The Working Group on Student Literacy Recommendation Report

Submitted February 2025

Acknowledgements

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This report reflects the views of members of the Working Group on Student Literacy established pursuant to P.L.2024, c.52. The information and recommendations set forth herein, including any external articles and data referred to, have not been endorsed by the Murphy Administration.

Working Group on Student Literacy

The recommendations reflect the collective insights and commitment of the group to achieving meaningful outcomes, and we deeply appreciate the hard work and teamwork. With gratitude, these contributors include:

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Working Group Charge

S2644/A4303

2a. 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.

3a. 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.

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Working Group Process

To fulfill the purpose outlined in the legislation, the Working Group on Student Literacy convened six times between October and January. The group was tasked with providing the Department of Education with recommendations on implementing evidence-based literacy strategies, universal literacy screening instruments, and high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). The working group, composed of literacy experts, practitioners, and representatives from diverse educational and regional backgrounds, was carefully selected and appointed by Acting Commissioner Kevin Dehmer to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach. Members included specialists in foundational literacy, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students with dyslexia; speech-language specialists, and certified school library media specialists, among others. The group also included parent representatives to emphasize meaningful family engagement.

To develop robust and actionable recommendations, the working group collaborated with experts, reviewed the latest research, and examined state and national best practices. Organized into two subcommittees—one focused on universal screeners and the other on HQIM—each group was co-chaired to ensure effective leadership and thorough examination of key topics. The subcommittees prioritized leveraging existing frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS), and Dyslexia Screening guidelines to create recommendations that seamlessly integrate with current structures.

The deliverables produced by the working group reflect this deliberate, research-driven process. All recommendations are designed to provide clear, evidence-based guidance while minimizing disruption to existing practices. Throughout the process, the Department provided support and will continue to release resources to assist districts in meeting these requirements efficiently and effectively. The NJDOE will work on creating guidance documents utilizing the recommendations from this report.

Summary of Recommendations

The Working Group on Student Literacy is honored to make the following recommendations to the New Jersey Department of Education to support the "implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies, appropriate and reliable instruments for a universal literacy screening, and high quality instructional materials" (S2644/A4303):

1. Adopt a clear criteria to identify acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting universal literacy screenings.
2. Provide school districts with a clear list of universal screening assessments that meet the screening criteria and develops a process to annually review and update assessments.
3. Develop a meaningful set of implementation guides and identify the resources necessary to support LEAs in successful implementation of universal literacy screening tools with specific alignment to the New Jersey Tiered Systems of Support, Dyslexia Handbook, and Intervention and Referral Services best practices.
4. Prioritize the selection of tools that offer progress monitoring capabilities to provide educators with ongoing feedback regarding student learning aligned to the MTSS model.
5. Develop a standardized reporting structure that minimizes the district resources necessary to meet any reporting and accountability requirements required by the legislation.
6. Develop a robust and accessible professional learning platform to support diverse adult learning needs, address a range of professional roles, and encourage pathways for growth.
7. Create regulations or support future legislation to require higher education institutions to provide pre-professional coursework or specific training related to foundational literacy frameworks to ensure that future educators of students in grades PK-5 have the ability to administer a literacy screener and utilize the data to inform instruction.
8. Develop and provide schools with a portfolio of clear, consistent, engaging, and accessible information for families to support a common language around early literacy development.
9. Ensure guidance is inclusive of diverse learners, including that multilingual learners are provided with screening tools that are appropriate to their specific learning needs, and provide specific guidance related to best practices for screening students accurately and equitably.
10. Develop a two-part rubric for LEA selection of instructional materials that:
    a. Requires robust support for high-quality foundational literacy classroom instruction, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension aligned to the MTSS model.

b. Addresses alignment to NJSLS, specifies level of support for students with disabilities and multilingual learners, and contains learning opportunities that reflects the diversity of New Jersey's classrooms.

11. Provide guidance to LEAs on how to engage in a rigorous selection process that uses the rubric and ensures an inclusive, stakeholder driven process.
12. Incentivize LEAs to engage in curricula review and adoption of HQIM to encourage systematic change.
13. Support districts in developing communities of practice related to the adoption and use of HQIM.
14. Work with legislators and the State Board to simplify the burdensome procurement regulations that limit the state's ability to work with vendors to make HQIM materials affordable and accessible to all districts in New Jersey.
15. Require districts to provide clear and accessible publicly available information related to adopted instructional materials.
16. Support district implementation of HQIM by providing access to evidence-based professional development aligned to foundational literacy skill development for all members of the learning community including school and district leaders.
17. Develop a strategic, evidence-based approach to selecting intervention materials that aligns closely with adopted core instructional materials, ensuring consistency and coherence in student support.
18. Require the Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive review of existing regulations, policies, and procedures at the district and classroom levels to identify bureaucratic impediments that hinder progress and undermine the constitutional requirement to provide an effective and efficient educational system. This review shall include, but not be limited to:
    a. An analysis of paperwork requirements, reporting obligations, and compliance procedures to determine their necessity and impact on instructional time and resource allocation.
    b. An evaluation of administrative processes related to budgeting, procurement, personnel management, and student support services to identify inefficiencies and redundancies.
    c. An assessment of the impact of federal, state, and local mandates on district and school autonomy, flexibility, and innovation.

Literacy In New Jersey

Overview

The passage of Literacy Legislation (S2644/A4303) marks a pivotal moment in New Jersey's educational landscape as the state becomes the 40th to enact legislation aligning with the national commitment to improving literacy outcomes. This milestone signals the beginning of a larger, statewide initiative to transform literacy practices and develop a comprehensive literacy plan to set a standard for literacy instruction for every classroom and student in New Jersey.

The legislation charges the Working Group on Student Literacy with making critical recommendations to the Department of Education. These recommendations include the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies, the selection of appropriate and reliable instruments for universal literacy screening, and the adoption of high-quality literacy instructional materials. This effort reflects New Jersey's dedication to ensuring that every student receives the literacy skills necessary for academic success and lifelong learning.

Ultimately, New Jersey students need a vision of literacy education that is consistent, and comes with significant statewide resources and support. As noted in the final recommendation of the report, we must review and address the systems that interfere with providing our educators with a strong platform of support. While the local control aspect of school systems can continue to be respected, we must also investigate the regulations and legislation obstructing state agencies from providing clear and consistent language and resources to local education agencies (LEAs).

Why it Matters

While New Jersey consistently is rated at the top of educational performance in the country, there is a history of persistent reading achievement disparities. New Jersey results from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found only 38% of 4th-grade students reading at a proficient level (NAEP, 2022). The 2024 NAEP results for New Jersey released in late January 2025 indicate that student achievement has stalled in New Jersey, and while the state remains among the top, there remain concerns about the rate New Jersey students are learning foundational literacy skills. Longitudinal data also demonstrates ongoing educational inequities, with minimal progress in closing racial achievement gaps over nearly two decades (NAEP, 2024). Black students scored an average of 26 points lower than White students, a performance gap statistically unchanged since 2003. In 2024, Hispanic students scored 34 points lower than White students, a gap that widened since 2003, and is among the highest achievement gaps in the nation. For economically disadvantaged students, the gap has grown from a 30- point difference to a 34-point difference. Also in 2024, male students trailed female students by 10 points. Similar trends of disparate achievement have appeared in the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment data.

Even as New Jersey continues to be placed in the top performing states in the NAEP assessments, it is important to note that there are states that have seen more substantive growth in grade 4 literacy outcomes. For example, in 2024, Louisiana had 32% of their students reading at a proficient level, the highest since administering the NAEP. Over the last fifteen years (2009 to 2024) Louisiana has seen its average scale score increase 9 points, tied with its highest achievement since 2015. Similarly, Mississippi has shown significant progress, with a 10-point increase in percentage of students reading at a proficient level and 8-point increase in the average scale score. Only 12 states increased the percentage of students reading at or above proficiency since the 2022 administration, and only four are at or above their "pre-covid" percentage of students identified as proficient: Louisiana, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama.

