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'We mean business': WDE announces Language and Literacy Initiative

Ivy Secret Wyoming Tribune Eagle
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From left, Annie McGlothlin, Chandel Pine, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Megan Degenfelder, Kari Roden, Claudia Ladd and Megan Hesser for a photo at the announcement of the Wyoming Department of Education's new statewide Language and Literacy Initiative in the auditorium inside the Capitol extension on Wednesday. McGlothlin, Roden, Chandel and Hesser represent WYO Right to Read, one of the partners in the initiative.

CHEYENNE — The Wyoming Department of Education announced a statewide Language and Literacy Initiative on Wednesday, aimed at addressing ongoing challenges students are facing when it comes to reading and writing.

Though Wyoming has seen notable improvements in English Language Arts testing proficiencies in the past year, returning to pre-pandemic numbers, several districts are still struggling, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Megan Degenfelder said during a news conference announcing the initiative.



“There remain children that are under-identified or not identified at all for their reading difficulties and go unserved,” Degenfelder said. “Wyoming does not settle for good; we strive for great. And so, no matter the progress we have seen, we still have much, much work to do.”

Wyoming State Superintendent of Public Instruction Megan Degenfelder announces a statewide Language and Literacy Initiative in the auditorium inside the Capitol extension on Wednesday. Partners include: Wyoming Legislature's Joint Education Committee, the Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board, the University of Wyoming College of Education, the University of Wyoming Literacy Research Center and Clinic, University of Wyoming Division of Communication Disorders-Speech Language

Pathology, University of Wyoming Early Childhood
Education, the Wyoming Community College
Commission, WYO Right to Read and Cox Campus.
Milo Gladstein/Wyoming Tribune Eagle



The initiative partners WDE with the state Legislature’s Joint Education Committee, the Wyoming Community College Commission, WYO Right to Read, Cox Campus and several entities at the University of Wyoming, to address the many facets impacting student literacy.

“Not one entity, not one group, not one politician, not one person can move the needle fully on literacy,” Degenfelder said. “It takes us all.”

Legislation

A major facet of this initiative is ensuring state statute supports the efforts of the new coalition, Degenfelder said.

Education Committee co-Chairwoman Sen. Wendy Shuler, R-Evanston, noted that though last year legislators worked on draft legislation to address literacy, they “just didn’t have it right.” She acknowledged that the state has room to improve and encouraged attendees to share their expertise with the committee in November.



Sen. Wendy Schuler, R-Evanston, announces a statewide Language and Literacy Initiative in the auditorium inside the Capitol extension on Wednesday. Partners include: Wyoming Legislature's Joint Education Committee, the Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board, the University of Wyoming College of Education, the University of Wyoming Literacy Research Center and Clinic, University of Wyoming Division of Communication Disorders-Speech Language Pathology, University of Wyoming Early Childhood Education, the Wyoming Community College Commission, WYO Right to Read and Cox Campus.on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2025.

Milo Gladstein/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

The committee is working on a draft bill that would implement new reporting requirements, evidence-based reading assessments, intervention programs and professional development in evidence-based literacy instruction for educators.

“I hope some of you here in the room will come and testify and give us your input and your ideas about how we can do a better job with whatever draft legislation we come up with,” Schuler said. “Because we want to get it right.”

Schuler and Degenfelder are not the only partners invested in legislation. WYO Right to Read, a local nonprofit dedicated to serving children with dyslexia and related reading difficulties, has played a major role in developing draft legislation to present to the committee.

“Today’s announcement represents more than a new initiative,” WYO Right to Read board member Kari Roden said Wednesday. “It is a promise, a promise that reading is a right in Wyoming and not a privilege.”

WYO Right to Read has assisted in drafting the legislation that the committee will work on in November. Their draft is intended to ensure that students receive structured and evidence-based literacy instruction, with provisions to better accommodate students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

“For too long, too many children have struggled in silence, negatively affecting their self-esteem and health, not because they lack potential, but because they lacked access to evidence-based instruction,” Roden said.

These initiatives also provide for grant support, certifications and training for teachers, as they learn how to implement these new teaching strategies.

“It empowers our teachers with the science of reading and structural literacy training, ensuring every student, including those with dyslexia and other language-based difficulties, has the opportunity to thrive,” Roden said.

When asked where the initiative stands should the Legislature not pass the supporting bills, Degenfelder said that the coalition will continue to work within existing legislation.

“We’ll make sure that these initiatives move further,” Degenfelder said. “But I feel very confident in our partners in the Legislature recognizing the importance of this effort.”

Additional resources

The partnerships aren’t only geared toward legislative change. Partners in this initiative are also supporting the professional development of current teachers.

The department has partnered with Cox Campus to provide free professional development through courses, and with the John P. Ellbogen Foundation to provide a language and literacy fellowship.

The Ellbogen Foundation pledged \$16,500 to provide the fellowship for up to 100 teachers, according to Degenfelder.

Additionally, the WDE recently received a \$24,453,007 Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant, to be distributed over the next five years from the U.S. Department of Education.

At least 95% of funds from the grant are required to be subgranted directly to districts and early childhood programs, with allocations across birth through kindergarten entry, grades K-5 and grades 6-12.

Current and future educators will also have access to educational programs and certificates through the University of Wyoming and the Professional Teaching Standards Board.

Measuring success

Nationwide, reading proficiency decreased from 2022 to 2024, according to the Nation's Report Card. Those literacy rates are essential, as reading is directly linked to academic and career success, Degenfelder said.

Children who can't read at grade level by third grade are less likely to graduate high school, and are more likely to struggle in their careers and personal lives, but literacy efforts are important after that point, as well.

Though Wyoming fourth-graders rank third in proficiency nationwide, the state's eighth-graders only rank 16th. The average also doesn't well represent the districts that are struggling with single-digit proficiency rates, Degenfelder said.

The success of the initiative, with its many lofty goals and moving parts, will largely be monitored through future state test scores.

“We’re making sure in our effort, particularly with our federal grant, we can do a better job of making sure that we’re measuring those outcomes,” Degenfelder said.

That doesn’t just mean accepting a higher average as success, Degenfelder said. The WDE is looking at where struggling schools are improving, where they may need more support and comparing that to well-performing districts.

“This is not just another initiative,” Degenfelder said. “This is a promise, we are coming together, and we mean business when it comes to literacy for the children in the state of Wyoming.”

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