

# Gov. Evers: Signs bill aimed at improving literacy outcomes for kids statewide

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today signed six bills, including Assembly Bill 321, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 20. The bill relating to literacy, drafted in coordination with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), makes several comprehensive updates to literacy instruction in the state designed to help improve reading and literacy outcomes for K-12 students.

“We have to ensure our kids have the reading and literacy tools and skills to be successful both in and out of the classroom. This bill, modeled after initiatives that have been successful in other states and fine-tuned with significant changes throughout the legislative process, is a step in the right direction,” said Gov. Evers. “But at the end of the day, the bottom line for me is that reading curriculum is only one small part of the equation to ensuring our kids are prepared for success—we know that kids who are hungry, in crisis, or experiencing other challenges at home might have trouble focusing in class or on their studies, be distracted or disengaged at school, and have a hard time completing their coursework.

“So, if we want to improve outcomes for kids in our classrooms across the board, this bill is only one small part of the work we have to do—we must continue making meaningful investments in our kids and our schools, bolster our education workforce to help keep class sizes small, and expand access to mental health services and healthy meals in our schools so our kids can bring their full and best selves to our classrooms.”

Assembly Bill 321, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 20:

- Creates an Office of Literacy to be known as the Wisconsin Reading Center at DPI;
- Creates the Council on Early Literacy Curricula, which will include nine members nominated by the state superintendent, speaker of the Assembly, and the senate majority leader and will meet annually to make recommendations to DPI that are then submitted to the Joint Committee on Finance for passive review;
- Creates a literacy coaching program through which the Office of Literacy would assign 64 contracted literacy coaches to traditional public schools, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in the choice program to provide support to administrators, school-based literacy coaches, principals, and teachers;
- Creates grants to cover 50 percent of the costs of purchasing approved curriculum and instructional materials;
- Prohibits the use of instruction or materials that contain the “three-cueing” method of literacy instruction, defined as any model that teaches a student to read based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues or memory, beginning in the 2024-25 school years;
- Increases the frequency of screening and diagnostic reading assessments and prescribes specific interventions, including the creation of personal literacy plans that identify specific skill deficiencies, provide goals and benchmarks of progress, and describe additional services; and
- Requires changes in how educators are prepared to teach reading, including prohibiting the state superintendent from approving a teacher preparatory program unless the program prepares a teacher to teach using science-based early literacy instruction and does not incorporate three-cueing and requiring certain educators to take the Lexia Learning Systems LLC, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) or another program endorsed by the Center for Effective Reading Instruction and that is offered by the Leadership in Literacy Institute or a provider that meets specified criteria.

The 2023-25 biennial budget includes \$50 million in the Joint Committee on Finance’s supplemental appropriation for efforts to improve reading and literacy outcomes for K-12 students, including those included in 2023 Wisconsin Act 20. This funding is in addition to other significant investments in K-12 education included in the 2023-25 biennial budget, including providing an overall increase of nearly \$1.2 billion in spendable authority for public school districts. This increase will be more than ten times larger than the increase in spendable authority for public school

districts in the 2021-23 biennium. The governor's vetoes also ensure school districts have predictable, long-term revenue limit spending authority increases to help meet rising costs for the foreseeable future.

The 2023-25 biennial budget increases the level of state support from 67.8 percent in fiscal year 2022-23 to an estimated 68.8 percent in fiscal year 2023-24 and 69.4 percent in fiscal year 2024-25. These will be the highest levels of state support for school districts since the calculation was initiated in fiscal year 1996-97 under the state's former "two-thirds" funding goal.

This increase is also generated by a \$325 per pupil increase on revenue limits in each fiscal year, in addition to an increase in the low revenue ceiling from \$10,000 to \$11,000 per pupil in the first year of the biennium. This is the largest increase in statewide revenue limit authority since revenue limits were first imposed on K-12 schools in 1993-94, and it is permanent and base-building.

Further, these record-high per pupil revenue limit increases also have the potential to take the burden off community members when it comes to school funding, as it alleviates the need for districts to seek operating referenda.

The 2023-25 budget, as enacted by Gov. Evers, also:

- Provides \$97 million GPR over the biennium to achieve a special education reimbursement rate of 33.3 percent each year, which is the highest reimbursement rate the state has seen in over 20 years;
- Invests \$4.6 million GPR over the biennium for high-cost special education aid, increasing the reimbursement rate of these programs from its current 39.5 percent to 50 percent by the end of the biennium. This aid helps school districts pay a portion of their eligible special education costs for pupils with specific and elevated educational needs; and
- Provides \$30 million to continue support for school-based mental health services modeled on the governor's successful "Get Kids Ahead" Initiative.

In addition to signing Assembly Bill 321, Gov. Evers signed several bills providing general wage increases for certain state of Wisconsin employees, including state attorneys, troopers and inspectors in the Wisconsin State Patrol, University of Wisconsin (UW) System employees, and those in the building trades.

"From public safety professionals to our UW System, state employees play a

critically important role in keeping communities safe, providing services to Wisconsinites in every corner of the state, including educating and training the next generation,” said Gov. Evers. “These pay increases are critically important and well-deserved for state workers, and I am glad to be signing these bills today to help support, retain, and bolster our workforce.”

Assembly Bill 322, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 21:

- Ratifies the collective bargaining agreement for State Patrol troopers and inspectors in the public safety employees bargaining unit for fiscal years 2021-22 and 2022-23, as negotiated by the Division of Personnel Management at the Wisconsin Department of Administration and the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Association, providing employees in this bargaining unit who meet a satisfactory performance rating a two percent general wage adjustment, effective Jan. 2, 2022, and an additional 4.7 percent general wage adjustment, effective Jan. 1, 2023.

Assembly Bill 323, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 22:

- Ratifies the collective bargaining agreement for attorneys working in the classified service for state agencies in the state attorneys bargaining unit for fiscal year 2022-23, as negotiated between the Division of Personnel Management at the Wisconsin Department of Administration and the Wisconsin State Attorneys Association, providing employees in this bargaining unit who meet a satisfactory performance rating a 4.7 percent general wage adjustment, effective Jan. 1, 2023.

Assembly Bill 324, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 23:

- Ratifies the collective bargaining agreement for UW-Madison employees in the building trades crafts collective bargaining unit for fiscal year 2022-23, as negotiated by UW-Madison and the Wisconsin State Building Trades Negotiating Committee, providing a 4.7 percent general wage adjustment for employees in this bargaining unit, effective Jan. 1, 2023.

Assembly Bill 325, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 24:

- Ratifies the collective bargaining agreement for UW System employees in the building trades crafts collective bargaining unit for fiscal year 2022-23, as

negotiated by the UW Board of Regents and the Wisconsin State Building Trades Negotiating Committee, providing a 4.7 percent general wage adjustment for employees in this bargaining unit, effective Jan. 1, 2023.

Assembly Bill 326, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 25:

- Ratifies the collective bargaining agreement for state of Wisconsin employees in the building trades crafts collective bargaining unit for fiscal year 2022-23, as negotiated by the state of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin State Building Trades Negotiating Committee, providing a 4.7 general wage adjustment for employees in this bargaining unit, effective Jan. 1, 2023.