

LITERACY ACADEMY COLLECTIVE

2025 Joint Legislative Hearing
Higher Education Testimony

My name is Ruth Genn and I am the Executive Director of [Literacy Academy Collective](#) (LAC), a school support organization. We successfully opened the first district public school in the country specifically designed for students with dyslexia, language based learning disabilities and other struggling readers in the South Bronx. Our second school is opening in central Brooklyn this fall. At LAC, we believe access to literacy is the most pressing Civil Rights issue in New York State. We ensure struggling readers achieve academic success by bringing structured literacy to students at the intersection of race, poverty, and disability. Our students come in on average at the 4th percentile on a nationally normed benchmark and after one year we have seen gains that are double the expected rate of growth. For the first time in their lives, our students are experiencing academic success: the first pillar of culturally responsive and sustaining education.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for most striving readers around the state. The recent release of NAEP¹ scores show that only 31% of our students are at or above proficient. According to the National Reading Panel, over 95% of all students could learn to read if taught using evidence-based practices grounded in the science of reading.² **NY State is fifth from the bottom in integrating evidence-based practices grounded in the science of reading into the core components of our EPPs³** who are responsible for teaching our students to learn to read. During the 2022-2023 school year, more than 90% of New York's public school teachers who had one or more teaching assignments in early childhood/elementary or literacy completed a New York educator preparation program.

Educator Preparation Programs have a significant role to play in addressing this crisis. At LAC, we see this regularly as we need to re-teach our teachers how to teach literacy. We have been energized and excited by the faculty and Educator preparation programs who are working diligently to integrate structured literacy into educator preparation.

I am here today to give testimony urging you to include \$500,000 in your One-House budgets to support the implementation of New York's [State Action Plan](#). This will improve literacy instruction in schools by supporting and integrating the science of reading into Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and certification requirements. The \$500,000 appropriation will support four positions at the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to ensure quality program oversight of the teacher preparation programs that have an emphasis on literacy instruction. NYSED currently does not have sufficient staff to oversee a more intensive program review process for all 4500+ educator preparation programs. NYSED currently has only two (2) staff to oversee program quality for all 4,500+ teaching programs. As EPPs shift to new practices, NYSED oversight is the critical next step toward strengthening the science of reading in our state. **Without these additional resources, the systems to monitor EPP integration of the science of reading will be anemic and insufficient. We are at a crucial juncture in this**

¹ [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) is the common measure of student achievement used across states to understand the performance of their students.

² The [National Reading Panel can be found here](#). The science of reading is an evidence-based approach to understanding how humans learn to read and the most effective methods for teaching reading, based on decades of cognitive science, neuroscience, and educational research.

³ [2023 review by the National Council of Teacher Quality \(NCTQ\)](#)

process and we must not lose momentum in our efforts to put NY State back on track to being the envy of the nation when it comes to teacher preparation.

In October of 2023, LAC and the New York State Education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa announced that New York State was chosen to participate in the third cohort of Hunt Institute's [The Path Forward for Teacher Preparation and Licensure in Early Literacy](#). In coordination with the NYSED, LAC has convened the NY State Path Forward cohort team, with the aim to transform early literacy instruction in New York State by embedding the [science of reading](#) into educator preparation programs. Led by an esteemed [Steering Committee](#), The Path Forward team is comprised of leaders from NYSED; the NY State Legislature; the Governor's office; leaders, deans, and faculty from higher education educator preparation programs; and key community advocates, funders, and stakeholders from across New York State. It has benefited from the support and participation of critical leaders in our state -

Lola Brabham President, Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities
Maria Fernandez Deputy Secretary for Education, Office of Governor Kathy Hochul
Dr. John B. King, Jr. Chancellor, The State University of New York (SUNY)
Dr. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez Chancellor, The City University of New York (CUNY)
Dr. Betty A. Rosa Commissioner of Education & President of the University of the State of New York
Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr. Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents, University of the State of New York
Judith J. Chin Vice Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents, University of the State of New York
Ruth Genn Executive Director, Literacy Academy Collective
Dr. Laura Glass Chief of Staff, Office of Education Policy, New York State Education Department (NYSED)
Dr. Mayme Hostetter President, Relay Graduate School of Education
Ileana Infante Assistant Secretary for Education, Office of Governor Kathy Hochul
Dr. Katie Pace Miles Associate Professor, Brooklyn College, CUNY
Dr. Santosha Oliver Assistant Commissioner, Office of Standards and Instruction, NYSED
April E. Poprilo District Superintendent, Western Suffolk Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)
Dr. Meisha Porter Former Chancellor, NYCPS & Visiting Senior Fellow, Center for Educational Innovation
Ian Rosenblum Senior Vice Chancellor for Policy Implementation & Chief of Staff, SUNY Office of the Chancellor
Jo Anne Simon NY State Assemblymember, District 52, Higher Education Committee Member
Dr. John Z. Strong Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, University at Buffalo
Dr. Ashleigh Thompson University Dean for Education, CUNY
Daniel Weisberg First Deputy Chancellor, NYCPS

We have been gathering regularly over the course of the past year and half, to collaborate on a New York State Action Plan to make that goal a reality.

