

Only 37% of high
school graduates are
proficient readers.

Reading Is
Fundamental
NATIONAL READING
COALITION 2018

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BRT Report: Why Reading Matters and
What to Do About It, December 2016



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This fall, at the first annual National Reading Coalition, Reading Is Fundamental gathered leaders from business, education, non-profit, and government to address the nation's literacy crisis and its impact on the workforce. We made the time for critical conversations, valuable learning, and calls to action so we might turn the tide towards a fully literate society. From case study presentations, to moderated panels, to personal stories of the lifesaving impact of reading, the focus stayed true to our shared mission.

The National Reading Coalition was the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing conversation that spurs action and garners results. Our commitment is to bring stakeholders together to ensure that every child has the opportunity to become a proficient reader. Literacy for all can only be attained with a collective effort at every level and in every sector. Participants of the National Reading Coalition are on board to continue the successful work that has already been done and expand the efforts to bring solutions to scale for maximum impact.

This report shares the findings of our first convening so that you can become an active member of this coalition, dedicated to taking steps to be part of the solution to this crisis. You'll find a brief summary of the state of literacy in the U.S. today and key recommendations that emerged from our meeting.

In the coming year, we invite you to stay connected with RIF. We're looking forward to supporting you as you develop and execute your plans. We hope you'll look ahead to 2019 and imagine yourself delivering a case study or participating on a panel to discuss your own success and the lessons learned from it. And, in the true spirit of coalition-building, we encourage you to think about someone you'd like to invite to the 2019 National Reading Coalition, as we bring more organizations into this critical work.

Thank you for your dedication to literacy development for all. We know your efforts will advance learning, strengthen our nation's workforce, and enhance lives for generations to come.



Alicia Levi

President & CEO | Reading Is Fundamental



The Need for a National Reading Coalition

The United States is facing a literacy crisis of epic proportions.

- Twenty-five million children cannot read proficiently.¹
- Only 37 percent of fourth graders were proficient in reading.²
- Only 27 percent of high school students met college readiness benchmarks in all four subjects: English, reading, math and science.³
- 93 percent of CEOs rated reading and writing as very or somewhat important for current job openings in their companies.⁴

Organizations like Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) have been delivering reading programs and resources for decades and the impacts on individual lives have been profound (as you'll see when you read about our former RIF Kid in this report), but the improvements are not happening fast enough to keep up with the pace of change. According to a recent Business Roundtable report, *Why Reading Matters and What To Do About It*, although more fourth graders were reading proficiently in 2015 than in 2005 – as measured by the NAEP assessment – at the current rate of progress “it would take nearly 30 years before even half of American fourth graders could read at a proficient level.” We need to do more to prepare a skilled and productive workforce.

“*Literacy is the gateway to quality of life and pathway to careers.*”

— Dane Linn
Business Roundtable

The business sector needs to be involved in education if we are to help create a strong and stable workforce. To meet the needs of learners and change the shape of the workforce, we need all hands on deck. We must look to organizations that may not have education at the core of their business but still understand that a literate workforce is foundational to success.

The National Reading Coalition was convened by RIF in September 2018 to launch a response to the literacy crisis in the United States and its effect on the national workforce. Gathering representatives from all sectors, the event marked the beginning of a focused, active, and collaborative effort to eradicate illiteracy. Recognizing that widespread and meaningful efforts are already being undertaken to address this crisis, RIF is committed to bringing these many stakeholders together and to supporting them as they address this issue.

Sources:

1. Based on an analysis of NAEP test scores. | 2. NAEP, 2018
3. ACT, 2017 | 4. Business Roundtable, 2016

Education is widely recognized as an area of need for investment. Organizations of all sizes want to help students as they develop into lifelong learners and contributing members of society. So often, though, these organizations aren't sure how to contribute. What is more effective: a national program or a local program? Is money or time more helpful? Is there a particular grade level at which literacy support has the biggest impact? The National Reading Coalition's aim is to help organizations answer these questions and many others in order to gather up the forces that can ensure a qualified, literate workforce.

The National Reading Coalition agenda seeks to foster collaboration among those who are dedicated to solving this crisis. The inaugural event included speakers with national- and state-level lenses, case study presentations from organizations who have found success, and panels of influencers who are shining lights on strategies and insights that will truly make a difference.

The paradox that we work within is that no one can tackle this crisis alone, but it will take individual action to achieve literacy for all and prepare this generation for college and career readiness.

