A compilation of recent articles that have appeared in the publication *Stateline Midwest* on literacy — the topic of this year’s MLC Chair’s Initiative of Michigan Sen. Ken Horn
MICHIGAN LEGISLATORS INVEST MORE IN LITERACY COACHES FOR SCHOOLS

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

With a law on third-grade reading set to take full effect in the spring and fall of 2020, Michigan legislators are doubling down on a key element of its plan to improve literacy among young learners.

The state’s new education budget, signed into law in September, spends an additional $14 million (a total of $21 million) to bring more early-literacy learning coaches into Michigan schools.

“Teaching literacy is complex and challenging,” says Lisa Brown, a program consultant for the Michigan Department of Education. “What the coaches do is break down the research practices for teachers and help with implementation of literacy instruction.”

Hired by Michigan’s intermediate school districts, these coaches get specialized training on how to effectively teach literacy in the early grades. They then go into local schools to share their expertise with teachers in kindergarten through third grade.

Under the grant program, each of the state’s 36 intermediate school districts gets the state’s help (a 50-50 cost share) in hiring one coach. Districts that serve a higher percentage of low-income students get preference in securing additional state grants.

The number of coaches will double (from 93 to 186) as a result of the state’s new funding commitment.

Michigan’s investment in these coaches enjoys bipartisan support. The program began under Republican Gov. Rick Snyder, and first-year Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer had proposed even more state dollars ($24.5 million).

“I’m glad we put more funding into it because it’s going to support teachers in the classroom,” says Michigan Rep. Pamela Hornberger, a former teacher.

The literacy-coaching model is part of the state’s 2016 Read by Grade Three Law. Under the law, students in kindergarten through grade three must be assessed early in the school year on their reading skills. Teachers, parents and school administrators then develop an individualized reading improvement plan for those young learners identified as needing extra help.

Starting with this year’s class of third-graders, students with low reading scores in the spring may be held back from entering fourth grade in fall 2020. Opponents of this retention piece of the law include Gov. Whitmer, who has said penalizing these children “flies in the face of all the science.”

Rep. Hornberger, though, says she has talked to teachers who support retention because it helps motivate parents to become active participants in the reading improvement plans.

She adds that the teachers and parents can seek a “good cause” exemption to avoid a student’s retention in the third grade.

This year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Chairwoman’s Initiative of Michigan Sen. Ken Horn is focusing on policies related to literacy. Stateline Midwest is featuring a series of articles on this subject throughout the year.

QUESTION | Do states certify police officers, and can certifications be removed for misconduct?

While not technically an occupational license, the certification of police officers is required in most states. The International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training defines certification as “the process by which law enforcement officers are licensed in their respective jurisdictions, establishing the satisfaction of selection, training and continuing performance standards.”

In most states, police officer standards and training (POST) commissions establish these standards and carry out certification. They also are responsible for decertification.

Nearly all U.S. states, including all 11 in the Midwest, have existing statutory authority to certify or decertify, according to Roger Goldman, a law professor at Saint Louis University and leading researcher on this issue. (The states without such authority are California, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island.)

However, some states (including Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin) in the Midwest do not provide their POST commissions with the authority to administratively revoke the certifications of police officers for non-criminal misconduct. In addition, the use of decertification varies greatly state by state. For example, in a 2016 study, University of Seattle criminal justice professor Matthew Hickman found that Florida and Georgia alone accounted for well over half of the country’s total revocations during the previous year. The 11 Midwestern states accounted for 8.6 percent of the country’s revocations.

Furthermore, there is sometimes no guarantee that law enforcement agencies will report officer arrests, non-criminal misconduct or firings to the state POST commission.

A 2017 Michigan law requires law enforcement agencies to create a separation of service record when an officer resigns, and for agencies to obtain individuals’ service records prior to hiring. However, this does not necessarily mean the hiring agencies cannot, or will not, hire officers who resigned because of past misconduct in another jurisdiction.

