



PRESS RELEASE

ANNOUNCING 'THE SCHOOL BOARD EARLY LITERACY CAMPAIGN'

Buffalo, October 2, 2023 – With the growing national and state focus on early literacy, the WNY Education Alliance is pleased to announce the launch of the **School Board Early Literacy Campaign**.

As part of the campaign, a number of organizations that are partners in the WNY Literacy Initiative are calling on school boards in Western New York to create and publish an **Early Literacy Plan** that establishes “**Literacy for All**” as a top priority. Early Literacy Plans should provide a detailed action plan to improve reading instruction in schools and increase reading proficiency scores across ALL student groups.

The organizations have worked with literacy experts, teachers, and school boards from around the country to develop a list of recommended action items for an **Early Literacy Plan** based on the learnings of other districts that have successfully implemented Early Literacy Plans to improve reading instruction and proficiency scores. The recommended steps are listed below:

1. Create an **Early Literacy Plan**, which commits to literacy instruction aligned with evidence on how kids best learn to read and write.

The plan should commit to the kinds of instruction recommended by literacy experts, including: daily, systematic phonics instruction in grades K-2; support for oral language and vocabulary development from the earliest grades; intentional efforts to build children’s content knowledge in science, history, and the arts, in order to support reading comprehension; work with rich, grade level texts for all students; and structured writing instruction connected to children’s reading instruction.

The plan should outline concrete steps aimed at improving reading instruction and set reading proficiency targets for all groups of students, including English learners, economically disadvantaged children, and students with dyslexia.



2. Appoint a **Head of Literacy** who is committed to the goals of that plan and to leading efforts to swiftly align curriculum, core instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional learning to the plan.
3. Provide **Teacher Training in Reading Science** for all pre-K-5 teachers.
4. **Align Curricula With Evidence-Based Practices** outlined in the plan. Until NYSED establishes its own guidelines and recommendations, literacy experts suggest using the recommendations of the Knowledge Matters Campaign, the Reading League, and Student Achievement Partners because they have been reviewed by literacy experts for alignment with research and offer broad choice for school districts:
<https://knowledgematterscampaign.org/explore-curricula>,
<https://www.thereadingleague.org/curriculum-evaluation-guidelines/>,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1abe6VCQ4HgAzHa7iqO6XlChBnnr1OqqI/view>
5. Provide **Universal Screening** for K-3 students to inform leaders about the changes that need to be made to classroom reading instruction, design a system of intervention supports, and identify the students who may be at risk for reading difficulties, including but not limited to those with dyslexia.
6. Create a **Parent Notification Plan** to communicate how students' early reading skills are progressing using effective (and less time-intensive) reading assessments.
7. Monitor **Reading Proficiency Targets** for all student groups, track/publish progress, and use the data to continually evaluate the district's reading instruction practices.

Many school districts in Western New York continue to use curricula (including Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell), assessments (such as F&P Benchmark Assessment System), and intervention programs (including F&P Leveled Literacy Intervention and



Reading Recovery) that are not evidence-based and are not recommended by literacy experts¹, third-party evaluators², and state education departments³ across the U.S.

Furthermore, research shows that these programs are not effective in providing many student groups with the foundational skills and background knowledge needed to learn to read. This, in part, explains the relatively low reading proficiency scores for economically disadvantaged students in Western New York school districts.

Tarja Parssinen, founder of WNY Education Alliance, commented: “School boards play an important role in setting priorities, overseeing curriculum decisions, and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Given the importance of literacy and the growing focus on improving reading instruction in schools, we believe that the time is right for school boards to prioritize literacy by creating Early Literacy Plans. We look forward to supporting school districts as they transition toward using evidence-based practices to teach ALL children to learn to read.”

Representatives from the NAACP, The Education Trust – New York, and the WNY Education Alliance will hold a press conference at the Mount Olive Baptist Church on Friday, October 6 at 11:30am to discuss the School Board Early Literacy Campaign.

¹ Marilyn Jager Adams, Lily Wong Fillmore, Claude Goldenberg, Jane Oakhill, David D. Paige, Timothy Rasinski, and Timothy Shanahan, *Comparing Reading Research to Program Design: An Examination of Teachers College Units of Study* (Student Achievement Partners, January 2020).

² EdReports, *Summary of Alignment & Usability: Units of Study*, (October 25, 2021). Ed Reports, *Summary of Alignment & Usability: Fountas & Pinnell Classroom*, (November 9, 2021).

³ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *FY2022: Accelerating Literacy Learning with High-Quality Instructional Materials*, (January 18, 2022).



Signed:

Buffalo NAACP
Buffalo Urban League
Community Action Organization of WNY
Dyslexia Allies of WNY
Dyslexia Services of WNY
The Education Trust – New York
Literacy Buffalo Niagara
Monkey See, Monkey Do...Children's Bookstore
Neuhaus Education Center
Parent Network of WNY
The Reading League
Read to Succeed Buffalo
Teach My Kid to Read
We the Parents of WNY
WNY Education Alliance
WNY Literacy Collaborative

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