

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Bolstering Literacy Education for New Jersey Students

08/13/2024

**TRENTON** – During this year’s [State of the State Address](https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562024/approved/20240109b.shtml) (<https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562024/approved/20240109b.shtml>), Governor Phil Murphy pledged to introduce new initiatives to increase literacy rates among New Jersey schoolchildren, furthering the state’s status as home to one of the best public education systems in the nation. Today, in collaboration with partners in the Legislature, the Governor signed two bills into law advancing his promise to set New Jersey’s students on course for lifelong success. The legislation will establish new initiatives to ensure young learners have access to the tools and resources needed to become strong, confident readers while also empowering our workforce of educators with professional development opportunities.

“Literacy education represents the foundation upon which all future learning is built, and we owe it to our children to give them the strongest foundation possible. By bolstering support for literacy education, we are enabling New Jersey students to thrive both academically and in life, helping them to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged citizens,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Recent years have brought forth many challenges for our schools and our children. Understanding that strong reading skills have the potential to open countless doors for young learners, we must work together to support accelerated literacy learning in communities across the state. This legislation balances targeted intervention, tested learning strategies, teacher training, and continuous monitoring to ensure we deliver for our students. I thank Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz for championing this important work in the Legislature, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact of these initiatives on our school communities.”

“Student literacy, especially for our youngest learners, is both fundamental to all student learning and a core element to bridging achievement and opportunity gaps,” **said Kevin Dehmer, Acting Commissioner of Education**. “These new initiatives, when coupled with our other programs to foster literacy, such as high-impact tutoring for students and existing professional development for teachers, can help students build those foundational skills that are so crucial to learning. These combined efforts will have lasting benefits for generations of students.”

The first bill – [S2644/A4303](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S3000/2644_U1.PDF) ([https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S3000/2644\\_U1.PDF](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S3000/2644_U1.PDF)) – aims to strengthen foundational literacy instruction by establishing a Working Group on Student Literacy. This group, comprised of members appointed by the Commissioner of Education from all regions of the state, will be responsible for making recommendations to the Department of Education on the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies, screening methods, and instruction for students, in addition to investigating ways to expand professional learning.

Based on these recommendations, the Department will develop and publish guidance for school districts to use beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, and shall establish an online resource center to aid school districts in the selection of evidence-based, high-quality literacy instructional materials, including data analysis tools, as part of the school district’s implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in English Language Arts. Additionally, the Department will create a professional development program for early education teaching staff, including librarians, and those serving multilingual learners and/or students with disabilities. This will be available to all districts at no cost.

Under the bill, districts will be required to conduct literacy screenings at least twice annually for students in grades K-3, beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Districts must notify parents and guardians of their child’s results within 30 days of the close of the initial screening period. The Fiscal Year 2025 budget includes \$5.25 million for literacy

initiatives to advance this work.

The primary sponsors of S2644/A4303 are Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Senator Vin Gopal, Assemblywoman Carmen Morales, Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt, Assemblywoman Annette Quijano, and Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin.

"This is a forward-looking package of educational enhancement bills that will help rectify pandemic-related learning loss, close the achievement gap and improve literacy rates for our students," **said Senate President Nick Scutari**. "The literacy instruction and intervention programs will be especially important for students who have experienced academic disparities. They will help advance educational equity in New Jersey's schools. I want to commend Senate Majority Leader Ruiz, Senator Gopal and Senator Turner for their collaborative work with the Department of Education, our Assembly colleagues and education advocacy groups to get this done."

"Increased equity in education, especially for foundational literacy, will serve every community in New Jersey," **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. "When every child in our state has greater opportunity to succeed, we all benefit. These laws will ensure more strategic use of resources for our best-in-the-nation public schools. I want to commend my colleagues for all of their work on this legislation, partnering with teachers and other experts and advocates in the field to deliver for New Jersey's kids."

"The bills signed today establish a framework to address the alarming fact that 57.6% of all third graders statewide are not meeting reading proficiency levels, with even more troubling rates for students of color, with 73.6% of Black and 72.5% of Latino third graders not reading at grade level," **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz**. "These initiatives are a major step toward reversing these trends by strengthening foundational literacy instruction and addressing long standing educational inequities across New Jersey."

