

A photograph of a teacher with curly hair, wearing a patterned top, smiling and reading from a book to a group of young students sitting on the floor in a classroom. The background shows classroom furniture and a whiteboard.

State of the States

Five Policy Actions to Strengthen Implementation of the Science of Reading

January 2024



National Council
on Teacher Quality

Companion Resources

State-Specific Profiles

Customized summaries for individual states on what they are doing well and where they can improve

 National Council on Teacher Quality

Alabama's progress on state policies to strengthen implementation of the Science of Reading

NCTQ's *State of the States: Five Policy Actions to Strengthen Implementation of the Science of Reading* report provides a framework of steps state policymakers should take to ensure their teacher workforce can implement the science of reading and sustain it over time. States fall into one of four categories based on the extent to which they have implemented the five policy actions to build teacher capacity to implement scientifically based reading instruction. Overall, Alabama earned a moderate rating, meaning the state has some policies in place across the five policy actions but there is more to do.

Alabama Rating: Moderate




Overall, states are doing a better job at setting standards for prep programs and providing professional learning opportunities than embracing strong prep program approval practices, requiring a strong reading licensure test, or ensuring districts use a high-quality reading curriculum aligned with the science of reading. In the analysis, all policy actions are weighted equally. The chart below depicts how all states perform across the five policy actions.

How is Alabama performing on the five state policy actions?
Alabama ranks slightly above the national average.

1. Sets specific, detailed reading standards for teacher prep programs	Moderate
2. Reviews teacher prep programs to ensure they teach the science of reading	Moderate
3. Adopts a strong reading licensure test	Strong


State Reading Policy Action Guide

A how-to on five key actions states can take with case studies demonstrating how to do it

READING POLICY ACTION GUIDE 

How States can Implement and Sustain Strong Reading Instruction

January 2024

 National Council on Teacher Quality

Far too many students aren't learning to read.



37%

of all 4th grade students are
BELOW BASIC on NAEP Reading

Historically marginalized students suffer most from
lack of access to strong reading instruction



Black students score
BELOW BASIC



Hispanic students
score BELOW BASIC



English language
learners score
BELOW BASIC



Students with
disabilities score
BELOW BASIC

Giving teachers the knowledge and skills they need to teach reading effectively is fundamental for **improving life outcomes for all children** and **reversing historical patterns of inequity**.

In efforts to improve literacy outcomes, state leaders often do not focus enough on the key component to success: *effective teachers*.

Estimates suggest that, with effective reading instruction rooted in the science of reading, more than 90% of students would learn to read.¹

Recognizing the power of strong reading instruction to improve academic and life outcomes for children, 32 states passed laws or implemented new policies related to evidence-based reading instruction between 2013 and July 2023.

While this is encouraging, these initiatives often do not focus enough on the key component to strong implementation and long-term sustainability: **effective teachers**. Only when state leaders implement on literacy strategies that prioritize teacher effectiveness will they achieve a teacher workforce that can strengthen student literacy.

Here are five policy actions state leaders can take to ensure a well-prepared teacher workforce that can implement and sustain the science of reading:

1. Set specific, detailed reading standards for teacher prep programs.
2. Review teacher prep programs to ensure they teach the science of reading.
3. Adopt a strong elementary reading licensure test.
4. Require districts to select high-quality reading curriculum.
5. Provide professional learning and ongoing support to sustain implementation of the science of reading.

Policy Action 1:

**Set specific, detailed reading standards for
teacher prep programs**

State standards are one of the best opportunities to ensure aspiring teachers are prepared in scientifically based reading instruction.

Teacher preparation programs are responsible for ensuring aspiring elementary teachers know how to teach reading, but too often aspiring teachers aren't receiving the preparation they need. Explicit standards are important because:

- 1) They clearly outline the skills and knowledge aspiring teachers should have by the time they complete the prep program.
- 2) They provide the state with specific criteria to apply in program review and approval.
- 3) They tell school districts what their newly hired teachers from the state's prep programs should know and be able to do.

