

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 4028

To expand equitable access to developmentally-appropriate literacy materials, programs, and family engagement in reading, especially in underserved communities, and strengthen the connection between literacy and long-term academic and economic success.

---

## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 9, 2026

Mr. KIM introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

---

## A BILL

To expand equitable access to developmentally-appropriate literacy materials, programs, and family engagement in reading, especially in underserved communities, and strengthen the connection between literacy and long-term academic and economic success.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3       **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4       This Act may be cited as the “Open Books, Open  
5       Doors Act”.

6       **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7       Congress finds the following:

1           (1) The 2024 National Assessment of Edu-  
2           cational Progress reading assessment results show a  
3           continued decline in reading scores for both fourth  
4           and eighth grade students, with average scores lower  
5           than both 2022 and 2019 levels.

6           (2) According to the Annie E. Casey Founda-  
7           tion, 1 in 6 children who are not reading proficiently  
8           in third grade do not graduate from high school on  
9           time, a rate 4 times greater than that for proficient  
10          readers.

11          (3) Families with incomes of \$100,000 or more  
12          have nearly twice the number of books than families  
13          with less than \$35,000 in annual income, at 125 and  
14          73 respectively.

15          (4) According to the American Consortium for  
16          Equity in Education, 45 percent of children in the  
17          United States live in neighborhoods that lack public  
18          libraries and stores that sell books or in homes  
19          where books are not present.

20          (5) 85 percent of all juveniles who interact with  
21          the juvenile court system are functionally low lit-  
22          erate.

23          (6) Only 2 percent of the 20,600,000 17- to 21-  
24          year-olds in the United States are eligible, propensed  
25          to serve, and of high academic quality for military

1 service, and only 29 percent of youth are eligible for  
2 military service without requiring some form of a  
3 standards waiver.

4 (7) A 2025 study from the University of Flor-  
5 ida and the University College London found that  
6 daily reading for pleasure among individuals in the  
7 United States has declined by more than 40 percent  
8 over the past 2 decades, a trend with serious impli-  
9 cations for children’s literacy development and long-  
10 term education outcomes.

11 (8) Children born to parents with low literacy  
12 skills are likely to have low skills themselves, perpet-  
13 uating poverty and other socioeconomic issues re-  
14 lated to low literacy.

15 (9) According to the Department of Education,  
16 43,000,000 adults in the United States, nearly 1 in  
17 5 adults in the United States, can’t read well enough  
18 to hold a basic job.

19 (10) According to the Nobel Prize-winning  
20 economist James Heckman, every \$1 invested in  
21 early childhood, including literacy programs, yields  
22 between \$4 to \$16 in long-term economic benefits.

23 (11) According to the World Literacy Founda-  
24 tion, low literacy costs the United States economy  
25 more than \$300,000,000,000 in lost earnings, lower

1 workplace productivity, higher crime, and more gov-  
2 ernment assistance.

3 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

4 In this Act:

5 (1) ESEA DEFINITIONS.—The terms “local  
6 educational agency” and “State educational agency”  
7 have the meanings given the terms in section 8101  
8 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of  
9 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

10 (2) BOOK DESERT.—The term “book desert”  
11 means a geographic area (as defined by census tract,  
12 ZIP Code, or local educational agency) where chil-  
13 dren and families have limited or non-consistent ac-  
14 cess to developmentally-appropriate, high-interest,  
15 and culturally relevant books and print materials in  
16 the home, schools, or community settings, as evi-  
17 denced by meeting 1 or more of the following cri-  
18 teria, as determined by the Secretary:

19 (A) Fewer than 1 book available per 300  
20 children younger than 18 years of age.

21 (B) No public library or bookstore within  
22 a 1-mile radius in an urban area or a 10-mile  
23 radius in a rural area.

1 (C) A high concentration of poverty, hous-  
 2 ing instability, or limited English proficiency  
 3 that contributes to barriers in accessing books.

