

Illinois State Board of Education

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

Author

Cory Stai, Region 9 Comprehensive Center

October 2023

Illinois State Board of Education

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

Authors

Cory Stai, Region 9 Comprehensive Center

October 2023

Contents

	Page
Background	1
Feedback Methods Overview.....	1
Listening Tour	1
Focus Groups	2
Individual Written Response	2
Session Facilitation.....	3
Feedback Analysis Methodology.....	4
Summary of Community Feedback	5
Generalized Feedback.....	5
Section 1: “Vision and Purpose” Feedback.....	6
Section 2: “Framework for Effective Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction” Feedback	7
Developmental Trajectories for Reading Foundational Skills	8
Developmental Trajectories for Literacy	9
Assessment to Support Literacy	10
Multi-Tiered System of Supports	11
Section 3: “Educator Professional Learning and Development” Feedback	11
Section 4: “Framework for Effective Leadership, Systems of Support, and Implementation Considerations” Feedback.....	12
Section 5: “Tools and Resources” Feedback.....	13

Exhibits

Page

Exhibit 1. Listening Session Dates and Participation by Event..... 2

Exhibit 2. Focus Group Dates and Participation by Event..... 3

Executive Summary

In May 2023, the Illinois General Assembly passed a bill 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 literacy outcomes for Illinois students. ISBE formed writing teams that worked in the spring of 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 and taking notes for these sessions. This report summarizes the events and feedback received through this process.

Feedback Events

To solicit feedback regarding the first draft of the plan, ISBE hosted a series of four in-person listening sessions, two virtual listening sessions, and 20 focus groups with the support of R9CC staff. A total of 341 community members participated across the six 3-hour listening sessions, and 169 total participants attended across the 20 90-minute focus groups.

Feedback Summary

Regarding the five sections of the first draft of the Comprehensive State Literacy Plan, several themes emerged to improve the plan: improve organization, expand or extend information, clarify audience and roles, and modify language use.

Listening Session Locations

Chicago, Mt. Vernon, Rockford, and Springfield, Illinois, and Virtual

Professional Organization Focus Groups

Association of Illinois School Library Educators
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education
Illinois Association for Career and Technical Education
Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education
Illinois Association for Gifted Children
Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools
Illinois Association of School Boards
Illinois Education Association
Illinois Federation of Teachers
Illinois Principals Association
Illinois Reading Council
Illinois State Board of Education
Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance
Large Unit District Association

Topical Focus Groups

Dyslexia
Early Literacy
Multilingual and Bidialectal Learners

Other Focus Groups

Everyone Reading Illinois
Educators From Legislative District 49
The Reading League Illinois

Background

In May 2023, the Illinois General Assembly passed a bill requiring the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to complete a series of initiatives designed to improve literacy outcomes for Illinois students ([Public Act 103-0402](#)), including development of the following:

- 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 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
- 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 the spring of 2023 to prepare the sections of the first draft. For the first draft, the writing teams utilized themes and information gathered from stakeholders who attended a Literacy Summit that ISBE had hosted—with R9CC supporting planning and facilitation—on October 25, 2022. ISBE then shared the draft for public comment through a series of community engagement opportunities. The feedback gathered through this process informs development of a second draft of the plan. The revised draft will receive a second round of feedback opportunities and revision before being presented to the nine-member State Board by January 31, 2024.

Feedback Methods Overview

From June 28 to September 6, 2023, ISBE hosted a series of four in-person listening sessions, two virtual listening sessions, and 20 focus groups with support of R9CC staff. These sessions were designed to gather feedback regarding the first draft of the Illinois Comprehensive State Literacy Plan from a wide range of community members interested in and affected by the final plan.

Listening Tour

ISBE offered four 3-hour, in-person, regional listening sessions, in northern (Rockford), central (Springfield), and southern (Mt. Vernon) Illinois, as well as in the city of Chicago. A 3-hour

virtual session filled two rooms to capacity. Therefore, ISBE added an additional virtual session to accommodate anyone who could not get into the initial virtual meeting. A total of 341 community members participated across all offered sessions. Exhibit 1 presents the meeting dates and participation numbers for each listening session.

