



A NATION OF READERS

HOW STATE CHIEFS CAN HELP EVERY CHILD LEARN TO READ

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Bureau of Indian Education, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

Matthew Blomstedt (Nebraska), President
Carissa Moffat Miller, Chief Executive Officer

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Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20001-1431
Phone (202) 336-7000 • Fax (202) 408-8072 • www.ccsso.org

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, driven by a commitment to improve enduringly troubling national student reading performance, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) assembled state chiefs, reading experts, policy experts, and other stakeholder groups to begin an open dialogue on how state education agencies (SEA) can improve reading skills for all students. (See page 4 for a complete list of summit participants.)

The objectives of the literacy summit were to:

- Enhance our collective understanding of the systemic barriers preventing teachers and administrators from improving reading skills for students, particularly the most vulnerable populations and students performing below grade level;
- Explore the solutions states and/or districts have found successful in addressing these systemic barriers;
- Begin to discuss action steps state leaders can take to remove systemic barriers and support improved reading skills; and
- Identify opportunities for partner support on this issue.

From this all-day convening emerged four concrete actions that state leaders can take to support improved student reading skills:

- 1** Articulate a coherent vision for improving literacy that is grounded in evidence-based practices and a commitment to equity and student outcomes.
- 2** Align SEA organization, staffing, and practices to support reading as a foundational driver of equity and achievement.
- 3** Provide policy guidance and support to districts and schools regarding aligning curricula, assessments, and professional learning to the science of reading.
- 4** Engage college and university partners to support the state reading strategy.

MANAGING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities for the most vulnerable learners, including students living in poverty, students of color, students with disabilities, youth experiencing homelessness, and English learners (ELs).

As school systems navigate the mix of remote, hybrid, and in-person learning, they will have to explicitly prioritize resources and support for these students, and state education agencies (SEAs) play an important role in ensuring that they do so. One of the highest leverage strategies and most pressing needs is maintaining and building students' literacy skills.

SEAs should be clear about the importance of reading instruction as a key lever for accelerating unfinished learning. The relief funding Congress authorized through ESSER gives districts a unique opportunity to invest in effective reading instruction, including curriculum and professional development. SEAs can build expectations for school systems by passing policy, issuing guidance, and using grants to incentivize the use of evidence-based reading instruction. SEAs can use each of these levers to encourage school systems to focus on making sure the most vulnerable students are receiving the reading resources and support they need to learn and thrive.

CCSSO has developed a variety of resources to help states support their districts and schools during the pandemic, including specific guidance for PreK-3rd grade teaching and learning recovery.

For more information, go to:

<https://ccsso.org/coronavirus>



Indeed, through advocacy, communication, support, guidance, and engagement, states play a critical role in setting the conditions for key stakeholders—including educator preparation programs, regional educational services agencies, school districts, and schools—to align curricula and instruction to evidenced-based practices.

This resource delves into the four concrete actions that state leaders can take (including more specific steps related to each action and state examples) to support state leaders as they continue to address this critical issue—thereby giving all children the best opportunity to become successful readers and, ultimately, succeed in school.

CCSSO LITERACY SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Kirsten Baesler

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota

Jillian Balow

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Wyoming, Past President, CCSSO Board of Directors (2019-2020)

Matthew Blomstedt

Commissioner of Education, Nebraska, President, CCSSO Board of Directors (2020-2021)

Daniel French

Secretary of Education, Vermont

Angelica Infante-Green

Commissioner of Education, Rhode Island

Hanseul Kang

then-State Superintendent of Education, District of Columbia (now executive director, Broad Center, Yale School of Management)

Johnny Key

Commissioner of Education, Arkansas

Heather Peske

Senior Associate Commissioner, Massachusetts (designee for Jeff Riley, Commissioner)

Pedro Rivera

then-Secretary of Education, Pennsylvania (now president of Lancaster County College)

Penny Schwinn

Commissioner of Education, Tennessee

Molly Spearman

State Superintendent of Education, South Carolina

Margie Vandeven

Commissioner of Education, Missouri

Carey M. Wright

State Superintendent of Education, Mississippi

INVITED GUESTS

Deborah Delisle

President and CEO, Alliance for Excellent Education

Denise Forte

Senior Vice President for Partnership and Engagement, The Education Trust

Emily Hanford

Senior Producer and Correspondent, American Public Media. APM Reports

Louisa Moats

President, Moats Associates Consulting, Inc.

Kara Paige

Third Grade Teacher, Canton Public School District, Mississippi

Robert Pondiscio

Senior Fellow and Vice President for External Affairs, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Emily Solari

Professor of Reading Education in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development

David Steiner

Executive Director, Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, Professor, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University

Joanne Weiss

President, Weiss Associates

James Woodworth

Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education



THE EVIDENCE BASE ON LEARNING TO READ: A PRIMER

Literacy has long been recognized as the foundational skill for success at every school level and in post-secondary education, work, and citizenship/life (Kogut, 2004; National Research Council, 1998; Wise, 2009). Too many indicators, however, demonstrate how far the nation has to go to ensure that every child learns to read.

Results of the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) showed that 34 states saw no change in Grade 4 reading scores since 2017, and 17 states saw a decline. Only Mississippi posted significant gains in reading between 2017 and 2019. The results for Grade 8 reading were worse, with scores declining in 31 states between 2017 and 2019. More sobering, however, is the widening gap between the highest-performing (90th percentile) and lowest-performing (10th percentile) students. Between 2009 and 2019, average NAEP scores for the highest-performing students increased by two points whereas average scores for the lowest-performing students decreased by seven points (U.S. Department of Education, [National Center for Education Statistics \[NCES\]](#), 2019).

Most pronounced is the persistent equity gap between white and Black students. While the 26-point NAEP score difference between white and Black students in 2019 was smaller than the 32-point gap in 1992—the first assessment year in which achievement levels were set for reading—the racial gap in reading skills remains vast. Similarly troubling data emerged from the 2019 12th-grade reading assessment, which found that the average reading score for all 12th-graders was 2 points lower in 2019 than it was on the last reading assessment (in 2015)—and the score decline was concentrated among the lower-performing students (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019).

Closing the achievement gap may seem daunting, but the evidence base is strong and settled regarding how children learn early foundational reading skills and how teachers can teach those skills. This bears repeating:

We know, scientifically,
how children learn early
foundational reading skills.

In 2000, Congress charged the National Reading Panel with assessing what was known about effective reading instruction. It built upon the groundbreaking work of the National Research Council (NRC) Committee on Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The NRC report summarized the “critical skills, environments, and early developmental interactions that are instrumental in the acquisition of beginning reading skills.” However, the NRC Committee did not address how critical reading skills are taught, nor did it identify which “instructional methods, materials, and approaches” are most effective for working with children with varying needs and abilities.

The National Reading Panel expanded on the work of the NRC. It conducted a meta-analysis of more than 100,000 scientific studies and concluded that effective reading instruction focuses on developing children’s competencies in five domains:

- 1 Phonemic awareness
- 2 Phonics
- 3 Fluency
- 4 Vocabulary
- 5 Text comprehension

In addition, the report emphasizes that comprehension is also influenced by other capabilities, such as a child’s vocabulary, their world knowledge, and their memory for text. All of these components must come together for any young reader to hone the skill of “reading for content knowledge,” which ideally is acquired by the end of third grade (National Reading Panel, 2000; p. 2-5). The report also acknowledges that states, districts, and schools must invest in high-quality, intensive professional development for teachers and work closely with them to ensure that teachers have the support they need to successfully implement effective instructional practices in reading.