4 (D) 40 percent of households with children  
 5 lacking reading materials at home.

6 (E) Limited or no book distribution pro-  
 7 grams, literacy events, or reading-focused com-  
 8 munity infrastructure.

9 (3) EVIDENCE-BASED LITERACY PROGRAM.—

10 The term “evidence-based literacy program” means  
 11 any instructional or community-based program,  
 12 intervention, or practice that—

13 (A) is grounded in the science of reading  
 14 and incorporates methods shown, through high-  
 15 quality research, to be effective in improving lit-  
 16 eracy skills for infants, toddlers, children, teens,  
 17 young adults, parents, or other caregivers;

18 (B) demonstrates measurable outcomes in  
 19 improving reading comprehension, phonemic  
 20 awareness, vocabulary acquisition, early lan-  
 21 guage development, fluency, or engagement  
 22 with reading;

23 (C) has been evaluated through a rigorous  
 24 study, such as randomized control trials, quasi-  
 25 experiential designs, or longitudinal research,

1 and shows statistically significant positive ef-  
 2 fects on literacy outcomes for the target popu-  
 3 lation; and

4 (D) includes components for adult-child  
 5 interaction, culturally responsive instruction, or  
 6 family and caregiver engagement, where appro-  
 7 priate.

8 (4) FAMILY LITERACY.—The term “family lit-  
 9 eracy” means services that are of sufficient intensity  
 10 in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to  
 11 make sustainable changes in a family, and that inte-  
 12 grate all of the following activities:

13 (A) Interactive literacy activities between  
 14 parents and their children.

15 (B) Training for parents regarding how to  
 16 be the primary teacher for their children and  
 17 full partners in the education of their children.

18 (C) Parent literacy training that leads to  
 19 economic self-sufficiency and financial literacy.

20 (D) A developmentally-appropriate edu-  
 21 cation to prepare children for success in school  
 22 and life experiences.

23 (5) QUALIFIED APPLICANT.—The term “quali-  
 24 fied applicant” means a State government, Tribal  
 25 government, local government, State educational

agency, State humanities council, State service commission, public library, local educational agency, public school, juvenile justice facility, community-based organization, nonprofit organization, or a consortium of such entities, that works with children and has a demonstrated record of promoting literacy for infants, toddlers, children, and young adults for not less than 1 year.

(6) QUALIFIED LITERACY MATERIALS.—The term “qualified literacy materials”—

(A) means any developmentally-appropriate, culturally relevant, and accessible print or digital content—

(i) designed to support literacy development in infants, toddlers, children, or young adults; and

(ii) which may be provided in English or any other language; and

(B) may include—

(i) storybooks, chapter books, graphic novels, and picture books;

(ii) multi-lingual and dual-language materials;

(iii) books in accessible formats, such as braille and large print;

1 (iv) comics, newspapers, magazines,  
2 poetry, play scripts, and encyclopedias;

3 (v) educational brochures and printed  
4 media intended to support language acqui-  
5 sition, vocabulary building, and reading  
6 comprehension;

7 (vi) digital materials and e-books that  
8 can be accessible offline; and

9 (vii) reading-level-appropriate content  
10 reflecting diverse cultures, experiences, and  
11 voices.

12 (7) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means  
13 the Secretary of Education.

14 **SEC. 4. OPEN BOOKS, OPEN DOORS GRANT PROGRAM.**

15 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall award  
17 grants, on a competitive basis, to qualified appli-  
18 cants to help promote child literacy.

