



RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK
Graduate School of Education



Rutgers Center for Literacy Development

VOL XVI. NO. 2

Letter from the Director

What do you wish for your class or school in 2026? I hope your wish comes true!

It is not too late to register for our PreK Literacy Today Conference on Jan. 14, 2026 at Busch Student Center at Rutgers. The flyer is below. To Register visit us at: [visit us at](http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/)
<http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/>

In 2026 We are creating family programs. Thus far we have created a Family Health and Literacy Program called Ready and Healthy for School created by Pediatricians and Educators, it has 4 sessions dealing with nutrition, exercise, bedtime routines and social and emotional Wellness. With a featured book to take home at each session, families learn about good health with literacy skills embedded. The sessions are lively with a read aloud, songs, and movement. The program evolved from a research grant. It can be delivered in English or Bilingual.

For more information see the attached flyer and be in touch with Kelly.clarida@GSE.Rutgers.edu or Lesley.Morrow@gse.rutgers.edu

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Newsletter

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A lovey little poem for the New Year.

After reading the poem, ask your students to write what they will do that is new for them in 2026 . Here is the poem to motivate ideas.

The New Year is Here

by Kenn Nesbititt in the Poetry Anthology by Vardell and Wong for the New Year
Let's Shout! Let's Cheer! We start a New Year. New dreams to chase. New goals to face.
New plans to make. New paths to take. New skills to learn. New hopes. New dreams.
Can't wait Let's Shout! Let's Cheer!
As we Start a great New Year !

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Workshop Topics Include :

Rachel Lella

Enhancing comprehension with Read Alouds for narrative and information stories

Alexandra Figueras-Daniel

Centering Multilingual Learners in Evidence Based Approaches for Developing Oral Language

Erin McBride

Developing Phonemic Awareness, Sight Words and additional Pre-K Foundational Skills

Alicia Drozd

Building Early Writers: Interactive Writing in the Preschool Classroom

Literacy in Pre-K Today Conference

**Wednesday
January 14, 2026
Busch Student Center
Rutgers University
9:30am - 3:00pm**

Keynotes:

**Muriel Rand, Ed.D. and
Lesley Mandel Morrow, Ph.D.**

Engaging Pre-K Children in Joyful Active Experiences, Using Evidence Based Literacy Strategies

Register at: <https://cvent.me/PAkR8D>



START STRONG: FAMILY LITERACY AND GOOD HEALTH PROGRAM FOR PRE-K AND KINDERGARTEN



Research-Based & Expert-Led

A grant-funded program combining early literacy and pediatric health for families to build literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, listening comprehension and fluency.



Interactive Family Evening

One in person session to introduce the family and children to school routines as well as learning self regulation. With the use of themes we engage the family in some art, music, and guided dramatic play to illustrate how they build vocabulary and knowledge. The themes we will use deal with exercise, nutrition, bedtime routines and social and emotional well being.



Extended Support with Virtual Sessions

Four follow-up online sessions continue the learning with literacy skills, and discussions about good health habits. Promoting discussion and interaction of parents and children will be emphasized. At each session a family receives a picture story book about the theme and activity pages to continue the learning. The program is bilingual in English and Spanish or English only.

About Us

Dr. Manuel Jimenez MD, MS Principal Investigator of the Research, is an Associate Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health, at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Children's Specialized Hospital.

Dr. Lesley Mandel Morrow, Ph.D. is a Distinguished Professor and coordinator of the Graduate Literacy Programs at Rutgers Graduate School of Education and the Director of the Center for Literacy Development. She has worked on the design of the program.



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The Silver Bullet for Teaching Reading Doesn't Come from a Program

Lesley M. Morrow

Director Center for Literacy Development



Happy New Year to you, your colleagues and students. People hope good things in the New Year. I hope that the New Year bring good health, happiness and peace. I also with that for all our children will be reading at or above their grade levels fluently.

When we look for successful reading achievement we look to see what programs are available that best suit the children we teach. Unfortunately, we have never found the one Silver Bullet that will teach all children to read and write. The Silver Bullet for teaching reading doesn't come from a program. According to research, it comes from good teachers.

I surveyed my graduate students who are teachers and becoming Reading Specialists, Supervisors, Interventionists, and literacy coaches to describe teachers that had a positive effect on their learning. Here are some of the responses.

The teachers that had the most positive effect on my learning:

- Challenged me to go farther with projects
- Only accepted my best
- Were passionate about teaching
- Made our class feel that we were all important to her
- Made our class feel like family
- Created bonds between students and the teacher
- Still has an impact on me years later
- Let us know that she cared about me and my classmates
- Made me want to make her proud
- Created a mutual respect in the classroom environment
- Made me feel that I was lucky to have her

...Continued

The Silver Bullet for Teaching Reading Doesn't Come from a Program

After I surveyed teachers I asked children who were struggling who they felt were their best teachers. The following are their responses.

What children say about good reading teachers:

- My reading teacher really cares about me when I read
- The only person I can read to is my Reading Teacher.
- I'm scared to read in my classroom, but not with my reading teacher in my small group.
- My reading teacher is like family. I have to tell Mom to invite her to Thanksgiving and birthdays.
- Even though reading is hard for me, my reading teacher makes me feel like I can do it.

This small survey demonstrates a common theme. It seems that teachers who are valued are those that form a personal connection with their students. It doesn't seem to be a program that makes the difference but the interaction and personal positive feelings between a teacher and a child. Carol Dweck (2007) speaks about a positive mindset and literacy development. She discusses how we need to speak to children so they think positively about reading achievement. The following are phrases that will encourage your children to feel good about learning.

Approach your class in a rejoicing manner Avoid sarcasm

Positive reinforcement should be carried out by naming the behavior, Don't just say, "Good Job."

Instead say, "I see you wrote more ideas today than yesterday. I'm so glad. Keep trying!"

Let children know you believe they can succeed by saying, "You can do it. I know you can" Make your classroom kinder by becoming a community of learners who help each other.

Dweck, C.S. (2007) Mindset: The new psychology of success. New York, NH: Ballantine Books



Award Winner!

Congratulations to Dr. Carmen Gordilla

Congratulations to Dr. Carmen Gordilla, who has been chosen as Liberty Middle School's 2025-2026 Educational Services Professional of the Year, under the Governor's Educator of the Year program!

To be named an Educational Services Professional of the Year (Office of Educator Effectiveness, 2025), you have been recognized as an outstanding educator because you:

- Serve as an exceptionally skilled and dedicated educator in a public or charter school;
- Inspire students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn;
- Demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside the classroom;
- Have the respect and admiration of students, parents, administrators and colleagues;
- Play an active role in the community as well as the school



Speaker Series 25-26

- **Feb 12, 2026 : Meghan M. Hargrave**
 - **Navigating Literacy instruction in the Era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (K-12)**
- **April 16, 2026 : Douglas Fisher**
 - **Teaching Foundational Skills in Grades 4 - 12: Word Recognition, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension**



Visit us at: <http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/>

[Click here to register](#)
<https://cvent.me/PAkR8D!>