

## Literacy Professorships Established At 4 UNC Universities

By Administrator

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An \$8 million gift from the C.D. Spangler Foundation has created four literacy professorships across the state, the University of North Carolina System announced. The Spangler Foundation in December 2021 pledged to establish the professorships at UNC institutions with the intent of ensuring reading proficiency in North Carolina's children. The professorships are designed to recruit and retain nationally recognized scholars who will support the training of future teachers and in-service teachers while also preparing future literacy faculty.

"We are so grateful to the Spangler Foundation for its historic investment in early child literacy at our colleges of education," said UNC System President Peter Hans. "The four distinguished professorships will bring experts to North Carolina who will help develop future teachers to ensure reading proficiency among our youngest learners. I can't imagine anything more important for our children, our schools and our future."

The \$8 million investment is divided equally across four institutions:

- Appalachian State University established the Spangler Distinguished Professor of Early Child Literacy within its Department of Reading Education and Special Education in its Reich College of Education.
- East Carolina University established the Spangler Distinguished Professor of Early Child Literacy in its College of Education.
- North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University established the Spangler Distinguished Professor of Early Child Literacy in its College of Education.
- The University of North Carolina at Charlotte established the Spangler Distinguished Professor of Early Child Literacy within its Cato College of Education.

These distinguished professors will serve as a network of early literacy expertise with the purpose of advancing the UNC System's current literacy initiatives across 15 educator preparation programs, through engaging in outreach and dissemination of best practice. In addition, the cadre of professors will enhance partnerships with school districts across North

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Carolina to foster collaboration between teacher education programs and current teachers in the field.

Funds from the foundation could be used toward the professors' salary, travel and research expenses, stipends for research assistants, special equipment, library materials and programmatic support.

The late President C.D. Spangler Jr., who served the UNC System from 1986 until 1997, believed that literacy was the key to economic and social progress for all North Carolinians.

"It is critically important that the University accept responsibility for eliminating disabling illiteracy in our people," Spangler said during his inaugural address. "It is not only cruel for us to permit illiteracy to exist, it is also unwise. Productivity, no matter how you measure it or for what purpose, is not possible without a literate people. Because these teachers reach across the state and into every home, I cannot imagine a more proper effort for the University to pursue."

These words helped inspire the Spangler Foundation's support for professorships in early child literacy, said Spangler Foundation Director Anna Spangler Nelson, who also serves on the UNC Board of Governors.

"North Carolina's reading proficiency levels, already disturbingly low, have declined further over the course of the pandemic," said Nelson. "Our investment in this work seeks to elevate the importance of early child literacy across North Carolina, enhance the preparedness of our teachers, and acknowledge our shared responsibility for doing better for our children and their futures."