19 (2) FUNDING ALLOCATIONS.—The Secretary  
20 shall allocate funds appropriated to carry out this  
21 Act for a fiscal year as follows:

22 (A) Not less than 70 percent of the funds  
23 shall be awarded as grants to qualified appli-  
24 cants located within, or that coordinate or pro-



vide services to, communities within book  
deserts and that collaborate with—

- (i) barbershops or salons;
- (ii) houses of worship;
- (iii) community centers;
- (iv) childcare centers;
- (v) Head Start or Early Head Start  
centers;
- (vi) laundromats;
- (vii) primary care providers, commu-  
nity health centers, health clinics, and ur-  
gent care centers;
- (viii) a local entity providing services  
under the special supplemental nutrition  
program for women, infants, and children  
established under section 17 of the Child  
Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786);
- (ix) independent bookstores;
- (x) youth-serving organizations;
- (xi) direct mail programs;
- (xii) family literacy programs; or
- (xiii) other highly trafficked places, as  
designated by the Secretary.

(B) 15 percent of the funds shall be  
awarded as grants to qualified applicants for

1 early screening, early intervention, and educator  
2 training related to children with learning dis-  
3 abilities—

4 (i) which shall—

5 (I) complement funding awarded  
6 under the Individuals with Disabilities  
7 Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401 et  
8 seq.);

9 (II) support programs that are  
10 developmentally-appropriate, non-pu-  
11 nitive, and followed by family commu-  
12 nication and support, not identifica-  
13 tion alone; and

14 (III) support programs that do  
15 not stigmatize or over-pathologize  
16 early readers; and

17 (ii) priority for which shall be to  
18 qualified applicants serving areas where  
19 the rate of reading disabilities or the rate  
20 of dyslexia screening or identification, is  
21 higher than the national average.

22 (C)(i) Not less than 8 percent of the funds  
23 shall be awarded as grants to qualified appli-  
24 cants proposing to develop, pilot, or scale prom-  
25 ising strategies that expand access to books,

1 promote reading engagement, or enhance lit-  
2 eracy instruction and family literacy, of  
3 which—

4 (I) not less than 25 percent shall be  
5 awarded to qualified applicants that are  
6 small entities or community-based organi-  
7 zations or pilot programs serving not more  
8 than 5,000 children; and

9 (II) not less than 25 percent shall be  
10 awarded to qualified applicants that con-  
11 duct family literacy programs;

12 (ii) Recipients of grants under clause (i)  
13 shall participate in an evaluation process as de-  
14 termined by the Secretary to assess effective-  
15 ness, scalability, and alignment with the pur-  
16 pose of this Act.

17 (iii) The Secretary shall publish and dis-  
18 seminate findings, toolkits, or case studies from  
19 strategies developed, piloted, or scaled under  
20 this paragraph to qualified applicants, State  
21 agencies, educators, and the general public to  
22 encourage replication or continuous improve-  
23 ment.

24 (D) Not more than 5 percent of the funds  
25 may be used for technical assistance and capac-

1           ity building, including for regional hubs or  
2           intermediary nonprofit organizations to provide  
3           coaching, help convene grantees, or share best  
4           practices.

5           (E) Not more than 3 percent of the funds  
6           may be used to support public engagement or  
7           awareness campaigns, including supporting na-  
8           tional or regional campaigns to promote reading  
9           habits, funding public service announcements,  
10          digital ads, or toolkits for local partners, and  
11          conducting special campaigns for reading in  
12          non-English languages or within immigrant or  
13          refugee communities.

14          (F) Not more than 3 percent of the funds  
15          may be used to support disaster-impacted  
16          areas, as defined by the Federal Emergency  
17          Management Agency.

18          (b) APPLICATIONS.—A qualified applicant that de-  
19          sires to receive a grant under this Act shall submit an  
20          application to the Secretary at such a time, in such man-  
21          ner, and containing such information as the Secretary may  
22          require, including the following:

23               (1) A description of the educational and finan-  
24               cial need of the community to be served by the quali-  
25               fied applicant.

1           (2) A description of how the qualified applicant  
 2       would partner with local publishers, businesses, li-  
 3       braries, or other stakeholders to raise additional  
 4       funds to carry out grant activities and increase book  
 5       donations.

