



# ROBERT CARROLL

ASSEMBLYMEMBER // 44<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT



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## Literacy Education in NYC: Achieving Student Success and Empowerment



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# Contents

- Background..... 4**
- The Solution: Implementing Structured Literacy With Additional Supports System-Wide..... 7**
  - Keys to Success ..... 8
- Budget Considerations..... 9**
- Structured Literacy is Progressive Pedagogy .....10**
- Dyslexia and Literacy Initiatives, Resources and Media .....11**
  - Legislation ..... 11
  - Budget Initiatives .....12
  - Oversight ..... 12
  - Advocacy .....13

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*“Thanks to funding from Assemblymember Robert Carroll, PS 107 in Park Slope, Brooklyn has been able to completely transform the way we teach reading and writing to align with what we now understand about how the brain learns literacy skills. The impact has been nothing short of remarkable: in the past, our literacy proficiency rates hovered around 80%, but with these shifts, we are now approaching 95% proficiency. The gains have been especially significant for our students with disabilities, whose proficiency rates soared from 52% to 80% in just one year. Assemblymember Carroll’s grant allowed us to train our teachers in the Science of Reading, adopt evidence-based curricula and decodable texts, and provide sustained professional learning to ensure these practices take root. This investment has transformed outcomes for all our students and set a new standard for what is possible in literacy instruction.”*

*Joanna Cohen, Principal, PS 107, Park Slope,  
Brooklyn*

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# Background

**New York City is Failing to Teach its Children to Read:** According to the 2024 results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 72% of New York City fourth graders were reading below the proficient standard (i.e. below grade level), with the figure for Black students 83% below the proficient standard and Latino students 87% below the proficient standard.

Reading is intrinsic to both personal growth, success in school, and economic opportunity and illiteracy correlates with America’s shockingly high rates of poverty, depression, and incarceration. Research shows that students who can’t read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely not to graduate from high school, high school dropouts are up to four times more likely to experience being arrested, needing government assistance, and using illicit substances or having poor health by age twenty-seven.

Whole language (later repackaged as “balanced literacy”) methodologies were for many years beginning in the 1980s the most widely used approaches to teach reading in the United States. These practices relied on the unproven theory that children are “natural readers” and if they are exposed to books that match their interest and abilities, they will develop reading skills over time. The most prominent proponent of whole language/balanced literacy has been Lucy Calkins of Columbia University’s Teachers College who successfully sold her curriculum to schools throughout the country. A survey by the organization Ed-Trust NY in 2023 indicated that Lucy Calkins “Units of Study” was the most widely used literacy curriculum by school districts in New York State. Other influential whole language/balanced literacy evangelists, education professors Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, have advanced the harmful but widely-used practice of “three cueing” that promotes students using meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues when attempting to read an unknown word – in practice asking students to guess at the word. The results of the NAEP as well as state tests are clear evidence that whole language and balanced literacy approaches are highly ineffective; whole language and balanced literacy are not supported by the “science of reading.”

The science of reading refers to the body of interdisciplinary research regarding how children and adults learn to read and write. Evidence-based approaches grounded in the science of reading utilize a structured and sequential curriculum that rests on the five pillars of literacy: phonics - the ability to associate sounds with letters and blend them together to form words (decoding); phonemic awareness - the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words; fluency - the ability to read quickly and accurately with appropriate expression; vocabulary - the knowledge of words and their meanings; comprehension - the ability to understand and make meaning from what is read. It is important to note that evidence-based reading pedagogy means not only an emphasis on phonics and “skills building” but also requires a commitment to knowledge building and rich subject area content.

Since 2013, forty states and the District of Columbia have passed laws or implemented policies related to the science of reading / evidence-based reading instruction, but New York State has been slow to take up reforms. New York State's failure to put in place statewide standards for teaching literacy based on what is known to work and leaving how best to teach literacy up to local school districts has kept many students back and been particularly harmful for Black and multi-language learners. Children with Dyslexia, which makeup as many as 20% of all students, are also especially likely to not get the instruction they need. According to the 2024 results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 72% of New York City fourth graders were reading below grade level, with the figure for Black students 83% and Latino students 87%; 46% of all New York City fourth graders, 58% of Black fourth graders and 62% of Latino fourth graders scored below the "basic level" meaning they struggled to read at all.

