

GEORGIA EARLY LITERACY ACT OF 2026 SUMMARY

House Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington) and House leaders have introduced [**HB 1193**](#), the Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026, by House Education Chair Chris Erwin (R-Homer). The Senate introduced an identical bill, [**SB 459**](#), sponsored by Senate Education & Youth Chair Billy Hickman (R-Statesboro). The 41-page Act provides extensive changes to several aspects of Georgia's public education system, including literacy instruction, mandatory kindergarten requirements, funding and structure for literacy coaches, promotion and retention requirements, and changes to educator preparation programs related to literacy.

Please note that HB 1193 and SB 459 are currently in committee. Provisions of the Act will become clearer as the legislation is presented and debated in committee, a process PAGE will engage in and report on.

Kindergarten and Pre-K Requirements

Beginning with the 2027-28 school year, students enrolled for 20 school days prior to their sixth birthday are subject to compulsory attendance provisions. The bill requires all children entering public schools to attend kindergarten unless they complete an assessment for readiness for first grade using State Board of Education (SBOE)-approved tools that include universal reading screener data, teacher recommendations, and parental preferences, prior to beginning first grade. Students at risk of reading deficiency must immediately complete a tiered reading intervention plan. No student can remain in kindergarten for more than two years. Parents/guardians of students deemed eligible for first grade may decide to enroll their child in kindergarten if they do not feel their child is developmentally ready for first grade. Parents of children aged 4 or 5 can enroll their child in a Georgia pre-K program.

Unified Literacy Plans & School District Waivers

The Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026 requires school districts to implement unified literacy plans that establish measurable literacy goals based on assessment data. Beginning Jan. 1, 2027, systems without these plans are unable to receive system waivers and cannot enter or renew charter or strategic waiver school system contracts. Universal reading screener requirements would be expanded under the bills, as would professional learning requirements, with schools required to offer on-site professional learning, demonstration lessons, side-by-side coaching, and more.

Screeners

Beginning April 1, 2028, and every three years after, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) is required to create a list of no less than two and no more than five universal reading screeners to be approved by the SBOE. The bill significantly redefines universal reading screeners and the requirements they must meet to be approved.

Educator Preparation Programs

Educator preparation programs must meet new requirements, and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission must create a literacy coaching endorsement by Dec. 30, 2026. GaPSC must also develop an ongoing review process of each educator preparation program offering literacy instruction and provide a report on these programs every four years to a variety of stakeholders.

Literacy Coaches

The bills provide each K-3 school with funding for one literacy coach, with schools with fewer than 200 FTE receiving 50% of that funding. The act codifies the RESA regional literacy coach structure and requirements of said coaches. The bill provides comprehensive descriptions, minimum qualifications, and duties for school-based literacy coaches, regional literacy coaches, and regional leadership literacy coaches.

Promotion & Retention

Promotion and retention policies will change significantly, with students deemed at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency by the end of first grade being retained. Schools must notify the parents of a student deemed at risk. Schools must reassess the student to determine whether they are deficient in literacy, and if so, provide the student with accelerated or differentiated instruction. If the student's parents or guardian appeal the school's decision, a placement committee consisting of the school principal or their designee, the student's teacher, and the student's parent or guardian must review the student's progress in literacy and decide if the student has made adequate progress for promotion. For students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the IEP committee will be the student's placement committee. The new promotion and retention policies will take effect in the 2026-2027 school year.

High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIMs)

Only HQIMs aligned to the science of reading will be allowed beginning with the 2029-2030 school year. After this time, districts will be prohibited from expending funds on any non-science-of-reading-aligned materials. The SBOE will determine a reasonable level of annual funding for the General Assembly to consider providing districts to purchase the materials.

State Literacy Leadership

The act establishes the Georgia Literacy Coordination Committee within GOSA, which will coordinate statewide literacy, including developing a statewide literacy plan and reviewing local literacy plans. The Georgia Literacy Task Force would be convened on Sept. 1, 2026, and would recommend screeners, instructional materials, and professional learning programs. The SBOE would then vote on the recommendations within 60 days. The Georgia Literacy Coach position will be renamed the Georgia Director of Literacy and will remain an employee of GOSA.