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### **Department of Education launches statewide effort to build better readers**

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Education is launching a statewide literacy initiative designed to build better readers across the state.

“The ability to read is foundational to all learning. Up until about 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students are learning to read; after that, they are reading to learn,” said Secretary of Education Joseph Graves. “Therefore, it’s critical that our students have strong reading skills early in their educational careers.”

While South Dakota students typically outperform their peers across the country, reading proficiency rates on the state assessment have not changed significantly in the last several years.

The literacy initiative is based on research collectively called the Science of Reading and includes an emphasis on phonics, which is a method of teaching reading by correlating sounds with letters.

Schools that choose to participate will receive supports for local implementation. Those supports include technical guidance, documents, and free professional learning opportunities for school staff. Successful implementation requires a systematic effort across a school, which is why the professional learning is available to every educator in a school, from paraprofessionals to teachers to school administrators.

Graves expects to see increases in students’ reading proficiency in schools that decide to participate. “All worthwhile things require hard work, and improvement will only come after a lot of hard work by South Dakota educators and those they serve. Knowing them as I do, I am confident that both are up to the task.”

Some school districts such as Sisseton and Tea Area have already begun implementing certain components and are experiencing positive results.