Mayor Adams and his former Schools Chancellor David Banks rightly focused on the need to reform New York City's approach to teaching literacy. Early in his first term Mayor Adams announced that there would be universal screening for dyslexia in NYC public schools and launched a pilot program with two schools offering programming specifically for students with dyslexia. This was followed by the launch of the "NYC Reads" initiative requiring schools to adopt literacy curriculum that follow the science of reading, moving the City away from whole language/balanced literacy.

Unfortunately, the follow-through in the Adams Administration on these initiatives has been inadequate. **The next Mayor should continue the use of evidence-based approaches, but will have to revamp and build on what has already been done.**

While the societal and individual costs of illiteracy are well documented, the City also pays a very direct cost for the failure of our public schools to put in place a system that teaches all kids to read. Under federal law, students with dyslexia and other disabilities are entitled to a "free appropriate public education." In practice this has meant parents who have the means and wherewithal end up suing the DOE for private placement for their children and the City ends up paying hundreds of millions each year as a result. The majority of these students are children struggling with dyslexia and other phonologically based learning issues.

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*"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."*

*International Dyslexia Association*

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Parents with children with dyslexia and related learning disorders continue to feel like their only recourse is to sue the City because they cannot get even basic services for their children. This places an incredible financial strain on families and is also discriminatory, in that those with limited resources are not able to pursue redress. This adversarial cycle will never stop unless leadership from City Hall demands it.

# The Solution: Implementing Structured Literacy With Additional Supports System-Wide

NYC DOE must implement a system-wide plan to train teachers on the science of reading, screen children for dyslexia, provide these students with necessary interventions, and commit to structured literacy programming for all students. The initiative would be phased-in starting with three to four schools in every district.

1. The Department of Education should provide ongoing support for elementary school teachers in the science of reading, including practices to specifically support dyslexic individuals. DOE should also deepen the focus on structured reading instruction in its alternative teacher preparation programs.
2. School days in the early grades must be centered around literacy, integrating literacy instruction into classes like science and social studies as well. Intensive structured literacy programming should be implemented in phases starting with 3-4 schools in every district that would serve as models. Whole language/balanced literacy materials should be replaced with decodable readers in classroom libraries for the purpose of literacy instruction.
3. The City should implement universal, yearly in-school screening of all students in kindergarten through second grade to identify students at risk for dyslexia.

Because children in early elementary school are in a critical phase of brain development, and scientific data show that the achievement gap between typical and dyslexic readers is present as early as first grade and persists, it is crucial that intervention and supports be provided to struggling students as early as possible. When teachers can identify students most at risk for dyslexia, they can make informed decisions about instructional techniques that will be helpful or begin the process of referring a student for a full evaluation. However, New York City DOE's protocols result in limiting the diagnosis of dyslexia when children have been referred for full evaluation by DOE personnel. This means that the only way for families to confirm their child's dyslexia is through private neuropsychological exams, which are unaffordable to the vast majority of households exacerbating disparities in who gets services.

4. The Department of Education should establish targeted dyslexia intervention programs using an Orton-Gillingham or other similar approach that combines direct, multi-sensory teaching strategies with structured, sequential phonics-based instruction. Multisensory, structured language education is effective for all students, but children with dyslexia will need targeted interventions that require extra small group instruction. In addition, students with dyslexia may require a classroom setting that is intentionally organized around the

specific needs of a dyslexic student. Such programs would support students in developing strong literacy skills with the goal that they can successfully re-enter a less restrictive classroom setting. Separate dyslexia intervention programs within district schools could also serve as teaching institutes in their own right, where teachers in training can complete a residency with a master teacher who is an expert in reading instruction for dyslexic students.

5. The Mayor should convene a small expert led literacy advisory group, led by either the Chancellor or Deputy Mayor for Education. This advisory group should work with institutions with deep expertise like the Windward Institute and the Haskins Global Literacy Hub at Yale.

### **Keys to Success**

- Appointment of a new schools chancellor who has demonstrated real commitment to and knowledge of evidence-based reading pedagogy
- Appointment of a high-level official in City Hall committed to literacy programming in our schools, libraries, community-based organizations, prisons, and pediatric offices to ensure sustained and coordinated effort.
- High quality professional development for teachers and other staff on the science of reading and multisensory structured language education

# Budget Considerations

**Successfully implementing a model for literacy education that meets the needs of most children will largely pay for itself**

Under the federal “Individual with Disabilities Education Act,” children with special needs are entitled to a “free and appropriate education.” The 1993 United States Supreme Court’s decision in *Florence County School District Four v. Carter* affirmed that parents who disagree with their child’s individualized education plan (IEP) developed by their public school district can enroll their child in a private school they believe better meets their child’s special needs. Parents can then seek reimbursement from the school district for tuition costs.

