



# THE PATH FORWARD SUMMIT 2022

ISSUE BRIEF





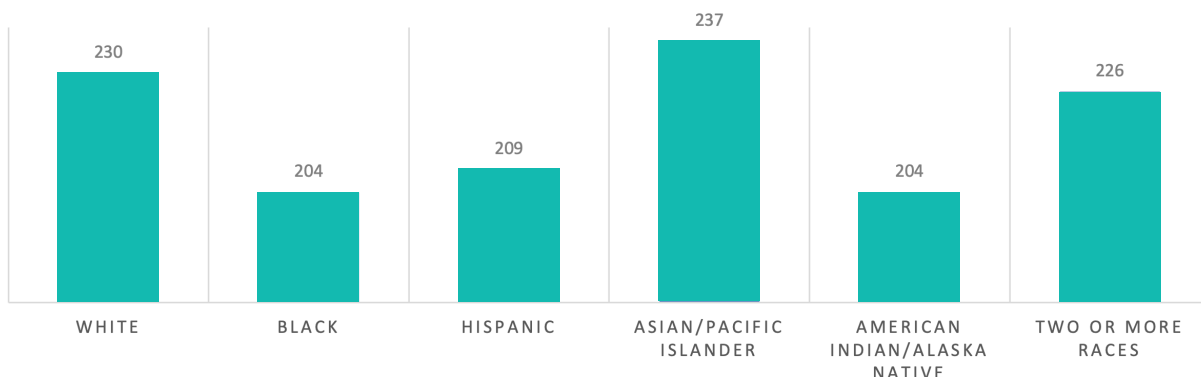
Early literacy proficiency is [critical](#) to later success, both in academics and in life. However, despite efforts to improve early literacy instruction across the country, the United States struggles to effectively teach children to read, showing [no progress](#) on international exams in reading since 2000. According to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), [average fourth grade reading scores](#) increased in only one state between 2017 and 2019, while scores decreased in 17 states and showed no significant change in all other states. Additionally, when examining the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning, the widely used Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) [reveals a three to six percentile drop in student reading scores](#) between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

In addition to declining scores generally, achievement gaps between white students and students of color are also widening. [Scores](#) from the 2019 NAEP fourth grade reading assessment show a 26 point difference in reading proficiency between white and Black students and between white and American Indian students, and a 21 point difference between white and Hispanic students.

In its first year, The Path Forward set out to change the current state of reading by working with **six states**—Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio—to achieve **four goals**:

- 1 Transform the curriculum and delivery of early literacy instruction by embedding the science of reading into teacher preparation;
- 2 Increase educator preparation program (EPP) accountability for early literacy outcomes through changes in state regulations and/or legislative policies;
- 3 Knit together a coalition of states to bring national attention to solutions that improve literacy instruction; and
- 4 Encourage the involvement of philanthropy as a neutral broker to affect change at the state level.

### AVERAGE SCORE FOR FOURTH-GRADERS ON NAEP READING ASSESSMENT, BY RACE | 2019



Source: [NAEP Report Card: Reading](#)

## The Science of Reading and Evidence-Based Practices

Literacy instruction is evidence-based when educators use practices that objective, scientific research has found to increase reading achievement. [Evidence-based recommendations](#) undergo an independent peer review, are replicable, and are supported by the research community. These evidence-based recommendations are encapsulated under the umbrella of the [science of reading](#), which according to nationally recognized researcher and authority on literacy education [Dr. Louisa Moats](#), is the “emerging consensus from many related disciplines, based on literally thousands of studies, supported by hundreds of millions of research dollars, conducted across the world in many languages.” The science of reading points to instructional practices other than those based solely on theories of reading development or observational data. For example, observed practices, such as “guessing” how to read the word based on meaning of the text, syntax of the language, and/or letters at the beginning of the word, lack a basis in science.

The science of reading recognizes that the brain is not wired at birth for reading, so children need to be taught reading skills and strategies directly. The National Reading Panel convened in 1997 to determine the evidence-base regarding reading instruction. The Panel conducted a meta-analysis of reading research and identified five pillars of instruction that contribute to reading development, depicted below.

