

A Problem Still in Search of a Solution

Roadmap for a Comprehensive State Policy on Improving Early Reading Proficiency

*By Kathy Christie
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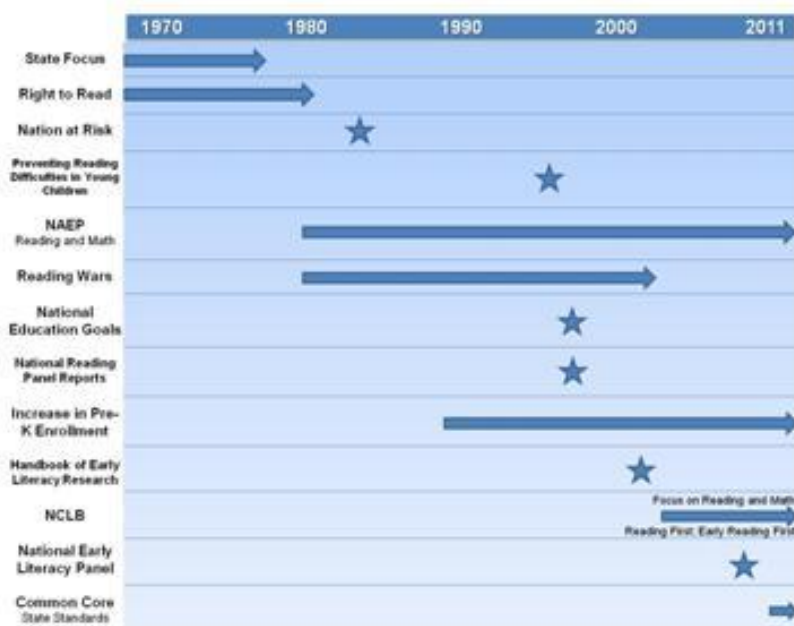
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Reading is just one step along the path of true literacy mastery. Children are continually building a body of knowledge and vocabulary from the day they are born. Once they begin to learn to read, it is this accumulation of experience, knowledge and vocabulary — that allows the words they are beginning to read to have meaning. They are beginning their road to literacy, and that road is far more than learning a set of skills. The big goal, of course, is for all students to meet the expectations for their grade level by the end of 3rd grade. That’s why, when we talk about early literacy, we’re talking about P-3.

While a number of states have developed strategic plans around the improvement of reading, reframing such recommendations into policy language can be challenging. This paper builds on our historical review of the many state and national reading initiatives that have yet to have their intended impact, as

evidenced by the following graphic. Consider, for example, the enormous state-level energy put into the numerous initiatives over the past 42 years against the average performance of 9-year olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Seminal Moments in U.S. Literacy



This graphic should serve as a reminder that it is “tough work” to translate research and policy into increased student outcomes. Since the 1970s to the most recent administration of the test in 2011 — the average reading score for 9-year olds increased by only 12 points — from 208 to 220.

So what should a roadmap for successful state policy look like? The power of state leadership comes from its authority to systematically:

- *Strengthen P-3 linkages*
- *Engage state leaders, teacher preparation institutions, educators, students and families in continuous improvement*
- *Ensure transparency*
- *Improve school and classroom practice*
- *Provide system oversight*
- *Drive “fixes,” not just consequences.*

State policy should create a convergence between two often disconnected spheres: System and practice. The purpose of this paper is to help create that convergence.

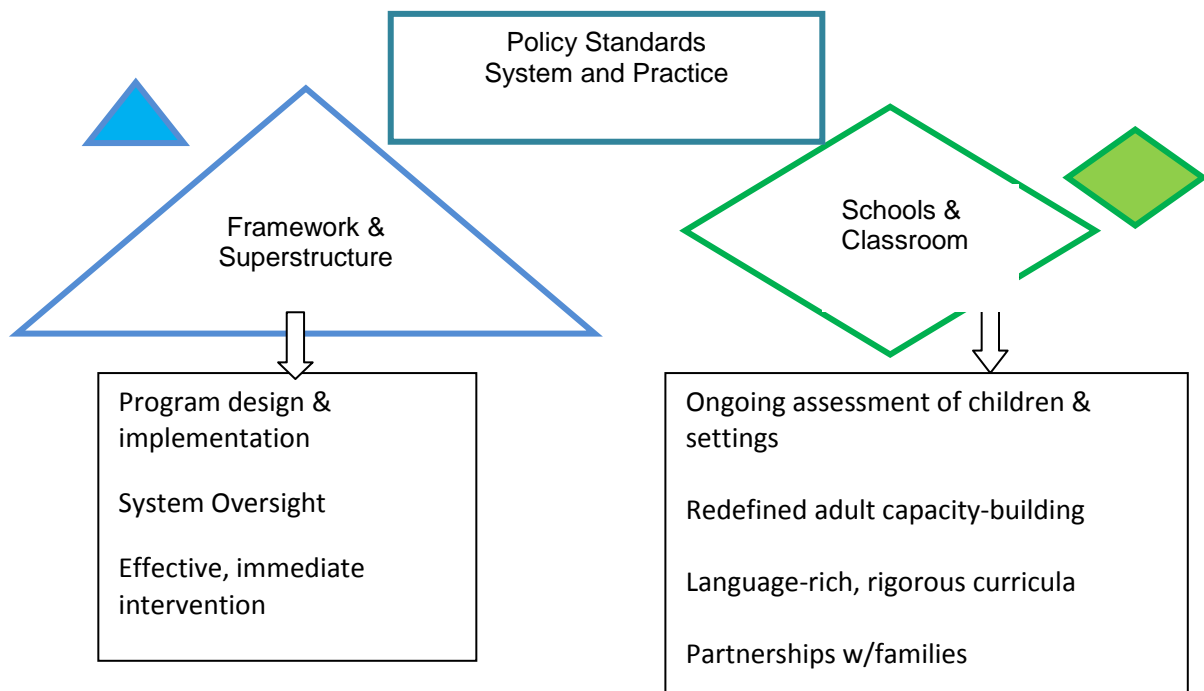
In this paper we outline policy standards for (1) a framework and superstructure that supports a system approach to literacy improvement and (2) a framework for influencing culture and practice at the school and classroom level.

Falling within the framework and superstructure:

Program design & Implementation
System oversight
Effective, immediate intervention.

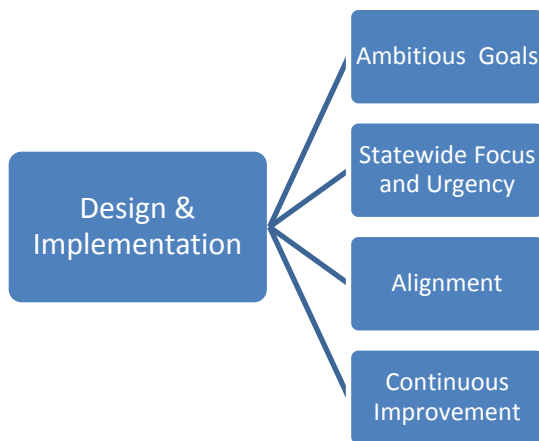
Falling within the framework for influencing practice at the school and classroom level:

Ongoing assessment of children & settings
Redefined adult capacity-building
Language-rich, rigorous curricula
Partnerships with families.





Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Policy standards for program design & implementation



Effective policy on program design & implementation:

- § Ensures that grade-level expectations are benchmarked to world-class standards
- § Aligns standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments
- § Creates and sustains a sense of urgency — such as implementation of a statewide campaign to improve reading proficiency
- § Links and aligns Pre-k with K-3.
- § Strengthens weak or indifferent attendance policies—during the regular school day and at extended (additional) learning times
- § Promotes continuous improvement
 - Sets annual targets for improvement (state and local)
 - Requires ongoing data collection and analysis
 - Supports communication and data sharing
 - Allocates funds to be used for ongoing impact analyses
 - Implements a system-wide “reviews of the reviewers” through high-level analysis of district and principal roles in employment, assignment and retention of high performing reading educators
 - Influences high-level practices such as reassignment of teachers whose evaluations document a track record (2-3 years) of flat or downward trends in student reading performance
 - Puts public spotlight (media and state) on successful interventions
 - Rewards programs that continuously refine services and get results.

What it looks like in policy

Ambitious goals: Some states, including the **Connecticut** legislature, require that reading instruction be in alignment with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that the state board sets. In **Louisiana**, the literacy division of the department has been tasked with meeting five critical goals:

- Students enter kindergarten [ready to learn](#).
- Students are literate by the third grade.
- Students will enter fourth grade on time.
- Students perform at or above grade level in English Language Arts by eighth grade.
- Achieve all Critical Goals, regardless of race or class.

Statewide focus & urgency: In **Colorado** local education providers must report to the state education department the number of early-grade students with significant reading deficiencies, based on the state board's definition. **Florida** law created the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) at the Florida State University, with two geographically-based outreach centers to provide technical assistance in evidence-based literacy instruction, assessments, programs, and professional development. The Center is also expected to conduct applied research that will have an immediate impact on policy and practices, conduct basic research on other facets of reading, and to collaborate with the Just Read! Florida Office and districts in the development of frameworks. In addition, the Center is to disseminate information statewide.

To provide focus and a sense of urgency, 13 states and DC prohibit social promotion of students not proficient in reading. If taking or considering this approach, it is critical to ensure that intensive interventions and the other components addressed in this paper are in place.

Continuous improvement (set annual targets): Beginning in 2014 **Connecticut** will provide incentives for schools that increase the number of students who meet or exceed the statewide goal level in reading by 10% or more. **Florida** requires each board to annually publish data in the local newspaper and to report in writing to the state department. Data include: the local boards's policies and procedures on student retention and promotion; by grade, by grade (3-10), the number and percentage of students performing at the two lowest levels on state reading assessments; by grade, the number and percentage of all students retained in grades 3-10; total number of students promoted for good cause, by each category of good cause; and any revisions to local board policy on student retention and promotion from the prior year.

"On or before July 1, 2014, the Commissioner of Education shall establish, within available appropriations, an incentive program for schools that (1) increase by ten per cent the number of students who meet or exceed the state-wide goal level in reading on the state-wide examination ... and (2) demonstrated the methodology and instruction used by the school to improve student reading skills and scores on such state-wide examination. Such incentive program may, at the commissioner's discretion, include public recognition, financial awards, and enhanced autonomy or operational flexibility. The Department of Education may accept private donations for the purpose of this section."

*—Connecticut
Sec. 94, S.B. 458 (2012)*

"The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Governor's Early Care and Education Cabinet, shall develop a system for the sharing of information between preschool and school readiness programs and kindergarten regarding children's oral language and preliteracy proficiency."

*—Connecticut
Sec. 96, S.B. 458 (2012)*

"The Department of Education shall prominently post on the website maintained by the Department best practice examples of reading intervention and remedial reading strategies used in school districts and charter schools in this state."

— Arizona S.B. 1258 (2012)

Alignment, Pre-K with K-3: Connecticut requires the development of a system to share information regarding children's oral language and preliteracy proficiency. The legislature also requires a state plan that aligns reading standards, instruction and assessments for K-3rd students.

Potential Roadblocks

- Insufficient funding strategy
- Narrow focus on compliance instead of outcomes
- Maintenance of the status quo, with two of every three children not reading proficiently (the pattern to date).

The [Connecticut] state plan must include:

1. *The alignment of reading standards, instruction, and assessments for K-3rd students*
2. *Teachers use of student progress data to adjust and differentiate instruction*
3. *The collection of information about each student's reading background, level, and progress for teachers to use to assist in a student's transition to the next grade level*
4. *An intervention for each student who is not making adequate reading progress to help the student read at the appropriate grade level*
5. *Enhanced reading instruction for students reading at or above their grade level*
6. *Reading instruction coordination between parents, students, teachers, and administrators at home and school*
7. *School district reading plans*
8. *Parental involvement by providing parents and guardians with opportunities to help teachers and school administrators to (a) create an optimal learning environment and (b) receive updates on their student's reading progress*
9. *Teacher training and reading performance tests to be aligned with teacher preparation courses and professional development activities*
10. *Incentives for schools that demonstrate significant student reading improvement*
11. *Research-based literacy training for early childhood care and education providers and instructors working with children birth to age five*
12. *Reading instruction alignment with the common core state standards that the state board sets.*

Connecticut S.B. 458 (2012)



Additional full-text policy excerpts for program design & implementation

“Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, each school district shall establish a Reading Enhancement and Acceleration Development (READ) Initiative. The focus of the READ Initiative shall be to prevent the retention of third-grade students by offering intensive accelerated reading instruction to third-grade students who failed to meet standards for promotion to fourth grade and to kindergarten through third-grade students who are exhibiting a reading deficiency.

“The READ Initiative shall: ... Provide a state-approved reading curriculum... provide scientifically based and reliable assessment ... provide initial and ongoing analysis of the reading progress of each student.”

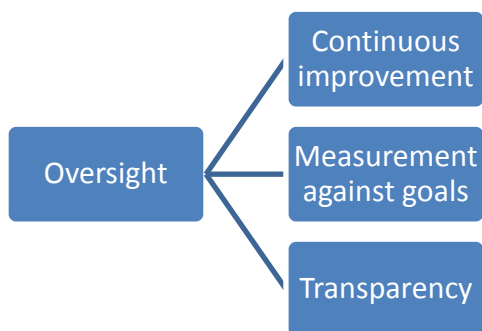
—Oklahoma §70-1210.508C

Creates the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) at the Florida State University. The center shall include two outreach centers, one at a central Florida community college and one at a south Florida state university. The center and the outreach centers, under the center’s leadership, will: (1) Provide Technical assistance and support to all school districts and schools in this state in the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction, assessments, programs, and professional development. (2) Conduct applied research that will have an immediate impact on policy and practices related to literacy instruction and assessment with an emphasis on struggling readers and reading in the content area strategies and methods for secondary teacher. (3) Conduct basic research on reading, reading growth, reading assessment, and reading instruction which will contribute to scientific knowledge about reading. (4) Collaborate with the Just Read! Florida Office and school districts in the development of frameworks for comprehensive reading intervention courses for possible use in middle schools and secondary schools. (5) Collaborate with the Just Read! Florida Office and school districts in the development of frameworks for professional development activities. (6) Disseminate information about research-based practices related to literacy instruction, assessment from screening, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments through the Florida Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network.

—Florida Sec. 1004.99



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement : Standards for oversight



Effective policy for oversight:

- § Designates an independent entity or entities to loosely monitor (with a goal of continuous improvement) how well schools are implementing early identification, providing immediate tiered support, and communicating with parents
- § Requires annual report to the public on literacy outcomes, specifically tied to how well annual targets were met based on state goals
- § Drives “fixes” rather than just consequences.

