

DELIVERS

STRONG EARLY READERS



DELAWARE DELIVERS STRONG EARLY READERS

Delaware Delivers Strong Early Readers provides school system leaders with an overview of how Delaware will develop strong readers who can succeed in college, career, and life. Specifically, it outlines the state’s investments in early literacy, including recent legislation, and how education leaders can create effective systems to bolster early literacy instruction in their schools.

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“Reading is such a fundamental part of living, of living well. The adverse experiences that students who can’t read on level experience throughout life just compound on one another. If you’re not literate, or if you struggle to read, it’s very difficult to participate in society. It’s difficult to get a good job, it’s difficult to participate in democracy.”

– Senator Laura Sturgeon¹

¹ Cechini, H. (2022, March 28). *Del. Lawmakers aiming to improve reading instruction in elementary schools*. WMDT. <https://www.wmdt.com/2022/03/del-lawmakers-aiming-to-improve-reading-instruction-in-elementary-schools/>

DELAWARE'S COMMITMENT TO EARLY LITERACY

Vision

Our instructional vision is that every student across the state of Delaware leaves school ready for success in college, career, and life. In early literacy specifically, all students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.

Mission

Delaware will define effective literacy instruction and the vital role of curriculum-based professional learning in effective implementation to provide focused guidance and resources to support teachers and school districts.

Early Literacy Commitments

For this vision to be achieved, the Delaware Department of Education commits to the following:

1

Provide guidance and support to districts and charters on creating **effective early literacy systems**.

2

Increase access to **professional development opportunities** to support educators in providing effective early literacy instruction.

3

Develop tools to support educators in **eliminating achievement gaps and increasing student learning**.

4

Increase **stakeholder collaboration** to achieve Delaware's vision for early literacy.

5

Engage families in supporting literacy at home.



Achieving the state’s vision for early literacy is hard work, and the DDOE can’t do it alone. Establishing and sustaining effective literacy systems is a joint effort by:

- **Teachers** who deliver or support Tier 1 literacy instruction, including those who enable students’ access to Tier 1 content through Tier 2, 3, or other contexts such as multilingual supports.
- **School-based instructional leaders, including coaches**, who ensure that teachers have the necessary tools, resources, and support to provide all students with high-quality, Tier 1 literacy instruction.
- **School administrators** who are responsible for their school’s governance and the execution of its academic vision.
- **School system instructional leaders, including content specialists**, who execute their school system’s academic vision and support school administrators and instructional leaders in meeting teachers’ needs.
- **School system administrators** who are responsible for their school system’s overall academic direction and governance.
- **Families and caregivers** who support student learning outside of school.
- **State education leaders** who are responsible for the state system’s overall academic direction and governance.
- **Governing entities** who create policies and statutes that govern schools and school systems.



EARLY LITERACY DEFINED

How to Build Strong Readers through a Structured Literacy Approach

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world. Literacy develops in the early years through two broad sets of abilities: word recognition and oral language comprehension, otherwise known as the Simple View of Reading. The Simple View of Reading includes a set of specific skills that are taught through the science of reading (SoR).²

The science of reading (SoR) is a vast, interdisciplinary body of *scientifically-based* research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. The SoR informs the development of proficient reading and writing and outlines the foundational reading skills all students should master: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and building knowledge.³

Unfortunately, the SoR has often been interpreted far too narrowly focused as exclusively on foundational skills. We know that reading success requires much more than foundational skills. Other critical factors for literacy development include those that address language, meaning, and communication. Among the most important is knowledge, which is necessary to comprehend what we read.

Early literacy instruction in Delaware encompasses a broader definition of the science of reading to include the following components.

- **Building Knowledge:** The ability to build and draw upon background knowledge in order for students to make sense of what they are reading and to understand, absorb, and analyze the information.
- **Comprehension:** The ability to understand, remember, and make meaning of what has been read. This is the purpose of reading.
- **Fluency:** The ability to read text accurately, quickly, and expressively, either to oneself or aloud.
- **Oral Language:** The ability to use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings.
- **Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear, identify, manipulate, and substitute the different sounds that make up speech.
- **Phonics:** The key to decoding new words. Breaking words down into sounds and syllables allows young readers to connect words on paper with the words they hear and speak daily.
- **Vocabulary:** The compilation of words that students understand and use in their conversation (oral vocabulary) and recognize in print (reading vocabulary).
- **Writing:** The ability to convey thoughts and ideas in a readable form.



