



**LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

# **EDUCATOR PREPERATION PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Act 139 of 2024**

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## Executive Summary

Vermont's vision for literacy is that every child in the state can read proficiently by third grade, and that adolescent readers who struggle receive the support they need, ensuring all students are prepared for college or career. This vision is grounded in the body of convergent, interdisciplinary research that informs how reading develops and is most effectively taught to all children.

Teacher expertise is one of the most powerful factors affecting student achievement.<sup>i</sup> Highly qualified teachers prepared to educate a diverse student population are essential to the success of a well-functioning public education system.<sup>ii</sup> Teacher preparation programs serve as the foundation for developing the expertise needed for effective teaching. In addition, decades of research provide substantial evidence on how children learn to read and how reading is best taught.<sup>iii</sup>

[Act 139](#), signed into law in 2024, is the state's most comprehensive literacy legislation to date and directs the Agency of Education (AOE/Agency) to recommend ways to strengthen Educator Preparation Programs' (EPPs) instruction in evidence-based literacy practices to the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) and include the Senate and House Education Committees on the recommendations.

The Agency offers recommendations based on analysis of current reading outcomes in Vermont, research on the impact of teacher expertise on student achievement, and lessons learned from EPP actions in other states. More specifically, the recommendations offered in this document are grounded in a synthesis of findings from leading national education organizations, including the National Center for Teacher Quality (NCTQ); ExcelsinEd; the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO); The Reading League (TRL); and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR).<sup>iv</sup> This synthesis surfaced five categories of state action to support EPPs in ensuring pre-service educators are well-equipped to teach students how to read. These five categories include:

1. Educator preparation standards
2. Licensure exams
3. Professional learning and coaching
4. Educator preparation program review
5. Statewide policies and systems of support.

These categories form the basis for the Agency's recommendations as well as considerations for the future. The recommendations are:

1. Revise teaching and leadership standards.
2. Require a literacy-focused licensure exam.
3. Revise the Results Oriented Program Approval Process.

The Agency also offers two areas for future inquiry. These include:

1. Professional learning and coaching support for faculty.
2. Statewide policies and systems of support.

The purpose of the above recommendations is to comply with Act 139 of 2024, ensure that Vermont's EPPs prepare aspiring teachers to teach reading using evidence-based practices, and offer a path forward for continued collaboration among Vermont schools, the Agency, and the EPPs.

## Purpose

This document fulfills the requirements of Section 8 of Vermont [Act 139](#) (2024), which directs the Agency to propose ways to strengthen EPP instruction in evidence-based literacy practices for consideration by the VSBPE. The VSBPE sets the licensing rules and policies that shape what all new educators in Vermont must know and be able to do.

These recommendations and areas for future consideration are offered with appreciation for the expertise and commitment of Vermont's EPPs, schools, and partners. Improving literacy outcomes is a long-term, statewide effort, and no single entity can do it alone. The recommendations support the statewide goal of creating greater alignment in how educators are prepared and supported to deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction.

## Rationale: Why Student Literacy Outcomes Matter

### The Evidence Is Clear: The Vast Majority of Students Can Learn to Read

If a child is struggling to read at the end of first grade, there is an 88% chance that they will continue to struggle at the end of fourth grade.<sup>i</sup> High school reading levels are also strongly predicted by first grade reading levels.<sup>ii</sup> Poor reading outcomes in the early grades are linked to a host of long-term negative consequences, including higher rates of unemployment, incarceration, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and suicide.<sup>iii</sup>

Decades of convergent research about language and reading development and instruction—often referred to as the *science of reading*—demonstrate that reading is not a natural process; it must be taught through instructional methods that explicitly and systematically develop phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.<sup>iv</sup> This body of research was conducted across many disciplines and languages and applies to all children, including linguistically diverse learners and those with dyslexia.<sup>v</sup> Crucially, research suggests that with effective, evidence-based classroom instruction about 95% of students can learn to read at grade level.

Vermont's EPPs play a critical role in ensuring that future educators are equipped with evidence-based literacy instructional practices.

## Current State: Vermont's Student Reading Outcomes

Overall, Vermont has experienced a decline in student reading and writing achievement over the last decade, with some signs of improvement in the 2024-2025 school year. Vermont student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate declining student proficiency in reading, and Vermont's statewide summative assessment, the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP), reflects persistent achievement gaps among historically marginalized groups in reading and writing.

