



EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 729

PROMOTING EARLY LITERACY BY ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY NETWORK

WHEREAS research based on the science of reading has determined that forming “reading-ready minds” requires reading to children and providing access to books at home;

WHEREAS research has also established that 90 percent of the brain is developed by the age of five;

WHEREAS parental involvement in the lives of young children is paramount to their development and future success in school and in life;

WHEREAS parents who read and talk to their children at young ages become their child’s “best, first teacher” and help develop “reading-ready minds”;

WHEREAS books open windows to imagination, discovery, and a life-long love of learning, and therefore, I am committed to fostering a love of reading and books in Alabama’s children from the youngest ages;

WHEREAS my administration’s Strong Start, Strong Finish initiative includes benchmarks focused on pre-K readiness, school readiness, and proficiency in literacy and numeracy by age eight;

WHEREAS, in February 2018, I established the Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, as a critical component of the Strong Start, Strong Finish education initiative, to establish local campaigns for grade-level reading in all 67 Alabama counties and to enhance learning outside of the classroom;

WHEREAS I have established goals for all students to score proficiently in mathematics and reading by the fourth grade on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) and for Alabama’s reading proficiency scores to reach, at a minimum, the national average on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), known as the “nation’s report card”;

WHEREAS every grade saw improvement in reading on the ACAP from 2021 to 2022, with second graders increasing from 43% to 49%;

WHEREAS, in 2022, Alabama increased from 49th in fourth-grade reading to 39th on the NAEP;

WHEREAS the Dollywood Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded by Dolly Parton in 1988 and headquartered in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee;

WHEREAS Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a simply designed, turnkey program that mails high-quality, age-appropriate books each month to children from birth until age five, no matter their family's income;

WHEREAS Dolly Parton's Imagination Library uses unique strategies to inspire family reading, is community-based to drive participation and engagement, and, most importantly, is designed to improve the lives of children by fostering a life-long love of reading and book ownership;

WHEREAS research demonstrates that programs that put books in the hands of parents with young children enhance the home literacy experience for children, which generates greater interest in reading and higher levels of literacy proficiency in school;

WHEREAS ten percent of the children in the United States, birth to age five, are now enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, and more than 30 communities in Alabama have recently established local Imagination Libraries to provide books to children from birth to age five;

WHEREAS, in November 2022, my administration authorized \$4.1 million for use by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education for establishing a statewide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library network;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Kay Ivey, Governor of the State of Alabama, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the State of Alabama, do hereby order and direct the following actions to establish a statewide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library network:

1. **Purpose.** The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education shall establish a statewide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library network for the purpose of developing, implementing, promoting, and fostering a

statewide initiative for encouraging children from birth to age five years to develop a love of reading. The network shall be used to provide age-appropriate books on a monthly basis, at home, to each child registered in the program from birth to their fifth birthday, at no cost to the families.

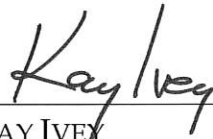
2. **Parental opt-out.** In implementing the network, the Department of Early Childhood Education shall provide parents a continuing opportunity to opt for their child not to be enrolled.
3. **Operation of the network.** The Department of Early Childhood Education shall serve as lead agency for operating the network as follows.
 - a. **State-level partner.** The Department shall serve as the state-level partner to promote the statewide development of local Dolly Parton's Imagination Library programs in every county.
 - b. **Promoting enrollment.** The Department shall advance and strengthen local Dolly Parton's Imagination Library programs with the goal of increasing enrollment.
 - c. **Volunteer recruitment.** The Department shall recruit volunteers to assist in the development, promotion, and coordination of the local programs.
 - d. **Public awareness.** The Department shall develop, promote, and coordinate a public awareness campaign to make donors aware of the opportunity to donate to the local programs and to make the public aware of the opportunity to register eligible children to receive books through the program.
 - e. **Local-match requirement.** The Department shall administer the local match requirement and coordinate the collection and remittance of local program costs for books and mailing at the state level.
 - f. **Outreach.** The Department shall develop statewide marketing and communication plans and plans for coordinating with state and local agencies.

4. **Funding.** Funding considerations for establishment of the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library network shall be as follows.
 - a. **Funding.** Continuation of this program shall be contingent on sufficient funding from state, federal, local, and private sources.
 - b. **Local match.** The Department of Early Childhood Education shall use its appropriated funds to provide grants to qualified local entities that agree to a dollar-for-dollar match for the purpose of the program.
 - i. **Financial-hardship waiver.** The Department may waive the dollar-for-dollar match requirement on a case-by-case basis due to financial hardship.
 - ii. **Local partners.** The Department shall recruit local 501(c)(3) organizations to serve as local partners. Local partners shall promote and register families for the program and shall serve as the primary fundraiser for providing the local match requirement.
5. **Statewide advisory board.** The Secretary of Early Childhood Education shall convene a statewide advisory board to promote awareness of the statewide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library network.
6. **State-agency cooperation.** State agencies and other state-funded entities, including the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Corrections, the Alabama Medicaid Agency, and the Alabama State Department of Education, shall cooperate with Department of Early Childhood Education and provide information to facilitate the implementation of this program.
7. **Implementation.** This order shall be implemented to the maximum extent possible consistent with applicable law and subject to the availability of appropriations. Nothing in this order shall be construed as impairing or otherwise affecting the authority granted by law to an executive branch agency, or the head thereof, including the Governor of the State of Alabama, except to the extent expressly set forth in this order.

8. **No private right of action.** This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any private party against the State of Alabama, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

DONE AND ORDERED this 18th day of January 2023.





KAY IVEY
Governor

ATTESTED



WES ALLEN
Secretary of State