

S. 929, The Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act

Literacy is Essential to Academic and Life Success

Research demonstrates that a high-quality, literacy-rich environment is an important prerequisite for academic success—this is especially true in early childhood when children are developing the foundation upon which future learning is built. Research also shows that low-income children are less likely to have access to high quality, literacy rich environments. These same children perform 40% lower on assessments of literacy achievement even before they start kindergarten.

These challenges become greater as children enter and progress through elementary and high school. More than 5 million high school students do not read well enough to understand their grade level material. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 26% of these students cannot read essential materials such as such as road signs, newspapers, and bus schedules. To be successful in today's 21st Century global economy, students must develop oral language, reading, and writing abilities. The Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act will ensure that all students receive high quality literacy instruction beginning in early childhood and continuing through high school graduation.

The LEARN Act responds to the clear need for literacy instruction and high quality support for students at all age, development and grade levels. This legislation provides for a strong federal investment in high quality literacy instruction that will help states improve programs to strengthen the literacy skills of all students.

Specifically LEARN supports high literacy for all students from birth through high school by:

- Authorizing \$2.35 billion for comprehensive literacy programs, to support local school-based literacy programs (birth to grade twelve).
- Enhancing state's capacity to improve literacy instruction through the creation of state literacy leadership teams.
- Providing high-quality, research-based professional development opportunities for instructional staff and financial support for literacy coaches.
- Supporting promising and innovative practices to improve literacy and writing, especially for students reading and writing below grade level.

We urge you to join us in supporting this needed legislation. Please contact Sarah Bolton at sarah_bolton@murray.senate.gov or by phone at (202) 224-2621 to co-sponsor.

Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act

The LEARN Act would support comprehensive state and local literacy programs to ensure that children from birth to grade twelve have the reading and writing skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Specifically, the bill would:

I. Provide federal support for literacy programs by:

- a) authorizing \$2.35 billion for comprehensive literacy programs, providing funds for both existing and new high-quality state and local school-based literacy programs that span birth to grade twelve, through the use of a state formula grant;
- b) allocating not less than 10 percent of the \$2.35 billion for children from birth to age five, not less than 40 percent for students in kindergarten to grade five, and not less than 40 percent for students grades six through twelve; and
- c) requiring a rigorous national evaluation of the programs that includes stringent conflict of interest restrictions for the programs' peer review process.

II. Enhance each state's role in improving literacy instruction by:

- a) supporting the formation of a state literacy leadership team made up of literacy experts and relevant stakeholders;
- b) supporting the development of a comprehensive state literacy plan, including a needs assessment and an implementation plan to ensure high-quality instruction in reading and writing from early childhood education through grade twelve;
- c) requiring each state to provide competitive subgrants to local educational agencies;
- d) targeting funding to schools with the greatest need (as defined by poverty or low student literacy achievement);
- e) requiring each state to provide technical assistance to local educational agencies on how to implement high-quality professional development programs for literacy instruction;
- f) requiring each state to review pre-service course work as well as state licensure and certification requirements, and make recommendations to improve training in high-quality literacy instruction; and
- g) allowing states with effective literacy instruction programs to keep and enhance their existing program structure;

III. Support the creation of local high-quality literacy programs in schools by:

- a) providing high-quality professional development for instructional staff that is job-embedded, ongoing, and research-based, providing teachers with expertise in literacy instruction appropriate to specific grade levels, analyzing data to improve student learning, and effective implementation of literacy instruction strategies;
- b) providing students with explicit, systematic, and developmentally appropriate instruction in reading and writing, including but not limited to vocabulary development, phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, and the use of diverse texts;
- c) utilizing diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to inform and improve instruction and student learning at all age levels; and
- d) supporting schoolwide literacy programs and additional literacy supports to address the specific learning needs of struggling readers and writers, including English language learners and students with disabilities.