

Policy Brief

High Quality Literacy Instruction Act Implementation Update

Analysts: Marit Andrews, Principal Policy Analyst

Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II

Date: October 16, 2026

New Mexico began on a strategic path to ensure all literacy instruction is grounded in the science of reading with the passage of [Laws 2019, Chapter 256 \(Senate Bill 398\)](#). Since the Public Education Department (PED) began implementing the law through the [structured literacy New Mexico](#) initiative in the 2020-2021 (SY21) school year, New Mexico has made progress in elementary reading proficiency, as noted in LESC's June 2025 [policy brief](#). However, implementation varies across the state, and stakeholders note increased coordination of efforts and support to address implementation gaps could be beneficial.

In the 2026 legislative session, lawmakers enacted [Laws 2026, Chapter 54 \(Senate Bill 37\)](#), LESC-endorsed legislation, which created the High-Quality Literacy Instruction Act to expand evidence-based reading support for public school students. The new law builds upon the work of [Laws 2025, Chapter 149 \(House Bill 156\)](#), which required educator preparation programs (EPPs) to use only structured literacy practices to teach preservice educators to teach reading.

The new law impacts literacy instruction for public school students as well as teacher candidates. Laws 2026, Chapter 54 requires all literacy instruction for kindergarten through third-grade (K-3) students to use high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) approved by PED. The law also requires all literacy materials for kindergarten through 12th-grade (K-12) students to be culturally and linguistically relevant, consistent with the science of reading and structured literacy, and not include use of the three-cueing model, provided that instructional materials for English learners and other students in bilingual or dual language programs support literacy and biliteracy development in English and home and other languages, if appropriate.

The law also requires PED to adopt a reading assessment system for K-3 students to measure student progress and identify supports for students whose results indicate a reading difficulty. PED must adopt a reading assessment system beginning in SY28 that can be administered with minimal impact on instructional time, provides for timely reporting of assessment results, and can be integrated with instructional support for teachers and students. If a student is identified as having a reading difficulty, parents must be notified within 30 days and receive progress reports four times a year. Finally, the new law requires PED to assign a literacy instructional coach to elementary schools that have an average reading proficiency in the bottom quartile of results statewide, also beginning in SY28.

Regarding educator preparation, Laws 2026, Chapter 54 requires EPPs to teach teacher candidates evidence-based approaches for biliteracy, such as bilingual and dual language instructional models that develop literacy in English and students' home languages.

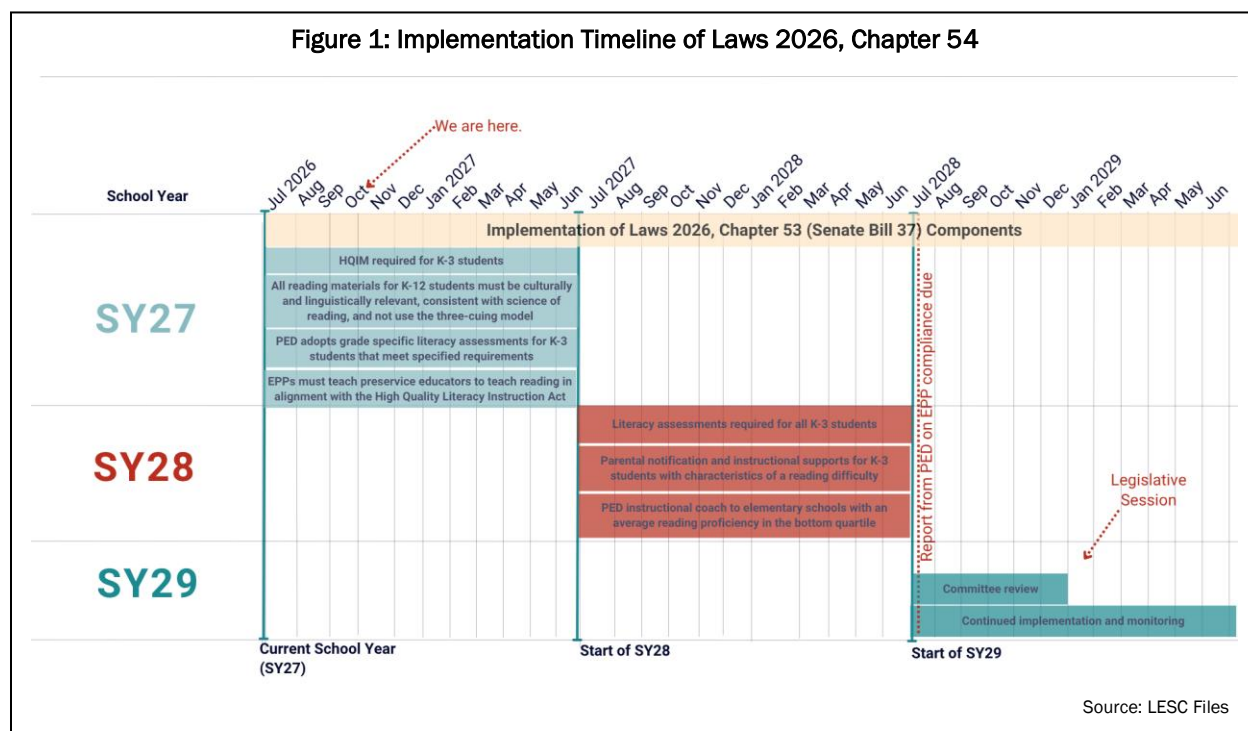
This brief will focus on implementation work required by Laws 2026, Chapter 54 in the 2026 interim, including work PED and EPPs have begun so far, and upcoming work for PED and EPPs into the 2027 interim.

