



Annual Report
November 30, 2024

Chairman's Message

Dear Friends,

It is my honor to submit this report on behalf of the Georgia Council on Literacy. This year has been one of goal setting, relationship-building, and envisioning a Georgia where all citizens have literacy skills needed for work and financial independence.

Council members and Working Group leads demonstrated their commitment to improving literacy by attending meetings, conducting research, analyzing data and reporting findings. I appreciate members of the Council for the dedication. I am equally appreciative to our education agency personnel for leading the Council's Working Groups: Amy Jacobs, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (Birth through Age Five Working Group); Amy Denty, Literacy Director, Georgia Department of Education (Kindergarten through Third Grade Working Group); Dr. Dana Nichols, Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs University System of Georgia (Teacher Professional Development Working Group), and Dr. Cayanna Good, Assistant Commissioner, Adult Education Technical College System of Georgia (Community Working Group), and Dr. Garry McGibboney, Executive Director, Sharecare, and Ellen Wiley, Council member and Board of Trustees member with the Atlanta Speech School, who led a subgroup to identify recommendations for improved hearing and vision.

I am delighted to share that the Council has developed a five-year literacy plan for Georgia. Led by Sarah Richards, Georgia Literacy Coach, Council members, and a diverse group of stakeholders met throughout the summer and fall to create the first iteration of this "living document." The literacy plan will provide the "north star" for Council work in upcoming years. I hope that you will review this plan and provide input for us. We will continue to develop this by determining and adding metrics and an implementation plan. The Council is committed to continuing to review the plan, update, and provide specific measures and activities. This plan is the roadmap to being ranked **the number one state for literacy**.

As I have stated many times, literacy is our most solvable problem. But it takes everyone to work together and align for impact. Our Georgia Reads movement is getting statewide traction and attention, thanks to Malcolm Mitchell, Georgia Reads Coach and our partners and sponsors including the Georgia Municipal Association, Share the Magic Foundation, Senator and Mrs. Billy Hickman, Georgia Power, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Outdoor Advertising Georgia, Get Georgia Reading, and the Georgia General Assembly. With their monetary and in-kind investments, the Georgia Reads movement is off to a great start and impacting lives in meaningful ways. We will continue to invite corporate as well as individual contributors in the year ahead to further develop and expand the impact of Georgia Reads to every part of our state.

At our recent meeting, I described the Georgia Council on Literacy as "a task force on a mission." We believe that is one in which everyone in our state can have a meaningful role. It is my hope you will take time to review this report, ask questions, and lean into the next five years with us as we change the trajectory of literacy and turn the page to a brighter future for all Georgians.

Best wishes,

Scott Johnson, Chair

Georgia Council on Literacy – Members

Governor Brian Kemp, Lt. Governor Burt Jones, and Speaker of the House Jon Burns appointed a total of 30 members to the Council as required by SB 211.

Governor Appointments

Dr. Gary Bingham, Professor, GSU, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education

Dr. Stan DeJarnett, State Board of Education Chair

Amy Denty, Director of Literacy, Georgia Department of Education

Scott Johnson, Chair, Georgia Council on Literacy

Kelly McKay, Assistant Superintendent, Rabun County Schools

Dr. Lindee Morgan, Executive Director, Sandra Dunagan Deal Center

Andri Pilgrim, Intervention Lead Teacher and Title 1 Coordinator, Bremen City Schools

Dr. Noris Price, Superintendent, Baldwin County Schools

Katie Seymour, Instructional Coach, Putnam County Charter School System

Julie Walker, State Librarian of Georgia, University System of Georgia Library System

Dr. Stephanie Westhafer, Teacher, West Jackson Elementary School, Jackson County School System

Ellen Wiley, Board of Trustees: Athens Academy, Atlanta Speech School, and Trinity School

Lieutenant Governor Appointments

Katie Bennett, Teacher, Brandywine Elementary School, Forsyth County Schools

Senator Clint Dixon (R – Buford), Chair, Senate Education and Youth Committee

Senator Jason Esteves (D – Atlanta)

Senator Billy Hickman (R – Statesboro), Chair, Senate Higher Education Committee

Jaillene Hunter, Board of Education Member, Marietta City Schools

Dr. Bubba Longgear, Superintendent, Candler County Schools

Christie Moore, President and CEO, Valdosta Chamber of Commerce

Senator Freddie Powell Sims (D – Dawson)