“There are many cases around the country where officers leave their departments because of misconduct and then they are rehired — sometimes knowingly, sometimes not — by other departments … That’s why you absolutely need to have the states come in and prevent this sort of thing from happening,” Goldman said in a 2017 interview with The Atlantic.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, and Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel have all recently called for legislative fixes to a system that allows for officers fired in one jurisdiction to be hired in another. In Illinois, Attorney General Kwame Raoul is calling for a new police-licensing system, similar to the way the state licenses doctors, lawyers, hairdressers, etc.

Meanwhile, one state that currently cannot decertify police officers is poised to enact one of the most far-reaching laws in the nation. Massachusetts HB 4794 and SB 2880 would establish certification committees made up of half, if not all, community members.

Question of the Month

The Month response by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csg.org), policy analyst for CSG Midwest, which provides individualized research assistance to legislators, legislative staff and other government officials. This section highlights a research question received by CSG Midwest. Inquiries can be sent to cmcs@csg.org.
by Tim Anderson (tanderson@cs.org)

In Wisconsin, the path to getting any kind of dyslexia-related bill through the Legislature has never been easy, with bills in various sessions getting cut up in what has been called the state’s “reading wars” over issues such as phonics, whole language and how best to instruct students. But proponents of getting the state, and its school districts, to do more to help young people with dyslexia and related conditions finally found some legislative success in early 2020.

“It’s going to be a very good first step,” Wisconsin Rep. Bob Kalp says of AB 110, which became law in February. “[It] puts dyslexia on the radar screen in our state.”

Prior to the bills passage, Wisconsin was one of four Midwestern states (Kansas, Michigan and South Dakota are the others) without laws on dyslexia, according to the National Center for Improving Literacy. Much of that center’s research has focused on provisions that require dyslexia-related screenings and interventions by school districts, as well as training for prospective and current teachers.

Wisconsin’s AB 110 includes no such mandates.

Instead, the state Department of Public Instruction ( DPI) will develop a guidebook on dyslexia and related conditions and then update it every three years. It will include information on how to identify dyslexia and provide students with proven intervention and instructional strategies.

An advisory committee will write the guidebook, and Kalp says it will be made up of equal numbers of members from two groups that traditionally have been on opposing sides in the state’s “reading wars.” The idea is to throw them in a room together and, with help from the DPI, “build a guidebook,” he adds. Once this new resource is complete, Wisconsin school districts must provide a link to it on their websites.

As part of the statute, too, Wisconsin legislators defined dyslexia:

“[A] specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin … characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities.”

Kalp is now looking to take additional policy steps — for example, modifying local reading assessments (AB 632) and requiring that each of Wisconsin’s Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, which provide support to K-12 districts, hire a dyslexia specialist (AB 635).

His proposals also incorporate some of the state strategies tracked by the National Center for Improving Literacy; AB 604, for instance, would require school districts to have a policy for identifying and helping students with dyslexia.

According to the center’s Brian Gearin, among the 50 states, universal screenings and early interventions are the most common policy trends.

“Most states with screening and intervention laws also provide educators with some level of in-service professional development,” he adds. “But in many cases, it is just a one-time event. About a dozen have laws that address pre-service training and educator preparation.”

The prevalence of dyslexia among students varies widely in different studies, but the rate usually falls between 3 percent and 7 percent. Gearin says these students’ reading difficulties often can be alleviated if they are addressed early on.

“After that, schools should use evidence-based interventions that correspond to a student’s specific area of need.”

This year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Chairman’s Initiative of Michigan Sen. Ken Horn is focusing on state policies related to literacy. Stateline Midwest will feature a series of articles on this subject throughout the calendar year.

**MLC CHAIRMAN’S INITIATIVE ON LITERACY: WISCONSIN HAS NEW DYSLEXIA LAW; OTHER STATES REQUIRE SCREENINGS, INTERVENTIONS AND TEACHER TRAINING**

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH**

**Do Midwestern states have procurement laws that encourage government purchasing of recycled products?**

Legislation in nearly every state in the region provides a purchasing preference to products manufactured or produced using recycled content. However, the extent of the preference varies, including whether the state has statutory language that spells out a price preference for bidders who offer recycled products.