Key Takeaways

- The High Quality Literacy Instruction Act impacts literacy instruction for public schools and teacher candidates, with the first deadlines in SY27 (*Pages 1-2*).
- The new law continues and expands existing structured literacy work for PED (*Pages 2-5*).
- EPPs must now also ensure teacher candidates graduate from their programs with skills to support English learners through biliteracy and oral-language development (*Pages 5-8*).
- The Legislature should continue to monitor PED and EPP implementation of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act throughout full implementation in SY28 (*Pages 8-9*).

Implementation Progress

The implementation process of requirements within Laws 2026, Chapter 54 spans multiple school years, with the first deadlines in SY27, as shown in **Figure 1: Implementation Timeline of Laws 2026, Chapter 54**, below.



Both PED and EPPs have requirements they must meet in SY27 to comply with the provisions of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act. All reading instructional material requirements within Laws 2026, Chapter 54 are in effect as of July 1, 2026. This means HQIM is required for literacy or reading instruction for K-3 students, and that all intervention or supplemental literacy materials for K-12 students must be culturally and linguistically relevant, consistent with the science of reading and structured literacy, and may not include use of the three-cueing model. In SY27, PED must adopt grade-specific literacy assessments for K-3 students which will be implemented at the beginning of SY28. As of July 1, 2026, EPPs are required to comply with the provisions of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act, including but not limited to using HQIM to train future educators and including requirements for supporting English learners and biliteracy instruction.

In SY28, all public schools will be required to administer grade-specific literacy assessments for K-3 students, notify parents, and provide support to students who are identified as having a reading difficulty based on the results of the reading assessment. In addition, beginning in SY28, Laws 2026, Chapter 54 requires PED to assign an instructional literacy coach to public elementary schools that have an average reading proficiency in the bottom quartile of the state.

PED Implementation

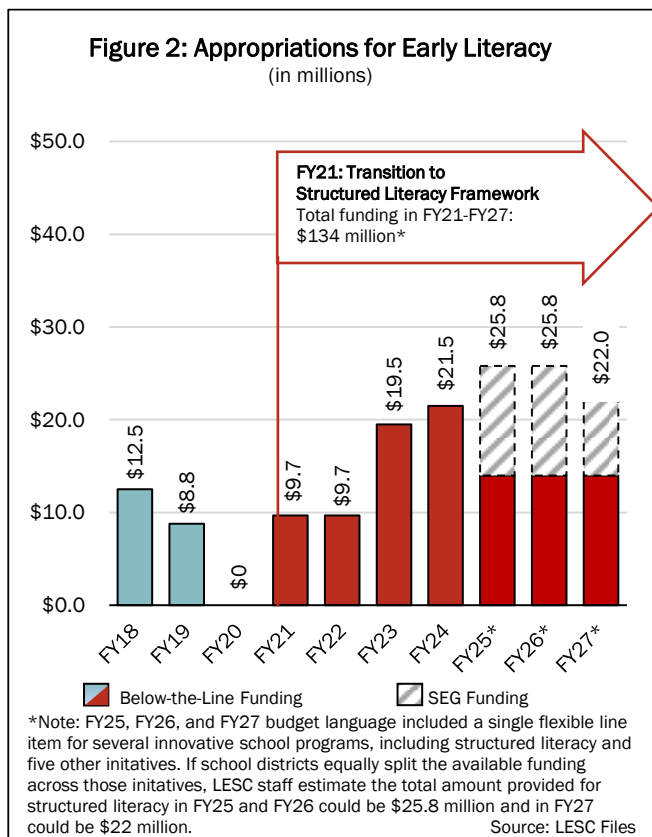
According to [PED](#), the structured literacy New Mexico initiative is focused on a mindset shift, moving from reactive to proactive, to increase the number of students reading at or above grade level and to reduce the number of students requiring special education services. Laws 2019, Chapter 256 required universal dyslexia screening for first-grade students, early interventions for students displaying characteristics of dyslexia, and structured literacy training for all elementary school teachers. See the science of reading and structured literacy in the red box on page 4 for more details on this evidence-based approach to reading instruction.

