



# A Closer Look at Early Reading

## Graduate and Alternative Route Elementary Programs

**KEY FINDINGS:** One in four (23 percent) of 210 graduate elementary programs teach scientifically based methods of early reading instruction. As low as that percentage is, it represents improvement since our last release of ratings when only 17 percent did so. Since 2014, a third of programs (33 percent) made progress in this critical area.

### Why learning how to teach reading is the most important skill for any future elementary teacher

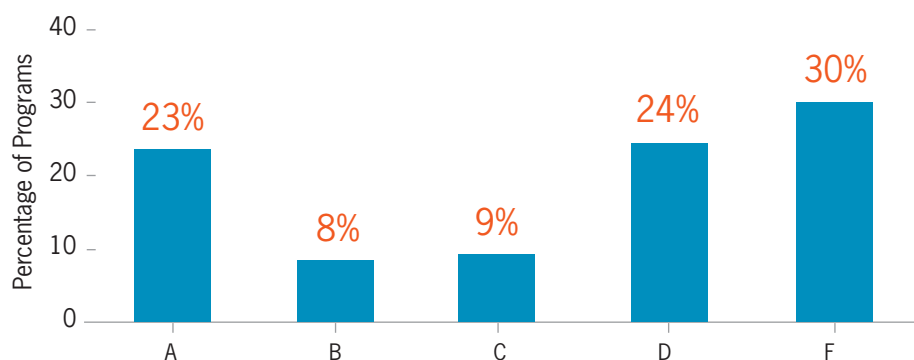
Reading proficiency underpins all later learning. Unfortunately, some 30 percent of all children do not become capable readers.<sup>1</sup> Using the knowledge gained from decades of research, research under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health has shown that this unacceptable rate of failure could be cut by two-thirds or even more, if only schools used scientifically based methods of reading instruction.

To earn an A on this standard, programs must adequately address all of the five essential components of reading which are explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Programs could meet this standard through a combination of relevant lectures; high quality textbooks; course assignments, tests, and teaching practice.

For more information about analysis and program grades, see the *Methodology in brief* and *Understanding program grades* sections below.

### How many programs teach elementary teacher candidates about the five key components of early reading instruction?

(N=210 graduate elementary programs)



Not shown in this chart are the 7 percent of programs we could not determine a score for due to incomplete information.

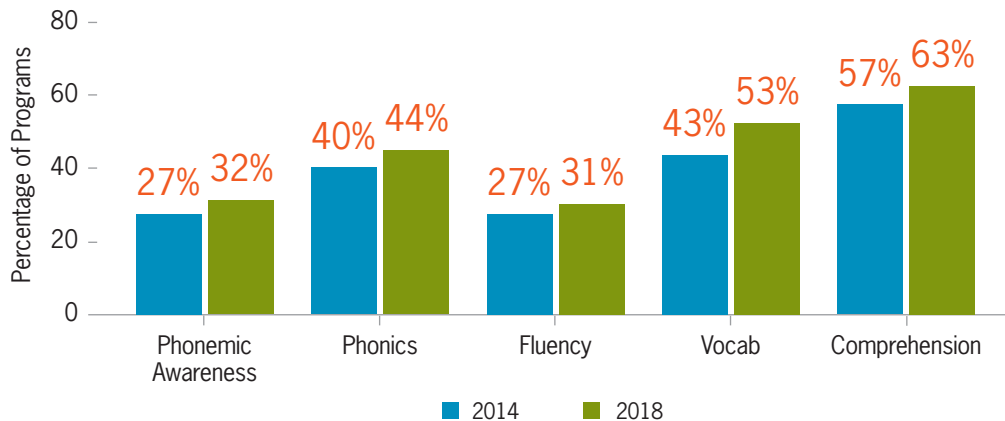
1 The most recent NAEP results find that 31 percent of 4th grade students are “below basic” on this reading assessment. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1992–2015 Reading Assessments. Retrieved March 12, 2018 from [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4).

The distribution of scores here provides insight into the divergent approaches that teacher prep programs take to early reading instruction, illustrating the polarization among teacher educators regarding how to teach reading. One in four programs are clearly designing instruction based on the best research available about what works in reading instruction. These programs are likely drawing from findings by the National Reading Panel as well as updated research from the Institute for Education Sciences,<sup>2</sup> the most authoritative source on how children learn to read. This research asserts that teachers need to know and be able to teach the five components of effective reading instruction. On the other hand, half of the programs (54 percent earning a D or F) teach at most two components of reading instruction, ignoring much of the scientific evidence on how most children best learn to read. Fewer programs fall in the middle, choosing to teach some elements of good reading instruction, but not others. However, the research is clear that it is not possible to omit or favor some components over others.

