

Illinois State Board of Education

Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Community Feedback, Fall 2023: Summary of Themes

Author

Kat Theodore, Region 9 Comprehensive Center

December 2023

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Executive Summary

On July 28, 2023, Illinois enacted a law requiring the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Illinois’s state education agency, to complete a series of initiatives, including the development of a comprehensive state literacy plan designed to improve the literacy outcomes for Illinois students. ISBE formed writing teams that worked in spring 2023 to develop a first draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan that was then shared for public comment. The Region 9 Comprehensive Center (R9CC) supported ISBE in co-planning, taking notes for these sessions, and developing a summary report about revising the first draft. In fall 2023, ISBE completed a second draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan that was also shared for public comment. Again, R9CC provided support in co-planning and taking notes. This report summarizes the events and feedback on the second draft received through this process.

Listening Session Locations

Champaign, Chicago, Edwardsville, Kewanee, Marion, Naperville, and Springfield

Focus Groups

Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education (IACBE)
ISBE Student Advisory Council (SAC)
Latino Policy Forum

Literacy Presentations

State Bilingual Program Directors Meeting
Everyone Reading Illinois Fall Conference
Learning Forward | IPA Education Leaders Annual Conference
Joint Annual Conference | IASB - IASA - IASBO

Feedback Events

To solicit feedback about the second draft of the plan, ISBE hosted—with support from R9CC staff—a series of seven in-person listening sessions and three focus groups. A total of 223 stakeholders participated across the seven 2-hour listening sessions and three 1-hour focus groups. In addition, ISBE conducted five literacy presentations at meetings and conferences in Illinois.

Feedback Summary

Regarding the five sections of the second draft of the Comprehensive State Literacy Plan, a few themes emerged to refine the plan: expand or extend information, include additional roles, and provide guidance and support.

Background

On July 28, 2023, Illinois enacted a law requiring the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to complete a series of initiatives designed to improve the literacy outcomes for Illinois students ([Public Act 103-0402](#)), including the development of

- A comprehensive state literacy plan;
- A rubric that districts may use to evaluate, select, and implement quality core reading instruction programs;
- A template to support the development of local literacy plans;
- Guidance on evidence-based practices for effective literacy coaching to support educators;
- Training opportunities aligned with the state literacy plan; and
- A plan to transition from the current to a new content area knowledge test required for endorsement in Elementary Education, Grades 1 through 6.

To develop the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan, ISBE formed writing teams of Illinois educators and other stakeholders that worked in spring 2023 to prepare the first draft of the sections. For the first draft, the writing teams utilized themes and information gathered from stakeholders who attended a Literacy Summit that ISBE hosted—with R9CC supporting planning and facilitation—on October 25, 2022. ISBE then shared the first draft for public comment through a series of community engagement opportunities. The feedback gathered through this process informed the development of the second draft of the plan. This report summarizes the feedback received on the second draft of the plan.

Feedback Methods Overview

From October 24 to November 16, 2023, ISBE hosted—with support from R9CC staff—a series of seven in-person listening sessions and two focus groups. These sessions were designed to gather feedback about the second draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan from a wide range of community members interested in and affected by the final plan.

Listening Tour

ISBE offered seven 2-hour, in-person listening sessions in Champaign, Chicago, Edwardsville, Kewanee, Marion, Naperville, and Springfield. A total of 192 community members participated across all sessions (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Listening Session Dates and Participation by Event

Listening Session Location	Date	Participants
Springfield	October 24, 2023	15
Naperville	October 25, 2023	64
Kewanee	October 26, 2023	7
Marion	November 6, 2023	10
Edwardsville	November 7, 2023	26
Champaign	November 8, 2023	50
Chicago	August 4, 2023	20

Focus Groups

Focus groups are targeted small-group conversations (ideally 4–12 people) about a specific topic. During the second round of feedback, ISBE conducted three additional focus groups that were not completed during the first round of engagement to proactively solicit feedback from Latino and multilingual groups’ perspectives. A total of 31 members from the Latino Policy Forum, Student Advisory Council, and the Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education participated in the two focus groups (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Focus Group Session Dates and Participation by Event

Focus Group Session	Date	Participants
Latino Policy Forum	October 24, 2023	2
ISBE Student Advisory Council (SAC)	November 14, 2023	16
Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education	December 1, 2023	13

Individual Written Responses

In addition to participating in live feedback sessions, all individuals had the opportunity to provide feedback through a form available on ISBE’s [Literacy Plan webpage](#). This form permitted feedback session participants to share additional or more specific comments than time had allowed during the group sessions; it also provided an opportunity for individuals who could not attend a live session to provide feedback about the sections of the draft literacy plan. In total, 251 feedback form responses were received. Equal weight was provided to both

written and oral comments provided, and the drafting team closely read and reviewed every submission.