Senator Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia), Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee

Speaker Appointments

Rep. Chris Erwin (R-Homer), Chair, House Education Committee

Rep. Becky Evans (D-Atlanta)

Dr. Yancey Ford, Superintendent, Effingham County Schools

Carlette Fulcher, Teacher, Rincon Elementary, Effingham County Schools

Rep. Matt Hatchett (R-Dublin), Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Rep. Chuck Martin (R-Alpharetta), Chair, House Higher Education Committee

Dr. Whit Myers, Board of Education Member, Screven County Schools

Jeanne Seaver, Literacy Advocate

Rep. Al Williams (D-Midway)

Table of Contents

Chairman’s Message

Council Members

Part 1: Senate Bill 211 Requirements for November 30 Report 1

Review of Literacy Conditions 1

Review of Needs Relating to Literacy 1

Review of Issues and Problems Relating to Literacy 1

Teacher Training 2

Universal Screener Requirements: SB 464 Amendment and SBOE Approved List 2

Tiered Reading Intervention Plan 3

Literacy Coach Programs and Updates 3

Senate Bill 464 Amendment for Creation of the Council’s Executive Committee 3

Upcoming Issues to be Addressed 4

Part 2: Support, Marketing and Communications, and Partnerships 4

Council Support Named on July 1, 2024 4

Marketing and Communications 4

Partnerships Creating Awareness and Support 5

2025 Council Meetings 6

Appendix 7

Introduction

This report will address the specific requirements of SB 211, in Part 1. Part 2 provides notable Council support, marketing, communications, and partnerships established to create statewide awareness and community action.

Part 1: Senate Bill 211 Requirements for November 30 Report

Senate Bill 211 states that the Georgia Council on Literacy (Council) shall:

- Review the **conditions, needs, issues, and problems** related to literacy outcomes and make recommendations for legislation and appropriations to support improving such outcomes; and
- Provide by November 30 of each year a report of such review and recommendations to the Governor, the Office of Planning and Budget, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate, (Georgia Code Section 20-1-44 (a) (2)).

Review of Literacy Conditions

The Council reviews annual data relating to literacy performance. The 2024 Milestones English Language Arts (ELA) assessment for third grade reading reveals that **61% of students were not reading proficiently**. Using the Lexile metric found [here](#), 20% of third grade students were on grade level but needing additional supports and 34% of third grade students were below grade level (needing remediation). For additional analyses, see [State of Literacy in Georgia](#).

Review of Needs Relating to Literacy

While Georgia has many nonprofit and public and private programs, initiatives, and activities to improve reading in all age groups, the Council can be the entity that aligns these efforts. The State Literacy Plan will provide specific goals and measures that all entities can use as the “north star” for funding, activities, programming and other support.

Since June 2024, Council members and stakeholders representing many diverse organizations have participated in facilitated discussions to arrive at the overarching goal for **Georgia to be the number one state for literacy by 2030**. The groups identified three primary tenets that will move the state toward the overarching goal: Every child a reader. Every educator prepared. Every community supported.

Sarah Richards, Georgia Literacy Coach, led the group discussions and created the first iteration of the plan. Timelines for completion and implementation plans are being established. The document is intended to be a “living document” meaning that the Council anticipates updates, changes and self-correction activities, as needed. The Council will review the plan at least quarterly and provide input. See Appendix 1 for the Plan.

Review of Issues and Problems Relating to Literacy

Georgia’s third-grade reading has remained flat for the past decade. In 2023, the legislature passed two bills to address low literacy: SB 211 created the Georgia Council on Literacy and HB 538 created the Early Literacy Act with requirements to implement the science of reading instruction. The requirements of HB 538 are currently implemented on or ahead of HB 538’s deadlines. An overview document outlining the GaDOE’s implementation of the Georgia Early Literacy Act can be accessed [here](#).

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)

The State Board of Education (SBOE) approved an initial list of high-quality instructional materials for kindergarten through third grade reading at the November 2023 meeting. On February 22, 2024, the SBOE approved a second list of high-quality instructional materials for kindergarten through third grade reading. The report from the HQIM Committee can be found [here](#).