2 Farrell, L., Hunter, M., Davidson, M., & Osenga, T. (2019). *The Simple View of Reading*. Reading Rockets. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/simple-view-reading>

3 The Reading League (2021, January 1). *What is the Science of Reading?* www.thereadingleague.org/what-is-the-science-of-reading

The Role of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) in Literacy Intervention & Acceleration

Most students can become proficient readers and writers through high-quality Tier I instruction grounded in SoR. However, some students will need additional support through Tier 2 and 3 instruction guided by the [Delaware Multi-Tiered System of Support \(MTSS\) framework](#).

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) provides all students access to rigorous Tier I instruction through HQIM. Through high-quality instruction and intervention, alongside a culture of collaboration, communication, and flexibility, parents, educators, and leaders can work together to boost student performance and develop a responsive system of support that addresses the academic (e.g., reading and mathematics) and non-academic (e.g., behavioral and social-emotional).

Delaware MTSS provides a whole-child framework for every student to reach their full potential in a positive, inclusive, and equitable learning environment. This system of support provides the foundation for district actions that ensure all students have access to strong Tier 1 instruction, along with access to evidence-based intervention support in Tiers 2 and 3, as appropriate. Districts should:

- Establish a district/charter MTSS leadership team.
- Select a fidelity of implementation tool(s).
- Develop a comprehensive assessment system and data system.
- Develop a district/charter evaluation plan.
- Select evidence-based practices, support, and high-quality instructional materials.
- Provide the infrastructure for the successful implementation of a tiered delivery system.
- Make training and coaching available to all schools with a differentiated support system.
- Support schools in engaging with families as meaningful stakeholders in MTSS implementation so that families are informed of their children's progress throughout the school year.

EARLY LITERACY INVESTMENTS

Delaware K–3 Literacy Plan

Released in 2019, the [Delaware K–3 Literacy Plan](#) establishes a framework to address the state’s literacy challenges by aligning core instruction to the state’s standards, implementing curriculum using high-quality instructional materials, enhancing early literacy instruction, and supporting educators through institutes of higher education.

Professional Learning Opportunities for Educators

A key activity within Delaware’s K–3 Literacy Plan is to support educators in accessing various modes of competency-based professional learning, including face-to-face, online, and one-on-one opportunities. Below are the professional learning opportunities that the DDOE has developed to support educators in building their knowledge of early literacy.

LETRS Trainings

- LETRS Volume 1
- LETRS Volume 2
- LETRS Facilitator Training (Volume 1)

AIM Pathways Trainings

- Pathways to Proficient Reading
- Pathways to Structured Literacy
- Pathways to Literacy Leadership
- Pathways to Proficient Writing

Early Literacy Micro-Credentials

- Meeting the Instructional Needs of Every Learner
- Universal Design for Learning
- Foundational Skills
- Decoding & Word Recognition
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Writing

Professional Learning Vendors

- Science of reading approved partners from the [Online Vendor Guide](#)
- Professional learning associated with [K–3 publisher profiles](#)

Early Literacy Legislation

In the spring of 2022, members of the House and Senate put forth legislation to solidify the strategic intentions of the state’s literacy plan into law. The following set of bills were signed into law in August 2022, and are the most comprehensive package of bills to govern curriculum use and professional learning in Delaware to date.

Senate Bill 4: High-quality curricula and professional learning

- Author: Senator Laura Sturgeon
- Requires the Delaware Department of Education to maintain and publish a list of evidence-based reading instruction curricula for grades kindergarten through 3, aligned to the [essential components of literacy](#), known as the “science of reading” and use high-quality instructional materials.
- Requires that by the beginning of the 2027–2028 school year, school districts and charter schools serving students in grades kindergarten through 3 do all of the following:
 - Adopt a reading instruction curriculum from the Department’s list.
 - Demonstrate that all educators who teach reading complete professional development aligned with the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction.
 - Identify a school-based supervisory position responsible for assisting with implementing the adopted curriculum.
 - Provide an annual report to the Department regarding the implementation of these requirements.⁴

“If you can’t read proficiently at third grade, what’s going to happen the rest of your life? You’re going to struggle.”

