



Mobilizing Minnesota's communities so every child is wired to read proficiently

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Press Release – For Immediate Release

As the nation observes National Literacy Month this September, Minnesota's Rally to Read is challenging communities and Rotary Clubs to take action to address the critical reading proficiency crisis facing the state's children. With more than half of students in Minnesota K-12 classrooms not reading proficiently, this community-driven initiative is mobilizing bold grass-roots action to ensure all children have the reading skills necessary for success in life.

Why is this urgent? Recent statistics show that more than 500,000 children in our K-12 classrooms cannot read proficiently. While the problem crosses the socio-economic strata, children from poverty-stricken, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities disproportionately impacted along with males and children with different learning abilities. Minnesota schools are the worst in the nation for our children of color. Black students in Mississippi, Georgia and Florida perform better. Reading is the civil rights opportunity of our day. It is the one civil rights opportunity we know how to solve.

Monticello, Minnesota, serves as a pioneering model. Monticello is making no more excuses. Instead, they are taking action. The Rally to Read movement was spearheaded by a Rotarian, real estate agent and immigrant from Colombia, Monica Martin who called school superintendent Eric Olson and said she wanted a model that would work for the Spanish speaking community in Monticello that could be replicated throughout the state.

Martin's response was inspired by a 2023 editorial by Tim Reardon in the *Minnesota StarTribune*, "If Cuba can eradicate illiteracy, Minnesota certainly can." The Rotary Club President in Monticello asked Tim to present to his club. His presentation spotlighted the state's alarming reading gaps. Minnesota's Rally to Read has launched a movement with a BHAG (Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal): transform Minnesota into the state with the highest reading proficiency, with the fewest inequities and achieve it with a "fierce urgency of now." The benchmarks of success: every child is "wired" to read by age 3 and reads proficiently at grade level.

Monticello's Prototype: the little community that could create proficient readers:

Monticello's prototype has become a beacon of hope for communities across the state. They've mobilized four action teams that:

- provide parents of newborns an "Infant Owner's Manual," including literacy tools and child development resources
- launched Early Learning Corps
- retrofitted an ambulance into the Magic Book Mobile that is delivering books to targeted neighborhoods
- increase access to books through Imagination Library and more Little Libraries
- trained dozens of childcare providers and are delivering books to those providers monthly

Minnesota's Rally to Read

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- piggyback on community events to distribute literacy related activities
- educate and engage parents and caregivers of kids who have the greatest opportunity gaps
- recruit volunteer tutors/book readers
- ground all strategies within cultural communities
- raised \$32,000 + the in-kind donation of the retrofitted ambulance, hundreds of books and hundreds of hours of volunteer support

As a result of Monticello's success, other communities—including Roseville, Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley, Chanhassen and Mankato are identifying local champions and laying the groundwork for their own community-driven Rally to Read Coalition.

A Call to Action: Building a Statewide Movement:

Minnesota's Rally to Read is calling on Rotary Clubs and communities across Minnesota to join this grassroots movement. Minnesota's Rally to Read is the Rotary District Literacy Committee's featured initiative for 2025. Through the organization's **Community Innovation Process**, local coalitions of parents, teachers, civic leaders, healthcare providers, and business owners come together to achieve the BHAG in their community.

This effort is grounded in the belief that early brain and literacy development is the key to closing opportunity gaps. "Every child deserves an equity of opportunity to develop their brain by age three. We know that early literacy is the best way to reduce inequities and prepare children for a lifetime of success," said Monica Martin, co-founder of Monticello's Rally to Read. "This September, during National Literacy Month, we're asking Minnesotans to recognize the urgency of the literacy crisis and commit to making a real difference in their communities."

Minnesota's Rally to Read:

1. **Educates** communities about the importance of early reading proficiency.
2. **Catalyzes local action** by encouraging grassroots initiatives aimed at achieving the BHAG of ensuring every child is "wired" to read by age three.
3. **Facilitates community action planning** to ensure strategies are grounded in research and tailored to local needs and creates community ownership and collective accountability for results.

The Urgency of Action

Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by third grade are at a significantly higher risk of poor academic outcomes, school discipline issues, and even incarceration. Studies estimate that there is a 90% chance that a poor reader in first grade will remain a poor reader throughout their academic career.



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The long-term economic costs are staggering. Former Minneapolis Federal Reserve economist, Art Rolnick, emphasizes that investing in early literacy is one of the best strategies for creating a more equitable, thriving state. Rolnick calculates an 18% return on investment for every dollar spent on early childhood literacy.

Approximately 60,000 children are born in Minnesota every year. 80% of a child's brain is developed by age 3. While it is possible to overcome poor brain nurturing, if we miss this opportunity we are constantly trying to catch up. It is harder, takes longer and costs more than doing it right from the start. We act now or add tens of thousands of children to our abysmal failure to teach kids to read.

For more information on how you can support the Rally to Read movement or start a coalition in your community, visit <https://mnrallytoread.org/> or contact Tim Reardon at mnrallytoread@gmail.com or 763 <https://mnrallytoread.org/-370-9927>].

About Minnesota's Rally to Read

Minnesota's Rally to Read is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal): transform Minnesota into the state with the highest reading proficiency and the fewest inequities and achieve it with a "fierce urgency of now." Benchmarks of success: every child in the state is "wired" to read by age three and reads proficiently at grade level. Our primary strategy is to mobilize community-based Rally to Read Coalitions across the state. Coalitions will tap their social capital and implement innovative grassroots strategies and research evidence-based best practices to achieve the BHAG in their community.

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