



County of Sonoma

State of California

Date: August 22, 2023

Item Number: _____

Resolution Number: _____

Majority Required

Resolution of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, State of California,

Declaring Literacy A Human Right in Sonoma County

Whereas, the fundamental human right to literacy is recognized in that The California Constitution guarantees pupils a free public education. Per Article IX, Section 5 of the California Constitution: *“The Legislature shall provide for a system of common schools by which a free school shall be kept up and supported in each district at least six months in every year, after the first year in which a school is established.”* and that public education has the mandate to provide literacy by virtue of its existence as a taxpayer funded institution; and

Whereas, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended in the area of public elementary and secondary education) provides: "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance..." and that a benefit of public education requires that all students, including and especially those with learning disabilities (such as dyslexia) be afforded the same literacy proficiency as those without disabilities; and

Whereas, of the approximately 64,000+ public education students in Sonoma County, only 28.14% of 11th grade public school students in Sonoma County have met grade level English Language Arts proficiency in the 2021-2022 school year CAASPP assessment ([Ed Data 21-22 school year](#)), leaving 48.64% of students exiting high school not meeting proficiency expectations in English Language Arts, many functionally illiterate; and

Whereas, 12,000+ Sonoma County public education students are English Language Learners and 23,000+ students are unduplicated socio-economically disadvantaged, foster and homeless youth (Ed Data 21-22 school year), thereby making access to additional literacy supports like tutoring a barrier to achievement and proficiency; and

Whereas, the Sonoma County public education graduation rate is 88.1% in the 2021-22 school year (Ed Data 21-22 school year) while the English Language Arts grade level proficiency rate in 11th grade students is 28.14%, thereby 48.64% of graduating students are not proficient in English Language Arts; and 7.6% of students to drop out of public education; and

Whereas, according to the Center for American Progress, (Alpha Ciallo May 28, 2020), “Adult illiteracy directly affects an individual’s employment options, likelihood to live in poverty, likelihood to be incarcerated, access to adequate health care and health outcomes, and life expectancy. Generational illiteracy makes it increasingly difficult to escape these circumstances, and millions of Americans face this reality every day” as referenced by the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; and according to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 70% of all incarcerated adults cannot read at a fourth-grade level, “meaning they lack the reading skills to navigate many everyday tasks or hold down anything but lower (paying) jobs,”; and

Whereas, Sonoma County resolves that literacy is a human right that directly prevents pipelines to prison, poverty, unemployment, houselessness and negative health outcomes and allows for each individual the right to reach their full potential; and

Whereas, the impacts of illiteracy on homelessness are significant as *“young people without a diploma or GED being 3.5 times (346%) more likely to experience homelessness than their peers who completed high school,”* and those who are houseless and functionally illiterate are unable to access critical resources such as healthcare, housing services and supports, higher education and trade school programs leading to employment, food resources and access, mental health care, treatment care, and any and all support programs that require an application, online or paper form intake and registration for in person appointments; and

Whereas, BIPOC students in Sonoma County schools have significantly disproportionate rates of not meeting the English Language Arts standard in comparison to their White peers, therefore, a disproportionately higher rate are graduating functionally illiterate and dropping out of high school than their White peers; and

Whereas, the Portrait of Sonoma County listed on its Agenda for Action “Access to Knowledge” as an area of need and an area to monitor progress for Sonoma County students and that graduation rates and therefore literacy is a component and mandate to meet state graduation standards; and

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved, on June 27, 2023, the Sonoma County Commission on Human Rights declared literacy a human right and illiteracy in Sonoma County a crisis that negatively impacts Sonoma County residents of all demographics and disproportionately impacts BIPOC residents and socioeconomically disadvantaged residents creating barriers to accessing healthcare, human services programs, housing, employment, and food; and

Be It Further Resolved, the County of Sonoma proclaims literacy a human right for all in Sonoma County.

Supervisors:

Gorin:

Rabbitt:

Gore:

Hopkins:

Coursey:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Abstain:

So Ordered.