"Reading is the cornerstone of learning and academic achievement, and if we do not intervene now, another generation of children will fail to achieve their academic and economic potential," **added Senator Ruiz**. "Early success in school significantly boosts the likelihood of students obtaining a high school diploma, pursuing higher education, and improving their future earning potential. The data is clear - median earnings rise from \$35,500 for those without a high school diploma to \$66,600 for those with a bachelor's degree. Setting our children up for success in life begins in the classroom. This is not only an investment in their futures but in the future of our communities."

"This is one of the smartest investments the state can make," **said Senator Paul Sarlo, Chair of the Senate Budget Committee**. "Giving our students the skills and knowledge they need to pursue educational achievement and compete in the rapidly-evolving workplace will improve their future opportunities and contribute to the state's economy. Our schools are an important foundation for educational excellence and economic progress. This initiative will help build a better future for New Jersey."

"There is no greater investment we can make than investing in our children and this legislation will help us do that," **said Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin, Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee**. "Specifically, it will enable us to focus on evidence-based practices and will assist us in identifying and addressing exactly where students face reading difficulties, ensuring timely and effective interventions for those in need."

"New Jersey public schools are among the finest in the nation, yet too often our children struggle to meet basic literacy proficiency thresholds," **said Senator Vin Gopal, Chair of the Senate Education Committee**. "Securing our children's success later in life begins in the classroom. These foundational literacy skills can determine a student's academic success, college readiness, and future career and economic prospects. Establishing a framework for reading assessments and interventions will give teachers and school districts a reliable resource to draw from in order to help all our students reach their fullest potential."

"Today marks a pivotal moment in our efforts to enhance literacy instruction in New Jersey," **said Assemblywoman Carmen Morales**. "This new law will be instrumental in helping us ensure that every child receives the foundational skills needed to succeed in the classroom, fostering a brighter and more equitable future for our students."

"This legislation is a testament to our continued commitment to education excellence. By focusing on early intervention and continued support, we are laying the groundwork for long-term success in schools," **said Assembly Education Committee Chair Pamela Lampitt**. "I applaud today's signing of this important bill and know that it will help strengthen our already top-notch education system."

"By instituting universal literacy screenings, we are taking proactive steps to address reading challenges early on," **said Assemblywoman Annette Quijano**. "This law will provide an invaluable resource for our teachers and ensure that every student receives the necessary support to develop stronger reading skills."

The second bill – [A2288/S2647 \(https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/A2500/2288\\_U1.PDF\)](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/A2500/2288_U1.PDF) – establishes the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery in the Department of Education to promote student literacy and advance learning equity through academic recovery practices.

The office will be responsible for improving the Department's capacity to make data-driven decisions, coordinate resources, and research best practices to support the creation of effective literacy, learning equity, learning acceleration policies, and professional development opportunities.

The primary sponsors for A2288/S2647 are Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Senator Shirley Turner, Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez, Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, and Assemblyman Sterley Stanley.

"Recent state test scores show significant drops in student performance compared to pre-pandemic, with preexisting disparities worsening for low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities," **said Senator Shirley Turner**. "The academic performance data is abundant and alarming, and we must utilize it in our efforts to ensure all students have a fair shot at success in school. Establishing the new Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery will help improve our understanding of the factors that impact students reading ability and will implement new data-driven strategies to get students back on track."

"Establishing the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery enables us to take a critical step to provide our students with the resources they need to achieve their full academic potential," **said Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez**. "The legislation signed into law today works to ensure that our school districts have access to such vital information, allowing them to make data-driven decisions regarding their literacy and learning equity policies."

"The office being created through this bill will provide the necessary resources and expertise to close achievement gaps, particularly for our most vulnerable students," **said Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly**. "By focusing on effective strategies and partnerships, we can strengthen student literacy and advance learning equity, leading to improved educational outcomes across the state."

"Our goal is to provide every student with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of the obstacles they've faced," **said Assemblyman Sterley Stanley**. "This bill being signed today will play a vital role in collecting and analyzing relevant data in order to ensure that we, as a State that prides itself on the world class education we are able to offer, implement the most effective solutions so our students can continue to thrive."