“

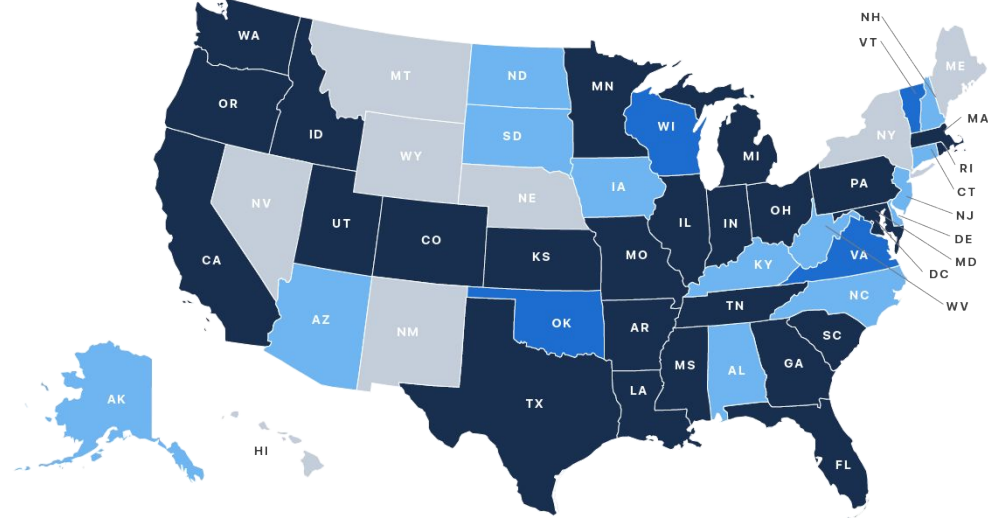
Expanding Colorado's reading standards allowed our preparation programs to understand the detail and depth of instruction needed to prepare our future teachers in the science of reading. This led to a deep review of reading courses offered in traditional and alternative programs. The specificity of the standards also allowed us to hold programs accountable through our reauthorization process, ensuring a true shift in how we prepare aspiring teachers to teach scientifically based reading instruction.”

— **Mary Bivens**, Colorado Department of Education

Too few states set specific reading standards for teacher prep, leaving too much up to chance.

Only 26 states

set detailed standards that provide specific details about what teachers should know and be able to teach for each of the five components of scientifically based reading instruction

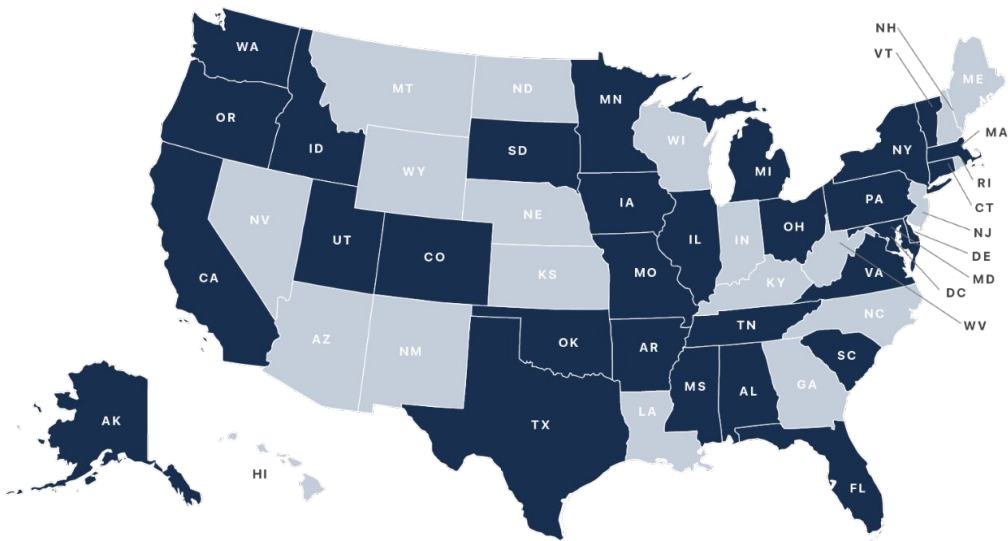


- Address all five components in detail
- Address all five components, some in detail
- Address all five components, but none in detail
- Does not address any of the components

English learners are one of the fastest growing student populations, but many states do not set any standards related to supporting them to read.

Only 30 states

include how to teach English learners in their reading standards for teacher prep programs



