

AUGUST 2021, ISSUE 1

# IDA Alaska News

*International Dyslexia Association Alaska Branch Quarterly E-Newsletter*

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE LINK:

[Click HERE for the update on reading bills provided by Alaska's Children's Trust](#)

### DYSLEXIA NEWS INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Message From The President - pg. 1 & 3
- **NEW** - Free Membership pg. 2
- School Spotlight - pg. 2 & 4
- Scholarship winner - pg. 3
- Structured Literacy for Teachers- pg. 4
- Scholarship Opportunity- pg. 4



## Message From The President

Heather Walton, CCC-SLP - President, IDA Alaska

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) has a new sharpened mission to promote Structured Literacy in every classroom. This is a drastic change in the methodologies used by public institutions from the past 30 years. Balanced Literacy and Guided Literacy approaches have been the norm nationwide, but they do not attack the decoding skills students with dyslexia need. 20% of the population has dyslexia (Shaywitz, 2003). That means in a classroom of 30 students, 6 of them are not being taught in a way that has been scientifically proven effective. The Structured Literacy approach is an evidence-based instruction model that instructs our students with learning disabilities, including dyslexia, neurotypical learners, and highly gifted students because it focuses on the basics of language skills (IDA 2020). While there have been various methods used in the past, the strongest evidence today shows that Structured Literacy has the best results in teaching students to read and write with the most consistent habits (Lorimor-Easy & Reed, 2019). *(Continue...pg. 3)*



*Learning to read is the process of acquiring the several types of statistical knowledge that support rapid and efficient comprehension starting with phonological structure, orthographic structure, the mapping between orthography and phonology, vocabulary, and grammar" (Seidenberg, 2017).*

# School Spotlight

## Aquarian Charter School- Brittany Nerland

IDA Alaska heard recently that Aquarian Charter School (Anchorage School District) will begin introducing Structured Literacy into classrooms for the 2021/22 school year, so we checked in with principal Brittany Nerland to learn more. We couldn't be more excited for the Aquarian community and wish them all the best during this transition to evidence-based reading instruction.

**IDA Alaska:** Which new reading curricula will Aquarian pilot next year and what is the implementation plan?

**Brittany:** Aquarian will be piloting Wit and Wisdom® in grades one and five for the 21/22 school year. We will also be piloting Foundations® in all of our kindergarten classrooms. We are looking at full implementation of Wit and Wisdom® for the 22/23 school year. Foundations® will be a rolling implementation. We will bring an additional grade level on each subsequent year.

**IDA Alaska:** This is a major change for an already strong performing school. How did you come to this decision?

**Brittany:** This journey started a bit over four years ago. Three teachers, Storme Fleming, Brenda Wimett, and I, were able to attend the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Conference in Atlanta. It was at this conference that we began to realize Aquarian students needed more than what they were getting. Our students needed a Structured Literacy program. Don't get me wrong, Aquarian teachers are phenomenal, but we had holes in our instruction. Two years after returning from Atlanta, we spent an in-service day participating in a dyslexia simulation. Then shortly after that, seventeen teachers attended a two-day conference here in Anchorage where we spent more time learning about the Science of Reading. Following that conference, we began to implement Heggerty Phonemic Awareness in grades K-2. We have noticed improvement, even through online learning, with our students' skills. We are looking forward to partnering Heggerty, Foundations®, and Wit and Wisdom® to create a robust reading program.

**IDA Alaska:** How will the teachers be supported through professional development to help them be successful with this shift to Structured Literacy? Do any of the teachers already have training in this area?

**Brittany:** This is our biggest area of need. This summer the teachers piloting Wit and Wisdom® will spend two days training on the curriculum. Our teachers piloting Foundations® will spend a day training in this curriculum. In addition to the curriculum-specific training, our teachers need professional development in the Science of Reading.

(Continue...pg. 4)

## CALL TO ACTION

What's happening with Structured Literacy in your world? We want to hear from you so we can help connect educators across the state.

Write us at:

[info.ak@dyslexiaida.org](mailto:info.ak@dyslexiaida.org)



# FREE MEMBERSHIP

New this year! IDA is offering free one year classroom teacher starter memberships for pre-service and current classroom teachers. For all membership options, including parents and professionals, see the link below:  
[HTTPS://PORTAL.DYSLEXIAIDA.ORG/CLASSROOMTEACHER](https://portal.dyslexiaida.org/classroomteacher)



(Continued from Page 1, Message from President)

The International Dyslexia Association has outlined the content of Structured Literacy as follows:

- Phoneme awareness
- Sound symbol correspondence
- Patterns and conventions of print (orthography)
- Morphology
- Syntax and Semantics

The principles and methods for Structured Literacy include:

- Explicit
- Systematic and cumulative
- Hands-on, engaging, and multi-modal
- Diagnostic and responsive

The above does not leave out the top of the Scarborough Rope which includes language comprehension. There are many curriculums that use the above approach which can be taught in the general classroom, Tier I, and in a small group or direct instruction through Tier II and III. Some of these approaches include Lindamood-Bell, Wilson, Barton, Spell-Links, Orton-Gillingham method, and more.

