

Remarks at Governor's Summit on Early Language and Literacy

VIPs:

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs, *DECAL Deal Center Board Chair*
- Dr. Theresa Magpuri-Lavel, *Executive Director, Deal Center*
- Judge Peggy Walker
- Representative Randy Nix
- Ralph Smith, *Managing Director, The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading*
- Arianne Weldon, *Director, Get Georgia Reading Campaign, Deal Center Vice-Chair*

Purpose:

- The purpose of this inaugural summit is to promote the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy's mission of improving Georgia's K-12 literacy rates through advocacy and early childhood education programs.

The education and well-being of our youngest citizens is critically important and has always been a priority for Sandra and me. For Sandra, who is a proud alumna of this university, **[established 1889, 129th year]**, that passion has driven her far beyond what has been expected of her as an educator and a First Lady.

She spent many years as a primary school teacher, planting the seeds of lifelong learning in her students, nurturing and preparing them for what lies beyond the classroom. When she became First Lady, she made it her personal mission to improve the lives, welfare, and education of our children throughout the state. That effort has taken her to all 159 counties and all 181 school districts, many of them multiple times, as she has made more than 830 individual school visits in the last seven and a half years. For her, it was more than just a show of face, it was a steadfast commitment to

advocating for one of Georgia's most pressing and far-reaching issues: childhood literacy.

And so, we reconvene here today to once again celebrate our state's educators' and their progress on this pressing issue of our time. But we also meet to rededicate ourselves to that cause... one which affects just about every other aspect of life.

Findings from numerous organizations – such as the Rollins Center for Language & Literacy, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Get Georgia Reading initiative – have continually shown the impact that our children's ability to read has on their future. Children who are poor readers in primary school have a higher chance of dropping out in high school, a lower chance of finding employment, and a higher chance of incarceration.

So, it is clear that childhood literacy is interlaced with every aspect of a child's future, which in turn affects the overall well-being of our state. This is why we have devoted so much of our time and budget to remedying this problem.

It's also why we created this Center, which serves as such a great resource for educators and families alike, and why we began this annual summit for Early Language and Literacy. The state and our great educators can only do so much. At a certain point, it is in the hands of the parents, grandparents, guardians, siblings, and other literate role models in a child's life to read to them, read with them, and guide them in finding their own paths to a love of reading. As American author Elizabeth Hardwick once wrote, "The greatest gift is a passion for reading," and that is a gift we can give to all the children in our lives.

The opportunities unlocked for a child when they have the key of literacy are immeasurable and incomparable. It's more than just one's ability to read or write, it's their ability to learn.

So I want to thank all those who have gathered here once again to discuss and advocate for one of the most critical issues of our time. Thank you for your devotion to this cause and all the work you have done to enrich our children's lives.

Now, please join me in welcoming a woman who has had education in the forefront of her vision her entire life, a woman who is a leading voice and champion for childhood literacy in Georgia, and a woman who has touched the hearts of millions of across our state over these past years... a woman that I have had the honor of calling my wife for 52 years now, the First Lady of Georgia, Sandra Deal.