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. 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.

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, 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)

![Graph showing percentage of programs addressing each component](image)

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.

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.

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

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.