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NEWS RELEASE

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Business and Education Leaders Call for Ohio School Child Literacy Programs Aligned With the Science of Reading

COLUMBUS – A broad-based coalition of education and business leaders has called on state officials to adopt policies to help Ohio reverse a downward trend in reading proficiency. The call for action and increased funding for results-based literacy instruction at Thursday’s “Literacy Matters” event comes at a time when recent state and national assessments show that Ohio students have fallen behind in reading.

Ohio’s youngest schoolchildren appear to be some of the worst affected by learning declines, a downward trend exacerbated by the pandemic, according to these state and national assessments. Third graders in Ohio experienced a reduction in reading proficiency during the pandemic, from 67% in the 2018-19 school year to 60% in the 2021-22 school year, according to a report from the Ohio Department of Education.

These declines must serve as a wake-up call to parents, educators, and state leaders, said Ohio Excels President Lisa Gray.

“Learning to read proficiently by the third grade is key to children’s life-long success, yet Ohio school kids risk falling behind their counterparts in other states if we don’t act quickly,” Gray said.

“Ohio must focus on implementing a comprehensive literacy strategy aligned to the science of reading to ensure Ohio’s students are poised for success,” said Dr. Stephanie Siddens, interim state superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education. “We must be unwavering in our commitment to increasing student literacy. It is critical that Ohio students receive high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction and every educator, across all content areas and grade levels, understands language and literacy development.” Siddens said.

Research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation has found that students who do not read proficiently by the third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a

diploma compared to proficient readers. The risk is multiplied for economically disadvantaged students, who are six times more likely to not graduate. By contrast, studies by the Ohio Department of Education have found that students who are proficient in reading by third grade are five times more likely to be college and career ready.

“The importance of children reading at grade level by the end of the third grade can’t be overemphasized,” said Dr. Carey Wright, former State Superintendent of the Mississippi Department of Education. “That’s why it’s crucial for the state to have a laser-like focus on a statewide literacy initiative using research-based interventions.”

Leaders gathered at the Literacy Matters event praised Gov. Mike DeWine for the emphasis his executive budget puts on prioritizing literacy, including \$64 million to help schools purchase curricula aligned with the science of reading. The governor’s budget also includes \$86 million for professional development and a plan to send 100 literacy coaches to districts with the lowest proficiency rates to support literacy instruction. The budget also provides \$15 million to support math and literacy tutoring through partnerships with colleges, universities, and educational service centers.

Education leaders say it’s crucial that Ohio align its educator preparation programs to the science of reading. This pairing can include a structured literacy approach that incorporates phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These steps should also include dyslexia training and other effective engagement practices for students struggling to read and students with high reading potential.

Other avenues should include incentives such as professional development reimbursement for current teachers and administrators—including early childhood education professionals—who complete professional development literacy training courses based on the science of reading.

Furthermore, the state should require aligned, high-quality, core curriculum and evidence-based interventions that rise above the typical curriculum, and ensure those practices include all struggling readers in K-3 and students in 4th grade and beyond, the leaders said.

“Success in the workforce begins with a high-quality education, which has reading at its foundation,” said Pat Tiberi, the President and CEO of the Ohio Business Roundtable and board chair of Ohio Excels. “Enlisting partners across the state to highlight and improve early literacy as a priority is a win-win for Ohio.”

For more information on the event and on Ohio Excels and its literacy initiatives, please visit <https://www.ohioexcels.org/>.

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