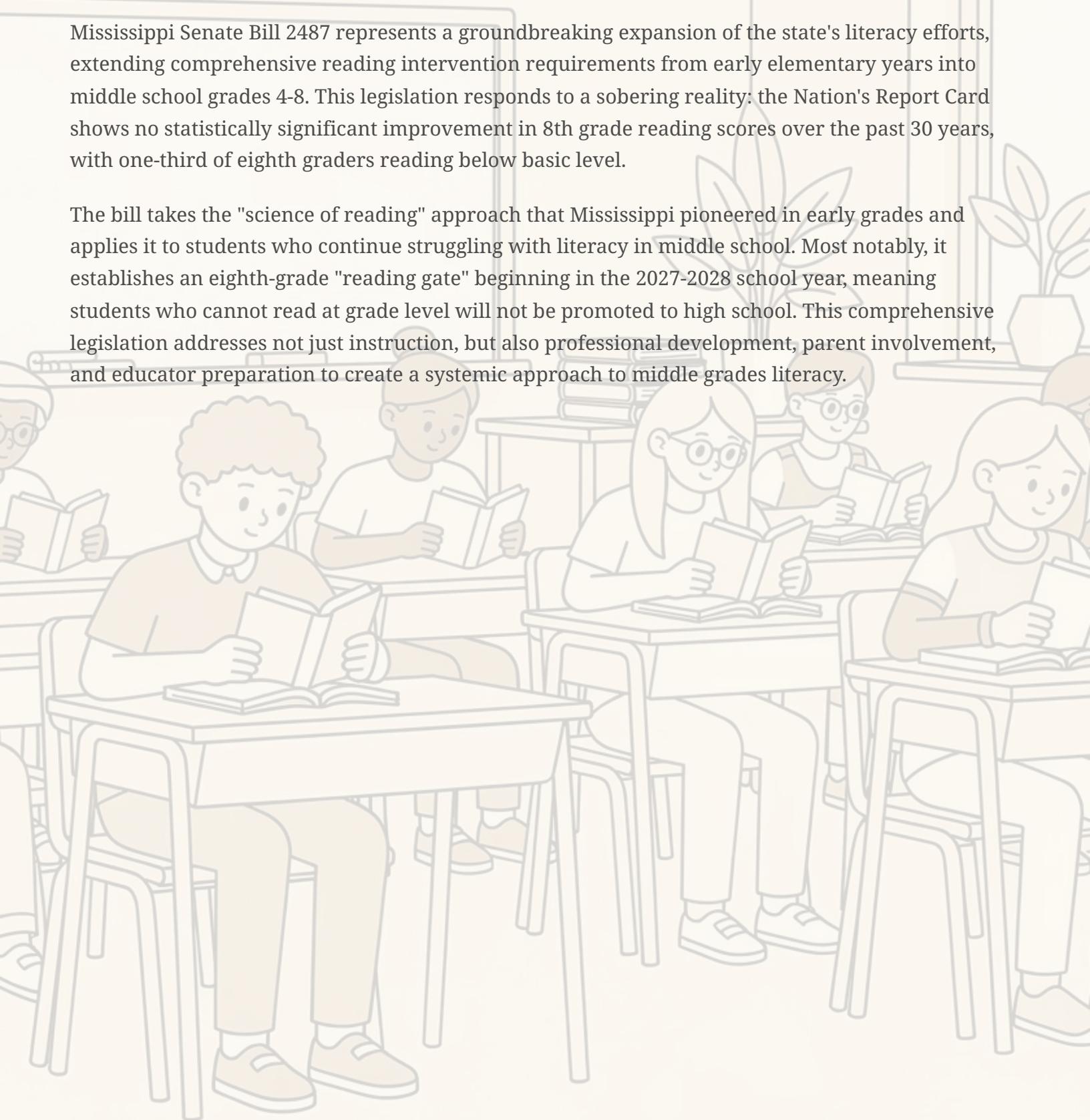
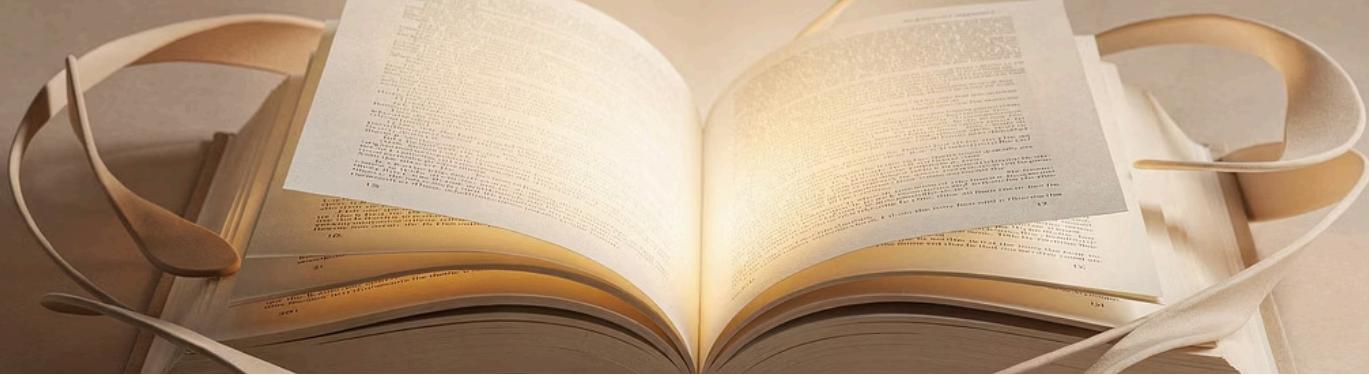