Evidenced-based reading practices are critical for all learners, including English learners and students with disabilities.

In the years since the National Reading Panel, extensive research on reading has continued— for example, “[How the Science of Reading Informs 21st-Century Education](#)” (Petscher, Cabell, et al., 2020) and “[Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition From Novice to Expert](#)” (Castles, Rastle, et al., 2018). The five fundamental components described by the National Reading Panel have been nuanced, and the research has uncovered even more about the ways in which different learning processes interact and reinforce one another (see Exhibit 1). Even given this, there is still much to learn, particularly around effective instructional practices for reading comprehension as well as factors and mechanisms related to reading among diverse learners.

Despite the rich evidence base on early foundational reading skills, evidence-based instructional practices have not been universally applied across schools and classrooms. CCSSO Literacy summit participants attributed this to several challenges:

We go back to this fundamental problem of coherence. Almost everything we’ve said today speaks to the fact that we’ve been building fragments; a little bit of PD about this, a chunk of curriculum because we can’t afford the whole thing. [We have] teacher preparation that’s disconnected from established curriculum, and principals who are doing something else. And at the heart of it, we’ve got to think about a continuum from pre-K to 12, and not two completely different systems that we then have to patch together; that’s not how children experience it...

We really lack a pre-K to 12 ELA curriculum that is high quality, that is responsive to the science of reading from the beginning, that builds that science of reading into a content-rich, sequential curriculum that gives us the knowledge build that we know we need when we get to reading to learn, as opposed to learning to read. As a result, that movement between [learning to read to reading to learn]—which shouldn’t be a sudden shunt but is a feathered operation—has been very poorly handled.

David Steiner

Executive Director, Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, Professor, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University

We say it takes three years [for teachers] to really be able to implement high-quality instructional materials. Think about that when you have principals turning over every two years and superintendents who are only there for two or three years. It takes three years to start to see the results that we expect, and yet that level of discipline and consistency in education is just not something that we have been traditionally strong in over the last 10 or 15 years.

Penny Schwinn

Commissioner of Education, Tennessee

The following sections lay out many options and opportunities for state chiefs to improve reading performance in their states.

EXHIBIT 1: ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF TEACHING READING

Building off findings from the Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction: Reports of the Subgroups (NRP, 2000), additional work and research has been done on the five domains set forth in that report.

It is important to note that recent research tells us that these domains all involve language learning processes that interact with and reinforce one another. An integrated lesson plan and comprehensive program needs to address them all explicitly— in an interactive way— with the emphasis and time allocation that are appropriate for each student’s phase of reading development and mastery (or lack thereof) of component skills.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS - The understanding that spoken language is made up of individual sounds (phonemes), the ability to identify, distinguish, and isolate those sounds in spoken words, and the ability to associate those sounds with the letters and letter combinations (graphemes) that represent them.

PHONICS - The relationship between the sounds of spoken words and the individual letters or groups of letters (graphemes) that represent those sounds in written words. Knowledge of phonics also includes knowledge of patterns and constraints on the use of letter sequences in the writing system (orthography), and knowledge of how syllables and meaningful word parts (morphemes) are represented in print.

FLUENCY - The ability to read text accurately and quickly and with expression and comprehension. Fluency depends upon automatic word recognition, or the ability to read most words instantly out of context, as well as familiarity with the language structures and informational content of the text.

VOCABULARY - The words we must know in order to communicate effectively. Both breadth or range of vocabulary and depth of word knowledge are important. Wide reading in varied content and explicit teaching of important academic vocabulary will build students’ mental dictionaries.

COMPREHENSION - The ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read. Reading comprehension depends on many factors including background knowledge, vocabulary, inference-making, familiarity with complex sentence structures, text organization, and general cognitive skills such as self-monitoring and sustained attention.

Source: Louisa Moats President, Moats Associates Consulting, Inc.

FOUR STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING



The discussion at the January 2020 CCSSO National Summit on Literacy illuminated actions that state chiefs and their SEAs can take to improve literacy. These are distilled below into four action areas, each of which includes more

detailed moves a state leader and state agency teams can make, as well as state examples. The content below draws from discussion at the summit, subsequent interviews with state representatives, and information on SEA websites.

STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING



1

ARTICULATE A COHERENT VISION FOR IMPROVING READING

Why is this a priority?

SEAs operate within different contexts and circumstances across the country. Despite those differences, however, state chiefs can play an essential role in articulating and advocating for the urgency of coherent literacy policy predicated on evidence-based practices regarding how children learn to read as well as how to teach reading. State chiefs can play an influential role in setting their state's education policy agenda by defining the reading challenge their state faces, and importantly, by articulating the range of acceptable solutions to those challenges (Kingdon, 1984; Young, Shepley, Song, 2010; Manna, 2012). Often driven by tradition and a lack of access to rigorous research on outcomes, too many districts do not align their reading policies, programs, and practices with the current evidence base regarding how reading skills develop. District decisions and teacher practices often occur in a vacuum, without clear state guidance or support around what constitutes high-quality literacy instruction.

State chiefs can codify a commitment to reading instruction based on evidence and articulate a coherent vision for state action on reading standards, assessments, instructional materials, professional learning, support systems, and educator preparation. Chiefs also can use their position to enlist others in positions of influence (such as their governor, legislators, Board members, district superintendents, and mayors) to support the cause of addressing literacy challenges, including providing funding and building coalitions of support. It requires a collective effort to build understanding among state legislators who can set the conditions that support SEA strategies to improve reading outcomes for all students.

State chiefs can also take steps to help districts use all available funding streams for effective reading practices. For example, chiefs can vet their agencies' funding-related policies and procedures to ensure they do not recommend or inadvertently incentivize reading practices that are not evidence-based. Chiefs can also ensure their agencies provide districts technical assistance in coordinating funding sources to promote improved reading outcomes.

We had standards that had been evaluated as the lowest in the nation, so we adopted some very rigorous college- and career-ready standards. Then we developed assessments that were aligned not only to our standards, but also to the NAEP and the rigor of NAEP. We felt very strongly about that. We were focused on the honesty gap report that came out, because here we were touting 65 to 70 percent reading proficiency, and the NAEP report found us at 22. We've got a very strong accountability system that I think drives the behaviors that we're looking for in our schools. We've done a lot to improve data quality and ...producing information for the state about how our districts and schools were doing. And then we have really doubled down on our professional development, not only for our teachers, but for our administrators.