More specifically, Vermont's NAEP scores have declined steadily each year since 2015. In 2024, only 31% of Vermont fourth graders and 29% of eighth graders scored at or above the proficient level in reading. Before 2015, Vermont consistently performed well above the national average on the NAEP. However, in 2024, Vermont's NAEP literacy score fell below the national average for the first time.

In the 2024-2025 school year, English language arts (ELA) proficiency rates on the VTCAP increased by seven and five percentage points among fourth and fifth graders, respectively, statewide. However, data indicate that only 54% of fourth graders and 58% of eighth graders scored proficient in ELA in 2023-2024. Students experiencing high poverty, particularly those qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), and those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and those experiencing other extraordinary circumstances, demonstrate persistent achievement gaps compared with their peers, with disparities ranging from 20 to 30 percent depending on the year and grade level.

An additional data point demonstrating the need to improve students' literacy proficiency is the assessment of Vermont Career and Technical Education (CTE) students' work-ready reading and writing skills. In the 2024-2025 school year, 47% of Vermont CTE students demonstrated proficiency in reading, understanding, and using workplace written materials, as measured by the WorkKeys reading assessment. These proficiency levels are unchanged from the 2023-2024 school year. All in all, Vermont student data trends highlight an urgent need to improve Vermont's literacy outcomes.

## The Importance of Teacher Knowledge and Practice

An extensive body of research demonstrates that teacher knowledge and practice are critical to student reading success; expertise in foundational reading skills, language structures, and evidence-based instruction can significantly reduce early reading failure and improve literacy outcomes across diverse student populations.<sup>vi</sup> In fact, research suggests that approximately 95% of children can learn to read if they receive explicit and systematic evidence-based instruction early and from well-prepared educators.<sup>vii</sup>

National studies indicate that teacher preparation programs have opportunities to strengthen how they prepare educators to teach reading effectively. In 2023, NCTQ conducted a review of over 700 elementary teacher preparation programs in the U.S. and found that 25% adequately cover the five foundational components of reading

instruction. There is a clear need to deepen pre-service teachers' knowledge and experiences as they prepare to provide effective reading instruction to improve literacy outcomes of Vermont students.<sup>viii</sup>

### Current State: Vermont's Educator Workforce

In 2022, the AOE conducted a survey about the educator workforce to which nearly 90% of Vermont Supervisory Unions/Districts (SU/SDs) responded. Of those who responded, only 19% indicated that they are always able to hire educators with literacy pre-service training in evidence-based literacy practices, while 65% indicated that it is rare or challenging to do so. One superintendent who completed the survey made the following observation, illustrating the challenge of hiring teachers who are ready to teach reading effectively:

*“New teachers are not coming to us well versed in the science of reading. We spend a lot of energy and resources teaching them these skills. Additionally, we are forced to combat philosophical reading strategies teachers have been taught, like the 3-cueing system, that conflict with the evidence-based practices we know our students need.”*

In a 2024-2025 University of Vermont survey of active Vermont elementary educators, 58% indicated that they wished they had learned more in their educator preparation program about explicit reading instruction.

Over the last several years, the AOE has engaged with partners in higher education, across Vermont's education system (including teachers, principals, curriculum leaders, and superintendents), and with community members to better understand literacy needs and opportunities. Input has been gathered through the 2024-2025 AOE Listen and Learn series, the Results-Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) process, school visits, Read Vermont professional learning and coaching, and the Literacy Advisory Council. Across these engagements, several common themes have emerged related to the preparedness of Vermont's educators:

- The need for resources to support the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment in Vermont's SU/SDs and classrooms.
- The need for high-quality professional learning and job-embedded coaching that supports educators in putting research into practice.
- The need for clear AOE guidance and accountability structures to guide shifts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

These common themes across various engagements since the passage of Act 139 demonstrate the opportunity to ensure that EPPs equip new educators with the knowledge and practices that Act 139 requires of all Vermont educators. Through aligning pre-service preparation with statewide expectations for evidence-based literacy instruction, Vermont can ensure sustained improvement of literacy outcomes.

## Laying the Foundation: Educator Preparation for Literacy Instruction

EPPs are a vital part of Vermont's education system that supports skilled reading development. While many factors influence teacher readiness, EPPs are a critical lever for ensuring new teachers have the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to help all students learn to read. They establish the foundation for teacher effectiveness through evidence-based coursework and clinical experiences.