PED issued local education agencies a memo with guidance for how to implement the expanded literacy requirements. The department has already begun implementation of Laws 2026, Chapter 54 and outlined for local education agencies (LEAs) how the new requirements within the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act fit within the department's broader structured literacy initiative through an August 4, 2026, [memo](#) for superintendents on SY27 structured literacy updates.

As in previous years, the structured literacy memo outlines structured literacy funding through the state equalization guarantee (SEG)—the public school funding formula—that school districts and charter schools receive to support implementation of professional development for teachers in structured literacy as required by Laws 2019, Chapter 256.

Since SY21, PED has provided professional development to elementary school teachers through the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) course of study to fulfill the requirements of Laws 2019, Chapter 256; these trainings are funded through below-the-line appropriations. LETRS is a two-year course consisting of eight units of study and includes asynchronous online coursework, 16 three-hour live virtual or in-person facilitated sessions, and reading the LETRS Manuals Volumes 1 and 2. LEAs have traditionally used SEG funding to support teachers with substitute coverage and stipends as they complete LETRS training.

As shown in **Figure 2: Appropriations for Early Literacy**, since the transition to the structured literacy framework in FY21, the Legislature has appropriated a total of \$134 million for early literacy.



PED's SY27 structured literacy memo also outlines implementation of other requirements of Laws 2019, Chapter 256, including the requirement that all first-grade students are screened for characteristics of dyslexia by the 40th school day or within two weeks of initial enrollment. PED provides three approved English dyslexia screeners (Amira ISIP, Teach me to Read Dyslexia Screener, and Lexercise) and two approved Spanish screeners (Amira Evaluar and Indicadores Dinámicos del Éxito en la Lectura) for when Spanish is the language of instruction for students. The memo also requires teachers to receive training on the administration of dyslexia screeners and complete PED's Structured Literacy and Dyslexia for Diverse Learners 2.0 course in Canvas. PED recommends educators retake this Canvas course every three years.

PED is already implementing early literacy assessment screening, tutoring, and progress monitoring. Laws 2026, Chapter 54 requires PED to adopt grade-specific K-3 literacy assessments, notify parents of students identified with a reading difficulty, provide caregivers with a read-at-home plan, and provide interventions or supplemental instructional services to these students.

Currently, as specified in PED's SY27 structured literacy memo, PED requires all public school districts and charter schools to administer the Amira reading assessment—except in cases where PED has approved use of an alternative assessment—to all kindergarten through grade two (K-2) students during the beginning-of-year (BOY), middle-of-year (MOY), and end-of-year (EOY) benchmark windows. PED also requires LEAs to conduct progress monitoring for students not testing as proficient. PED also [requires](#) all public schools to provide all students 30 minutes of high-impact tutoring per week. PED funds the Amira instruction and Amira tutor components, which use Amira's real-time voice recognition and artificial intelligence (AI) analysis, for LEAs to meet these requirements, as previously noted in the LESC staff report [Screen Use in Elementary School Classrooms Legislative Task Force Report](#). While PED allows LEAs to opt out of one or more components of the

standard Amira assessment administration process, LEAs must administer and purchase another method of tutoring for all K-2 students for 30 minutes per week and monthly interventions for students testing below proficiency if they opt out of Amira's assessment, tutoring, and intervention AI services.

It is unclear if PED plans to use Amira to implement the K-3 literacy assessment, tutoring, and progress monitoring requirements outlined in Laws 2026, Chapter 54.