Exhibit 1. Listening Session Dates and Participation by Event

Session location	Date	Participants
Chicago	July 10, 2023	52
Mount Vernon	July 27, 2023	15
Rockford	July 11, 2023	47
Springfield	June 28, 2023	15
Virtual Listening Session, Room 1	July 31, 2023	96
Virtual Listening Session, Room 2	July 31, 2023	96
Additional Virtual Session	August 4, 2023	20

Focus Groups

Focus groups are targeted, small-group conversations (ideally 4–12 people) about a specific topic. ISBE utilized focus groups to proactively solicit feedback from individuals representing a diverse set of perspectives. Focus groups were organized by participant roles (e.g., superintendents, principals, teachers, school psychologists, librarians, deans, professors), by topics (e.g., students with disabilities, advanced learners, multilingual and bidialectal learners, early learning), and by organization (e.g., Everyone Reading Illinois, The Reading League-Illinois). A total of 169 individuals, including community members, advocates, and representatives from 14 professional organizations, participated in one of 20 90-minute focus groups. Several focus groups were comprised of representatives sharing feedback solicited from all organization members. Exhibit 2 presents the meeting dates and participation numbers for each listening session.

Individual Written Response

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 provided an opportunity for feedback session participants to share additional or more specific comments than time allowed in the group session; it also provided opportunity for individuals who could not attend a live session to provide feedback about the sections of the draft literacy plan. In total, 100 feedback form responses were received and reviewed.

Exhibit 2. Focus Group Dates and Participation by Event

Focus group session	Date	Participants
Association of Illinois School Library Educators	August 2, 2023	8
Dyslexia	July 24, 2023	3
Early Literacy	August 28, 2023	3
Educators From Legislative District 49	September 6, 2023	6
Everyone Reading Illinois	August 1, 2023	5
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education	July 31, 2023	7
Illinois Association for Career and Technical Education	July 31, 2023	6
Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education	July 21, 2023	11
Illinois Association for Gifted Children	August 10, 2023	5
Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools	August 3, 2023	20
Illinois Association of School Boards	August 30, 2023	2
Illinois Education Association	August 11, 2023	4
Illinois Federation of Teachers	July 14, 2023	9
Illinois Principals Association	July 26, 2023	32
Illinois Reading Council	August 1, 2023	6
Illinois State Board of Education	August 15, 2023	16
Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance	August 8, 2023	3
Large Unit District Association	July 20, 2023	7
Multilingual and Bidialectal Learners	July 21, 2023	5
The Reading League Illinois	August 3, 2023	11

Session Facilitation

The four ISBE staff members overseeing the development of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan led and facilitated each in-person listening tour session. Two R9CC staff attended each session as notetakers to capture all feedback provided throughout the structured discussion. Two or three ISBE team members, supported by two R9CC notetakers, led and facilitated the virtual sessions. At least one facilitator and one notetaker led each focus group.

Listening tour sessions began with a brief overview of the purpose, development process, and structure of the literacy plan. Then, facilitators led a protocol whereby participants provided feedback regarding each of the five sections of the literacy plan.

Feedback Analysis Methodology

To analyze feedback from all community engagement sessions, R9CC first compiled all raw notes from listening sessions and focus groups into a single collection, cleaning up notes and formatting for consistency and readability (e.g., writing out abbreviations used to capture discussion in real time, turning fragments into complete sentences). During the clean-up process, R9CC staff collected names of suggested researchers, research studies, publications, websites, or other resources offered by participants to be used as supporting evidence or inclusion within the Tools and Resources section of the plan. R9CC staff provided this information to ISBE staff to explore and consider while analysis and coding occurred.

Next, R9CC literacy specialists reviewed all notes, highlighting them to indicate any of the following:

1. Comments that are supportive of the development process, feedback sessions, or organization and content of the literacy plan
2. Comments that are informative, actionable, or constructive to ISBE but not directly relevant to the literacy plan itself
3. Edits, wording changes, typos, or other feedback that can be implemented easily
4. Comments that are informative or actionable to potential revisions of the literacy plan

R9CC staff then used this highlighting to develop the following outputs:

1. R9CC staff gathered positive and supportive comments to document the significant enthusiasm and appreciation expressed by many participants about the writing and feedback processes and the resulting draft literacy plan. R9CC provided these comments, along with constructive feedback recommending improvement to the draft plan, to ISBE for review and consideration.
2. R9CC staff compiled and provided to ISBE informative or actionable suggestions not relevant to the literacy plan revisions but potentially useful for consideration and action planning to capture this additional feedback.
3. R9CC staff made recommended edits through tracked changes within a copy of the literacy plan, attending to all minor edits, word changes, typos, or other small changes. ISBE staff

then reviewed and accepted, rejected, or altered those changes. ISBE then used this adjusted, improved draft as the basis for making the more significant revisions to the draft.

