

NYSED P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices

Frequently Asked Questions



These questions were collected from the January 7, 2025 Prekindergarten-3rd grade Literacy Best Practices event as well as questions submitted to the OEL email.

Timeline/Attestation Questions

1. Q: When are districts required to make the attestation?

A: According to Education Law Section 818, all public-school districts are required to make the attestation no later than **September 1, 2025**. The link will be available in mid-February through the NYSED Business Portal. Each school superintendent has a log-in. Please note that the attestation only needs to be made once, by September 1, 2025; however, the law requires that every school district shall annually review their curriculum and instructional practices in the subject of reading for students in prekindergarten through grade three to ensure that they align with the reading instructional best practices provided by the Commissioner.

2. Q: Where can I find the link for where to submit the attestation?

A: The attestation link is not live yet. We plan on making the attestation survey available by the end of March, 2025. This will be sent in a memo to all school districts with sign-in information.

3. Q: Can I have a copy of the questions we will be required to answer?

A: The attestation questions will be shared when the survey is published. For a preview of the types of questions, please see the [January 7, 2025 NYSED Literacy Instructional Best Practices slides](#) from the webinar, slides 40-44. Please note the slides are posted at the bottom of the page.

4. Q: Do you have a copy of the timeline for local review of instruction and the submission date for the attestation?

A: Please see the following graphic, which outlines the steps. This can also be found [on slide 40](#) of the webinar presentation.



5. Q: *Where is the law that requires the attestation?*

A: Per [Education Law §818](#), on or before September 1, 2025, every school district shall verify that their curriculum and instructional practices in the subject of reading, in prekindergarten through grade three, aligns with all the elements of instructional best practices.

6. Q: *The law states that all public school districts must complete the attestation; does this include the BOCES? Who is not included in the requirement?*

A: All public school districts must complete the attestation; this does not include Charter Schools or nonpublic schools, but they are encouraged to reference the guidance. If a BOCES is responsible for the instruction of any grades from Prekindergarten to Grade 3, they must also make the attestation.

7. Q: *UPK programs often have collaborating partners and multiple sites. Does a public school district need to attest that all programs are in alignment?*

A: Yes, a public school district that includes Universal Prekindergarten or another Prekindergarten program will need to make the attestation about its instruction for prekindergarten. If a UPK program has collaborating partners (CBOs) across sites, we recommend the district create a process to work with the CBO sites to gather information about whether programs are aligned to the literacy best practices. According to UPK regulations, a school district is required to oversee their curriculum and instruction to ensure it is aligned to the NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards for all students; therefore, the process of working with CBOs for the attestation should be in alignment with that oversight and process. When a school district makes the attestation for Prekindergarten, the submission should reflect all programs and sites for UPK.

8. Q: *If a school has a 3-year-old and a 4-year-old prekindergarten program, do they attest for both programs together?*

A: In NYS, prekindergarten is defined as age four, so 3PK does not apply to the law. A district will only attest for the four-year-old prekindergarten program. However, it is always good practice to review the three-year-old program to ensure differentiation between the three-and four-year-old programs.

9. Q: *Is the State going to provide funding to pay teachers for professional development as they will need to implement practices and instruction to support Literacy Instructional Best Practices.*

A: Currently, there is no additional separate professional development funding available for implementing this alignment. The process of review for alignment should be viewed as part of the district's already established curriculum and instruction oversight. The

Governor's Back to Basics program awarded NYSUT \$10 million dollars to provide professional development on the Science of Reading.

10. Q: *What if our alignment is only partial? What should we mark on the attestation?*

A: Whether a district instructional practice is aligned to the P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices is a local determination. If the district determines the local instructional practice is not fully aligned, then they should mark "no" on the attestation for that practice and grade level. A district should mark "yes" if they determine that it is fully aligned. Additional information on the attestation process will be released with the survey in early February.

11. Q: *What will happen if a district marks "no" for alignment to any of the P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices. Will a district need to submit an action plan to NYSED?*

A: If a school district marks "no" for alignment to any of the instructional best practices, they should complete a curriculum and instruction review to determine necessary next steps to incorporate the best practices in classroom instruction. Marking "no" for alignment will have no effect on the funding a school receives nor does the Department plan on assigning a status to schools that are not aligned.

If a district marks "no" for alignment to any of the P-3 best practices, they will not need to submit a separate action plan to NYSED; however, there will be a question in the attestation to summarize district next steps.

12. Q: *If a district has written their own curriculum, can they list that for the curriculum question on the attestation?*

A: Yes. If a district has created their own curriculum, they can note "locally-developed" or "district-developed curriculum" in the space provided next to that question.

P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices

13. Q: *Where on the NYSED website can we find the resources?*

A: You can find the NYSED Literacy Instructional Best Practices Guide on the [Office of Early Learning's Literacy website](#).