The sub-committee reviewing universal screening tools looked deeply at the state level policies and resources available to support literacy education. This analysis revealed some significant commonalities among the states seeing improvement. First, they each offer a concise and clear list of screeners that meet their requirements. Second, they offer accessible and evidence based professional development. Three of the states offer teachers in grades K–3 LETRS training, a specific and targeted program of learning. By creating a statewide program of learning, all four states are ensuring a common language of instruction around foundational literacy. All of the training is accessible via online portals, so there is no scarcity of resources. Third, they offer clear and accessible resources for families with consistent language about how early literacy develops and the role of families. It is important to note that two of the states, Louisiana and Mississippi also include language around retaining students which the committee does not recommend to the state.

What Our Students Need

Over twenty years ago, the National Reading Panel conducted a meta study that identified foundational literacy skills necessary for the acquisition of language including: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension. Since then, ongoing research has continued to affirm the findings and develop recommendations for assessment, pedagogy, and development of professional practice related to literacy. In 2023, the New Jersey Student Learning Standards—English Language Arts were substantially updated to reflect the significant body of literacy research.

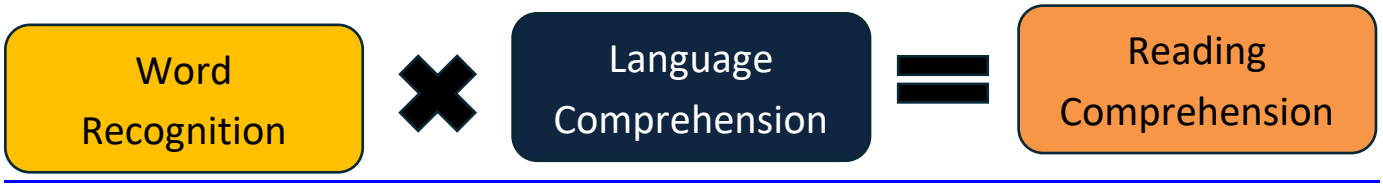
A significant body of research establishes that children who are poor readers by the end of the first grade have much smaller probability of acquiring average-level reading skills by the end of elementary school without substantial and sustained remediation efforts (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Juel, 1988; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). Researchers now estimate that 95% of all children can acquire the foundational literacy skills necessary for early literacy by the end of first grade when classroom instruction begins in kindergarten and follows research-based components and practice (Moats, 2020). Becoming a reader not only enhances academic achievement; it boosts a student's social, emotional, economic, and physical health (Moats, 2020). These findings highlight the

critical importance of identifying and addressing reading disparities in order to prevent cumulative academic deficits.

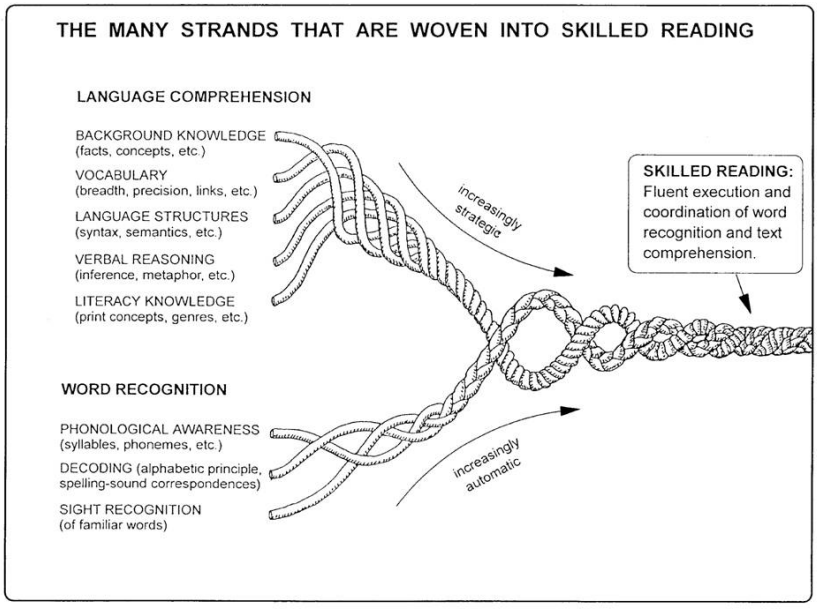
Building literate students is more than word recognition, and the learning process goes beyond phonics; it encompasses a wide range of skills and practices. The Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tummer, 1986) and Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001) provide two examples of frameworks for understanding and identifying foundational literacy practices. Each framework requires that students receive systematic, explicit, and direct foundational literacy instruction that is scaffolded and differentiated.

In the *Simple View of Reading*, the skillsets are grouped into two categories, "Word Recognition" and "Language Comprehension." *Scarborough's Reading Rope* develops those two categories of learning into a granular depiction of the skills necessary for students to not only learn to read, but become skilled readers.

Visual Depiction of the Simple View of Reading



Scarborough's Reading Rope



Text Version: Scarborough's Reading Rope

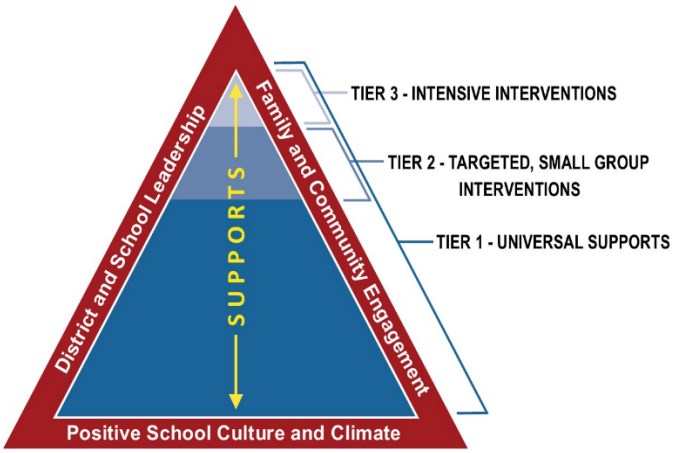
Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), Handbook for research in early literacy (pp. 97–110). New York: Guilford Press.

For students to reach reading proficiency we know evidence-based literacy practices must be implemented early in students' learning. Beginning as early as pre-kindergarten, students need systematic, developmentally appropriate, skill-based instruction and support. This is not in the hands of any single teacher, but rather a consistent cycle and ecosystem of learning and support using high quality instructional materials, reliable literacy screening tools, intentional professional learning for teachers and administrators, and clear communication with families.

A consistent cycle and ecosystem of learning and support means that schools and teachers have the appropriate knowledge and resources to provide effective literacy instruction, informative assessments that provide immediate feedback to inform classroom practices, and the protocols to utilize when a student is identified as struggling with the learning.

In order to establish a comprehensive learning ecosystem, it is essential that schools employ Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). The NJDOE has developed a significant amount of resources to support this effort, identified as the New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS). As described in the online guide, "NJTSS is a framework of supports and interventions to improve student achievement, based on the core components of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and the three tier prevention logic of Response to Intervention (RTI). With a foundation of strong district and school leadership, a positive school culture and climate and family and community engagement, NJTSS builds on Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) and gives schools structure to meet the academic, behavioral, health, enrichment and social/emotional needs of all students."

As noted in the image below, an effective MTSS system begins with Tier I instruction and universal supports. This means that teachers are looking at the class as a whole, identifying learning patterns and areas where students need support. In this area, a teacher may develop whole-group or small group lessons designed to support students. Classroom level interventions may occur in the Tier I space. Tier II support is targeted, built around specifically identified student learning needs, and carefully monitored for impact. Students engaging in Tier II may benefit from inclusive classroom support based upon a student, or group of students' specific learning needs. This level of support occurs on a consistent basis until the student's knowledge and skills have been built, or until they are moved to more intensive interventions that may include the Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS).



