

# Strengthening Alabama’s Implementation of the Science of Reading through Teacher Preparation

Literacy is critical for success in school, work, and civic engagement. Research finds that reading failure can be reduced to fewer than 1 in 10 students when teachers provide scientifically based reading instruction.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of learning loss experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, we must ensure aspiring teachers are prepared to teach children to read using scientifically based reading instruction.

## The stakes for students in Alabama

In Alabama, only **28% of 4th grade students read proficiently** based on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). That number falls precipitously for some of Alabama’s historically underserved students. This dismal data has nothing to do with the students and families and everything to do with **inequities in access to effective literacy instruction**.

## Alabama’s Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Alabama	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	725,894	28%
Hispanic students	74,589	17%
Black students	239,673	13%
English language learners	31,903	13%
Students with disabilities	95,189	8%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	409,431	16%

## Teacher prep programs are key to implementing and sustaining the science of reading at scale.

### *Are Alabama’s teacher prep programs ensuring aspiring teachers learn the most effective methods to teach reading?*

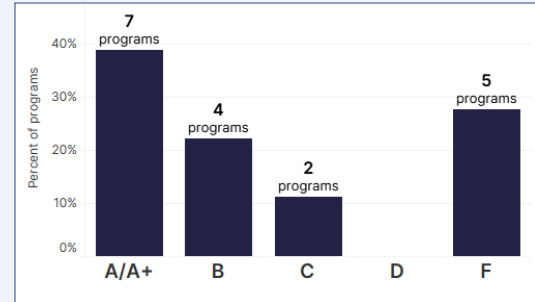
The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy nonprofit, evaluated nearly 700 programs across the country, including 18 in Alabama, on how well they prepare aspiring elementary teachers to teach reading.

This review considered attention to **the five core components of scientifically based reading instruction** –phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension–across four different instructional approaches (instructional hours, background materials, objective measures of knowledge, and opportunities to practice).

The review also deducted points when programs teach aspiring teachers content contrary to research-based practices; and considered whether programs provide instruction in how to support a range of learners (struggling readers, English language learners, and students who speak language varieties other than mainstream English).

<sup>1</sup> See [appendix](#) for citation for this statement and data included throughout.

In Alabama, 39% of the 18 programs evaluated earn an A for preparation in reading, meaning they adequately teach all five components of reading and provide little or no instruction on content contrary to research-based practices.



Alabama ranks above the national average for the average number of components of reading its programs adequately address. In Alabama:

- Programs are most likely to cover **comprehension** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **Four of 18 programs provide at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There is one program in Alabama that teaches **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- Eleven programs devote some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- Eight programs devote some instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Alabama include both the undergraduate and graduate programs at Samford University and the graduate program at Alabama A&M University.**

## Better teacher preparation is essential to ensure all students effectively learn to read.

State policy question	Answer for Alabama
Does Alabama have standards for teacher prep programs that address all five core components of scientifically based reading?	Partially, the standards list phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension, but do not include fluency
Does Alabama require a licensure test that addresses reading?	Yes, the state requires a reading licensure test
What are the required or optional licensure tests that address reading?	Foundations of Reading
Does Alabama require the review of reading course syllabi as part of preparation program renewal?	Yes

*“Every child has the right to read. Sending teachers into the classroom without the science behind how kids learn to read puts everyone in an unfair position. As teachers, we are in this profession to always do what is best and necessary. If we aren’t properly taught by the institutions we put our trust and dollars into, we are made ineffective.”*

- Virginia Quinn-Mooney, First grade teacher

### Recommendations for state leaders:

- Set specific, explicit, and comprehensive preparation standards for scientifically based reading instruction.
- Incorporate a specific evaluation of reading instruction in program renewal or reauthorization processes, and take action if programs are not aligned to the state’s standards for scientifically based reading instruction.
- Require a reading licensure test aligned with scientifically based reading instruction for any PK–5 teachers to earn licensure, and publish the pass rates.
- Deploy a comprehensive strategy to implement scientifically-based reading instruction, and prioritize teacher prep.
- Use the bully pulpit to draw attention to the importance of teacher prep to sustain implementation of improved reading instruction.

For more detail on these recommendations, visit [www.nctq.org/review/standard/reading-foundations](http://www.nctq.org/review/standard/reading-foundations).

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### Program grades in Alabama

School	Program Level	Grade	Adequate coverage of core components: Graded (Up to 12 points per component; 8 points for adequate coverage; 4 or more contrary practices results in letter grade deduction)						Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
Alabama A&M University	UG	B	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	No (7 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	3 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Alabama A&M University	G	A+	Yes (8.64 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	0	8 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Alabama State University*	UG	B	No (5.14 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	1	3 pts	3 pts	2 pts
Auburn University	UG	F	No (5.14 pts)	No (7.41 pts)	No (6.47 pts)	No (5.06 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	1	7.88 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Jacksonville State University	UG	F	No (4 pts)	No (7 pts)	No (5 pts)	No (1 pts)	No (3 pts)	0	4 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Jacksonville State University	G	F	No (6.32 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (6 pts)	0	4 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Miles College	UG	F	No (3.64 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (5.25 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (6 pts)	0	0 pts	2 pts	0 pts

View this data online at [nctq.org](http://nctq.org) for more details. An asterisk by an institution name indicates that additional materials for consideration were provided after the review deadline, but prior to publication; scores for these programs may change pending review of those materials.

School	Program Level	Grade	Adequate coverage of core components: Graded (Up to 12 points per component; 8 points for adequate coverage; 4 or more contrary practices results in letter grade deduction)						Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
Samford University	UG	A+	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	8 pts	6 pts	3 pts
Samford University	G	A+	Yes (10.89 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	8 pts	7.5 pts	2 pts
Troy University	UG	A	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	0	8 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Troy University	G	B	No (7.29 pts)	Yes (8.44 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	8 pts	5.5 pts	0 pts
University of Alabama	UG	B	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (9.22 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	1	6 pts	6 pts	4 pts
University of Alabama	G	C	No (6.32 pts)	No (4.78 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (9.5 pts)	1	2 pts	6 pts	0 pts
University of Alabama in Huntsville	UG	C	No (7.64 pts)	Yes (8.97 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	5	5.5 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Montevallo	UG	F	No (1.5 pts)	No (1.67 pts)	No (1.67 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (5 pts)	0	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of South Alabama	UG	A	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	1	8 pts	4.75 pts	4.75 pts
University of South Alabama	G	A	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (10.81 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	1	8 pts	4.75 pts	4.75 pts
University of West Alabama	UG	A	Yes (10.61 pts)	Yes (9.19 pts)	Yes (10.5 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11.75 pts)	1	8 pts	5.5 pts	0 pts

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