The SBOE approved the process to ensure that each public school and school system will annually certify the GaDOE locally approved HQIMs for kindergarten through third grade literacy using GaDOE established data collections, procedures, and verification. The deadline for local boards of education to approve HQIM is December 1, 2024. The certification deadline is December 15, 2024.

Teacher Training

Pursuant to HB 538 and the SBOE's rule, all kindergarten through third grade teachers shall complete approved professional learning in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills by July 1, 2025. GaDOE is providing multiple pathways to satisfy this requirement. Educators may complete the Georgia Literacy Academy through Cox Campus, or another approved training program accredited by the International Dyslexia Association. Alternatively, educators may complete a dyslexia endorsement or reading endorsement recognized by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC).

New Teacher Training

The University System of Georgia has collected plans for implementation of the science of reading in the colleges and universities' schools of education and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) is currently reviewing them. The Georgia Assessment for Certification of Educators (GACE), required by the PSC for teacher certification, is being updated for alignment with developmentally appropriate evidence-based literacy instruction.

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

All teachers in all programs of DECAL should receive training on developmentally appropriate evidence-based literacy instruction. The training should be aligned with DECAL's content standards. DECAL is currently developing standards to meet the July 1, 2025 requirement for training.

Universal Screener Requirement: SB 464 Amendment and SBOE Approved List

One HB 538 requirement is for the SBOE to publish a list of approved universal screeners. In July 2023, the SBOE approved a list of 16 screeners. The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center (Deal Center), at the request of the Council, provided an analysis for these 16 screeners and found that three were not comparable or reliable and others had challenges for consistency. In February 2024, the SBOE removed the lowest ranked screeners from the list and approved 13. For the 2024-2025 school year, schools and school systems were required to select a universal screener from the SBOE approved list of 13.

Senate Bill 464, passed during the 2024 legislative session, included an amendment requiring the SBOE to approve no more than five universal screeners, one of which shall be free to schools and school systems. The Council's executive committee approved the Deal Center's plan to analyze screeners and make a recommendation to the SBOE.

The Deal Center conducted a Request for Information (RFI) from August 28 to October 8, 2024. Sixteen vendors responded to the RFI. A task force of experts evaluated each screener, and on October 29, four screeners were selected. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement conducted a request for pricing, and from that request, one screener will be provided free to school systems. The Deal Center's report of the selected screeners will be considered by the SBOE on December 12, 2024; and the free screener will be identified in January 2025. Schools will be required to implement a vetted high-quality screener during the 2024-25 school year. See [Deal Center Analysis and Report on Screeners](#).

Tiered Reading Intervention Plans

As outlined in the Early Literacy Act, students who exhibit a significant reading deficiency as measured on the universal reading screener must be provided with a tiered intervention plan. Schools began implementation of these plans beginning in August 2024. The GaDOE provided both templates and sample parent letters to school systems to ensure that they have the resources needed to create an individualized plan and inform parents. These plans may be incorporated into each school's multi-tiered system of support.

Literacy Coach Programs and Updates

The FY 2025 budget included regional literacy coaches and stipends for teacher leads in each kindergarten through third grade elementary school. The Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) were identified as the organization to hire, train, and deploy the regional coaches.

FY 2025 budget included \$6,111,300 for regional literacy coaches. The budget document states:

Provide funds to Regional Education Service Agencies for: regional literacy coaches with at least one at each RESA (\$4,000,000); supplements for 950 school literacy leads upon the completion of an accredited training model (\$1,022,675); and training for local coaches, teachers, and supplemental training for ESOL teachers, prioritizing training to schools identified by the RESA as needing additional literacy intervention (\$1,088,625). Regional Education Service Agencies shall provide data to the Department of Education for an annual report to the Office of Planning and Budget and House and Senate budget offices, regarding the number of teachers and coaches trained, the type of training completed, and the schools supported by the trained professionals. Reports shall be provided annually on August 1, beginning August 1, 2024. See Appendix 2 for the report.

Governor Brian Kemp's Budget Instructions for FY 2025 relating to the RESA literacy coach funding states:

In administering the Special Project, the Department shall also ensure that RESAs' literacy initiatives funded through this program are aligned with the recommendations of the Georgia Literacy Council to maintain consistency statewide in addressing student literacy needs.