What it looks like in policy

Continuous improvement: For students who have been retained and assigned to intensive acceleration classes, **Florida** requires weekly progress monitoring measures to ensure progress is being made and reports to the Department of Education and the state board. Florida also requires the department to monitor and track implementation of each district plan, including conducting site visits and collecting specific data on expenditures and reading improvement results. While asking for continuous improvement at the school and district level is good, it is needed at the state level as well.

Measurement against state goals: The state of **Arizona** requires review of reading programs if more than 20% of students at the school or district level do not meet standards.

Transparency: In **Minnesota**, the state's Reading Corps program was expanded to include comprehensive, scientifically based reading instruction to children age three to grade three but also

“Each district school board must annually publish in the local newspaper, and report in writing to the State Board of Education by September 1 of each year, the following information on the prior school year:

- 1. The provisions of this section relating to public school student progression and the district school board’s policies and procedures on student retention and promotion.*
- 2. By grade, the number and percentage of all students in grades 3 through 10 performing at Levels 1 and 2 on the reading portion of the FCAT.*
- 3. By grade, the number and percentage of all students retained in grades 3 through 10.*
- 4. Information on the total number of students who were promoted for good cause, by each category of good cause as specified in paragraph (6)(b).*
- 5. Any revisions to the district school board’s policy on student retention and promotion from the prior year.*
- 6. ... The Department of Education shall establish a uniform format for school districts to report the information [above]. The format shall be developed with input from district school boards and shall be provided not later than 90 days prior to the annual due date. The department shall annually compile the information... along with state-level summary information, and report such information to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.”*

— Florida 1008.25

requires a biennial report that records and evaluates program data to determine the efficacy of the program. **Florida** requires each local entity to annually publish data on student performance in reading, the number and percentage of students retained in grade and of those who did not meet grade level standards but were promoted for good cause.

Potential Roadblocks

- Independent entity not perceived as independent or perceived as compliance-oriented
- Lack of means to draw public attention to annual reports on progress
- Fails to foster motivation and/or engage educators and students in continuous improvement

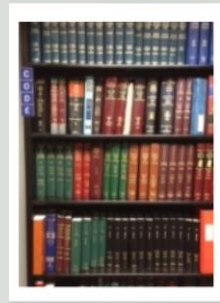
“Establish at each school, where applicable, an Intensive Acceleration Class for retained grade 3 students who subsequently score at Level 1 on the reading portion of the FCAT. The focus of the Intensive Acceleration Class shall be to increase a child’s reading level at least two grade levels in 1 school year. The Intensive Acceleration Class shall... Include weekly progress monitoring measures to ensure progress is being made... Report to the Department of Education, in the manner described by the department, the progress of students in the class at the end of the first semester... **Report to the State Board of Education, as requested, on the specific intensive reading interventions and supports implemented at the school district level.** [emphasis added] The Commissioner of Education shall annually prescribe the required components of requested reports.”

—Florida

§1008.25

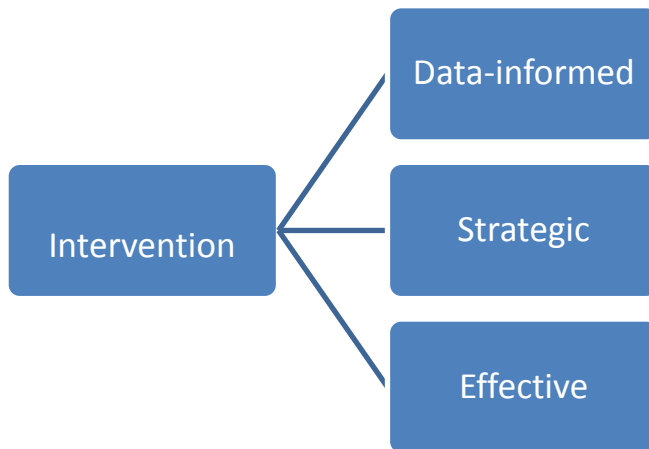
“If more than twenty per cent of students in grade three at either the individual school level or at the school district level do not meet the standards, the governing board or governing body shall conduct a review of its reading program that includes curriculum and professional development in light of current, scientifically based reading research.”

– Arizona §15-704



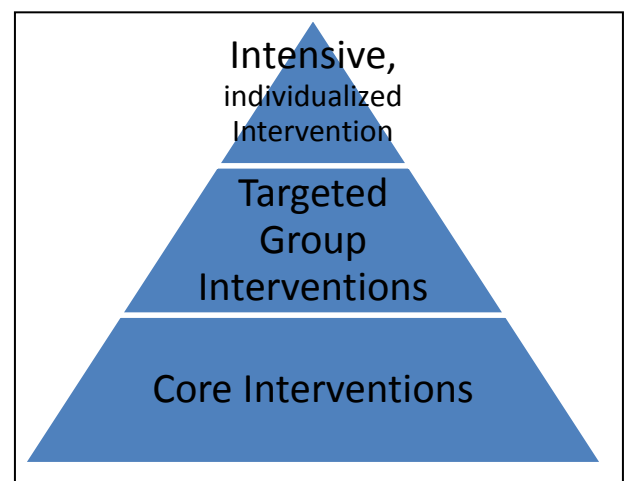


Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement Standards for effective, immediate intervention



Effective state policy on effective, immediate intervention supports:

- § Robust use of data to inform instruction
- § Tiers of support that include development of alternative learning plans and alternative interventions
- § Minimum number of minutes per day of additional, intensive reading instruction (not redistributing class time)
- § Mandatory attendance in extended day instruction, Saturday schools and in summer school, if applicable
- § Strategies that maximize structured use of trained mentors, tutors, including public/private partnerships
- § Development and maintenance of online, open access resources
- § Public celebration of exemplary school-level or classroom-level results.
- § Intentional assignment of highest quality reading teachers to students at risk of not meeting grade level expectations (w/teachers identified via prior reading results)
- § Intervention strategies are evidence-based.



- § If student retention is used as a means of intervention, the instructional experience is not a repeat of what the student just experienced.
- § Vetted, language-rich, rigorous and engaging grade-level curricular materials for educators or parents to access and use
- § Exemplary instruction and/or lessons tied to world-class benchmarks — including comprehension and vocabulary-building strategies for all subject areas

What it looks like in policy

Data-informed: In 2012 **Florida** added a policy provision that requires that allocated funds be used to specifically support teachers in making instructional decisions based on student data, and improve teacher delivery of effective reading instruction, intervention, and reading in the content areas based on student need. (See also details of state policy under ongoing assessment of children and settings.) **New York** requires monitoring of student’s abilities and skills, and where substandard progress, instruction tailored to individual needs with increasingly intensive levels of intervention and instruction. One piece of Florida’s law is a Comprehensive Student Progression Plan that includes a number of requirements, including specific criteria for mid-year promotion of a retained student. Several states make a retention decision for students who received additional services but did not meet grade-level standards based on factors that include whether a student completed summer school or after school instructional programs.