4. R9CC literacy specialists developed a list of emerging topics and themes that arose while reviewing and highlighting feedback notes. They then used these themes to develop a coding template. Two R9CC coders then systematically reviewed and coded all highlighted feedback by general comment, section, and theme or by adding additional themes as they emerged. Finally, R9CC staff used the coded comments to generate this summary report.

Summary of Community Feedback

Session participants provided feedback regarding the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan draft in response to each of the 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
- Tools and Resources

This report summarizes general feedback and section-specific feedback.

Generalized Feedback

Some feedback from session participants was global in nature, relating to the entire plan. One type of global feedback concerns concepts or content that participants felt is missing throughout the plan. These comments include the following recommendations for the plan:

- Include specific *references to state standards*.
- Name and promote the roles of *libraries* and *school and public librarians*, as well as promote hiring of librarians who are certified.
- Include and emphasize the role and contributions of *parents, families, and home environment*.
- Add reference throughout to *biliteracy* and its benefits.

Another category of frequent global feedback concerns specific terminology and language use. The most frequently mentioned concern is the following:

- Use of *asset-based language*, including specific recommendations to use *multilingual* instead of *English learners*, where appropriate

Participants also made suggestions for greater emphasis or inclusion across the plan for concepts they felt were named but insufficiently addressed or inconsistently emphasized throughout the plan. Common topics mentioned as needing additional discussion include the following:

- Need for greater emphasis on the importance of effective *writing instruction*: Participants noted that writing is absent from the definition of literacy offered within the plan; associated with this writing focus, participants identified a need for greater inclusion and discussion of *encoding/spelling*.
- Additional reference and discussion of students with *dyslexia* and considerations of *neurodiversity*, more generally

Finally, participants called for the plan to consider language use. One common suggestion was to *define terms* that are used in the plan in order to support understanding. Many individuals suggested the plan *include a glossary*. Terms called out to be defined include *evidence based*, *research based*, and the *science of reading*.

Section 1: “Vision and Purpose” Feedback

The first section of the state literacy plan is titled Vision and Purpose. A frequent theme within feedback across sessions was to make this opening section of the plan bolder, creating an *urgency for change* and making a *call to action* for systemic and individual change.

Associated with the calls to action were many comments advocating for the plan to name *addressing inequity* and *providing equitable access* to evidence-based instruction as a goal.

“I want the doc to be strengths based but also acknowledge systemic inequities. The issue is not the families but the system. We want to address barriers and address equity.”

—Early Learning Focus Group Participant

Another theme was a call to *acknowledge students' assets* of language, literacy, and culture. Related recommendations call for the plan to increase emphasis on the need to support use of *culturally and linguistically relevant, responsive, and sustaining practices*.

The item most discussed within this section throughout sessions was the *definition of literacy*. Participants suggested including references to *21st century skills, media literacy, social media reading independence*, and *cultivating a joy of reading*. Many participants called out the absence of explicit mention of reading and writing in the definition.

Participants across the sessions often discussed the need to *clarify the intended audience* of the plan. Comments referenced the following topics:

- Whether the plan intended to address only core/Tier 1 instruction or whether it is inclusive of students needing supports
- Emphasis on the need to support students across the developmental continuum from prekindergarten through Grade 12

Many participants suggested that this section include a discussion of *cognitive research* and describe the process of how people learn to read.

Another frequent theme regarding this section was the need to provide additional *emphasis on early screening assessment* and supports to *understand types and uses of assessment*.

Section 2: “Framework for Effective Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction” Feedback

The one overarching theme of feedback for this section of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan is a need to discuss a wider range of students throughout the plan. The plan currently discusses the needs of multilingual learners; however, participants recommended that the plan add or expand content to *highlight a wider array of student groups*, such as students with dialects; twice-exceptional, or 2e, students; and students with dyslexia.

Graphic

The most frequently discussed topic for this section related to ways to *improve the graphic* on page 4 of the plan. Trends in the feedback for this graphic include calls for the following:

- Build out components across the developmental bands with *consistent and similar levels of specificity*.

- *Extend concepts into additional developmental bands*, for example, extend phonics instruction into prekindergarten and expand vocabulary instruction into later grades.
- *Address elements missing from the graphic*, including phonological awareness and writing.
- Provide *additional emphasis and detail* about some areas of instruction, including content knowledge development, oracy, and writing

Developmental Trajectories for Reading Foundational Skills

Listening session and focus group participants offered many specific language and wording suggestions for the developmental trajectories for the reading foundation skills: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. R9CC staff coded and shared that feedback with ISBE staff to inform revisions to the content of this section.