Indiana, Kansas, Michigan and Minnesota are examples of states that specify a particular price preference. Indiana offers a price preference of between 10 and 15 percent for products containing recycled content, while Kansas provides a 5 percent price preference. The Kansas preference applies only to paper, including newsprint and high-grade printing and writing paper.

In Michigan, the statute provides for a 10 percent price preference for recycled materials. In addition, the law includes language that a minimum of 20 percent of purchases in a product contain recycled content. Minnesota also requires the purchase of products with recycled content, when they do not exceed the price of products without recycled content by more than 10 percent.

Other states in the Midwest have statutes that express a general preference for the purchase of products with recycled content, but often without a specific price preference. Instead, many of these statutes call for state agencies to buy recycled products whenever economically feasible.

Paper is a commonly requested recycled product and has been one of the nation’s recycling success stories. Slightly more than 68 million tons of paper and paperboard were recovered in 2018, a new high, according to the American Forest and Paper Association. This has kept increasing amounts of paper out of landfills. In 2017, 22 million tons of paper products went to landfills, compared to 36 million in 2007.

Along with using their purchasing powers to encourage recycling, states have the option of restricting the disposal of certain materials from landfills and/or requiring that certain materials be recycled.

According to a 50-state study from the Northeast Recycling Council, every Midwestern state has a disposal ban of some kind. [Nationwide, the most common banned materials are lead-acid batteries, waste oil, tires and liquid wastes.]

In addition, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin were among the 22 states noted in the council’s 2017 study as having some kind of mandatory recycling law in place. The breadth of these laws can vary widely. Illinois’ statute only covers mercury thermostats, for example, while in Wisconsin, local governments are required to have recycling programs that collect aluminum cans, corrugated cardboard, food and beverage containers, and certain types of paper.

Nationwide, the five materials most frequently covered by states’ mandatory recycling laws are lead-acid batteries, corrugated cardboard, high-grade office paper, aluminum and tin cans, and glass containers.

Six states in the Midwest have battery-recycling laws of some kind, notes Call2Recycle®, a consumer-battery recycling and stewardship program.

In Minnesota and Iowa, the producers of certain types of batteries must offer or fund recycling of their products. (Minnesota’s law covers more types of batteries than Iowa’s.) The laws in Indiana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin apply to lead-acid batteries. Indiana and Wisconsin require retailers to post notices to customers about the state’s disposal and recycling laws. North Dakota and South Dakota require retailers to accept lead-acid batteries as part of a customer exchange/trade-in.

**Question of the Month response by Ilene Grossman, CSG Midwest assistant director. She can be reached at igrossman@csg.org.**

CSG Midwest provides individualized research assistance to legislators, legislative staff and other state government officials. This section highlights a research question received and answered by CSG Midwest. Research inquiries can be sent to csg@cs.org.
**STATE REQUIREMENTS ON PERSONAL FINANCE EDUCATION**

- Stand-alone class must be offered by high schools and taken by students
- Coursework must be offered by high schools and taken by students (integrated into other stand-alone class)
- Coursework must be offered by high schools

*Every Midwestern state except Kansas requires schools to implement state standards on personal finance education. This subject is part of standardized testing in Michigan.

Source: The Council for Economic Education

**Breast Cancer Deaths Per 100,000 Women**

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<tr>
<td>Below U.S. rate</td>
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Source: American Cancer Society (using data from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Question of the Month**

What state have legislature in the Midwest done to improve access to diagnostic mammography and other screenings?

Screening mammograms are used to check for breast cancer in women who have not yet shown any signs or symptoms of the disease. Diagnostic mammograms, on the other hand, are used when additional images are needed after the screening mammogram discovers possible indicators of breast cancer.

These indicators include lumps and dense breast tissue, the latter is an important indicator because women with extremely dense breasts are four to six times more likely to develop cancer than women with fatty breasts, according to Denubeast info, an online educational resource. Additionally, it is often hard to detect cancer via routine screening mammograms in higher-density breasts, thus necessitating further tests. Beyond more in-depth X-ray diagnostic mammograms, other detection tests include ultrasound (sonograms) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs).