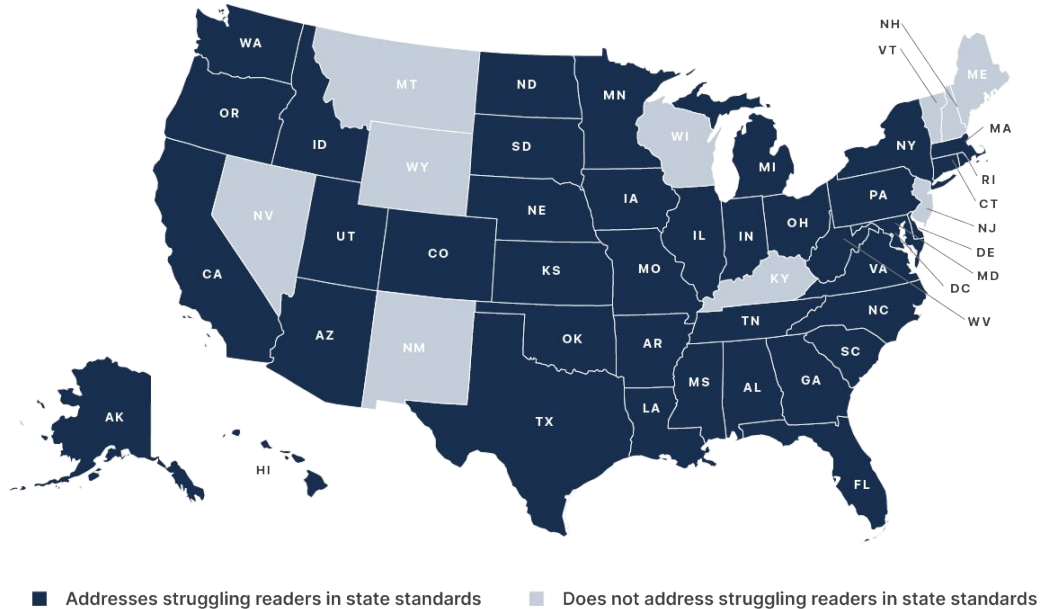
■ Addresses English Learners in state standards

■ Does not address English Learners in state standards

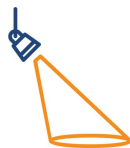
In every state, at least one third of students struggle to read, but not every state includes how to help struggling readers in their teacher prep reading standards.

41 states

include guidelines on how to teach struggling readers, including those with dyslexia, in their reading standards for preparation programs



STATE SPOTLIGHT



Utah

Utah provides [very specific reading competencies](#) for their teacher preparation programs. Their competencies also include examples of what covering the skills would look like in a teacher preparation program, clarifying expectations for teacher candidates and prep programs alike.

Action 2:

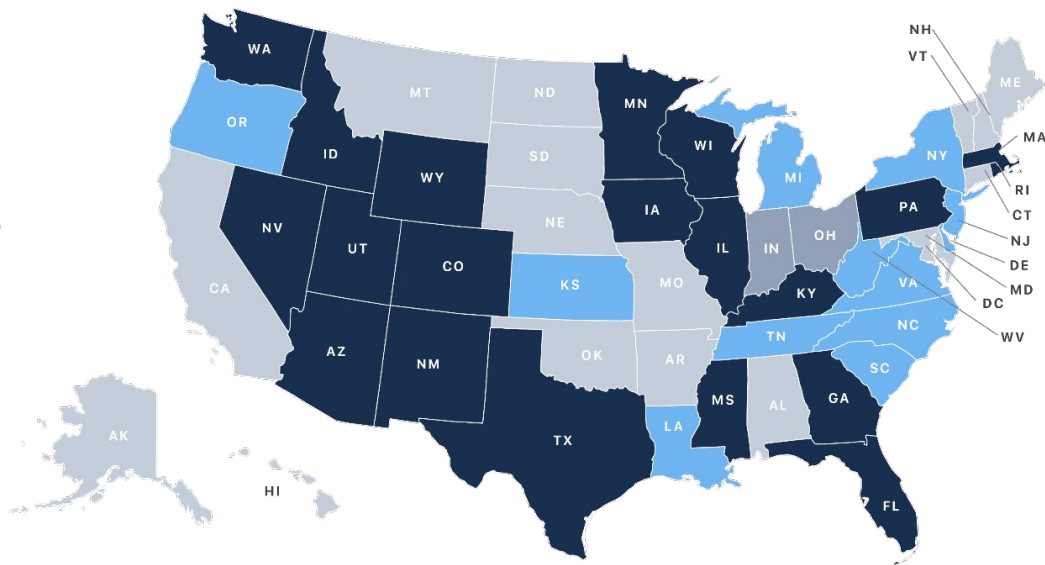
Review teacher prep programs to ensure they teach the science of reading

Without detailed reviews, states cannot guarantee prep programs adequately prepare teachers to teach reading.

Only 23 states

conduct their own program approval where they can ensure programs are aligned to the science of reading.

States should more fully use their authority to verify that teacher prep programs are carrying out literacy policies.