The Science of Reading and Structured Literacy

The science of reading is an interdisciplinary body of research that explains how individuals learn to read and the best practices for reading instruction, and structured literacy describes research-based practices within the classroom. Structured literacy is an umbrella term coined by the International Dyslexia Association in 2016 to describe a science-based, explicit, systematic, and cumulative approach to reading and writing instruction. Structured literacy is an approach to reading instruction where teachers carefully structure important literacy skills, concepts, and the sequence of instruction to facilitate children's literacy learning as much as possible. This [approach](#) is helpful for all students and can be beneficial not only for students with reading disabilities, but also for other at-risk students including English learners and struggling adolescents.

PED's "literacy champions" will help ensure schools have the resources they need to comply with the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act. PED [requires](#) each elementary school to identify a "literacy champion" to serve as the school-based point of contact for Amira implementation and data analysis and provides a stipend of \$1,500 for their efforts. According to PED, the literacy champion will also serve as the school-based point of contact for read-at-home kits. PED notes the literacy champion role is expected to require approximately 25-30 hours of additional work in SY27, with tasks including attending required trainings and meetings, reviewing Amira data, supporting teachers with implementation, verifying required information, and completing related follow-up tasks. PED notes the literacy champion may be a school-site administrator, instructional coach, reading interventionist, or teacher.

PED will meet parent communication and at-home literacy support requirements in the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act through read-at-home plans. According to PED, these forms will include parent notification and at-home instruction through read-at-home plans provided by Just Right Reader. [Just Right Reader](#) is an educational publishing company that offers take-home packs of phonics-focused decodable books aligned with the science of reading. According to PED, all assessment data and proficiency levels will be submitted to Just Right Reader partners with the support of the on-site literacy champion, in accordance with PED deadlines. PED notes that student data will inform the creation of an individualized PED Family Literacy Plan for every K-2 student statewide. For third-grade students, PED notes that teachers will submit individual proficiency level (high, medium, low) data.

According to PED, schools will receive personalized, science of reading aligned materials to distribute to students for at-home use. PED notes that on four scheduled PED dates, students will take home:

- An individual family literacy plan;
- Structured literacy activities;
- Assessment results; and
- Progress monitoring documentation.

It is unclear if PED will leverage the literacy champions initiative to implement the HQIM requirements for K-3 students and instructional material requirements for K-12 students specified in Laws 2026, Chapter 54.

Educator Preparation Programs

Laws 2026, Chapter 54 builds on legislation passed in 2025 that aimed to ensure EPPs equip teacher candidates with strong preparation in structured literacy and the science of reading. EPPs must now also ensure teacher candidates graduate from their programs with skills to support English learners through biliteracy and

oral-language development. Laws 2026, Chapter 54 also narrowed the definition of HQIM and amended the definitions of the science of reading and structured literacy.

Implementation of 2025 Legislation

Teacher colleges have worked to ensure teacher candidates have a strong understanding of the science of reading and structured literacy instructional practices over the past few years.

In 2025, the Legislature passed legislation to ensure teacher candidates are prepared to teach structured literacy. [Laws 2025, Chapter 149 \(House Bill 156\)](#) included several provisions to ensure EPPs accomplish this goal. PED was required to develop teacher preparation standards related to the five components of the science of reading, including the knowledge and skills to support struggling readers, students with dyslexia, and English learners. EPPs were required to implement these standards and, more generally, to ensure teacher candidates are prepared to teach scientifically-based reading instruction. Programs were also required to provide elementary teacher candidates at least 100 hours of supervised field experience in public school classrooms implementing the science of reading, including the use of HQIM. Finally, as part of the state approval review process, EPPs were required to provide evidence of alignment with the state’s statutory and regulatory requirements for structured and systematic science of reading instruction.

These measures codified several [requirements](#) issued by PED in October 2023. PED published a memo stating, “effective immediately, all [EPPs] in New Mexico must adopt and implement English language arts and teaching of reading core curriculum requirements that align with the science of reading and structured literacy.” EPPs were also directed to conduct a programmatic review to ensure course and syllabi alignment with the science of reading and a structured literacy approach.

According to PED, only one EPP state accreditation review has been completed since the passing of Laws 2025, Chapter 149, and the new structured literacy requirements were incorporated in the evaluation of curriculum and instruction indicators. PED is in the process of revising its state accreditation system, and the revised indicators will align with all of the state’s recently passed literacy requirements.