Text Version of NJTSS Diagram

Resources

- Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel
- Narrowing the Third-Grade Reading Gap: Embracing the Science of Reading
- National Reading Panel Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implication for Reading Instruction
- Reading League: Science of Reading Definition Guide
- The New Jersey Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Early Literacy Development & Reading Struggles
- New Jersey Tiered Systems of Supports Implementation Guidelines

Universal Literacy Screening Instruments

Overview

Literacy is a cumulative process and it is essential to have the right tools and protocols to measure student learning and identify students in need of support. Since the 2012 Dyslexia Legislation New Jersey has required that students who present with one or more potential indicators of dyslexia or other reading disabilities be screened no later than the student's completion of the first semester of the second grade. The 2024 Literacy Legislation (S2644/A4303) strengthens the current mandates by requiring a minimum of two annual screenings in kindergarten through grade three to determine a student's reading proficiency using universal screening. Districts are required to provide written notification to families of the results and interventions to students consistent with New Jersey Tiered Systems of Support (NJTSS) and Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) after each screening period.

Why it Matters

Universal Screening is imperative for all students to successfully implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Universal screening and early intervention are critical for addressing reading challenges, with significant implications for student academic success (Cruz et al., 2023; Foorman et al., 2021). A study revealed that 74% of poor readers in third grade remain poor readers in ninth grade, highlighting the long-term consequences of unaddressed reading difficulties (Solari et al., 2021). Scholars assert that early identification through universal screening is superior to reactive approaches, as it allows for timely and targeted interventions that can prevent cumulative academic deficits (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2019, Gaab & Petscher, 2022). It also provides an opportunity for educators to be responsive in their Core or Tier I instruction.

Early reading interventions are crucial for achieving educational equity. Struggling readers, if left unaddressed, face increased risks of behavioral problems, social challenges, school dropout, and potential involvement in the correctional system (Solari et al., 2021). A high-quality screening and intervention approach that connects to students' individual learning needs can enhance motivation and learning, while a lack of such systematic support can deepen existing educational disparities. By reducing the number of children in need of intensive reading interventions, universal screening represents a proactive strategy for both supporting students' reading skill development across all tiers of support and the timely identification of specific learning disabilities in reading.

What Our Students Need

When selecting literacy screeners for students, it is essential to prioritize assessments that meet specific criteria to ensure efficiency, accuracy, and inclusivity. Screeners should be time-efficient, requiring less than 10 minutes per student, and should employ standardized scoring rules for consistency. Rather than determining individual reading levels, the assessments must measure

performance against common skills criteria, using the same assessment form for all students unless an alternate assessment is necessary. To track progress, screeners should offer multiple, equivalent forms to assess performance across different benchmarks. They should also be easy to administer and score, with clear evidence of reliability, validity, and predictive accuracy—demonstrating that students who do not meet initial benchmarks are accurately identified as at risk in later assessments. Screeners must include sufficient items for each skill and require oral production responses for tasks such as letter-sound identification, word reading, and connected text reading. Furthermore, to address the diverse needs of students, assessments should be available in multiple languages in addition to English. These criteria ensure that screeners are equitable, effective, and aligned with best practices in literacy instruction.

Summary of Recommendations

To ensure the effective implementation of universal screeners, the NJDOE should provide a structured rollout plan that progresses through key phases, beginning with screener selection, educator training, and administration. This should be followed by the use of diagnostic assessments to refine intervention planning, ensuring that students receive targeted support based on their specific needs. Progress monitoring must be emphasized as a critical tool in this process, allowing educators to track student growth, adjust instruction, and make data-driven decisions that enhance literacy outcomes. Additionally, the NJDOE should clearly distinguish between recommended screeners and those requiring supplemental support, providing districts with guidance on selecting assessments that best align with state literacy goals. By following this structured approach, schools can establish a cohesive, systematic framework that maximizes the effectiveness of screening and intervention efforts, ultimately improving literacy outcomes for all students.

It is important to note that New Jersey has already begun providing support for this work through the NJTSS Early Reading (NJTSS-ER) Project, developed in collaboration with Rutgers University and the NJDOE. Their robust platform has used a cohort model to provide schools and districts a systematic way to address learner variability and engage all students in learning the New Jersey Student Learning ELA Standards. The NJTSS-ER website hosts resources to assist with implementation, including online training courses that provide guidance on planning for and implementing both essential assessments and effective instruction within response to intervention or multi-tiered system of supports frameworks.

Within the NJTSS-ER Framework, all Kindergarten through Grade 3 students are screened to identify their performance relative to research-based benchmark expectations established by the screening instrument developer. In addition to assessing all students' performance relative to benchmark expectations, screening data can also be used in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:40-5.3, which requires that "each student enrolled in the school district who has exhibited one or more potential indicators of dyslexia or other reading disabilities is screened for dyslexia and other reading disabilities using a screening instrument…no later than the student's completion of the first semester of the second

grade." For an in-depth explanation of the use of screening data for this purpose, see The New Jersey Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Early Literacy Development & Reading Struggles.

Many of the recommendations made are consistent with the work already started through NJTSS-ER, and we strongly encourage the NJDOE to utilize the thoughtful resources and expertise provided therein.

Recommendations

1. Clear Criteria for Universal Literacy Screenings

> We recommend the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to adopt a clear criteria to identify acceptable and reliable instruments for conducting universal literacy screenings.

The Working Group recommends the adoption of the New Jersey Tiered System of Support-Early Reading (NJTSS-ER) Universal Screening Criteria that was created through the U.S Department of Education Personnel Development Grant in partnership with Rutgers University and the NJDOE. This framework provides a rigorous and research-based foundation for identifying effective universal screening tools to support early literacy development. The Working Group also acknowledges that oral language is an important early literacy indicator, especially for Pre-K through K students and considered that it be a component of a universal screener (NELP Report 2009; Shanahan & Lonigan 2010, Adolf & Hogan, 2019, Cabell et al., 2021; Gaab & Petscher, 2022).

2. List of Universal Screening Assessments

> We recommend that the NJDOE provides school districts with a clear list of universal screening assessments that meet the screening criteria and develops a process to annually review and update assessments.

Through our research of state policies, we identified 36 assessments referenced at least once in 42 state-level resources. This list provided a basis for research relating to the instruments. After conducting a thorough analysis of screening research utilizing National Center on Intensive Intervention: Academic Screening Tool Chart and available technical manuals from vendors, policies and guidance across states, the Working Group has identified specific screeners for further investigation that meet the NJTSS-ER Universal Screening criteria. The screeners identified below met the criteria set through the NJTSS-ER Universal Screening Criteria referenced in the previous recommendation. This process was done through a research-based process that did not include inviting vendors in or the opportunity for vendors to submit their product for review. This list is a snapshot from the Working Group and will not be updated based on Vendor requests. We recognize this is an evolving market, and encourage the NJDOE to provide a specific list of assessments, minimizing the burden on school districts in choosing an instrument.

Assessment	Status	Considerations
DIBELS 8th Edition	Recommended	This tool is free and has been utilized by the NJTSS-ER Project conducted in partnership between the NJDOE and Rutgers University. DIBELS 8th Edition does not include an oral language screening component (e.g., vocabulary, listening comprehension, sentence imitation). Educators may want to screen these skills with other tools. A Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) indicator is determined through a Letter Naming Fluency (LNF). Younger students without automaticity of letter recognition may have difficulty with this task. Recommendations have been made to use objects for the first administration of RAN in kindergarten. Sensitivity for grades K, 1, and 3 are below .80.
mClass DIBELS 8th Edition	Recommended	See RAN LNF comment and recommendation under DIBELS 8 (above) specific to K students. This version includes spelling, RAN, and Oral Language Screening components (vocabulary, sentence repetition) that are extra assessments and not part of the DIBELS composite.
Acadience	Recommended	K–3 Spanish K–2 French Has Pre-K PELI (ages 3–5); separate RAN and Spelling (K–1) subtests. Includes an advanced diagnostic tool, Acadience Reading Diagnostic: CFOL to assess Story coherence/text structure, Listening and reading comprehension, Vocabulary and oral language (e.g., formal definitions, morphological awareness, figurative language, syntax), and Fluency with expository and narrative texts.
AIMSweb Plus	Recommended with Support	AIMSPlus has additional add-on measures across dyslexia and behavior/social-emotional skills. PIAT Pattern Inventory & Analysis Tool (PIAT) on aimswebPlus is a spelling assessment and analysis tool with intervention plan for Grades 3–12. There are no oral language comprehension/listening comprehension tasks. Educators may want to screen these skills with other tools. Fall assessment for 1st grade includes silent-e words which are not taught until later in 1st grade contributing to possible false positives.