14. Q: *Why is writing not addressed in this guidance document?*

A: Although the main aspects of the law required the Department to publish instructional best practices on the Science of Reading, it is clear that writing is an important aspect of the process. In the coming weeks, the Department will review additional research and make any necessary additions to the P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices guide.

15. Q: *What about the genetic components of Dyslexia?*

Response provided from Dr. Cantor:

A: The dyslexia question is a really important one, and not only because of dyslexia, since there are a number of things called learning disabilities that are thought to be genetic or a genetic predisposition.

If you have a genetic predisposition that makes it more difficult for you to learn to read, then you're going to have a situation where you have to work harder to be able to do that. Given that human variation is the norm, not the exception in human development, an educator's purpose should be to figure out how to make it easier for a person whose brain is organized a different way to be able to read, as opposed to teaching them the way somebody with a different brain learns how to read.

Another way of thinking about this is, how must we design learning environments to respect learner variation, and the extent of it?

16. Q: Will there be guidance for grades 4 and 5, or the upper grades?

A: At this time, the Department is focused on guidance for Prekindergarten-Grade 3 but will consider this request for the future.

17. Q: We noticed the term phonological awareness in page 4 of the guide, but the instructional best practice is referred to as Phonemic Awareness. Are you using the terms interchangeably?

A: Phonological awareness is a broad skill involving the ability to recognize and manipulate sound structures in spoken language, such as words, syllables, and rhymes, while phonemic awareness is a subset that focuses specifically on individual sounds (phonemes) within words. Phonological awareness develops first and provides the foundation for phonemic awareness, which is critical for decoding and encoding words. Both Dr. Lesaux's briefs and NYSED's Instructional Best Practices Guide emphasize explicit, systematic instruction in these skills as essential components of effective literacy instruction.

18. Q: Are briefs for English Language Learners forthcoming?

A: The P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices are for all students. Additional guidance for literacy and Emergent Multilingual Learners and English Language Learners is under development from the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages.

19. Q: Is NYS considering giving out a list of options for curriculum?

A: New York State is a local control state for curriculum decisions, meaning school boards have the authority to select their own curriculum and instructional materials. The [Prekindergarten to 3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Best Practices Guide](#) was developed to support districts in evaluating and reflecting on their chosen curricula. This guide aligns with evidence-based practices, including the science of reading, and aims to provide educators with strategies and tools to strengthen literacy instruction while meeting NYS Next Generation ELA learning standards. Also available is the [K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Guide](#). This Guide is designed for optional use by districts and schools in selecting high-quality K-3 literacy curricula and curricular materials designed to meet the needs of all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

20. Q: Does NYS have an expectation for words per minute for fluency?

A: There is no numerical expectation for words per minute for fluency. Through the Instructional Best Practices Guide, general fluency expectations are given. The guide encourages monitoring fluency as part of assessing reading proficiency but does not prescribe exact words per minute benchmarks for all grades. Fluency expectations should align with the grade-level NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards and be used alongside other indicators of reading comprehension and proficiency.

21. Q: How are the PK-3 best practices incorporated with/different from the 5 high-impact practices outlined in the literacy briefs? Are both expected?

A: The P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices align with and support what was published in the New York State Literacy Briefs in January 2024. The P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices were outlined by 2024 law, and specifically included Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and other Science of Reading aspects of instruction. The High-Impact Practices published in the briefs, in some cases, include broader areas that impact curriculum, such as the “Collaborative and Culminating Projects, Performances, and Celebrations” section. Other aspects of the Brief’s High-Impact Practices, such as “Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Skill-Building” support the recently P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices and can be used in tandem with the guidance. For the purposes of the September 1, 2025, attestation, please note that the law requires NY State public schools to only attest to the alignment to the P-3 best practices.

22. Q: If a district has written their own literacy curriculum, can they list that as their curriculum or do they have to adopt and list a published vendor curriculum?

A: New York State is a [local control state](#), meaning school districts have the authority to select their own curriculum and instructional materials. The [Prekindergarten to 3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Best Practices Guide](#) was developed to support districts in evaluating and reflecting on their chosen curricula. This guide aligns with evidence-based practices, including the science of reading, and aims to provide educators with strategies and tools to strengthen literacy instruction while meeting NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards. Districts are not required to purchase a published vendor curriculum but should work to ensure that any curriculum used is aligned to the NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards as well as these instructional best practices. Also available is the [K-3 Literacy Curriculum Review Guide](#). This Guide is designed for optional use by districts and schools in selecting high-quality K-3 literacy curricula and curricular materials designed to meet the needs of all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

23. Q: Will vendors use this document to review the products they sell?

A: The guide is specifically designed for educational professionals, including district leaders, building administrators, literacy specialists, and teachers, to support informed decisions, effective literacy strategies, and improved student outcomes. It focuses on providing guidance for implementing best practices in literacy instruction, not on

promoting or endorsing specific products. Districts can feel free to share the guide with outside stakeholders/vendors when selecting a program.

