621 LITERACY AND THE READ ACT

[NOTE: By the 2026-2027 school year, the school district must provide evidence-based reading instruction through a focus on student mastery of the foundational reading skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, as well as the development of oral language, vocabulary, and reading comprehension skills. Students must receive evidence-based instruction that is proven to effectively teach children to read, consistent with Minnesota Statutes, sections 120B.118 to 120B.124.]

I. PURPOSE

This policy aligns with Minnesota law established in the Read Act and on other topics related to reading.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The school district recognizes the centrality of reading in a student's educational experience.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. "Evidence-based" means the instruction or item described is based on reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence and has demonstrated a record of success in increasing students' reading competency in the areas of phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Evidence-based literacy instruction is explicit, systematic, and includes phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension that can be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. Evidence-based instruction does not include the three-cueing system, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.119, subdivision 16.

B. "Fluency" means the ability of students to read text accurately, automatically, and with proper expression.

C. "Foundational reading skills" includes phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, and fluency. Foundational reading skills appropriate to each grade level must be mastered in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3. Struggling readers in grades 4 and above who do not demonstrate mastery of grade-level foundational reading skills must continue to receive explicit, systematic instruction to reach mastery.

D. "Literacy specialist" means a person licensed by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board ~~as a teacher of reading, a special education teacher, or a kindergarten through grade 6 teacher,~~ who has completed professional development approved by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in structured literacy. ~~A literacy specialist employed by the department under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.123, subdivision 7, or by a district as a literacy lead, is not required to complete the approved training before August 30, 2025.~~

E. "Literacy lead" means a literacy specialist with expertise in working with educators as adult learners. A district literacy lead must support the district's implementation of the Read Act; provide support to school-based coaches; support the implementation of

structured literacy, interventions, curriculum delivery, and teacher training; assist with the development of personal learning plans; and train paraprofessionals and other support staff to support classroom literacy instruction. A literacy lead may be employed by one (1) district, jointly by two (2) or more districts, or may provide services to districts through a partnership with the regional service cooperatives or another district.

F. "Multitiered system of support" or "MTSS" means a systemic, continuous improvement framework for ensuring positive social, emotional, behavioral, developmental, and academic outcomes for every student. The MTSS framework provides access to layered tiers of culturally and linguistically responsive, evidence-based practices and relies on the understanding and belief that every student can learn and thrive. Through an MTSS at the core (Tier 1), supplemental (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) levels, educators provide high quality, evidence-based instruction and intervention that is matched to a student's needs; progress is monitored to inform instruction and set goals and data is used for educational decision making.

G. "Oral language," also called "expressive language" ~~or~~ and "receptive language," includes speaking and listening, and consists of five (5) components: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Oral language also includes sign language, in which speaking and listening skills are defined as expressive and receptive skills, and consists of phonology, including sign language phonological awareness, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

H. "Parent" means a student's parent or legal guardian.

I. "Phonemic awareness" means the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken syllables and words.

J. "Phonics instruction" means the explicit, systematic, and direct instruction of the relationships between letters and the sounds they represent and the application of this knowledge in reading and spelling.

K. "Progress monitoring" means using data collected to inform whether interventions are working. Progress monitoring involves ongoing monitoring of progress that quantifies rates of improvement and informs instructional practice and the development of individualized programs using state-approved screening that is reliable and valid for the intended purpose.

L. "Reading comprehension" means a function of word recognition skills and language comprehension skills. It is an active process that requires intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and reader. Comprehension skills are taught explicitly by demonstrating, explaining, modeling, and implementing specific cognitive strategies to help beginning readers derive meaning through intentional, problem-solving thinking processes.

M. "Structured literacy" means an approach to reading instruction in which teachers carefully structure important literacy skills, concepts, and the sequence of instruction to facilitate children's literacy learning and progress. Structured literacy is characterized by the provision of systematic, explicit, sequential, and diagnostic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and oral language development, and reading comprehension. This approach is consistent with the principles identified in the science of reading and is designed to ensure all students develop strong foundational literacy skills.

N. "Three-cueing system," also known as "meaning structure visual (MSV)," means a method that teaches students to use meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues when attempting to read an unknown word.

O. "Vocabulary development" means the process of acquiring new words. A robust vocabulary improves all areas of communication, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary growth is directly related to school achievement and is a strong predictor for reading success.

IV. READING SCREENER; PARENT NOTIFICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

A. The school district must administer an approved reading screener to students in kindergarten through grade 3 within the first six (6) weeks of the school year, by February 15 each year, and again within the last six (6) weeks of the school year. A district must provide vendor-approved screening accommodations to students with documented accommodation plans.