**...with the goal to implement  
Structured Literacy in our  
schools so someday,  
everyone can read.**

But where does this instruction come from? It comes from our fabulous teachers providing the instruction and the districts supplying the materials. Being that many post-secondary education institutions have been teaching our upcoming teachers Balanced and Guided Literacy approaches, most of our licensed teachers, unfortunately, do not have adequate training to teach reading and spelling using a Structured Literacy approach. There is little evidence-based instruction being conducted.

A universal teacher preparation requirement for licensed teachers in Alaska in evidence-based literacy instruction is needed to ensure our students do not continue to slip through the cracks.

The International Dyslexia Association has tasked itself with naming accredited teacher training institutions using "Knowledge and Practice Standards" (KPS). Our teacher-training institutions must include these standards in their literacy education curriculums and aim for accreditation from IDA.

All students in the state of Alaska and nationwide should have the ability to be taught to read and write through evidence-based curriculum. Legislation has been ongoing the past few years, but Alaska is still behind the many states with comprehensive literacy laws.

It is the mission of the IDA Alaska to be an advocate for those with dyslexia and a resource for teachers, school districts, and state policymakers with the goal to implement Structured Literacy in our schools so someday, everyone can read. •

## UPCOMING DATES:

Quarter 3 Meeting: September 13

National IDA Conference: Oct 21-23

Quarter 4 Meeting: December 14

Scholarship Deadline: Until allocation is  
awarded

### SCHOLARSHIP AWARD RECIPIENT

*Heather  
Mildon*

IDA Alaska is honored to award Heather Mildon, the principal at Chugiak Elementary, a \$500 scholarship this quarter. Heather is pursuing Orton Gillingham Associate Level Training with OG Training Fellow Janet George through The Fortune Academy. This includes coursework via distance delivery, followed by an 8 month, 100-hour practicum working 1:1 with a student, including observations with feedback. Go, Heather! (See page 4 to learn about scholarship opportunities.)



(Continued from pg. 2, School Spotlight)

**IDA Alaska:** Will you share some of the challenges or hiccups you encountered on the journey toward piloting these new Structured Literacy programs? How did you overcome these challenges?

**Brittany:** Honestly, we haven't had many challenges. Our staff came to this point together. We make decisions as a team. Two of our amazing teachers, Sarah Fineman and Lynda Vanwinkle, spent time researching reading curriculums. They spent countless hours reading blogs, listening to podcasts, and talking to other educators. Through this process, they discovered Wit and Wisdom® and Foundations®. We have a strong staff, and we trust one another. When the three of us came back from Atlanta, we started talking to other teachers in small groups. As time passed, more and more staff began to see the deficits. Slowly our entire staff agreed. We needed training and resources to bring Structured Literacy to Aquarian.

**IDA Alaska:** What would you say was most helpful in bringing this concept to fruition for the school?

**Brittany:** This change is being driven by a shared vision. Without a shared vision, change will not be successful.

## Continuing Ed. Scholarship Opportunity

Scholarships are now available to IDA Alaska members for professional development opportunities – good for classroom teachers, advocates, administrators, or parents who intend to become a voice in the community. Check out the new free membership!

IDA branches across the nation, as well as other organizations aligned with the Science of Reading, are successfully presenting high-quality virtual conferences, webinars, certification programs, and continuing education programs. IDA Alaska compiled a list of recommended opportunities and hopes to support its members on their continuing education journey. Continuing education opportunities not on this list, if aligned with the Science of Reading, can be eligible upon approval.

For more information on IDA Alaska scholarship awards (up to \$500 per participant) visit: [www.ak.dyslexiaida.org](http://www.ak.dyslexiaida.org).

## Structured Literacy Teacher Insight

Featured Facebook Group For Educators: **Alaska Science of Reading- What I Should Have Learned in College**

About this group:

The purpose of this group is to connect the research of how we learn to read to our teaching practice. Our mission is to inform and deliver to teachers professional development in evidence-based practices.

Dr. Mark Seidenberg defines the “Science of Reading” as a body of basic research in developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience on reading, one of the most complex human behaviors, and its biological (neural, genetic) bases. This research has been conducted for decades in the US and around the world. The research has important implications for helping children to succeed, but it has not been incorporated in how teachers are trained for the job or how children are taught.



Promoting literacy through research, education, and advocacy.



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