Assessment	Status	Considerations
iReady Diagnostic	Recommended with Support	Strong professional development will be needed to ensure teachers understand the comprehensiveness of this suite of assessments. For students in grades K and 1, it is essential that districts utilize the Literacy Tasks feature that is based on the DIBELS-8. For the word identification task on i-Ready Diagnostic, students view a short list of words and are asked via computer audio to identify the word they hear. This task does not provide an opportunity for students to read words aloud. A task in which students read words aloud is available using the i-Ready Literacy Tasks assessment. There are no oral language comprehension/listening comprehension tasks. If this is included in the Literacy Tasks feature, it is not clear to current practitioners. Educators may want to screen these skills with other tools.
Amira	Recommended with Support	This is an Artificial Intelligence based application. The software may have difficulty recognizing speech of some students with complex speech challenges or multilingual students with accents. Teachers are encouraged to listen to student recordings and rescore subtests if needed- which also helps the software learn the student's speech profile.
FastBridge EarlyReading/ aReading	Recommended with Support	aReading has been shown to be predictive of future reading difficulties for grades 2 and above; it has not shown the same level of accuracy for grade one (NCII Classification Accuracy). EarlyReading has been shown to be predictive of future reading difficulties for kindergarten and grade one.

Assessment	Status	Considerations
MAP Reading Fluency	Recommended with Support	MAP Reading Fluency does not include a Decoding Nonsense Words task. The RAN Task uses pictures only and does not include a RAN letters task. Educators wanting to include a nonsense word decoding task, could consider using the Nonsense Word Fluency task and Letter Naming Fluency task from DIBELS 8th Edition. While the scores from these subtests would not be included in the student's level of risk determination, educators could consider this information along with the full data set collected from MAP Reading Fluency. There are no oral language comprehension/listening comprehension tasks. Educators may want to screen these skills with other tools.
STAR	Recommended with Support	There are no oral language comprehension/listening comprehension tasks. Educators may want to screen these skills with other tools. Strong professional development will be needed to ensure teachers understand the comprehensiveness of this suite of assessments.

It is important to note that the NJTSS-ER model specifically utilizes the DIBELS 8th Edition screening tool because it meets the specific research-based criteria and can be administered free of charge.

For the purposes of grant development and establishing accountability, the Working Group recommends that any screener not included in this initial list be required to meet the established criteria outlined in the NJTSS-ER Universal Screening worksheet to be deemed acceptable for use by Local Education Agencies (LEAs). This approach ensures that all adopted screeners align with evidence-based practices and effectively support the literacy needs of New Jersey's diverse student population. It also provides the opportunity for screeners that are new or have been revised to still be considered by districts.

3. Implementation Guides and Resources

Develop a meaningful set of implementation guides and identify the resources necessary to support LEAs in successful implementation of universal literacy screening tools with specific alignment to the New Jersey Tiered Systems of Support, Dyslexia Handbook, and Intervention and Referral Services best practices.

A universal literacy screener will not address student learning needs, rather it is an essential tool for guiding educators in developing students' foundational literacy skills. Implementing universal screeners effectively requires a strategic approach that emphasizes alignment with evidence-based practices, grade-specific needs, and integration with progress monitoring systems.

The Working Group recommends that the NJDOE develops clear, accessible implementation guides that are visually engaging for all stakeholders. The guidance resource needs to include screener flowcharts, cut-score charts, approved screener lists, and timelines for rolling out new literacy laws. Such tools not only facilitate consistency but also empower educators with the information needed to implement screeners effectively.

4. Selection of Tools

The NJDOE should prioritize the selection of tools that offer progress monitoring capabilities to provide educators with ongoing feedback regarding student learning aligned to the MTSS model.

In addition to providing clear guidance, the NJDOE should prioritize the selection of universal screeners that include built-in progress monitoring capabilities. This approach, similar to Montana's emphasis on tools that serve dual purposes—screening and ongoing monitoring—maximizes efficiency by streamlining data collection and instructional adjustments. Progress monitoring allows educators to track student growth, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and make informed instructional decisions without relying on separate systems, ultimately saving time and resources for schools and districts.

By integrating universal screeners within the NJTSS-ER framework and ensuring alignment between screening data and instructional decision-making, districts can create a more cohesive and effective system that supports all students. Establishing clear expectations for data use, providing high-quality training for educators, and fostering collaboration among teachers, administrators, and families will be critical to ensuring that screening and intervention efforts translate into meaningful improvements in literacy outcomes across the state. A systematic, data-driven approach will not only enhance instructional coherence but also promote equitable access to high-quality literacy support for all students.

5. Standardized Reporting Structure

> The NJDOE should develop a standardized reporting structure that minimizes the district resources necessary to meet any reporting and accountability requirements required by the legislation.

To ensure transparency and accountability, it is recommended that the NJDOE provide standardized data reporting tools, such as district-level screener data sheets. These tools streamline data collection and help districts analyze results to inform decision-making.
Incorporating comprehensive follow-up diagnostics into the process is also essential, as seen in Alaska's approach, which highlights the importance of assessing foundational skills even in later grades for students who continue to struggle.

This proposed legislation aims to guarantee that every student in New Jersey receives high-quality literacy instruction. To ensure districts are implementing required universal screening, accountability measures will be essential. To allow for effective implementation and professional development, the state should dedicate the 2025-2026 school year to the initial implementation and introduction of the data collection tools. Accountability data collection, including information for QSAC (Quality Single Accountability Continuum) determinations, should begin in the 2026-2027 school year.

Additional Considerations for Universal Literacy Screening Instruments

While the legislation mandates a minimum of two screenings per year, the instruments identified above all recommend screening three times a year. Along with those tools, it is our recommendation that the following areas should be screened at each grade level during Fall, Winter, and Spring:

- Kindergarten: Letter Naming, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Oral Language
- First Grade: Letter Name, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency
- Second Grade: Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension
- Third Grade: Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension

The Working Group also discussed including literacy screeners with oral language subtests or a separate oral language screener as a component of universal literacy screening. Other states have also reported on the importance of oral language (California, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Virginia, Wisconsin). Language comprehension is represented by the upper strands of Scarborough's Rope and is responsible for understanding the meaning of language in print. Students with language comprehension weakness may be described as "poor comprehenders" or present with "hyperlexia," a strong ability to decode with impairment in language processing or comprehension that impacts reading. Students with social-linguistic disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum), vocabulary weaknesses, developmental language disability (DLD), and learning difficulties that affect abstract reasoning and logical thinking (Cutting et al, 2013; Lam et al, 2024, Landi & Ryherd, 2017, Moats & Tolman, 2009, Nation et al, 2006, Spear-Swerling, 2015, Adolf & Hogan, 2019) can struggle

with reading due to underlying oral language weaknesses. Additionally, about 14% of multilingual learners acquiring English as a second language may also have a learning disability that includes language disorders (Lesaux, et al. 2010), and students from low-SES families typically achieve at lower levels than peers from middle- and high-SES families, enter kindergarten with significantly lower language skills, and score at least 10% lower than the national average in mathematics and reading (Iris Center 2025).

In reviewing individual screeners, the committee noted that some areas, such as phonemic awareness and oral language are not consistently assessed across all grade levels, yet there may be students in higher grades who continue to perform below expectations in these areas. Teachers need to be aware of the characteristics of a chosen screener. Additionally, screening tasks on individual screeners may be labeled differently from the areas cited within the NJTSS-ER criteria list. For example, many screeners do not specifically label "phonics" as a screening task and most assess skills as a fluency task (e.g., letter naming fluency, word reading fluency).

While the legislation and recommendations focus on grades kindergarten through three, further exploration of the connection and impact of this work on preschool could be a valuable area for future consideration. Additionally, there are students who will be in grades four and higher who will not benefit from the current legislation. Thus, consideration should also be given to screeners that include grade four and higher.