Mississippi Senate Bill 2487: Middle Grades Literacy Intervention

Mississippi Senate Bill 2487 represents a groundbreaking expansion of the state's literacy efforts, extending comprehensive reading intervention requirements from early elementary years into middle school grades 4-8. This legislation responds to a sobering reality: the Nation's Report Card shows no statistically significant improvement in 8th grade reading scores over the past 30 years, with one-third of eighth graders reading below basic level.

The bill takes the "science of reading" approach that Mississippi pioneered in early grades and applies it to students who continue struggling with literacy in middle school. Most notably, it establishes an eighth-grade "reading gate" beginning in the 2027-2028 school year, meaning students who cannot read at grade level will not be promoted to high school. This comprehensive legislation addresses not just instruction, but also professional development, parent involvement, and educator preparation to create a systemic approach to middle grades literacy.





The Reading Crisis in Middle School

For three decades, eighth grade reading achievement has remained stagnant despite numerous educational reforms and initiatives. The Nation's Report Card data reveals a persistent challenge: approximately one-third of eighth graders are reading below basic level, lacking the fundamental literacy skills needed for high school success and beyond.

This crisis extends beyond simple reading mechanics. Students who struggle with literacy in middle school face cascading challenges across all content areas—science, social studies, mathematics—where reading comprehension is essential for learning. The inability to read grade-level texts creates barriers to accessing curriculum, participating in classroom discussions, and completing assignments independently.

Mississippi's decision to extend its successful early literacy framework into middle grades acknowledges that reading development doesn't end in third grade. Many students need continued, intensive support to develop the sophisticated literacy skills required for complex academic texts, critical thinking, and college and career readiness.

1

30 years

without significant improvement in 8th grade reading scores

2

1 in 3

eighth graders reading below basic level

3

Grades 4-8

now covered by comprehensive intervention requirements

Individual Reading Plans: Personalized Support



Student-Centric Approach

At the heart of Senate Bill 2487 is the requirement for Individual Reading Plans (IRPs) for any student in grades 4-8 who shows reading deficiencies. These plans must be developed within 30 days of identification, ensuring swift action when students need help. Unlike generic intervention programs, IRPs are tailored to each student's specific needs, strengths, and challenges.



Collaborative Development

The development process is intentionally collaborative, bringing together teachers, interventionists, principals, and parents to create a comprehensive support strategy. Each IRP must describe the specific, evidence-based interventions the student will receive, including the frequency, duration, and intensity of support. This ensures accountability and clarity about what help students will receive and how progress will be measured.