■ State maintains full authority

■ State to conduct specific review of science of reading implementation

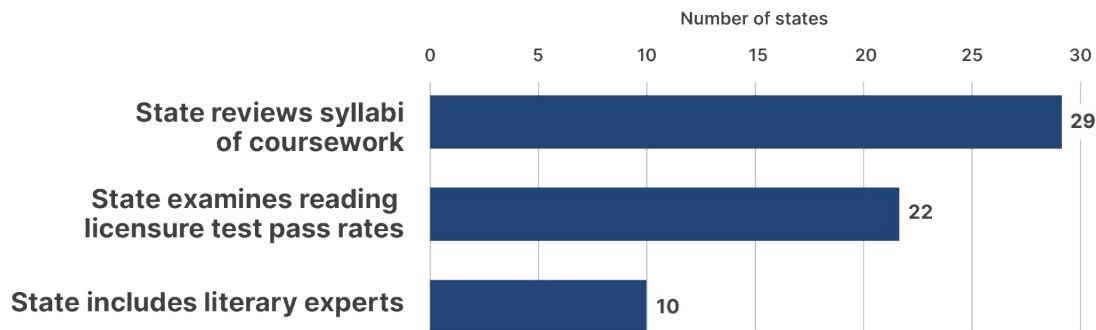
■ State makes the final decision but requires accreditation to qualify for state approval

■ State allows national accreditation to substitute its own approval process

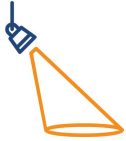
Few states use multiple pieces of evidence and include literacy experts to inform program review processes.

Only 3 states

(FL, KS, and RI) consider syllabi and pass rates, as well as include literacy experts, in program review

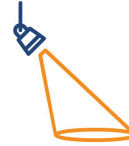


STATE SPOTLIGHT



Colorado

- Colorado [created a list](#) of specific knowledge and skills related to each of the reading standards that candidates must complete in the program.
- Each program identifies where the skills are taught, when candidates practice the skills, and how they receive feedback on it.
- Reviewers use it to verify whether programs are teaching the standards, based on evidence like course syllabi and assignment descriptions.
- When state reviewers conduct on-site visits, they include literacy experts to gauge the quality of implementation.
- Based on this process, the state either recommends approval or issues conditional approval, allowing one year to remedy any shortcomings.



Ohio

- [Ohio](#) will soon begin auditing teacher preparation programs specifically on implementation of the science of reading.
- The audits may be more efficient than relying on the program approval process because they are targeted specifically to reading and can offer a more immediate check on programs' alignment to state reading standards. (Note that, ultimately, the results may have implications for program approval.)
- Audits are required for every institution every four years, and summaries of the findings will be made public.

Action 3:

Adopt a strong elementary reading licensure test

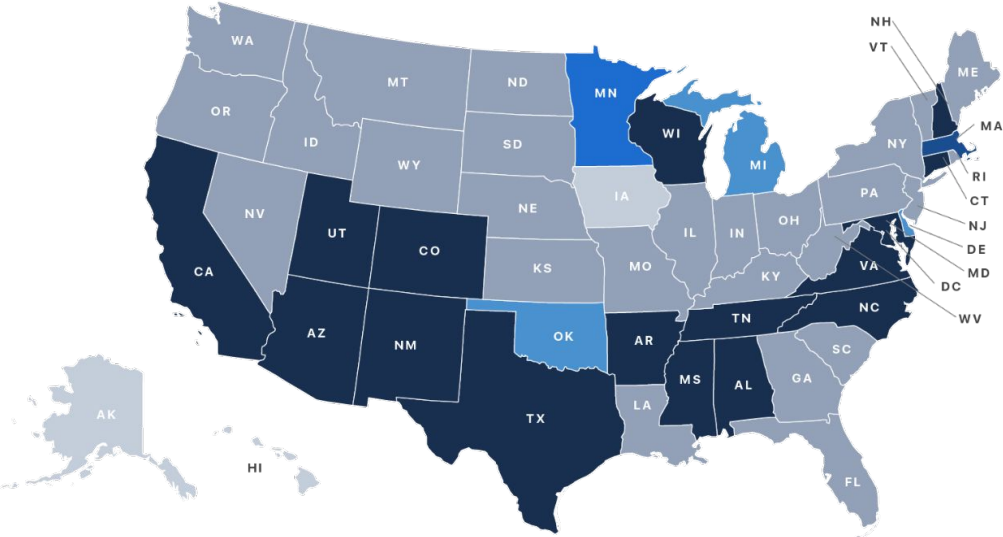
Licensure tests are an important guardrail for ensuring teachers know how to teach reading before entering the classroom.

- Licensure tests can be an efficient and comprehensive way for policymakers to ensure that all teachers possess the basic knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach students to read.
- NCTQ examined 25 elementary reading licensure tests in use and found 15 to be weak, 4 to be acceptable, and 6 to be strong.
- This shortcoming means that annually, nearly 100,000 elementary teachers across the country enter classrooms with false assurances that they're ready to teach reading.

The majority of states use a weak reading licensure test.

