



# A Closer Look at Early Reading

## Undergraduate Elementary Programs

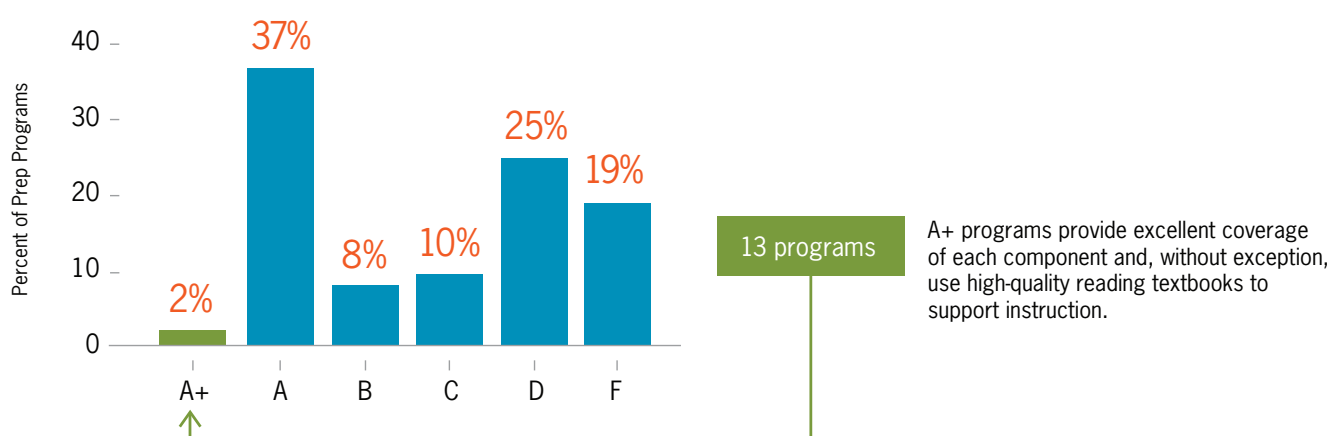
**KEY FINDINGS:** Two in five (39 percent) of the 820 undergraduate elementary programs evaluated provide instruction in all five essential components of early reading instruction. At the other end, a much smaller number, 19 percent of programs, require literacy coursework that addresses no more than one of the five essential components. Programs show marked improvement on this standard—228 programs improved their instruction in early reading between 2014 and 2016, and a higher proportion of programs provide instruction in each component of early reading.

### Why teacher prep programs should have strong early reading programs

Teaching children how to read is “job one” for elementary teachers because reading proficiency underpins all later learning. Unfortunately, some 30 percent of all children do not become capable readers.<sup>1</sup> Using the knowledge gained from decades of research, effective reading instruction could cut this unacceptable rate of failure by two-thirds or even more. To earn an A on this standard, programs must adequately address all of the five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) through a combination of lectures; textbooks; and course assignments, tests, or teaching practice.

For more information about analysis and program grades, see the *Methodology in brief* and *Understanding program grades* sections below.

How many programs teach elementary teacher candidates about the five key components of early reading instruction? (N=820 undergraduate elementary programs)<sup>2</sup>