For the content regarding phonological and phonemic awareness, the multilingual and bidialectal learners focus group flagged the need for revisions to *remove deficit-based language* in the paragraph about English learners.

Within content about phonics, participants recommended that the section *discuss decoding and encoding together*. The revisions team should consider pulling relevant writing and spelling content from the Integration part of the section into this content.

For the content about fluency, a theme in the participants' feedback points out a need to *expand and extend fluency practices* stated for middle school (e.g., choral reading, partner reading) and high school (e.g., wide reading), which are not specific to those grade levels. Other participants pointed out additional engaging strategies (e.g., radio reading, reader's theater, poetry) that could also be included.

Appreciation for the *inclusion of morphology* was a common theme in feedback about Section 2, but participants noted it should also be included within the vocabulary section.

Participants in many feedback sessions stated that *the content about comprehension lacks specificity* compared to the content presented about other foundational skills. Specifically, feedback suggestions include additional emphasis on reading for meaning, language structures, and building general and content knowledge.

Considerations for English Learners

Participants' comments during many feedback sessions pointed out that *many statements within the content about Considerations for English Learners apply to all students*; therefore,

the plan should provide greater clarity about what all students need first and then add considerations or needs of other student groups. For example, the English learner section discusses concepts of print and use of high-quality, diverse, and culturally inclusive materials, but these concepts, which are important to all students, are not discussed elsewhere.

Considerations for Learners With Special Needs

For the content addressing considerations for learners with special needs, participants in several sessions expressed that, as with comprehension, this content needs *additional information about students with disabilities*. Specifically, developing a set of bullet points of considerations to match the approach for English learners would be helpful. Several sessions included participant feedback about the *need to specifically name and address dyslexia* within the plan.

Integration of Writing, Spelling, Handwriting, and Oracy With a Focus on 21st Century Skills

For the content about integration of writing, spelling, handwriting, and oracy with a focus on 21st century skills, discussions across feedback sessions debated the connections between pencil movement/letter formation, spelling, and keyboarding. Participants advocated that revision of the plan consider inclusion of both print and digital encoding.

Developmental Trajectories for Literacy

Feedback regarding the section that articulates developmental trajectories across age/grade bands calls for the following revision:

- Build out descriptions across the developmental bands with *consistent and similar levels of specificity*. In particular, the ranges of prekindergarten literacy (birth to 3 years and ages 3–5), middle school, and high school were each identified as needing to be expanded with additional information to match the level of detail for the other developmental ranges

Participants in several feedback sessions called for the birth to 3 years content to be more comprehensive. Suggestions for needed content include the following:

- Address *language acquisition*, which is crucial at that stage of development.
- Address *supports for parents and guardians*, including promotion of reading in the home.

“We miss a huge window from birth to age 3 because parents don’t know how important literacy is and that language is developing at this time; it is important to get parents involved earlier so that conversations concerning literacy aren’t happening for the first time when kids start school. Pediatricians need information on literacy resources to educate and engage parents on the importance of literacy; we need to tie them in to engage with parents on literacy development; we need to educate them to do this.”

–Mount Vernon Listening Session Participant

As with the birth to 3 years section, participants across several engagement sessions suggested expanding the content about ages 3–5. Specific suggestions for additional content included *knowledge building*, *play-based learning*, and engaging with writing tools and integrating *emergent writing* into play.

Feedback about the elementary school sections of the developmental trajectories content was considerably less than for other sections. Participants in two sessions included recommendations to *increase the emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension* to accompany the significant discussion of phonological awareness and phonics because vocabulary and comprehension are also important in the early grades. There were no themes about grades 3–5 that emerged from individual feedback about this content.

The middle school and high school content received significant criticism across multiple feedback sessions, identifying poor organization and a lack of specificity in the content compared to the rest of the section. Community members shared a variety of suggestions for additional or clarifying content, including the following:

- *Clarify the reference that “all teachers are literacy teachers”* to mean all secondary teachers are teachers of literacy *within their content areas*.
- Add content discussing *content-area literacy instruction* (not only intervention), and provide specific recommendations and connections for content-area teachers.
- *Expand the high school content* to be more robust, specific, and strongly worded.