We reviewed a limited sample of 28 elementary alternative certification programs. None earned an A in elementary reading preparation: four earned a B, one earned a C, seven earned a D, and the remaining 16 earned failing marks.

### A closer look at program adherence to the five essential components of effective reading instruction

Percentage of graduate programs addressing each component throughout the years  
(N=215 2014 programs; N=210 2018 programs)



Compared with 2014, programs are showing marked improvement — a higher proportion of programs are teaching each component.

More programs' course designs include comprehension (63 percent) than any other reading component.

In addition, about half of programs' course designs include vocabulary and phonics (53 percent and 44 percent, respectively). However, only around one-third include fluency or phonemic awareness (31 percent and 32 percent, respectively). As we wrote in 2006, fluency and phonemic awareness are the two components which surfaced most recently in the academic research. However given that consensus behind this research is at least twenty years old, we hope it does not take another twenty years to see them in a majority of programs.

2 National Reading Panel (US), National Institute of Child Health, & Human Development (US). (2000). Report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health; Foorman, B., Beyer, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., & Wissel, S. (2016). Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide/21>.

## Textbooks used in early reading programs

Unlike in the field of elementary math preparation, where a relatively small number of textbooks are used, there appears to be no end of possible elementary reading texts. We evaluated 159 new texts for the 2018 Review. Over five years of teacher prep releases, we have examined 859 different assigned by teacher prep reading course.

Almost half (49 percent) of these textbooks are inadequate, because they do not convey scientifically based early reading instruction. Names of additional acceptable textbooks can be found in the [list](#) of recommended texts.

Below are the ten textbooks most commonly used in courses evaluated in the Review that comprehensively and rigorously cover the scientific basis and instructional elements of the five essential components of effective reading instruction. Names of additional acceptable textbooks can be found in the full list of all evaluated texts.

### Texts covering all five elements of effective reading instruction

Title	Author	Edition	# courses in graduate elementary programs using this text
Creating Literacy Instruction for All Students	Gunning, Thomas G.	9	28
Teaching Children to Read: The Teacher Makes the Difference	Reutzel, D. Ray; Cooter, Robert D.	7	13
Assessment for Reading Instruction	McKenna, Michael C & Dougherty Stahl, Katherine A.	3	9
Teaching Reading in the 21st Century	Graves, Michael F; Juel, Connie F; Graves, Bonnie B; Dewitz, Peter F	5	8
Striking a Balance: A Comprehensive Approach to Early Literacy	Cecil, Nancy Lee	5	8
Literacy: Helping Students Construct Meaning	Cooper, J.D., Robinson, M.D., Slansky, J.A., & Kiger, N.D.	9	7
The Essentials of Teaching Children to Read: The Teacher Makes the Difference	Reutzel, D.R. & Cooter, R.B. Jr.	3	6
CORE: Teaching Reading Sourcebook Updated Second Edition	Honig, Bill, Linda Diamond, and Linda Gutlohn	2	6
Teaching Reading and Writing: The Developmental Approach	Templeton, S. & Gehsmann, K.M.	1	6
Literacy's Beginnings: Supporting Young Readers and Writers	McGee, Lea M., Richgels, Donald J.	6	5

## Methodology in brief

Reading experts reviewed lecture topics, student assignments, and textbooks of required reading courses to determine whether the training that teachers receive is in line with the findings of the National Reading Panel, the most authoritative source on how children learn to read, as well as the updated analysis provided in 2016 by the [Institute for Education Sciences](#).

To learn more about how we evaluate programs' early reading instruction, including how individual indicators are satisfied, please see our [methodology](#).

For examples of model materials on this standard, please see the [resources](#) section.

## Understanding program grades for Early Reading

### Traditional

- A+** Program coursework addresses all five essential components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) requiring at least two lectures and one type of practice (test, writing assignments, or teaching experience) and all required textbooks are “acceptable.”
- A** Program coursework adequately addresses all five essential components. Examples of adequate coverage include:
  - An acceptable textbook and two or more lectures on a component;
  - An acceptable textbook and a test on a component;
  - An acceptable textbook and an assignment and practice teaching on a component;
  - Two or more lectures and a test on a component;
  - Two or more lectures and assignments on a component; etc.
- B** Program coursework addresses four of the five essential components.
- C** Program coursework addresses three of the five essential components.
- D** Program coursework addresses only two of the five essential components.
- F** Program coursework addresses at most one of the five essential components.



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