Dynamic & Responsive

IRPs are living documents, not one-time paperwork exercises. The legislation requires annual review and adjustment based on student progress, recognizing that effective intervention is responsive and dynamic. If a student isn't making adequate progress, the team must reconvene to modify the approach, trying different strategies until they find what works for that individual learner.



Parent Partnership and Communication

1

Rapid Notification

Parents must be notified in writing within 10 business days when their child is identified with a reading deficiency, ensuring families are informed quickly.

2

Home Language Support

All notifications must be provided in the family's home language, removing communication barriers and ensuring all parents can understand their child's needs.

1

Comprehensive Information

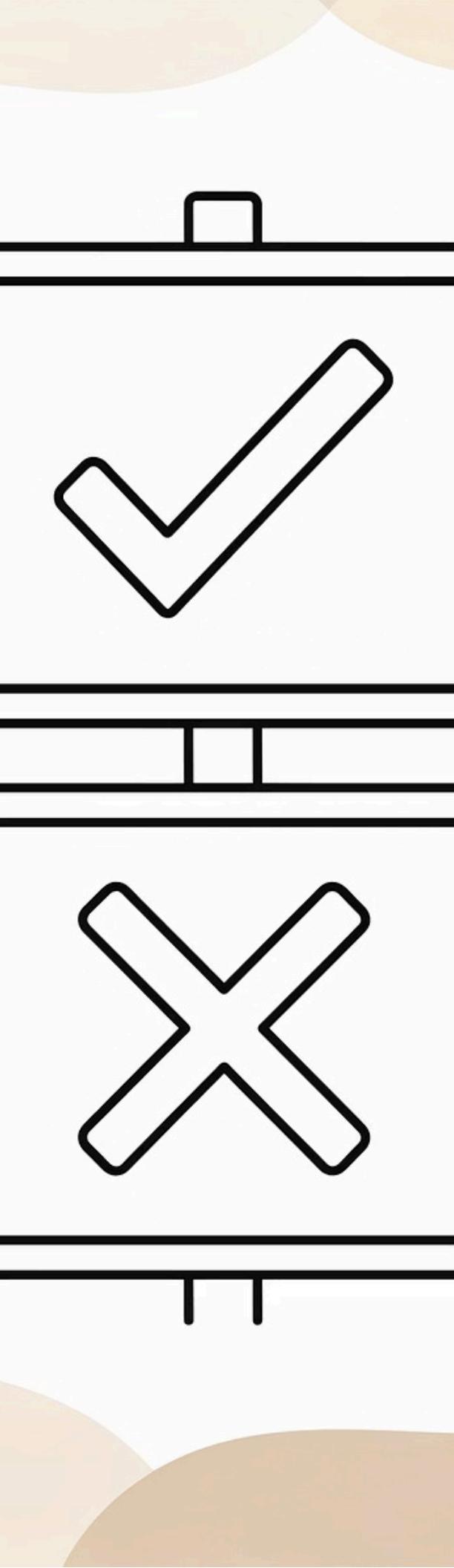
Notifications include descriptions of current services, proposed interventions, and specific strategies parents can use at home to support their child's reading development.

2

Collaborative Planning

Parents participate directly in developing their child's Individual Reading Plan, contributing insights about their child's strengths and needs.

The legislation recognizes that effective literacy intervention requires partnership between school and home. By providing parents with clear information, practical strategies, and a voice in decision-making, the bill ensures families are empowered to support their children's reading development. This approach acknowledges that parents are essential partners in their child's education, not passive recipients of school decisions.



Science of Reading: Evidence-Based Instruction

What's Required

Senate Bill 2487 mandates that all reading instruction align with evidence-based strategies grounded in decades of research. Instruction must be explicit and systematic, covering six essential components:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics and decoding
- Reading fluency
- Vocabulary development
- Morphology (word structure)
- Reading comprehension strategies

This comprehensive approach ensures students develop all the skills needed for proficient reading, not just some of them.

What's Banned

The bill explicitly prohibits "balanced literacy" approaches, including the "three-cueing system" that encourages students to guess at words using meaning, structure, and visual cues. Research has consistently shown this approach to be ineffective and even harmful for struggling readers.