– Governor John Carney⁵

House Bill 304: Screening and interventions

- Author: Representative Kimberly Williams
- Requires the Delaware Department of Education to create a state list of universal reading screeners and literacy intervention approaches aligned with the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction.
- Requires LEAs to screen K–3 student three times a year for reading competency
- Requires inclusion of curriculum and special education supervisors, elementary school teachers, and elementary special education teachers from districts and charters in developing the lists of aligned screeners and interventions.
- Specifies educators must be given time during the contractual day to complete duties associated with the universal reading screener, including DDOE-provided professional learning.
- DDOE and districts must report annually on the number and percentage of students identified with a potential reading deficiency and the provided literacy intervention approaches.⁶

Senate Bill 133: Educator preparation

- Author: Senator Laura Sturgeon
- Requires, beginning July 1, 2023, that teacher preparation programs must provide instruction in evidence-based reading instruction.
- Requires the DDOE to establish a minimum number of hours of training that instructors in educator preparation programs must complete in evidence-based reading instruction.⁷

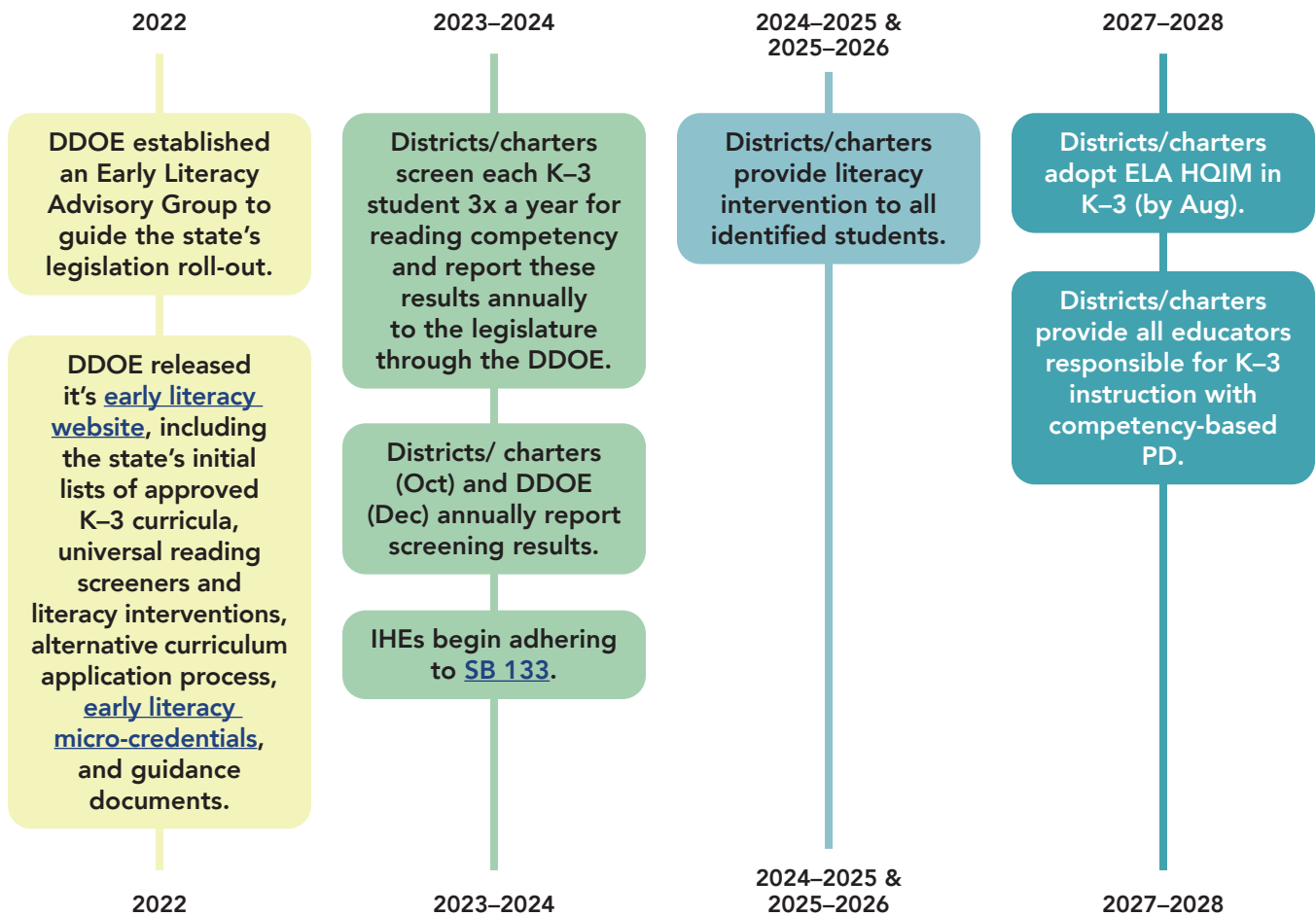
4 Sturgeon, L., McBride, S., & Heffeman, D. (2022). *Senate Bill 4*. Delaware General Assembly. <https://legis.delaware.gov/json/BillDetail/GenerateHtmlDocumentEngrossment?engrossmentId=25126&docTypeId=6>