Since 2010, under the Affordable Care Act, insurance providers must cover screening mammograms once a year for women ages 40 to 74 with average risk for breast cancer, and once every two years for all other women. However, insurance providers are not required to cover diagnostic tests under federal law.

As of January 2020, 39 states — including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin in the Midwest — had passed laws mandating that patients be notified about high breast density by either their screening facility or their physician. Often, these notifications must also include information on additional screening options. A smaller number of U.S. states (nine) require insurers to cover the costs of supplemental diagnostic screenings, including Illinois and Indiana, according to Donubeast info. Illinois’ SB 162, signed into law last year, is considered one of the most far-reaching statutes of its kind in the country. Under the new law, when diagnostic mammograms, ultrasounds, and MRIs are deemed medically necessary by a medical professional, they must be covered by both private insurers and Medicaid. SB 162 also prohibits cost sharing, such as deductibles, coinsurance, copayments, etc., for medically necessary diagnostic mammograms.

Indiana’s law, passed in 2013, asserts that health insurance (including the state’s employee health plan) which provides coverage for basic health care services must provide coverage for appropriate medical screenings, exams or tests for female enrollees at 40 years old who have been found to have high breast density.

Nebraska is among the states where legislation has been introduced this year to expand insurance requirements and improve patient access. LB 948 would require insurers to cover one baseline screening mammogram for women between 35 and 40 years of age, an annual screening mammogram for women 40 or older, and an annual screening digital breast tomosynthesis and diagnostic MRI for women 40 or older with increased risks of breast cancer.

Other related bills in the Midwest this year include Iowa’s SB 3162 and Minnesota’s HF 3088.

**Question of the Month response by Mitch Arvidson, a CSG Midwest policy analyst.**

CSG Midwest provides individualized research assistance to legislators, legislative staff and other state government officials. This section highlights a research question received and answered by CSG Midwest. Research inquiries can be sent to csigmw@csg.org.
I n their federal lawsuit against the state of Michigan, seven students of Detroit’s public schools told of buildings that were unsafe and of classrooms that were unfit for learning.

“The smell of ‘dead vermin and black mold in hallways’,” Teachers absent as many as 50 days a year. Classes run by substitute teachers, paraprofessionals or even the students themselves.

Out-of-date textbooks having to be shared by multiple students.

Classroom temperatures exceeding 90 degrees, or freezing cold other times of the year.

“The basic thesis of the case was that these were schools in name only, and they were not capable of delivering even their basic literacy instruction,” says Mark Rosenbaum, director of Public Counsel, the largest pro bono law firm in the nation and an attorney for the student-plaintiffs.

“As a result, the students were not being put in a position where they could better their circumstances or where they could be meaningful participants in a democracy.”

The evidence in this case: A vast majority of students in these schools fell below proficiency on reading and math assessments.

The legal argument: These students were being deprived of access to foundational literacy, a constitutional right under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Earlier this year, a U.S. Court of Appeals agreed, overturning a decision at the district level that had sided with the state of Michigan.

“The role of basic literacy education within our broader constitutional framework suggests it is essential to the exercise of other fundamental rights,” the U.S. Court of Appeals wrote in April in its 2-1 decision.

“Most significantly, every meaningful interaction between a citizen and the state is predicated on a minimum level of literacy, meaning that access to literacy is necessary to access our political processes.”

Soon after the Court of Appeals ruling, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer reached a settlement with the plaintiffs (against the wishes of the state Legislature), agreeing to take the following actions:

- Propose legislation during her first term that provides $94.4 million in literacy-related programs and initiatives for the Detroit Public School Community District.
- Provide $280,000 for the student-plaintiffs to further their education or access a high-quality literacy program.
- Bolster the advisory role of the state Department of Education in helping school districts implement evidence-based literacy strategies, with a focus on reducing class, racial and ethnic disparities.
- Establish a Detroit Equity Task Force that will conduct yearly evaluations on literacy and provide state-level policy recommendations.