6           (3) A description of how the qualified applicant  
 7       would conduct outreach to marginalized and under-  
 8       served communities to understand their literacy  
 9       needs.

10          (4) A sustainability plan for how the qualified  
 11       applicant will continue to promote child literacy  
 12       after the grant period ends.

13          (5) A description on how the qualified applicant  
 14       will, where appropriate, partner with or procure  
 15       qualified literacy materials through local businesses  
 16       as a way to support local economies.

17          (6) A description of how the qualified applicant  
 18       will deliver, or collaborate with partners already en-  
 19       gaged in, evidence-based literacy programs.

20       (c) GRANT ACTIVITIES.—

21           (1) IN GENERAL.—A qualified applicant that  
 22       receives a grant under this Act shall use the grant  
 23       funds for at least one of the following:

1           (A) Purchasing or renting property to con-  
2           struct and maintain distribution facilities for  
3           qualified literacy materials.

4           (B) Establishing new literacy centers,  
5           book-exchange boxes, neighborhood libraries,  
6           mobile libraries, and book banks.

7           (C) Purchasing and transporting qualified  
8           literacy materials or hosting book drives.

9           (D) Conducting in person programs and  
10          utilizing digital and online tools that promote  
11          literacy, adult engagement, and reading com-  
12          prehension.

13          (E) Eliminating or waiving late fees at  
14          public and school-based libraries.

15          (F) Facilitating community or cultural  
16          events that promote literacy and family literacy.

17          (G) Implementing universal early screening  
18          and diagnostic or identification tools for learn-  
19          ing disabilities, such as dyslexia, including  
20          training for staff on identifying and supporting  
21          students with reading disabilities.

22          (H) Purchasing screening tools and pro-  
23          viding follow-up assessments and referrals in  
24          collaboration with local educational agencies or  
25          community health providers.

1 (I) Hiring, paying, and training (including  
 2 coaching) educators, volunteers, health care  
 3 professionals, caretakers, and parents in evi-  
 4 dence-based literacy programs.

5 (J) Providing meals or transportation serv-  
 6 ices for individuals receiving services in any of  
 7 the activities described in this subsection.

8 (2) ADMINISTRATIVE CAP.—

9 (A) NONPUBLIC ENTITY.—A qualified ap-  
 10 plicant that is a non public entity and receives  
 11 a grant under this Act may use not more than  
 12 25 percent of the grant funds on operating ex-  
 13 penses, including salaries, utilities, equipment,  
 14 and supplies, unless the Secretary approves a  
 15 waiver of such cap.

16 (B) PUBLIC ENTITY.—A qualified appli-  
 17 cant that is a public entity and receives a grant  
 18 under this Act may use not more than 25 per-  
 19 cent of the grant funds on operating expenses,  
 20 including salaries, utilities, equipment, and sup-  
 21 plies, unless the Secretary approves a waiver of  
 22 such cap.

23 (d) MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT.—A qualified appli-  
 24 cant may receive grant funds for a fiscal year only if the  
 25 Secretary finds that the expenditures of the qualified ap-

1 plicant on literacy efforts for the preceding fiscal year  
2 were not less than the expenditures of the qualified appli-  
3 cant on literacy efforts for the second preceding fiscal  
4 year.

5 (e) MATCHING REQUIREMENTS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Each qualified applicant  
7 that receives a grant under this Act shall provide,  
8 from non-Federal sources, an amount equal to 25  
9 percent of the amount of the grant to carry out ac-  
10 tivities supported by the grant.

11 (2) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive the re-  
12 quirement under paragraph (1) when determined ap-  
13 propriate by the Secretary.

14 **SEC. 5. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.**

15 Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment  
16 of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall  
17 submit to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor,  
18 and Pensions and the Committee on Appropriations of the  
19 Senate and the Committee on Education and Workforce  
20 and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of  
21 Representatives, a report containing the following infor-  
22 mation for each grantee:

23 (1) A breakdown of the number of students  
24 served through grant activities and relevant demo-  
25 graphics (including socioeconomic status, race, age,



1 and disability status) in each grade that is partici-  
2 pating in the program carried out with grant funds.

