

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
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STATE OF NEW JERSEY
221st LEGISLATURE

ADOPTED JUNE 20, 2024

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SYNOPSIS

Requires DOE to establish working group on student literacy; mandates universal literacy screenings for kindergarten through grade three students; requires professional development for certain school district employees.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Substitute as adopted by the Senate Education Committee.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/28/2024)

1 **AN ACT** concerning student literacy and supplementing chapter 6 of
2 Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

3

4 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

6

7 1. As used in this act:

8 “Foundational literacy instruction” means an evidence-based
9 reading instruction practice that addresses the acquisition of
10 language, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and
11 spelling, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension
12 that may be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students.

13 “Reading proficiency” means the level at which a student scores
14 on a universal literacy screening, diagnostic assessment,
15 standardized summative assessment, or progress monitoring in
16 relation to grade-level expectations.

17 “Screening period” means the time period required to conduct a
18 universal literacy screening and determine screening results.

19 “Universal literacy screening” means a process conducted to
20 gather information about the literacy skills of a student to identify
21 or predict a student’s risk of experiencing reading difficulties in
22 order to inform instruction, differentiate targeted intervention, and
23 determine if additional assessment is required.

24

25 2. a. There is established in the Department of Education a
26 Working Group on Student Literacy. The purpose of the working
27 group shall be to provide recommendations to the department
28 regarding the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies,
29 appropriate and reliable instruments for a universal literacy
30 screening, and high-quality literacy instructional materials.

31 b. The working group shall consist of members appointed by
32 the Commissioner of Education. The working group shall be
33 composed of members representing the northern, central, and
34 southern regions of the State, and shall include, but not be limited
35 to:

36 (1) at least one member who is a parent of a student enrolled in
37 a school district with expertise on how to meaningfully include
38 parents on this topic; and

39 (2) literacy experts and practitioners with demonstrated success
40 implementing evidenced-based literacy strategies, including:

41 (a) at least one member who has expertise working with
42 students with disabilities;

43 (b) at least one member who has expertise working with
44 multilingual learners;

45 (c) at least one member who is a current practitioner in grades
46 preschool through grade three with specialized experience in
47 foundational literacy instruction and intervention;

1 (d) at least one member who has expertise working with
2 students with dyslexia;

3 (e) at least one member who is a certified school library media
4 specialist;

5 (f) at least one member who is a representative from the public
6 charter schools community; and

7 (g) at least one member who is a certified speech-language
8 specialist.

9 c. Appointments to the working group shall be made within 60
10 days after the effective date of this act. The working group shall
11 organize as soon as practicable, but no later than the 30th day after
12 the members are appointed. Vacancies in the membership of the
13 working group shall be filled in the same manner as the original
14 appointments were made.

15

16 3. a. It shall be the duty of the working group to examine and
17 make recommendations to the Department of Education regarding
18 the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies,
19 appropriate and reliable instruments for a universal literacy
20 screening, and high-quality literacy instructional materials.

21 b. The recommendations shall include, but not be limited to, an
22 examination of:

23 (1) the body of research related to universal literacy screenings
24 and literacy instruction materials;

25 (2) ways to expand professional learning for universal literacy
26 screenings;

27 (3) acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting universal
28 literacy screenings, which shall consider: constructs measured;
29 technical adequacy; attention to linguistic diversity; and
30 administration usability and support; and

31 (4) State and national best practices, regulations, and policies
32 that support successful foundational literacy instruction,
33 assessment, and intervention.

34

35 4. a. The Department of Education shall, after consideration of
36 the recommendations provided by the working group pursuant to
37 section 3 of this act, develop and publish guidance for use by school
38 districts beginning with the 2025-2026 school year regarding:

39 (1) acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting a
40 universal literacy screening;

41 (2) high-quality literacy instructional materials;

42 (3) best practices for the frequency of screening students in
43 grades kindergarten through three, and grades four through 12; and

44 (4) data analysis strategies for high-quality literacy instruction
45 and intervention.

46 b. The department shall disseminate the guidance developed
47 pursuant to this section to school districts.

1 5. a. A school district shall, at least twice annually, conduct a
2 literacy screening of each student enrolled in kindergarten through
3 grade three to determine a student's reading proficiency using an
4 acceptable and reliable instrument for a universal literacy screening
5 that complies with the guidance issued by the department pursuant
6 to section 4 of this act, within the limit of funds appropriated or
7 otherwise made available to the district for this purpose.