According to Rosenbaum, conditions in Detroit made it a clear choice to make the literacy-based challenge to substandard schools — the state had taken over the school system for an extended period of time, for example, and Detroit had the lowest literacy rate of any major U.S. school district.

But he adds that “you could throw a dart at the map, and you’ll find in any state a school district where you have enrollment with mostly students of color and low-income families having to address the same challenges.”

Earlier this year, California settled a lawsuit brought by students, parents and advocacy groups. Unlike the lawsuit in Michigan, the California case centered on students’ right to access literacy under the state Constitution.

As part of the settlement, California agreed to spend $50 million on evidence-based literacy instruction at the state’s 75 lowest-performing elementary schools. It also will create a new statewide position to lead Californians work on literacy instruction.

The Michigan and California lawsuits were the first right-to-literacy cases of their kind, Rosenbaum said, but won’t be the last:

“There are more of these cases coming.”

This year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Chairman’s Initiative of Michigan Sen. Karen Horn is focusing on policies related to literacy. StateLine Midwest is featuring a series of articles on this subject throughout the year.

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### Question of the Month

**Do states require privacy sleeves, return postage or a witness signature for absentee or vote-by-mail ballots?**

Entering this year, 29 states — including all Midwestern states but Indiana — already allowed vote-by-mail or “no excuse” absentee voting, meaning a voter can request an absentee ballot without having to meet set criteria, according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

But there has never been an election year quite like 2020.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, absentee ballot applications were mailed to all registered voters in advance of primary elections in states such as Indiana (which also temporarily waived its “excuse” requirement), Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Under a recently enacted law in Illinois (SB 1863), every person who has voted over the past two years will be sent an application in advance of this November’s general election.

As a result of many states’ primaries being held during the COVID-19 pandemic, there already has been a historic rise in the number of people voting by mail in Iowa’s June 2 primary election, for example, more than 41,000 people voted absentee, dwarfing the previous mark of 38,000 from the 2016 primary. In North Dakota, all 53 counties opted for voting by mail in that state’s June 9 primary. 199,321 of the 196,000 ballots sent were returned by voters.

Due to this increase, vote-by-mail policies are receiving increased attention and scrutiny. Here are results of a recent CSG Midwest survey about policies in three key areas: the use of secrecy sleeves/envelopes, whether postage is prepaid for votes, and whether voters must provide a witness signature with their returned ballot.

#### Secrecy sleeves/envelopes

Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota and Ohio provide special “secrecy” sleeves or envelopes for voters to protect ballot secrecy in the mail or when opened for election judges to verify the ballot isn’t spoiled. Under Minnesota law, voters must be provided with an additional envelope or flap that “conceals the signature, identification and other information.” Other states leave the use of secrecy sleeves or envelopes to local election authorities, for example, this policy is left to the counties, says Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Katie Koupal.

**Prepaid postage**

A return envelope with postage prepaid means voters don’t have to pay just to have their ballot counted, thus making them easier to return. Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin provide postage-paid envelopes for voters to return ballots. Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and South Dakota do not. Illinois and Kansas leave the decision on prepaid postage to local election boards or counties, respectively. But Illinois’ SB 1863, which sets emergency rules for the 2020 general election, requires election authorities to accept “any vote by mail ballot returned with insufficient or no postage.”

**Witness signature**

While votes in all Midwestern states must sign the return envelope to sign their signatures can be compared to ones already on file, Minnesota and Wisconsin require a witness signature attesting that the person who filled out the ballot is who he or she claims to be. Minnesota is waiving that requirement for its Aug. 11 primary election.

Four states require witness signatures (Indiana, Michigan and Nebraska) or affidavits (Illinois) if voters need assistance or make only a mark — for example, an “X” — instead of a signature. South Dakota requires a notary’s signature for absentee ballot applications if the voter doesn’t submit a photocopy of his or her ID, but not for the ballots themselves, according to the nonprofit, nonprofit organization Vote At Home. Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota and Ohio do not require witness signatures.

