

Advocates and education officials push for new state literacy standards

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Dyslexia and reading advocates are helping to draft a bill that would give Wyoming a dedicated literacy department that serves and monitors school districts across the state.

The group Wyo Right to Read is working with the Department of Education (WDE) and other stakeholders to draft a bill that would establish a literacy division within WDE. [The draft bill](#) also aims "to establish evidence-based literacy instruction, intervention programs, and accountability measures to ensure all students receive the support they need to become proficient readers," according to a news release from Wyo Right to Read.

Gay Wilson, a retired reading specialist affiliated with the advocacy group, [testified to lawmakers on the Legislature's Education Committee earlier this month](#).

"When a student graduates reading at a second grade level, we are not handing them a diploma. We are handing them a lifetime of barriers," she said. "This is not just an educational issue. It's a workforce issue, a public health issue and a general generational equity issue."

Rep. Julie Jarvis (R-Casper) is not a member of the Education Committee, but she testified for the bill as a trained literacy expert with a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

She told her fellow lawmakers that teachers typically specialize in phonics, vocabulary or another "strand" of reading instruction.

"This is phenomenal for us, but nobody really takes this information at the post-secondary level and puts it all together in teacher training programs," Jarvis said. "Our teachers are coming to us with expertise in these strands, in different areas, depending on where they graduated from."

The bill calls for professional development to train teachers in all strands, in order to offer a more comprehensive evidence-based reading program.

The Education Committee did not take a vote on [the version of the bill](#) presented during its most recent meeting. Instead, the committee directed Jarvis and the advocates, as well as representatives from WDE and the University of Wyoming, to collaborate as a working group on an updated draft.

The group plans to return the draft legislation to the committee at its next meeting on Nov. 13-14.