8 b. Following the screening conducted pursuant to subsection a.
9 of this section, a school district shall provide to the student any
10 necessary supports as determined by the district, which may include
11 conducting an additional screening. Supports shall be provided in a
12 manner consistent with the district's intervention and referral
13 services as required pursuant to State Board of Education
14 regulations.

15
16 6. a. A school district shall provide written notification to a
17 parent or guardian of a student's results of the universal literacy
18 screening within 30 days of the close of the initial screening period
19 conducted pursuant to subsection a. of section 5 of this act. The
20 notification shall include the identification of a student's literacy
21 screening score with a comparison to grade-level norms, and
22 information concerning the range of intervention and referral
23 services supports, including but not limited to, reading intervention
24 supports available in the district to assist the student in meeting
25 grade-level reading proficiency goals.

26 b. A school district shall report universal literacy screening
27 data to the department in a manner and frequency determined by the
28 Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the working group
29 established pursuant to section 2 of this act.

30 c. Nothing in this section shall be construed to preclude the
31 screening requirements of P.L.2013, c.210 (C.18A:40-5.1 et seq.),
32 or any other screening requirement of school districts established by
33 any other law or regulation.

34
35 7. The department shall establish an online resource center to
36 aid school districts in the selection of evidence-based, high-quality
37 literacy instructional materials, including data analysis tools, as part
38 of the school district's implementation of the New Jersey Student
39 Learning Standards in English Language Arts. The online resource
40 center shall be consistent with the guidance developed by the
41 department pursuant to section 4 of this act.

42
43 8. a. The Department of Education shall establish a
44 professional development program regarding evidence-based
45 foundational literacy instruction, which shall be available to all
46 school districts at no cost. The program shall be made available to:
47 teaching staff members serving students in preschool through grade
48 six, including school library media specialists serving students in

1 kindergarten through grade six, individuals serving multilingual
2 learners and students with disabilities, and individuals holding an
3 educational services certificate with a reading specialist
4 endorsement, individuals holding an educational services certificate
5 with an early literacy specialist endorsement, and individuals
6 holding an educational services certificate with a speech-language
7 specialist endorsement; and school administrators.

8 b. The program shall be differentiated by grade band. The
9 program shall include, but is not limited to:

10 (1) for teaching staff members serving students in preschool
11 through grade three:

- 12 (a) orthography;
- 13 (b) phonological and phonemic awareness;
- 14 (c) phonics;
- 15 (d) fluency; and
- 16 (e) vocabulary and comprehension; and

17 (2) for teaching staff members serving students in grades four
18 through six:

- 19 (a) the neurobiology of reading;
- 20 (b) advanced word study;
- 21 (c) fluency; and
- 22 (d) comprehension; and

23 (3) for school administrators: the design and implementation of
24 high-quality literacy instruction in preschool through grade six.

25

26 9. a. A school district shall use the professional development
27 program established pursuant to section 8 of this act or any other
28 evidence-based literacy instructional material that complies with the
29 requirements of section 8 of this act to annually provide
30 professional development to all teaching staff members serving
31 students in preschool through grade six, including school library
32 media specialists serving students in kindergarten through grade
33 six, individuals serving multilingual learners and students with
34 disabilities, individuals holding an educational services certificate
35 with a reading specialist endorsement, individuals holding an
36 educational services certificate with an early literacy specialist
37 endorsement, and individuals holding an educational services
38 certificate with a speech-language specialist endorsement.

39 b. A school district shall use the professional development
40 program established pursuant to section 8 of this act or any other
41 evidence-based literacy instruction material that complies with the
42 requirements of section 8 of this act to annually provide training to
43 school administrators on the design and implementation of high-
44 quality literacy instruction in schools.

45 c. A school district may utilize the professional development
46 instruction provided pursuant to section 2 of P.L.2013, c.105
47 (C.18A:6-131) to satisfy the requirements of this section, provided

1 the professional development instruction complies with the
2 requirements of this section.

3
4 10. Sections 1 through 4 of this act shall take effect
5 immediately. Sections 5 through 7 of this act shall take effect
6 immediately and shall first apply in the 2025-2026 school year
7 provided the guidance required pursuant to section 4 of this act has
8 been issued, except the Commissioner of Education may take any
9 anticipatory administrative action in advance as necessary for the
10 implementation of the provisions of this act. Sections 8 and 9 shall
11 take effect on July 1, 2025.