Strategic: A number of states specify afterschool and summer interventions and make attendance mandatory. In **Kentucky**, state law requires district-wide use of a K-3 response-to-intervention system that includes a tiered continuum of interventions with varying levels of intensity and duration and that connects general, compensatory and special education programs to provide interventions implemented with fidelity to scientifically based research. [Montana](#) also supports use of a response-to-intervention model. **Florida** targets an additional hour per day of intensive reading instruction to students in the 100 lowest-performing elementary schools (H.B. 5101, 2012). Also see details of **Colorado**’s READ plan (see sidebar). The **Rhode Island** state department provides guidance that requires students’ personal literacy plans (PLPs) and that each plan address a cycle of student support to:

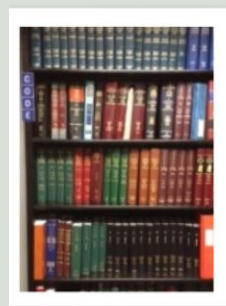
- Diagnose, Analyze, and Validate Need (s)
- Design Intervention Plan
- Implement Intervention
- Review Progress Monitoring Data
- Revise/Modify Support
- Implement Revised/Modified Intervention

“A summer academy reading program shall be a program that incorporates the content of a scientifically research-based professional development program administered by the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation or a scientifically based reading program administered by the State Board of Education and is taught by teachers who have successfully completed professional development in the reading program or who are certified as reading specialists.” — Oklahoma [§70-1210.508C](#)

“Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, each school district shall establish a Reading Enhancement and Acceleration Development (READ) Initiative. The focus of the READ Initiative shall be to prevent the retention of third-grade students by offering intensive accelerated reading instruction to third-grade students who failed to meet standards for promotion to fourth grade and to kindergarten through third-grade students who are exhibiting a reading deficiency.

*...
The READ Initiative shall: ...
Provide a state-approved reading curriculum... provide scientifically based and reliable assessment ... provide initial and ongoing analysis of the reading progress of each student.”*

—Oklahoma [§70-1210.508C](#)



- Use Assessments to Determine Discontinuation or Need for New Intervention

Effective: In **Arizona**, state policy requires the department to post best practice examples of reading intervention and remedial reading strategies used in schools and districts.

Colorado requires student plans to include programs from an “advised” list and that address the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and reading fluency, including oral skills and reading comprehension.

West Virginia requires a team to review the needs of students who continue to struggle despite interventions.

Florida stipulates that the required additional hour of reading instruction include: research-based reading instruction that has been proven to accelerate progress of students exhibiting a reading deficiency; differentiated instruction based on student assessment data to meet students’ specific reading needs; explicit and systematic reading development in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, with more extensive opportunities for guided practice, error correction, and feedback and the integration of social studies, science, and mathematics-text reading, text discussion and writing in response to reading (Florida H.B. 5101, 2012). In addition, Florida requires that struggling students be assigned to a different teacher for reading.

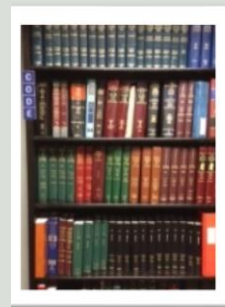
“State board policy requires every school to establish a student assistance team that reviews student academic needs that have persisted despite being addressed by instruction and intervention and requires every school to implement, in an equitable manner, programs during and after the instructional day at the appropriate instructional levels that contribute to the success of students ...

The state board shall provide for... encouraging and assisting county boards in establishing and operating critical skills instructional support programs during and after the instructional day and during the summer for students in grades three and eight who, in the judgment of the student assistance team or the student's classroom teacher, are not mastering the content and skills in reading, language arts and mathematics adequately for success at the next grade level and who are recommended by the student assistance team or the student's classroom teacher for additional academic help through the programs.”

—West Virginia – [§18-2E-10](#)

*“Provide written notification to the parent of any student who is retained that his or her child has not met the proficiency level required for promotion and the reasons the child is not eligible for a good cause exemption. **The notification must include a description of proposed interventions and supports that will be provided to the child to remediate the identified areas of reading deficiency.**” [emphasis added]*

Florida – 1008.25



Potential Roadblocks

- Instruction and interventions not built or linked to world class standards such as the Common Core State Standards
- Parent resistance if they have no voice in retention-related decisions for their kids
- Kids retained in grade because of factors outside of their control such as a lack of quality instruction
- Interventions that pull children away from the regular classroom rather than adding instructional time
- Insufficient funding strategy
- Lack of a private sector-like “project management” capacity for ensuring that data systems work the way they need to, that changes are made where necessary, that efforts are coordinated, etc. and that children and families are served well.

Resources from the research...

Best evidence on approaches to assisting struggling readers:

<http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/strug/keyfind.htm>

What Works Clearinghouse Improving Reading Comprehension in Grades K-3: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide.aspx?sid=14>

What Works Clearinghouse reviews of interventions:

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/topic.aspx?sid=8#accessiblecontent0-1>

Center on Instruction (Federally funded center):

Index: <http://centeroninstruction.org/index.cfm>.

Literacy: <http://centeroninstruction.org/topic.cfm?k=L>

Response to Intervention: <http://centeroninstruction.org/topic.cfm?k=R>

“Each READ plan shall include, at a minimum: (a) The student’s specific, diagnosed reading skill deficiencies that need to be remediated in order for the student to attain competency; (b) the goals and benchmarks for the student’s growth in attaining reading competency; (c) the type of additional instructional services and interventions the student will receive in reading; (d) the scientifically based or evidence-based reading instructional programming the teacher will use to provide to the student daily reading approaches, strategies, interventions, and instruction, which programs at a minimum shall address the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral skills and reading comprehension. The local education provider may choose to select the programs from among those included on the advisory list prepared by the department...; (e) the manner in which the local education provider will monitor and evaluate the student’s progress; (f) the strategies the student’s parent is encouraged to use in assisting the student to achieve reading competency that are designed to supplement the programming described in paragraph (d)...; and (g) any additional services the teacher deems available and appropriate to accelerate the student’s reading skill development.”
—Colorado H.B. 12-1238 (2012)

Key Takeaways: Framework & Superstructure

Effective policy on program design & implementation

Ensures	grade-level expectations are benchmarked to world-class standards
Links & Aligns	Coherent standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments with pK-3
Creates and sustains	sense of urgency — such as statewide campaign
Strengthens	weak or indifferent attendance policies—during the regular school day and at extended (additional) learning times
Promotes	continuous improvement
	annual targets – state & local ongoing data collection and analysis communication and data sharing ongoing impact analyses Review of the system of adult review (high-level analysis of high performing educator employment, assignment and retention) High-level practices (i.e., reassignment of teachers whose evaluations document a track record of flat or downward trends in student reading performance) Replication of successful interventions Rewards for programs that continuously refine services and get results

Effective policy for oversight

Designates	Independent, loose monitoring of the system
Requires	annual reports to the public on literacy outcomes, specifically tied to how well annual targets were met based on state goals

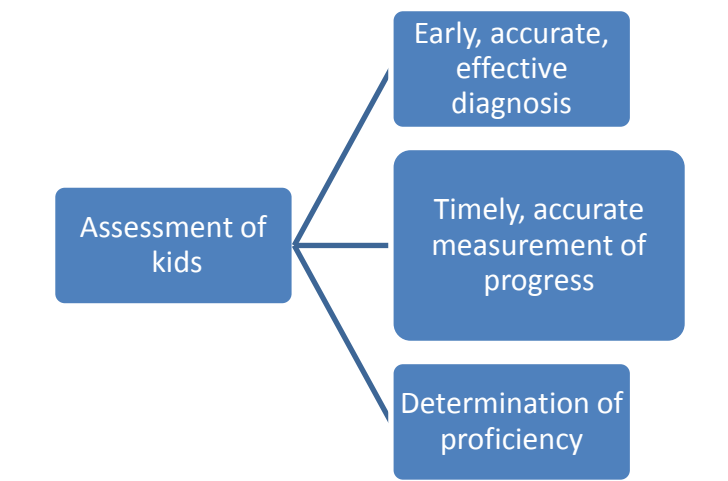
Effective state policy on effective, immediate intervention supports