6. Professional Learning

Develop a robust and accessible professional learning platform to support diverse adult learning needs, address a range of professional roles, and encourage pathways for growth.

To support the implementation of universal literacy screeners, the NJDOE should prioritize a comprehensive professional learning framework that equips educators and administrators with the knowledge and skills to support evidence-based practices in literacy instruction. Many states provide exemplary models that highlight the importance of robust preservice training, ongoing professional development (PD), and targeted incentives to ensure high levels of educator engagement and effectiveness.

One key recommendation is the integration of LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training for both teachers and administrators. States such as Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, and Mississippi have implemented LETRS training at scale, recognizing its value in deepening educators' understanding of the science of reading. The NJDOE could build on this model by explicitly outlining the availability of LETRS training, exploring incentives for participation (as seen in Colorado and Georgia), and ensuring access to both teachers, speech-language specialists, and administrators. Administrator training is particularly crucial, as it fosters alignment in literacy goals and supports implementation fidelity across schools.

In addition to LETRS training, the NJDOE should consider a staircase of professional learning opportunities that provide clear pathways for growth. This could include micro-credentialing, such as Delaware's model, which offers targeted, stackable certifications that allow educators to deepen expertise in specific areas. For example, micro-credentials could focus on topics like phonemic awareness, phonics, and differentiated instruction for struggling readers. As educators progress, these credentials could feed into post-baccalaureate programs and master's degree pathways, offering a continuum of professional growth opportunities.

Another critical area for professional learning is guidance on how to use screening data to inform instruction. Educators need support in interpreting screening results and making data-driven adjustments to Tier I instruction, as well as determining when follow-up diagnostics and targeted interventions are necessary. Professional development should focus on these practical applications to ensure screening outcomes translate into meaningful improvements in student learning.

7. Regulations and Legislation

> Create regulations or support future legislation to require higher education institutions to provide pre-professional coursework or specific training related to foundational literacy frameworks to ensure that future educators of students in grades PK–5 have the ability to administer a literacy screener and utilize the data to inform instruction.

Future initiatives should also explore partnerships with higher education institutions to align teacher preparation programs with the state's literacy goals. This could involve developing sample curricula and syllabi that emphasize evidence-based literacy practices, equipping preservice teachers with a strong foundation before entering the classroom. The NJDOE has already taken steps to update preparation codes for teachers, but additional guidance on implementation would ensure these standards translate effectively into practice. Several universities are including coursework on the development of oral language to reading and writing and understanding bilingualism and English language variations (Reading League Educator Preparation Programs). Additionally, in order to foster collaboration between educators and speech-language specialists regarding the role of oral language in development of reading and writing, future initiatives should explore partnerships with NJ higher education institutions that train speech-language pathologists (e.g., Departments of Communication Sciences & Disorders, Speech-Language Pathology).

8. Parent Communication

Develop a portfolio of clear, consistent, engaging, and accessible information for families to support a common language around early literacy development.

Family engagement remains a critical component of the successful implementation of universal screeners and literacy development efforts in New Jersey. To foster meaningful partnerships with families, the NJDOE must prioritize clear, consistent, and engaging communication that extends beyond merely notifying parents of their child's scores. Instead, communication should actively involve families in understanding the screening process, its purpose, and its role in guiding instruction and intervention.

Drawing inspiration from Louisiana's approach to "engaging families through all ages and stages," the NJDOE should emphasize ongoing, transparent communication that empowers parents to support their children's literacy development (*Literacy Resources for Louisiana Families*). Other states, such as Mississippi and Virginia, have successfully implemented parent-friendly resources that provide accessible explanations of screening processes, the importance of oral language, intervention strategies, and literacy concepts. For example, Mississippi's *Finding the Right Starting Point for Reading Interventions* companion guide and Virginia's *Literacy Screening in Virginia* initiative offer clear, easy-to-understand descriptions of how screeners inform instruction and intervention practices. New Jersey can benefit from similar resources tailored to its diverse communities.

To ensure equitable access to information, the NJDOE should develop a suite of parent-friendly resources, including an Early Literacy Screening FAQ sheet modeled after D.C., sample parent letters like those used in Georgia and Arizona, and interactive parent dashboards similar to Georgia's. These tools should explain key literacy concepts, outline the purpose of universal screeners, and provide actionable insights into how screening data informs instruction. Additionally, resources should be made available in multiple languages to reflect New Jersey's diverse population, ensuring that all families can engage with and understand the process.

Beyond static resources, direct engagement opportunities should be prioritized. Schools should offer workshops, informational sessions, and regular updates about literacy initiatives to create meaningful dialogue with parents. Louisiana's model of incorporating parent-accessible tutoring before, during, or after school provides an example of how schools can facilitate family involvement in student progress. Additionally, districts should utilize multiple communication channels—such as parent-teacher nights, recorded presentations, and multilingual online materials—to ensure that all families receive timely and relevant information.

To promote consistency and alignment, parent communication materials should be developed in tandem with teacher-facing resources. Clear guidelines for educators on how to explain the screening process, interpret results, and discuss next steps with families will help ensure that parents receive

accurate and supportive information. These materials should not only clarify the technical aspects of literacy screening but also acknowledge and address the emotional concerns of families navigating their children's learning journeys.

By prioritizing family engagement over passive notification, the NJDOE can create a robust framework for collaboration between schools and families. A well-informed and engaged parent community will be instrumental in supporting children's literacy development and ensuring the successful implementation of universal screeners across the state.

9. Supporting Diverse Learners

Ensure diverse learners, including multilingual learners are provided with screening tools that are appropriate to their specific learning needs, and provide specific guidance related to best practices for screening students accurately and equitably.

The Working Group recommends that the NJDOE take specific steps to ensure universal screeners are inclusive and effective for diverse learners, including multilingual learners (MLs), students with disabilities, including those with oral language and writing disorders, and other populations requiring accommodations. By prioritizing equity and accessibility, the NJDOE can ensure that all students are accurately assessed and supported in their literacy development.

To address the needs of multilingual learners, the Working Group recommends that the NJDOE develop guidelines for screening all MLs, regardless of English proficiency. Drawing from Massachusetts' model, these guidelines should include recommendations for administering screeners in both the student's home language (e.g., Spanish) and English, along with clear guidance on interpreting results. This would involve using true peer comparisons to contextualize scores and accurately identify students' literacy strengths and challenges. Additionally, the creation of flowcharts tailored for MLs could guide educators in determining appropriate next steps after initial screenings, ensuring that interventions are culturally and linguistically responsive.

To support students with disabilities, the NJDOE is encouraged to incorporate alternative screening options, as highlighted by Georgia's approach (*Georgia Literacy Update*). This includes considerations for students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, spoken language disorders including nonverbal students and/or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) users, as well as those with speech-sound disorders (Tambyraja et al., 2020) or fluency disorders (*Understanding How Oral Reading Assessment Affects Children who Stutter*). Students with visual or hearing impairments, or other specific needs, may need access to glasses or hearing aids before assessments. Resources such as the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library offer a model for providing accessible materials to students with visual impairments. Developing partnerships or similar resources in New Jersey would ensure equitable access to screeners and instructional tools.

The Working Group also recommends the creation of an ML Accommodations Checklist to guide educators in implementing appropriate supports during literacy screening. This checklist would help ensure that assessments accurately reflect MLs' literacy abilities and are not influenced by language barriers. A complementary literacy screener video could serve as a training and communication tool for educators and families, enhancing understanding of the screening process and accommodations available for diverse learners.

To further promote equity, the NJDOE should provide support for disaggregating screener data by subgroups, including MLs, students with speech-language disorders (severe speech-sound disorders, stuttering/fluency, nonverbal students, AAC users, DLD), students with writing disabilities (dysgraphia), and other underrepresented populations (Autism). This would help districts identify potential disparities in screening outcomes and take targeted action to address them. Such data analysis could uncover patterns that inform resource allocation and intervention strategies, ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Critical Resources: Time & Cost

Although not mandated by legislation, the Working Group recognized the importance of conducting a cost analysis of screening tools to inform district decision-making. However, to maintain the integrity of the process and prevent vendor influence, this analysis could not be completed within the scope of the report. The committee aimed to ensure an unbiased evaluation of screening options while keeping discussions focused on best practices and alignment with state literacy goals. Moving forward, districts may need to conduct their own cost-benefit analyses when selecting screening tools, considering both effectiveness and financial feasibility.