Decades of studies [confirm](#) that teaching phonics, or the sounds for each letter, is the reliable approach for teaching kids how to read. In addition, [other elements](#) have been found to support reading development, such as building background knowledge, teaching language

structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge, and [morphological skills](#). As additional research becomes available, information on evidence-based practices within the science of reading will continue to expand and evolve.

## Best Practices from Across the Country: Policies to Improve Reading Instruction

Across the country, policymakers have taken steps to encourage or mandate instructional practices aligned with the science of reading. These efforts generally focus on three areas: teacher preparation and licensure, early instruction, and professional development.

### Teacher Preparation and Licensure

Teachers are more likely to use the science of reading in classroom instruction if they have learned evidence-based instructional practices in their educator preparation programs (EPPs). In 2020, [32 states](#) required EPPs to teach the science of reading and more states are increasing the role of the science of reading in educator preparation. For example, [North Carolina Senate Bill 387](#) was signed into law in April 2021 and mandates EPPs provide coursework in the science of reading to elementary and special education pre-service teachers receive as part of their training in order for the program to be approved or renewed. The Virginia General Assembly also passed and enacted the bipartisan [Virginia Literacy Act](#) in April 2022, which includes several strategies to improve literacy instruction, including a requirement for EPPs to demonstrate mastery of science-based reading research and evidence-based literacy instruction.

In addition to completing coursework, pre-service teachers must meet certain requirements to obtain a teaching license. [Twenty states](#), including [Texas](#) and [Ohio](#), require

### FIVE PILLARS OF LITERACY



Phonemic Awareness



Phonics



Fluency



Vocabulary



Comprehension

elementary teachers to pass a licensure exam that fully measures their knowledge of the science of reading.

### **Early Assessment and Instruction**

In 2020, [nineteen states](#) had current or proposed legislation to require evidence-based reading instruction in the early grades and include language associated with the science of reading within policy. For example, [Arizona](#) mandates that each school district and charter school provide ongoing diagnostic assessments to plan evidence-based instruction and interventions for students in kindergarten through third grade. If more than 20 percent of students in a school or district do not meet proficiency standards on the state reading assessment, the state education agency will review the related curriculum and professional development to consider how evidence-based reading instruction was used.

The interest in evidence-based early literacy [grew](#) in 2021, with at least 18 states and the District of Columbia indicating they planned to use COVID-19 relief funding through the American Rescue Plan and previous aid packages to support teacher training or instruction in evidence-based approaches to early literacy. In Utah, policymakers used \$12 million in relief funding to [launch](#) an effort to re-train 8,000 teachers in [Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling \(LETRS\)](#), a professional learning solution focused on the science of reading. Additionally, several states wrote the science of reading into state law during the 2021–2022 time frame, including [Delaware](#), [Tennessee](#), [Connecticut](#), and [Pennsylvania](#).

As states identify assessments to ensure students are receiving appropriate instruction and intervention, they should consider that data is most helpful when it alerts teachers of reading gaps early. [Universal screeners](#), which are assessments administered to all students, can be beneficial in ensuring no students are overlooked. Some states adopt assessments that must be used by all public schools, while others provide choice to districts. [Massachusetts](#) approved several universal screener assessments for reading that school districts may purchase using grant funds.

### **Professional Development**

Many teachers and pre-service faculty [did not learn](#) about the science of reading when they worked toward

their teaching degrees and licensure, including those who pursued advanced degree programs. In terms of professional development, at least [four states](#) require that in-service teachers receive professional development aligned to the science of reading. For example, [Colorado](#) requires local education agencies that receive funds for interventions or through literacy grants to collect [documentation](#) from all kindergarten through third grade teachers to ensure they are trained in evidence-based practices to teach reading. [Missouri](#) utilizes the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant to provide professional development to teachers on the science of reading.

There is a growing interest in ensuring that pre-service faculty also receive professional development in the science of reading. The [Mississippi Momentum Partnership](#) is an example of support provided to pre-service faculty. Through this initiative, faculty that taught reading at fifteen public and private EPPs in Mississippi were provided [training, mentoring, texts, and seminars around the science of reading](#). The partnership was a result of the [2015 Governor’s Task Force to Improve Teacher Preparation of Early Literacy](#).