In the City Fiscal Year that ended June 30, 2025, the total budget for Carter Cases was over \$1.3 billion. In comparison, a preliminary estimate indicates that one educator specializing in dyslexia interventions should be hired for every one-hundred general education students. This would cost approximately \$410 million annually.

Fully implementing structured literacy programming and dyslexia screening and interventions throughout the New York City school system, will result in significant savings from a reduction in Carter Cases, as children will get the services they need within the public schools.

## **Structured Literacy is Progressive Pedagogy**

The debate around science of reading/structured literacy versus whole language/balanced literacy methodologies has been sometimes mischaracterized and misunderstood as “back to basics” versus “child centered / progressive” approaches to teaching literacy. Implementing structured literacy with fidelity requires in fact the use of rich and culturally responsive content. Through the dedicated application of structured literacy children from all backgrounds are far more likely to become fluent readers empowering them to grapple with complex topics in the later grades. Literacy skills are the fundamental building blocks of progressive pedagogy. There can be no progressive education in the later grades without students having strong reading skills; such skills will enable students from diverse backgrounds to not only be successful in school but to be able to successfully navigate what education theorist Lisa Delpit has referred to as the “culture of power.” This will empower all children both in terms of personal growth and to have the opportunity to pursue the full range of academic and career choices that they may aspire to.

# Dyslexia and Literacy Initiatives, Resources and Media

## Legislation

### Dyslexia Task Force – Enacted

A.133 as amended by A.8492 established a statewide dyslexia task force, chaired by the State Commissioner of Education, with the mandate to examine and report on appropriate and effective evidence-based screening, intervention, and support for students with and at risk of dyslexia and dysgraphia. The Task Force, which consisted of 49 members, 12 of which were recommended by Assemblymember Carroll, included teachers, school leaders, education experts, and individuals with or family members of people with dyslexia or dysgraphia. It met throughout the summer and fall of 2024 and held three public hearings taking testimony from over one hundred members of the public. [The Final Report of the Task Force](#) released in December 2024 included fourteen recommendations pertaining to screening methods, reading interventions and other educational supports for dyslexia and dysgraphia for students in kindergarten through grade five.

### The Dyslexia Diagnosis Access Act – Enacted

**A.2898 as amended by A.419** – This legislation mandated that private health insurance policies pay for neuropsychological exams for the purpose of diagnosing dyslexia. Students are unlikely to receive the intervention required to overcome dyslexia without a positive diagnosis. Neuropsychological exams currently may cost in excess of six thousand dollars and are typically not paid for by health insurance, making them unaffordable to many families.

[Private Insurers Must Now Cover Dyslexia Testing in New York. The New York Times. December 11, 2024.](#)

[Private insurers must now cover dyslexia evaluations in New York. The Gothamist. December 11, 2024.](#)

### **A.2687/S.5569 (R.Carroll/Fahy) – Establishes a center for dyslexia and dysgraphia - Passed Legislature, Pending Governor’s Signature**

The Final Report of the State Task Force on Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, which was convened last year pursuant to Assemblymember Carroll’s legislation, included the recommendation for the creation of a state level center for dyslexia and dysgraphia. Enshrining this center in law will ensure the State maintains best practices over time so that children struggling with dyslexia and dysgraphia can become successful students. \$250,000 was included in the just Enacted Fiscal 2025-26 Budget to start the Center!

### **A.2721/S.7615 (R.Carroll/Bailey) – Expands Medicaid coverage to include neuropsychological exams for dyslexia**

In 2024 the Legislature passed Assemblymember Carroll's bill the Dyslexia Diagnosis Access Act, which was then signed into law by Governor Hochul. That legislation requires that private insurance policies pay for neuropsychological exams for the purpose of diagnosing dyslexia. Medicaid eligible families should receive comparable benefits. The cost of neuropsychological exams is a major barrier to students getting an appropriate diagnosis and receiving the interventions needed to overcome dyslexia.