"Early literacy is the foundation for academic success," **said NJEA President Sean M. Spiller**. "We owe it to our children to give them every resource and every opportunity they need as they learn to read. Every child learns in a different way and at a different pace. We hope that this new effort will give our members more tools to identify challenges, offer needed supports and help their students succeed."

"The New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA) supports the Literacy Bill Package (Bill A2288ACS and S2644/2645/2646 SCS). This legislation establishes the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery within the Department of Education (DOE), mandates universal literacy screenings for students from kindergarten through grade three and requires professional development for specific school district employees," **said Sharon Roseboro, President of NJPTA**. "Research indicates that children who engage in reading at home are better prepared for academic success. Additionally, reading has been shown to enhance mental function. To ensure all children have equal opportunities, it is crucial to support measures that level the playing field. Parental involvement is vital to the success of these initiatives."

"New Jersey's public education system consistently produces some of the best student outcomes in the nation. However, Governor Murphy and legislators recognize that student literacy achievement must not only return to pre-COVID-19 levels but also surpass them. Today's endorsed legislation underscores this critical goal and introduces measures for both support and accountability to ensure its achievement," **said Richard Bozza, Executive Director of NJASA**.

"The New Jersey Children's Foundation shares the administration and Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz's belief that learning to read is such a critical factor in lifelong success. That is why we truly appreciate the Governor signing this

legislation which takes very necessary steps forward in improving our ability to teach all students to read at an early age," **said Barbara Martinez, Executive Director of the New Jersey Children's Foundation.**

"JerseyCAN is thrilled and thankful for Governor Murphy's great leadership, Senate Majority Leader Ruiz's collaborative efforts, and the commitment of cross-sector organizations, educators, and parents to get us to this bold step of the passage of foundational literacy and academic recovery legislation that, though not a magic bullet, is the sorely-needed equalizer that all of New Jersey's children deserve. Governor Murphy once stated that New Jersey is where opportunity lives, where education is valued, and where justice is embraced and today, as the Governor cements pivotal foundational literacy and academic recovery legislation into law, these words ring resoundingly true," **said Paula White, Executive Director of JerseyCAN.**

"We thank Governor Murphy, Majority Leader Ruiz and all the legislative sponsors for recognizing the urgency of the challenges facing New Jersey's schools, from learning loss to longstanding resource gaps in our urban centers. These new laws were the product of collaboration with a broad array of education stakeholders and will give more schools, both district and public charter schools, the tools to grow and expand their literacy programs to meet the needs of our youngest learners. While this policy response will require a continued all-hands-on-deck approach, New Jersey's public charter schools stand ready to meet that challenge," **said Harry Lee, President and CEO of the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association.**

"Literacy is the essential skill that serves as the foundation for all learning. The New Jersey School Boards Association thanks Governor Murphy for prioritizing this issue and Senate Majority Leader Ruiz for her leadership in spearheading these critical measures that demonstrate her commitment to the children of New Jersey. And we applaud the entire Legislature for taking swift and bipartisan action in promoting and approving these bills, which will better prepare New Jersey's students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens. We look forward to seeing the positive impact they will have on students' academic achievement," **said Dr. Timothy J. Purnell, NJSBA Executive Director and CEO.**

"Foundational literacy skills are not only the cornerstone of a high quality education but serve as the key to lifelong success, something every New Jersey student deserves. The school leaders who make up the membership of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, in partnership with loving parents and dedicated teachers, are committed to developing all students' literacy skills at the earliest possible ages. This legislative package was developed collaboratively with the Legislature, the Governor, and education stakeholders, and NJPSA wants to thank Senator Ruiz and Governor Murphy for their commitment to our children. From ABCs to written worlds to be explored, NJ's future readers are fortunate to learn here!" **said Debra Bradley, NJPSA Director of Government Relations, and Karen Bingert, NJPSA Executive Director.**

