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June 2, 2026

**Dr. Jill K. Underly**  
State Superintendent  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
125 S. Webster Street  
P.O. Box 7841  
Madison, WI 53707-7841

Dear Superintendent Underly,

The data is clear: Milwaukee faces a worst-in-the-nation reading crisis. Milwaukee's children are falling further behind with each passing year; they cannot afford for adults to continue to put politics in front of their education.

We write in support of the work of the Milwaukee Reading Coalition, of which City Forward Collective is a proud member, to call on you and the Department of Public Instruction to return to the table and deliver on its broken promises, on behalf of the thousands of Milwaukee students who deserve high-quality early literacy opportunities.

The Milwaukee Reading Coalition spent a year doing everything right — building an unprecedentedly broad, citywide coalition, securing funding, standing up infrastructure — only to be met with shifting guidance and bureaucratic delay. That is unacceptable.

Milwaukee's literacy crisis has persisted for more than thirty years — and it is getting worse, not better. On the most recent Nation's Report Card, Milwaukee Public Schools posted some of the lowest scores ever recorded for the district and ranked at the bottom of all 26 major urban districts assessed:

- **4th grade reading:** Only 9% of MPS fourth-graders scored proficient or above.
- **8th grade reading:** Only 15% of MPS eighth-graders scored proficient or above.

The Education Recovery Scorecard delivered the same damning verdict: Milwaukee ranked in the 1st percentile nationally in reading — below 99% of districts around the country. For Black students, Milwaukee ranked in the bottom 20 of more than 10,000 districts assessed a.

And, this crisis is a citywide one: even under DPI's lowered standards for students, just one in four Milwaukee students met expectations in reading on the 2025 state assessments.

For the first time, Milwaukee's district, public charter, and private schools have united with philanthropy, civic, and community leaders behind one goal: ensuring every K5-3 teacher in Milwaukee is trained in the Science of Reading, with real accountability for outcomes. It's what we know works — an approach that's powered Mississippi's remarkable rise, led to gains

across the Southern Surge states, and is yielding results in schools across the country.

A coalition this rare – and this necessary – on an issue this urgent deserves a willing partner at the state level. City Forward Collective stands with the Milwaukee Reading Coalition’s leadership in calling on DPI to return to the table. We urge DPI to re-engage in good faith and to utilize existing literacy funding to support this initiative without further delay. Milwaukee’s families – and especially Milwaukee’s students – deserve nothing less.

Silence and continued delays send one message to Milwaukee’s families: that once again, their children will be the ones shortchanged. We refuse to accept that outcome – and we call on DPI to do the same.

For All of Milwaukee’s Children,



**Colleston Morgan Jr.**  
President & Executive Director  
City Forward Collective



**Tim Sheehy**  
Chair, Board of Directors  
City Forward Collective