



# Annotated Summary of Recommendations from the New Jersey Working Group on Student Literacy

The New Jersey Working Group on Student Literacy, whose membership included members of the New Jersey Legacy of Literacy (NJLL) coalition, fellows from JerseyCAN's Parent Champions for Strong Schools Fellowship, fellows from JerseyCAN's New Jersey Teacher Leader Policy Fellowship, traditional public school educators from across the state, and members of New Jersey's public charter school community, published a report that was made available to the public in March 2025. This report included specific recommendations for the New Jersey Department of Education to adopt, pursuant to the goal of ensuring the best possible literacy outcomes for the largest swath of students in the state of New Jersey. These recommendations are as outlined by law, "regarding the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies, appropriate and reliable instruments for a universal literacy screening, and high quality instructional materials" (S2644/A4303).

The summary of the Working Group's recommendations, found on pages 6 and 7 of the report, is below.

Selected recommendations are annotated by JerseyCAN, and appear in blue italics. Annotations are intended to highlight the recommendation's potential for effective implementation and/or the recommendation's evidence-based association with positive student outcomes.

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.

*This is important because it removes guesswork from universal literacy screener selection by providing strong specific recommendations, with commentary about limitations and assets of each option.*

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.

*New Jersey's Literacy Bill Package includes a mandate for twice yearly literacy screenings for students in kindergarten through second grade, however best practice in the field stipulates that thrice yearly is optimal for student support and growth. This recommendation addresses a shortcoming of the legislation by urging educators to screen students three times yearly as a best practice, rather than just the twice yearly minimum requirement from the new law.*

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.

*This recommendation is particularly helpful because it names specific states that have made significant literacy improvements, including Louisiana and Mississippi. This is supportive of New Jersey choosing wisely when reviewing practices for replication in this state in order to advance reading success.*

*By making specific reference to LETRS training, a well-regarded literacy training that deepens teachers' understanding of foundational literacy, educators in the field have an exemplar that has been used in states witnessing significant reading growth. LETRS training can potentially confer graduate college credit for completion which, with additional credits, can increase educator compensation. As such, this could provide an opportunity of compensated professional growth and also be a path to teacher leadership.*

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.

*This draws much-needed attention to the importance of teacher preparation programs being in alignment with foundational literacy principles and practices, as outlined in recent literacy legislation passed in New Jersey. The New Jersey Administrative Code has already been revised to facilitate this recommendation and the revision will be effective in September 2025. Nonetheless, this serves as an important reminder that educator preparation programs must add more literacy-focused coursework to their programs, and that the coursework must address phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, writing, vocabulary and comprehension.*

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.

*The Working Group states that districts would benefit from “prioritizing family engagement over passive notification” regarding students’ reading status. This is a relevant distinction in the pursuit of improved student outcomes because just notifying a parent of a child’s reading status can be demoralizing and is ultimately unhelpful, if not paired with a viable plan of action. Enhancing families’ understanding of early literacy, empowers and encourages them to engage in pro-literacy activities with their children, regardless of literacy achievement. However, this further supports impactful home-school relationships in cases where students have a reading deficiency.*

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.

*This is a vital recommendation, because good teaching practice and the New Jersey Tiered Student Supports System calls for meeting all learners’ needs. Thus, supports must take into consideration the unique needs of specific populations. This recommendation addresses this, including the need to be intentional about supporting multilingual learners, and learners with learning disabilities.*



- 10.** Develop a two-part rubric for LEA selection of instructional materials that:
- Requires robust support for high-quality foundational literacy classroom instruction, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension aligned to the MTSS model.
  - 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.

*From addressing teacher workload concerns to placing emphasis on good pedagogy, the value of the right curriculum cannot be overstated. This recommendation of a state-specific rubric to closely vet High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) for literacy acknowledges this and notes a study that found that only 7% of curricular materials made available to educators align fully with the standards their students are to be taught. This is a compelling statistic that underscores the level of care that must be taken to make good decisions during the curriculum selection process, which is what the development of a hyper-specific, two-part rubric for LEA selection of instructional materials will provide.*

- 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.