24. Q: *Should districts plan to review common curricular resources together and who should be involved in the review process?*

A: How a district reviews their curriculum is a local decision. If districts using the same curriculum wish to work together, they would each still need to consider the instructional practices within their own district, reflect on these practices, and submit their own attestation. Consider having teams with administration and teaching staff represented during the review process to gain all perspectives.

25. Q: *How will districts ensure that instruction is personalized?*

A: Districts can ensure personalized instruction by using data-driven practices and progress monitoring to tailor teaching of literacy instructional best practices to their individual student's needs. Teachers can and should implement things like differentiated instruction, small flexible groupings, and culturally responsive strategies aligned to the science of reading.

26. Q: *How and where do you find rich, authentic texts so that students can see themselves in the books they are reading?*

A: To find rich, authentic texts that allow students to see themselves in their reading, educators can utilize NYSED-approved resources like the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework and partner with organizations such as local libraries, BOCES, and community groups. Free and available published book lists are available online and offer diverse, high-quality texts aligned with NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards. Additionally, educators can involve families and students in the selection process to ensure classroom libraries reflect the identities, cultures, and experiences of all learners.

27. Q: *How can these instructional considerations happen across all content areas?*

A: Instructional considerations can be applied across all content areas by embedding literacy best practices into the content areas. For example, teachers can emphasize and instruct on comprehension, vocabulary, and use of oral language skills within other disciplines outside of the literacy instruction. This ensures that students engage with and deepen their understanding of content through cross curricular use.

28. Q: *Does the document include recommendations for MLLs and Students with Disabilities?*

A: The introduction of the document references how to meet the needs of diverse learners including multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Please see page 5 of the guide for these recommendations.

29. Q: *Are there any professional development considerations for supporting an understanding of how home language impacts language development?*

A: There is currently no professional development planned regarding home language and its impacts on language development; however, on page 5 of the P-3 Instruction Best Practices Guide, and throughout the document, information on how districts can best meet the literacy needs of Multilingual Learners is available. Other resources that may be helpful can be found on the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages page containing [English Language Learner and Multilingual Learner Educator Resources](#).

30. Q: *What is the connection/alignment with the State 3-8 Assessments and the guidance provided for instructional best practices?*

A: Instructional Best Practices for prekindergarten to third grade build the foundation necessary for students to be successful on the 3-8 assessments and beyond by ensuring they develop strong foundational skills in literacy. These practices align with the NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards assessed in grades 3-8 by fostering critical early competencies in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

31. Q: *Second and Third Grade in the guide references students reading books at their independent level. Individual students can have different levels. Can you explain independent reading levels?*

A: Each student's independent book level can be different and span a wide range of grades and texts. The IES Guide *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through Third Grade* defines instructional-level text as "text that is challenging but manageable for readers to read accurately with support."

32. Q: *The document is predicated upon practices being evidence-based. It uses terms such as instructional level, frustration level, and independent level. Why are these terms included in the guidance?*

A: The terms "instructional level," "frustration level," and "independent level" are included in the Fluency Competency guidance to ensure that instruction is appropriately matched to each student's reading ability to ensure that instructional best practices and considerations are achievable. These terms help teachers differentiate instruction by identifying texts that are at the right level of challenge for students, not leveled in the traditional sense—texts that are neither too difficult (frustration level) nor too easy (independent level), but just right for growth (instructional level). By using these terms, educators can select texts, whether decodable, picture books, or classic literature, that support students' development while avoiding frustration or lack of engagement, ensuring that instruction is evidence-based and tailored to individual needs. IES defines these terms as the following:

- Instructional level - is text that readers can read accurately with teacher support.
- Frustration level - is text that is difficult for readers to read accurately.
- Independent level - is text that is relatively easy for readers to read accurately without support.

33. Q: Will it be up to superintendents to contact BOCES or other professionals to complete the attestation?

A: If a local school district is looking for additional support to complete their review, they may reach out to a consultant, a BOCES or school district central office. For questions about the attestation process, please contact the Office of Early Learning at OEL@nysed.gov.

34. Q: On page 4 of the document, there is a chart that references inclusive curriculum and assessments. How are these defined?

A: The chart on page 4, is from Brief #1 - "Science of Reading: What is it?" In this chart, Dr. Lesaux elaborates on the key idea of the Science of Reading and emphasizes and reflects on the importance of fostering a culturally responsive teaching environment. To achieve these results, stakeholders must incorporate an equity and inclusion lens in every facet of their work. The NYSED [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#) offers a set of guidelines intended to help education stakeholders create student-centered learning environments - ones that are conducive to effective and equitable instruction. This would include inclusive curriculum and assessments as referenced in the chart.