"ACNJ commends the Legislature and the Administration for these intentional policies to address literacy amongst New Jersey school-aged children. With only 42 percent of third graders meeting or exceeding proficiency standards in English language arts, there is a pressing need for action. Statewide efforts, including understanding student literacy, implementing literacy screenings, and supporting educators, are crucial and speak to New Jersey's commitment to investing in children," **said Mary Coogan, President & CEO, Advocates for Children of NJ.**

"With Gov. Murphy signing legislation to establish the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery and a working group on student literacy, along with mandating universal K-3 literary screenings, New Jersey's students who have fallen behind will have the resources and personnel they need to get back on track," **said AFTNJ President Jennifer S. Higgins.**

"We are delighted to see these bills come to fruition and thankful to Senator Ruiz for her sponsorship and advocacy. The real beneficiaries are the children of New Jersey, whose lives will be changed by this literacy initiative," **said Elisabeth Ginsburg, Executive Director, Garden State Coalition of Schools.**

"On behalf of the New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NJSHA), an organization representing more than 1,100 speech-language pathologists and audiologists working in schools as well as health care settings and private practice, I first want to thank Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz for her vision and leadership on the issue of student literacy," **said Dr. Karen Kimberlin, a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who specializes in language and literacy disorders, and who represented the Association on the Literacy Working Group created by the Majority Leader.** "We also thank the Assembly sponsors of the bills, Education Chair Pamela Lampitt and Housing Chair Yvonne Lopez and of course, Governor Murphy for signing this legislation today. SLPs are experts in language development, both oral expression and language comprehension, which are critical to the development of literacy skills. So, we are pleased

that a Speech Language Specialist (SLS), as SLPs are called in school settings, will have a role in implementing these laws as a member of the Working Group on Student Literacy in the Department of Education.”

“The ability to communicate effectively is the cornerstone of learning. New Jersey Tutoring Corps, Inc. wholeheartedly supports the signing of bills S2644/45/46, providing measures to strengthen literacy education for NJ children and their teachers. Further, we strongly support the signing of bill A2288, establishing an office focused on learning equity and academic recovery. Together, these bills will provide NJ students, particularly our students who are furthest behind, with more opportunities to succeed both academically and in terms of their confidence as learners. Thank you, Senator Ruiz and Governor Murphy, for your efforts on behalf of education for all students in our state,” **said Katherine Bassett, CEO NJ Tutoring Corps.**

“The New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) applauds Governor Murphy on the passage of the legislative initiatives to support student literacy (S2644,2645,2646). To most powerfully address reading deficiency, NJASL believes we must pair the foundational literacy skills with the simple joy of reading, and this really is the core mission of the school librarian. The thrill of a new book in the hands of a child after a school library visit or the excitement of students clamoring to ask questions of an author after a reading - to witness these interactions is to understand the superpowers of the school librarian and their ability to support student reading!” **said Beth Raff, President of New Jersey Association of School Libraries.**

“Early literacy in any language is essential for student success. NJTESOL/NJBE is encouraged that these bills will support Multilingual Learners' success in reading by providing academic assistance for all struggling early readers,” **said Kathleen Fernandez, Executive Director, NJ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/NJ Bilingual Educators.**

“Save Our Schools NJ thanks Governor Murphy and Senator Ruiz for their commitment to the students of New Jersey. Making sure districts have resources is fundamental to their ongoing literacy efforts,” **said Julie Larrea Borst, Executive Director, Save Our School NJ Community Organizing.**

“Strengthening reading and literacy outcomes for students gives them a better head start in all walks of life and provides improved preparation for continuing their post-secondary education or for entering the workforce, even for youth workers. We thank the sponsors and supporters of this legislation, as well as Governor Murphy, for giving our students even more opportunity toward professional and personal development in these early stages,” **said NJBIA President and CEO Michele Siekerka.**

“We are pleased to see legislation passed which finally starts NJ school districts addressing our general education literacy proficiency issues by using best practices, based in reading science, for reading instruction with all children. Additionally, we are thankful for legislation which will require all K-3 universal literacy screenings to help identify children early who might have reading challenges, like Dyslexia and get the appropriate intervention they need before they fall so far behind!” **said Elizabeth Barnes, Founding Member, Decoding Dyslexia-NJ.**

## Governor Phil Murphy

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