Resources

- Academic Screening Tools Chart
- Five Questions to Consider when Reviewing Assessment Data for English Learners
- NJTSS-ER Essential Assessments: Universal Screening
- Screening for Early Literacy Milestones and Reading Disabilities: The Why, When Whom, How and When

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) In Literacy

Overview

The New Jersey Student Learning Standards specify the knowledge and skills students should acquire at each grade level. Educators determine how students engage with and master these standards. The resources used to support student learning, such as lesson plans, unit plans, texts, and tasks are known as curricular materials. These materials form the basis of learning experiences in the classroom coupled with the teachers' implementation of the materials to create rich learning experiences. High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) are defined as instructional materials that include specific learning goals and lessons aligned to content standards, research-based teaching strategies, teacher support materials, and embedded formative assessments to effectively help teachers implement instructional units and courses that are integrated, coherent, and sequenced. Materials are culturally relevant, free from bias, and easy to use with support for diverse learners.

Why it Matters

There is compelling evidence that the quality of instructional materials significantly impacts student learning, with effects comparable to those of teacher effectiveness (Chingos and Whitehurst, 2012; Whitehurst, 2009; Boser, Chingos, & Straus, 2015). Providing teachers with high-quality materials leads to greater improvements in student outcomes than the difference between a new teacher and one with three years of experience (Kane, 2016). Scholars assert that a comprehensive, coherent literacy curriculum that includes HQIM is superior to a fragmented approach, as it ensures all components reinforce each other (Liben and Paige, 2017; Graham et al, 2016).

High-quality curricular materials are crucial for achieving equity (TNTP, 2018; Gay, 2002). Historically underserved students, such as students of color, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities, are less likely to receive high-quality materials. A study across diverse districts found that students of color are more likely to be given below-grade-level assignments, widening the opportunity gap (TNTP, 2018). HQIM that connects to students' cultural knowledge can enhance motivation and learning, while a lack of such connections can deepen inequities (Gay, 2002).

High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) not only enhance student outcomes but also significantly impact teacher workload and equity in education. Teachers currently spend an average of 7–12 hours per week searching for or creating their own materials, diverting valuable time and energy from instructional planning and delivery, and increasing the likelihood that material selection and instructional practices may not rely on evidence-based practices / research (Goldberg, 2016). In a study of these materials, only 7% of materials were found to be fully aligned to standards (Polikoff and Dean, 2019). HQIM equips teachers with the tools they need to focus on effective teaching, while ensuring all students, regardless of background, receive equitable access to high-quality education.

What Our Students Need

Students need explicit, direct, and systematic foundational skills instruction at all grade levels that is sequential and aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) can accelerate students' access to the types of assignments and instruction in literacy that students need and set a high bar for student experiences. To be considered high-quality instructional materials, materials must incorporate evidence-based practices and fully support all of the essential components of reading instruction, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Additionally, HQIM must also reflect students' lived experiences, connect to their diverse backgrounds, and simultaneously build essential background knowledge. Effective HQIM incorporates strategies to develop oral language and vocabulary acquisition, offers differentiation for diverse learners, and includes diverse media to engage multisensory input for whole-brain integration. Additionally, instructional materials should align with universal screeners to ensure that teachers have the tools and resources to provide targeted and coherent support to address the needs of all students.

For HQIM to have the most student impact, professional learning for educators - including administrators, coaches, teachers, and related service providers- must be focused on deepening understanding of the evidence-based literacy practices and the research-base on how students learn to read, paired with aligned curricular materials that help bring that research-base to life in classrooms across New Jersey. While educators will need training on how to access and navigate their curricular materials, professional learning should go beyond "one-and-done" approaches and must be ongoing to support sustained improvements over time. For example, educators should have opportunities to learn about the design and intent of units and lessons within their HQIM and how they align with the research-base, as well as opportunities to internalize units and lesson plans alongside peers and plan to meet the needs of all students leveraging their instructional materials and knowledge of their students. Professional learning should support educators across all levels of a school system and should be ongoing to sustain support over time. Effective professional development must include development in teaching foundational reading skills at all levels in addition to teaching vocabulary, language, and comprehension skills. It must not be solely how to navigate curricular materials.

Recommendations

10. Rubric for Selection of Instructional Materials

Develop a two-part rubric for LEA selection of instructional materials that:

a. Requires robust support for high-quality foundational literacy classroom instruction, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension aligned to the MTSS model.

b. Addresses alignment to NJSLS, specifies level of support for students with disabilities and multilingual learners, and contains learning opportunities that reflects the diversity of New Jersey's classrooms.

To support LEAs in aligning their instructional materials to evidence-based literacy practices, the Working Group recommends that the NJDOE creates a state-specific rubric that LEAs may use to review and/or vet instructional materials to identify and determine whether they are HQIM. The rubric should include a set of gateways and criterion that LEAs progress through to make a determination about the strength of the instructional materials they are considering.

The first gateway will leverage external reviews of materials. EdReports provides a robust and reliable foundation for evaluating the quality and alignment of instructional resources as an initial gateway for districts to vet materials. These reports are free and publicly available and reflect the vast majority of the instructional materials available in today's market with over 1100 reviews completed. Many states across the country leverage EdReports as an initial gateway, including Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Delaware. EdReports is continuously updating their reviews based on lessons learned and new materials that enter the market. As an example of this, EdReports is in the process of updating their reviews using their 2.0 rubrics, which provide more rigorous analysis of K–2 foundational skills and introduce non-negotiables aligned to the evidence-base. Therefore, NJDOE should consider the following guidance in using their earlier reports (*How to Use EdReports' Earlier Reports and Review Tools*).

To ensure that materials meet the unique needs of New Jersey's educational landscape, the Working Group further proposes the development of a second gateway rubric. This rubric would address additional, state-specific considerations, including alignment to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS), resources to support multilingual students and students with disabilities, and the incorporation of diversity and inclusivity within the materials. To help shape the rubric indicator on alignment to the NJSLS-ELA consider exploring the Tier I Core Instruction Analysis Tool Aligned to NJSLS. To build out the indicator on diversity and inclusivity consider further examination of the Culturally Responsive English Language Arts Curriculum Scorecard from NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, as well as guidance from the English Learners Success Forum.

11. Guidance on Selection Process

Provide guidance to LEAs on how to engage in a rigorous selection process that uses the rubric and ensures an inclusive, stakeholder driven process.

Finally, the working group recommends that districts and LEAs be provided guidance on how to engage in a rigorous local decision-making process that utilizes the state's guidance to identify HQIM to review, select, and adopt based on the needs of their students and local context. LEAs should be encouraged to be inclusive of a range of stakeholders in their decision-making process, including educators, district staff, and families. Stakeholders who participate in the process of vetting instructional materials should receive guidance and training on how to use the tools, what to look for, and how to leverage their local data to identify a short-list of instructional materials to consider. The process should also be grounded in data on students' needs within their schools and classrooms, including the extent to which their current instructional programs are meeting the needs of all students. This will ensure that LEAs are supported in this process and that the selected materials align to the LEA's vision for effective literacy instruction, reflect evidence-based literacy practices, and have broad support from a range of stakeholders who will ultimately use or experience the instructional materials in their classrooms.

The Working Group recommends that NJDOE encourage LEAs to participate in this rigorous curriculum selection and adoption process through incentives, as articulated below, to ensure that more LEAs across New Jersey are seeing HQIM as a lever to increase access to academic experiences aligned with evidence-based literacy practices and more equitable student outcomes.

12. Incentives

Incentivize LEAs to engage in curricula review and adoption of HQIM to encourage systematic change.