Literacy Presentations

The ISBE Literacy team conducted presentations on the process and content of the literacy plan at four events (Exhibit 3): the State Bilingual Program Directors Meeting, the Everyone Reading Illinois Fall Conference, the Learning Forward: Illinois Principal Association (IPA) Education Leaders Annual Conference, and the Joint Annual Conference: Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO).

Exhibit 3. Literacy Presentation Dates and Participation by Event

Literacy Presentations	Date	Participants
State Bilingual Program Directors Meeting	September 28, 2023	560
Everyone Reading Illinois Fall Conference	October 25, 2023	26
Learning Forward IPA Education Leaders Annual Conference	October 16, 2023	120
Joint Annual Conference IASB – IASA - IASBO	November 18, 2023	120+

Session Facilitation

The four ISBE staff members overseeing the development of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan led and facilitated each in-person listening session. Listening sessions began with a brief discussion of meeting norms, including a request for all participants to provide responses in a succinct manner. Then, facilitators led a protocol whereby participants provided feedback about each of the five sections of the literacy plan. R9CC developed and used a spreadsheet to capture feedback about each of the five sections of the literacy plan. Each of the five sections received feedback from all of the listening sessions and focus groups.

Feedback Analysis Methodology

After each session, R9CC reviewed and cleaned up all raw notes for consistency and readability. R9CC literacy specialists then reviewed all notes and categorized them as follows:

- Comments that were supportive of the development process, feedback opportunities, or literacy plan organization and content;
- Comments that are informative or potentially actionable to revisions of the literacy plan (ISBE staff subsequently reviewed all comments to determine if recommended changes fall within the purview of ISBE oversight);
- Comments that were informative, actionable, or constructive to ISBE but not directly relevant to the literacy plan itself; and
- References and resources that were recommended by participants for inclusion in the plan.

R9CC staff then reviewed the comments that were informative or actionable to potential revisions of the literacy plan to develop the following outputs:

1. R9CC literacy specialists highlighted and coded feedback notes in each section and categorized comments that were similar.
2. Once categories were formed for each section, R9CC staff developed a list of emerging themes.
3. Finally, R9CC staff used the themes and coded comments that were categorized to generate this summary report.

Summary of Community Feedback

Session participants provided general feedback about the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan draft and feedback specific to the following five sections of the first draft:

- Vision and Purpose;
- Framework for Effective Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction;
- Educator Professional Learning and Development;
- Framework for Effective Leadership, Systems of Support, and Implementation Considerations; and
- Tools and Resources.

This report summarizes general feedback and section-specific feedback.

Generalized Feedback

Some of the feedback from session participants was global in nature. This feedback focused on recommendations about English learners and early childhood content that participants considered to be important to include in the plan:

- Include *definitions of terms* in relation to English learners;
- Add *information about newcomers* to reinforce the need for attending to housing security, social and emotional needs, and other aspects unique to newcomers; and
- Provide information about what *play-based instruction* looks like in early learning.

Feedback also indicated topics that were insufficiently addressed or inconsistently emphasized throughout the plan. Participants made suggestions about topics that needed greater emphasis or that needed to be included more fully throughout the plan. Common topics that needed deeper discussion and references included *dyslexia and comprehension*. Participants noted that in comparison to the discussion about foundational skills, more discussion was needed in the area of comprehension.

Feedback About “Vision and Purpose”

The introduction of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan describes the vision and purpose of the plan. A frequent theme with feedback across sessions was to use even stronger language in this introduction of the plan, creating an *urgency for change* and making a *call to action* for systemic and individual change.

The following quote illustrates how one participant envisions a call to action for individual change in the literacy plan.

“One of the most common pieces of feedback my organization has received has been that the plan is not especially seen as a call to action—to point out that individuals are the ones that will impact the education ecosystem and drive improvement. Overall, really good! That’s just one area you might think about improving on in this section.”

–Springfield Listening Session Participant

Another theme was a call for *additional roles and information* in the “Literacy Plan by Audience” section on page 11 of the plan. Comments suggested the following:

- Add an *audience section* for *students*,
- Add an *audience section* for *education preparation programs*, and
- Include *public libraries* in the community and family audience.

Another frequent theme about the introduction was the need to provide additional information about *family and community*, *dyslexia*, and *reading disabilities*.

Feedback About Section 1: “Framework for Effective Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction”

Overall, participants provided frequent feedback about “Classroom Practices in Alignment with Evidence-Based Instruction” and “Classroom Practices Not in Alignment with Evidence-Based Instruction” on page 31 of the literacy plan. Comments provided the following recommendations:

- *Reframe the aligned and not aligned* classroom practices by describing practices and instances when it is and is not appropriate to use them,
- *Match each classroom practice* in alignment with evidence-based instruction with the classroom practices that are not aligned to show what not to do, and
- *Use a matrix or chart* to clarify the classroom practices aligned with and not aligned with evidence-based instruction.

