

2023 Act 20 (AB 321): Early Literacy Bill

Act 20, which has been enacted into law beginning July 20, initiates a statewide adherence to science-based early literacy instruction to address low reading proficiency across the state. The bill modifies existing statutes and creates two new entities that specify the types of reading curriculum and instruction that schools receiving public funding must provide to pupils in grades kindergarten to 3.

Creates two new entities:

- Establishes the Office of Literacy, or “Wisconsin Reading Center”, through July 1, 2028.
 - Overseen by a director nominated by the state superintendent and subject to Senate confirmation.
 - Responsible for supervising literacy coaches to assist with curriculum implementation.
 - The office must submit an annual report to the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) beginning October 15, 2024.
- Establishes a permanent Council on Early Literacy Curricula, made up of nine appointed experts, which will annually recommend literacy curricula and instructional materials for grades K-3 and maintain a list of these materials on the department’s website.
 - Recommendations for the 2024-25 school year must be submitted to DPI by December 1, 2023 and approved by DPI by February 1, 2023.
 - The initial 9-member council will be jointly appointed by the state superintendent, the assembly speaker, and the senate majority leader within the first 45 days after passage. (If after 45 days the appointments are not made, each of the appointing authorities will name 3 members.)
 - After initial appointments, the council is made of 3 members appointed by the state superintendent, 3 members appointed by the assembly speaker, and 3 members appointed by the senate majority leader.
 - **Qualifications:** The 9 members will have knowledge of, or experience with science-based literacy instruction Kindergarten-3rd grade and literacy curricula.
 - **Terms:** Members will be appointed to staggered 3-year terms.

Creates new requirements to improve reading instruction:

- **For all publicly funded schools:** Requires that schools establish a written policy that specifies the requirements for third- to fourth-grade promotion by July 1, 2025. (DPI must create a model policy by January 1, 2025)
 - For students who score in the lowest proficiency in third grade and are promoted to fourth grade, the school must provide services, monitoring, support, an intensive summer reading program, and parent notification.
 - Schools must continue to provide intensive summer programming until the student becomes grade-level proficient, unless such students meet certain exemption requirements as detailed in the legislation.
 - Beginning on September 1, 2027, public schools may not promote a 3rd grade student to the 4th grade unless that student satisfies the criteria for promotion specified in the school’s adopted policy.

- **For district & charter schools only:** Requires intensive screening, assessment, and planning for early literacy, including:
 - K4 early literacy screening,
 - Universal screening assessments conducted for K-3 students at least three times per year, to identify students at-risk (below the 25th percentile), including parental notification of results,
 - Diagnostic assessment for dyslexia to students identified as at-risk, as well as parental notification,
 - Detailed personal reading plan for students identified as at-risk,
 - Detailed annual reporting of assessment results, beginning on July 15, 2025, including the number of students whom were referred based on the results of the diagnostic assessment.
- **For district & charter schools only:** Requires all K-3 education teachers, principals of schools that offer grades K-3, and reading specialists take part in professional development training centered on science-based early literacy instruction, by no later than July 1, 2025, and provided at full cost by DPI.
 - Professional development training must be Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) provided by Lexia Learning Systems, LLC, or another program endorsed by the Center for Effective Reading Instruction as an accredited, independent teacher training program.
- Prohibits purchase of “three-cueing” literacy curriculum immediately, and instruction in these methods beginning in the 2024-25 school year.
- Requires that teacher preparation programs leading to licensure must adhere to science-based literacy. After July 1, 2026, new teacher licenses will only be granted to teachers receiving instruction in science-based literacy methods.
- Adds third grade proficiency, including the percentage of students scoring in the lowest proficiency category, to State Report Cards beginning with the 2024-25 school year reports. *The language is ambiguous as to whether this includes private schools; however, report cards for all schools typically contain the same information.*

Allocates \$50M in funding to provide schools with:

- Grants that cover 50% of the curriculum cost to schools adopting a recommended early literacy curriculum after January 1, 2024.
- 64 FTE literacy coaches supervised by the Office of Literacy. Milwaukee schools will be eligible for a total **of up to 10 of these literacy coaches**; the law specifies additional provisions to ensure coaches are distributed statewide.
 - Half of the literacy coaches will be assigned to schools based on pupil scores on the third-grade reading assessment, and the other half will be allocated evenly across CESA regions to eligible schools requesting early literacy support.
- Screening and diagnostic assessments for K-3.