



PRESS RELEASE

THE WNY EDUCATION ALLIANCE ISSUES STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S 'BACK TO BASICS' PLAN TO IMPROVE READING

Buffalo, January 4, 2024 – The WNY Education Alliance has released a statement regarding Governor Kathy Hochul's 'Back to Basics' Plan to improve reading proficiency. As announced by the Governor's office, Governor Hochul will allocate \$10mm to help train teachers in the science of reading, expand the SUNY and CUNY science of reading microcredential program, and introduce legislation "to ensure evidence-based best practices are used in schools throughout New York."

Tarja Parssinen, founder of the WNY Education Alliance, commented:

"Governor Hochul's 'Back to Basics' Plan is an important and historic first step toward improving reading instruction in New York State. We appreciate the Governor's commitment to addressing the reading crisis in our region and her leadership on this critical issue. We would like to thank all of those behind the scenes, including the families of struggling readers, educators, legislators, literacy experts, civil rights advocates, librarians, and non-profit organizations, who have helped to make 'literacy for all' a top priority.

As excited as we are about the potential changes to reading instruction in New York State, we know that this is where the hard work will begin. Improving literacy rates across all student groups, reducing the achievement gap, and addressing the inequities in education will require a significant, multi-year effort from all stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, school boards, NYSED, and teacher prep programs.

It will also take an unwavering commitment to being driven by data, not ideology. In order to truly address the reading crisis, and avoid being just another 'pendulum swing', the changes that are made need to be grounded in research and they need to be comprehensive, addressing all aspects of reading and writing, not just phonics. Higher education and NYSED will play a particularly important role in studying and recommending the instructional practices and curricula that are most effective.



Government will play an important role as well. More funding will be required to pay for changes to curricula, assessments, and interventions, and to ensure that teachers receive the necessary training and support to implement new practices and curricula.

While systemic change will take time, school boards and school leaders should take steps now toward improving reading instruction. Simply adding a 'phonics patch' does not align one's instructional practices with the research. We believe that all school districts should follow the Governor's lead in prioritizing 'literacy for all' by creating Early Literacy Plans which are evidence-based and aim to improve reading and writing proficiency across all student groups. While research shows that 95+% of children are capable of learning to read with the proper instruction, less than 45% of students in Western New York, and just over 30% of economically disadvantaged students in the region, are reading and writing on grade level, according to NYSED data. The longer that it takes to improve reading instruction, the more children will be impacted by illiteracy.

Lastly, education non-profits, like the WNY Education Alliance and the other partners in the WNY Literacy Initiative, stand ready to support these efforts as needed and in partnership with other stakeholders. We look forward to being part of the solution and are committed to doing our part to improve educational outcomes for all children."

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WNY Education Alliance

The WNY Education Alliance is a non-profit organization committed to improving education in the Western New York area through research and advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships.

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