There are currently ten EPPs that are approved by the VSBPE to recommend their graduates for an educator license, as well as one approved alternate route to licensure, the Peer Review program based at the Agency of Education. Of those, eight are approved to recommend graduates for licensure in elementary education, five for special education, and three for the Specialized Literacy Professional endorsement. Peer Review can recommend successful completers for licensure in any endorsement. There is also a nationwide initiative to train teachers through a registered apprenticeship model, which has been started here in Vermont. Because not all teachers complete a traditional educator preparation program, but all educators must meet the Core Teaching Standards and the endorsement competencies set by the Vermont Standards Board, the focus of these recommendations is on those standards and competencies. Another benefit of revising the standards to ensure all new educators are well-versed in current best practices is that in-service educators use those standards when completing the ongoing professional learning needed for license renewal. This ensures that new teachers as well as experienced teachers are all using the same set of standards.

In 2022, the Region 1 Comprehensive Center conducted a limited review of syllabi from Vermont's EPPs for the Agency.<sup>ix</sup> Six of Vermont's EPPs voluntarily submitted 20 sample syllabi for review, representing 60% of Vermont educators recommended for certification in early childhood, early childhood special education, and elementary pathways. The review found that EPP syllabi generally align with the expectations outlined in the ROPA process. However, the review indicated that there is an interest and willingness among EPPs to better integrate evidence-based practices into the ROPA requirements. In addition, the review recommended a deeper review of EPPs for *how* essential components of literacy are addressed within program content to provide a more complete understanding of program strengths and opportunities.

Since the syllabi review, the passage of Act 139 (2024) further underscores the importance of ensuring that educator preparation programs align their coursework and field experiences with evidence-based reading instruction. Act 139 requires that all students in kindergarten through grade three receive explicit, systematic, evidence-based instruction in the five foundational components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) delivered by teachers who are skilled in these areas. Act 139 also requires that in-service educators receive training in these same evidence-based practices, reinforcing the coherence between pre-service

preparation and ongoing professional learning. In summary, Vermont's EPPs play a critical role in ensuring that new teachers enter the classroom prepared to deliver instruction consistent with Vermont's statewide literacy requirements.

Vermont's EPPs care deeply about preparing effective educators for Vermont's students and work hard to do so, often within tight time and resource constraints. As one EPP partner aptly noted, "How much can an EPP do in the time they have?" This question highlights the importance of viewing educator preparation as part of a continuum of professional learning from pre-service through induction and ongoing professional growth. While new educators are not expected to enter the field with the same depth of expertise as experienced educators, there must be a clear and consistent baseline of knowledge and skill in evidence-based literacy practices aligned with Act 139. Continued support through mentoring, professional learning, and coaching ensures that educators will continue to build on their strong foundation and sustain effective practice throughout their career for Vermont students.

## National Momentum: States Lead the Way

Given the strong evidence on how reading develops, in combination with the critical role of appropriate instructional practices and teacher expertise, 40 states have passed legislation requiring that reading instruction align with evidence-based practices and 30 of these states are also aligning educator preparation program content with evidence-based practices.<sup>x</sup> Through the passage of Act 139 in 2024, Vermont joined this national movement to strengthen reading instruction at its roots: teacher preparation. The alignment of EPPs with evidence-based literacy instruction is complex and will require sustained and coordinated action across organizations and governing bodies that influence how Vermont prepares educators. These bodies include the General Assembly, the Agency of Education, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators, the State Board of Education, and educator preparation programs. The Council of Chief State School Officers' 2020 document, *A Nation of Readers*, specifically highlighted the importance of chief state school officers engaging with colleges and universities to revamp teacher education programs to ensure preservice educators learn the science of reading.<sup>xi</sup>

A synthesis of findings from leading national education organizations, including the National Center for Teacher Quality (NCTQ); ExcelinEd; the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO); The Reading League (TRL); and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) surfaced five categories of state action that have helped ensure educators are well-equipped to teach students how to read.<sup>xii</sup> These five categories include: educator preparation standards, licensure exams, professional learning and coaching, Educator Preparation Program review, and statewide policies and systems of support.