28 states

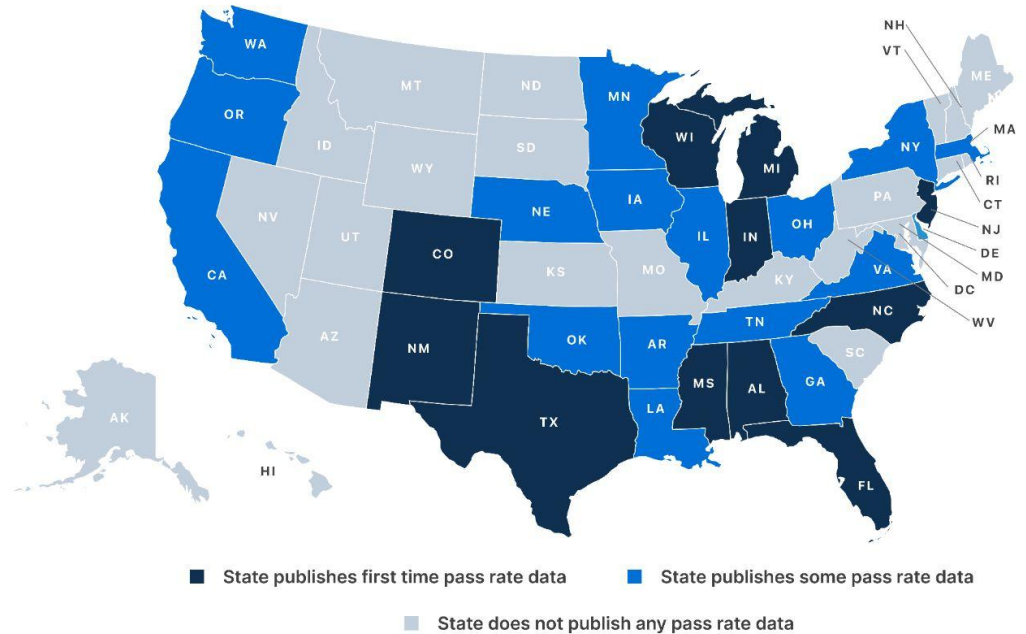
use weaker tests that do not fully signal teachers' preparedness to teach reading



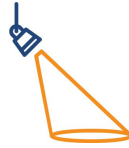
- Strong
- Mix of strong and acceptable
- Acceptable
- Mix of acceptable and weak
- Weak
- No Test

Few states publish first time pass rates on reading licensure tests.

Only 11 states
make first time pass
rates publicly available
by institution or program



STATE SPOTLIGHT



Texas

Texas is a good example of a state that uses a strong reading licensure test, the [Science of Teaching Reading](#) Exam, and uses the results as [one piece of evidence, along with several others](#), to inform program approval decisions. Texas considers the percentage of candidates that pass the examination within the first two attempts and publishes the data on its website.

Action 4:

**Require districts to select
high-quality reading curriculum materials**

High quality curriculum boosts student outcomes and offers a cost-effective policy solution.

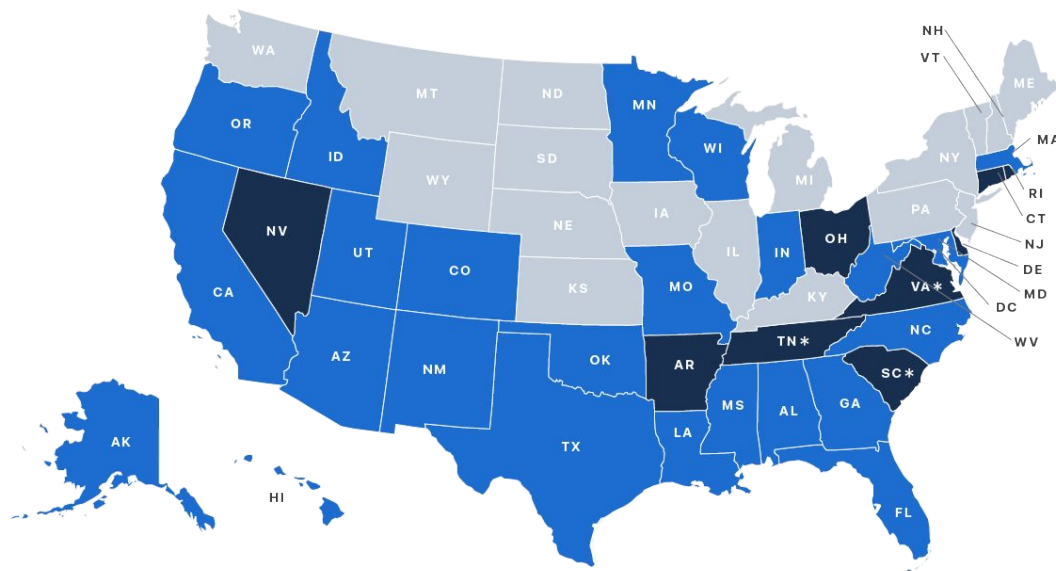
- The difference in impact on student learning between high- and low-quality curriculum can be greater than the difference between a first year teacher and one with three years of experience.²
- Students of color are more likely to lack access to grade-level assignments and high quality curriculum³.
- Using a high-quality curriculum can also ease the burden on teachers, reducing the time that they might spend searching for materials online.⁴
- Improving the quality of the curriculum was found to be **40 times** more cost effective than reducing class size.⁵

While states spend over \$1 billion dollars on reading curriculum, only nine states require districts to select high-quality reading curriculum materials.