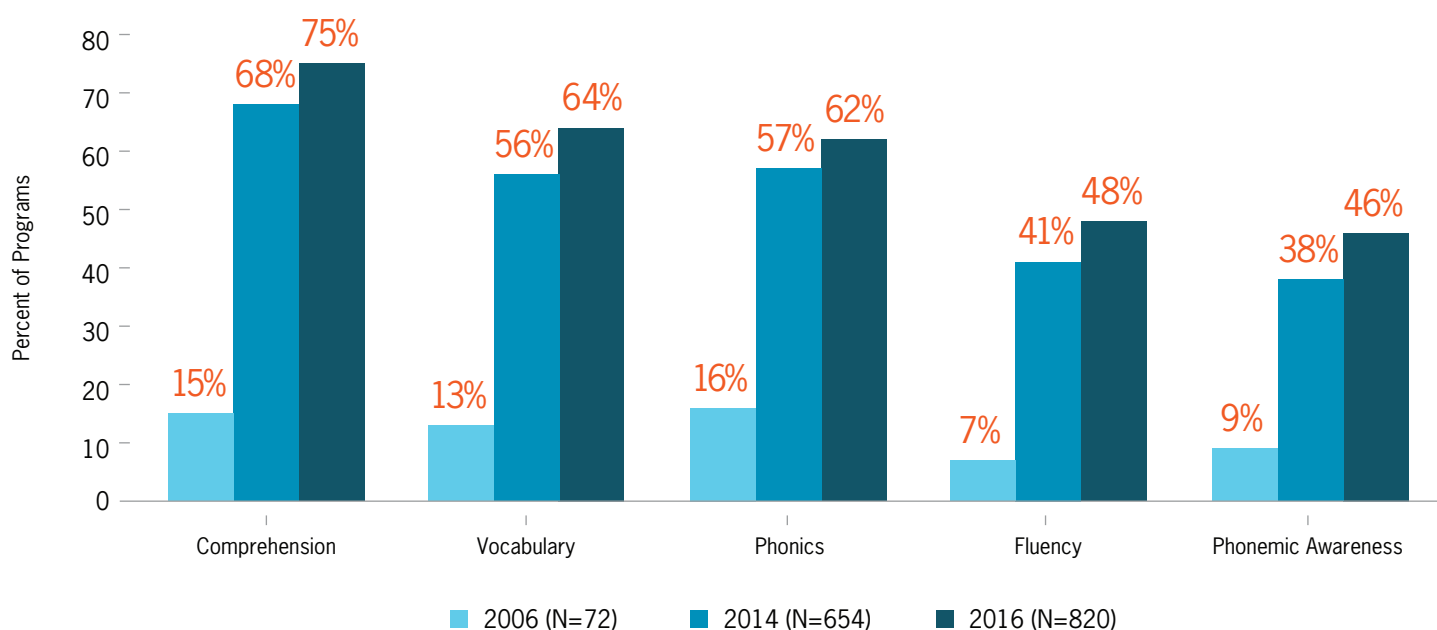
- 1 The most recent NAEP results find that 31 percent of 4th grade students are “below basic” on this reading assessment. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1992–2015 Reading Assessments. Retrieved 31 October 2016 from [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/acl?grade=4).
- 2 Programs earning a “Pass” are counted as having an A for the purpose of this graph; programs earning a “Not Pass” are counted as having a D. Numbers do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

The distribution of scores here provides insight into the divergent approaches that teacher prep programs take to early reading instruction, illustrating the polarization among teacher educators regarding how to teach reading. Two in five programs are clearly designing instruction based on the best research available about what works in reading instruction. These programs are likely drawing from findings by the National Reading Panel as well as updated research from the Institute for Education Sciences,<sup>3</sup> the most authoritative source on how children learn to read. This research asserts that teachers need to know and be able to teach the five components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. On the other hand, another two in five programs (44 percent earning a D or F) teach at most two components of reading instruction, ignoring much of the evidence on how children learn to read. Few programs fall in the middle, showing that few programs choose to teach only some elements of reading—which is critical, as research finds that if you’re not teaching all five components, you’re not teaching the full science of reading.

In 2014, 29 percent of undergraduate elementary programs earned an A or A+ in Early Reading.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, 39 percent of programs earned an A or A+. Moreover, whereas 50 percent of programs earned a D or F in 2014, only 44 percent of programs earn these low grades in 2016, showing a general trend of greater attention to reading across the field.

### A closer look at the five components

Percentage of programs addressing each component, by year



3 National Reading Panel (US), National Institute of Child Health, & Human Development (US). (2000). Report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health; Foorman, B., Beyer, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., & Wissel, S. (2016). Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide/21>.

4 On this standard, programs that “met the standard” or earned a score of “pass” on this standard in 2014 earned the equivalent of an A.

Compared with 2014, programs are showing marked improvement—a higher proportion of programs are teaching each component. Even more striking is the comparison to findings from an analysis of 72 programs conducted in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

More programs' course designs now include comprehension (75 percent) than any other reading component. Even one in four failing programs include comprehension in course designs, but leave out virtually all other components.

In addition, two-thirds of programs' course designs include vocabulary and phonics (64 percent and 62 percent, respectively). However, fewer than half include fluency or phonemic awareness (48 percent and 46 percent, respectively).

### Textbooks used in early reading programs

Unlike in the field of elementary math preparation, where a relatively small number of textbooks are used, there appears to be no end of possible elementary reading texts. We evaluated 159 additional texts during the 2016 *Review*, bringing the total number of current editions of textbooks assigned by teacher prep reading courses to 859 different textbooks.