- **Educator Preparation Standards:** States across the country have adopted comprehensive evidence-based standards for educator preparation programs. These standards serve as the blueprint for designing coursework, clinical experiences, and assessments in EPPs. As of 2024, 26 states have adopted literacy standards for EPPs.<sup>xxix</sup> When educator preparation standards are well-designed and aligned with evidence, they help ensure new teachers enter classrooms ready to deliver effective and evidence-based reading instruction.
- **Licensure Exams:** Licensure tests are the most widely used measure of teacher knowledge. NCTQ reviews state licensure exams to determine whether they sufficiently assess candidates' knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction and their capacity to meet the needs of diverse learners. According to NCTQ, 19 states currently use strong licensure exams, which are described as covering at least 75% of the five core components of reading as well as covering the needs of advanced readers, struggling readers, and linguistically diverse students.<sup>xxx</sup>
- **Professional Learning for Faculty:** Strengthening faculty expertise through professional learning and coaching is an important step toward improving the quality of teacher preparation and, ultimately, student outcomes. Research indicates that teachers benefit from additional support and training to strengthen their knowledge and skills in scientifically based reading instruction.<sup>xxxi</sup>
- **Educator Preparation Program Review:** A teacher preparation program review is a systematic evaluation of EPPs to confirm that coursework and clinical experiences are consistent with scientifically based reading instruction so that all teacher candidates enter the profession prepared to deliver effective reading instruction from day one. NCTQ recommends that states establish a review process to ensure that teacher preparation programs are aligned with evidence-based practices and that ineffective or discredited practices are discontinued.<sup>xl</sup>
- **Statewide Policies and Systems of Support:** Critical factors within the education system that influence skilled, proficient reading development include evidence-based reading instruction and assessment, high-quality in-service professional development and coaching, effective instructional and assessment frameworks, and the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). ExcelinEd developed a framework that identifies the key policy actions taken by states that have achieved the most significant gains in early literacy.

[Appendix A](#) contains research, background, and examples of how various states have addressed each of the five categories for recommendation.

## Recommendations

These five categories form the framework for the Agency's recommendations, providing the foundation for phased, system-wide alignment of teacher preparation with evidence-based reading development and instruction.

The Agency's recommendations cover all areas connected to teacher preparation that should align with evidence-based reading development and instruction. These recommendations integrate:

- Findings from NCTQ, ExcelinEd, CCSSO, TRL, and CEEDAR;
- Highlights from states that are comprehensively engaged in this work;
- Insights from Vermont educator professional learning surveys;
- Input from a convening of Vermont teacher preparation program faculty; and
- Review of peer-reviewed research.

In addition, a cross-divisional team from the Agency worked collaboratively with support from a national expert to integrate research and information from various sources and inform the recommendations and areas for future inquiry below.

### Recommendation 1: Revise Teaching and Leadership Standards

Currently, the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) Standards, the Core Teaching Standards (CTS; Rule Series §5235 & A Vision for Teaching, Leading, and Learning: Core Teaching and Leadership) and the individual licensure endorsements (Rule Series 5100, §5440) govern what teacher candidates learn and know how to do upon licensure. As part of the ROPA process, there is a thorough review of how each EPP teaches and assesses their candidates' competency in the CTS and the endorsement standards.

**Recommendation:** The Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators should incorporate knowledge of evidence-based literacy instructional practices that all educators need into the Core Teaching and endorsement standards. **The Agency recommends that the VSBPE 1) define and adopt awareness-level practices for educators in the Core Teaching Standards to ensure all educators have basic knowledge of how students learn to read, and 2) revise endorsement competencies for educators directly responsible for teaching students how to read to align with Act 139.**

Establishing clear, statewide awareness and proficiency standards will provide the coherence and specificity needed to support programs in this work and ensure consistent expectations for educator preparation programs.

**Action Steps:**

1. **The Agency recommends that the VSBPE consider and adopt revisions to the Core Teaching Standards (CTS)** to ensure all educators have a basic awareness of the foundations of literacy.
2. **The Agency recommends that the VSBPE consider and adopt endorsement standard revisions** for teachers seeking licensure in Early Childhood, Early Childhood Special Education, Elementary Education, Multilingual Learners, Special Education, and Specialized Literacy Professional, as well as those seeking administrator licensure as Principal, Special Education Director, or Curriculum Director. The revised standards will align with Act 139's requirements for explicit and systematic instruction in the five foundational skills. These endorsement standard revisions will involve:
  - a. Opportunities to learn about, observe, plan, assess (including screening), and deliver explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
  - b. Evidence-based competencies related to supporting linguistically diverse learners and learners with characteristics of dyslexia.
3. As part of the current ROPA process, **all approved educator preparation programs will be required to align coursework and clinical experiences to these new core teaching and endorsement standards** within two years of adoption by the VSBPE.

