



LITERACY™
RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 3105
LaGrange, GA 30241
706-443-1334

www.literacyresearchassociation.org

Dear LRA Family and Friends,

Warm greetings to everyone—particularly coming from Arizona!

As Conference Chairs for LRA's 71st Annual Meeting, Doris and I are looking forward to meeting you face-to-face in Atlanta, Georgia! Plans are well underway with conference research presentations being organized, plenary speakers being arranged, and elements of virtual hybridity being implemented. We will be sharing more of these details in the coming weeks and months. But first, we wanted to provide some further context related to our decision to meet face-to-face in Atlanta, particularly given the recent spate of legislation across the country aimed at restricting voting rights.

As you know, in just the spring of this year, 14 states have enacted laws that suppress voting access, and similar legislative efforts across the country in almost every state are underway. These efforts to curtail one of our most precious citizenship rights are of great concern to LRA's Board of Directors whose members share the feeling, as one long-time LRA supporter expressed, that such attempts to limit voting opportunities are "egregiously anti-democratic."

However, unlike other unfortunate events such as the senseless and tragic murders of George Floyd and members of the Asian community in Atlanta—to which LRA was able to respond in a timely manner with official statements of solidarity—the conference location issue is more complicated, and LRA's flexibility to respond in ways which seem more aligned with its mission and social justice orientation is limited.

In short, like other professional organizations of LRA's size or larger and with whom we also compete for conference venues, the needs for acquiring sufficient space for the number of research presentations, organizational and unit meetings, and conference attendees at the best prices require that LRA contract these venues (after receiving dozens of bids) usually three years in advance. In addition, these contracts also subject LRA to substantial cancellation fees in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, even two and three years out, making it almost impossible to respond to any local or national event quickly. The Atlanta location, for example, was contracted in late May of 2018.

Despite these constraints, there was serious consideration this year about canceling our contract with the Westin due to the issue of voting rights and possible safety issues due to COVID-19. The Board even explore this possibility through LRA's legal counsel. However, in the end, cancellation would have had serious financial consequences for LRA, and the Board decided that moving ahead with the in-person conference was best for the long-term well-being of the organization. Nonetheless, the Board is discussing how to improve our negotiating leverage in these contractual agreements, but there are many conflicting factors to consider.

Most importantly, when the issue of voter suppression was discussed, there was consensus that Stacy Abram's plea for businesses, professional organizations, and tourists still to come to Georgia made sense for the sake of the workers who would be most hurt by a turndown in business. Therefore, in our minds at least, the Board politically and ethically leaned toward greater solidarity with the workers in the state—the hotel, local service, and restaurant employees in our case—who might be directly impacted and felt less inclined to exact a perceived punishment on the state.

These many issues which are impacting our democracy and literacy research will, no doubt, engender further

discussion at our annual meeting. Perhaps collectively, we can come to some viable solutions and ways to approach these complex issues.

With great appreciation for everyone's support of LRA, and best,

David Yaden
President-Elect, 71st Annual Meeting Conference Chair

Doris Walker-Dalhouse
Vice President, 71st Annual Meeting Associate Conference Chair
Literacy Research Association