“Instead of being overwhelmed by the statistics, what if we looked at it as over a million opportunities to have an impact? Not why literacy but where to start?”

— **Denine Torr**
Dollar General

“Don't hitch your program to one person. Let the larger community own the program. Come up with a specific initiative, find the hook, and embed it.”

— **Beth Caron**
National Governors
Association

Key Coalition Findings

1. Lifelong Literacy Requires Support at Every Stage
2. Successful Literacy Initiatives Include Access to Resources
3. National Organizations Provide Program Support
4. Statewide Programs Offer Important Benefits
5. Partnerships Increase Impact

Lifelong Literacy Requires Support at Every Stage

Early literacy is critical and many programs focus on the years from birth through pre-K to help children develop the skills that lead to success. Another marker for measurement is third grade where it's been shown that students move from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn. If students haven't developed the skills that allow for that transition by third grade, they're likely to start, and continue, to fall behind. In middle and high school, the strengthening of literacy is foundational to learning and graduation rates. And, finally, many adults need literacy support to achieve their potential beyond formal schooling. The successful programs discussed at the coalition meeting addressed all these life stages.

- **Early childhood and elementary school:** Keynote speaker Dane Linn, Vice President at the Business Roundtable, offered examples of leaders like Jim Goodnight, CEO of SAS, who are making a difference. Goodnight has spearheaded the effort to build a comprehensive system for students from birth to age 8 in North Carolina and has brought a group of CEOs together to help kids in the state through programs like Read to Achieve. An interagency council is able to apply pressure to the state legislature to bring solutions like expanded access to high-quality pre-K, data collection and connection, and accountability and alignment of school programs.
- **Middle and high school:** Organizations like America's Promise Alliance (APA) are developing programming for communities to address the crisis at a local level. Tanya Tucker, Chief of Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships at America's Promise Alliance, provided insight into APA's Grad Nation, which focuses on increasing the high school graduation rate and sees graduation as a milestone rather than an end goal. The program brings together the whole community—parents, local business, friends, and neighbors—to help kids see why a high school education is relevant and support them as they make it to and through the milestone.

Literacy is ongoing, throughout life. Older people may be more comfortable using printed material, but they have a responsibility to model using digital materials.

— Susanne Thompson
Discovery Education

- **Adults:** The Dollar General Literacy Foundation, overseen by Denine Torr, Senior Director of Community Initiatives, has awarded over \$160M toward literacy and is proud of taking care of people “from the twinkle to the wrinkle.” The foundation supports adults as they earn their high school diplomas later in life. Finish Your Diploma is a program that coordinates teachers, families, friends, donors, and information to help adults access the resources that can help strengthen literacy. One simple solution, based on discussions with the community, was to create a directory of literacy programs and build awareness of the resource, so people know where to go when they are ready to start.
- **Support for caregivers:** One group that is critical to the success of students is the people who take care of and teach them. Almost all the organizations involved in literacy development now support educators and caregivers, too. The Library of Congress, Discovery Education, Scholastic, RIF, and more have both printed and digital materials to help educators and caregivers help kids. Ensuring that educators have access to professional development and caregivers are aware of available resources is one way organizations can create programs with significant reach.

Successful Literacy Initiatives Include Access to Resources

No matter the scope, from the school down the street to a national campaign, one thing every good literacy program needs is equal and easy access to high-quality resources. Consider partnering with a national organization to get books and other literacy materials into the hands and onto the screens of your readers.

- Reading Is Fundamental fulfills its commitment to a literate America through programs like *Books for Ownership*, which provides new books for kids, and *Literacy Central*, an online resource for free digital resources tied to children’s book titles.
- The Library of Congress provides thousands of digital materials, including primary source resources and paired curricula, and also provides grants for local programs in communities across the country. It puts much of its programming on a YouTube channel and is able to bring authors into classrooms via livestream.
- Discovery Education and other education-based businesses offer digital resources for students, teachers, and parents, some at no cost and others as district- or school-based subscription services.

“*The Library of Congress has been able to open up the treasure chest through technology. Right now, 38 million objects have been digitized.*”

— Lee Ann Potter
Library of Congress

National Organizations Provide Program Support

The 25 million children who can't read proficiently means 25 million people who will enter the workforce lacking the skills they need to succeed. And these future workers aren't concentrated in particular geographical areas. They're in every community, from urban to suburban to rural, in every state and every city. A national crisis has spurred national efforts to address it and there are many organizations that have created scalable resources and programs that are available to local groups.

