



**Statement in Support of SCS-2644, 2645, 2646 and 2647  
Before the Senate Education Committee  
June 20, 2024**

Good morning Chairman Gopal, Vice-Chair Turner and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Debra Bradley, NJPSA Director of Government Relations for the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association. Today, I am here to speak on behalf of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, but also to voice the support of a strong coalition of statewide education associations who have worked together with our respective members from the education field, to review and make recommendations concerning the bill package before you today. On behalf of the NJ School Boards Association, the NJEA, the Garden State Coalition of Schools, the NJ Association of School Administrators and the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, I am here to voice our strong and collective support of the literacy bill package that has been sponsored and championed by Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz.

We must begin by expressing our deep thanks to the Majority Leader for elevating the importance of foundational literacy instruction in our state for our youngest readers. Foundational literacy skills are the cornerstone of a high quality education and the key to academic achievement as students move through elementary and secondary education. We wholeheartedly agree that the development of foundational literacy skills in every student must be a statewide goal of our public education systems. We commend the Majority Leader for gathering together diverse stakeholder groups to assist in the development of targeted legislation to achieve this goal.

This legislative package ensures that all students in grades kindergarten through grade three are screened every year to determine their reading proficiency. Parents will be notified of their child's reading level so both parents and schools can work in partnership to promote reading success for every student. The legislative package

further establishes a statewide literacy framework where school districts will have access to:

- The top research in foundational literacy,
- Universal literacy screening tools,
- High quality instructional materials,
- Valid and reliable universal screening instruments recommended by the NJDOE,
- An online resource center to assist in the selection of evidence-based high quality instructional materials,
- NJDOE guidance, developed in conjunction with a Working Group on Student Literacy, on effective literacy instruction and interventions, and
- Free professional development programs for educators in the early grades to update and inform their literacy knowledge and practice.

We are especially excited about the establishment of the Student Literacy Working Group which will meld the expertise of practitioners in the field, across roles and specialties, with the work of the NJ Department of Education. This provision mirrors the collaborative process utilized during the development of this legislative package and will result in strong statewide policy, the identification and promotion of best practices from across the state and the selection of screening instruments and high quality instructional/ intervention materials that promote foundational literacy for every NJ student. We thank Senator Ruiz for seeing the promise of this approach!

At this time, I would like to turn the conversation to two practicing professionals with expertise in literacy instruction, Natalie Dougherty, Supervisor of Elementary Education, K-12 Instructional Technology and K-12 ELL Programs in Metuchen and Barbara Wilchensky, Director of Language Arts Literacy from the Bridgeton School District.