To support the adoption and effective implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) in New Jersey school districts, the Working Group recommends several key strategies to incentivize adoption. This will be necessary to encourage districts to adopt HQIM since it is not mandated by the legislation. Targeted grant funding should be made available to assist districts in selecting, purchasing, and implementing HQIM within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Reading (MTSS-R) framework. Resources such as the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD) or similar funding streams should be leveraged to encourage widespread adoption. This strategy has been seen successful in states like Louisiana that have seen large gains in their 4th grade reading NAEP scores. Massachusetts also provides a models for incentivizing adoption and implementation of HQIM. Additionally, districts should be further incentivized through opportunities to access free support from NJDOE on how to utilize state guidance with fidelity when selecting and adopting HQIM.

Grant funding should be provided to districts who are engaging in an HQIM selection, adoption, and implementation process with differentiated opportunities for support based on their current phase of implementation. For districts who have not yet vetted and selected HQIM, grant funding should be provided to districts to enable them to participate in the rigorous process to select new HQIM to better meet the needs of their students and align instruction and content to evidence-based literacy practices, in alignment with state guidance. Grant funding should also be provided to districts to acquire instructional materials, provided they meet the state approved criteria for HQIM and alignment to evidence-based literacy practices, and were selected based on the guidance provided by the state. Additionally, for districts who demonstrate that they are using HQIM as outlined in the state's rubrics, grant funding should be available to support effective implementation of those materials. LEAs that select HQIM that meet the state approved criteria should be able to access grant funding to provide professional development opportunities through reputable providers such as those identified by Rivet Education (Curriculum-Based Professional Learning). Ensuring educators receive high-quality, job-embedded, and curriculum-based professional learning will support effective implementation and maximize the impact of HQIM on student outcomes.

In addition to grant funding, the Working Group also recommends that LEAs are provided support to guide them through a strong, locally-driven selection process grounded in the state rubric and criteria for HQIM. This will ensure an inclusive and high-quality process for districts who have not yet begun to consider HQIM for their communities and desire to do so. This support will build capacity of LEAs to undergo a rigorous process to ensure that their selection of HQIM is data-driven, informed by a local needs assessment, engages key stakeholders, and reflects the criteria outlined in the state rubric. This process should incorporate an analysis of student data and demographics, administrator and teacher feedback, and meaningful engagement with families and the community.

13. Communities of Practice

Support districts in developing communities of practice related to the adoption and use of HQIM.

To further inspire and expand HQIM adoption, the Working Group recommends developing a system for recognizing and showcasing successful district implementation and providing districts with opportunities to learn from each other. This could include a publicly accessible database of exemplar districts, highlighting best practices and demonstrating measurable improvements in student achievement. By sharing success stories, the state can encourage broader participation and provide models for effective HQIM integration.

14. Procurement Regulations

Work with legislators and the State Board to simplify the burdensome procurement regulations that limit the state's ability to work with vendors to make HQIM materials affordable and accessible to all districts in New Jersey.

Additionally, simplifying procurement processes is essential to reducing barriers to HQIM adoption. The Working Group recommends that the state negotiate contracts with HQIM vendors to lower costs, making high-quality materials more accessible for districts. This approach aligns with the principle of "making the right choice the easy choice," ensuring that financial and logistical challenges do not impede the selection of effective instructional resources.

15. Clear and Publicly Available Information

Require districts to provide clear and accessible publicly available information related to adopted instructional materials.

Finally, curriculum transparency is critical to foster accountability and public trust. The Working Group recommends that districts be required to publish information about their adopted instructional materials on their websites and include this data in their School Performance Reports. Providing clear, accessible information about HQIM usage will empower stakeholders—including educators, families, and policymakers—to make informed decisions and advocate for high-quality instructional resources in New Jersey schools.

16. Implementation

Support districts implementation of HQIM by providing access to evidence-based professional development aligned to foundational literacy skill development for all members of the learning community including school and district leaders.

The Working Group on Student Literacy emphasizes the crucial role of comprehensive and sustained professional development in ensuring the effective implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and evidence-based literacy practices. Teachers and leaders need an in-depth understanding of the research and evidence-base behind students learning to read and write in order to implement and sustain meaningful change in classroom practice. They also need opportunities to plan for, practice, and reflect on changes to their practice, using their instructional materials to maximize their learning and the potential impact of their HQIM to meet students' needs. To achieve fidelity and sustainability across the state, the Working Group recommends that the NJDOE supports districts in identifying and selecting appropriate HQIM, with a focus on promoting an understanding of what evidence-based literacy entails and how HQIM supports that evidence base. This effort aims to establish clarity around the essential components of literacy and dispel misconceptions, ensuring that

educators, families, and communities are aligned with evidence-based practices and are supported in bringing them to life with students.

The first phase of professional development should be grounded in evidence-based literacy research, encompassing critical components such as phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), fluency, and language comprehension. This training must also cover important aspects of background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Additionally, the training should also include discussion of evidence-based instructional practices in foundational literacy, including aligned content, explicit instruction, sufficient student practice, assessment and differentiation. Training should be required for K–4 teachers, special educators, and any educators in 5–12 who support students with missing foundational skills. Training like LETRS, IMSE, IMSLEC and other structured literacy approaches that offer a practicum should be considered when planning and developing foundational professional development for educators, as well as other professional learning providers who cover these topics thoroughly within the context of instructional practice. By connecting this training to Universal Screeners, educators will be equipped to adjust Tier I instruction and implement effective interventions using HQIM.

The initial training should be followed by professional learning grounded in the LEA's selected curriculum, with particular emphasis on the design of the HQIM and its alignment to evidence-based research and practices in literacy. Beyond initial "unboxing" of HQIM and foundational learning in how to access materials, educators should receive professional learning that facilitates internalization of the materials to support planning and preparation to deliver lessons that meet the diverse needs of all students. Professional learning should be ongoing and job-embedded, supported by ongoing virtual and/or in-person coaching, include case studies and models, and provide collaborative planning time to ensure successful classroom implementation.

Sustained training and support are critical for maintaining the effective use of HQIM. The Working Group also recommends that the NJDOE utilizes a strategy that builds local capacity to support continuous improvement and educator development within local districts. This may look like "train the trainer" models where select individuals receive deeper support at early phases of implementation, with guidance on how to turnkey learning locally within their school communities. Tools such as Rivet Education's Partner Search Tool can help districts connect with high-quality professional learning providers, while detailed guidance documents may outline steps for implementation and strategies for troubleshooting challenges.

School and system leaders play a critical role leading change efforts and ensuring systems are equipped to monitor progress and sustain instructional improvements over time. The Working Group recommends that school and system leaders also receive training on evidence-based literacy practices, including how HQIM aligns to the research and the NJSLS. School and system leaders should be supported to set a clear vision, articulate aligned district-wide instructional priorities grounded in their context and student needs, and develop plans to build educator capacity while also leading the necessary cultural and logistical shifts to support HQIM implementation. Professional development

must be tailored to each role, with educators, instructional coaches, and related service providers (e.g., SLSs) receiving specialized training on implementing HQIM, differentiating instruction, analyzing data, evaluating ongoing progress, and collaborating with parents and other related service providers (e.g., OTs). Instructional coaches will play a key role in troubleshooting and fostering collaboration, while school leaders will monitor fidelity and integrity to the materials and ensure that HQIM implementation aligns with school improvement plans.

17. Intervention Materials

> Develop a strategic, evidence-based approach to selecting intervention materials that aligns closely with adopted core instructional materials, ensuring consistency and coherence in student support.

The Working Group on Student Literacy advocates for a strategic, evidence-based approach to selecting intervention materials that aligns closely with adopted core instructional materials, ensuring consistency and coherence in student support. The group's recommendations stress the importance of embedding interventions within all tiers of instruction, in accordance with the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity (Fuchs, Fuchs & Malone, 2017) as utilized in the NJTSS-ER structure. These principles emphasize the need for targeted, data-driven interventions that are aligned with state standards and tailored to meet the specific needs of students.