A district must administer an approved reading screener to students in grades 4 and above who are not reading at grade level at least once per year until the student reaches grade-level proficiency. The screener must be one of the screening tools approved by MDE.

B. The school district must identify any screener it uses in the district's annual literacy plan, and submit screening data with the annual literacy plan by June 15.

C. Schools, after administering each screener, must follow the language access plan under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.32 and give the parent of each student who is not reading at or above grade level information from the screener about:

1. the student's reading proficiency as measured by a screener approved by MDE;

2. reading-related services currently being provided to the student and the student's progress; and

3. strategies for parents to use at home in helping their student succeed in becoming grade-level proficient in reading in English and in their native language.

D. For students enrolled in dual language immersion programs, the school district must measure the student's reading proficiency in English or in the program's partner language, if available, according to Article V. below. Following its language access plan under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.32, the school district must notify families with timely information about students' reading proficiency, including how the student's reading proficiency is assessed, any reading-related services or supports provided to the student and the student's progress, and strategies for families to use at home in helping students succeed in becoming grade-level proficient in reading in English or the partner language. The dual language immersion program may provide information about national research on reading proficiency for students in dual language immersion programs in the parent notification.

E. The school district may not use this section to deny a student's right to a special education evaluation.

V. IDENTIFICATION AND REPORT

A. Students enrolled in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3, including multilingual learners and students receiving special education services, and students enrolled in dual language immersion programs, must be universally screened for mastery of foundational reading skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, oral language, and for characteristics of dyslexia as measured by a screening tool approved by MDE. The screening for characteristics of dyslexia may be integrated with universal screening for mastery of foundational skills and expressive or receptive language mastery. The screening tool used must be a valid and reliable universal screener that is highly correlated with foundational reading skills. ~~For students reading at grade level, beginning in the winter of grade 2, the oral reading fluency screener may be used to assess reading difficulties, including characteristics of dyslexia, without requiring a separate screening of each subcomponent of foundational reading skills~~.

B. The school district must submit data on student performance in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3 on foundational reading skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, and oral language to MDE in the annual local literacy plan submission due on June 15.

C. For students enrolled in dual language immersion programs:

1. if students are screened in the partner language, they must be screened at the same interval as the screenings in English under Paragraph A above;

2. if the program provides instruction in foundational reading skills in English, the students receiving that instruction must be screened in English;

3. if the program provides instruction in foundational reading skills in the partner language, the students receiving that instruction must be screened in the partner language;

4. if no screener is available in the partner language, the school district must identify how students' reading proficiency is assessed and how the school district determines and provides targeted reading instruction in the partner language and supports to students identified as needing additional support in developing mastery of foundational reading skills; and

5. the partner language screening tool must be approved by the school district for kindergarten through grade 3 students.

D. Students in grades 4 and above, including multilingual learners and students receiving special education services, who are not reading at grade level must be screened for reading difficulties, including characteristics of dyslexia, using a screening tool approved by MDE and must continue to receive evidence-based instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring until the students achieve grade-level proficiency. A parent, in consultation with a teacher, may opt a student out of the literacy screener if the parent and teacher decide that continuing to screen would not be beneficial to the student. In such limited cases, the student must continue to receive progress monitoring and literacy interventions.

E. Reading screeners in English, and in the predominant languages of school district students where practicable, must identify and evaluate students' areas of academic need related to literacy. The school district also must monitor the progress and provide reading instruction appropriate to the specific needs of multilingual learners. The school district must use an approved, developmentally appropriate, and culturally

responsive screener and annually report summary screener results to the MDE Commissioner ("Commissioner") by June 15 in the form and manner determined by the Commissioner.

F. An English language learner must be screened for characteristics of dyslexia according to the vendor's assessment guidelines.

G. The school district must include in its local literacy plan a summary of the district's efforts to screen, identify, and provide interventions to students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia as measured by a screening tool approved by MDE. With respect to students screened or identified under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.12, subdivision 2, paragraph (a), the report must include:

1. a summary of the school district's efforts to screen for characteristics of reading difficulties, including dyslexia;

2. the number of students universally screened for that reporting year;

3. the number of students demonstrating characteristics of dyslexia for that year; and

4. an explanation of how students identified under this subdivision are provided with alternate instruction and interventions under Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.56, subdivision 1.

VI. INTERVENTION

A. For each student identified under the screening identification process, the school district shall provide aligned and targeted reading intervention to accelerate student growth and reach the goal of reading at or above grade level by the end of the current grade and school year.

B. The school district must implement progress monitoring, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.119, for a student not reading at grade level.

