



RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK

Center for Literacy Development

Graduate School of Education

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!

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 !



Winter 2026

Newsletter

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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.

The next CLD conference is on Feb. 12. The speaker is Meghan M. Hargrave and her topic is “Navigating Literacy instruction in the Era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (K-12)”. Be sure to share the AI information you learn at this conference back to your schools!

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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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



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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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!>

Literacy Coaching and Professional Development Services

We support schools with:

- Assessment
- Multiple forms of small group instruction
- Close Reading
- Comprehension
- Culturally Responsive Instruction
- Differentiated Instruction
- Digital Literacies
- Dyslexia
- Motivation
- Phonics
- English Language Learners
- Program Evaluation/Organization
- Family Literacy
- Fluency
- Foundational Skills
- Project Based Learning
- MTSS
- Data Based Instruction
- Social Emotional Learning
- Vocabulary
- Science of Reading
- Simple view of reading
- Active View of Reading

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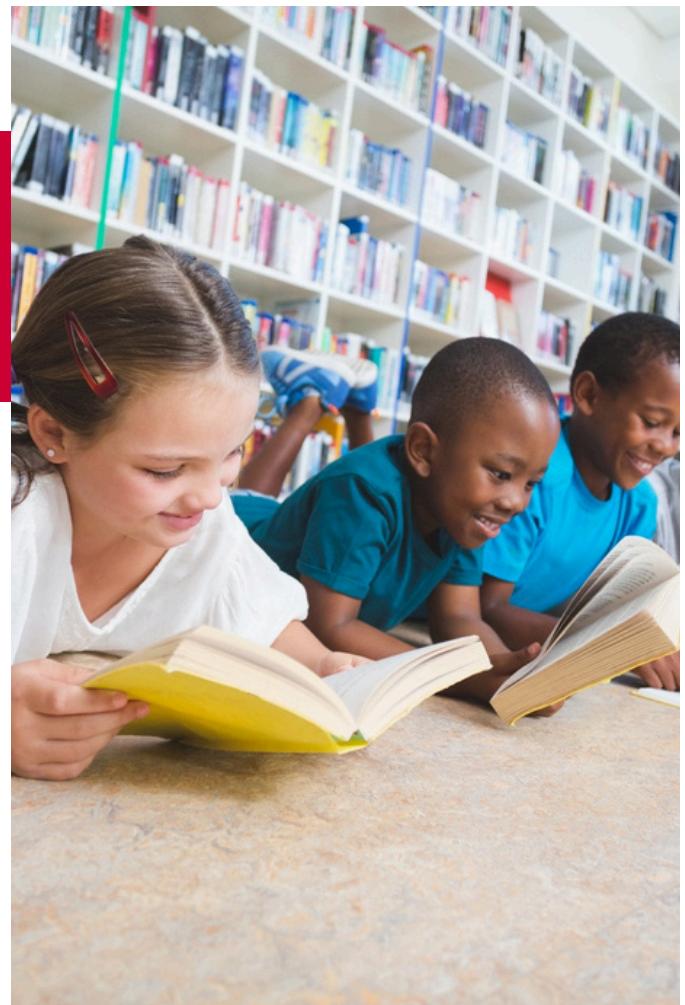
READING CLUB

For Struggling Readers

WHAT IS THE RUTGERS READING CLUB?

The Rutgers Reading Club is an After School Intervention for struggling readers that takes place in your school.

- Evidence Based Small Group after school instruction twice a week for 12 weeks
- Professional Development provided for Club teachers
- Progress monitoring with collection of assessment data at the beginning and culmination of the program
- Data based instruction
- Participants and their families are invited to a celebration with a Rutgers certificate at the culmination



THE IMPACT

Children in the program demonstrated gains towards meeting the NJ state standards that applied to them, after the 12 weeks.



SUPPORT

An expert coach from our team partners with you and your school for the duration of the program to ensure quality implementation.



BEYOND LITERACY

Teachers also report an increase in motivation, engagement and overall confidence of the children in the program.



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rutgersliteracycenter.org



Save the Date: Thursday Jan 29, 2026 ~ 7:00-8:00 pm

The Rutgers Graduate School of Education Alumni Association DEI Committee invites you to join us for our Virtual Coffee & Conversation

Why Teach Asian American Studies?

An Introduction to AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islanders) New Jersey

New Jersey's pathbreaking [law S4021](#) "requires school districts to provide instruction on the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as part of implementation of New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies" starting in the 2022–2023 school year.

[Teach Asian American Stories \(TAAS\)](#), an initiative fueled by AAPI New Jersey, is working to ensure that [New Jersey's educators](#) have access to high-quality resources and training to incorporate AAPI history and contributions into their everyday lesson plans.



Dr. Dakashna Lang is a dedicated English teacher with 22 years of experience in Livingston, NJ. In 2024, she was honored as one of the inaugural fellows of the Teach Asian American Stories fellowship with AAPI NJ, and she remains an active TAAS Ambassador. Dr. Lang holds advanced degrees from Johns Hopkins University, the University of Pennsylvania, and a Doctor of Education in Literacy from Rutgers University. Recently, she earned certifications in Educational Technology and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. A 2025 recipient of the ECEA Racial Advocacy Award and the NJEA Human Rights Committee's Judith Owens Spirit Award, Dr. Lang is deeply committed to advancing social justice and equity in education.

Date/Time:

Format: Thursday, January 29, 2026; 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Fee: Virtual – Zoom Link will be sent to all registrants.

Audience: This is a no-cost event!

For educators, administrators, parents and students and all who are interested in understanding the many identities of Asian Americans

[GSEAA DEI Coffee & Conversation 1-29-26](#)

To Register: Contact gseaaru@gmail.com - PD Certificates are also available upon request.

This program is made possible through the generous support of the Rutgers University Alumni Association (RUAA) and the GSEAA.