To initiate the intervention process, districts should first utilize universal screeners to identify students who may need additional support. The NJTSS-ER Tier II and Tier III Intervention and Analysis Tool — found on the NJTSS Early Reading Planning and Implementation Resources page—is a strong resource for districts to utilize in determining their process. Once students are identified, diagnostic tools should be employed to pinpoint the exact areas of need, enabling educators to select interventions that are precisely targeted. This diagnostic approach ensures that interventions are based on clear, actionable data, providing a foundation for effective support. The Working Group also proposes the development of a "NJ What Works – Intervention" database, which would curate a list of recommended interventions organized by specific areas of student growth. This database would serve as a valuable resource for educators and related service providers, helping them to choose evidence-based interventions that align with the identified needs of their students.

The process of selecting and implementing interventions should be dynamic and responsive, driven by ongoing progress monitoring. As students receive interventions, data from these assessments will guide adjustments to ensure that the support provided is effective and appropriate. Districts will have flexibility in choosing the type of intervention that best fits their resources and needs, whether standardized or individualized. This tailored approach allows for a more customized response to student learning gaps, ensuring that interventions are aligned with each district's unique context.

The intended impact of this approach is to provide students with intensive instruction and corrective feedback that fosters skill development and the ability to transfer learned strategies. By using data to adjust interventions, districts can promote instructional coherence and ensure that interventions minimize non-productive behaviors. The emphasis on using ongoing data to refine and adjust interventions will help maximize their effectiveness and ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed.

Cost

Although conducting a cost analysis was not part of the legislative charge, the Working Group recognized its importance and aimed to include it in this process. Unfortunately, the necessary data to complete this analysis was not attainable due to different pricing structures. However, it is worth noting that HQIM are not inherently more expensive than non-HQIM options. In fact, there are numerous Open Educational Resources (OER) available that are either free or come with minimal costs, offering high-quality, standards-aligned alternatives for districts.

Beyond the cost of materials, the state and local agencies will need to include the cost of professional development for staff.

Resources

- CCSSO's High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Network
- Curriculum Support Guide
- EdReports: Adoption Steps
- Guide to Implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)
- The Unrealized Promise of High Quality Instructional Materials

Conclusion

Working in Synergy

A comprehensive and systematic approach to literacy instruction requires universal screeners, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), evidence-based intervention strategies to work in synergy with existing frameworks, including NJTSS, Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS), and dyslexia screening, and collaboration with parents and other service providers. This alignment ensures that screening data drives Tier I, II, and III instruction, with progress monitoring guiding instructional adjustments at every level. Fidelity of implementation at Tier I is critical, as the data collected must inform core instruction and create a structured, responsive system that meets the needs of all students. Screener data should not only identify students in need of intervention but also highlight areas for growth within the current instructional programming, strengthening Tier I practices to reduce the need for more intensive interventions over time. To build an effective, sustainable system, all stakeholders—including educators, related service providers, administrators, and families—must be actively involved in the conversation from the outset, ensuring that structures are proactively designed rather than retrofitted after the fact. Family engagement is particularly crucial, as helping parents understand the process early on fosters collaboration and enhances student success. By embedding these essential components within the NJTSS framework, districts can establish a cohesive, data-driven approach to literacy instruction that accounts for all learners and ensures every child receives the support they need to thrive.

18. Comprehensive Review of Existing Regulations, Policies, and Procedures

Require the Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive review of existing regulations, policies, and procedures at the district and classroom levels to identify bureaucratic impediments that hinder progress and undermine the constitutional requirement to provide an effective and efficient educational system.

This review shall include, but not be limited to:

1. An analysis of paperwork requirements, reporting obligations, and compliance procedures to determine their necessity and impact on instructional time and resource allocation.
2. An evaluation of administrative processes related to budgeting, procurement, personnel management, and student support services to identify inefficiencies and redundancies.
3. An assessment of the impact of federal, state, and local mandates on district and school autonomy, flexibility, and innovation.

Text Version: Scarborough's Reading Rope

The many strands that are woven into skilled reading

The Reading Rope consists of lower and upper strands. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice.

Language Comprehension (Upper Strands)

Strands include:

- Background knowledge (facts, concepts, etc.)
- Vocabulary (breadth, precision, links, etc.)
- Language structures (syntax, semantics, etc.)
- Verbal reasoning (inference, metaphor, etc.)
- Literacy knowledge (print concepts, genres, etc.)

Word Recognition (Lower Strands)

Strands include:

- Phonological awareness (syllable, phonemes, etc.)
- Decoding (alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences
- Sight recognition (of familiar words)

Skilled Reading

Language comprehension becomes increasingly strategic and word recognition becomes increasingly automatic in the progression to becoming a skilled reader. A skilled reader displays fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

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Text Version: NJTSS Diagram

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports represented as an equilateral triangle with the following sides:

- District and School Leadership
- Family and Community Engagement
- Positive School Culture and Climate (base of triangle)

The word "Supports" is shown as the altitude of the triangle (a line reaching from the vertex to the middle of the base).

Starting at the top, the three tiers inside the triangle are:

- Tier 3: Intensive Interventions
- Tier 2: Targeted, Small Group Interventions
- Tier 1: Universal Supports

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Glossary

Comprehension. Intentional thinking about and understanding of the content of a text (comprehension is a summative skill that is supported by a student's aptitude in the other four pillars). One of the Five Pillars of Reading.

Diagnostic Assessment. Tests that can be used to measure a variety of reading, language, or cognitive skills. Although they can be given as soon as a screening test indicates a child is behind in reading growth, they will usually be given only if a child fails to make adequate progress after being given extra help in learning to read. They are designed to provide a more precise and detailed picture of the full range of a child's knowledge and skill so that instruction can be more precisely planned

Evidence Based Literacy Practices. Refers to instructional practices with a proven record of success based on reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence that when the instructional practices are implemented with fidelity, students can be expected to make adequate gains in literacy achievement

Explicit Instruction. Direct, face-to-face teaching that involves teacher explanation, demonstration, and the provision of ongoing corrective feedback.

Fluency. Reading text accurately and with sufficient pace, so that deep comprehension is possible. One of the Five Pillars of Reading.

Foundational literacy instruction. 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.

High-Quality Instructional Materials. Instructional materials that include specific learning goals and lessons aligned to content standards, research-based teaching strategies, teacher support materials, and embedded formative assessments to effectively help teachers implement instructional units and courses that are integrated, coherent, and sequenced. Materials are culturally relevant, free from bias, and easy to use with support for diverse learners.

Listening Comprehension. The ability to understand spoken language by interpreting and constructing meaning from auditory information. It is a complex process that involves many cognitive and linguistic skills, including identifying phonemes, understanding word meanings, understanding syntax, interpreting higher-level language, and integrating information.

Letter Naming. A student's ability to recognize and name letters in the English alphabet.

Multilingual Learners. Students with a primary language other than English who are in the process of developing proficiency in English

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventative framework that integrates data and instruction to maximize student achievement and support students social, emotional, and behavior needs from a strengths-based perspective. MTSS offers a framework for educators to engage in data-based decision making related to program improvement, high-quality instruction and intervention, social and emotional learning, and positive behavioral supports necessary to ensure positive outcomes for districts, schools, teachers, and students.

New Jersey Tiered System of Support (NJTSS). New Jersey's framework of supports and interventions to improve student achievement, based on the core components of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and the three tier prevention logic of Response to Intervention (RTI).

Oral Language. Oral language, sometimes referred to as spoken language, involves listening (receptive) skills and speaking (expressive) skills. It also includes different forms (phonology, morphology, syntax), content (vocabulary/semantics), and uses (pragmatic language including social skills, matching language to situations, conversation, storytelling). Oral language is the foundation for development of reading and writing.

Phonemic Awareness. The ability to detect and manipulate the smallest units (i.e., phonemes) of spoken language (e.g., recognition that the word "cat" includes three distinct sounds or phonemes).

Phonics. The associations between sounds and print (alphabet letters). One of the Five Pillars of Reading.

Professional Development. The ongoing learning provided to teachers and staff pertaining to specific strategies and skills and often based on a grade level/building/district student learning goal.

Reading Proficiency. 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. The time period required to conduct a universal literacy screening and determine screening results.

Universal Literacy Screening. 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.