In addition to the classroom practices, participants provided feedback about the “Progression of Literacy Development Table” on pages 15 and 16 of the plan. Comments referenced the following ways to improve the progression:

- *Differentiate* by grade level;
- Include an *overlapping chronological development* of *literacy progression*;
- Use *specific pre-K language* in the table; and
- Include *semantics, syntax, spelling, and morphology*.

Another frequent theme was the need to **add to or clarify guidance** in the following areas:

- Whether *handwriting* is cursive or print,
- What good *assessment practices* look like,
- What a good *literacy block* looks like,
- The importance of using a *variety of texts*,
- Specific information about *differentiation*, and
- A statement that *MTSS* is not just a means for *special education identification*.

Participants across sessions recommended that the plan expand upon or add guidance about specific topics in the instruction section:

- Provide additional information about *dyslexia and reading disabilities* and consider including a section about dyslexia;
- Provide additional information about *middle and high school practices*;
- Include a statement about the role of *content area teachers*;
- Include a *progression for pre-K-K* curricula; and
- Provide additional information about *screening*, including a robust explanation of a universal screener and screening tools.

The quote below offers a participant's view about the critical role of screening and why additional information is necessary.

“Early screening: It’s so critical to identify children with foundational literacy skills below their peers. This section needs to be more robust. Early screening should start in kindergarten. Screening is not important but critical. Also, include what skills to screen.”

–Chicago Listening Session Participant

Feedback About Section 2: “Educator Professional Learning and Development”

A few themes emerged from feedback about Section 2 of the draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan on professional learning development, particularly themes about the need to *provide more guidance and support on resources* in two areas:

- Provide information about where to purchase *tools* and *resources* in the plan and
- Provide guidance to support the *selection of curriculum resources and materials*.

In addition, participants recommended the need to provide guidance about *who should be represented* when discussing and answering the guiding questions in the workbook section (pp. 64–78).

Several participants commented about the *strategies for professional learning* in the plan, including

- A belief that *asynchronous learning* is not as effective as *synchronous* presenter-led *professional learning* and
- Confusion over the order of the strategies.

For example, some participants felt that having asynchronous learning listed as number one gives the impression that asynchronous learning is the best choice. A suggestion was made to *change the order* of the list by interchanging the strategies, so that *asynchronous* is not the first strategy.

Feedback About Section 3: “Framework for Effective Leadership, Systems of Support, and Implementation Considerations”

Section 3 of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan generated discussions about what is needed for principals. Feedback referenced the following types of needs:

- Equip principals with *knowledge through professional learning*,
- Provide *coaching* and *mentoring* to principals, and
- Provide *tools* to help principals *identify their school needs* and *make helpful decisions*.

Participants also mentioned the *need for funding* for literacy across sections and sessions.

A second theme focused on *leadership and leadership practices*. Participants recommended that the plan discuss *distributive leadership* as a way to support principals with the demands of the job and knowledge demands of literacy. Participants also recommended that the professional learning section include more *research on leadership practices*.

Finally, participants suggested *additional content* that they would like to see included or improved in this section:

- Provide stronger language about *family and community engagement*,
- Reinforce that all teachers play a *role in literacy*,
- Include time in the workbook pages for principals to *observe and take notes* during reading instruction,
- Add the *four purposes of assessment* in the plan to strengthen principals' data decision-making skills, and
- Include *school board members* in the effective leadership section.

Feedback About Section 4: “Systems of Support and Implementation Considerations”

Overall, participants offered very few comments about Section 4 of the plan. A major piece of feedback recommended using this plan to *think systemically* to connect this work with other initiatives, as reflected in the following quote.

“Thinking about how work around literacy in schools that need it the most is intersecting with IL Empower Schools and Systems of Support. What we have seen in the other states is they funnel resources to schools that are really struggling with literacy. Going even bigger, how is this work intersecting with other initiatives, such as teacher shortages, etc. Think systemically.”

–Chicago Listening Session Participant

Feedback About Section 5: “Tools and Resources”

In Section 5 of the plan, participants across sections provided feedback about the need to *define or improve definitions* of terms in this section or in the glossary:

- Include a definition of *balanced literacy* and why it is not being used,
- Improve definitions of terms, such as *leveled reading and guided reading*,
- Add definitions for *synchronous and hybrid* in the glossary, and
- Consider *defining terms* in the “Evidence-Based Effective Literacy Instruction” section rather than in this section.

Participants’ feedback also focused on brainstorming *other available resources* for engaging the community. Participants’ comments referenced *pediatricians* as viable partners but they also asserted that pediatricians needed to be supported with early literacy knowledge using such techniques as *awareness campaigns or community toolkits*. In addition to comments about community engagement, participants also shared feedback about the one-page briefs. Comments focused on adding the following components to the early elementary brief:

- *Handwriting and encoding* and
- *Knowledge and vocabulary*.

Finally, participants offered two recommendations for this section that relate to the plan in general:

- *Align the developmental progression* with the “Progression of Literacy Development Table” and
- *Address equity* through the lens of rural and small districts throughout the plan.

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American Institutes for Research®
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | AIR.ORG