Carey M. Wright

State Superintendent of Education, Mississippi

1 STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING - ARTICULATE A COHERENT VISION FOR IMPROVING READING

What state chiefs can do:

- Define high-quality reading instruction and improved reading outcomes as the foremost equity issue and insist that all state and local policies and practices promote and make readily available reading curricula and professional learning for educators based on evidence-based practices.
- Work with staff within the SEA to (a) develop a shared understanding of both the science of reading and evidence-based instruction and (b) develop a common goal around improving reading outcomes for students.
- Develop or revise a comprehensive state plan, grounded in the current evidence base on how reading develops, laying out a systemic, coherent approach to curricula- and instruction-improvement efforts.
- Advocate for state reading improvements. Use data to educate state legislators on the problems and which legislative levers support solutions. Exhibit 2 lists the states with laws or proposed legislation related to the science of reading.
- Regularly evaluate the implementation and outcomes of state reading programs. Signal clearly to districts the difference between high- and low-quality reading curricula. Use incentives such as competitive grants and pricing advantages with publishers of high-quality curricula to encourage districts and schools to emphasize programs and practices derived from the current evidence base on how reading skills develop.
- Provide technical assistance, training, and incentives to help district and school leaders transition to reading programs that are backed by the strongest research evidence.
- Publicly report data on the impacts of research-based reading programs on student performance, and directly share state data with legislators about these programs' impact.
- Require low-performing schools to develop literacy support plans that outline steps for improving instruction and student performance, including actions such as ensuring the use of high-quality instructional materials with aligned professional learning for educators.
- Ensure that all teachers know and can teach instructional practices that are aligned with the evidence-base, by: (1) revising teacher licensing requirements and tests to align with knowledge of the evidence-based practices and/or requiring a proficiency test on knowledge of the evidenced-based instructional practices; (2) revising state teacher- and principal-evaluation standards; and (3) providing guidance to LEAs on the recruitment, hiring, and placement of educators with the evidenced-based practice skills to teach reading. (See Section 4 for related state actions.)
- Focus state boards of education on reading issues that relate to student achievement. Lead discussions around data and questions such as: "Why are some districts getting better reading outcomes than others?"
- Identify and publicly communicate the availability of funding streams (e.g., Title I, Title II) to support implementation of reading curricula based on the science of reading.
- Ensure that funding policies and procedures (such as the LEA-to-SEA application for Elementary and Secondary Education Act or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding, technical assistance, monitoring rubrics, etc.) are aligned and do not recommend programs or practices that are not aligned to evidence-based reading instruction.
- Provide technical assistance to districts on how various funding streams can be coordinated in ways that promote evidence-based reading practices.
- Ensure that state standards in reading/language arts reflect the current science of reading.

When you start educating your state board members, they then become great emissaries around what is happening across the state and start challenging [the status quo by asking questions]: 'Well, why isn't such and such happening? Why aren't [universities] on board? Why aren't some districts moving as fast as others?'

Carey M. Wright

State Superintendent of Education, Mississippi

1 STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING - ARTICULATE A COHERENT VISION FOR IMPROVING READING

EXHIBIT 2: STATES WITH LAWS ADDRESSING THE SCIENCE OF READING

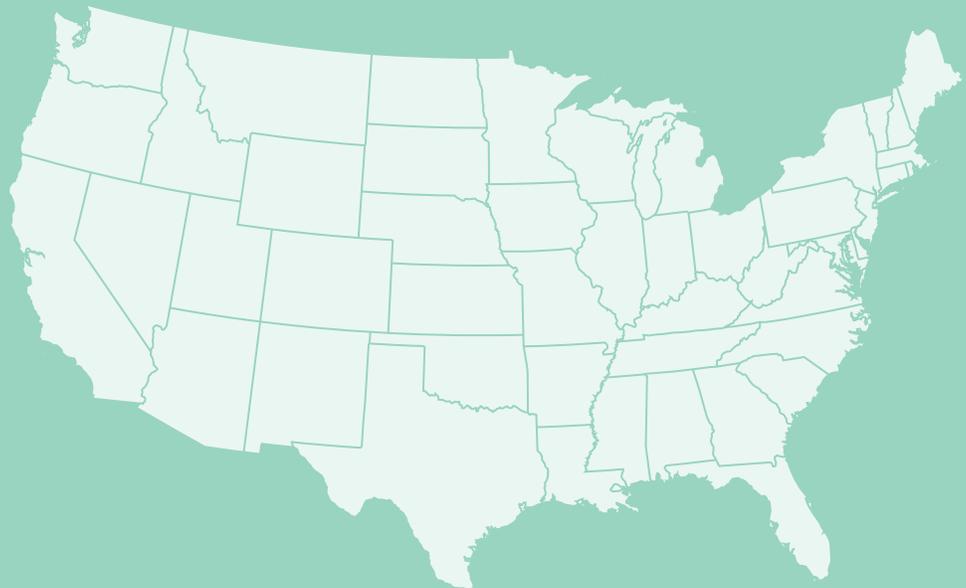
Several states have either passed laws or proposed new legislation designed to encourage or require districts to implement the science of reading.

STATES WITH LAWS

Alabama
Arkansas
Arizona
Colorado
Florida
Idaho
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
Nebraska
North Carolina
Oklahoma
Rhode Island
Texas
West Virginia
Wyoming

STATES WITH PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Kentucky
Tennessee



Source: *Reading Instruction: A Flurry of New State Laws*, 2020

1 STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING - ARTICULATE A COHERENT VISION FOR IMPROVING READING

Examples of state leadership:

ARKANSAS' Right to Read Act (RRA), passed in 2017, was aligned with and ultimately accelerated and expanded a major SEA effort, begun in 2016, to revamp professional development for literacy instruction. See Exhibit 3 for a full description of the state law and related SEA activities.

MASSACHUSETTS has developed a state literacy plan to sustain and improve its past success in literacy outcomes. The plan defines the essential components of evidence-based early literacy instruction, focusing on phonological awareness, phonics, and language comprehension. The plan lays out a comprehensive state system of support that includes K-8 literacy coaches, reviews of reading curricula, promotion of high-quality instructional practices and reading materials, professional development, literacy screening and assessment tools, and promotion of evidence-based reading interventions. Massachusetts also has made state literacy guidance publicly available, Mass Literacy (www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy).

MISSISSIPPI focused on improving reading by providing coaching support and professional development for teachers and leaders. The state also implemented a coherent accountability system that included licensure tests for teachers and third-grade reading tests for students.

MISSOURI'S literacy plan is wide-ranging, focusing on leadership and sustainability, standards-based curriculum, intentional instruction, assessment, and partnerships. When developing the state literacy plan, the state gathered input from many stakeholder groups, including educator preparation programs and licensure representatives. As one of 11 states in 2020 to be awarded a federal Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant, Missouri will soon review and update its literacy plan to ensure that it reflects the most recent research on the science of reading.

NEBRASKA'S Reading Improvement Act emphasizes “the importance of strong early reading instruction and individual supports for students who struggle.” The law requires that schools: (1) administer SEA-approved assessments of student reading three times a year; and (2) provide an evidence-based supplemental reading intervention program to any student identified as having reading differences. In fact, the new law inspired the Nebraska Department of Education to launch NebraskaREADS, an initiative created to “serve the needs of students, educators, and parents along the journey to successful reading.” This program provides tools and resources to support high-quality literacy instruction.

EXHIBIT 3: **ARKANSAS LAW SUPPORTS THE SCIENCE OF READING**

Through the enactment of the Right to Read Act of 2017, the Arkansas legislature created the conditions for a statewide commitment to the science of reading. The law supported, expanded, and accelerated the work already begun by the SEA. The SEA's campaign, Reading Initiative for Student Excellence (or RISE Arkansas), had begun in 2016, was designed to implement the science of reading in every district and school. The initiative includes the state-managed RISE Academy with 80 trainers, approved instructional materials, school-level literacy planning, communication resources, and connections with educator preparation programs. Highlights of the state law include the following:

- All K-6 core content teachers, K-12 special educators, and K-12 reading specialists in the state must complete professional development pathway and obtain a “proficiency credential” on the science of reading. Eighteen pathway options are available through approved providers (e.g., SEA, regional service agencies, higher education, vendors). Pathways typically include 3-6 days of training, often with coaching and classroom practice. Each also includes a formal demonstration of proficiency, such as by having teachers observed by a Certified Assessor or requiring them to achieve a passing score on the Foundations of Reading Assessment.
- All other teachers must complete a professional development pathway to ensure “awareness” of the science of reading.
- Beginning in 2021-2022, all employed K-6 teachers and K-12 special education must meet proficiency thresholds in the science of reading, or risk non-renewal of their license.
- All administrators, including school leaders and district level staff, must complete an “awareness pathway” on the science of reading.
- In 2019, additional legislation was passed to support implementation of the state’s reading initiative by requiring each district to establish a professional development program based on the science of reading or risk of accreditation probation.
- Every school must include a literacy plan component in its school improvement plan. Likewise, every district must develop a literacy plan in its district plan to support schools.
- Districts that score below specific thresholds on the state reading test must submit a literacy support plan to the state for approval.

STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING

2

DEPLOY SEA RESOURCES STRATEGICALLY TO SUPPORT READING



Why is this a priority?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has been credited for causing one of the most substantial federal education policy shifts in decades. ESSA allowed states to realign state accountability systems with SEA priorities; now SEAs also can better align resources (staff and funding) to SEA priorities and can provide effective instructional supports that are consistent with the evidence base on how reading skills develop.

It is vital that chiefs reflect on how the organization of their agencies and who within them will bring a comprehensive and coherent approach to the work of ensuring that all children learn to read. Carrying out a major state commitment to improving reading will benefit from an SEA that strategically uses its resources to support and sustain implementation.

...we need the SEA to take a lead role in this very different approach [to reading]. So I brought together the key people in our SEA who touched reading, so our dyslexia specialist, our special education specialists, our reading specialists, our early learning folks, our teacher preparation specialists, English/language arts and social studies teachers, and we looked at the [state literacy plan], and I shared with them my concerns. And I can tell you, even within our own SEA, we were not on the same page. We are working through it and I think we're making tremendous progress, but what I found is that...some of the things that we thought we were all saying, we really weren't.

Margie Vandeven

Commissioner of Education, Missouri

What state chiefs can do:

- Provide the SEA with adequate staff (through new hires or strategic reassignment of existing staff) to lead early childhood- and elementary-level reading initiatives that are informed by the science of reading. Hire and authorize an expert on reading research to work with the state department of education to develop state policies and initiatives supporting instruction that is aligned to the science of reading.
- Foster cross-divisional SEA teams and activities around reading improvement, to develop coherent messaging and goals while simultaneously harnessing the wealth of knowledge and experience within the SEA. Employ leadership, modeling, and support strategies to bring staff together from all relevant offices (i.e., those focusing on curriculum and instruction, educator effectiveness, special education, school improvement, assessment, early education, and English language learning).
- Integrate federal programs into cross-divisional work. Ensure federal program staff understand, and can support LEAs in understanding, effective reading practices and how they can be supported with federal funds. Consider having staff with subject-matter knowledge and experience in evidence-based reading instruction vet federal program related materials (such as the application for funds, technical assistance documents, monitoring rubrics, etc.) to ensure they promote effective practices and align to state literacy policies.
- Build SEA knowledge, coherence, and capacity related to evidence-based instructional practices through staff training and the strategic use of external experts.
- Advance the state vision for reading by working with regional education service agencies, large districts, institutions of higher education, and other partners. Form reading-focused committees, offer trainings, and strategically place literacy coaches and other literacy supports.

2 STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING - DEPLOY SEA RESOURCES STRATEGICALLY TO SUPPORT READING

What state chiefs can do:

- Incorporate early literacy programs into the Office of Early Childhood Education to coordinate and lead efforts within the SEA to strengthen literacy programs statewide.
- To strengthen early childhood reading programming and bolster young children's kindergarten readiness, offer all early childhood education (ECE) providers professional development opportunities in both public and private settings.
- Take a systems approach to implementing the science of reading: Bring together everyone who touches reading and explain that the SEA is drawing on the evidence base for teaching reading to set expectations and provide supports aligned to this research.
- Review and revise teacher evaluation policies and tools to align with evidenced-based instructional practices.
- Align competitive funding from the SEA with requirements for use of high-quality instructional materials/curricula that are aligned with evidence-based practices and related professional learning opportunities for educators.
- Consider ways to use and align state-level federal program funds (such as state activities funds under Title II and IDEA) to support effective literacy practices.

Examples of state leadership:

NEBRASKA has taken steps to increase coherence in its vision and messaging regarding reading instruction. Cross-divisional teams from offices responsible for teaching and learning (i.e., assessment, school support, special education, and early childhood education) meet to align their priorities to support reading. These teams have focused on how the state can promote the science of reading to districts through high-quality K-3 instructional materials and the state's Multi-Tiered System of Support and interventions for schools identified as low performing. Nebraska has also begun to improve coherence among its 17 regional Educational Service Units (ESUs), which have traditionally delivered professional development and assistance to district educators.

An SEA administrator co-chairs the ESU network's literacy cadre as it develops a network-wide vision for literacy. The SEA also has convened ESUs for professional learning related to selecting and implementing high-quality instructional materials and assessments.

MISSOURI'S \$18 million, five-year Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant will fund services to children from birth through grade 12 as well as preservice and in-service teachers. The grant also is generating opportunities for specialists throughout the SEA who work on reading instruction (including team members in English language arts, dyslexia, early learning, and teacher preparation) to collaborate on implementing the state's literacy plan.

CONNECTICUT'S Partnership for Literacy Success was formed to directly address the reading opportunity gap in Connecticut and support literacy success for all students. Funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Partnership's team of expert reading coaches, trainers, and evaluators work directly with schools to implement Connecticut's Literacy Model and actualize the State Board of Education's goals, priorities, and vision for improving student reading achievement in the state. The Partnership represents a unique 8-year collaboration between the State Department of Education, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus of the Connecticut General Assembly, the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, HILL for Literacy, and Literacy How.

MISSISSIPPI'S Literacy-Based Promotion Act gave the SEA the authority to implement a variety of policies and practices to improve literacy instruction (see Exhibit 4 below).

EXHIBIT 4: **MISSISSIPPI'S COHERENT STATEWIDE APPROACH TO LITERACY**

Mississippi began a coherent statewide approach to reading instruction with a 2013 state law, the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA, amended in 2016), which emphasizes the development of reading skills for students in Kindergarten through third grade. Students must meet assessment thresholds to advance to grade four, with some exceptions.

The LBPA was notable because it allocated SEA funding to design and deliver teacher training in the science of reading. Beginning in 2014, to address the literacy needs of students, the SEA began providing statewide training to K-3 teachers on scientifically based literacy instruction. The state selected training program, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), includes in-person workshops, online learning modules, and for low-performing schools, literacy coaches.

In 2017, Mississippi collected feedback and performance data to inform and strengthen its literacy strategy, codified into the [Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan](#) (MCLP). It administered the nationally normed Literacy Organizational Capacity Inventory to teachers and leaders statewide, identifying areas of strength and weakness in the system.

Features of the MCLP include the following:

- A statewide diagnostic process and tool to screen K-3 students who need additional literacy support. The tool is based on the science of reading and includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.
- K-3 students with deficits must have an Individualized Reading Plan used to target instruction and monitor growth.
- Statewide literacy training statewide for teachers and administrators, and trained literacy coaches for low-performing schools.
- State-adopted instructional materials based on the science of reading.
- Minimum recommended standards for literacy instructional time for K-3
- Educator evaluation observation tools and learning protocols for improvement of literacy instruction.
- Requirement for low-performing schools to develop a [Literacy Support Plan](#) using a template.
- Early childhood literacy development through collaboration with early childhood EPPs, as well as professional development and endorsement opportunities for early childhood teachers on literacy instruction.

STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING

3

PROVIDE POLICY & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE & SUPPORT TO DISTRICTS & SCHOOLS



Why is this a priority?

