

NEWS

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MMSD CONTACT:

Tim LeMonds
608-228-3521
tjlemonds@madison.k12.wi.us

UW-MADISON CONTACT:

Todd Finkelmeyer
608-335-3459
todd.finkelmeyer@wisc.edu

Joint Task Force on Early Literacy Issues Final Report

Experts from the MMSD and UW–Madison provide new path to early literacy

MADISON — Today, the Early Literacy and Beyond Task Force, a joint effort between the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) and University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Education (UW-Madison), is releasing its final report during a public presentation at the MMSD Board of Education’s Instruction [Work Group meeting](#), this evening at 5 p.m. The report is the culmination of months of collaborative work to review evidence and identify the most effective ways to teach literacy in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

The joint effort broadly identified how literacy, especially early literacy, is currently taught across MMSD, and analyzed literacy achievement data for MMSD students. Similarly, it examined how literacy is taught to teacher education students at the UW–Madison School of Education, and analyzed what future teachers are currently learning about literacy.

The report provides a pathway on how to best help current and future teachers refine their literacy instruction, improve outcomes, and makes recommendations to MMSD and the UW–Madison School of Education on steps to strengthen literacy instruction in the Madison Schools and UW-Madison’s teacher education programs.

The task force, launched in December 2020 and co-chaired by Lisa Kvistad, MMSD’s former assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, and John Diamond, a professor at UW–Madison who holds the Kellner Family Distinguished Chair in Urban Education, included top educators, leaders, and researchers from both organizations. The task force developed a report dedicated to examining how best to strengthen literacy instruction and accelerate learning so all students can succeed.

Studies show literacy affects a range of educational and life outcomes. Research across the nation, and here in Madison, also indicates how, too often, there are inequities in literacy attainment among students based on factors such as race and income. What can sometimes get lost in examining such issues is that behind each data point is a child, a family, and a future.

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During tonight's presentation, MMSD Superintendent, Carlton D. Jenkins and UW–Madison School of Education Dean, Diana Hess will deliver remarks while task force co-chairs Lisa Kvistad and John Diamond will give a short presentation about the team's work.

"The work of the task force builds on a long tradition of collaboration across MMSD and the UW-Madison School of Education, and together, we are committed to making real change to literacy education which is grounded in research, evidence, and humanity," said Jenkins.

"I'm grateful for the hard work of so many talented educators, researchers, and leaders on this joint task force and their efforts in focusing on improving literacy instruction," said Hess. "We plan on immediately getting to work on translating the recommendations into an implementation plan."

The report notes several key points: opportunities and outcomes need to be more equitable for students; all children need improved literacy outcomes; and it is the collective responsibility of MMSD and the School of Education to put systems and processes in place to allow for the potential within each child to be realized.

Recommendations in the report are grouped into eight broad themes:

- Ensure Anti-racist, Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Equitable Education
- Improve Instructional Coherence
- Align Leadership for Literacy
- Enhance Organizational Structures to Support Literacy
- Refine Data Systems
- Build on the Strengths of Our Students, Families, and Community
- Collectively Grow Together Through a Commitment to Continuous Improvement
- Enhance Implementation Efforts Through Communication and Coordination

"These recommendations are just the beginning of our work," said Kvistad. "Now we need to hear from our teachers and instructional coaches to move these recommendations into action."

"Our team was very mindful of the fact that behind every data point we examined, there is a child," added Diamond. "The task force members kept children and equity at the center of our work. In the end, the recommendations of the task force – based on research, empirical evidence, and practical experience – seek to disrupt educational inequities while enhancing Madison students' learning and UW-Madison preservice teachers' preparation."

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