Only 9 states

require districts to select high-quality reading curriculum materials.

Three of those states (SC, TN, VA) require the use of high-quality reading curriculum *and* allocate funds to all districts.



■ Required list is published ■ Recommended list is published
■ None *=Funding is allocated by state

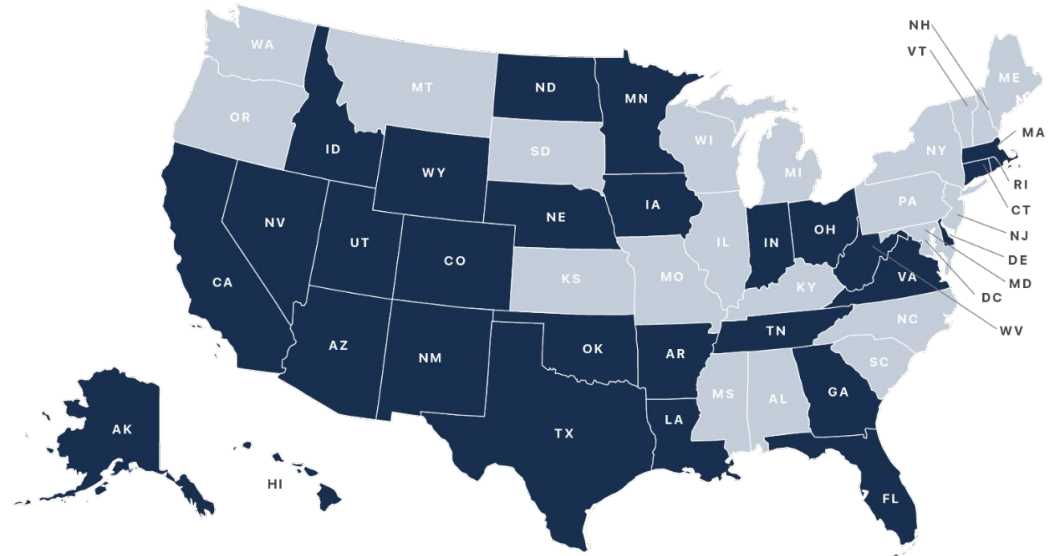
Nearly half of states have no way to know the quality of their districts' reading curriculum.

21 states

do not collect data on what curricula districts use nor do they require districts to publish it

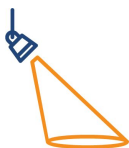
17 states

collect district curriculum information, but do not publish it



District reading curricula is collected or published by state and/or district ■ Yes ■ No

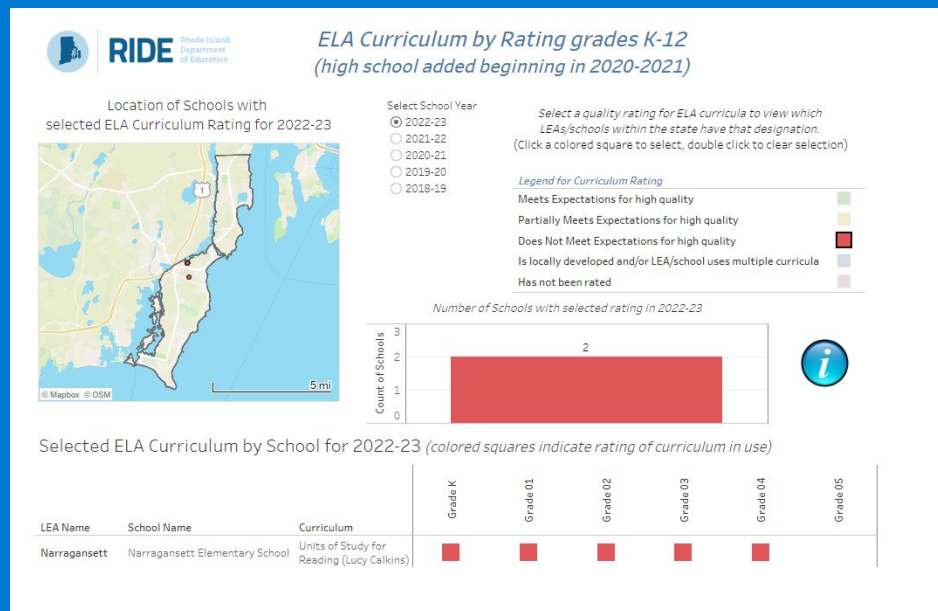
STATE SPOTLIGHT



Rhode Island

RI publishes a [Curriculum Visualization Tool](#), which allows stakeholders to see the curriculum each school is using and whether the state has determined it to be high quality or not.