In February 2026, PED issued a memo with guidance for EPPs to implement the newly required 100 hours of structured literacy field experience for elementary teacher candidates. The [memo](#) PED issued clarified which teacher candidates must complete the 100 hours of structured literacy field experience. Elementary, early childhood, and special education teacher candidates who complete a traditional (undergraduate) preparation program had to meet the field experience requirement beginning July 1, 2025. Those who completed an alternative preparation program had to meet the requirement beginning July 1, 2026.

Supervising teachers must hold a level 2 or level 3 license, have completed PED-approved professional learning in structured literacy, and have received a score of “observed” or “strong evidence” on certain components of their teacher evaluation.

PED’s memo described a variety of ways teacher candidates completing different types of clinical experiences may fulfill the 100-hour requirement. For example, in addition to traditional clinical experiences such as serving as a resident or student teacher in a supervising teacher’s classroom, certain candidates can count observation hours included in in-person or online courses, as well as observation and delivery of high-quality tutoring.

EPPs are responsible both for ensuring the teachers supervising the 100 hours of clinical experience meet required criteria, and for reporting evidence of compliance to PED. According to PED staff, all EPPs have made assurances for provision of the 100-hour requirement, and all assurances have been reviewed and approved.

Although not included in the memo, LEAs have a critical role to play in the success of teacher preparation. Most EPPs place their teacher candidates in schools across the state to complete their clinical experiences. Because of this, they rely on school leaders who know their staff well to help recommend supervising teachers. School leaders can also help ensure supervising teachers are modeling high-quality instruction, implementing HQIM, and building positive relationships with teacher candidates.

In August 2026, PED published new educator preparation literacy standards for kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers. Through a collaborative process with the literacy standards and articulation working group, composed of EPP faculty, and with support from the Higher Education Department (HED) and literacy experts, PED published new [standards](#) grounded in the following principles:

- Science of reading and evidence-based instruction;
- Alignment with state legislation and policy;
- Commitment to New Mexico’s diverse learners;
- Equitable access to high-quality instruction; and
- Statewide coherence and consistency in educator preparation.

PED describes the standards as being foundational rather than comprehensive and states that EPPs are expected to ensure candidates are introduced to and develop competencies across the standards, while recognizing expertise deepens over time.

Table 1: Overview of PED Literacy Standards for Kindergarten through 8th Grade Teacher Candidates

Standards	Sub-Standards
Standard 1: Foundations of Literacy and Language Development	Literacy development
	Phonological and phonemic awareness
	Phonics and word recognition
	Automatic, fluent reading
	Vocabulary
	Listening and reading comprehension
	Spelling and written expression
	Integration of foundational literacy components
Standard 2: Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction	Standards-aligned instruction
	Structured literacy instruction
	Knowledge of diverse reading profiles
Standard 3: Literacy Skills Assessment and Evaluation	N/A

Source: New Mexico Educator Preparation Literacy Standards K-8

In August 2026, PED contracted with Deans for Impact to facilitate literacy coursework revisions at EPPs. [Deans for Impact](#), a national organization focused on supporting best practice implementation at EPPs, will help facilitate literacy coursework and syllabi revisions at EPPs with programs leading to kindergarten through eighth-grade (K-8) teacher licensure. All EPPs must provide faculty to engage in the 10-month-long process to ensure course alignment with the new literacy standards by June 2027. Deans for Impact will facilitate professional learning for program faculty and staff, provide a suite of high-quality course modules to support coursework revisions, and direct support for literacy coursework revision aligned to the state standards. Planning and coordination work began in August 2026, professional learning for faculty will continue through January 2027, and technical assistance will be provided through May 2027. The redesigned courses should be offered in SY28. Support for EPPs will be tiered based on the level of implementation each EPP is engaged in. According to PED, one program has more intensive, ongoing support provided by TPI-US, a nonprofit organization that evaluates and inspects preparation programs.

Implementation of 2026 Legislation

The High Quality Literacy Instruction Act expands requirements for EPPs to prepare teacher candidates to teach structured literacy, as shown by the red box on the next page.

Laws 2026, Chapter 54 further specifies how EPPs must prepare teacher candidates to support English learners. While legislation passed in 2025 specified literacy instruction for English language learners should include evidence-based practices for biliteracy, 2026 amendments expand this requirement to include English learners *and* students in bilingual or dual language programs, and specify evidence-based practices may include bilingual and dual language instructional models that develop literacy in English and students’ home languages.