Instead of teaching students to guess, the science of reading approach teaches them to decode words accurately using phonics knowledge. This gives students the tools to read any word they encounter, building confidence and independence rather than reliance on context clues or memorization.

Professional Development: Building Educator Capacity

Senate Bill 2487 recognizes that effective implementation requires comprehensive professional learning for all educators who work with middle grades students. The State Department of Education must provide training for district leaders, principals, content-area teachers across all subjects, special education teachers, literacy coaches, dyslexia therapists, and interventionists. This broad scope reflects a fundamental principle: literacy is everyone's responsibility, not just the job of English teachers.

The legislation emphasizes job-embedded coaching as a key component of professional development. Rather than traditional workshop-style training where teachers attend a session and then return to their classrooms, job-embedded coaching brings trained coaches on-site to work directly with teachers. Coaches provide demonstration lessons, engage in co-teaching, observe classroom instruction, and offer immediate, specific feedback. This approach recognizes that changing instructional practice requires ongoing support, not just information delivery.



Demonstration Lessons

Coaches model effective instructional strategies in real classroom settings with actual students.

Co-Teaching

Coaches and teachers work together to plan and deliver instruction, sharing expertise.

Observation and Feedback

Coaches observe teachers and provide immediate, actionable feedback for improvement.

Assessment and Data-Driven Decision Making

School districts must use state-approved screening tools administered three times per year to identify students who need intervention. These assessments provide regular checkpoints throughout the school year, allowing educators to monitor progress and adjust support as needed. The screening tools must measure both fluency—how quickly and accurately students can read—and comprehension—how well they understand what they read.

For students showing difficulties, the assessments include additional diagnostic capabilities to pinpoint specific areas of struggle. Is the student having trouble with decoding multisyllabic words? Struggling with vocabulary? Having difficulty making inferences? These diagnostic insights guide the selection of targeted interventions that address each student's particular needs.

Critically, the bill emphasizes using multiple data points to make decisions about student needs, not relying on a single test score. Teachers consider screening results alongside classroom performance, work samples, and other assessments to develop a comprehensive picture of each student's reading abilities. This multi-faceted approach ensures decisions are based on thorough evidence, not a snapshot from one testing day.

01

Screen 3x Yearly

Fall, winter, spring checkpoints to identify students.

02

Diagnose Needs

Identify specific reading challenges and areas of struggle.

03

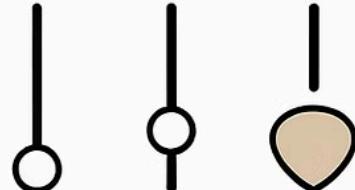
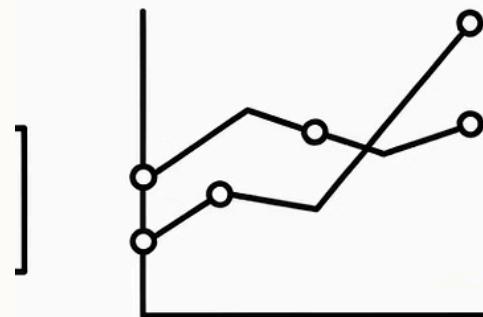
Target Interventions

Implement personalized support strategies based on diagnostic insights.

04

Monitor Progress

Continuously adjust support based on ongoing assessment results.



The Eighth-Grade Reading Gate

Starting with the 2027-2028 school year, Senate Bill 2487 establishes a consequential accountability measure: students who score at the lowest achievement level in reading on the state assessment or an approved alternative cannot be promoted to ninth grade. This "reading gate" reflects the recognition that students who cannot read proficiently face overwhelming challenges in high school, where reading demands increase dramatically across all content areas.

The retention policy includes several "good cause" exemptions recognizing that some students may need promotion despite reading difficulties. English language learners with less than two years in an ELL program may be exempt, acknowledging they are still developing English proficiency. Students with certain disabilities whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) indicate the assessment is inappropriate may also be exempt. Additionally, students who have already been retained twice cannot be held back again, preventing students from being stuck indefinitely in middle school.

Teacher Documents

Classroom teacher must document the student's reading performance and intervention history.