### **A.5835/S.8044 (R.Carroll/Bynoe) – Establishes the libraries literacy education guidance act**

The FY 24-25 Enacted Budget included Article VII language drawing on Assemblymember Carroll's Right to Read bill requiring the State Education Department (SED) to establish statewide standards for evidence-based and scientifically based instructional practices for the teaching of childhood literacy. This legislation is intended to complement this initiative by promoting the awareness and use of evidence-based literacy practices and programming for both children and adults in libraries throughout the State.

### **A.37/S.6844 (R.Carroll/Jackson) – New York Individuals with Dyslexia Education Act (NYIDEA)**

This bill would overhaul how the State addresses the needs of children with dyslexia by creating statewide standards for dyslexia screening and interventions for K-5 students.

### **A.78/S7544 (R.Carroll/Hoylman-Sigal) – Right to Read Act**

This bill takes a comprehensive approach towards reforming how early childhood literacy policy in the State. It would establish statewide standards for teaching literacy based on the science of reading / evidence-based curricula.

## **Budget Initiatives**

- \$280,000 to schools in AD 44 for structured literacy programming,
- \$50,000 to the Brooklyn Public Library to align their adult literacy programming with the science of reading
- \$1.3 million in to support the Promise Project at Columbia University, which provides neuropsychological exams and teacher training regarding reading disorders for young children in marginalized and underserved communities in New York City.
- \$250,000 in the State's Fiscal 2025-26 Budget to jump-start the Center for Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, making the passage of this bill especially timely.

## **Oversight**

1. Assemblymember Carroll questions Mayor Bill de Blasio, Mayor, during a joint Assembly-Senate 2020-21 budget hearing on Local/General Government. February 2020.

<https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Robert-C-Carroll/video/15018/#videos>

2. Assemblymember Carroll questions Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner, New York State Education Department during a joint legislative 2023-24 budget hearing on education. February 2023.

<https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Robert-C-Carroll/video/>

## Advocacy

1. Assemblymember Carroll: *Opinion – New York City’s Next Mayor Can’t go Back on Literacy*. February 2025.

<https://www.cityandstateny.com/opinion/2025/02/opinion-new-york-citys-next-mayor-cant-go-back-literacy/402678/>

2. Assemblymember Carroll’s Online Petition and Video Calling for Universal Dyslexia Screening and Funding for Interventions. October 2018.

<https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Robert-C-Carroll/story/83717>

3. Assemblymember Robert Carroll and John J. Russell. *Commentary: Changes are needed in the way schools teach reading*. Times Union. March 2019.

<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Commentary-Changes-are-needed-in-the-way-schools-13689995.php>

4. Assemblymember Carroll successfully lobbies for dyslexia screening at two local schools. January 2020.

<https://www.thecity.nyc/education/2020/1/10/21210606/new-dyslexia-risk-screening-at-two-brooklyn-schools-for-2-000>

5. Assemblymember Robert Carroll and New York City Department of Education Announce Implementation of Shaywitz Dyslexia Screen. January 2020.

<https://dyslexia.yale.edu/assemblymember-robert-carroll-new-york-city-department-education-announce-implementation-shaywitz-dyslexiascreen/>

6. Assemblymember Carroll joins Mayor Adams and School Chancellor Banks in announcing citywide dyslexia screening and intervention initiative. May 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/12/nyregion/adams-dyslexia-nyc-schools.html>

7. Assemblymember Carroll and advocate Brooke Lyn Sicignano with Erroll Louis on “Inside City Hall.” May 2022.  
<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/inside-city-hall/2022/05/21/advocates-push-for-dyslexia-screening-for-students-statewide>
  
8. Assemblymember Robert Carroll and Jamie Williamson. *Revamping how we teach reading must be fundamental to NYC DOE reforms.* August 2022.  
<https://www.cityandstateny.com/opinion/2022/08/opinion-revamping-how-we-teach-reading-must-be-fundamental-nyc-doe-reforms/375859/>
  
9. Assemblymember Carroll organizes petition urging Governor Hochul to sign Dyslexia Task Force Act. October 2022.  
<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2022/10/10/hundreds-sign-petition-urging-hochul-sign-dyslexia-task-force-act>
  
10. Assemblymember Carroll and Schools Chancellor David Banks announce expansion of structured reading pilot program. February 2023.  
<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/education/2023/02/10/city-schools-to-expand-dyslexia-reading-pilot-program>



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