EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 30

WHEREAS, literacy is foundational to a student's success in school, postsecondary education, career, and civic life; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey students who experience early difficulties in reading are at greater risk of ongoing academic challenges, and research has consistently demonstrated that proficiency in reading by the end of third grade is strongly associated with future academic achievement, high school completion, and postsecondary readiness; and

WHEREAS, despite the fact that New Jersey consistently leads the nation in education for grades Pre-K through 12, English language arts achievement does not yet meet grade-level expectations for nearly half of New Jersey students in grades three through nine, and achievement rates remain substantially lower for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and certain racial and ethnic groups; and

WHEREAS, research demonstrates that evidence-based reading instruction, effective screening and assessment practices, high-quality instructional materials, well-prepared educators, and timely intervention can improve student literacy outcomes; and

WHEREAS, P.L.2024, c.52 reinforced the State's commitment to improving literacy outcomes for New Jersey students by establishing a plan to ensure that young learners benefit from evidence-based literacy instruction and requiring, among other initiatives, that school districts conduct universal literacy screening for students in kindergarten through third grade; and

WHEREAS, to support implementation of P.L.2024, c.52, in May 2025 the New Jersey Department of Education (the "Department") published The New Jersey Literacy Framework: A Guide to Evidence-Based Literacy Practices and Universal Screeners, to guide school districts in developing evidence-based reading instruction and universal screening systems to strengthen literacy instruction and improve student reading outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the State can build upon these efforts through a coordinated statewide approach that establishes clear goals, measurable milestones, implementation strategies, and supports to improve early literacy and narrow achievement gaps; and

WHEREAS, significant disparities in reading achievement persist among student groups, and expanding access to evidence-based early literacy instruction, timely intervention, and high-quality learning opportunities can help reduce longstanding achievement inequities and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the support needed to become proficient readers; and

WHEREAS, the Department has identified key areas for strengthening early literacy, including literacy screening and assessment, high-quality instructional materials, educator preparation and professional learning, literacy coaching, and intensive summer literacy learning opportunities; and

WHEREAS, developing and implementing a comprehensive Early Literacy Strategic Plan will provide a framework for coordinating these efforts and establishing a clear pathway for every New Jersey student to read at grade level; and

WHEREAS, the Administration seeks to establish a goal of significantly and measurably improving third-grade reading proficiency and closing achievement gaps and to develop the policies, supports, and implementation strategies necessary to make sustained progress toward that goal;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MIKIE SHERRILL, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the Statutes of this State, do hereby ORDER and DIRECT:

1. **Definitions.** For purposes of this Order, "evidence-based reading instruction" shall mean reading-instruction practices that are backed by high-quality evidence and address the acquisition of language, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling,

fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension that may be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students.

2. **Early Literacy Strategic Plan.** Within 90 days following the issuance of this Order, the Department shall develop and transmit to the Governor a comprehensive early literacy strategic plan ("comprehensive strategic plan") with an emphasis on expanding evidence-based reading instruction, strengthening third-grade reading proficiency, and narrowing achievement gaps in New Jersey schools. The comprehensive strategic plan shall identify measurable milestones for statewide literacy-proficiency improvements and achievement-gap reductions and shall include implementation plans, deliverables, and timelines for the specific actions directed in Paragraphs 3 through 10 of this Order. Upon submission to the Governor, the Department shall immediately publish such comprehensive strategic plan on the Department's website, advance implementation of the actions identified therein, and provide regular public updates on implementation progress and milestone achievement.

3. **Literacy-Screener Improvements.** Within 180 days following the issuance of this Order, the Department shall update the evidence-based criteria for literacy-screening tools in its New Jersey Literacy Framework Guide to ensure all literacy-screening tools are based on nationwide best practices. The Department shall also review literacy-screening tools currently in use in the State and publish a list of at least two approved literacy-screening tools aligned with the evidence-based criteria established by the Department, at least one of which shall be available at no cost. Upon publication of the Department's approved list, the Department shall require school districts to adopt their literacy-screening tool from among this approved list.