Educators deserve high-quality reading instructional materials. Many teachers spend time pulling materials from Google, Pinterest, teacherspayteachers.com, SEA websites, Readworks.org, and other online sources (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016) to try to incorporate them into a reading curriculum. According to the Brookings Institution, teachers spend an average of 12 hours a week searching for or creating their own materials. What's more, a research review by the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and the Johns Hopkins Center for Research and Reform in Education found that the cumulative impact of high-quality curricula can be significant, adding up to years of potential additional learning.

We have to teach what the speech sounds are. We have to teach how the print system works. And then we have to teach the psychology of reading and how all this computes in the brain. And then we have to teach what a good [reading] program looks like and what are the instructional activities. And all of that takes a lot of time.

Louisa Moats

President, Moats Associates Consulting, Inc.

High-quality instructional materials also can ensure that students are doing appropriate, grade-level work— something that is critical for students who are learning to read. As illustrated vividly in The New Teacher Project's [The Opportunity Myth](#) report, students spend 500 hours per school year on assignments that are not appropriate for their grade.

"What we know," said literacy summit participant David Steiner, executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, "is that teachers are too often unprepared to use the most important pedagogical skills [to teach reading]. Teachers care about materials and want to use good ones; there's a real hunger for [them]."

As important as it is to have high-quality curricula and evidence-based instructional materials to teach reading, teachers also need to know how to use those materials effectively. A recent study (Blazer, D. et al., 2019) showed that when districts introduced a new textbook, they gave teachers fewer than two days (on average) of professional development to learn how to use it. The study also found that, while most teachers surveyed reported using the textbook for some purpose in more than half their classes, only 25 percent used it "nearly all the time." In his 2019 commentary about the study, Steiner suggested that teachers behave rationally when they choose not to use new curricula or textbooks: "What do any of us do when given a complicated device with only cursory instructions? We dabble with it, but soon resort to more familiar tools and habits of use" (*Education Week*, April 1, 2019).

Indeed, effectively teaching the science of reading (including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) will not come without a significant investment of time and resources to appropriately train teachers. The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) warned that if states, districts, and schools do not offer teachers high-quality and intensive professional development, they risk losing teacher commitment and buy-in to implementing effective instructional practices in reading.

Some phonics programs require a sophisticated understanding of spelling, structural linguistics, and word etymology. Teachers who are handed the programs but are not provided with sufficient inservice training to use these programs effectively may become frustrated. In view of the evidence showing the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction, it is important to ensure that the issue of how best to prepare teachers to carry out this teaching effectively and creatively is given high priority (NRP, 2000; p. 2-96)

In a 2016 study describing ways to overcome the challenges that invariably affect the implementation of effective reading interventions in schools, Coyne et al. recommended that states, districts, and schools deliver “ongoing coaching and targeted professional development to support administrator and teacher knowledge of evidence-based instructional practices” (Coyne, 2016). In addition, a 2019 meta-analysis of STEM instructional improvement programs found that professional development that connected instructional strategies directly to the curriculum teachers would use in their classrooms had a stronger impact on student performance than professional development that did not (Lynch, Hill, Gonzalez, and Pollard, 2019).

Of course, providing high-quality curricula, instructional materials, assessments, and professional development takes resources. Districts can use federal funds to support their efforts, and states play an important role in helping districts understand how they can do so effectively. CCSSO has a number of resources to support states, including A Guide to State Educational Agency Oversight Responsibilities under ESSA: The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs. For special considerations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, please see CCSSO’s Restart & Recovery federal funding resources [here](#).

The following describes what chiefs can do to provide policy guidance and support to districts and schools as it relates to curricula and instructional materials, assessments, and professional learning. In addition, Exhibit 5 describes CCSSO’s High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Network, through which 13 SEAs receive intensive support to help schools use high-quality instructional materials and provide teachers with pre-service/in-service training in how to effectively use these materials.

EXHIBIT 5: CCSSO’S IMPD NETWORK

CCSSO developed the High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Network to support state education leaders working with districts to ensure educators have high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and professional development grounded in the use of those materials.

Started in 2017, the IMPD Network now has 13 states that receive intensive team support as they implement a strategic plan to equip schools with high-quality instructional materials and to ensure that pre-service and in-service teachers have access to professional development that is grounded in the use of these materials.

What state chiefs can do:

CURRICULA/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Chiefs can use their influence to ensure that districts adopt and use high-quality reading curricula and instructional materials. Specifically, state chiefs can:

- Establish criteria and provide examples that illustrate what high-quality reading curricula and instruction look like, by posting information on the SEA website and issuing policy briefs and white papers on the science of reading. Engage educators to provide feedback throughout the process.
- Identify strategies to incentivize the adoption of these high-quality reading curricula. Examples include:
 - tying school-improvement support to the adoption of high-quality reading curricula and professional development that supports the implementation of this curricula
 - providing targeted and competitive funding for evidence-based reading initiatives
- Provide direct training to the districts and regional service agencies that support local adoption processes.
- Establish clear guidelines for approval of curriculum, textbooks, and providers of professional learning. If the SEA publishes a list of approved textbooks/curricula for districts to select from, be sure this list includes only high-quality instructional materials that have been vetted by the state.
- Dedicate SEA staff to provide technical assistance and support to districts on selecting and adopting curricula that support evidence-based instruction.
- Signal the state's commitment to quality by offering direct support or support through a regional service agency or external technical assistance provider. Work with external technical assistance providers to recommend high-quality materials and advise on evaluating and adopting materials that support the science of reading.
- Encourage districts to adopt high-quality reading materials through state grants or offer state funding for professional development aligned to instructional materials rooted in instruction aligned to the science of reading.

[Through procurement] you can make it very, very unpleasant for districts to acquire bad materials and you can make it very, very easy for districts to acquire good materials. You can incentivize this by putting points on any application for state funding [so that] districts that have adopted high-quality materials gain an advantage. You can offer state dollars for professional development only to districts that adopt the highest quality curriculum. All of this is within your purview.

David Steiner

Executive Director, Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy;
Professor, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University

ASSESSMENTS

Chiefs can encourage districts to use assessment tools based on the science of reading— i.e., assessments that measure the extent to which children are developing skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

In addition, chiefs can:

- Review and approve screening assessments for reading skills; promulgate this list to districts; and (where competitive funding is available for reading instruction) require districts to use this approved list.
- Encourage the design of assessment systems to include interim assessments that inform instruction by measuring student growth as well as summative assessments that permit performance comparisons with national cohorts (Foorman, B. R., forthcoming).
 - Develop a pre-K-2 assessment system that informs teachers about student progress in reading.

MANAGING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

Key actions and steps for districts to consider when using student assessments this school year:

- Ensure that assessments focus on how to help students access grade-level priority content and master the building blocks of early literacy as deeply as possible. The most useful assessments will focus on priority content, considering the prior grade level only when needed.
- Address the potential for over-remediation. Assessment results will likely show some students are further behind than previous years, but educators must resist the temptation to remediate all unfinished learning.

Source: CCSSO: https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/CCSSO_RR_Consider_Teach-PreK-3rd-Recovery-v3.pdf
<https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/RESTARTRECOVERYCONSIDERATIONSFORTEACHINGANDLEARNINGACADEMICS/#page=9>
<https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/RESTARTRECOVERYCONSIDERATIONSFORTEACHINGANDLEARNINGOVERVIEW/#page=1>

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Chiefs can advocate for policy, funding, and organizational structures that better support teachers in building knowledge and improving practice in the science of reading.

