

Strengthening Wisconsin’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 Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, 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 Wisconsin’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**.

Wisconsin’s Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Wisconsin	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	778,151	33%
Hispanic students	109,122	19%
Black students	72,777	10%
English language learners	50,902	7%
Students with disabilities	120,348	10%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	339,283	18%

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

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

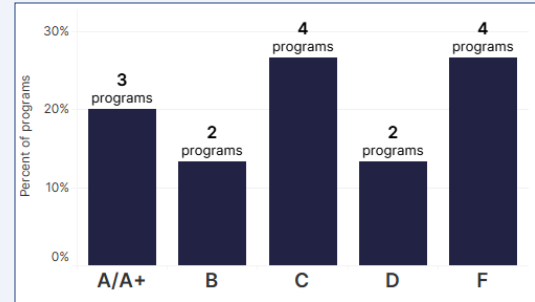
The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy nonprofit, evaluated nearly 700 programs across the country, including 15 in Wisconsin, on how well they prepare aspiring elementary teachers to teach reading.

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 Wisconsin, 20% of the 15 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.



Wisconsin ranks above the national average for the average number of components of reading its programs adequately address. In Wisconsin:

- Programs are most likely to cover **comprehension** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **Three of 15 programs provide at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There are 10 programs (67%) in Wisconsin that teach **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- Seven programs devote some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- Eleven programs devote some instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Wisconsin include the undergraduate program at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point.**

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

State policy question	Answer for Wisconsin
Does Wisconsin have standards for teacher prep programs that address all five core components of scientifically based reading?	Partially, the standards only address phonics, but not phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
Does Wisconsin require a licensure test that addresses reading?	Yes, the state requires a reading licensure test
What are the required or optional licensure tests that address reading?	Foundations of Reading
Does Wisconsin 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 Wisconsin

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)						Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Struggling readers		ELLs	Speakers of language varieties	
Carthage College	UG	F	No (3.86 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (6.75 pts)	No (1.75 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	1	0 pts	4 pts	0 pts	
Maranatha Baptist University	UG	A	Yes (8.39 pts)	Yes (8.59 pts)	Yes (9.31 pts)	Yes (10.13 pts)	Yes (9.75 pts)	2	5 pts	2.5 pts	0 pts	
Marian University	UG	D	No (5.32 pts)	No (6.84 pts)	No (6.13 pts)	Yes (10.13 pts)	Yes (9.5 pts)	3	0 pts	3.5 pts	0 pts	
University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire	UG	F	No (0.32 pts)	No (3.38 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (0.75 pts)	No (3 pts)	2	0 pts	1.5 pts	0 pts	
University of Wisconsin - Green Bay	UG	C	Yes (8.93 pts)	No (7.75 pts)	No (7.75 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	3	2.75 pts	2 pts	0 pts	
University of Wisconsin - La Crosse	UG	C	No (6.29 pts)	Yes (8.03 pts)	Yes (8.31 pts)	No (7.13 pts)	Yes (11.5 pts)	1	3 pts	6 pts	0 pts	

View this data online at nctq.org for more details. An asterisk by an institution name indicates that additional materials for consideration were provided after the review deadline, but prior to publication; scores for these programs may change pending review of those materials.

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
University of Wisconsin - Madison	UG	A	Yes (8.29 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (8.75 pts)	1	2 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee	UG	F	No (3.82 pts)	Yes (8.15 pts)	No (1.13 pts)	No (7.13 pts)	No (6 pts)	7	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh	UG	C	Yes (9.91 pts)	Yes (11.44 pts)	No (6.75 pts)	No (6.88 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	3	2.5 pts	4.25 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Parkside	UG	B	Yes (9.5 pts)	Yes (10.5 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	4	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Platteville	UG	D	No (4.82 pts)	No (4.45 pts)	No (7.97 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	2	4.5 pts	5.13 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - River Falls	UG	B	No (7.18 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9.58 pts)	2	5.5 pts	5.38 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point	UG	A+	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	2 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Wisconsin - Superior	UG	F	No (2.5 pts)	No (5 pts)	No (4 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	No (5 pts)	0	2 pts	5.5 pts	2 pts
University of Wisconsin - Whitewater	UG	C	No (7.79 pts)	Yes (11.06 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	4	3 pts	2 pts	0 pts

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