**Recommendation 2: Require a Literacy-Focused Licensure Exam**

**Recommendation:** The VSBPE require a strong licensure exam for educators responsible for teaching students how to read. More specifically the *Praxis Teaching Reading (5205)* is recommended as Vermont already uses other Praxis tests and this assessment specifically evaluates candidates' ability to teach and assess the five foundational components of reading. This test would be required for all licenses and endorsements related to early childhood, elementary education, special education, and reading specialists.<sup>1</sup> The Agency may use pass rate data to strengthen program approval, renewal, and transparency.

**Action Steps:**

1. The VSBPE **require the use of *Praxis Teaching Reading: Elementary (5205)***, for all licenses and endorsements related to early childhood, elementary education, special education, and reading specialists that are responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundations of Reading (190) is also a strong licensure exam and covers explicit and systematic instruction of the five foundational literacy skills outlined in Act 139. However, given that Vermont already uses the Praxis, the Praxis test is recommended.

teaching students how to read. This exam should be required for all teacher licensure pathways, including alternative routes.

2. The Agency **may consider annually publishing licensure pass rate data** and incorporating pass rate data into the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) review.

### **Recommendation 3: Revise the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) Process**

The Agency recommends a phased revision of the ROPA process to ensure specific and objective evidence of instructional quality and alignment with Act 139. It is recommended that the phased approach includes EPPs volunteering to engage in a pilot of the revised review process. The revised review process for coursework that prepares teachers to teach reading should utilize a valid and reliable course assessment tool that addresses the five foundational components of literacy (such as the [Course Alignment Planning Tool \(CAPT 3.0\)](#)). Crucially, the review team must include a reviewers with demonstrated expertise in evidence-based literacy instruction to ensure alignment with research on how students learn to read.

#### **Action Steps:**

1. **The Agency will work with partners to identify funds** (state, federal grants, or philanthropic) to review the ROPA process and pilot the revised review process focused on courses preparing educators to teach reading.
2. Identify voluntary pilot sites to **engage in pilot review**. Utilizing subject matter expertise, complete course section reviews for alignment with standards and to identify any discredited, inefficient, and ineffective methods of assessing and teaching reading. Consideration should be given to the review and analysis of:
  - a. Syllabi, textbooks, and learning management system content
  - b. Course observations
  - c. Interviews with faculty, leadership, candidates, and program completers
  - d. Review of clinical experiences
3. Depending on the outcomes the pilot, the Agency may codify to scale the review process and the VSBPE may establish a timeline for further adoption.

### **Areas for Future Inquiry**

#### **Professional Learning and Coaching Support for Faculty**

EPPs, in collaboration with the Agency and other partners, may consider providing faculty in educator preparation programs with targeted professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance to align courses and clinical practices with evidence-based reading instruction. Investment in release time, stipends, and grants to support course

redesign and sustainable implementation are important long-term considerations. It is recognized that this would require sustained collaboration, resources, and commitment from various entities.

**Considerations:**

1. EPPs may consider release time and stipends for faculty to analyze and revise courses.
2. EPPs offer grants for professional learning, technical assistance, and coaching to support program evaluation and redesign, including:
  - Professional learning about evidence-based reading development and instruction.
  - Technical assistance aligning existing coursework and clinical experiences with established standards.
  - Observation and non-evaluative coaching of faculty in their classrooms as they implement changes to instructional practices.

**Statewide Policies and Systems of Support**

Vermont can strengthen early literacy outcomes by building a state-led and supported network that delivers coherent and evidence-based professional learning and coaching, aligning teacher preparation and licensure to evidence-based reading instruction, and supporting districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials that teachers are trained and coached to implement.

**Considerations:**

1. The Agency and partners explore the possibility of launching a Read Vermont Literacy Hub to ensure comprehensive policy, support, and funding frameworks for stakeholder alignment with Vermont's vision for literacy.
2. Convening state and philanthropic partners to build a sustainable funding model to ensure sustained and scalable efforts.
3. Creating opportunities for comprehensive support, professional development, and coaching opportunities for educators. This may include automating approval of pre-determined professional learning criteria/credentials within the current Vermont Licensing System for Educators (VLSE).
4. The Agency provides guidance and recommendations for schools about how to evaluate, select, and implement high-quality instructional materials (HQIM).