Principal Reviews

Building principal reviews all documentation and makes a recommendation.

Super. Approves

District superintendent must approve any retention decision.

Parents Have Authority

Parents retain final say and may choose retention even if school recommends promotion.

The decision-making process for retention is deliberately multi-layered, requiring documentation from the teacher, review by the principal, and approval by the district superintendent. Notably, parents retain the final authority—they may choose to have their child retained even if school administrators recommend promotion, recognizing that families know their children best.

Implementation Timeline and Accountability



Effective Date

Act takes effect July 1, 2026



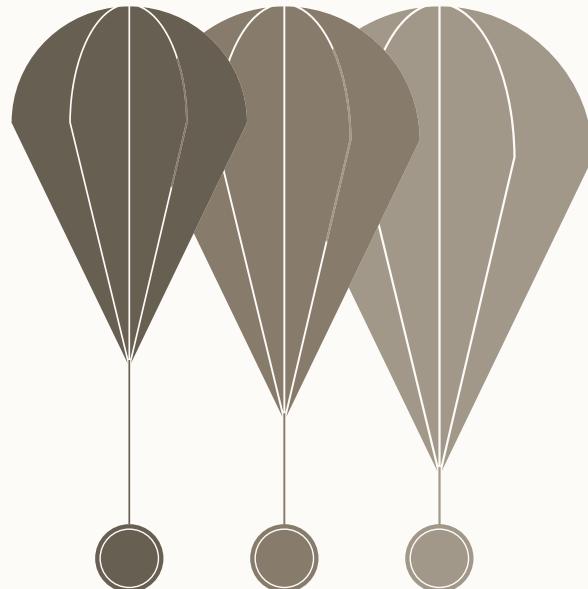
Retention Begins

2027–2028 school year starts eighth-grade retention



Annual Reporting

District reports due October 1 each year



The legislation provides a clear implementation timeline, with the act taking effect July 1, 2026, giving districts time to prepare systems, train staff, and establish intervention programs. The eighth-grade retention policy begins the following school year (2027-2028), allowing an additional year for students currently in middle school to receive intensive intervention before the gate takes effect.

School districts must begin annual reporting by October 1 following the act's implementation. These reports must include comprehensive data on the number and percentage of students performing below grade level, the number receiving interventions, and the number retained at each grade level. This transparency ensures the public can track implementation and outcomes, holding schools accountable for supporting struggling readers.

The legislation acknowledges that implementation will require "sufficient funding" from the Legislature, though specific amounts are not detailed in the bill. This recognition is important—effective literacy intervention requires resources for professional development, intervention materials, additional staff, and assessment tools. The success of Senate Bill 2487 will depend not just on the requirements it establishes, but on the state's commitment to funding those requirements adequately.

Preparing Future Educators

All Content-Area Teachers

Social studies, science, and ELA teachers grades 4-8 must complete training in evidence-based reading instruction before certification.

Required Training

"AIM Pathways to Proficient Reading" or an equivalent program approved by the State Department of Education.

Core Principle

Literacy is not just the responsibility of English teachers—it's everyone's job.

This requirement reflects the legislation's core principle that literacy is not just the responsibility of English teachers—it's everyone's job. A science teacher needs to understand how to support students struggling to read their textbook. A social studies teacher must know how to help students decode complex historical documents. By requiring all content-area teacher candidates to learn about reading instruction, the bill ensures the next generation of educators enters the classroom prepared to support literacy development across all subjects.

The bill also carefully defines key terms, distinguishing between accommodations that change how students access information without lowering expectations and the comprehensive support system it envisions. It defines dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin, emphasizing that reading difficulties can stem from multiple causes requiring different interventions. This definitional precision ensures educators understand the diverse needs of struggling readers and can provide appropriately targeted support.

Senate Bill 2487 represents a comprehensive, systemic approach to middle grades literacy that addresses instruction, intervention, professional development, parent involvement, and educator preparation. Its success will depend on sustained commitment, adequate funding, and the collective effort of educators, families, and policymakers working together to ensure every Mississippi student develops the literacy skills needed for success in high school and beyond.