Use of data	to inform instruction
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<i>Tiers of support</i>	<p>alternative learning plans, alternative interventions</p>
	<p>Minimum number of minutes per day of additional, intensive reading instruction (not redistributing class time)</p> <p>Mandatory attendance in interventions Strategies to maximize assistance</p>
<i>Resource development & maintenance</i>	<p>online, open access repositories</p>
<i>Public celebration</i>	<p>exemplary school-level or classroom-level results</p>
<i>Evidence-based assignment, curriculum</i>	<p>Struggling students get highest quality reading teachers</p> <p>Intervention strategies are evidence-based Vetted, language-rich, rigorous and engaging grade-level curricular materials for educators or parents to access and use</p> <p>Exemplary instruction and/or lessons tied to world-class benchmarks — including comprehension and vocabulary-building strategies for all subject areas</p>



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Standards for ongoing assessments of children and settings



Effective state policy on assessment of kids supports:

- § Screening, formative and summative assessment tools
- § Evidence-based, diagnostic or screening assessments with accurate, rapid results
- § Assessments selected from a pool of vetted, evidence-based tools
- § Inclusion of teacher recommendation as a means of casting a wider net of identification
- § Timely notice to parents and processes for parent support
- § Connection to a robust data system that maximizes use of early warning indicators and that provides easily accessible reports that support teacher/leader use of data and that minimizes bureaucratic requirements for teachers
- § Inclusion of early education & care settings, as well as PK-3 classrooms.

What the research says...

Data from assessments of children should not be reported without data on the programs that serve them.

Reporting on program quality should highlight attributes of classroom quality, instructional practices, and teacher-child interactions that are most highly correlated with enhancing children's progress in learning and development

Reporting on child assessments should highlight children's progress over time (or the "value-added" contributions of programs) as well as their end-of-program status.

Source: [*"Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality"*](#)

What it looks like in policy

Early, accurate, effective diagnosis: In **Iowa**, the state legislature established a Cross-Agency Assessment Instrument Planning Group to study and select one standard, multidomain assessment for implementation by all districts for purposes of kindergarten assessments. **Idaho** requires skills to be assessed K-3, two times annually, with a statewide test. The state allows students in the lowest 25% of performance to be tested more frequently.

Timely, accurate measurement of progress. **Oklahoma** requires that the screening instrument be accompanied by a data management system and that it be capable of providing profiles of achievement at the student, class, grade and school levels.

Determination of proficiency. All states administer a statewide test to determine whether students are meeting level reading standards in 3rd grade. Fourteen states and DC require students to be retained if they are not proficient for their grade level by the end of 3rd grade.

Potential Roadblocks

On one hand: Resistance to a single assessment, if choices limited to one or selected by one entity.

On the other hand: If a central pool of vetted assessments is not available, local choices might not be optimal.

What the research says...

“When assessment systems result in high-stress experiences for our children or purposeless additions to professionals’ plates, we can all be concerned. However, by neglecting to regularly evaluate our young children’s language and early reading skills, we have done more harm than good. We need to put our efforts into selecting multiple measures and interpreting their results in appropriate ways to promote student success. It is how assessments are used - and with whom and how the results are interpreted and used - that can be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate. When used in accurate and ethical ways, assessments can be the critical difference between a child receiving the help he needs or struggling in reading.”

[Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success](#)
(2010)

“All public school students in kindergarten and grades one (1), two (2) and three (3) shall have their reading skills assessed. For purposes of this assessment, the state board approved and research-based “Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Plan” shall be the reference document. The kindergarten assessment shall include reading readiness and phonological awareness. Grades one (1), two (2) and three (3) shall test for fluency and accuracy of the student’s reading. The assessment shall be by a single statewide test specified by the state board of education, and the state department of education shall ensure that testing shall take place not less than two (2) times per year in the relevant grades. Additional assessments may be administered for students in the lowest twenty-five percent (25%) of reading progress.”

Idaho – 33-1614

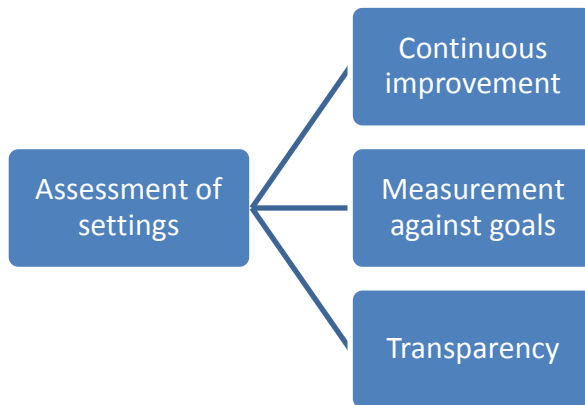
Oklahoma H.B. 2511 (2012) requires that the screening instrument be “accompanied by a data management system that provides profiles for students, class, grade level and school building. The profiles shall identify each student’s instructional point of need and reading achievement level.”

Iowa S.F. 2284 (2012)

“Sec. 35. CROSS-AGENCY ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT PLANNING GROUP. The department of education and the early childhood Iowa state board shall collaborate to form a cross-agency planning group. Members of the planning group shall include teachers and school leaders, and representatives from the departments of public health, human services, and education, the Iowa early childhood state and area boards, the state board of regents, applicable nonprofit groups, and experts in early childhood assessment and educational assessment. The planning group shall study and select one standard, multidomain assessment instrument for implementation by all school districts...1. The instrument shall align with agreed upon state and national curriculum standards. The planning group shall study all costs associated with implementing a universal assessment instrument...”



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Standards for assessment of P-3 settings



Effective policy on assessment of P-3 settings:

- § Includes frequent observation, of duration, with feedback (Pianta, 2012) http://ccf.tc.columbia.edu/pdf/Task_Force_Report.pdf
- § Provides for regular review of classroom, school and district results against state goals
- § Intentionally targets use of P-3 review tools in lowest-achieving classrooms (tools such as [CLASS](#), QRIS, Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)).

What it looks like in policy

Includes frequent observation, of duration, with feedback. Connecticut uses an Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Regular, targeted review. **Florida** policy (H.B. 5101, 2012) directs the department to monitor implementation of each district plan, including conducting site visits and collecting specified data, and to report its findings annually to the legislature. In addition, any Intensive Acceleration Class for retained grade 3 student who subsequently scores at the lowest level must be monitored weekly and progress reports made to the state board. **Arizona** sets a performance threshold beneath which the governing body must conduct a review of its reading program that includes curriculum and professional development in light of current, scientifically based reading research.

Connecticut —Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System
The program must:
Count towards professional development requirements established under the bill
Be based on student reading assessment data
Provide differentiated and intensified training in teacher reading instruction
Be used to identify mentor teachers who will train teachers in reading instruction
Outline how model classrooms for reading instruction will be established in schools
Inform principals on how to evaluate classrooms and teacher performance in scientifically-based reading research and instruction
Be job-embedded and local whenever possible.