5 Newman, M. (2023, January 26). Raises, education and housing: 5 things to know about Delaware Gov. Carney's spending plan. *Delaware News Journal*. <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/politics/2023/01/26/delaware-gov-carneys-spending-plan-5-things-to-know-in-his-budget/69831617007/>

6 Williams, K., McBride, S., Sturgeon, L., & Lockman, E. (2022, August 9). *House Bill 304*. Delaware General Assembly. <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/89280>

7 Sturgeon, L., McBride, S., Williams, K., & Dorsey Walker, S. (2021, June 30). *Senate Bill 133*. Delaware General Assembly. <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/68682>

LEGISLATION TIMELINE & PROGRESS TO-DATE



IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Creating Systems to Ensure Strong Early Readers

The following section outlines a set of core actions school system leaders, and teachers should take to implement the state’s early literacy legislation and to ensure that all students will read at grade level by the end of third grade, providing them with the foundation to become strong readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers.⁸

Implementation Support for District and School Leaders

Core Actions	Planning Considerations	Resources and Connections
<p>Adopt high-quality early literacy instructional materials that every educator can use to deliver high-quality, structured literacy instruction to all students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do we have high-quality early literacy materials in grades K–3 that are on the state’s approved curricula list and aligned with our vision for early literacy instruction? ● Are building administrators equipped to assess and amend current structures and policies that support instruction (e.g., school schedules, PLC schedules, collaborative planning time, professional learning plans, staffing models) in consultation with their content and curriculum experts to determine what they should start, stop, or keep to support literacy materials? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Delaware K–3 Literacy High-Quality Instructional Materials list ● Use Step 1.2.B of Instruction Partners’ Curriculum Support Guide resources to establish a clear, shared, content-specific vision. ● Use the Early Literacy Playbook by Instruction Partners to help leaders focus their early literacy efforts on what is known to be effective—the five Essential Practices in Early Literacy: vision, materials, data, team, and time.

⁸ National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (2020, June 30). *High-Quality Curriculum Implementation: Connecting What to Teach with How to Teach It*. <https://www.niet.org/assets/1da4c1fbd6/high-quality-curriculum-implementation.pdf>

Implementation Support for District and School Leaders

Core Actions	Planning Considerations	Resources and Connections
<p>Provide all students, including students with exceptionalities and multilingual learners, with high-quality, standards-aligned, Tier 1 instruction with appropriate scaffolds and support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How are we ensuring that teachers use the supports embedded in the instructional materials to ensure our students, including students with exceptionalities and multilingual learners, master grade-level content within Tier 1 before considering additional support? ● How are we creating instructional coherence for students across Tier 2 settings and after-school programming? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Delaware K–3 literacy screeners and interventions list ● Use Delaware’s MTSS Framework and Implementation Tools to guide decision-making related to tiered supports. ● Use DDOE’s Understanding the Science of Reading for Multilingual Learners to implement Delaware’s early literacy legislation with Multilingual Learners.
<p>Implement a balanced assessment system that includes curriculum-based assessment measures, screeners, diagnostics, and student work analysis. Data will be leveraged to support teachers in recognizing student knowledge and understanding, diagnosing student literacy needs, and providing the necessary scaffolds to ensure all students have access to grade-level literacy instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do we ensure that the assessments included in our adopted instructional materials are key components of our system’s overall assessment plan in addition to our literacy screeners? ● How are we supporting teachers in using formal and informal assessment measures, strategies, tools, and data (including student work) to make instructional decisions and interpret information from each source in valid and equitable ways? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use Key Action II.2 in Instruction Partners’ Curriculum Support Guide to facilitate conversation and planning related to assessment systems.