35. Q: Are there models of instructional practices in action that can be shared as resources?

A: The [IES Practice Guides](#) provide evidence-based strategies for improving literacy instruction and give additional examples of instructional best practices in action.

36. Q: Why isn't there a mention of decodable readers?

A: Decodable texts are referenced in the Comprehension Competency instructional consideration as well as in the Phonics Competency. The instructional considerations, "Engage students in guided practice when they are reading decodable words in isolation and in text," and "Purposefully select text for repeated readings to increase familiarity of content and language, model the transfer of comprehension skills and/or strategies from the read aloud to other various texts (decodable, shared reading, independent)." Both reference decodable texts. Please note that decodable texts should gradually stop being used when students have developed sufficient phonics skills and are able to decode more complex words and texts independently.

37. Q: Will there be time ranges/expectations attached to the skills in the Six Pillars of Literacy?

A: The New York State Education Department (NYSED) Literacy Briefs do not specify exact timeframes or expectations for the skills in the Six Pillars of Literacy. Instead, they highlight that the allocation of instructional time focus on evidence-based practices and be tailored to students' needs. The emphasis is on ensuring that each of the Six Pillars outlined in the P-3 Literacy Instructional Best Practices Guide receives appropriate focus within the structure of a comprehensive literacy program.

38. Q: What are letter walls?

A: Letter walls are included in the CR-SE instructional considerations for phonics and would include the alphabet with mnemonics that are representative of all students in the classroom.

39. Q: *Why isn't there an inclusion of sound walls?*

A: Sound walls were not included in the NYSED Literacy Instructional Best Practices because the guide emphasizes foundational literacy competencies without prescribing specific tools. The guide allows flexibility for educators to choose the most effective resources for their students when using best practices and instructional considerations (which may include the use of sound walls).

40. Q: *Why aren't high frequency words included in the prekindergarten and kindergarten instructional considerations for phonics?*

A: Recognizing high-frequency words begins at Kindergarten in the NYS Next Generation Literacy Standards. The researched best practices for kindergarten phonics focuses on letters and the sounds the letters make. As a student progresses through kindergarten and can identify letters, they can begin to learn high-frequency words.

41. Q: *Can you provide more specific examples of high-frequency words/vowel teams rather than districts having to rely on publisher created lists?*

A: NYSED does not publish lists of required high-frequency words to be taught. High-frequency words can vary depending on abilities, interests, and topic allowing for district flexibility in determining what is best for the students they serve.

42. Q: *The terms emergent and beginning level have been used in relation to text. Will these be defined somewhere?*

A: These are terms used in the NYS Next Generation ELA Learning Standards. More information can be found within the NYS [standards document](#).

43. Q: *How is Prek included when it is not mandated?*

A: While the compulsory age for school in NYS is 6, there [are prekindergarten learning standards](#) for districts that run programs. If a district does not run a prekindergarten program they will mark N/A when answering questions about prekindergarten instruction. Additionally, the law (818) requires prekindergarten as part of the grade range.

44. Q: *What are ways for districts to align to the science of reading?*

A: The last page of each pillar within the P-3 Literacy Best Practices Guide provides a chart with reflection statements for districts to use when determining whether their curriculum and instruction aligns to the instructional best practices.

45. Q: *What is the recommendation for assessing and determining a child's independent and instructional levels?*

A: NYSED does not endorse the use of any particular program for the assessment of students' instructional level. However, districts can select programs and methods for helping teachers to determine appropriate texts for students.

Questions from the July 23 NYSED Literacy Attestation webinar

46. Q: *What if the CBO is shared across several districts in a county/region? How should individual districts report?*

A: Each district is responsible for the students from their district within the CBO location. If a CBO is shared amongst multiple districts, each district will attest to the curriculum and instruction being provided to their specific students.

47. Q: *Are there any specific colleges you recommend reaching out to for PD?*

A: Each School District is unique in location and needs; therefore, the department cannot recommend a specific college for in person trainings. Many districts have connections to their local colleges, and it is recommended that if a district is looking to utilize a college for professional development, they reach out to that college to see if they offer courses in the Science of Reading.

SUNY New Paltz offers an online Science of Reading Fundamentals Micro credential that is aligned to the Best Practices and the Back-to-Basics Initiative. NYSUT also has a free Science of Reading course for its members.

48. Q: *What is the role of the statements under each practice?*

A: The statements listed under each best practice are Instructional Considerations. These include a list of possible ways a teacher might teach the Best Practices. These are not required; however, they are research-based ways of how to best teach the Best Practices.

49. Q: *Are District's required to submit an attestation every year?*

A: Educational Law 818 states that all districts must submit the attestation by September 1, 2025. While it does not require districts to attest yearly, it does state that all districts must review their curriculum and instruction yearly to ensure continued alignment to the best practices.