## Appendix A. National Momentum: States Lead the Way

Appendix A provides background information and national context about the five recommendation categories.

### Educator Preparation Standards

States across the country have adopted comprehensive evidence-based standards for educator preparation programs defining what all teachers should know and be able to do upon completion of EPPs. These standards serve as the blueprint for designing coursework, clinical experiences, and assessments in EPPs. When educator preparation standards are well-designed and aligned with evidence, they help ensure new teachers enter classrooms ready to deliver effective and evidence-based reading instruction from day one and are prepared to continue growing their knowledge and application of evidence-based practices through ongoing professional learning.

According to the National Academy of Education,

Program approval and accreditation should maintain common expectations for opportunities to learn for all candidates and for the evaluation of TPPs in all routes and pathways into teaching. State approval agencies and accreditors should collectively define a set of professional standards of practice that hold all candidates, regardless of pathway, to the same high-quality criteria.<sup>xiii</sup>

### Educator Preparation Standards Nationally

Starting in the early 2010s, states began modifying educator preparation standards to align with the scientific evidence of how students learn to read. Many state standards include the following three indicators recommended by NCTQ.

- Detailed reading standards for teacher preparation programs that include explicit, systematic instruction in five foundational components of reading instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension;
- How to differentiate teaching for linguistically diverse learners; and
- How to teach students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia.

It is important to note that Vermont's Act 139 mandates that all Vermont schools provide instruction that addresses each of these three indicators, but it does not specify that they must be addressed by EPPs.

As of 2024, 26 states have adopted literacy standards for EPPs, according to NCTQ.<sup>xiv</sup> NCTQ recommends that state standards include the five core components of reading as well as what teachers should know and be able to teach for each of the core components aligned to the research. For instance, Ohio, Utah, Rhode Island, and Arkansas have adopted comprehensive teacher preparation standards.

- Ohio’s [Science of Reading Audit Metrics](#) establishes clear expectations for both coursework and clinical practice.
- Utah’s [Educator Preparation Program Competencies for Elementary Literacy](#) details the specific competencies that preservice educators must demonstrate to meet teacher preparation standards. Their competency model includes a tiered development framework including basic knowledge, application, and demonstration, while also integrating literacy across subjects.
- [Rhode Island Science of Reading and Structured Literacy: Resource Bank for Syllabi Refinement](#) defines foundational reading competencies.
- Arkansas’ [Foundations of Reading Competencies-Proficiency Level](#) outline competencies for educators who are responsible for teaching students to read and the [Foundations of Reading Competencies-Awareness Level](#) outlines competencies that all educators should have no matter what subject area they teach.

## Licensure Exams

Teachers can teach only what they know. Licensure tests are the most widely used measure of teacher knowledge. NCTQ reviews state licensure exams to determine whether they sufficiently assess candidates’ knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction and their capacity to meet the needs of diverse learners. NCTQ uses four rating categories: strong, acceptable, weak, and unacceptable. A strong licensure test is described as one that covers at least 75% of the five core components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), and covers the needs of advanced readers, struggling readers, and linguistically diverse students. According to NCTQ, 19 states use strong licensure exams, one state uses an acceptable licensure exam, and 30 states use weak licensure exams. Vermont’s licensure test, the *Praxis Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects (5001)*, is rated as *weak* in the NCTQ review. Of the 19 states with strong reading licensure tests, 11 use *Foundations of Reading (190)*, 6 use *Praxis Teaching Reading: Elementary (5205)*, and 1 uses *Praxis Teaching Reading: K-12 (5206)*.<sup>xv</sup> Additionally, NCTQ and ExcelinEd recommend that states publish licensure test pass rates and use pass rate data as part of program approval and renewal processes. In Vermont, 56% of candidates pass the licensure exam on the first try, with a pass rate range among programs of 32% to 100%.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Professional Learning and Coaching

Research indicates that pre-service and in-service teachers may benefit from additional support and training to strengthen their knowledge and skills in scientifically based reading instruction.<sup>xvii</sup> What pre- and in-service teachers know about reading development, language structures, and scientifically based reading instruction impacts student reading levels.<sup>xviii</sup> Guided by this research, 41 states have implemented

professional development in scientifically based reading instruction for in-service educators; however, only 13 of those states mandate this professional development.<sup>xix</sup>