- Becky Zalesnik, Director of Innovative Programs in the Sheldon Independent School District, enrolled a number of national organizations to help her rebuild after Hurricane Harvey. State Farm, the NBA, RIF, and the whole community pitched in to make the library the center of learning after the entire school and its book collections were damaged. They created a new maker space, a STEM area, and a comfortable and exciting library that the kids love.
- Scholastic has been able to support local initiatives like the one in Massachusetts described by Jessie Lyons, Vice President, Government Relations & Strategic Partnerships. In a district with a 50% proficiency in reading in third grade, they worked with the mayor to galvanize the school district, community organizations, and parents and citizens to design a program to infuse literacy into the community. The program used the municipal water bill to convey information about reading, and canvassing and door knocking to promote library cards and book distributions.

Statewide Programs Offer Important Benefits

In many cases, state-specific regulations or programs offer opportunities to maximize impact. Whether engaging state leadership to prioritize literacy, taking advantage of tax credits, or tailoring national programs to state needs, organizations should consider targeting efforts within the state.

- Beth Caron, Program Director for Early Care and Education at the National Governors Association, discussed the slew of new governors poised to take office and the opportunity to help them identify literacy as a key part of their agendas. She added that it's critical to create solutions that don't rely on a particular leader to serve as the champion, rather we should create a policy infrastructure that relies on community involvement and investment.

If we collaborate and partner and leverage what we know, we can really go to scale.

— Guy Vickers
PVH Corp.

- Joe Swope, Manager, Media Relations & Special Projects at UGI, highlighted particular benefits available to organizations in specific states. In Pennsylvania, for example, the education improvement tax credit has allowed UGI to make allocations to literacy programs. Their efforts have actually expanded as federal funding has decreased as a result of state programs. And, state-based groups, like the CEOs who came together in North Carolina, can have big impact on the state level.
- Courtney Kissel, Director of Programs & Partnerships at the National PTA, reminded the coalition that the national PTA is a governing organization for local PTAs and provides resources across the country, but it is particularly focused on developing leadership at the state level. In recognition of the state-specific needs, the organization believes state-level impacts are best achieved through state-level leadership and action.

Partnerships Increase Impact

Organizations committed to addressing the literacy crisis can maximize their efforts by partnering with like-minded groups and tapping into existing, proven programs. They can also increase impact by having local offices or stores participate in a national program coordinated within the company. Partnerships can be internal, too: involving employees in the entire process, from planning to execution, and pairing departments or divisions for a more cohesive program.

- Pitney Bowes has a strong focus on literacy and education and is committed to making an impact in the communities where their business operates. Kathleen Ryan Mufson, President of the Pitney Bowes Foundation, makes sure the company partners with literacy organizations of all sizes to maximize reach. On a local level, their employee volunteers serve on nonprofit boards, provide skilled support in

There really is no silver bullet. It's complex and takes all of us working together in lots of different ways. Collaboration across sectors is key.

— Tanya Tucker
America's Promise Alliance

We must solve this problem at scale. Stop boutique solutions. We must link small community efforts to larger efforts by forming partnerships.

— Dane Linn
Business Roundtable

marketing and data analysis, and read to children. They also participate in RIF programs, partner with ProLiteracy to help adults develop literacy, and work with the Success for All Foundation to provide research-proven programs for students from all backgrounds. Their global volunteer program is carried out in partnership with United Way in eight countries.

- The Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois, under the stewardship of Tim Shanahan, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, set up a program with the city of Chicago to provide head start information to parents and help moms get GEDs and succeed in community college. Shanahan stressed the importance of addressing the literacy problems at all different stages of life and creating solutions that are complex in recognition of the complexity of the problem.
- Guy Vickers, President of the PVH Foundation, believes in the importance of engaging the workforce within your own organization. At PVH, employees apply to participate in the community involvement programs. The company is creating a platform to house all corporate philanthropic activity and makes this part of the business as accountable as any other business division. They are focused on making the efforts collective and holding themselves and their partners accountable for feedback and data.

Focusing on education has a long-term impact to the health and vitality of the communities we serve.

— Joe Swope
UGI

We don't read digitally very well. As those studies have filtered through we're hearing back, "See, we should be reading books." But, in fact, what we really need to be doing is conducting research and figuring out ways that people can be reading digital materials more successfully.

