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NEWS RELEASE
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OKLAHOMA BUILDS MOMENTUM TO STRENGTHEN EARLY READING THROUGH STRONG READERS ACT IMPLEMENTATION

Speaker Kyle Hilbert led briefing highlighting educator training, literacy coaching and evidence-based instruction

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — Oklahoma is taking important steps toward strengthening reading outcomes as state and local education initiatives advance educator training, literacy coaching, early intervention, and evidence-based instruction in the ongoing implementation of the Oklahoma Strong Readers Act.

Oklahoma House Speaker Kyle Hilbert led a news briefing highlighting progress across the state, including initiatives designed to equip teachers with effective reading strategies, help schools identify students who need additional support and give families resources to understand the law and their children's reading progress.

"Oklahoma's students deserve an education system built on what works," said House Speaker Kyle Hilbert, R-Bristow. "We are building the systems necessary to turn the law's requirements into meaningful results in the classroom. Through collaboration among educators, state leaders, literacy experts and committed organizations across Oklahoma, we are ensuring schools have the tools and support they need to help every student become a strong reader."

During the briefing, Speaker Hilbert touted the success of summer teacher training academies, provided an update on the search for a screening tool for students, explained how a funding formula change rewards growth and success, and praised efforts by schools that are implementing the law's provisions.

The Strong Readers Act strengthens Oklahoma's approach to early literacy by emphasizing the science of reading and evidence-based practices, consistent statewide screening, targeted interventions, and support for educators. The law establishes a framework intended to identify reading difficulties earlier and provide students with the instruction and resources they need to succeed.

Educator training and coaching advances statewide.

Several initiatives are helping Oklahoma educators as the law is being implemented.

According to Melissa Ahlgrim, Program Director, Literacy Policy and Programs at the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma strengthened its longstanding early literacy efforts through this year's updates to the Strong Readers Act. Ahlgrim highlighted how teacher training, classroom coaching, early reading checks, and family resources work together to support students and educators. She noted that Oklahoma's approach is informed by research, the experience of Oklahoma educators, and lessons from other states. She recognized contributions from state agencies, Oklahoma colleges and universities, and the State Chamber Research Foundation to this shared work.

"Strong readers grow from strong teaching and timely support," Ahlgrim said. "Our responsibility is to turn Oklahoma's commitment into everyday classroom practice, so every child receives the help they need to read confidently and pursue greater opportunities."

During summer 2026, 450 teachers participated in the Oklahoma Education Quality and Accountability (OEQA) Early Literacy Academy. The intensive academies provided 40 hours of instruction over one to two weeks, covering the science of reading, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and standards-aligned early literacy instruction. Teachers who participated responded overwhelmingly positively to the training.

Established through 2026 legislation, the academies were delivered by Oklahoma universities and taught by current practitioners. Each public school could send one certified staff member serving students in kindergarten through third grade at no cost and the participating teachers received a $3,000 stipend for completing the training.

Additionally, Oklahoma Science of Reading Academies provide intensive professional learning opportunities, including Lexia's LETRS program and the Literacy Communities of

Practice course developed by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. These courses deepen educators' understanding of how children learn to read and equip them to provide evidence-based instruction and support for students experiencing reading difficulties.

The state's HEROES literacy instructional team provided another layer of support. The program has 26 literacy experts in the field, including 20 coaches working in over 100 schools. These coaches are helping educators and administrators strengthen instruction, address challenges and build systems that support improved reading outcomes.

Outside state government, the Oklahoma State Chamber Research Foundation's Oklahoma Literacy Initiative worked with 10 school districts to provide professional learning, classroom coaching and ongoing support grounded in the science of reading. Participating districts included Valliant, where educators were working to align instruction and give teachers opportunities to learn from literacy specialists.

Local success demonstrates the potential of evidence-based instruction.

Valliant Public Schools Superintendent Brandon Frazier has seen the impact of evidence-based reading instruction firsthand through the progress of his daughter, Ashdyn, who has dyslexia.

After her family sought an evaluation and arranged private tutoring with Valliant teacher Mary Maxwell, a certified academic language therapist, Ashdyn began making significant progress. Frazier said she was reading within four months of beginning Maxwell's instruction and was now at the top of her class.

"I've seen it work," Frazier said. "Within four months of being under her working in her program, my kid was reading."

Frazier said the experience reinforced his support for evidence-based literacy instruction and the importance of identifying reading difficulties early so students could receive help when it could make the greatest difference.

Maxwell's work illustrated how specialized teacher training and targeted instruction could help students develop foundational reading skills and build confidence.

Oklahoma draws lessons from other states' progress.

Dr. Kymyona Burk, senior policy fellow for early literacy at ExcelinEd, shared how other states had strengthened reading instruction and improved literacy outcomes through comprehensive policies and effective implementation.

Burk's work included supporting states developing or improving kindergarten-through-third grade reading policies, with an emphasis on putting those policies into practice.

"Oklahoma has an opportunity to learn from other states while developing an approach that meets the needs of its students and educators. I know from personal experience when states align strong policy with effective implementation, meaningful improvement is possible," Burk said. "Strong literacy policies grounded in evidence-based instruction set the bar for student achievement and leave space for the right tools, training and support needed to achieve that goal."

Oklahoma lawmakers also recently formed the Oklahoma Reading Caucus to sustain and expand progress in early literacy. The bipartisan group plans to focus on implementing the Strong Readers Act, monitoring outcomes, learning from states that had improved reading proficiency and identifying opportunities to strengthen results for Oklahoma students.

Resources help parents and educators prepare.

As implementation efforts progress, the Oklahoma Education Impact Initiative (OKEII) developed a question-and-answer resource to help parents and educators better understand the Strong Readers Act and its implications for schools and students.

The guide is available at **OKEII.org** and provides accessible information as schools and parents prepare for the changes ahead.

The initiatives highlighted at the briefing represented important steps toward building a coordinated system of educator preparation, school support and evidence-based reading instruction as Oklahoma worked toward full implementation of the Strong Readers Act in the 2027–28 school year.

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NOTE TO MEDIA: News media may access electronic versions of collaterals that were distributed during the briefing, including this news release, a news release about Ashdyn Frazier's success story and presenter bios at this link: OKEII News Briefing Press Packet

The news briefing meeting recording may be viewed once posted at: https://www.okeii.org/strongreadersact.

ABOUT OKEII

The Oklahoma Education Impact Initiative is a non-profit organization dedicated to rapidly transforming Oklahoma's public education system. The initiative is undertaking a comprehensive research effort conducted by an independent team of leading scholars

from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University. For more information, visit www.okeii.org.