



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Education Department Division of Adult  
Education and Library Extension Press Clippings and  
Background Files Concerning the Board of Regents Literacy  
Test A0063**

---

New York State Archives  
222 Madison Avenue  
Albany, NY 12230  
[archref@nysed.gov](mailto:archref@nysed.gov)  
URL: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>

**Table of Contents**

---

Overview of the Records ..... 3

Arrangement ..... 3

Administrative History ..... 3

Scope and Contents ..... 4

Related Information ..... 5

Other Finding Aids ..... 5

Use of Records ..... 6

Administrative Information ..... 6

Access Terms ..... 6

## Overview of the Records

---

<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	This series consists of newspaper clippings, memorandums, notes, and pamphlets documenting the State Education Department's response to changes in voting requirements, including the introduction and administration of the Regents literacy test. Background files discuss immigrant, adult, and rural education. The bulk of the series consists of a scrapbook of clippings, extracted from local newspapers, documenting the literacy test program.
<b>Creator:</b>	New York (State). Education Department. Division of Adult Education and Library Extension
<b>Title:</b>	Press clippings and background files concerning the Board of Regents literacy test
<b>Quantity:</b>	1.8 cubic feet
<b>Quantity:</b>	1500 clippings; 2 microfilm rolls
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1916-1933
<b>Bulk Date:</b>	1922-1933
<b>Series:</b>	A0063

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Arrangement

---

Chronological by date for bound clippings; remainder of series unarranged.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Administrative History

---

A 1921 amendment to the State Constitution required that all new voters after January 1, 1922 "be able, except for physical disability, to read and write English." Subsequently, certification of literacy by the Board of Regents was established by Chapter 809 of the Laws 1923, which (in addition to age and residency requirements) required the new voter to present proof of literacy that was subject to scrutiny by election inspectors. Literacy certificates were issued

by the Regents after applicants passed a test on their comprehension of written English, and these certificates were conclusive proof. According to the law, the new voter could also present as evidence a certificate or diploma showing completion of work of an approved eighth grade elementary school or of a higher-level school in which English was the language of instruction.

According to statistics reported in the series, 28,402 certificates of literacy were issued in 1923. Of that total, 19,806 were applicants who passed the Regents literacy test, and more than one-half came from New York City. After the first meeting of the 1924 Board of Regents, changes in regulations covering issuance of certificates were announced. These changes made the law easier to administer by opening up more schools, extending the period during which exams were held, and permitting applicants who could prove completed work at the sixth grade level in either day or evening school to receive certification of literacy at any time during the school year (decreasing the rush of applicants at election time). Another provision enabled school superintendents to give the Regents literacy test at special times during the year to students enrolled in classes for foreigners and in citizenship, bringing schools in closer contact with the naturalization procedure.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Scope and Content Note

---

The series consists predominantly of newspaper clippings and a small amount of memoranda, notes, and pamphlets documenting the department's response to changes in voting requirements, including introduction and administration of the Regents literacy test, and progress and results of literacy training offered through adult education classes throughout the state. The bulk of the records are in the form of a scrapbook of clippings, collected from local newspapers and pasted on paper, about the literacy test program.

The remainder of the series contains some unorganized files and clippings, apparently originating in the Education Department, concerning literacy testing, immigrant education, and rural education. Frank P. Graves was Commissioner of Education when the literacy testing began, and the department acted as the administrative arm of the Regents, which set policy.

The unorganized background files at the beginning of the series contain various unattributed and largely undated notes and memoranda. The material includes: instructions on how to judge a text book on English for adult immigrants; minutes of a meeting of America's Making, Inc., a committee (apparently organized by the Education Department) in charge of a festival and exhibit showing the achievements of immigrants and promoting national unity; material on how visiting school nurses could cooperate in immigrant education; memoranda about organizing adult education classes; posters announcing literacy tests; publications, from New York and other states, and memoranda about literacy testing, immigrant education, and rural education; and unbound, unarranged newspaper clippings dating 1922-1932 about the literacy test program in New York State.

The scrapbook articles were collected by a clipping service from newspapers all over the state. They date from 1922 to 1933, with the bulk of clippings dating prior to 1926. Each clipping is identified by date and name of newspaper. The clippings generally relate to developments in enacting the literacy test program, including: a drive to transfer the Board of Elections' power to administer the literacy test to the Education Department; accounts of the 1923 legislation and subsequent court decisions, especially the Court of Appeals affirmation of the "Steinberg Law on Literacy" entrusting the administration of literacy tests for new voters to the Board of Regents; announcements of scheduled dates and sites for testing and literacy classes (usually night school); reports on the numbers of people attending and passing the literacy test, sometimes listing names of those in the community who passed, or the percentages of those successful/unsuccessful; and advocacy work of the State Education Department and organizations such as the National Education Association to encourage enactment of the literacy test program nationwide (in 1924 the department estimated that 20 million Americans would fail a literacy test at the fifth grade level)

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Related Information

---

### Related Material

Series A0055 Board of Regents Annual Literacy Test Files contains related materials.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Other Finding Aids

---

### Available at Repository

Folder and microfilm roll lists are available at the repository.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Use of Records

---

### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of this material.

### Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

Microfilm is available for use at the New York State Archives or through interlibrary loan.

---

## Administrative Information

---

### Custodial History

These records were transferred to the State Library at an unknown date, and subsequently transferred to the State Archives in 1978 as old series 63, accession number -58.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

## Access Terms

---

- Literacy
- Testing
- English language--Study and teaching--Foreign speakers
- Documenting language testing
- Education and state
- New York (State)
- Pamphlets
- Administering government policy
- Emigration and immigration
- Language policy
- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Americanization
- Language and languages--Examinations
- Literacy tests (Election law)
- Education, Rural
- Testing adults
- Adult education and state
- Voter registration

- Memorandums
- New York (State). Education Department. Division of Vocational and Extension Education
- Graves, Frank Pierrepont, 1869-1956
- New York (State). Education Department