— Tim Shanahan
University of Illinois-
Chicago

Coalition Building

Reading Is Fundamental is here to support organizations and individuals as we all work to solve the literacy crisis. We are steeped in the conversation with organizations in all sectors and continue to work to strengthen partnerships and celebrate success.

RIF can:

- Be your **clearinghouse for connections** to those who can partner with you.
- Provide the **rationale and research** as you develop your plan.
- **Partner with you on classic book celebration events and other programming opportunities** to continue to inspire kids.
- **Design and execute local programs** that meet the needs of your community.

Together, we can scale successful programs that will ensure children can read and access the pathways to productive work and citizenship.

CONVENE

Return to your community and bring your leadership, employees, educational institutions, peers, and literacy organizations to the table to affect change.

CONVERSE

Keep the conversation going as you implement your programs with fidelity and flexibility, ensuring that as you execute your plans you have the ability to adjust course with new learning.

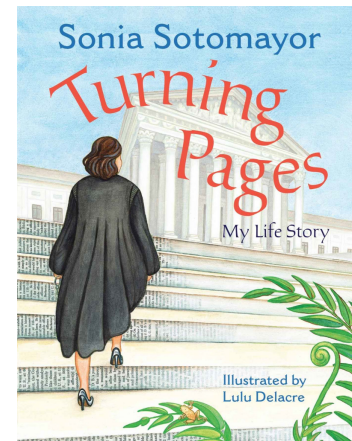
COMMIT

Make a commitment that your organization will take action to address the literacy crisis, then research your options and identify a program plan.

HONORED GUESTS DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS

United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor and award winning author and illustrator Lulu Delacre

The National Reading Coalition was honored to welcome Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and author and illustrator Lulu Delacre to discuss their new book and the role reading and stories have played in both of their lives. Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote *Turning Pages* to share her journey with young readers. As part of her lunchtime conversation with Ms. Delacre, she spoke about her earliest experiences with words and stories coming in the form of family songs and poetry gatherings. Later, she found an escape from sadness in the library and the books she devoured there. She credits literacy as a key to her success and reminded us of the importance of promoting an enjoyment of reading. *Turning Pages* is beautifully illustrated by the renowned Lulu Delacre who spoke about the importance of kids seeing themselves reflected in books and the empowerment that can come from that experience. She shares Justice Sotomayor's belief that literacy is the key to success and works to ensure that kids can find themselves reflected in the books she writes and illustrates.



Elisha DeMaria, Course Materials Manager, NYU & Former RIF Kid

The National Reading Coalition was also honored to welcome Elisha DeMaria to discuss the critical role RIF and books played in her early literacy development and love of learning. Ms. DeMaria generously shared her experience growing up in a rural area with limited resources and treasuring the library books she was able to borrow. One day, she was surprised in school when she was allowed to select a book to keep. She said, “RIF let me know that disadvantaged kids can also own their own books. You’re not just this little girl who has hand me downs and throwaways.” Incredibly, DeMaria held up her original RIF book which now lives in her son’s library. She credits literacy for her ability to imagine and set goals for college and a fulfilling life. And, she is passing it on by using words and books to help her son, who has autism, communicate more easily.

PRESENTERS AND PANELISTS

Beth Caron, Program Director for Early Care and Education, National Governors Association

Lulu Delacre, Author and Illustrator

Allie Kimmel, Senior Education Policy Advisor, Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee

Courtney Kissell, Director of Programs & Partnerships, National PTA

Dane Linn, Vice President, Business Roundtable

Jessie Lyons, Vice President, Government Relations & Strategic Partnerships, Scholastic, Inc.

Kathleen Ryan Mufson, President, Pitney Bowes Foundation

Lee Ann Potter, Director of Educational Outreach, Library of Congress

Timothy Shanahan, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago

Sonia Sotomayor, United States Supreme Court Associate Justice and Author

Joseph Swope, Manager, Media Relations & Special Projects, UGI Utilities, Inc.

Susanne H. Thompson, Senior Vice President, Corporate Education Partnerships, Discovery Education

Denine Torr, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Dollar General Corporation

Tanya Tucker, Chief of Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships, America's Promise Alliance

Guy Vickers, President, PVH Foundation

Rebecca Zalesnik, Director of Innovative Programs, Sheldon Independent School District