Implementation Support for District and School Leaders

Core Actions	Planning Considerations	Resources and Connections
<p>Develop and execute a system-level plan to provide teachers and leaders with the initial and ongoing professional learning needed to understand and use their high-quality materials to provide Tier 1 literacy instruction to all students and identify and address individual student's learning needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have we created and communicated a year-long scope and sequence for training and coaching all educators across the system, with a plan for annual revision by monitoring for effectiveness and shifts in practice? ● Do we have the internal capacity and content or curricular expertise to provide teachers, coaches, specialists, and school leaders with the initial training and the ongoing, competency-based professional learning needed to effectively support the ongoing implementation of literacy materials tailored by role (e.g., teacher, interventionist, principal) and by individual need? ● How are we ensuring that teachers and coaches are provided with the curriculum-based training needed to use the embedded supports and strategies in the literacy materials to provide all students with access to Tier 1 instruction? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the Delaware Vendor Guide to find high-quality partners who can help build your educators' content and curriculum expertise. ● Use Instruction Partners' Professional Learning Conditions and Practices to assess and improve conditions for adult learning. ● Use Key Action II.3 in Instruction Partners' Curriculum Support guide to tighten alignment among schedules, expectations for instruction and collaboration, and instructional materials.
<p>Establish clear roles and responsibilities for everyone responsible for literacy programs, professional learning, and instruction, including administrators, content specialists, coaches, literacy teachers, teachers, and leaders focused on students with disabilities and multilingual learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do system administrators, building administrators, specialists, and coaches regularly collaborate to support teachers with high-quality literacy materials? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consult Step II.1.A of Instruction Partners' Curriculum Support Guide for guidance on roles and responsibilities specific to curriculum implementation. Find communications tools such as adaptable templates for staff emails, slide decks, meeting agendas, and more in the Resources section.

Implementation Support for Teachers

Core Actions	Planning Considerations	Resources and Connections
<p>Provide all students, including students with exceptionalities and multilingual learners, with high-quality, standards-aligned, Tier 1 instruction with appropriate scaffolds and support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you have access to a high-quality ELA curriculum from the state’s K–3 ELA HQIM list? ● Do you have the instructional time to implement your HQIM as intended? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Delaware K–3 Literacy High-Quality Instructional Materials list ● Use Delaware’s State Literacy Plan to review a framework to address the state’s early literacy challenges. ● Use curriculum scope and sequence guides to understand how the curriculum is coherent, cohesive, and builds from one grade level to the next. ● Use Delaware’s MTSS Framework and Implementation Tools to guide decision-making related to tiered supports.
<p>Engage in professional learning to build your understanding of what excellent ELA instruction looks like when grounded in research-based HQIM.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have you received professional learning that equips you to use your HQIM skillfully, including the embedded supports to meet the learning needs of all students? ● Do you have opportunities to be observed by school leaders or your peers on implementing your HQIM and receive actionable feedback to improve your reading instruction? 	
<p>Engage collaboratively in unit and lesson preparation, lesson modeling, and feedback reflection to drive improvement in your practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can you use collaborative time more effectively to plan for and practice units and lessons, review and analyze student work, and receive feedback on your practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the curriculum’s unit and lesson planning protocols to collaborate with colleagues to prepare for lesson delivery.

Implementation Support for Teachers

Core Actions	Planning Considerations	Resources and Connections
<p>Use formal and informal assessment measures, strategies, tools, screeners, and data (including student work) to make instructional decisions and interpret information from each source in valid and reliable ways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have you received professional learning that equips you to use the embedded assessments in your curriculum to support the learning needs of all students? ● Have you received professional learning that equips you to use interim assessments from your district or the state, and screener data to support the learning needs of all students? 	
<p>Communicate and plan alongside reading interventionists, special education teachers, and MLL teachers to ensure students have a cohesive learning experience in small-group instructional settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you have opportunities to plan and communicate with special education teachers collaboratively, reading interventionists, teachers supporting multilingual learners, and instructional paraprofessionals? 	

If you answered no to any of the above questions, speak to your supervisor about how your school district can provide you and your colleagues access to these early literacy supports.



EARLY LITERACY RESOURCES

Delaware-specific resources

- [Delaware's State Literacy Plan](#)
- [Delaware Literacy Coalition Strategic Plan for Grades 4–8](#)
- [MTSS Framework and Implementation Tools](#)

Publications

- [Essential Practices in Early Literacy](#)
- [Hard Words: Why aren't our kids being taught to read?](#)
- [The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Professional-Based Learning](#)
- [The Science of Reading: Applying the Science of Reading in Tennessee](#)
- [The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System—and How to Fix It](#) by Natalie Wexler
- [Know Better, Do Better: Teaching The Foundations So Every Child Can Read](#) by David and Meredith Liben
- [Why Knowledge Matters](#) by E.D. Hirsch
- [A Fresh Look at Phonics](#) by Wiley Blevins
- [The Baseball Study](#) by Recht and Leslie

Blogs

- [Timothy Shanahan](#)
- [Curriculum Matters](#)
- [Knowledge Matters Campaign](#)

Podcasts

- [Science of Reading: The Podcast](#)
- [Sold A Story](#) and [discussion guide](#)
- [Melissa and Lori Love Literacy](#)