

Strengthening Illinois’s Implementation of the Science of Reading through Teacher Preparation

Literacy is critical for success in school, work, and civic engagement. Research finds that reading failure can be reduced to fewer than 1 in 10 students when teachers provide scientifically based reading instruction.¹ In the wake of learning loss experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, we must ensure aspiring teachers are prepared to teach children to read using scientifically based reading instruction.

The stakes for students in Illinois

In Illinois, only **33% of 4th grade students read proficiently** based on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). That number falls precipitously for some of Illinois’s historically underserved students. This dismal data has nothing to do with the students and families and everything to do with **inequities in access to effective literacy instruction**.

Illinois’s Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Illinois	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	1,797,260	33%
Hispanic students	507,624	21%
Black students	308,430	13%
English language learners	229,180	13%
Students with disabilities	291,371	9%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	938,330	17%

Teacher prep programs are key to implementing and sustaining science of reading at scale.

Are Illinois’s teacher prep programs ensuring aspiring teachers learn the most effective methods to teach reading?

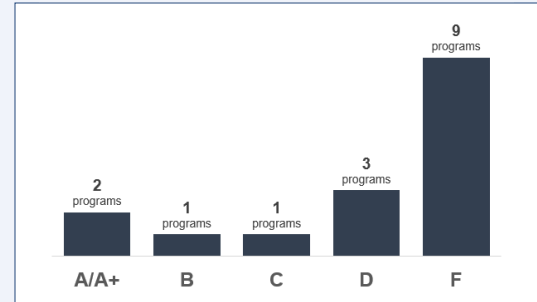
The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy nonprofit, evaluated nearly 700 programs across the country, including 16 in Illinois, on how well they prepare aspiring elementary teachers to teach reading.

This review considered attention to **the five core components of scientifically based reading instruction**—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—across four different instructional approaches (instructional hours, background materials, objective measures of knowledge, and opportunities to practice).

The review also deducted points when programs teach aspiring teachers content contrary to research-based practices; and considered whether programs provide instruction in how to support a range of learners (struggling readers, English language learners, and students who speak language varieties other than mainstream English).

¹ See [appendix](#) for citation for this statement and data included throughout.

In Illinois, 13% of the 16 programs evaluated earn an A for preparation in reading, meaning they adequately teach all five components of reading and provide little or no instruction on content contrary to research-based practices.



Illinois ranks among the worst in the nation for the average number of components of reading its programs adequately address. In Illinois:

- Programs are most likely to cover **comprehension** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **One of 16 programs provides at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There are eight programs in Illinois that teach **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- Eight programs devote some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- Five programs devote some instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Illinois include the undergraduate programs at Illinois College and Olivet Nazarene University.**

Better teacher preparation is essential to ensure all students effectively learn to read.

State policy question	Answer for Illinois
Does Illinois have standards for teacher prep programs that address all five core components of scientifically based reading?	Yes, the standards address all five core components with details related to the knowledge and skills needed to teach them
Does Illinois require a licensure test that addresses reading?	Yes, but the test combines reading with all other subjects
What are the required or optional licensure tests that address reading?	Illinois Licensure Testing System Elementary Education (Grades 1-6) (305)
Does Illinois require the review of reading course syllabi as part of preparation program renewal?	No

“Every child has the right to read. Sending teachers into the classroom without the science behind how kids learn to read puts everyone in an unfair position. As teachers, we are in this profession to always do what is best and necessary. If we aren’t properly taught by the institutions we put our trust and dollars into, we are made ineffective.”

- Virginia Quinn-Mooney, First grade teacher

Recommendations for state leaders:

- Set specific, explicit, and comprehensive preparation standards for scientifically based reading instruction.
- Incorporate a specific evaluation of reading instruction in program renewal or reauthorization processes, and take action if programs are not aligned to the state’s standards for scientifically based reading instruction.
- Require a reading licensure test aligned with scientifically based reading instruction for any PK–5 teachers to earn licensure, and publish the pass rates.
- Deploy a comprehensive strategy to implement scientifically–based reading instruction, and prioritize teacher prep.
- Use the bully pulpit to draw attention to the importance of teacher prep to sustain implementation of improved reading instruction.

For more detail on these recommendations, visit www.nctq.org/review/standard/reading-foundations.

Questions? Contact Shannon Holston, NCTQ Chief of Policy and Programs at shannon.holston@nctq.org.

Program grades in Illinois

School	Program Level	Grade	Adequate coverage of core components: Graded (Up to 12 points per component; 8 points for adequate coverage; 4 or more contrary practices results in letter grade deduction)						Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
Chicago State University	UG	D	No (6.11 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	No (6.67 pts)	1	3 pts	0.75 pts	0 pts
Governors State University	UG	F	No (7.29 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (6 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	4	4 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Greenville University	UG	F	No (0 pts)	No (7.12 pts)	No (5.81 pts)	No (4.5 pts)	No (5.5 pts)	3	4 pts	4 pts	0 pts
Illinois College	UG	A+	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	7 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Judson University	UG	F	No (6.95 pts)	Yes (10.92 pts)	No (7.03 pts)	Yes (9.5 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	4	4 pts	4 pts	4 pts
Loyola University Chicago	UG	F	No (4.64 pts)	No (5.72 pts)	No (5.56 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	3	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Northeastern Illinois University	UG	F	No (0 pts)	No (3.56 pts)	No (4.12 pts)	No (3.75 pts)	No (4 pts)	2	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts

View this data online at nctq.org for more details. Data updated September 2023.

School	Program Level	Grade	Adequate coverage of core components: Graded (Up to 12 points per component; 8 points for adequate coverage; 4 or more contrary practices results in letter grade deduction)						Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
Northeastern Illinois University	G	F	No (0 pts)	No (0 pts)	No (5.25 pts)	No (0 pts)	No (4 pts)	2	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Northwestern University	G	F	No (1.93 pts)	No (1.75 pts)	No (0 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (5.25 pts)	2	1 pt	4 pts	1 pt
Olivet Nazarene University	UG	A+	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	0	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	UG	B	No (2.64 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	1	5 pts	3 pts	0 pts
University of Illinois at Chicago	UG	D	No (2.5 pts)	Yes (9.5 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (4.5 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	1	2 pts	0 pts	5 pts
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	UG	F	No (4.61 pts)	No (5.81 pts)	No (5.81 pts)	No (4.12 pts)	No (6 pts)	0	0 pts	1.5 pts	0 pts
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	G	F	No (1.61 pts)	No (2.25 pts)	No (2.81 pts)	No (1.12 pts)	No (5.5 pts)	0	1 pt	0 pts	0 pts
University of Illinois Springfield	UG	D	No (3 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	No (4 pts)	No (6.75 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	0	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of St. Francis	UG	C	No (4.68 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	3	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts

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