The most recent RESA [Literacy Coach Update](#) was presented at the Council's November 19, 2024 meeting.

The GaDOE provided \$6 Million in federal funds to have 60 literacy coaches in the lowest performing schools. See Appendix 3 for an update.

Senate Bill 464 Amendment for Creation of the Council's Executive Committee

Legislative members of the Council became aware that business decisions could not be made quickly with all 30 members. To address this problem, SB 464 was amended to require the selection of a five-member executive committee from the Council to act contemporaneously as issues arise. Members of the committee were selected by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House and include Scott Johnson, Council Chair; Stan DeJarnett, State Board of Education Chair; Andri Pilgrim; Sen. Billy Hickman; and Rep. Chris Erwin. See Appendix 4 for the executive committee minutes.

Upcoming Issues to be Addressed

The Council's Working Groups presented their recommendations to the Council on November 19, 2024. The GaDOE and RESAs provided updates on the literacy coach programs at this meeting. The Council's executive committee met to formally determine budget and legislative recommendations that should be considered during the 2025 legislative session. See Appendix 5 for November 26 minutes.

Part 2: Support, Marketing and Communications, and Partnerships

Council Support Named on July 1, 2024

Georgia Literacy Coach

In July, Sarah Richards replaced Miranda Williams in the role of Georgia's Literacy Coach. Sarah transitioned into this role with over 20 years of prior experience in the field of education. In her previous role at the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, Sarah served as a Statewide Teacher Coach for the Governor's School Leadership Academy. Over her career, Sarah held roles as a classroom teacher, literacy master teacher leader, and elementary instructional administrator. She has an M.Ed. in Education Administration and Policy from the University of Georgia and is a certified teacher and school leader. Additionally, she holds a reading endorsement and has been trained in Orton Gillingham and through the Rollins Center/Cox Campus. Sarah is dedicated to advancing literacy outcomes to build a brighter future for all of Georgia's children.

Georgia Reads Coach

Also in July, author and Super Bowl Champion Malcolm Mitchell was named the Georgia Reads Coach. Despite his football success with the University of Georgia and the New England Patriots, Malcolm's greatest achievement is his love of reading. In 2016, he founded the Share the Magic Foundation to transform children's lives through literacy.

Georgia Council on Literacy

Council member Malcolm Mitchell resigned on July 1, 2024, to become the Georgia Reads Coach. Lt. Governor Burt Jones appointed Christie Moore, CEO from the Valdosta Chamber of Commerce, to succeed him. Representative Becky Evans will conclude her term on December 31, 2024. A new member will be appointed by Speaker Jon Burns in January.

Marketing and Communications

Georgia Reads Movement

Georgia Reads, a statewide initiative dedicated to transforming literacy outcomes, launched at the Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) annual conference in Savannah on June 24, 2024. The campaign is committed to:

- Raising awareness of the urgent need to improve reading skills in all age groups;
- Promoting engaging activities that increase literacy rates throughout the state; and
- Recognizing and celebrating the vital contributions of community partnerships working to build a more literate Georgia.

Georgia Reads Day, September 30, 2024

Governor Kemp's [Proclamation](#) outlines the reasons Georgians should be interested in improving literacy and recognizes September 30, 2024 as Georgia Reads Day.

With the help of Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Georgia Reads Day Reading Rally was livestreamed to families, schools and libraries across Georgia. Over 300 Atlanta Public Schools students attended in person at the College Football Hall of Fame. Georgia Reads Coach Malcolm Mitchell led a press

conference and a Reading Rally where copies of his book, *My Very Favorite Book in the Whole Wide World*, were given to students in attendance. Georgia Public Broadcasting reported that approximately 112,000 students across Georgia participated in the livestreamed event. Georgia Reads Day partners who contributed to this event included Senator and Mrs. Billy Hickman, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Georgia Power Company, and the Outdoor Advertising Association of Georgia. See [agenda](#) and [press release](#).

Georgia Reads Website

On September 30, 2024, the Georgia Reads website was launched. This site hosts literacy resources, data, grant and award opportunities, events, Council meeting dates, minutes, presentations, and videos. See www.georgiareads.org.