Assessment to Support Literacy

Participants across feedback opportunities provided significant feedback regarding the assessment content within Section 2. Recommendation themes include the following:

- *Align the literacy plan to ESSA* (the federal Every Student Succeeds Act), including the state ESSA plan and ESSA’s definitions of levels of evidence.
- Clearly *identify any required or recommended assessments*.
- Ensure teachers receive *training on assessment use and interpretation*.
- Include *language screening* and *developmental screenings for preschoolers* in the screening information.
- Replace the reference to the 20th percentile with *normed benchmark targets*.
- Consider a *graphic or flowchart* to support understanding of assessment practices.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Participants across feedback sessions offered several suggestions for this section, including the following:

- Remove multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) from the assessment section to *its own section* because MTSS is about more than assessment.
- Emphasize the role of MTSS as a framework of *prevention*.
- Ensure MTSS plans include *all students* and *core instruction*, as well as interventions (i.e., MTSS is not just about special education).
- Identify addressing *over- and under-identification for services* as a benefit of MTSS.
- Consider reordering the section to *lead off with MTSS*.

Section 3: “Educator Professional Learning and Development” Feedback

The third section of the draft Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan on professional learning development received many suggestions across the feedback sessions. ISBE received many specific, individual comments and suggestions from session participants for improving the content within this section. Across feedback sessions, the following themes emerged:

- Clearly *define evidence based* as used in this section, whether in the section or a glossary.
- Ensure this section promotes professional learning *inclusive of all staff*, including teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, librarians, specialists, and others.
- Add explicit guidance about “*de-implementing*” poor practices; consider naming practices that have been found to be ineffective.

“I think something that is missing is the concept of *de-implementation*. The idea that there are things that they should stop doing. It is just as important as adding new things on the plate.”

–Everyone Reading Illinois Focus Group Participant

Some participants commented on specific topic areas that are important for the professional learning section to address. Those comments include the following:

- Robust content on strengthening *family partnerships*
- Integrating more information about *cultural relevance and responsiveness*, including reference to the culturally and linguistically responsive practices standards for institutes of higher education
- Meeting the needs of *multilingual and bidialectal learners*, including sharing *additional WIDA resources* beyond the Can Do descriptors

Finally, multiple sessions included significant conversations about educator preparation programs and the quality of preparation received by graduates entering education. Although participants seldom reached consensus recommendations during these discussions, the following trends were documented within recorded feedback:

- Address both *pre-service and in-service* professional learning.
- Highlight the quality *teaching standards* to which institutions of higher education (IHEs) are expected to align.
- Promote review of educator preparation programs’ alignment to the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan and associated state standards.

“I think the plan should be stronger in stating that IHEs should review and revise their courses for alignment to this plan.”

–Dyslexia Focus Group Participant

Section 4: “Framework for Effective Leadership, Systems of Support, and Implementation Considerations” Feedback

Feedback regarding the fourth section of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan yielded several overall suggestions for improving the content. The first theme in the feedback was the need to shorten the chapter, making it easier to navigate and digest. Participants suggested the following as ways to do so:

- Develop a *one-pager for stakeholder groups* that details steps to be taken within that role in support of the plan and local literacy efforts.
- Pull out some of the content not directly helpful to development of a local literacy plan into a *workbook* or other resource.
- Consider providing *one or two guiding questions* instead of the longer lists of bulleted items.

Another set of suggestions that received broad support across the engagement sessions was to make improvements to the organizational structure of the section. Suggestions for improving the structure include the following:

- *Reverse the order of the section* by changing the discussion from a top-down (i.e., state level to classroom level) to a bottom-up order to focus the chapter on classroom instruction, educators, and students.
- *State the goals at the beginning* of the plan.
- *Split up the state leadership section* to *define which actions are for whom*.

A third theme derived from the collective feedback was to make *explicit connections between the state literacy plan and other plans or initiatives*, for example, align the plan with the dyslexia handbook, state academic standards, WIDA resources, and so forth.

In addition to providing these recommendations for prioritizing and ordering the content, feedback session participants suggested *additional content* they would like to see included in this section. This feedback includes the following suggestions:

- Mention the roles of *reading interventionists* and *librarians*.
- Discuss *blending and braiding of funds* to support professional development.
- Consider adding *one-pagers* for additional stakeholders: members of higher education, parents, and families.

Section 5: “Tools and Resources” Feedback

In the listening sessions and focus groups, participants were informed that the Tools and Resources section is still a work in progress. Participants were asked to provide any specific tools and resources they might recommend to support the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan and district efforts to develop aligned, local literacy plans. R9CC staff gathered the many resources participants provided and shared those resources with ISBE for consideration when developing the Tool and Resources collection.

Notice of Trademark: “American Institutes for Research” and “AIR” are registered trademarks. All other brand, product, or company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

This material is in the public domain. While permission to reprint is not necessary, publication should be cited. The material is prepared by the Region 9 Comprehensive Center under Award #S283B190010 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the American Institutes for Research®. The content of the document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.



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