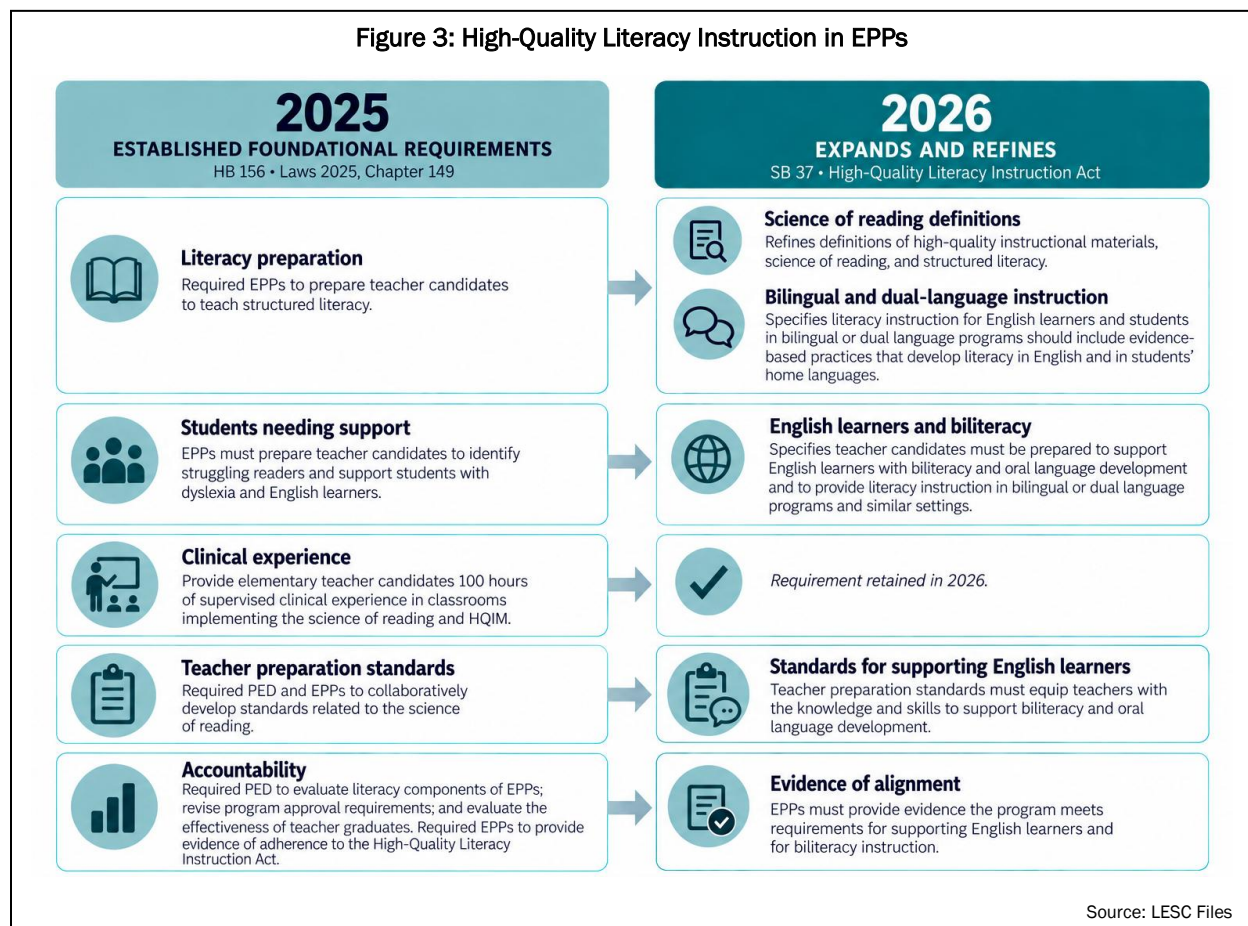
The 2025 legislation already noted this instruction should be differentiated and culturally and linguistically responsive.

New Literacy Requirements for EPPs

1. EPPs must ensure teacher candidates graduate from their programs prepared to support English learner students through biliteracy and oral-language development.
2. PED must ensure teacher preparation standards explicitly address biliteracy and English-learner knowledge and skill. EPPs must implement these new standards.