Specifically, chiefs can:

- Provide new and experienced teachers at every level (early childhood, K-3, 4-5, middle school, and high school) with ongoing coaching, mentoring, and professional development in using high-quality curricula that includes the science of reading.
- Offer statewide professional development and training programs that are rooted in the science of reading. Offer this training to early-childhood, elementary, and secondary school educators (in public and private school settings) as well as to educators in Head Start and other before-/after-school programs. Some chiefs may want to consider making such training mandatory.

My teacher preparation program started at a four-year university where we were required to get a reading endorsement...which [involved] 21 hours of reading coursework. And to be honest, I can't say that the coursework prepared me to teach students how to read, but I didn't realize that until I got in a classroom... So thank goodness at that time, Mississippi had just pushed the LETRS program which taught me a lot of the science of reading and I was able to teach students phonics, phonemic awareness, and the other components of reading.

Kara Paige

3rd Grade Teacher, Canton Public School District, Mississippi

MANAGING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Given that many students will start the 2020-2021 school year farther behind than is typical, and given that ongoing disruptions are likely, it is essential to focus students on the most important, grade-level content.

Achieving this goal requires support from state leaders to help districts, schools, and teachers prioritize instructional content based on what is determined to be essential knowledge from the current and prior grades.

Focusing on essential content helps teachers overcome their concern that students need to learn everything from the prior grade before taking on the next grade's learning. It enables them to concentrate on teaching the highest-leverage learning.

For instance, teachers of children matriculating from Pre-K to kindergarten are encouraged to proceed with implementing the kindergarten curriculum. Teachers of children matriculating to first and second grade can prioritize building their students' essential, foundational skills in early literacy and reading; they also can employ evidence-based teaching strategies that have the greatest impact.

Professional learning for teachers should align with how best to teach the critical concepts and skills their students will need to master throughout 2020-2021. This includes understanding the connections within and across subject areas that make learning coherent for students— an approach which also helps teachers support continuity-of-learning and support services for all students, including ELs and students with disabilities, in accordance with the students' Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

Source: CCSSO: https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/CCSSO_RR_Consider_Teach-PreK-3rd-Recovery-v3.pdf
<https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/RESTARTRECOVERYCONSIDERATIONSFORTEACHINGANDLEARNINGACADEMICS/#page=6>
<https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/RESTARTRECOVERYCONSIDERATIONSFORTEACHINGANDLEARNINGOVERVIEW/#page=1>

Examples of state leadership:

CURRICULA/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

LOUISIANA developed a statewide Instructional Materials Review (IMR) process to help districts select high-quality English language arts curricula as well as provide a range of tools and training to promote the planning and implementation of the curricula. Through the IMR process, Louisiana systematically evaluates the quality of instructional materials, including their alignment with state ELA standards. The process provides critical information to districts about adoption decisions and identifies materials that meet “Tier 1” criteria. Non-negotiable criteria include foundational skills (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, etc.) consistent with reading research. The state has contracted with publishers of Tier 1 materials to simplify purchasing for both materials and vendor professional development and coaching for implementation of Tier 1 curricula. In partnership with its teachers, the state has created Louisiana’s [ELA Guidebooks](#): an online, high-quality ELA curriculum for grades 3-12 that is available via the [Louisiana Curriculum Hub](#).

ARKANSAS law requires that districts align instructional materials to the science of reading. The SEA is currently reviewing the quality of roughly 50 K-2 reading programs and developing an approved materials list. As one state administrator explained, districts’ instructional materials need to align with the science of reading or the state’s investment in delivering professional development that supports implementation of these materials is wasted. “We started reviewing districts’ reading programs because teachers were returning to their districts [after participating in the state-sponsored training] and using materials that were not aligned with the science of reading.” In 2020-21, the SEA expects to see teachers begin to formally demonstrate proficiency in the science of reading, and districts purchasing literacy materials after that school year must purchase off an approved list aligned to the science of reading.

We see this as year-long professional development; this is not train you one day and we don’t see you again. [Teachers] have coaches, and every week someone’s in there working with them... This is hard work, and there’s a gap in the knowledge base and [so] you have to work with teachers very, very closely.

Emily Solari

Professor of Reading Education in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development

NEBRASKA provides guidance and technical assistance to districts on instructional materials selection, in a context in which districts have historically had autonomy in selecting reading instructional materials. Three years ago, the state began collecting data on each district’s instructional materials and displayed the data via the Nebraska [Instructional Materials Map](#). This data collection helped the state have conversations with districts about instructional materials, both within Nebraska and across the nation. With the assistance of the U.S. Department of Education-funded [Regional Educational Laboratories Program](#) (REL Central), the state created practice guides to highlight evidence-based, actionable recommendations for high-quality early literacy instruction. Additionally, through its Multi-Tiered System of Support, Nebraska developed an online resource that provides districts with information about reading programs, including reading skills taught, third-party critiques, research summaries, and whether it meets thresholds for ESSA, the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), and Evidence-Based Practices.

Examples of state leadership:

CURRICULA/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (CONT.)

WYOMING has funded instructional facilitators to, in large part, support elementary school reading teachers. In addition, the Wyoming legislature passed a law in 2019 (W.S. § 21-3-401) requiring that districts have a process in place for addressing reading difficulties for all K-3 students. Specifically, every district must have an evidence-based and multi-tiered program in place to address student reading difficulties. The law also requires that districts must annually report to the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) on the type of evidence-based interventions they use, by grade level, to address student reading difficulties. The WDE issued non-regulatory guidance — *K-3 Early Literacy Guidance Manual*¹ — on implementing the requirements of the 2019 law.

The **COLORADO** READ Act requires the department to identify quality reading instructional programs and professional development programs for use by local education agencies. In 2019-2020 the Department led a review of over 140 core, supplemental and intervention programs to determine the evidence-based effectiveness of each program. The review resulted in a comprehensive advisory list of scientifically or evidence based instructional programs from which district should select when using READ Act per pupil dollars.

DELAWARE started by convening its districts to provide guidance, information, and in-depth support around adoptions. Delaware provided significant grant funding to support instructional materials embedded professional learning as a way to incentivize adoptions. As result, 11 out of the 19 districts in Delaware have adopted high-quality English language arts instructional materials in at least one grade band. Delaware is providing on-going grant support to districts for continuous professional learning on adopted, high-quality instructional materials. The state has also developed a State Literacy Plan, which includes four strategic intents that reinforce the importance of adopting high-quality instructional materials and combines this work with literacy efforts focused on the science of reading.

TENNESSEE released a free, optional supplement to support early literacy, TN Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement, which follows evidenced-based research to build a solid foundation for literacy in pre-K through second grade. To create the supplement, a Tennessee teacher team took OER Core Knowledge materials as a foundation, added phonemic awareness activities developed by nationally recognized literacy experts Meredith and David Liben, and aligned all lessons to Tennessee standards. The supplement is openly available online along with a robust suite of resources designed to support educators and others in implementation.

¹The WDE expected to release updated guidance in late 2020.

Examples of state leadership:

ASSESSMENTS

NEBRASKA'S Reading Improvement Act requires all districts to administer an SEA-approved reading assessment three times during the school year to all students in kindergarten through grade three. Approved assessments must:

- Measure progress toward reading proficiency;
- Be valid and reliable;
- Align with academic content standards for reading adopted by either the State Board of Education or the school district;
- Allow teachers access to results within a reasonable time period (i.e., not to exceed 15 working days) as established by the SEA.

