

## CHAPTER 52

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

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

C.18A:6-142 Definitions.

1. As used in this act:

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

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

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

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

C.18A:6-143 "Working Group on Student Literacy" established.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C.18A:6-144 Working Group on Student Literacy duties, recommendations.

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

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

- (1) the body of research related to universal literacy screenings and literacy instruction materials;
- (2) ways to expand professional learning for universal literacy screenings;
- (3) acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting universal literacy screenings, which shall consider: constructs measured, technical adequacy, attention to linguistic diversity, and administration usability and support; and
- (4) State and national best practices, regulations, and policies that support successful foundational literacy instruction, assessment, and intervention.

C.18A:6-145 Develop, publish guidance, literacy.

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

- (1) acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting a universal literacy screening;
- (2) high-quality literacy instructional materials;
- (3) best practices for the frequency of screening students in grades kindergarten through three and grades four through 12; and
- (4) data analysis strategies for high-quality literacy instruction and intervention.

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

C.18A:6-146 Universal literacy screening.

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

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

C.18A:6-147 Written notification, student results, universal literacy screening.

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

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

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

C.18A:6-148 Online resource center established.

7. The department 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. The online resource center shall be consistent with the guidance developed by the department pursuant to section 4 of this act.

C.18A:6-149 Professional development program established, literacy instruction, Department of Education.

8. a. The Department of Education shall establish a professional development program regarding evidence-based foundational literacy instruction, which shall be available to all school districts at no cost. The program shall be made available to: teaching staff members serving students in preschool through grade six, including school library media specialists serving students in kindergarten through grade six; individuals serving multilingual learners and students with disabilities; and individuals holding an educational services certificate with a reading specialist endorsement, individuals holding an educational services certificate with an early literacy specialist endorsement, and individuals holding an educational services certificate with a speech-language specialist endorsement; and school administrators.

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

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

- (a) orthography;
- (b) phonological and phonemic awareness;
- (c) phonics;
- (d) fluency; and
- (e) vocabulary and comprehension;

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

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

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

C.18A:6-150 Professional development program, literacy, teaching staff.

9. a. A school district shall use the professional development program established pursuant to section 8 of this act or any other evidence-based literacy instructional material that complies with the requirements of section 8 of this act to annually provide professional development to all teaching staff members serving students in preschool through grade six, including school library media specialists serving students in kindergarten through grade six, individuals serving multilingual learners and students with disabilities, individuals holding an educational

services certificate with a reading specialist endorsement, individuals holding an educational services certificate with an early literacy specialist endorsement, and individuals holding an educational services certificate with a speech-language specialist endorsement.

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

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

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

Approved August 13, 2024.