



THE PATH FORWARD SUMMIT 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS



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KEYNOTE

PRESENTER

- ✓ [Beth Battle Anderson](#), President & CEO | Core Knowledge Foundation
- ✓ [Dr. Dan Willingham](#), Professor of Psychology | University of Virginia

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Phonics is foundational, but not sufficient. While phonics is essential for decoding individual words, reading comprehension depends on more than decoding. Understanding meaning requires background knowledge and familiarity with language structure.
- Reading comprehension requires content knowledge. Students rely on what they already know to make sense of what they read. Even when texts appear straightforward, background knowledge helps readers resolve ambiguities and fill in gaps that writers often omit.
- Language structure can be inherently ambiguous.
 - › For example: “Lyn scribbled on Brayonna’s picture. She ran to tell the teacher.”
 - › Without context, it’s unclear who “she” is. Background knowledge about typical behavior helps readers infer the correct meaning.
- Writers and readers omit information based on perceived shared knowledge.
 - › For example: “Maya was thirsty, but she was watching her spending. She waited until she’d boarded to get a drink.”
 - › Understanding this requires knowledge about airports, airplane beverage service, and travel costs—none of which is stated directly.
- Expertise studies: Students with prior knowledge of a topic [performed better](#) on reading comprehension—even when the relevant information was explicitly stated.
- Correlational studies: Students’ general cultural knowledge (e.g., knowing who El Greco was or what “absolute zero” means) [correlates strongly](#) with reading comprehension, even when controlling for non-verbal IQ.
- Lottery-based curriculum study: Students who attended schools using a knowledge-rich Core Knowledge Sequence [scored significantly higher](#) on English assessments, especially those from low-income backgrounds.
- Knowledge-rich curricula benefit all students—especially English learners. Students who may not bring assumed knowledge from home benefit when schools provide structured, intentional instruction in content knowledge. What matters is not where the knowledge comes from—but that students have access to it.
- Early and intentional knowledge-building is key. Differences in background knowledge can be measured as early as preschool. Developmental phase theory (i.e., children can’t learn certain things until a specific age) is not backed by science.
- The earlier students build knowledge, the easier it is to learn more—knowledge begets knowledge.

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- If educators avoid defining essential content, they risk leaving knowledge acquisition to chance. Educators must be willing to make hard choices about what content is essential, to ensure equity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support knowledge-rich curriculum development and implementation**, especially in early grades to ensure all students are accumulating the necessary knowledge for reading comprehension.
- **Reflect on assumptions** about developmental appropriateness through a research-based lens about early exposure to content.
- **Integrate background knowledge building across subjects** to strengthen reading comprehension and include authors from varied backgrounds when building and assessing reading comprehension.

RESOURCES

- [Why Don't Students Like School? By: Dr. Daniel T. Willingham](#) | This foundational book summarizes what cognitive science says about student motivation, thinking, and what that means for teachers.
- [Resources on Knowledge and Literacy](#) | This resource from Core Knowledge Foundation offers articles, books, and podcasts on the importance of knowledge in literacy development.

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PREPARING NEW TEACHERS WITH THE SCIENCE OF READING

MODERATOR

- ✔ [Dr. Heather Peske](#), President | NCTQ

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- ✔ [Dr. Denelle Wallace-Alexander](#), Dean | School of Education at Norfolk University
- ✔ [Dr. Nancy Marchand-Martella](#), Special Advisor to the Chancellor of Faculty Success Initiatives | School of Education at Norfolk University
- ✔ [Dr. Katie Pace Miles](#), Associate Professor & Director of Reading Science Advanced Certificate Brooklyn College | City University of New York (CUNY); Co-Founder & Principal Investigator | CUNY Reading Corps
- ✔ [Megan Comb](#), Executive Director | Wheelock College of Education at Boston University