MISSISSIPPI specifies literacy assessment goals, implementation, and plans for sustainability in its comprehensive state plan. The state administers a kindergarten Readiness instrument and has early-intervention mechanisms to identify students from birth to age five who may need special education services. In addition, the state uses:

- evidence-based screening and assessment tools in grades K-2 to identify early reading skills and needs;
- a grade 3 statewide literacy assessment, which students must pass for promotion to grade 4; and
- guidance and support for using reading screeners and state assessments in grades 4-12.

WYOMING'S 2019 law (W.S. § 21-3-401) requires every school district to select and implement an assessment tool that screens all K-3 students for signs of dyslexia or other reading difficulties. In addition, the law requires that districts annually report to the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) on their schools' progress toward achieving the state goal of 85 percent of all students reading on grade level by third grade. Among other reporting requirements, districts must report the type of reading assessment they use, by school- and grade-level, as well as the number of students tested and the percent scoring at the proficient or advanced levels. In addition, districts must assure the WDE that their reading assessments are "curriculum independent" and measure the five as required under the 2019 law.

MASSACHUSETTS has reviewed and approved several early literacy universal screening assessments based on criteria including reliability and usability for teachers. Recognizing that the pandemic created an even more urgent need for accurate data on the literacy strengths and needs of individual students, the state created a grant opportunity for districts to purchase an assessment from the approved list, as well as a year of professional development to support teachers in utilizing the assessment and the data generated from it. This grant program will result in more teachers having access to accurate and timely information to guide early literacy instruction in 2021 and beyond.

Examples of state leadership:

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LOUISIANA created a district-based “content leader” position to provide high-quality, curriculum-specific professional development to teachers at the school system level. Content Leaders receive nine days of professional development and access to content modules, much of this focused on how to help others implement Louisiana’s ELA Guidebooks or other Tier 1 curricula. To promote effective implementation of ELA curricula, the state has developed the *ELA Curriculum Implementation Observation Tools* for K-2 and 3-12. The tools include indicators for explicit phonics instruction and use of the Tier 1 curricular materials.

To carry out its strong state law and commitment to statewide literacy, the **ARKANSAS** SEA funds roughly 50 literacy specialists trained in the science of reading and who work in the state’s larger districts or in regional cooperatives that serve multiple districts.

In 2019, **MISSOURI** created a [state literacy plan](#) that serves as a model for districts to use in creating their literacy plans. The document includes templates, examples, and targeted questions to promote district self-study and planning. At its core, the plan provides a vision of literacy instruction that is rooted in the science of reading. In addition, the state’s 2020 CLSD grant provides intensive professional development and support to educators throughout the state on applying the science of reading to classroom instruction.

MISSISSIPPI trains educators statewide to develop more effective instructional strategies in reading. It deploys literacy coaches for teachers in schools demonstrating the greatest need for support in K-3 reading instruction, based on student outcomes (see Exhibit 6).

The **COLORADO** General Assembly demonstrated a financial commitment to ensuring that kindergarten through third grade teachers understand scientifically or evidence-based reading practices by ensuring training is offered at no cost by the state. Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, each Colorado district that receives state funds through the Colorado READ Act must annually ensure that all K – 3 teachers have completed evidence-based training in teaching reading. In 2020 Colorado rolled out two no cost options for teachers to [participate](#).

In the fall of 2020, **TENNESSEE** launched a new virtual professional learning series for district and school leaders focusing on implementing high-quality ELA materials through in-person and remote settings. District leaders and school leaders attend separate sessions with content tailored to those respective roles. The training for school leaders is tailored to virtual professional learning communities. District leaders attending monthly sessions can also receive the professional learning materials so that the content can be tailored and redelivered within the district.

EXHIBIT 6: **MISSISSIPPI'S SUPPORTS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

With funding appropriated by the state legislature for a K-3 literacy initiative, the Mississippi Department of Education organized itself to carry out the state reading law and the Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan. A state literacy director oversees several state literacy coordinators, who oversee region-based coordinators. These regional coordinators support state-funded literacy coaches who work directly in schools demonstrating the greatest need.

A study of educator outcomes showed that teachers receiving the literacy coaching were implementing evidence-based instructional practices in reading in their classrooms (Folsom, Smith, Burk, & Oakley, 2017). In addition, a review of student performance showed improvement on early reading assessments. In addition, Mississippi was the only state to post significant gains in student performance on the NAEP grade-4 reading assessment in 2019.

In response to these positive results, the Mississippi legislature has continued funding the literacy initiative. Mississippi has expanded supports to include (1) an early childhood component to accelerate the language development of young children; and (2) available professional development to all teachers in all grades to use evidence-based reading and writing strategies in their classrooms.

STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE READING

4

ENGAGE COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PARTNERS



Why is this a priority?

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) play a particularly critical role in shaping the direction of reading instruction. As such, it is key for SEAs to create strong, aligned partnerships with EPPs to ensure that they develop all future educators to use the highest quality instructional and curricular tools to teach reading. A recent report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) found that EPPs are making progress on implementing coursework and clinical experiences that reflect the science of reading (Drake, G. & Walsh, K., 2020). According to the report, more EPPs are beginning to teach the science of reading. That is, of the 1,047 traditional EPPs scored through NCTQ's Teacher Prep review process, more than half earned a grade of A or B for providing "adequate instruction" in at least four of the five components of scientifically based reading instruction, which is a six-percentage point increase from 2016.

It is true that state education departments, with the support of governors, have multiple tools at their disposal that they're simply not using. Accreditation is a real tool; a school of education and alternative certification program cannot operate if the state says it can't operate. Certification is a real tool; teachers cannot teach if the state says they're not certified to do so.

David Steiner

Executive Director, Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy;
Professor, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University

However, the NCTQ report also found that, of the five components of scientifically-based reading instruction, traditional EPPs are most likely to skip phonemic awareness, which the authors described as "the most challenging instructional skill teachers need to teach before children can learn to read." Indeed, as described by the National Research Council (1998), preparing educators to implement all five components of scientifically-based reading instruction will not be easy or quick. To teach reading well, educators need to know and be able to do many things:

To know enough to teach children, they must acquire an understanding of the nature of language that is firmly based on linguistic research about phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, rhetorical structures, as well as the social and linguistic diversity in all of these. From psychological research, they must understand the processes of producing and understanding spoken and written language and the courses of individual development among bilinguals as well as monolinguals. From the humanities and other social sciences, they must understand the variations in structures, contexts, and motives that underlie the concrete instances of written and oral language in society (pp. 284-288).

The NCTQ also maintains a dashboard that tracks state policies regarding elementary teacher preparation. For example, as of 2020, 32 states require that elementary EPP standards address the components of the science of reading instruction, and 20 states require licensure tests that fully measure candidates' knowledge of the science of reading.

While EPPs are making progress, there are many policies and practices that states can invoke to support, incentivize, and encourage every EPP to support the science of reading.