4. **High-Quality Instructional Materials.** Within 360 days following the issuance of this Order, the Department shall work with educators to review and evaluate early-literacy instructional

materials currently in use in the State and shall publish, after considering the recommendations provided by the working group pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:6-145, a list of approved high-quality evidence-based early-literacy instructional materials. Upon publication of the Department's approved list, the Department shall encourage school districts to adopt materials from the approved list, provide technical assistance to support such adoption, and assess the feasibility of requiring school districts and educators to adopt these high-quality instructional materials, including a financial assessment of the resources needed by school districts to procure these materials.

5. **New-Educator Training.** The Department shall initiate the administrative rulemaking process to amend the approval criteria and process for Educator Preparation Programs at N.J.A.C. 6A:9A-3.1 and 6A:9A-3.3 to ensure that such programs are aligned with evidence-based reading instruction. The Department shall also monitor and provide technical assistance to new and existing Educator Preparation Programs in designing, implementing, and continuously improving their programs to ensure alignment with evidence-based reading instruction, including through guidance on submission requirements, review protocols, and monitoring processes.

6. **New-Educator Certification.** The Department shall conduct a comprehensive review of educator-certification pathways, endorsements, and program-approval requirements, and shall develop and implement modifications designed to increase the number of qualified reading instructors and educators with early-literacy and reading-specialist endorsements.

7. **Existing-Educator Training.** The Department shall work with school districts and educators to review and evaluate literacy-training programs to help them meet the annual educator professional development requirements under P.L.2024, c.52. The Department shall support districts and educators in ensuring that such programs are

high-quality, evidence-based, and aligned with national best practices to increase the number of educators trained in evidence-based reading instruction. The Department shall work with districts to encourage and support them in adopting and using literacy-training programs evaluated to be high-quality and evidence-based, to meet the requirements of P.L.2024, c.52.

8. **Literacy Coaches.** The Department shall implement a regional literacy-coaching pilot program to train and provide ongoing guidance, feedback, and support to school districts and educators in their implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction, including training on effectively using literacy-screener data, in alignment with multi-tiered systems of support. The Department shall also make available training modules to support literacy coaches and educators with best practices for data-driven decision-making, including analyzing literacy screening and assessment data, adjusting instructional methods based on such data, monitoring student progress, and supporting implementation of evidence-based reading instruction.

9. **Implementation and Feasibility Plan for an Intensive Literacy Summer Camp Program.** Within 90 days following the issuance of this Order, the Department shall develop an implementation plan for a statewide Intensive Literacy Summer Camp program designed to provide evidence-based literacy instruction to students who are behind grade level in reading based on end-of-year literacy screeners. The Intensive Literacy Summer Camp program implementation plan shall include, but not be limited to, a feasibility assessment and recommendations for program structure.

10. In implementing its comprehensive strategic plan, the Department shall provide technical assistance and support to school districts and educators, including guidance on transitioning to approved literacy-screener tools, meaningfully engaging with and using screener data to support student learning in the classroom,

developing parental-notification tools to support family engagement with screener data, and effectively using evidence-based instructional materials in the classroom.

11. **Construction.** Nothing in this Order shall be construed to alter or limit the statutory authority of any Executive Branch department or agency; require the disclosure of confidential, privileged, or legally protected information; or create a private right of action to enforce any provision of this Order or any rule, recommendation, or action developed pursuant to it. This Order shall be implemented consistent with all applicable State and federal law and subject to the availability of appropriations.

12. This Order shall take effect immediately.

GIVEN, under my hand and seal this 23rd day of November, Two Thousand and Twenty-Six, and of the Independence of the United States, the Two Hundred and Fifty-First.

[seal]

/s/ Mikie Sherrill

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Elizabeth M. Harris

Deputy Chief Counsel to the Governor