The 2025 legislation required EPPs to equip teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to support English learners. Laws 2026, Chapter 54 specified this support should include biliteracy and oral language development and that teacher candidates should be prepared to provide literacy instruction in bilingual or dual language programs and similar settings. See **Figure 3: High-Quality Literacy Instruction in EPPs** to see how literacy requirements for EPPs were refined and expanded from 2025 to 2026.

Figure 3: High-Quality Literacy Instruction in EPPs



In August 2026, PED published a memo requiring EPPs to expand bilingual and heritage language faculty. The memo directs EPPs to actively recruit, retain, and support faculty with expertise in bilingual education, multilingual education, Indigenous and heritage language instruction, and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Likewise, PED directed EPPs to strengthen recruitment, preparation, and retention of future K-12 bilingual and heritage language teachers. These directives align with PED's *Martinez-Yazzie* Action Plan submitted to the First Judicial District Court. As of writing, however, the Court has not ruled on the finality of the

action plan submitted by PED. PED will convene EPPs periodically to share promising practices, discuss barriers and challenges, review progress toward goals, and identify areas for technical assistance. In discussions with LESC staff, EPP staff and faculty expressed strong commitment to these goals, but requested additional information from PED, including explicit goals and timelines. They also said hiring additional faculty with these qualifications may be difficult without dedicated funding.

Laws 2026, Chapter 54 requires teacher literacy preparation standards to address biliteracy. Specifically, the standards must ensure teacher candidates graduate with the necessary knowledge and skills to support English learners with biliteracy and oral language development and to provide literacy instruction in bilingual or dual language programs and similar settings. PED's new K-8 educator preparation literacy standards do already include some standards specific to supporting English learners and biliteracy. PED also includes biliteracy and culturally and linguistically responsive instruction as a learning outcome for both higher education literacy courses (foundations of early literacy development and literacy instruction in upper elementary and middle grades). However, PED staff indicate they are currently reviewing the standards with the expanded requirements of Chapter 54 and may make further changes to better align the standards to the legislation. PED staff also indicated that Deans for Impact will incorporate these new requirements in its reworking of EPP K-8 literacy coursework.

From 2023 to 2026, New Mexico EPPs improved dramatically in a national review of educator literacy preparation. The National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ), a nonpartisan research organization, evaluated literacy coursework at traditional undergraduate and graduate elementary teacher preparation programs across the country in [2023](#). At that time, only three of the nine programs reviewed in New Mexico received an 'A' grade. The reviewers found New Mexico programs were most likely to cover comprehension and least likely to cover phonemic awareness.

The report recommended New Mexico set standards for teacher preparation that specifically address the five core components of the science of reading and require the review of reading course syllabi as part of preparation program renewal. The Legislature has since required both.

NCTQ again reviewed these programs in [2026](#) and awarded all but one of the New Mexico programs reviewed an "A" or "A+." New Mexico was also highlighted as leading the nation in preparing teachers to support English learners. See **Table 2: NCTQ Review of Literacy in Traditional Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs**. These improvements reflect substantial efforts from the Legislature, PED, and EPP faculty and staff.

Table 2: NCTQ Review of Literacy in Traditional Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs

EPP	Program Level	2023 Rating	2026 Rating
Eastern New Mexico University	Undergraduate	A	C
New Mexico Highlands University	Undergraduate	B	A+
New Mexico State University	Undergraduate	B	A+
New Mexico State University	Graduate	B	A+
Northern New Mexico College	Undergraduate	D	A
University of New Mexico	Undergraduate	D	A
University of New Mexico	Graduate	F	A
Western New Mexico University	Undergraduate	A+	A+
Western New Mexico University	Graduate	A+	A+

Source: NCTQ

Policy Considerations and Recommendations

LESC staff recommend the Legislature continue to monitor PED and EPP implementation of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act through full implementation in SY28. PED is actively working on implementation of many components of Laws 2026, Chapter 54, including but not limited to establishing statewide guidelines for literacy

instructional coaches. In August 2026, PED released a draft [Comprehensive Coaching Framework](#) to guide literacy coaching across the state that the department will revisit throughout the year with a final update scheduled for summer 2027.

The Legislature should...

- Continue to monitor PED implementation of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act, including requirements that do not take effect until SY28, such as the assignment of literacy instructional coaches to public elementary schools that have an average reading proficiency in the bottom quartile for reading proficiency in the state; and
- Continue to monitor EPP implementation of the High Quality Literacy Instruction Act.