These examples represent just a sampling of policies addressing the science of reading. Nearly [20 states](#) passed or were considering measures related to the science of reading as of fall 2021 and as of spring 2022, more states, including [Virginia](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Illinois](#), and [Delaware](#), have either passed or considered legislation focused on the science of reading.

### **Students with Learning Differences**

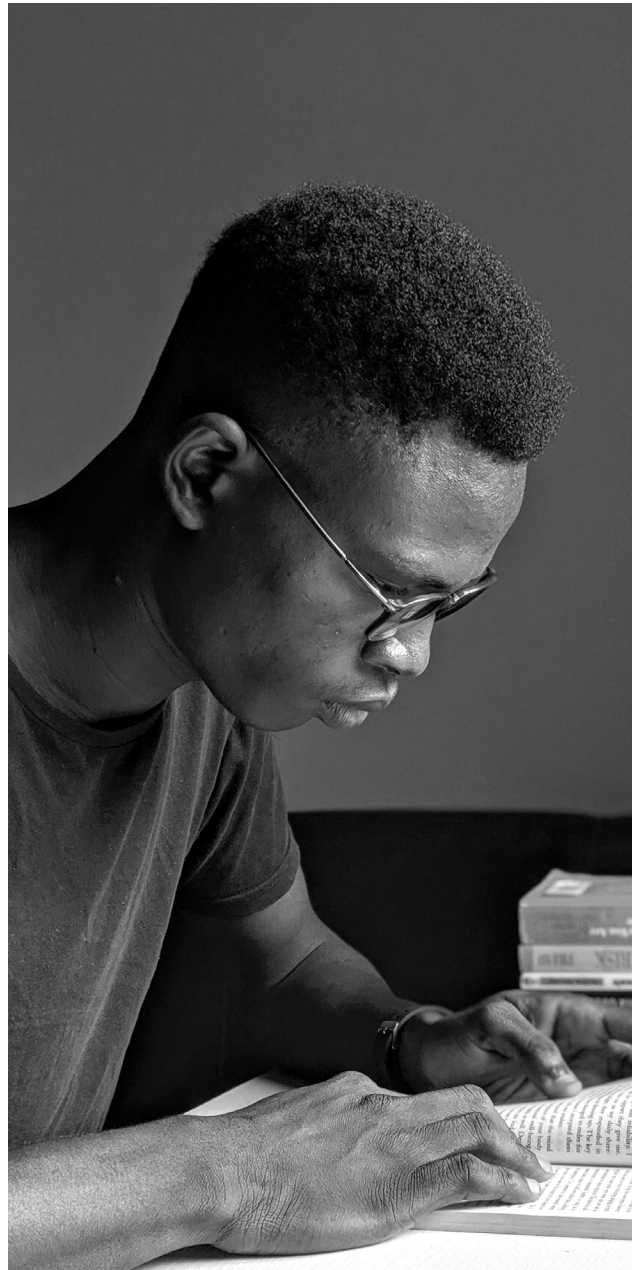
To meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities, the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) requires that individualized education plans (IEPs) are crafted for each student. Despite this and [evidence](#) from the National Institute of Health that only five percent of young readers have significant cognitive impairments that would make attaining reading proficiency extremely difficult, [more than 60 percent](#) of students with specific learning disabilities experience significant difficulty learning to read. The District of Columbia has taken action by enacting [D.C. Law 23-191](#), which requires the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to support schools in



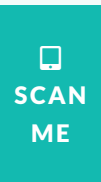
identifying reading difficulties and establishes professional development requirements for educators on the topic of reading difficulties.

## Guiding Questions

1. How do students in your state perform on state, national, and international reading assessments? Are there differences in performance across different student populations?
2. Does your state require that EPPs align coursework with the science of reading? If so, how?
3. Are teachers in your state required to utilize evidence-based reading instruction? If so, how is this policy measured and with what degree of accountability? If not, what rules guide reading instruction in your state?
4. Does your state require that teachers receive professional development aligned with the science of reading? If so, what are those policies?
5. Has your state conducted a landscape analysis to determine if pre-service programs and faculty knowledge are aligned with the science of reading?
6. What are the greatest barriers to implementation of instruction aligned with the science of reading?



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