*This is an extremely important recommendation, which supports the game-changing idea that the NJDOE should incentivize districts to use High Quality Instructional Materials “to encourage widespread adoption”. New Jersey can ill afford to distribute precious fiscal resources to support districts that are not using “best in class” curriculum explicitly tethered to the principles of foundational literacy and the science of reading because this is precisely what literacy grant funding is designed to correct. This can be done by naming specific curriculum that meet the NJDOE’s exacting standards, and embedding an HQIM requirement into the criteria for grant awards around grants that have a literacy component, for example, the \$50 million dollar Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD) that was recently awarded to the NJDOE by the US Department of Education.*

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

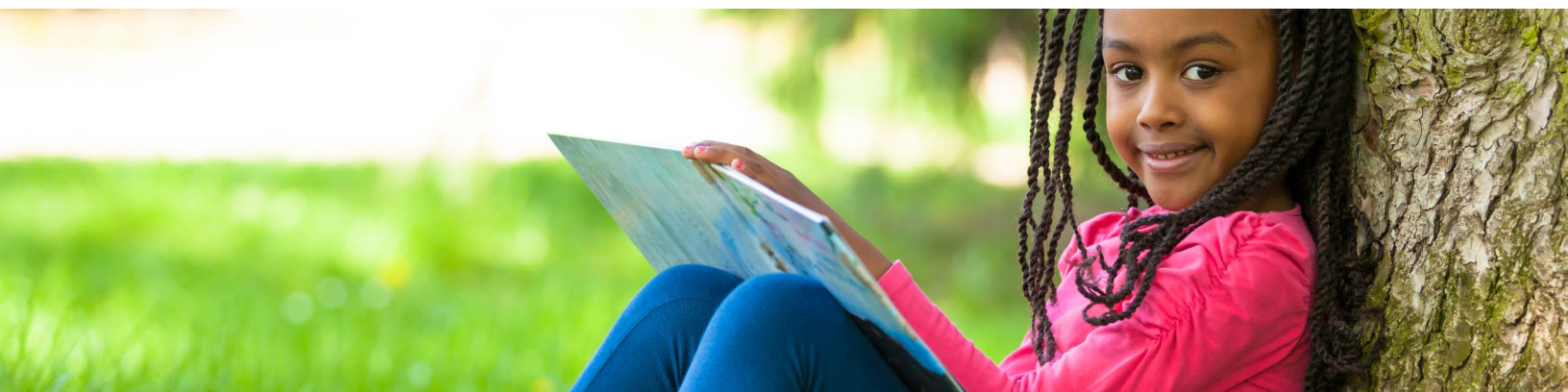
*This is an important recommendation elevating “Communities of Practice”, i.e. districts in the state where stellar literacy practices are being used and are showing measurably positive impact on student learning, in order to support replication of those good practices by other districts and schools. There are good examples in both traditional public schools and public charter schools where “positive outlier” performance is seen, and their proximity to other schools in New Jersey should render their lessons for other districts more accessible.*

- 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.

*Given the mammoth, layered requirements for securing contracts, this important recommendation focuses on eliminating bureaucratic “red tape” by having the state department negotiate contracts with vendors selling High Quality Instructional Materials. This could result in lowering costs for individual districts and also making the materials more readily available for every district along the same timeline.*

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

*In the interest of parent engagement and widespread accountability, this recommendation establishes that districts should fulfil an obligation to publish information about their adopted instructional materials so that families are aware, and that the State should further promote transparency by naming these materials on School Performance Reports published by the NJDOE. This action could capture any patterns that might become evident, i.e. identifying correlations between specific curricula and literacy outcomes in schools that outpace their peers.*



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.

*Advocating for the use of literacy coaches, which is the gold standard of teacher professional development in literacy, is arguably the most important recommendation to emanate from the Working Group's report. Specifically, the Group recommends professional learning that is "job-embedded, and supported by ongoing virtual and/or in-person coaching. Evidence of the value of high-quality coaching to teaching practice is borne out by research, and coaching can drive the development and implementation of Tier 1 instructional plans for all students, as well individual reading plans to be implemented at school for students identified with a reading deficiency.*

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.

*The paramount value of this recommendation lies in its focus on using intervention materials for students that align explicitly with the core instructional materials used in the classroom. This recommendation is also crucial to maximizing the efficacy of high-dosage tutoring and out-of-school time programs.*





**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:

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

*When districts and schools have to navigate layers of bureaucracy to accomplish simple goals, a landscape analysis is needed to weed out bureaucratic impediments to success. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of maintaining the commitment to implementing state literacy laws, and finding the time in school to focus directly on student learning and teach children well. Reducing the bureaucratic load for educators can certainly help.*

