

OPINION

To tackle the literacy crisis, we must all join the team



(From left) Will, Preston and Gabby Flournoy watch as former NFL player and Georgia Bulldogs star Malcolm Mitchell signs their copies of his book, "The Magician's Hat." (Alexis Stevens/AJC)

By Sarah Richards and Malcolm Mitchell

3 hours ago



Education at the federal level has recently been [in limbo](#), but Georgia is prioritizing student learning. During a recent joint meeting of the Education committees for the Georgia House and Senate, they named literacy as one of their top priorities.

We fully support a focus on literacy for the future of our children and our state. Enhancing [literacy](#) is the game changer that our state and our communities need for future success.



Reading is one of the most powerful tools a person can possess. Research indicates that literacy affects lives and predicts future academic and career success.

If you are reading this article now, you might take for granted that you have mastered the ability to read effortlessly. You may not even recognize that the complex processes your brain employs to derive meaning from the letters on this page is a learned skill.

For many, reading does not come naturally and can be quite challenging. Reading is akin to a sport: It must be systematically taught, developed and practiced to achieve success.

Any professional athlete will tell you that improving in a sport takes time, focus and dedication. Reading is no different. Just as athletes need proper equipment and training, our students require the right support and instruction to achieve proficiency and beyond.

Across Georgia, our student-athletes excel because their schools and coaches invest in their development. Reading may not be a sport, but it deserves the same level of commitment. Literacy is what builds champions and truly helps our children reach their future goals.



Credit: Natrice Miller/AJC

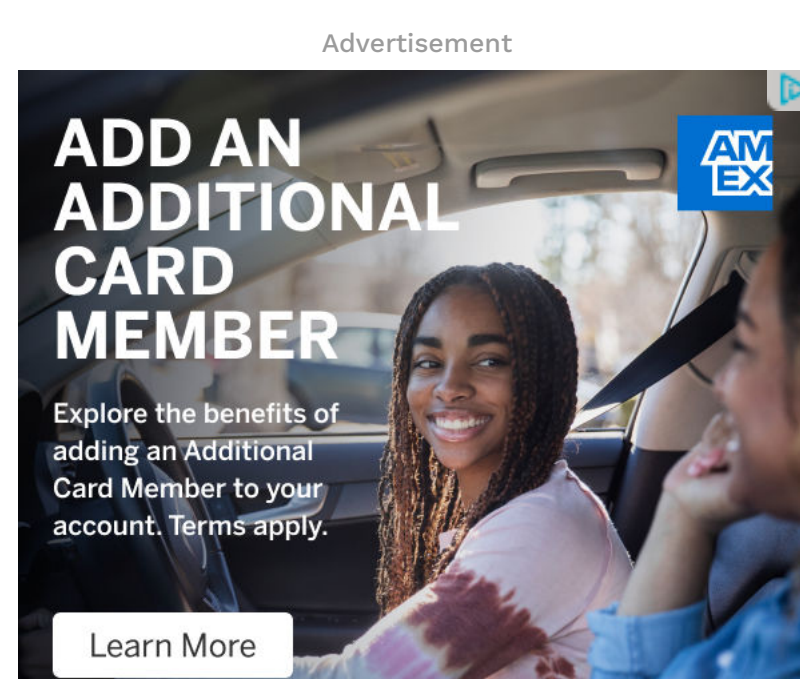
Former UGA football star Malcolm Mitchell reads his new book, "A Magnificent Field Trip to the Governor's Mansion," to pre-K students from Heards Ferry Elementary at the Governor's Mansion on May 8, 2024. Natrice Miller/AJC 2024

Literacy rates have been an ongoing challenge for quite some time, not only in Georgia but across the nation.

While Georgia's 2024 [National Assessment of Educational Progress scores](#) aligned with national averages, only 30% of fourth grade students and 31% of eighth grade students scored at or above reading proficiency. In 2023, a Deloitte study revealed that [1 in 10 adults in Georgia](#) had low literacy rates.

