



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

ENSURING ALL STUDENTS LEARN TO READ: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Every parent expects the public schools to teach their children how to read. They know that acquiring strong literacy skills opens the door to future learning, in and out of the classroom, and is essential for civic participation and economic success. Yet for far too long, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has failed to meet the critical charge of ensuring all students become literate: according to the 2024 New York State tests, **only half of New York City students in grades 3–8—and just 37% of Black and Latinx students, 21% of students with disabilities, and 7.7% of English Language Learners—are reading proficiently.**

In recent years, the City has begun to take steps to address this challenge. While there is an extensive research base—known as the “science of reading”—on how to teach reading effectively, individual schools in New York City long had free reign to choose their own English Language Arts (ELA) curricula, resulting in widespread use of ineffective programs. NYCPS' efforts to change course are promising, but the experiences of other states and districts that have similarly attempted to overhaul reading instruction suggest that **meaningful change takes time and requires a substantial and sustained commitment of resources.**

- 2016–17** *Under Mayor de Blasio, the City launches the Universal Literacy initiative, which places highly trained reading coaches at elementary schools to help K–2 teachers improve their practice.*
- 2021–22** *In response to the pandemic, NYCPS institutes universal screening for reading difficulties, using research-based tools.*
- 2023–24** *The Adams administration rolls out NYC Reads in 15 of the City's 32 community school districts. This initiative requires each district to use one of three pre-approved ELA curricula in all its elementary schools.*
- 2024–25** *NYC Reads expands Citywide.*

Literacy must remain a top education priority for the next administration. To sustain and build upon the work done thus far, **New York City should develop a robust system of intensive interventions and support for students across all grade levels; provide teachers with ongoing coaching and professional learning in the science of reading; and partner with families to support literacy learning.** These recommendations are described in more detail on the next page.

Ensure every student who needs extra help in reading receives one-on-one or small group intervention that targets their individual needs.

AFC continues to hear from families of students who have dyslexia or other reading difficulties and have been unable to access support within the public system. The City's literacy efforts to date have largely focused on improving core instruction in the early elementary grades, but even when core instruction is strong, there will always be a subset of students who need extra help and individualized attention to become proficient readers. In addition, there are many adolescents still struggling with foundational skills who need intensive intervention at the middle or high school level. At AFC, we often resort to suing for private school tuition or private tutoring for such students because there is a severe dearth of options for accessing such help within the public schools. NYCPS should build out a system of intensive intervention and support for students at all grade levels who are struggling with reading. The City could, for example, hire a new corps of reading interventionists dedicated to working with students one-on-one or in small groups; leverage existing staff to provide evidence-based intervention; or consider creating district-level intervention hubs where students could receive support outside of school hours.

Strengthen core instruction for all students by providing educators with ongoing support and coaching.

Requiring schools to use pre-approved ELA curricula in grades K–5 was a critical first step towards eliminating ineffective approaches to teaching reading. However, any curriculum is only as good as its implementation, and truly shifting what happens in the classroom on a day-to-day basis will be a multi-year effort. Additional, ongoing training in implementing the new curricula is essential for teachers and administrators, many of whom never received training in the science of reading before they began teaching. As schools continue to adjust to new curricula and struggle to deploy it successfully with students who require additional support, educators will need at-the-elbow coaching to be able to use screening data effectively and differentiate instruction for students with a wide range of needs.

Ensure that every parent receives information about the literacy skills students should be learning at each grade level, regular updates about their child's progress, and a clear roadmap for how to get additional help if their child is struggling.

The City has taken initial steps to engage families in NYC Reads, but there remains much work to do to ensure that schools are responsive to parents' concerns and engage with families effectively to support their students. NYCPS should provide teachers and administrators with more tools, training, and resources to foster two-way communication between home and school; provide families with information to help them understand screener data, the literacy curriculum, and any interventions being used in their child's school; offer those who want to support literacy instruction at home the tools to do so; and establish clear pathways for accessing support for students who need extra help to become proficient readers.