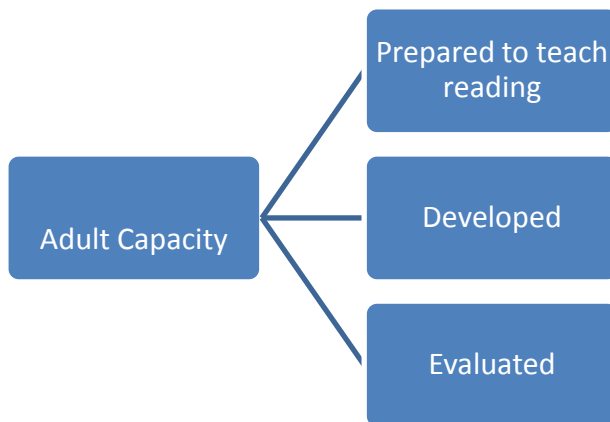
The bill also requires the Commissioner to annually review the professional development and to assess whether the professional development meets state goals for student academic achievement through (1) state board-adopted common core state standards, (2) research-based interventions, and (3) federal special education law. The Commissioner is required to submit his review to the Education Committee.
Bill analysis for Connecticut S.B. 458 (2012)

“If more than twenty per cent of students in grade three at either the individual school level or at the school district level do not meet the standards, the governing board or governing body shall conduct a review of its reading program that includes curriculum and professional development in light of current, scientifically based reading research.”
— Arizona [§15-704](#)

This section describes four essential areas of adult capacity-building: 1) Teacher preparation and certification; 2) Principal & superintendent preparation; 3) Professional development; 4) Teacher and principal evaluation.



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Standards for redefined adult capacity-building models



1. Teacher preparation and certification policy supports:

- § Program approval that is based on evidence that relevant programs effectively address reading instruction
- § Program approval that is based on evidence of robust development of oral language and vocabulary for teacher candidates
- § Internationally-benchmarked entrance/exit requirements
- § Rigorous, stand-alone assessment of teacher candidate knowledge of reading instruction assessed at program exit or prior to licensure, and in certain circumstances—periodically post-licensure—with level of proficiency benchmarked to world-class standards
- § Early intervention for teacher candidates who are at risk of not meeting expectations in area of reading instruction
- § Practice or residency programs with sufficient time and connection to highly-effective and qualified master teachers to deepen knowledge of instruction and intervention
- § Meaningful alignment with certification or licensure (both preparation and certification built on world-class level of knowledge/skill expectations).

“(b) The department may not grant an initial practitioner license to an individual unless the individual has demonstrated proficiency in the following areas on a written examination or through other procedures prescribed by the department:

(1) Basic reading, writing, and mathematics.

(2) Pedagogy.

(3) Knowledge of the areas in which the individual is required to have a license to teach.

(4) If the individual is seeking to be licensed as an elementary school teacher, comprehensive **scientifically based** reading instruction skills, including:

(A) phonemic awareness;

(B) phonics instruction;

(C) fluency;

(D) vocabulary; and

(E) comprehension.”

Indiana IC 20-28-5-12

“The department may not issue an initial teaching license that authorizes the holder to teach in grades kindergarten to 5 or in special education, an initial license as a reading teacher, or an initial license as a reading specialist, unless the applicant has passed an examination identical to the Foundations of Reading test administered in 2012 as part of the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure. The department shall set the passing cut score on the examination at a level no lower than the level recommended by the developer of the test, based on this state’s standards.”

—Wisconsin – S.B. 461 (2012)

The Just Read, Florida! program requires the development and monitoring of reading competencies that must be demonstrated for teacher licensure, reading endorsement and reading certification.

What it looks like in policy

Adults are prepared. A 2012 bill (S.B. 458) in Connecticut requires the education commissioner to annually review the professional development required under the bill for teachers holding professional certificates with early childhood nursery through third grade or elementary school endorsements and holding jobs requiring such endorsements. **Connecticut** also requires a practice-based preliteracy course for early childhood teacher candidates. Additionally, the state requires teacher preparation programs to require, as part of their curricula, that students have four semesters of classroom clinical, field, or student teaching experience.

Florida requires that approval of postsecondary teacher preparation programs be based on proof that programs cover the required competencies. **Wisconsin** requires the department to use the test selected and used by Massachusetts in 2012 and to set the passing cut score on the examination at a level no lower than the level recommended by the developer of the test.

2. Professional development policy supports:

§ Maximization of opportunities presented by movement to the Common Core State Standards

§ Provision of a sequential pathway that includes training in strategies and skills for implementing the knowledge acquired through preparation and professional development. In other words, instead of giving educators a fighter jet, train them to fly.

§ State-supported summer reading academies for reading teachers (face-to-face or online) and workshops for principals

§ Proficiency standards for literacy interventionists

What it looks like in policy

Professional development: In **South Carolina**, the Reading Achievement Systemic Initiative Panel (2011) made several recommendations to expand the knowledge base of principals and instructional leaders, including: provide mandatory state-wide series of workshops; provide on-site visits to audit literacy practices and offer suggestions for moving classrooms toward High Progress Literacy Classrooms; provide virtual support via website, seminars, workshops, and webinars.

Connecticut policy appears to meet the majority of the goals for ensuring adult capacity (see sidebar). The **Kentucky** Department of

§ 7—PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN READING

By July 1, 2013 the bill requires the education commissioner to establish a professional development program in reading instruction for teachers.

The program must:

- 1) count towards professional development requirements established under the bill (§ 38)*
- 2) be based on student reading assessment data*
- 3) provide differentiated and intensified training in teacher reading instruction*
- 4) be used to identify mentor teachers who will train teachers in reading instruction*
- 5) outline how model classrooms will be established in schools for reading instruction; and*
- 6) inform principals on how to evaluate classrooms and teacher performance in scientifically-based reading research and instruction, and*
- 7) be job-embedded and local whenever possible.*

Beginning July 1, 2014 and each following school year, all certified employees (i.e., teachers and administrators) working in grades K-3 are required to take a practice version of a state-board approved reading instruction exam. Each local and regional board of education is required to annually report the results to the Department of Education.

This bill also requires all certified employees who hold a certificate with an early childhood nursery through grade three or an elementary endorsement and are employed in a position requiring such an endorsement in kindergarten to grade three, inclusive, to do the same.

—Connecticut S.B. 458 (2012)

Education offers [online resources](#) for educators in an easily-accessible, engaging format.

3. Principal & superintendent preparation policy supports:

- § High-level practices in preparation and licensure that include evaluation and coaching of adults
- § Preparation that includes high-level standards such as: the foundations of quality early childhood programs, principles and practices engaging families and communities; appropriate learning environments for young children using data for early identification and intervention setting high expectations for children, and communicating with and supporting teachers.
- § Development of the type of 21st Century skills and strategies that leaders need in order to help teachers skillfully implement what it is they have learned in their preparation or professional development programs.

What it looks like in policy

Leader preparation: In Connecticut, state law requires that professional development inform principals on how to evaluate classrooms and teacher performance in scientifically-based reading research and instruction.

4. Teacher & principal evaluation policy supports:

- § Evaluation using multiple measures, including student achievement
- § Assignment to teach reading (particularly to students below grade-level standards) based on a track record of positive student achievement data
- § Funding for professional development that is contingent on commitment to quantitative evaluation of such professional development (i.e., knowledge of teaching reading assessed)
- § System of review that looks loosely at data on reading improvement and whether adult capacity is sufficient (i.e., state review of district evaluation data such as the number of teachers non-renewed for

performance, number in lowest two categories of performance and similar review of school-level data performed at the district level).