Research also suggests that professional development combined with coaching impacts the practices of educators.<sup>xx</sup> Building knowledge of evidence-based practices is important. However, integrating new knowledge into practices typically requires sustained support that is not typically included in professional learning opportunities.<sup>xxi</sup> Skilled coaching can support the coherent consolidation of new knowledge into practice.<sup>xxii</sup> Teachers, including teacher educators, cannot teach what they do not know.<sup>xxiii</sup> Traditional professional learning typically does not provide participants with practice or guidance about how to integrate their new knowledge into their existing practice.<sup>xxiv</sup> Skilled coaching can help teachers, including teacher educators, consolidate and translate this new knowledge into practice.<sup>xxv</sup>

### **Align Educator Preparation Review Process with Standards**

Ohio and Indiana are examples of states requiring an audit of all EPPs to verify that literacy coursework and clinical practices are aligned with evidence-based reading instruction. Colorado requires that EPPs provide evidence that coursework, syllabi, and clinical experiences are grounded in the science of reading and are aligned to the reading competencies established in the Colorado READ Act.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **Educator Preparation Program Review**

A teacher preparation program review is a systematic evaluation of educator preparation programs (EPPs) to confirm that coursework and clinical experiences are consistent with scientifically based reading instruction. The goal of the review is to strengthen programs so that all teacher candidates enter the profession prepared to deliver effective reading instruction from day one. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), most states lack formal review processes to verify that all content in teacher preparation programs is aligned with evidence-based reading development and instruction. NCTQ recommends that states establish a review process to ensure that teacher preparation programs are aligned with evidence-based practices and that ineffective or discredited practices are discontinued.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **Statewide Policies and Systems of Support**

Other critical factors within the education system that influence skilled, proficient reading development include evidence-based reading instruction and assessment, high-quality in-service professional development and coaching, effective instructional and assessment frameworks, and the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). EPPs specifically note inconsistent use of HQIM as a barrier to effective practicum experiences.

## Leading States and Key Actions

ExcelinEd developed a framework that identifies the key policy actions taken by states that have achieved the most significant gains in early literacy. The framework outlines a comprehensive statewide approach that begins with building educator knowledge in evidence-based reading instruction and supporting the implementation of that knowledge through ongoing professional learning and school-based literacy coaches. The framework calls for aligning educator preparation programs and licensure requirements with evidence-based practices to ensure new teachers enter the classroom ready to teach reading effectively.

The framework also establishes a statewide assessment system that includes universal early literacy screening and screening for characteristics of dyslexia, paired with timely communication to families when students are not meeting grade-level expectations. The framework prioritizes the adoption of high-quality, evidence-aligned instructional materials; the use of individualized reading plans and ongoing progress monitoring; and access to structured intervention during and beyond the school day; and ensuring that families have the resources to support literacy at home.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Critically, the framework underscores the need for sustained state, district, school, family, and educator preparation program funding to support implementation.

## Mississippi

**Overview:** Mississippi has been widely recognized for the impact of their comprehensive, integrated literacy reform. In 2013, the state enacted the Literacy-Based Promotion Act, which called for state-funded training and coaching, universal screening, intensive intervention, family engagement, and a third-grade promotion standard to ensure all students develop strong foundational reading skills. Between 2015 and 2019, Mississippi required educator preparation programs to align coursework with the science of reading and adopted the Foundations of Reading licensure exam to ensure new teachers demonstrated mastery of evidence-based reading instruction. Between 2013 and 2022, Mississippi jumped nearly 30 spots from 49th in the nation in 2013 in 4th grade NAEP scores to 9th in the nation in 2024. Notably, Mississippi's gains in fourth-grade NAEP reading scores were particularly strong improvement among Black students and students experiencing poverty.<sup>xxix</sup>

## Mississippi's Key Elements of Literacy Reform

Mississippi identifies state-funded, state-managed literacy coaching paired with training in the science of reading as the *central driver* of its reading improvement.

- The state did not just train teachers – the state embedded trained literacy coaches in schools to support classroom practice every day.

- Coaches were highly trained, centrally selected, and supervised by the state, ensuring consistency and quality.
- Teachers then received ongoing support to apply evidence-based reading instruction, not one-time PD.

