

1 Introduced by Committee on Education

2 Date:

3 Subject: Education; literacy; teacher training

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to **continue**
5 **the ongoing work to improve** literacy for all students in the State, while
6 recognizing that achieving this goal will require a multi-year and multi-
7 dimensional effort requiring continued focus by the General Assembly, the
8 Administration, and school leaders.

9 An act relating to improving prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy within
10 the State

11 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

12 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

13 (a) Addressing literacy outcomes is a key strategy for the successful
14 implementation of 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173. The following findings
15 from the report entitled “Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports
16 for Students who Struggle” issued by the District Management Group in
17 November 2017, which informed the development of Act 173, support the
18 urgency to improve Vermont’s literacy outcomes relative to special education
19 reform:

20 (1) “Investing in the effectiveness of core reading instruction is critical
21 for students in general education and students with disabilities.”

1 (2) “Students with mild-to-moderate disabilities who struggle with
2 reading may not be supported by teachers skilled in the teaching of reading.”

3 (3) “While some special education teachers across the supervisory
4 unions had a strong background in the teaching of reading, others indicated
5 that they did not have the training or background to be effective supporting
6 students struggling in reading.”

7 (b) The data indicate Vermont needs to improve its literacy outcomes at the
8 early grades:

9 (1) Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium results from 2016 to 2018
10 indicate that only about 50 percent of students in grade 3 were proficient in
11 English Language Arts in each of these years.

12 (2) From 2015 to 2019, Vermont’s average scale in grade 4 reading on
13 the National Assessment of Educational Progress dropped every year from a
14 high of 230 to a low score of 222.

15 (c) The COVID-19 emergency has adversely affected student academic and
16 developmental progress. Failure to address literacy outcomes now could
17 significantly impact student development for many years to come since literacy
18 is foundational to the success of each student.

19 Sec. 2. PURPOSE

20 The purpose of this act is to continue the ongoing work to improve literacy
21 for all students in the State, while recognizing that achieving this goal will

1 require a multi-year and multi-dimensional effort requiring continued focus by
2 the General Assembly, the Administration, and school leaders.

3 Sec. 3. LITERACY GRANT FUNDING; APPROPRIATION

4 The sum of \$3,000,000.00 is appropriated from [federal funds] for fiscal
5 year 2022 to the Agency of Education. The Agency shall use this
6 appropriation to provide grants to supervisory districts and supervisory unions,
7 on behalf of their member school districts, to provide professional
8 development for teachers in methods of teaching literacy. The Agency shall
9 administer the grant program and determine which supervisory districts and
10 supervisory unions are eligible and the amount to be granted to each applicant
11 based on its assessment of the relative need for this funding, taking into
12 account the following factors across applicants:

13 (1) literacy assessments of students;

14 (2) the number of literacy instructors per enrolled students;

15 (3) the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals;

16 (4) the number of students subject to exclusionary discipline per
17 enrolled students; and

18 (5) the extent to which teacher professional development is integrated
19 with multi-tiered system of supports.

20 Sec. 4. AGENCY OF EDUCATION; LITERACY DIVISION; CREATION;
21 APPROPRIATION

1 The sum of \$[] is appropriated from the General Fund for fiscal year
2 2022 to the Agency of Education to create a new Literacy Division within the
3 Agency responsible for improving prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy
4 within the State.

5 Sec. 5. AGENCY OF EDUCATION; LITERACY VISION

6 On or before December 1, 2021, the Agency of Education, in collaboration
7 with the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Superintendents
8 Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the Vermont Council of
9 Special Education Administrators, shall develop a State-wide vision for
10 literacy, including the core principles for early literacy instructional practices
11 and a clear articulation of expectations for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 literacy
12 instruction.

13 Sec. 6. AGENCY OF EDUCATION; DATA COLLECTION

14 On or before December 1, 2021, the Agency of Education, in collaboration
15 with the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Superintendents
16 Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the Vermont Council of
17 Special Education Administrators, shall develop a plan for collecting literacy-
18 related data that informs:

19 (1) literacy instructional practices;

20 (2) teacher professional development in the field of literacy;

1 (3) what proficiencies and other skills should be measured through
2 literacy assessments; and

3 (4) how to identify schools progress in achieving literacy outcomes.

4 Sec. 7. TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS; REVIEW

5 (a) On or before December 1, 2021, the Agency of Education shall
6 review teacher preparation programs to assess to what extent these programs
7 prepare teacher candidates to use evidence-based structured literacy
8 instruction.

9 (b) “Evidence-based structured literacy instruction” means evidence-
10 based, specialized reading, writing, and spelling instruction that is
11 multisensory in nature, equipping students to simultaneously use multiple
12 senses, including vision, hearing, touch, and movement, to teach word
13 identification and decoding strategies. Evidence-based methods of instruction
14 employ direct instruction of systematic and cumulative objectives, with the
15 sequence beginning with the student’s easiest and most basic elements and
16 progressing methodically to more difficult material, as indicated by systematic
17 progress monitoring. Each step is built on those steps previously learned.
18 Components of evidence-based methods of instruction include instruction
19 targeting phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable
20 structure, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

21 Sec. 8. AGENCY OF EDUCATION; REPORTS

1 (a) On or before December 15, 2021, the Agency of Education shall report
2 its findings and recommendation under this act, and its progress in achieving
3 the purpose of this act, to the General Assembly.

4 (b) On or before each of December 15, 2022 and 2023, the Agency of
5 Education shall report the State-wide progress in achieving the purpose of this
6 act to the General Assembly.

7 Sec. 9. EFFECTIVE DATE

8 This act shall take effect on passage.