Snapshot of RI's Curriculum Visualization Tool



States should provide guidance to districts on selecting high-quality curriculum to meet the needs of all students.

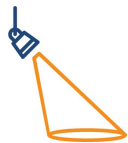


One-third of states provide no guidance on how curriculum materials should address struggling readers.



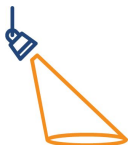
Nearly half of states provide no guidance to determine if curriculum materials include support for English Learners.

STATE SPOTLIGHT



Mississippi

Mississippi provides a [curriculum assessment tool](#) that provides guidance on assessing curricula, including interrogating how well the curriculum supports teachers to meet the needs of English learners.



Arkansas

Arkansas [provides a list](#) of approved dyslexia and intervention programs.

Action 5:

Provide professional learning and ongoing support to sustain implementation of the science of reading

Professional learning matters for skillful implementation of curriculum.

- Professional learning is most useful to teachers when it is regular, frequent, job-embedded, and builds on the curriculum or instructional materials that teachers use every day in their classrooms.
- Teachers who experienced effective professional learning opportunities aligned with the curriculum were less likely to report that their materials were “too challenging” for their students and more likely to use the high-quality curriculum.⁶

Though more than half of states require some type of professional learning on the science of reading and allocate funds for it, over half a million teachers may be left without it.

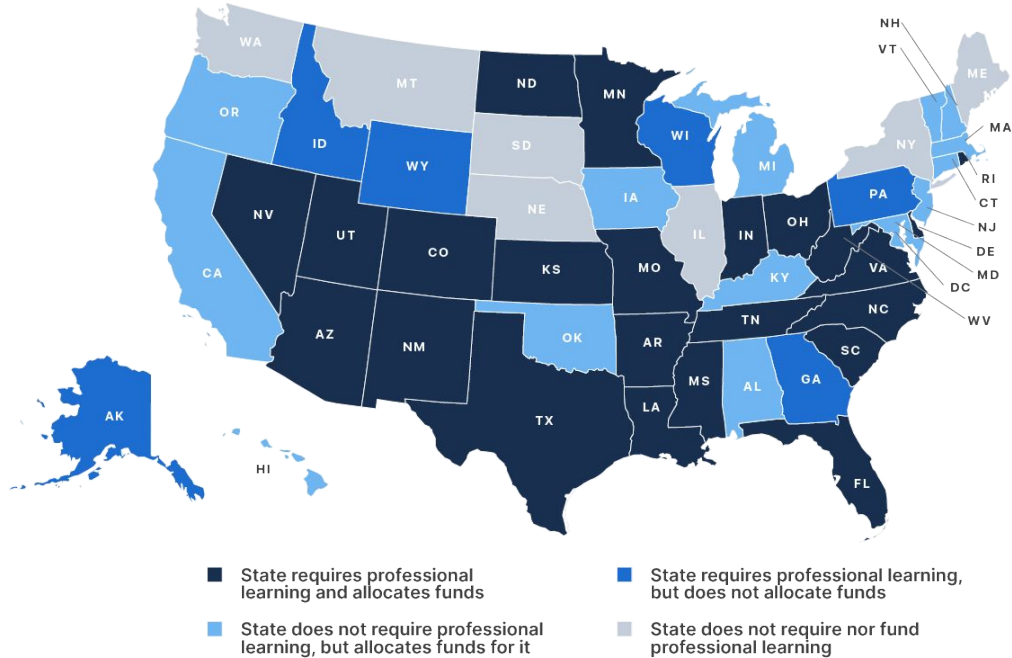
30 states

require science of reading professional learning for elementary teachers

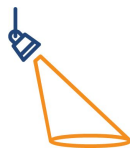
and

36 states

invested over \$660 million dollars in the last 18 months to train current teachers in the science of reading