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Teacher preparation must include the “three supports” for learning: Core knowledge, opportunities to practice, and expert feedback. These supports are critical for candidates to become effective literacy instructors.
- Faculty mindset shifts are essential. Deans and leaders often face resistance among faculty. Transparent expectations, targeted hiring, and one-on-one conversations to reconnect faculty to their “why” can help overcome barriers.
- Tutoring-based learning labs strengthen candidate readiness. Brooklyn College’s tutoring model embeds structured, high-impact literacy tutoring into coursework, combining reading science with rigorous coaching and assessment to support both candidates and K–12 students.
- Partnerships across EPPs, districts, and states elevate quality. Reciprocal relationships, such as sharing PD, involving superintendents in EPP design, and creating advisory boards, ensure preparation stays aligned to real-world classroom needs.
- Mentor teacher roles must be elevated. Strong clinical placements with effective mentors are critical for first-day-ready teachers. States can support this through direct compensation, licensure incentives, or micro-credentials.
- Secondary literacy and leadership training are often overlooked. Reading instruction must extend through grade 12 and include building leaders equipped to identify and support high-quality literacy instruction.

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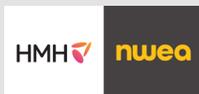
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish and enforce licensure, coursework, and program approval expectations** that ensure comprehensive, evidence-based literacy instruction is embedded across teacher preparation.
- **Collaborate to create clear selection criteria, incentives, and training opportunities** that recognize the value of high-quality cooperating teachers in ensuring first-day-ready candidates.
- **Strengthen data-sharing systems** so EPPs can regularly access completer outcomes and use those insights to adjust coursework, field placements, and support.

RESOURCES

- [What Constitutes a Science of Reading Instruction](#) | This resource explores the common misconceptions related to the science of reading and discusses the implications of these related to instructional implementation.
- [Contesting Science that Silences: Amplifying Equity, Agency, and Design Research in Literacy Teacher Preparation](#) | This article from Reading Research Quarterly, shared by an attendee, explores some of the challenges with the discourse around the science of reading and the impact this narrative has on teacher preparation programs.
- [Student Teaching Placement Guide](#) | This resource, developed in collaboration with Utah's CEEDAR group of state education agencies, local education agencies, and institutes of higher education, aims to identify effective student teacher mentors.

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SHARED OWNERSHIP & STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN

MODERATOR

- ✓ [Dr. Miah Daugherty](#), Vice President on Academic Advocacy (English Language Arts and Literacy) | NWEA

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- ✓ [Terri Clark](#), Read on Arizona
- ✓ [The Honorable Bob Wise](#), Governor | West Virginia (2001–2005)
- ✓ [The Honorable Lisa Coons](#), Superintendent of Public Instruction | Virginia Department of Education (2023–2025)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Transparency and storytelling through data are essential. Data must be accessible and multidimensional to reflect the full picture of literacy efforts.
 - › Leaders need to proactively shape the narrative behind test scores like NAEP or state assessments. Planning how to share progress—early, midyear, and annually—helps secure and sustain partnerships.
 - › Legislators and stakeholders expect updates quickly; having a clear data strategy from the start is critical.
- Successful initiatives often begin with a few committed founding partners and expand into larger networks. Statewide collaboratives have grown from just a handful to more than 20 regional groups working toward a shared goal.
 - › Clear frameworks, such as state literacy plans, help align efforts and define how different partners contribute. Tools and resources must be widely accessible, so every stakeholder is empowered to act.
- Stakeholder mapping and grassroots leadership are key. Identifying key influencers, such as school principals, district leaders, or community advocates, can help scale efforts more effectively.
 - › Starting with a single motivated leader can lead to broader school or district-wide buy-in. Public engagement and outreach beyond traditional education circles are essential to building a movement around literacy.
- Superintendents and district teams need to be brought into the conversation early and often. When districts are empowered to co-design solutions, particularly around challenges like multilingual learner support, peer learning networks emerge as powerful tools for progress.
- Literacy policies grounded in local input and real implementation experience tend to be more sustainable. State-level mandates tied to clear expectations, including literacy endorsements and coaching models, create measurable impact. When data and stories from schools show that these policies are working, it fuels continued support and investment.
- Meaningful literacy improvement is often reflected in tangible student outcomes, like reduced special education referrals or stronger classroom engagement.
 - › Without clearly defined milestones, long-term implementation can lose momentum.