This issue affects all of us and demands a genuine team effort for continued improvement. So why now? What will truly create lasting change for our students and citizens?

As a state, we have gained momentum in the right direction.



Since implementing the [Early Literacy Act](#), our educators have dedicated countless hours to professional learning in the science of reading. Our teachers and school leaders are committed to this work and are making significant progress.

We urge our state leaders to continue striving toward the goal of funding free literacy screeners, literacy coaches and the necessary support for our schools to help all students become proficient readers.



Credit: Contributor

Sarah Richards is the Georgia literacy coach for Georgia Reads. Courtesy photo.

Our Georgia Council on Literacy has set the lofty goal of making Georgia the nation's No. 1 state for literacy. The council's vision is that every child is a reader, every educator is prepared and every community is supported.

We are on our way.

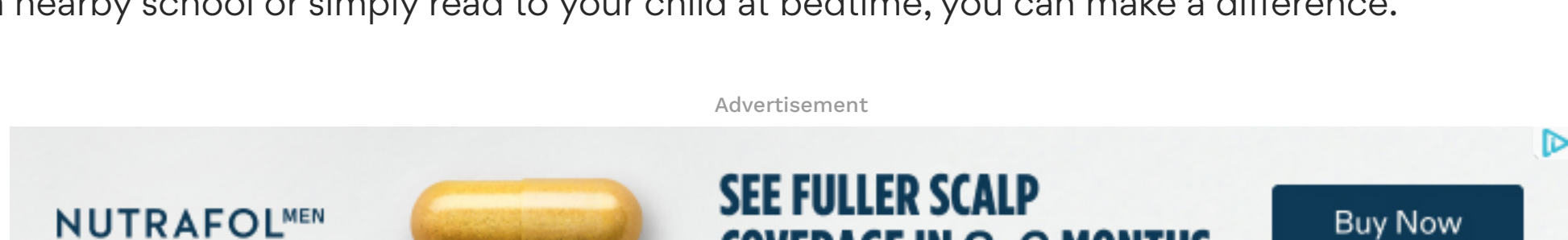
We are inspired by the way Georgia leaders are working across agencies, county lines and party lines to join as one team for our kids and the future of our state.

Change under the Gold Dome is vital, but true potential for transformation starts at home.

Research shows that reading begins at birth and requires foundational language and literacy skills to develop. In support of families statewide, we are proud to announce that the [Georgia Reads initiative](#) has awarded \$25,000 to [10 communities](#) to boost their local literacy efforts.

We plan to visit each of these Georgia Reads communities to celebrate their exceptional work. However, these 10 are just the starting lineup. Every community in Georgia must participate in enhancing literacy.

We invite you to join our Georgia Reads team. Whether you support your local library, tutor at a nearby school or simply read to your child at bedtime, you can make a difference.



Our educators are tackling the issue, our leaders are taking action and we can't stay on the sidelines any longer. The time is now to unite in support of our children and to turn the page toward a brighter future.

A win for literacy is a win for Georgia.

Sarah Richards is the Georgia literacy coach for Georgia Reads. Malcolm Mitchell is an author, former Georgia Bulldogs running back, Super Bowl champion and the Georgia Reads coach.

About the Authors

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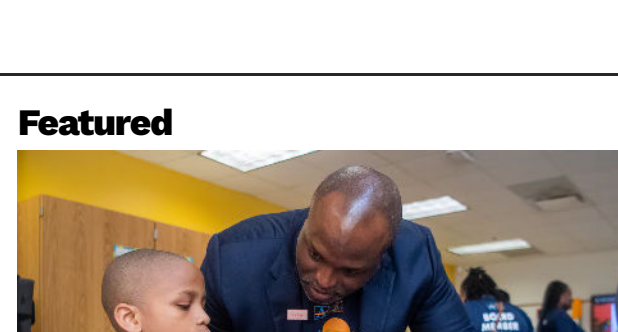


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