What the research says...

“Despite the availability of training, school leaders across the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have often reported that they felt they had not been adequately trained to assume their posts. Although most candidates for school-leadership positions have a teaching background, they are not necessarily competent in pedagogical innovation...”

Source: Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: Lessons from Around the World (2012) edited by Andreas Schleicher

What it looks like in policy

Multiple measures used for evaluation: In Wisconsin, state law requires 50% of the total evaluation be based on measures of student performance. For a principal, evaluation is based on the extent to which the principal’s practice meets the 2008

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Educational Leadership Policy Standards. **Arizona** law

expects that if more than 20% of 3rd grade students at either the school or district level do not meet standards, the school board has to review its reading program (curriculum and professional development) in light of current, scientifically based reading research.

Assignment to successful teachers. In **Florida**, state law specifies that reading coaches are intended to support teachers in making instructional decisions based on student data and improve teacher delivery of effective reading instruction, intervention, and reading in the content areas. It also insists that students who are struggling readers are not assigned the same teacher. Also, a 2012 policy (H.B. 5101) requires that for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, each district with one or more of the 100 lowest-performing elementary schools have to provide intensive reading instruction during an additional hour of instruction beyond the normal school day each day of the school year. This hour of instruction may only be provided by teachers or reading specialists who are effective in teaching reading.

Potential Roadblocks

- Acquisition of knowledge without the skills to implement
- Poorly delivered professional development
- A reading coach selection process that fails to ensure coaches are master teachers of reading and communicate well with adults as well as with children
- Lack of 21st Century skill set related to accountability, implementation, professional development, leadership.

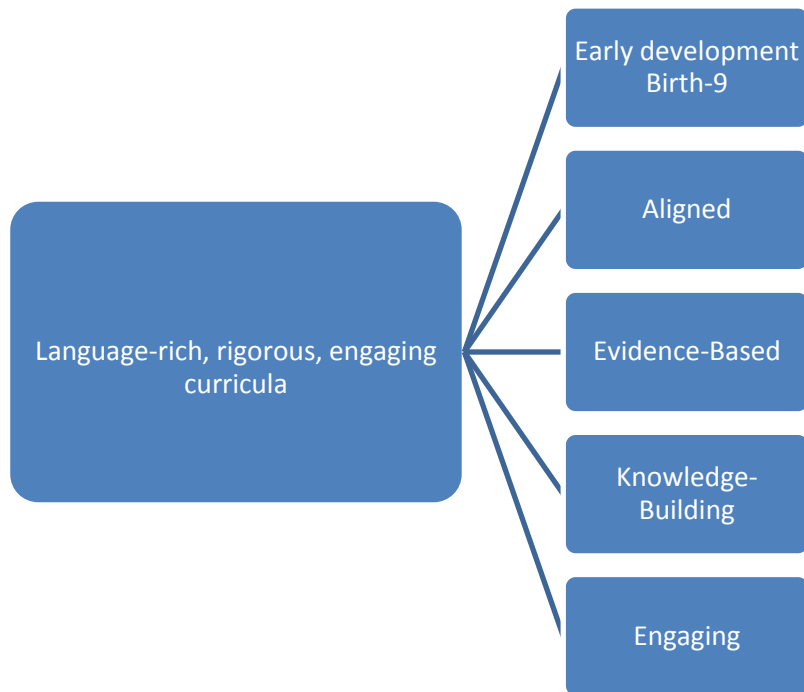
Wisconsin S.B. 461 (2012)

“The department shall develop an educator effectiveness evaluation system according to the following framework:

1. Fifty percent of the total evaluation score assigned to a teacher or principal shall be based upon measures of student performance, including performance on state assessments, district-wide assessments, student learning objectives, school-wide reading at the elementary and middle-school levels, and graduation rates at the high school level.
2. Fifty percent of the total evaluation score assigned to a teacher or principal shall be based upon one of the following:
 - For a teacher, the extent to which the teacher’s practice meets the core teaching standards adopted by the 2011 Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.
 - For a principal, the extent to which the principal’s practice meets the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Educational Leadership Policy Standards.”



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Standards for language-rich, rigorous & engaging curricula



State policy on curricula supports:

- § Birth-age 9 focus on rich, engaging, rigorous, coherent curricula
- § Both written and oral literacy
- § Grade- and age-level expectations benchmarked to world-class standards
- § Evidence-based curriculum chosen from pool of state-identified options or alternatively, local option but a process for curriculum review in low-performing schools
- § State role in publicizing and incentivizing use of programs identified by the What Works Clearinghouse, Best Evidence Encyclopedia or similar evidence-based resources as having positive effects or potentially positive effects
(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FindWhatWorks.aspx?o=6&n=Reading/Writing&r=1>)

"Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval

...(5) Early Childhood: Teacher of Students With and Without Disabilities (Levels: PreK-2)

(a) The following topics will be addressed on the Foundations of Reading test:

- 1) Reading theory, research, and practice.
 - a) Knowledge of the significant theories, approaches, practices, and programs for developing reading skills and reading comprehension.
 - b) Phonemic awareness and phonics: principles, knowledge, and instructional practices.
 - c) Diagnosis and assessment of reading skills using standardized, criterion-referenced, and informal assessment instruments.
- 2) Development of a listening, speaking and reading vocabulary.
- 3) Theories on the relationships between beginning writing and reading.
- 4) Theories of first and second language acquisition and development. ...

(7) Elementary (Levels: 1-6)

(a) The following topics will be addressed on the Foundations of Reading test:

- 1) Reading theory, research, and practice.
 - a) Knowledge of the significant theories, practices, and programs for developing reading skills and reading comprehension.
 - b) Phonemic awareness and phonics: principles, knowledge, and instructional practices.
 - c) Diagnosis and assessment of reading skills using standardized, criterion-referenced, and informal assessment instruments.
- 2) Development of a listening, speaking, and reading vocabulary.
 - a) Theories on the relationships between beginning writing and reading.
 - b) Theories of first and second language acquisition and development."

Massachusetts 603 CMR 7.00

- § Inclusion in all early education & care settings, as well as PK-3 classrooms
- § Use of complimentary drivers such as the Common Core State Standards initiative to maximize professional development in teaching reading at an internationally-benchmarked standard.

What it looks like in policy

Early development Birth-9: The Arizona Literacy Plan addresses elements such as kindergarten transition, early oral language development and emphasizes text comprehension.

Evidence-based: Oklahoma’s READ initiative is required by law to provide a state-approved reading curriculum. **Indiana** prohibits granting of a licensure to an elementary teacher candidate who has not demonstrated proficiency in comprehensive **scientifically based** reading instruction skills, including:

- (A) phonemic awareness;
- (B) phonics instruction;
- (C) fluency;
- (D) vocabulary; and
- (E) comprehension.”

Vocabulary development supports knowledge-building: In **Massachusetts**, state regulations specify aspects that the Foundations of Reading test for teachers is required to include, including, among others: development of listening, speaking and reading vocabulary, theories of language acquisition and knowledge of significant theories, practices, and programs for developing reading skills and reading comprehension.

“The READ Initiative shall: ... Provide a state-approved reading curriculum... provide scientifically based and reliable assessment ... provide initial and ongoing analysis of the reading progress of each student.”