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*Question of the Month response by Jon Pytkisz (jpytkisz@csg.org), policy analyst for CSG Midwest, which provides individualized research assistance to legislators, legislative staff and other government officials. This section highlights a research question received by CSG Midwest. Inquiries can be sent to csgm@csg.org.*
AUGUST 2020

MLC CHAIR’S INITIATIVE

COULD MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION BE THE ANTIDOTE FOR MISINFORMATION?

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

In an age when the definition of “media” has expanded by orders of magnitude and the very definition of “truth” seems up for grabs, how are elementary and high school students to make sense of the myriad images and messages — overt and subliminal — bombarding their neurons?

The answer is comprehensive media-literacy education for K-12 students, says Erin McNeill, founder and president of Media Literacy Now, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit advocacy group.

People are aware of how the nuts and bolts of media systems work, but not of how the messages work their way into their thinking, McNeill says. Media-literacy education gives students the critical thinking skills to be aware of and assess those messages.

“Media literacy for the 21st century,” McNeill says, “is like being able to smoke and vaping: showing teens how they were manipulated by tobacco companies is effective, but that wasn’t helpful when vaping companies used the same playbook. “If we had educated young people, we wouldn’t have lost 50 years of public health progress.”

LEGISLATING FOR LITERACY

The idea has caught on since Media Literacy Now was formed between 2011-13. While Ohio and Florida are the only states with statutory requirements to include media literacy in their curricula for K-12 students, Minnesota’s administrative rules include media literacy standards, specifically that students “will critically analyze information found in electronic, print and mass media and use a variety of these sources” and “will communicate using traditional or digital multimedia formats and digital writing and publishing for a specific purpose.”

A Minnesota law requires the state’s education commissioner to “review and appropriately embed technology and information literacy standards” based on recommendations from school media specialists into the state’s academic standards and graduation requirements (and to review them every 10 years).

While not technically an occupational license, the certification of police officers is required in most states. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, and Training defines certification as “the process by which law enforcement officers are licensed in their respective jurisdictions, establishing the satisfaction of selection, training and continuing performance standards.”

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Question of the Month response by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csg.org), policy analyst for CSG Midwest, which provides individualized research assistance to legislators, legislative staff and other government officials. This section highlights a research question received by CSG Midwest. Inquiries can be sent to csgrcs.org.
**State, Federal Funds for “Grants to States” Program for Library Services (FY 2020)**

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*Source: Institute of Museum and Library Services*

**QUESTION | Under state laws in the Midwest, when can election officials start verifying, processing and counting mail-in absentee ballots?**

This year, more than 100 million Americans voted before Election Day—a record number that was close to 74 percent of the total votes cast in the 2016 election, according to the U.S. Election Project. In the Midwest, in every state, early-voting figures eclipsed 50 percent of total turnout four years ago.

These statistics underscore just how different this year’s election was for voters, as well as state and local officials: for health and safety reasons, growing numbers of people chose to vote before Election Day, either in person or by mail.

These increases, especially in vote-by-mail, have raised questions about state laws that limit when ballots can start being processed and counted. Such statutory restrictions have been in place for many decades due to concerns that results could be released prior to polls being closed on Election Day, Amber McIntosh, CEO of the National Vote at Home Institute, said in an interview earlier this year with CSG Midwest.

“Back in the day when it was more hand tallies and not optical scanners doing the tabulating, there was more of the potential of that happening,” she said.

In the Midwest, with the exceptions of Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and Ohio (see map), states don’t allow ballot counting to begin until Election Day, sometimes only after polls close. Outside the region, some states allow for ballot counting well in advance of Election Day—15 days in Colorado and seven days in Oregon. These states have traditionally relied on mail-in ballot systems. California passed legislation this year that permitted ballot counting 29 days in advance of the November 2020 election.

Prior to counting, each ballot that arrives by mail must be verified. The ballot envelope typically contains information necessary to verify the voter, so election officials are able to match the name and address of a registered voter with the identifying information on the outside envelope, or the privacy sleeve, holding the mail ballot. Many states verify the signatures of the voter. Some states then allow further processing in advance of Election Day, such as removing the ballots from the envelope and unfolding it, or placing it in a sealed container for counting.