Mississippi credits aligning teacher preparation and licensure with the science of reading as key to sustaining literacy growth. Here are three specific, concrete actions Mississippi took to align teacher preparation with the science of reading:

- **Aligned Educator Preparation Coursework:** Required all teacher preparation programs to teach evidence-based early literacy aligned to the science of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and explicit instructional practice).
- **Adopted a Strong Reading Licensure Exam:** Implemented the Foundations of Reading licensure assessment to ensure teacher candidates demonstrate mastery of the science of reading before becoming certified.
- **Reviewed and Monitored EPP Alignment:** Required educator preparation programs to revise syllabi and clinical practice placements, with ongoing state oversight to verify alignment and assure program accountability.<sup>xxx</sup>

## Louisiana

Louisiana has also been recognized for the impact of its comprehensive early literacy reforms. Beginning in 2018, the state advanced a statewide literacy strategy that included mandatory science of reading–aligned professional learning for K–3 teachers, the expansion of a state-supported literacy coaching network, universal early literacy screening, and the use of high-quality instructional materials vetted through Louisiana’s rigorous curriculum review process. Louisiana strengthened this work by requiring educator preparation programs to align coursework to the science of reading and by adopting the Praxis Elementary Reading (5205) licensure assessment with a strong cut score to ensure new teachers demonstrate mastery of evidence-based reading instruction prior to entering the classroom. Between 2019 and 2024, Louisiana experienced some of the largest fourth-grade NAEP reading gains in the nation, improving its ranking from 41st to 15th. Notably, Louisiana’s improvements were broad-based across student groups, helping to narrow long-standing opportunity gaps.<sup>xxxii</sup>

## Louisiana’s Key Element of Literacy Reform

Louisiana credits its literacy gains to the pairing of high-quality instructional materials with sustained teacher training and embedded coaching.<sup>xxxii</sup>

## Alabama

**Overview:** Alabama has similarly been recognized for the strength of its comprehensive approach to early literacy improvement. Following the passage of the Alabama Literacy Act in 2019, the state implemented a coordinated strategy that included state-funded literacy coaches in every K–3 school, mandatory science of reading–aligned professional learning (including statewide LETRS training), and universal early literacy and dyslexia screening to identify students needing support as early as possible. Alabama also required districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned to the science of reading, ensuring instructional coherence across classrooms. To sustain these reforms, the state aligned educator preparation programs to the science of reading and required new teachers to demonstrate proficiency through a strong Foundations of Reading licensure assessment. Between 2019 and 2024, Alabama was one of only two states in the nation where fourth graders’ NAEP reading scores exceeded pre-pandemic levels, improving its ranking from 48th to 33rd. Notably, Alabama’s gains have been statewide and across student groups, reflecting the depth and consistency of implementation.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### Alabama’s Key Element of Literacy Reform

Alabama credits its literacy progress to a coherent statewide approach that pairs science of reading professional learning with state-funded literacy coaching, high-quality instructional materials, early screening and intervention, and alignment of teacher preparation and licensure to evidence-based reading instruction. However, Alabama identifies state-supported literacy coaching paired with statewide science of reading professional learning (including LETRS) as keys to their literacy success.

## Indiana

**Overview:** Indiana has also been recognized for its recent, coordinated statewide effort to improve early literacy. In 2022–2023, the state launched a major science of reading initiative supported by more than \$170 million in combined state and philanthropic funding to expand literacy coaching, provide statewide LETRS training for K–3 teachers and administrators, and strengthen early reading instruction in every district. Indiana required universal early literacy and dyslexia screening and provided districts with state-approved Science of Reading–aligned instructional materials and implementation guidance to promote coherence in classrooms. To sustain this work, Indiana passed House Enrolled Act 1558 (2023), which requires educator preparation programs to train new teachers in the science of reading and ensures teacher candidates demonstrate proficiency in evidence-based reading instruction for licensure. Between 2022 and 2024, Indiana experienced one of the largest fourth-grade NAEP reading improvements in the nation, rising from 19th to 6th, with gains observed across many student groups—reflecting the scale and consistency of implementation. In late 2025,

the Indiana Secretary of Education announced a major public-private investment to further accelerate literacy improvement through coaching and professional learning in evidence-based practices.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## Indiana’s Key Element of Literacy Reform

Indiana identifies state-supported literacy coaching, science of reading professional learning, the launch of the Indiana Cadre, and alignment of teacher preparation and licensure to evidence-based reading instruction as the key drivers of its literacy improvement.<sup>xxxv</sup>

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