C. The school district must use evidence-based curriculum and intervention materials at each grade level that are designed to ensure student mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. If the school district purchases new literacy curriculum, or literacy intervention or supplementary materials, the curriculum or materials must be evidence-based as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.119.

[NOTE: Starting in the 2026-2027 school year, a school district must use only evidence-based literary interventions. The 2025 Minnesota legislature amended Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.12, subdivision 3, to delay the 2025-26 requirement for one school year.]

D. If a student does not read at or above grade level by the end of the current school year, the school district must continue to provide aligned and targeted reading intervention as defined by the MTSS framework until the student reads at grade level. School district intervention methods shall encourage family engagement and, where possible, collaboration with appropriate school and community programs that specialize in evidence-based instructional practices and measure mastery of foundational reading skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, and oral language.

E. By the 2025-2026 school year, intervention programs must be taught by an intervention teacher or special education teacher who has successfully completed training in evidence-based reading instruction approved by MDE. Intervention may include but is not limited to requiring student attendance in summer school, intensified reading instruction that may require that the student be removed from the regular classroom for part of the school day, extended-day programs, or programs that strengthen students' cultural connections.

F. The school district must determine the format of the personal learning plan in collaboration with the student's educators and other appropriate professionals. The school must develop the learning plan in consultation with the student's parent or guardian. The personal learning plan must include targeted instruction that is evidence-based and ongoing progress monitoring, and address knowledge gaps and skill deficiencies through strategies such as specific exercises and practices during and outside of the regular school day, group interventions, periodic assessments or screeners, and reasonable timelines. The personal learning plan may include grade retention, if it is in the student's best interest; a student may not be retained solely due to delays in literacy or not demonstrating grade-level proficiency. A school must maintain and regularly update and modify the personal learning plan until the student reads at grade level. This paragraph does not apply to a student under an individualized education program.

VII. LOCAL LITERACY PLAN

A. The school district must adopt a local literacy plan to have every child reading at or above grade level every year beginning in kindergarten and to support multilingual learners and students receiving special education services in achieving their individualized reading goals. The school district must update and submit the plan to the Commissioner by June 15 each year. The plan must be consistent with the Read Act, and include the following:

1. a process to assess students' foundational reading skills, oral language, and level of reading proficiency and the screeners used, by school site and grade level, under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.123;

2. a process to notify and involve parents;

3. a description of how schools in the school district will determine the targeted reading instruction that is evidence-based and includes an intervention strategy for a student and the process for intensifying or modifying the reading strategy in order to obtain measurable reading progress;

4. evidence-based intervention methods for students who are not reading at or above grade level and progress monitoring to provide information on the effectiveness of the intervention;

5. identification of staff development needs, including a plan to meet those needs;

6. the curricula used by school site and grade level and, if applicable, the district plan and timeline for adopting evidence-based curricula and materials starting in the 2025-2026 school year;

7. a statement of whether the school district has adopted an MTSS framework;

8. student data using the measures of foundational literacy skills and mastery

identified by MDE for the following students:

a. students in kindergarten through grade 3;

b. students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia; and

c. students in grades 4 to 12 who are identified as not reading at grade level;

9. the number of teachers and other staff that have completed training approved by the department;

10. the number of teachers and other staff proposed for training in structured literacy;

11. how the district used funding provided under the Read Act to implement the requirements of the Read Act;

12. beginning as soon as practicable after the end of fiscal year 2026, how the district used literacy aid funding received under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.98; ~~and~~

13. beginning on December 31, 2025, for a district with a dual language immersion program:

a. the program's partner language;

b. grade levels included in the program;

c. the language used to screen students' foundational reading skills;

d. the percentage of grade 3 students taking the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; and

e. the number of students in the program in grades 4 to 12 who are identified as not reading at grade level, and~~.~~

14. beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, a description of how schools in the district will use the school library media center to complement students' foundational reading skills.

B. Annually by June 15, the school district must post its literacy plan on the official school district website and submit it to the Commissioner using the template developed by the Commissioner.

C. The school district must use a streamlined template developed by the Commissioner for local literacy plans that meets the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.12, subdivision 4a, and requires all reading instruction and teacher training in reading instruction to be evidence-based.

VIII. STAFF TRAINING

A. The district must provide training from a menu of approved evidence-based training programs to the following teachers and staff by July 1, 2026:

1. reading intervention teachers working with students in kindergarten through grade 12;

2. all classroom teachers of students in kindergarten through grade 3 and children in prekindergarten programs;

3. kindergarten through grade 12 special education teachers responsible for foundational reading instruction;

4. curriculum directors;

5. instructional support staff, contractors, and volunteers who assist in providing reading interventions under the oversight and monitoring of a trained licensed teacher;

6. employees who select literacy instructional materials for a district; and

7. teachers holding English as a second language teaching licenses.