The Path Forward is designed to bring all stakeholders to the table to work on a committed set of actions: no one is left out, and everyone is accountable. In addition to the [Leadership and Steering Committees](#), LAC convened three [Working Groups](#) focused on P-20 Partnerships, Educator Preparation, and Faculty Professional Learning. Comprised of over 55 experts from across all regions of the state and made up of educators, professors, district leaders, teachers, and advocates, they advised the Steering Committee on each aspect of the Action Plan throughout the process. The Action Plan is an interlocking set of steps designed so that every sector plays their critical role in transforming literacy instruction in NY State.

On October 9, 2024, LAC and State Education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa announced the release of the [New York State Action Plan: The Path Forward](#) (the Action Plan), which seeks to transform the way educators are prepared to teach literacy. Over the next three to five years, this Action Plan will serve as a road map as New York State seeks to transform the way educators are prepared to teach literacy. It focuses on teacher preparation programs in early childhood education, childhood education, English to speakers of other languages, literacy, and students with disabilities. Specifically, the Action Plan outlines initiatives in six areas:

1. **Align Program Requirements with Culturally Responsive, Evidence-based Practices that are Grounded in the Science of Reading (SoR).** Ensure that educator preparation programs (EPPs) integrate SoR into their courses of study and into the measures of teacher candidate readiness (e.g., program requirements, certification exams, teacher performance assessment).
2. **Review Programs:** Develop a system for understanding how EPP courses of study are aligned with culturally responsive, evidence-based practices for teaching literacy grounded in SoR on an ongoing basis in order to refine and improve the New York State Education Department's (NYSED's) program review process.
3. **Secure Funding:** Generate public and philanthropic support to adequately fund the innovation and change management work in EPPs and partnerships between EPPs and school districts.
4. **Engage EPP Leadership and Faculty:** Engage EPP leadership and faculty in the integration of culturally responsive, evidence-based practices for teaching literacy that are grounded in SoR into teacher preparation programs.
5. **Promote P-20 Partnerships:** Support and incentivize strong partnerships between EPPs and school districts/Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).
6. **Study the Activities in the Action Plan and Establish an Information Sharing System.** Engage third-party research organization(s) to study the activities outlined in the Action Plan and establish an information sharing system to gather, codify, and disseminate effective practices in culturally responsive, evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in SoR.

Currently, Action Area 1 is already budgeted and paid for by NYSED. Similarly, items in Action Areas 3-6 are in motion and initially being funded by private philanthropy in partnership with CUNY, SUNY, and CICU. Action Area 2 - Review Programs - requires a relatively small investment to develop a system for understanding how EPP courses of study are aligned with culturally responsive, evidence-based practices for teaching literacy grounded in SoR on an ongoing basis in order to refine and improve the NYSED's program review process. Importantly, this investment mirrors what other states - such as Colorado and Massachusetts - have invested to ensure an effective team to provide program oversight.

Last year, New York took critical steps toward addressing the State's literacy crisis. The FY2024-25 Enacted Budget committed to integrating the science of reading into our literacy practices by supporting teacher training and providing guidance on instructional best practices. While this was a strong start, it is insufficient for the task at hand. Other states that have successfully and dramatically shifted literacy

outcomes tackled all components of literacy: early reading assessment, support for current teachers, high-quality instructional materials, and oversight & regulations that ensure EPPs are preparing new teachers to teach evidence-based literacy grounded in the science of reading. By funding these NYSED positions this year, New York will show we are committed to this change.

We have already started on the road to ensuring every child can read. If the state does not provide the funding for these four positions, it will undermine the crucial work we have begun. We call on the Legislature to fund this small amount as a critical down payment for the work ahead. The children of this state deserve no less.

About Ruth Genn:

Ruth is a co-founder and the Executive Director of Literacy Academy Collective and brings over 20 years of leadership and innovation in the NYC education sector. Ruth founded the New York office of Bottom Line and served as its Executive Director for eight years. During her tenure, Bottom Line NY grew from an inaugural class of 125 students to a thriving program helping over 3,000 students annually to earn their college degree, establishing itself as a leader in the college access and success space. Previously, Ruth worked at New Visions for Public Schools where she launched and directed New Visions' first Data and College Readiness departments. Before joining New Visions in 2005, Ruth worked in the Bloomberg Administration on the integration of after-school services across several New York City agencies. Ruth has served on the advisory board of several NYC nonprofits and education coalitions, and is currently an Advisor at the Heckscher Foundation for Children. She began her career as a New York City public school teacher through Teach for America. Ruth holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy from the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley; and a Bachelor's degree from Cornell University.