

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, January 27th, 2020; 12:01 AM EST

CONTACT  
Nicole Gerber  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
[ngerber@nctq.org](mailto:ngerber@nctq.org)  
202-393-0020, ext. 712

## ARKANSAS' TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS RANK AT TOP IN NATION FOR THEIR EARLY READING INSTRUCTION

*More Aspiring Teachers in Arkansas Are Being Prepared to Teach All Children to Read, as State Pushes for Adoption of the Science of Reading*

**Washington, D.C.** — New [data and analysis](#) from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) finds significant progress on adoption of scientifically-based methods for teaching reading by the nation's teacher preparation programs, with Arkansas programs not only outperforming all but three other states, but registering some of the most significant improvement in the nation.

For the first time since NCTQ began publishing program ratings in its 2013 *Teacher Prep Review*, the number of programs in the nation to embrace reading science has crossed the halfway mark, with 51 percent of 1,000 evaluated traditional elementary teacher preparation programs across the country now earning an A or B grade for their coverage of the key components of the science of reading—up from just 35 percent seven years ago.

Programs in Arkansas perform well above that national average, with 77 percent (10) of 13 Arkansas programs now earning an A or B. **Arkansas Tech University**, in particular, receives special commendation in NCTQ's 2020 *Teacher Prep Review* for being one of 15 exemplary teacher preparation programs, receiving an A+ designation. Arkansas also has the distinction of having the most improved program scores since NCTQ's last evaluation in 2016, with the average program improving by over a full letter grade. Only Mississippi, Utah, and New Hampshire scored higher.

Arkansas' R.I.S.E. Initiative, resulting from the passage of the Right to Read Act in 2017, requires schools to train teachers in reading instruction methods based on science and for new teachers to demonstrate knowledge of the science behind literacy in order to qualify for a teaching license. The Arkansas Department of Education, institutions of higher education, parent advocates, teachers, and school districts have all participated in the hard work to affect change.

"When we launched the Reading Initiative for Student Excellence, or R.I.S.E. Arkansas, three years ago, we knew we had a lot of work to do to improve student reading levels, including how we prepare teachers to teach reading," Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Johnny Key said. "Since its launch, the initiative has received overwhelming support from educators, community partners, and higher education partners who value the critical importance of strong reading skills. We are excited about the results of this independent analysis, which confirm that R.I.S.E. Arkansas is changing the way we prepare future teachers to foster reading success for students. We look forward to continued successes as we lead the nation in student-focused education."

The latest findings in Arkansas and across the nation are a positive sign for the newly energized movement across the nation to bring down notoriously high rates of illiteracy in the United States. Each year, well over a million public school students arriving in the fourth grade are added to the nation's ranks of nonreaders. Two-thirds are black and Hispanic children struggling in the face of an inequitable education system. Reading ability is a key predictor of future educational gains and life success, making successful reading instruction essential to achieving educational equity.

"I firmly believe that Arkansas would not have achieved such progress had stakeholders--from the Governor's office and the Arkansas Department of Education to parent activist groups--not welded together under a common mission," said Kim Head, an Arkansas dyslexia therapist and teacher. "But we know there is still ground to cover. We can reduce the need for new laws and retraining teachers if universities continue

to improve and align courses, curriculum, and textbooks using the model data provided by NCTQ. Arkansas can do better than 'most improved.' I expect we can grab 'best in the nation.'"

"While we are encouraged to see so many programs acknowledge that there is a science to teaching reading, time will tell if the teachers coming out of these programs will also get the data tools, high quality curricula, and support from their schools. That's how literacy rates climb," observed Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ. "It's exactly the road taken in Mississippi, and it has since made more progress than any state in the nation," referring to Mississippi's recent growth in its fourth grade reading scores on the Nation's Report Card (the NAEP).

Audie Alumbaugh, an advocate of children's right to read in Arkansas shared Walsh's sentiment: "I look forward to living in a world where every student has an opportunity at full literacy. Arkansas has made great gains but we have miles to go before we sleep. Most of those miles need to be traveled by higher education."

Now in its fourth edition, the *Teacher Prep Review* assigns a team of literacy experts to examine every course a program requires in early reading, looking at the planned topics to be covered in each class, readings, assignments, practice opportunities, and tests, as well as rating the quality of the textbooks used in each course. These experts look for clear evidence of dedicated course time as well as measures where aspiring teachers must demonstrate their knowledge of the five key components of the science of reading: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension**. All programs receive their preliminary grades well in advance of publication with an opportunity to appeal their rating and are invited to submit additional evidence for consideration. (See a short animated video explaining the methodology [here](#).)

"There has been a great deal of cynicism—and I include myself—regarding the capacity of teacher prep to make changes," commented Arne Duncan, former U.S. Secretary of Education in the Obama Administration. "I thank the National Council on Teacher Quality for refusing to turn their attention away from this issue. This progress gives me real hope."

**See how programs in Arkansas and other states performed in the interactive Teacher Prep Review Database:** [www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading](http://www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading)

**Watch a short explanation of the NCTQ methodology here:** [www.nctq.org/pages/TPREarlyReadingMethodology](http://www.nctq.org/pages/TPREarlyReadingMethodology). **For a more detailed explanation, see:** [www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading#howWeGraded](http://www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading#howWeGraded)

**Read the full NCTQ summary of findings and see all the top-performing programs at:** [www.nctq.org/publications/2020-Teacher-Prep-Review:-Program-Performance-in-Early-Reading-Instruction](http://www.nctq.org/publications/2020-Teacher-Prep-Review:-Program-Performance-in-Early-Reading-Instruction).

**Note:** In Arkansas, there were two programs NCTQ was unable to rate, in spite of repeated requests to the institution to look at their reading syllabi. Those programs are listed here: [https://www.nctq.org/review/search/standard/Early-Reading\\_CBD--](https://www.nctq.org/review/search/standard/Early-Reading_CBD--)

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To schedule an interview with NCTQ President Kate Walsh or the individuals quoted in this press release, please contact Nicole Gerber at [ngerber@nctq.org](mailto:ngerber@nctq.org) or (202) 393-0020 ext. 712.

**About the National Council on Teacher Quality:** *The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).*