—Oklahoma §70-1210.508C

“Not later than July 1, 2013, the Department of Education, in consultation with the Board of Regents for Higher Education, shall design and approve a preliteracy course to be included in a bachelor’s degree program with a concentration in early childhood education... from an institution of higher education accredited by the Board of Governors of Higher Education. Such course shall be practice-based and specific to the developmentally appropriate instruction of preliteracy and language skills for teachers of early childhood education.”

— Connecticut S.B. 458
(2012)

E.D. Hirsch, recipient of the 2012 James Bryant Conant Award, ECS

“A large vocabulary is, on average, the best single predictor of job competence and life changes. And a large vocabulary can only be gained by acquiring broad general knowledge, not by studying words. Nor can a large vocabulary be gained by practicing reading strategies and thinking skills—those dominant topics in our elementary schools...

Broad substantive knowledge, not formal technique, is the key to achievement and equity.”

—acceptance speech, 2012 ECS
National Forum on Education Policy

Resources from the research...

From the Best Evidence Encyclopedia:

http://www.bestevidence.org/reading/elementary_read/elementary_read.htm

From the What Works Clearinghouse:

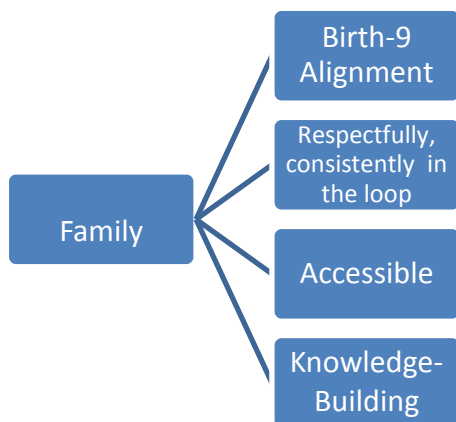
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/topic.aspx?sid=8>

[Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades K-2](#)

Other: <http://curry.virginia.edu/resource-library/castle-research-brief-long-term-effects-of-print-referencing>



Supporting a System Approach for Literacy Improvement: Standards for partnerships with families focused on language & learning



Effective policy on partnerships focused on language & learning supports:

§ Development and promotion of strategies and resources for families that will strengthen their capacity to support literacy (i.e., efforts to more fully inform parents – particularly low-income parents—of the value of talking with their children, naming items in picture/story books with their children, etc.)

§ Connections between families and the diverse supports they might need

§ Programs to facilitate smooth transitions to school by helping families understand school processes and making children and parents feel comfortable and welcome

§ Construction and dissemination of new technology such as mobile “apps” for parents and early care givers

§ Ongoing parental notification of reading difficulties

§ Parental inclusion in high stakes decisions and in development of individual learning plans.

What it looks like in policy

Birth-9 alignment, beginning with parents. Idaho provides a [brochure](#) for parents that makes suggestions for how they can support their child’s reading and vocabulary development. While this action is not policy related, it cites the state law on the Idaho Reading Indicator as the basis for the publication. The **Arizona** Literacy Plan addresses elements such as kindergarten transition, early oral language development and

“The parent of any student who exhibits a substantial deficiency in reading must be notified in writing of the following:

1. That his or her child has been identified as having a substantial deficiency in reading.
2. A description of the current services that are provided to the child.
3. A description of the proposed supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the child that are designed to remediate the identified area of reading deficiency.
4. That if the child’s reading deficiency is not remediated by the end of grade 3, the child must be retained unless he or she is exempt from mandatory retention for good cause.
5. Strategies for parents to use in helping their child succeed in reading proficiency.
6. That the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is not the sole determiner of promotion and that additional evaluations, portfolio reviews, and assessments are available to the child to assist parents and the school district in knowing when a child is reading at or above grade level and ready for grade promotion.
7. The district’s specific criteria and policies for midyear promotion. Midyear promotion means promotion of a retained student at any time during the year of retention once the student has demonstrated ability to read at grade level.”

— *Florida 1008.25*

emphasizes text comprehension. Florida law also requires “Strategies for parents to use in helping their child succeed in reading proficiency.”

Respectfully, consistently in the loop. See the Florida language (Sec. 1008.25) provided in the sidebar.

Knowledge-building: Florida requires that parents be provided with strategies to use in helping their child succeed.

Resources from the research ...

[What Works Clearinghouse](#)

[Top Tier Evidence Initiative](#) at the Coalition for Evidence Based Policy

[Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#) from Johns Hopkins School of Education

[ECS Research Studies Database](#) – Reading Section

Generally: www.ecs.org/rs

Schools & Classrooms

Conclusion

Sound state early literacy policy requires a framework that supports a system approach, and one that successfully translates into effective implementation at the school and classroom level. The goal of a state policy is to strengthen P-3 linkages, provide transparency, and improve school and classroom practice. It needs to engage state leaders, teacher preparation institutions, educators, students and families in continuous improvement—concentrating first on drivers that foster motivation of teachers and students.

*Roger Sampson,
president, ECS*

"If you expect people to improve or change practice, you must provide a sequential pathway with support along the way."

Excerpted from "Five Things I've Learned." Pearson Foundation.

The state track record (and as the states go, so goes the nation) is not good. This roadmap of standards for policy should evolve with input from every domain it touches (e.g., state leader, state agency, practitioners, and parents).

Progress will require a review of assumptions, ongoing investigations to identify

unintended consequences and a commitment to continuous improvement if we are to counteract unforeseen difficulties with implementation.

Acknowledgements

The categories included in this report echo those suggested by [*Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*](#), a report commissioned by Strategies for Children, Inc. and authored by Dr. Nonie Lesaux, Ph.D., of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Thanks go to Kelly Kulsrud, Director of Reading Proficiency and Carolyn Lyons, CEO, Strategies for Children, Inc., Boston, MA for their review. And finally, appreciation for review and suggestions by ECS staff Karen Schimke, Emily Workman, Matthew Smith and ECS' advisor on leadership, Gary Whiteley.

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Resources

Hernandez, D.J. (2011) Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Other ECS Resources

Stephanie's new SN:

The Progress of Education Reform: [Pre-K-12 Literacy](#)
ECS, December 2011

[Third Grade Literacy Policies: Identification, Intervention, Retention](#)
(ECS, March 2012)

[The Road to High-Quality Early Education](#)
(ECS, December 2011)

ECS Research Studies Database www.ecs.org/rs

[ECS Policy Tracking, Reading/Literacy](#)

<http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecscat.nsf/WebTopicView?OpenView&count=1&RestrictToCategory=Reading/Literacy>

[The Progress of Education Reform: Early Care and Education](#)
ECS, 2008

[Transition and Alignment: Two Keys to Assuring Student Success](#)
(ECS, 2010)

[2012 State of the State Addresses that targeted reading:](#)

<http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecscat.nsf/WebStateofStateTopic2012?OpenView&Start=1&Count=1000&Expand=78#78>

Pianta, Robert C. (May 2012) *Implementing Observation Protocols – Lessons for K-12 Education from the Field of Early Childhood* http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2012/05/pdf/observation_protocols.pdf

Nonie Lesaux, Harvard Graduate School of Education, "[*Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*](#)," 2010

National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force. (2007). *Taking stock: Assessing and improving early childhood learning and program quality*. Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved November 7, 2007, from http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k_education/task_force_report1.pdf.

Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (year?). Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia. *Measuring and Improving Teacher-Student Interactions in PK-12 Settings to Enhance Students' Learning* <http://www.teachstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/class-mtp-pk-12-brief.pdf>

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