3 (2) State assessment data or other validated lit-  
4 eracy engagement scales, on a biannual basis, for  
5 local educational agencies that receive support under  
6 the grant.

7 (3) Survey responses from teachers and parents  
8 measuring the impact increased access to books is  
9 having on children's reading enthusiasm and con-  
10 fidence.

11 (4) The number of books per child before and  
12 after the program carried out with grant funds and  
13 the number of caregivers participating in the pro-  
14 gram.

15 **SEC. 6. INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—To ensure implementation and  
17 maximize the impact of the grant program established  
18 under this Act, the Secretary shall coordinate with rel-  
19 evant Federal agencies, including—

20 (1) the Corporation for National and Commu-  
21 nity Services;

22 (2) the Food and Nutrition Service of the De-  
23 partment of Agriculture;

24 (3) the Department of Health and Human  
25 Services, including the Health Resources and Serv-

1       ices Administration, the Maternal and Child Health  
2       Bureau, and the Office of Head Start;

3               (4) the Department of Housing and Urban Af-  
4       fairs;

5               (5) the Department of Labor;

6               (6) the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delin-  
7       quency Prevention of the Department of Justice;

8               (7) the Federal Communications Commission;

9               (8) the Institute of Museum and Library Serv-  
10      ices; and

11              (9) the National Endowment for the Human-  
12      ities.

13      (b) ACTIVITIES.—The coordination required under  
14      subsection (a) shall include—

15              (1) aligning literacy efforts with existing Fed-  
16      eral early childhood, education, health, and commu-  
17      nity development programs;

18              (2) sharing data and best practices to identify  
19      geographic areas of greatest need;

20              (3) ensuring consistent messaging and outreach  
21      to families across federally supported platforms;

22              (4) encouraging joint applications and cross-  
23      sector partnerships among grantees supported by  
24      multiple agencies; and

1           (5) identifying opportunities for co-location or  
2           integration of literacy services in federally supported  
3           housing, health, education, and nutrition programs.

4           (c) INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP.—

5           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
6           after the date of enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
7           retary shall establish an interagency working group  
8           to support implementation of this Act.

9           (2) MEETING FREQUENCY.—The working group  
10          shall meet not less often than twice annually.

11          (3) REPORT AND NATIONAL STRATEGY.—The  
12          working group shall—

13                (A) submit an interagency coordination re-  
14                port to Congress every 2 years outlining shared  
15                initiatives, challenges, and recommendations to  
16                strengthen Federal literacy programming; and

17                (B) create and develop a national strategy  
18                to promote literacy among young children from  
19                birth to age 5, school-aged children from kin-  
20                dergarten to 12th grade, and young adults.

21   **SEC. 7. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

22          Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize  
23          the Secretary to ban or censor materials or otherwise in-  
24          fluence local curricular or content decisions based on polit-  
25          ical or viewpoint grounds.

1 **SEC. 8. FEDERAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON BOOK ACCESS.**

2 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary, in coordina-  
3 tion with each of the Federal agencies listed in section  
4 6(a), shall establish a Federal Clearinghouse on Book Ac-  
5 cess that shall—

6 (1) identify, collect, and evaluate evidence-based  
7 strategies, programs, and interventions that have  
8 been shown to have a significant effect on children  
9 accessing qualified literacy materials and improving  
10 literacy outcomes for children and families living in  
11 book deserts; and

12 (2) provide guidance, toolkits, and technical re-  
13 sources to States, local educational agencies, health  
14 professionals, libraries, and nonprofit organizations  
15 seeking to expand book access in book deserts.