Georgia Reads Community Awards

The Council’s Community Working Group sets goals for community partnerships to be established across the state. This group created an [application](#) for the Georgia Reads Community Award. Applications became available September 30 and are currently being collected through December 3, 2024. The Georgia Reads Community Award will recognize community partnerships that have made progress with literacy in the past three to five years. Up to 10 communities will be recognized as Georgia Reads Communities in February 2025 and will receive \$25,000 and a ceremony at the State Capitol.

Digital Billboards for Awareness

Outdoor Advertising Association of Georgia provided pro bono [billboard](#) space for Georgia Reads messages.

Georgia General Assembly Videos to Create Awareness

The House and Senate Press Offices created various videos to raise awareness about Georgia Reads and the PEACH Education Tax Credit that has a restricted fund to support the Georgia Council on Literacy.

- Senate [videos](#)
- Representative [videos](#)
- Dayle Burns PEACH Education Tax Credit [video 1](#)
- Dayle Burns PEACH Education Tax Credit [video 2](#)

Partnerships Creating Awareness and Support

Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)

In addition to supporting the activities of Georgia Reads Day, GMA invited Chairman Scott Johnson or his designee to attend all GMA regional meetings to highlight the importance of state literacy efforts, the mayors’ reading initiatives, the Georgia Reads Community Awards and all activities of the Council. See Appendix 6 for GMA meetings.

Share the Magic Foundation

Georgia Reads Coach Malcolm Mitchell and his literacy foundation, Share the Magic, have provided excellent partnership opportunities for Georgia Reads. Already well known throughout our state and country, the Foundation’s mission is to inspire students to read for a better future, empower educators with impactful in-school programs and amplify the importance of book ownership.

Mitchell's READBowl began November 4, 2024. PreK (Grades 3-5), elementary, middle, and high school teams will participate in the football championship style reading competition starting January 13, 2025, through Super Bowl Sunday, February 9, 2025. Georgia classrooms with the highest average reading minutes will win state recognition and a visit to the State Capitol in February 2025.

2024 Book Drive

Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones’s 2024 book drive brought in more than 3,800 books for students and adult learners, which was over 1,000 more than last year. Partnering with the Georgia Public Library Service, the books were donated to Ferst Readers and Books for Keeps, Georgia literacy nonprofit organizations.

Peach Education Tax Credit

The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (for the Council) entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Georgia Foundation for Public Education, a 501(c)(3) organization, to have a restricted fund dedicated to supporting the Georgia Council on Literacy. Donors to the fund can receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit through the [Peach Education Tax Credit](#) for donations to the Foundation. Dayle Burns and Malcolm Mitchell explain [how it works](#). For information about donating, visit the [Georgia Foundation for Public Education](#).

The Council is seeking private dollars to match public funding to augment the Georgia Reads Community Award and to provide additional resources for teacher and leader literacy training.

2025 Council Meetings

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| • January 7, 2025 | Virtual Meeting |
| • April 15, 2025 | Valdosta State University |
| • July 22, 2025 | Dalton State College |
| • November 18, 2025 | University of West Georgia |

Appendix

Part 1

Appendix 1 – [Georgia Literacy Plan](#)

Appendix 2 – [RESA Network Annual Literacy Report to the Georgia Department of Education \(GaDOE\) - August 2024](#)

Appendix 3 – [GaDOE Literacy Coach Report](#)

Appendix 4 – [Literacy Council Executive Committee Minutes - June 7, 2024](#)

Appendix 5 – [Literacy Council Executive Committee Minutes - November 26, 2024](#)

Part 2

Appendix 6 – Georgia Municipal Association Regional Meetings

2	9/10/2024	Helen
9	9/24/2024	Mt. Vernon
4	9/25/2024	Warm Springs
7	10/1/2024	Madison
3	10/2/2024	GMA Atlanta
6	10/3/2024	Byron
12	10/9/2024	Riceboro
10	10/22/2024	Camilla
11	10/23/2024	Valdosta
1	10/29/2024	Adairsville
8	10/30/2024	Reynolds
5	11/14/2024	Thomson

Additional Important Documents

- [July 2024 Newsletter - Georgia Council on Literacy's Inaugural Year in Review](#)
- [Meeting minutes](#) and presentations can be found at www.georgiareads.org
- [Council Report to SBOE - October 31, 2024](#)