

Wilson: September is Literacy Awareness Month: Wyoming must lead the way

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September is National Literacy Month, a time to reflect on the importance and impact of literacy in our day-to-day lives. According to ProLiteracy, in the U.S., approximately 48 million adults cannot read above a third-grade level. That staggering number reminds us that literacy is not just an educational issue — it’s a matter of equity, opportunity and human dignity. Across the country, organizations aligned with the Science of Reading are raising their voices. The International Literacy Association reminds us that “literacy transforms lives,” while Planet Word Museum calls reading “a fundamental human right that opens doors and builds foundations for a lifetime of learning.” These statements aren’t just inspiring — they’re a call to action. (visit planetwordmuseum.org/national-literacy-month/ for more resources).

Here in Wyoming, WYO Right to Read proudly joins this national movement by recognizing September as Literacy Awareness Month. Our mission is clear: to ensure that every student receives instruction grounded in the Science of Reading, supported by early screening, structured literacy and teacher training. We believe that literacy equity is not optional — it’s essential.

One of the most powerful things families can do is read with their child every day, even if it’s for 10 to 15 minutes. This simple act builds vocabulary, strengthens oral language skills, and lays the foundation for comprehension and critical thinking. Parents and caregivers should also be aware of early red flags that a child may struggle with learning to read. These can include difficulty learning colors, shapes, letter names and numbers; trouble rhyming; confusion with left and right; trouble tying shoes; speech delays or unclear speech; mixing up opposites; using the wrong words; forgetting the word they want to say; and a family history of reading struggles or dyslexia. Recognizing these signs early allows for timely intervention, which can make all the difference in a child’s reading journey.

Your local library is another powerful ally in building literacy. Visiting together not only gives children access to a wide range of books, but also creates opportunities for shared experiences. After reading, take time to talk about the stories — ask questions, discuss favorite parts and important words, and connect the themes to your child’s own life. These conversations deepen comprehension, strengthen relationships, and make reading a joyful, shared adventure.

This month, we invite families, educators and community leaders to explore what evidence-based literacy looks like and why it matters. Whether you’re a parent wondering how to support your child’s reading journey or a policymaker shaping the future of education, the time to act is now!

WYO Right to Read offers a growing library of resources, including legislative briefs, advocacy toolkits and creative outreach materials. Visit WyoRightToRead.org to learn more, get involved, and help us build a future where every Wyoming student can read with confidence and joy.

Let’s make September more than a celebration—let’s make it a turning point. Wyoming has the heart, the grit, and the vision to lead the nation in literacy equity. Together, we can turn awareness into action. After all, learning to read is a fundamental right — not a privilege!

Gay Wilson, a retired educator and former reading intervention specialist, serves on the boards of WYO Right to Read and The Reading League Wyoming, and advocates for literacy policy reform, dyslexia awareness and educational equity.