**Almost half (49 percent) of these textbooks are inadequate because they do not convey scientifically-based early reading instruction.**

Below are the 10 textbooks most commonly used in courses evaluated in the *Review* that comprehensively and rigorously cover the scientific basis and instructional elements of the five essential components of effective reading instruction. Names of additional acceptable textbooks can be found in the [full list](#) of all evaluated texts.

#### Texts covering all five elements of effective reading instruction

Title	Author	Edition	Number of courses using book in programs covered in the <i>Review</i>
Creating Literacy Instruction for All Students	Gunning, Thomas G.	9	102
Teaching Children to Read: The Teacher Makes the Difference	Reutzel, D. Ray & Cooter, Robert D.	7	70
CORE: Teaching Reading Sourcebook Updated Second Edition	Honig, Bill; Diamond, Linda; & Gutlohn, Linda.	2	54
Assessment for Reading Instruction	McKenna, Michael C. & Dougherty Stahl, Katherine A.	3	33
The Essentials of Teaching Children to Read: The Teacher Makes the Difference	Reutzel, D. Ray & Cooter, Robert D.	3	28
Teaching Reading in the 21st Century	Graves, Michael F.; Juel, Connie F.; Graves, Bonnie B.; & Dewitz, Peter F.	5	27
Literacy: Helping Students Construct Meaning	Cooper, J.D.; Robinson, M.D.; Slansky, J.A.; & Kiger, N.D.	9	24

5 Walsh, K., Glaser, D., & Wilcox, D. D. (2006). What education schools aren't teaching about reading and what elementary teachers aren't learning. National Council on Teacher Quality. Retrieved from [http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/What\\_Ed\\_Schools\\_Arent\\_Teaching\\_About\\_Reading\\_NCTQ\\_Report](http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/What_Ed_Schools_Arent_Teaching_About_Reading_NCTQ_Report).

Title	Author	Edition	Number of courses using book in programs covered in the Review
Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards: Helping Every Child Succeed	Reutzel, D. Ray & Cooter, Robert D.	5	22
Locating and Correcting Reading Difficulties	Cockrum, Ward A. & Shanker, James L.	10	21
Striking a Balance: A Comprehensive Approach to Early Literacy	Cecil, Nancy Lee.	5	18

### Thorough instruction in all aspects of early reading

Thirteen undergraduate elementary programs earn “A+” designations for their early reading preparation of prospective elementary teachers. These programs deserve special recognition for their comprehensive and efficient instruction in the five essential components, with all required courses and textbooks supporting that effort:

- CO ▶ Colorado Christian University
- ID ▶ Northwest Nazarene University
- IN ▶ Saint Joseph’s College
- IN ▶ Taylor University
- LA ▶ Nicholls State University
- MA ▶ Gordon College
- NC ▶ University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- SC ▶ Winthrop University
- TX ▶ University of Texas at Arlington
- UT ▶ Dixie State University
- UT ▶ Utah State University
- WV ▶ Fairmont State University
- WV ▶ West Liberty University

## Methodology in brief

Reading experts reviewed lectures, assignments, and textbooks of required reading courses to determine whether the training that teachers receive is in line with the findings of the National Reading Panel, the most authoritative source on how children learn to read. Programs that earned an “A+” are exemplary in every aspect of training in reading instruction we examined.

To learn more about how we evaluate programs’ early reading instruction, including how individual indicators are satisfied, please see our [methodology](#).

For examples of model materials on this standard, please see the [resources](#) section.

## Understanding program grades for Early Reading

- A+** Program coursework addresses all five essential components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) requiring at least two lectures and one type of practice (test, writing assignments, or teaching experience) and all required textbooks are “acceptable.”
- A** Program coursework adequately addresses all five essential components. Examples of adequate coverage include:
- An acceptable textbook and two or more lectures on a component;
  - An acceptable textbook and a test on a component;
  - An acceptable textbook and an assignment and practice teaching on a component;
  - Two or more lectures and a test on a component;
  - Two or more lectures and assignments on a component; etc.
- B** Program coursework addresses four of the five essential components.
- C** Program coursework addresses three of the five essential components.
- D** Program coursework addresses only two of the five essential components.
- F** Program coursework addresses at most one of the five essential components.



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