What state chiefs can do:

- Revise licensure standards for all early-grade teachers and leaders to ensure they include the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to implement evidenced-based reading instruction.
- Work with educator certification test publishers to design tests that:
 - align with the new licensure standards for early-grade teachers and leaders;
 - measure knowledge of pedagogy that reflects the science of reading (for one example, see Exhibit 7 on The Foundations of Reading Assessment); and
 - include performance-based assessments that require demonstration of curriculum and instruction reflecting evidenced-based practices.
- Link licensure renewal for all early-grade teachers to the requirement that teachers receive either state-approved professional development or additional university coursework aligned to the science of reading.
- Work with EPPs to:
 - offer coursework and clinical training rooted in the science of reading and offer to train EPP faculty and mentor teachers in the science of reading through state reading programs for K-12 teachers;
 - provide evidence of standards for teaching reading that reflect the components of the science of reading;
 - teach aspiring teachers how to select and use high-quality instructional materials, rather than develop their own; and
 - teach aspiring principals enrolled in pre-service training programs about the science of reading.
- Find and partner with EPP faculty who support and promote the science of reading as well as with reading science-supportive organizations that influence higher education.
- Provide incentives for stronger partnerships between preparation programs, schools, and districts that encourage high-quality, clinical experience grounded in evidenced-based instruction.
- Use the state processes for program approval and accreditation to:
 - hold EPPs accountable for their graduates' impact on student performance;
 - require EPPs to show evidence that their curricula reflect the science of reading; and
 - provide actionable feedback to EPPs from the program review process to guide continuous improvement.

I would encourage state leaders to find your people; we exist in academia. There are people in academia who will work with you.

Emily Solari

Professor of Reading Education in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, University of Virginia

EXHIBIT 7: FOUNDATIONS OF READING ASSESSMENT

One example of an assessment that measures knowledge of the essential components of reading development and best practices in scientifically based reading instruction is The Foundations of Reading assessment.

Eight states require new elementary school teachers to pass this exam:

- | | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. Arkansas | 3. Massachusetts | 5. New Hampshire | 7. Ohio |
| 2. Connecticut | 4. Mississippi | 6. North Carolina | 8. Wisconsin |

Source: National Council on Teacher Quality. (2020). Teaching Reading national results. State Teacher Policy Database.

Examples of state leadership:

ARKANSAS has worked strategically to develop a productive relationship with its university EPPs—a relationship that advances the science of reading. Despite some conflicting perspectives on reading instruction, the SEA and its preparation partners have formed a learning community. A key point of leverage is recent [state law](#), which requires all K-6 and special education teacher candidates to pass the [Foundations of Reading for Arkansas](#) assessment. Because most preparation programs did not initially have curricula aligned to the assessment, the SEA elected to require yet support changes to help EPPs come into alignment. Specifically, the SEA sent literacy specialists as well as staff from the educator effectiveness unit to engage in problem-solving with EPP leaders. The SEA also convened the EPPs for training through the LETRS Foundation. The SEA invited each institution to send two representatives (primarily professors who teach reading instruction), with roughly 30 representatives attending the four-day event. A key strategy was having a fellow professor from LETRS lead the sessions, making it easier to address contextual issues and concerns among higher education providers. Subsequent sessions, including some delivered through an online platform, have sustained program changes. The SEA is currently creating a new position to monitor and help support EPP alignment with the science of reading.

TEXAS passed [House Bill 3](#) in 2019, which required all new teachers seeking certifications for preschool through sixth grade after January 1, 2021 to pass the [Science of Teaching Reading \(STR\)](#) exam, a comprehensive assessment that tests the five components of scientifically based reading instruction. While teachers who are currently certified do not need to pass the STR exam to renew their certificate, all K-3 teachers and principals must attend [Reading Academies](#) by the 2022-2023 school year. These academies are designed to increase teacher knowledge and implementation of evidence-based practices to improve student reading achievement.

CONCLUSION

As of January 2020, an open and wide-ranging dialogue had started among state chiefs, reading experts, policy experts, and other stakeholder groups to drive lasting, once-and-for-all improvements in the reading skills of our nation's children and youth. The National Summit on Literacy, hosted by CCSSO, was intended to build an understanding of the barriers that prevent schools from helping children learn to read, as well as to explore solutions states and districts have found to address these barriers.

Among the summit's key takeaways were:

- The evidence base for how children learn early foundational reading skills is settled.
- State chiefs are uniquely positioned and uniquely responsible for driving improvements in literacy founded on the evidenced-based practices.

Over the course of the day-long summit emerged four concrete action steps state chiefs can take to help every child learn to read.

- 1** Articulate a coherent vision for improving literacy that is grounded in evidence-based practices and a commitment to equity and student outcomes.

Chiefs can start by:

- defining the reading challenge the state faces and articulating the range of acceptable solutions to those challenges;
- addressing all aspects of reading — including reading standards, assessments, instructional materials, professional learning, support systems, and educator preparation; and
- leading in a manner that enlists others in positions of influence to support the cause of addressing literacy challenges through the science of reading.

- 2** Align SEA organization, staffing, and practices to support reading as a foundational driver of equity and achievement.

Chiefs can start by:

- aligning SEA organization, staffing, and practices to support reading as a foundational driver of equity and achievement;
- distributing state resources in ways that guide, support, and encourage (where possible) local agencies and schools to imbue literacy policies, programs, and practices with the science of reading; and
- identifying who, within the SEA, will focus on bringing a comprehensive and coherent approach to the work of ensuring that children become highly proficient readers.

- 3** Provide policy guidance and support to districts and schools regarding aligning curricula, assessments, and professional learning to the science of reading.

Chiefs can start by:

- establishing criteria and providing examples that illustrate what high-quality reading curricula and instruction look like, by posting information on the SEA website and issuing policy briefs and white papers describing the science of reading. Establish clear guidelines for state approval of curriculum, textbooks, and providers of professional learning.
- encouraging districts to use formative or diagnostic assessment tools that measure the extent to which children are developing skills in the five domains of reading competency and overseeing the development of state assessments that measure the extent to which the science of reading is taught in districts and schools; and
- advocating for policy, funding, and organizational structures that better support teachers in building knowledge and improving practice in the science of reading.

- 4** Engage college and university partners to support the state reading strategy.

Chiefs can start by:

- working with educator certification test publishers to design, adopt, or adapt tests that measure knowledge of pedagogy which reflects the science of reading;
- working with EPPs to offer coursework and clinical training rooted in the science of reading; and
- using the state program approval and accreditation processes to (a) hold EPPs accountable for their graduates' impact on student performance and (b) require that EPPs show evidence that their curricula reflect the science of reading.

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APPENDIX

STATE LAWS AND PROPOSED LEGISLATION	
STATE	LEGISLATION
ALABAMA	https://legiscan.com/AL/bill/HB388/2019
ARKANSAS	https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/Detail?ddBienniumSession=2017%2F2017R&measureno=SB502
ARIZONA	https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/00704.htm
COLORADO	http://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb19-199
FLORIDA	https://www.flsenate.gov/laws/statutes/2019/1001.215
IDAHO	https://legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2019/legislation/H0105/
MICHIGAN	http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S/filjk5rzzcjmaikwpx4nmy))/mileg.aspx?page=GetMCLDocument&objectname=mcl-380-1280f
MINNESOTA	https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/120B.12
MISSISSIPPI	https://www.mdek12.org/OEER/LBPA#:~:text=Passed%20during%20the%202013%20legislative,progress%20through%20grades%20K%2D3.
MISSOURI	https://www.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/adrules/csr/current/5csr/5c20-400.pdf
NEBRASKA	https://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/display_html.php?begin_section=79-2601&end_section=79-2607
NORTH CAROLINA	https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2017/sb%20599
OKLAHOMA	http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb194&Session=1900
RHODE ISLAND	http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText19/SenateText19/S1036.pdf
TEXAS	https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=86R&Bill=HB3
WEST VIRGINIA	https://apps.sos.wv.gov/adlaw/csr/readfile.aspx?DocId=51034&Format=PDF
WYOMING	https://www.wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2019/HB0297
TENNESSEE	http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/Billinfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=HB2229&ga=111
KENTUCKY	https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/19rs/HB272.html