B. The school district must provide training from a menu of approved evidence-based training programs to the following teachers by July 1, 2027:

1. teachers who provide foundational reading instruction to students in grades 4 to 12;

2. teachers who provide instruction to students in a state-approved alternative program; and

3. teachers who provide instruction to students in dual language immersion programs.

The Commissioner may grant a school district an extension to these deadlines.

C. By August 30, 2025, the school district must employ or contract with a literacy lead, or be actively supporting a designated literacy specialist through the process of becoming a literacy lead. The school board may satisfy the requirements of this subdivision by contracting with another school board or cooperative unit under Minnesota Statutes, section 123A.24 for the services of a literacy lead by August 30, 2025. The school district literacy lead must collaborate with school district administrators and staff to support the school district's implementation of requirements under the Read Act.

D. Training provided by the following may satisfy the professional development requirements under this Article:

1. a certified trained facilitator; or

2. a training program that MDE has determined meets the professional development requirements under the Read Act.

E. Beginning July 1, 2027, an educator required to receive training under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.123, subdivision 5, paragraph (a), who is new to the state of Minnesota or is a newly licensed teacher who did not receive instruction in the teaching of foundational reading skills based on structured literacy, must complete one (1) of the approved required trainings. Training must be offered through the regional literacy network and facilitated by a local certified trained facilitator. MDE must review district

literacy lead waiver requests and grant waivers to educators new to the state or educators who provide reading instruction exclusively using alternatives to sound-based approaches, and who have completed the professional development requirements consistent with this subdivision.

F. For the 2024-2025, 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years only, the hours of instruction requirement under Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.41 for students in elementary and secondary school, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.05, subdivisions 9 and 13, is reduced by 5-1/2 hours for a district that enters into an agreement with the exclusive representative of the teachers that requires teachers to receive at least 5-1/2 hours of approved evidence-based training required under this subdivision, on a day when other students in the district receive instruction.

The hours of instruction reduction for secondary school students is applicable only for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years.

G. An educator who was first enrolled in an elementary, special education, or early childhood education Minnesota-approved teacher preparation program on or after June 1, 2026, does not need to receive additional training according to Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.123, subdivision 5, paragraph (a).

H. All professional development and digital curriculum resources must comply with the accessibility standards developed according to Minnesota Statutes, section 16E.03, subdivision 9. Professional development provided in accordance with the Read Act is subject to the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 363A.43.

IX. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A. The school district must provide training programs on evidence-based reading instruction to teachers and instructional staff in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.12, subdivision 1, paragraphs (b) and (c). The training must include teaching in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

B. The school district shall use the data under Article V. above to identify the staff development needs so that:

1. elementary teachers are able to implement explicit, systematic, evidence-based instruction in the five reading areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension with emphasis on mastery of foundational reading skills as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.119 and other literacy-related areas including writing until the student achieves grade-level reading and writing proficiency;

2. elementary teachers have sufficient training to provide students with evidence-based reading and oral language instruction that meets students' developmental, linguistic, and literacy needs using the intervention methods or programs selected by the school district for the identified students;

3. licensed teachers employed by the school district have regular opportunities to improve reading and writing instruction;

4. licensed teachers recognize students' diverse needs in cross-cultural settings and are able to serve the oral language and linguistic needs of students who are multilingual learners by maximizing strengths in their native languages in

order to cultivate students' English language development, including academic language development, and build academic literacy; and

5. licensed teachers are well trained in culturally responsive pedagogy that enables students to master content, develop skills to access content, and build relationships.

C. The school district must provide staff in early childhood programs sufficient training to provide children in early childhood programs with explicit, systematic instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness; oral language, including listening comprehension; vocabulary; and letter-sound correspondence.

X. LITERACY AID USES

The school district must use its literacy aid to meet the requirements and goals adopted in the school district's local literacy plan.

Legal References: Minn. Stat. § 120B.119 (Read Act Definitions)
Minn. Stat. § 120B.12 (Read Act Goal and Interventions)
Minn. Stat. § 120B.123 (Read Act Implementation)
Minn. Stat. § 123A.24 (Withdrawing from a Cooperative Unit; Appealing Denial of Membership)
Minn. Stat. § 124D.68 (Graduation Incentives Program)
Minn. Stat. § 124D.98 (Literacy Incentive Aid)
Minn. Stat. § 125A.56 (Alternate Instruction Required before Assessment Referral)
Minn. Stat. § 363A.43 (Continuing Education; Accessibility)

Cross References: None