16 (b) INFORMATION TO INCLUDE.—The Federal Clear-  
17 inghouse on Book Access shall ensure the guidance, tool-  
18 kits, and technical resources provided under subsection (a)  
19 include, to the extent practicable, the following informa-  
20 tion:

21 (1) The strength of the evidence that the guid-  
22 ance, toolkit, or technical resource expands book ac-  
23 cess and increases literacy outcomes.

24 (2) The populations that were served in the  
25 programs that are the bases for the guidance, tool-  
26 kit, or technical resource, along with where the pop-

1       ulations are located, such as urban, suburban, or  
2       rural areas.

3           (3) Implementation models for the programs  
4       described in paragraph (2), such as whether the pro-  
5       grams were school-based, library-based, health care-  
6       based, or community-based approaches.

7           (4) Cost considerations of implementation.

8           (5) Demonstrated literacy outcomes in the pro-  
9       grams described in paragraph (2).

10          (6) Findings and data from previous Federal or  
11       State commissions recommending improvements to  
12       book access and increasing literacy outcomes.

13          (7) Other supportive evidence or findings relied  
14       upon by the Clearinghouse, in consultation with  
15       Federal agencies listed in section 6(a), in identifying  
16       evidence-based strategies, programs, and interven-  
17       tions, as described in subsection (a)(1).

18       (c) CONSISTENCY WITH CIVIL RIGHTS.—The guid-  
19       ance, toolkits, and technical resources provided by the  
20       Clearinghouse shall be consistent with Federal civil rights  
21       laws, including title II of the Americans with Disabilities  
22       Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12131 et seq.), the Rehabilitation  
23       Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 701 et seq.), and title VI of the  
24       Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.).

1       (d) CONSULTATION.—In identifying the evidence-  
2 based strategies, programs, and interventions for the Fed-  
3 eral Clearinghouse on Book Access, the Secretary shall  
4 consult with—

5           (1) literacy researchers and experts; and

6           (2) State educational agencies, local educational  
7 agencies, early childhood education providers, com-  
8 munity-based and nonprofit literacy groups focused  
9 on book access and literacy development, libraries,  
10 health providers, educators, and school administra-  
11 tors.

12       (e) ADMINISTRATION.—

13           (1) IN GENERAL.—The Federal Clearinghouse  
14 on Book Access shall be assigned such personnel and  
15 resources as the Secretary considers appropriate to  
16 carry out this section.

17           (2) DETAIL.—The heads of each of the Federal  
18 agencies listed in section 6(a) may detail personnel  
19 to the Federal Clearinghouse on Book Access.

20       (f) PRODUCTION AND PUBLICATION OF MATE-  
21 RIALS.—The Secretary may produce and publish materials  
22 identified, collected, and evaluated by the Federal Clear-  
23 inghouse on Book Access to assist and train early child-  
24 hood, educational, health care, law enforcement, and work-  
25 force agencies on the implementation of the evidence-based

1 strategies, programs, and interventions for literacy devel-  
 2 opment and enhancing access to books.

3 (g) COLLECTION OF DATA, FEEDBACK, AND EVAL-  
 4 UATIONS.—For the purpose of continuous improvement of  
 5 the Federal Clearinghouse on Book Access, the Secretary  
 6 shall collect—

7 (1) Clearinghouse data analytics;

8 (2) user feedback on the implementation of evi-  
 9 dence-based strategies, programs, and interventions  
 10 identified by the Clearinghouse; and

11 (3) any evaluations conducted on implementa-  
 12 tion of the evidence-based strategies, programs, and  
 13 interventions.

14 (h) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-  
 15 tion shall be construed to require State educational agen-  
 16 cies or local educational agencies to adopt the evidence-  
 17 based strategies, programs, and interventions identified  
 18 pursuant to subsection (a).

19 **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appro-  
 21 priated to carry out this Act \$100,000,000 for each of  
 22 fiscal years 2026 through 2031.

1       (b) SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS.—The Sec-  
2   retary may request supplemental appropriations based on  
3   demand for literacy services.

○