During the 2020 presidential primaries, more than half a million mail ballots were rejected. The most common mistake was related to voter signatures. Either a voter’s signature does not match the one on file, or the ballot envelope simply was not signed.

According to the Campaign Legal Center, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 18 states—including Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Ohio—had required mail ballot rejections to be followed by a cure of an error that would cause a ballot to be rejected.

Nancy Medema, program director at the State Library of Iowa, says its grant is used for technology but also for literacy, mainly via the Iowa Center for the Book (an affiliate of the national program created by the Library of Congress to promote literacy and reading).

“The center operates “All Iowa Reads,” a statewide book club of sorts that picks a book each year for adults, adolescents (ages 12 to 18) and children (ages 8 to 12). Each of these books is set in Iowa or written by an Iowa author if possible. The center also runs the Iowa Literary Award Program, which has made an “outstanding contribution to that has literacy efforts.”

Measuring the success of literacy efforts is difficult because feedback is largely anecdotal, especially so this year as programs also slowed when the COVID-19 pandemic began, Medema says.

“We measure [by] how many literacy programs get reported to us, so we have a somewhat good idea of how many programs there are,” she says. “You hear these kinds of stories that help us determine, ‘Yes, we want to keep this program.’”

Ohio determined that grant-supported literacy programs can address any form of literacy, not just traditional “learn to read” ones, says Evan Struble, associate state librarian at the State Library of Ohio. Even before COVID-19 struck, he says, literacy grants enabled the “Guiding Ohio Online” program to place a State Library technology trainer in a rural library for 12 months to assist staff and patrons with navigating the online environment (for example, job hunting or using e-government services).

“But digital literacy “becomes increasingly critical as we’re forced to work remotely and use all sorts of devices” as a result of the pandemic, Struble says.

“It’s been interesting, anecdotal speaking, to see how libraries had to pivot and respond to maintain a relevant summer library program” by broadening their reach via social media platforms and online forums, he says.

Ohio officials are now looking at how they might encourage libraries to maintain their digital reach to a wider audience: “I think there will have to be a place for a digital option alongside traditional offerings,” Struble says. The Ohio State Library also uses literacy money to fund a summer library grant, open to every library in Ohio, which focuses on helping keep students (and others) involved with reading during the summer months.

This year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Chairman’s Initiative of Michigan Sen. Ken Horn is focusing on policies related to literacy. Stateline Midwest is featuring a series of articles on this subject throughout the year.

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH**

“...a statewide book club of sorts that picks a book each year for adults...”

**STATELINE MIDWEST | DECEMBER 2020**

**STATELINE MIDWEST**

| Illinois | $2,894,856 | $5,619,426 |
| Indiana | $1,739,021 | $3,358,276 |
| Iowa | $1,028,494 | $1,996,489 |
| Kansas | $981,083 | $1,904,655 |
| Michigan | $2,368,299 | $4,597,286 |
| Minnesota | $1,605,154 | $3,272,652 |
| Nebraska | $749,893 | $1,455,674 |
| North Dakota | $559,194 | $1,085,494 |
| Ohio | $2,702,131 | $5,245,313 |
| South Dakota | $883,237 | $1,132,165 |
| Wisconsin | $1,551,680 | $3,011,929 |

*Source: Institute of Museum and Library Services*

**WHEN VOTES CAN BE PROCESSED AND COUNTED IN MIDWEST (2020 ELECTION)**

Process and count ballots before Election Day

Process ballots before Election Day, count ballots on Election Day

*Processing can include measures such as signature matching and verification that information on the outside of the ballot is complete. Some states also allow additional types of ballot processing in advance of Election Day.*

These notice-and-cure provisions give voters a chance to fix their ballot, either by affidavit or in person. Other states adopted such laws this year in response to the rise in mail-in voting. Some states also have faced court orders to allow voters to fix their ballots.