers have full plates. The Alliance is poised to build a coordinated community engagement strategy for literacy across the lifespan. I'm talking cradle to cane.

Here's what I commit to as your Interim Co-Chair:

- **Bring the right people to the table.** This is Delaware, we're strong and small. No duplicated efforts.
- **Elevate the Alliance as a policy voice.** That means being a trusted resource for the General Assembly and elected officials seeking to strengthen literacy supports statewide and ensure coordination with the Secretary's literacy plan.
- **Spread the word to the changemakers** including parents, guardians, educators, advocates, businesses, and state agencies, and to everyone who knows literacy is foundational to success but doesn't have time to navigate what's available. Library services, nonprofit programs, and state supports should no longer be Delaware's best-kept secrets. And people deserve to know what's different this time: what's working, what's not, and where they can make their voice heard.

We have a strong foundation. The Alliance, built by Delaware Libraries and Literacy Delaware, has active committees ready to move. And we have the right leadership: a former literacy specialist and superintendent at the helm, finally giving educators and administrators the support they've needed.

So let's get to work. For my son, and for all our children.



DELAWARE LITERACY ALLIANCE CONVENES STATEWIDE LEADERS

for Strategic Planning & Alignment Session

On February 10, the Delaware Literacy Alliance convened Advisory Board members and key stakeholders from across Delaware's literacy landscape at the Kent County Levy Court for a strategic planning and alignment session focused on strengthening collaboration, advancing statewide literacy efforts, and building a more coordinated literacy ecosystem.

The convening brought together leaders representing education, libraries, healthcare, workforce development, housing, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and community-based initiatives to assess progress, identify opportunities for deeper alignment, and explore how organizations across sectors can work together toward a shared vision of literacy across the lifespan. Participating organizations included the Delaware Department of Education, Delaware Division of Libraries, United Way of Delaware, Delaware State Housing Authority, Literacy Delaware, Read Aloud Delaware, Delaware Readiness Teams, ChristianaCare, Delaware Community Foundation, and many others.

The session centered around the Alliance's "North Star" goal of achieving 100% literacy across Delaware and emphasized the importance of intergenerational literacy, systems alignment, shared measurement, and sustainable collaboration. Using a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) framework, participants engaged in a structured alignment exercise designed to identify existing strengths across the literacy ecosystem

while also surfacing opportunities to strengthen coordination, reduce duplication of efforts, and improve shared impact.

A key theme throughout the convening was the recognition that Delaware is not lacking in meaningful literacy work, but rather that the greatest opportunity lies in intentionally aligning and strengthening existing efforts across organizations and systems. Discussions highlighted the importance of cross-sector collaboration, intergenerational programming, statewide data alignment, policy and advocacy efforts, and community-centered literacy strategies that support individuals and families from early childhood through adulthood.

Reflecting on the convening, Kelly Sheridan of the Delaware Community Foundation shared,

"The convening on the Delaware Literacy Alliance's strategic planning was both useful and purposeful to me, as a new member, to understanding the mission and long-term goals of the Alliance. I learned a lot and have a better understanding of the importance of the mission and what it will take to see literacy rates climb in Delaware. We have our work cut out for us!"

The convening also reinforced strong alignment between the Delaware Literacy Alliance's strategic direction and the Delaware Department of Education's statewide priorities around early literacy, school readiness, equity, and measurable outcomes.

As the Alliance moves into its next phase of work, the February convening helped establish a stronger foundation for coordinated action, shared accountability, and long-term collaboration across Delaware's literacy ecosystem. The Delaware Literacy Alliance looks forward to continuing to work alongside partners throughout the state to advance literacy, strengthen communities, and ensure that every Delawarean has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

THE HEALING POWER OF BOOKS

By Teri Lawler, EdD, LCMH, Education Associate, TIPSEBW, Delaware Department of Education



Have you ever lost yourself in a great book? Well, this bibliophile (book lover) has. I've used books to explore new worlds, experiment with new relationships, and ultimately examine

new ways of being. I have always loved to read and as a child was frequently caught reading under the covers with a flashlight after my bedtime just to finish an exciting chapter. While books have always been a source of friendship and comfort for me, research shows that they also play a significant role in expanding wellbeing. Books are even being used as a complement to traditional mental health counseling and therapeutic supports. Reading is not only fundamental, but it has been proven to be a powerful tool to improve our emotional resilience!

Books can provide validation and reduce isolation as characters and their real-life experiences help us feel connected and understood, reducing loneliness. Through book characters, readers can safely experience and process feelings that lead to insights into their own lives. Books can offer opportunities to see the world through different lenses, increasing our empathy and range of problem solving. Many self-help books have been paired with other therapeutic treatments as they can provide actionable techniques and tools for handling life challenges. Many people are turning to books as a meaningful way to cope and heal.

This approach — called BIBLIOTHERAPY — is the process of reading, reflecting upon, and discussing literature (personal narratives and stories) to increase understanding and awareness, promote empathy and perspective-taking, teach coping skills, encourage reflection, and provide comfort and self-care.

Bibliotherapy in its truest sense uses reading and books, including works of fiction and non-fiction, to gain personal insights and discover coping mechanisms to deal with daily life challenges. By engaging with books, stories, and literature, you are not only nourishing your mind but also discovering new ways to understand and manage your emotions. Bibliotherapy is a powerful and accessible tool that can foster emotional expression and enhance self-awareness.

For these reasons, we have partnered with our state libraries to strengthen literacy AND enhance wellbeing in Delaware schools. Libraries in each county have curated books to foster social, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing for all ages. Titles specifically designed to support whole child development are available for book lovers of all ages. In addition, books spotlighted in the Department of Education's trauma-informed practices and social and emotional learning quarterly book studies have been added to the state catalog, assuring that educators and anyone who supports the development of children can invest in professional learning and development at no cost. Healthy and whole children grow among thriving adults so grab your library card.

You don't have to be a therapist to be therapeutic. Visit your nearest library and ask about the K-12 Bibliotherapy Project. A healthier Delaware begins with your next book!





CELEBRATING 80 YEARS OF UNITED WAY OF DELAWARE

The Delaware Literacy Alliance proudly congratulates United Way of Delaware on its 80th anniversary and celebrates eight decades of leadership, partnership, and service to communities across our state.

As a valued partner and member of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, United Way of Delaware has played an important role in strengthening collaboration and advancing opportunities for Delaware families and

communities. Their longstanding commitment to education, economic mobility, early student success, and community empowerment continues to create meaningful impact across generations.

For 80 years, UWDE has worked to bring people, organizations, and resources together to help build a stronger Delaware. Through innovative initiatives, strategic partnerships, and a deep commitment to community-centered solutions, they continue to help individuals and families thrive.

We are grateful for United Way of Delaware's partnership, leadership, and continued dedication to improving outcomes for communities throughout Delaware. Congratulations on this remarkable milestone and on 80 years of impact and service.

We look forward to continuing this important work together for many years to come.