STATE SPOTLIGHT



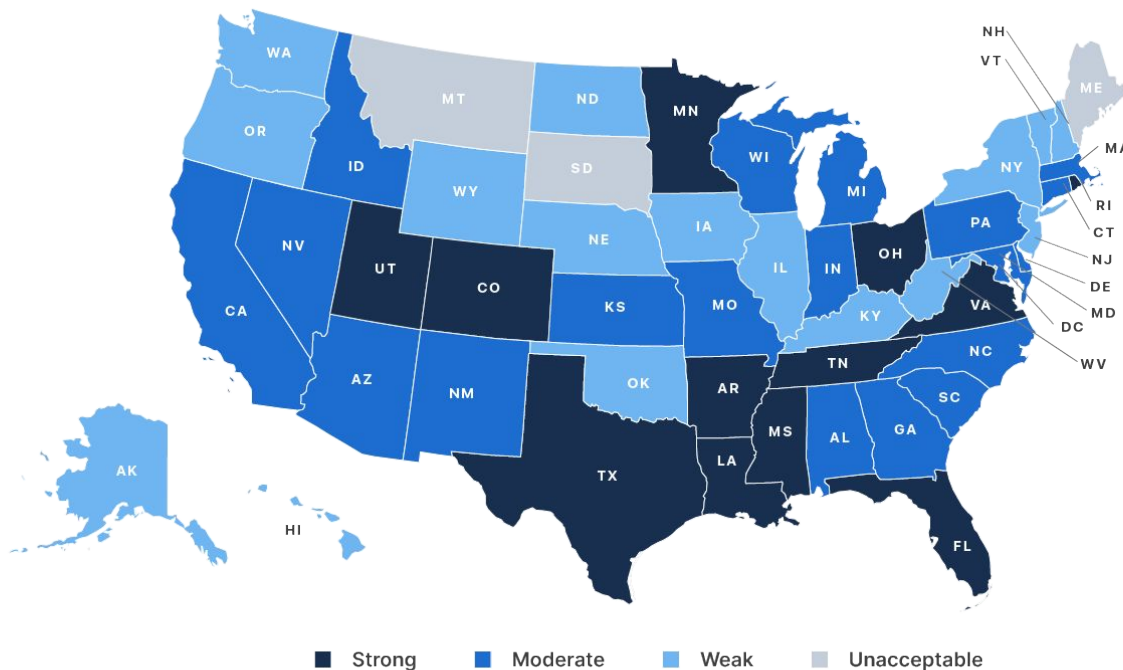
Tennessee

Leading Innovation For Tennessee (LIFT) is a network of districts who have been working to address Tennessee's literacy crisis by providing teachers with high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional learning and supports. Tennessee partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to work with the districts on using high-quality materials and optimizing it by aligning texts and tasks to grade-level standards. Ongoing training and coaching is a part of the success to build teacher capacity and skillful implementation of a high-quality curriculum.

Conclusion & Recommendations

All five policy actions are connected, and when implemented together, states are more likely to increase teacher effectiveness and positively impact student reading outcomes.

State performance on implementing policies and practices to build teacher effectiveness in the science of reading



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

What states can do to ensure an effective teacher workforce who can implement the science of reading

✓ **Policy Action 1: Set specific, detailed reading standards for teacher preparation programs**

- Set specific, detailed reading standards for teacher preparation programs that are aligned to the science of reading
- Include how to teach English learners in the reading standards for teacher prep programs
- Incorporate how to teach struggling readers, including those with dyslexia, in the reading standards for teacher prep programs

✓ **Policy Action 2: Review teacher prep programs to ensure they teach the science of reading**

- Conduct program reviews to hold programs accountable for implementing the science of reading
- Maintain full control over program approval processes
- Use multiple sources of evidence to gauge implementation of the science of reading
- Require PreK-12 literacy experts as program reviewers

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

What states can do to ensure an effective teacher workforce who can implement science of reading

✓ **Policy Action 3: Require a strong elementary reading licensure test**

- Adopt a strong reading licensure test as a guardrail to ensure new teachers know the science of reading
- Require all elementary teacher candidates to pass a reading licensure tests
- Publish reading licensure pass rate data

✓ **Policy Action 4: Require districts to use high-quality reading curriculum**

- Require the use of high-quality curriculum aligned to the science of reading
- Collect and publish data on curriculum districts are using
- Allocate resources to help make the transition to new curriculum
- Provide guidance on how to select high-quality curricula that support struggling readers (including students with dyslexia) and English learners

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

What states can do to ensure an effective teacher workforce who can implement science of reading

- ✓ **Policy Action 5: Provide professional learning and ongoing support to sustain implementation of science of reading**
 - Require all current elementary teachers to receive high-quality professional learning in scientifically based reading instruction and to demonstrate their learning
 - Provide districts with resources to support implementation and sustainability, such as literacy coaches or support networks
 - Support professional learning to promote skillful implementation of high-quality reading curricula
 - Evaluate results of investments in professional learning

ENDNOTES

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