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- Initiating collaboration may be stated by legislation, but it is sustained by relationships. Legislative initiated partnerships grow through trust, shared ownership, and consistent collaboration. Nonpartisan positioning helps build longevity and credibility over time.
- Statewide databases may be complex but offer a high reward. Local control means that assessment systems vary, but identifying high performing districts can help others learn from their success.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Tell your own data story** leveraging voices from classrooms and communities in addition to performance data and other metrics. This will help you to create a more robust picture when implementation data is slow.
- **Maintain central collaboration** through trust and shared ownership. This keeps momentum during challenging implementation periods.
- **Use mapping strategies** to identify stakeholders early and engage key influencers who can drive broader support for literacy initiatives.

RESOURCES

- [Arizona Literacy Plan 2030](#) | Arizona’s literacy plan was developed after a yearlong process of gathering input from partners and stakeholders to ensure commitment and buy-in.

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SUPPORTING SECONDARY LITERACY

MODERATOR

✔ [Emma Mogendorff](#), Senior Program Director | Sauer Family Foundation

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✔ [Rebecca Kockler](#), CEO and Founder | Magpie Literacy

✔ [Dr. Carolyn Durante](#), Lead Relationship Manager | AIM Institute for Learning and Research

✔ [Colleen Danilson](#), Faculty Manager | AIM Institute for Learning and Research

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Secondary literacy requires targeted support—not just a continuation of early literacy efforts. Many students continue to struggle with decoding into middle and high school, even after progress in elementary grades. [Roughly 40 percent](#) of middle schoolers cannot decode well enough to comprehend grade-level text. Instruction must continue beyond third grade and include explicit support for multisyllabic word decoding and morphology.
- The idea that students have “learned to read” by middle school leaves many struggling readers behind. Literacy instruction must continue into secondary grades and be seen as a Tier 1 need, not just an intervention strategy.
- Students must cross a “decoding threshold” to access complex texts. Without mastery of multisyllabic decoding, students plateau. Assessment tools like [CAPTI](#) and [ROAR](#) can help identify persistent gaps and track progress beyond early grades.
- Students of color, multilingual learners, and those with disabilities are disproportionately affected by reading gaps. Morphology instruction helps all students access vocabulary more efficiently and fluency practice improves comprehension—but instructional resources must also reflect students’ cultures and experiences to be truly responsive.
- All teachers—not just ELA teachers—must see themselves as teachers of reading. Training in decoding, morphology, and fluency needs to be part of both pre-service preparation and in-service support. This includes helping teachers understand the *why*, not just the *how*.
- Sustainable change happens when both teachers and leaders are equipped with shared knowledge and aligned goals. Without administrative support and shared understanding, even high-quality literacy strategies struggle to take root.
- Many intervention models are slow-moving and focus on isolated skills. Research supports a shift toward more direct, faster instruction in multisyllabic decoding and morphology, which meets the needs of older students more efficiently.
- Students who have struggled with reading for years often disengage. Rebuilding their confidence and normalizing continued literacy instruction through middle school helps preserve students’ emotional well-being and engagement.

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- Job-embedded coaching and professional learning must be sustained over time. Systems must plan for onboarding new teachers, conducting fidelity checks, and maintaining capacity as staff turnover occurs.
- Oral reading fluency (ORF) assessments are not sufficient for diagnosing literacy needs in older students. States and districts should consider tools that capture decoding, morphology, and comprehension skills in a grade-appropriate way, and provide real-time data to guide instruction.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Consider screening all students through middle and high school using appropriate tools.** Regular literacy screening, even twice or three times a year, provides critical insight into student needs and instructional priorities.
- **Explore opportunities to include secondary literacy in pre-service preparation.** Teacher preparation programs should explicitly address secondary reading challenges, adding targeted coursework and experiences for new educators.
- **Investigate the alignment between secondary literacy strategies, research, and cultural responsiveness.** Instructional frameworks and materials should reflect both research best practices and the lived experiences of the student body.

RESOURCES

- [Policy recommendations for addressing the middle school reading crisis](#) | This NWEA resource provides recommendations for addressing secondary literacy challenges.
- [A Systematic Review of the Literature of Multisyllabic Word Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9](#) | This 2025 literature review explores the impact of multisyllabic interventions for students.
- [Effects of a classwide reading intervention on reading fluency and comprehension of content area text with students in middle school](#) | This resource explores the effectiveness of partner reading with paragraph shrinking for middle school students.

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