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MISSOURI LAGS BEHIND REST OF NATION IN ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' EARLY READING PREPARATION

Latest Review of Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs by the National Council on Teacher Quality Finds Missouri Behind in the Fight to Reduce Large Numbers of Children Who Are Never Taught to Read

Washington, D.C. — New [data and analysis](#) from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) looking at the approach to reading instruction taught by Missouri's teacher preparation programs find few signs of progress. All but 41 percent (12) of the 29 traditional programs in the state continue to ignore the reading methods most likely to be effective with the highest number of students, in contrast to significant progress being made in most other states. The average score earned by Missouri's programs continues to fall below the national average.

At the national level, the number of programs to embrace reading science has crossed the halfway mark for the first time in the history of the *Teacher Prep Review*, with 51 percent of 1,000 evaluated traditional elementary teacher preparation programs across the country now earning an A or B grade for their coverage of the key components of the science of reading—up from 35 percent in 2013. Missouri now ranks 41st nationally, about the same since NCTQ last rated programs in 2016.

Each year, well over 25,000 public school students in the fourth grade are added to Missouri's ranks of nonreaders. The lion's share are black and Hispanic children struggling in the face of an inequitable education system, with their schools unwilling or unable to provide the reading instruction that decades of research has found to be highly effective. Reading ability is a key predictor of future educational gains and life success, making successful reading instruction essential to achieving educational equity.

"Where, when, and how we teach reading says more about us, than it does the students," shared Kareem Weaver, member of the Oakland NAACP Education Committee. "Explicitly teaching and leveraging the science allows us to overcome our blind spots, assumptions, and biases which impact every aspect of instruction. In other words, the quest to fortify our society and its institutions begins with preparing our teachers to apply the science of reading and reach all students. That's the way to save us from ourselves and avoid a permanent underclass filling our correctional institutions as prisoners of the 'reading wars.'"

Two traditional programs in Missouri earn As in the 2020 *Teacher Prep Review*: the undergraduate program at **Hannibal-LaGrange University** and the graduate program at the **University of Missouri - St. Louis**.

In addition to traditional undergraduate and graduate programs, NCTQ evaluated 58 non-traditional (alternative certification) programs, including the **American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE): Missouri**, which earned an F. The fast track design of non-traditional programs makes it difficult to provide preparation in early reading instruction before aspiring teachers enter the classroom.

[\(See how all Missouri programs performed here.\)](#)

Now in its fourth edition, the *Teacher Prep Review* assigns a team of literacy experts to examine every course a program requires in early reading, looking at the planned topics to be covered in each class, readings, assignments, practice opportunities, and tests, as well as rating the quality of the textbooks used in each course. These experts look for clear evidence of dedicated course time as well as measures where

aspiring teachers must demonstrate their knowledge of the five key components of the science of reading: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension**. All programs receive their preliminary grades well in advance of publication with an opportunity to appeal their rating and are invited to submit additional evidence for consideration. (See a short animated video explaining the methodology [here](#).)

Dr. Maria Murray, a former teacher educator in reading who left her university position to start a national nonprofit dedicated to advancing evidence-aligned reading instruction, spoke to her own experience: “I was deeply frustrated that the science of reading—researched approaches that develop all aspects of what makes a successful reader—were not the norm in education. I am heartened that the tide may be turning. The Reading League’s fast-growing numbers—11,000 strong in three years—speak to how common my experience was and the eagerness of classroom teachers to learn more.”

Classroom teacher and coach Maci Fisher echoed Murray’s sentiments: “As a teacher in training, I had a few hours of instruction on phonics, but nothing on how to actually teach it. We mostly focused on getting students to use context or clues to figure out unknown words. When I first started teaching, I was teaching my struggling readers to guess words instead of actually teaching them to read the words. Frustrated and discouraged, I spent many hours after school researching ways to help them and had to learn the right methods on the job. It’s unfair that so many teachers start out without the knowledge and training they need to successfully teach their students to read.”

For programs that want to improve their reading instruction, a growing number of models of excellence exist. The 2020 *Teacher Prep Review* highlights 15 teacher preparation programs that do an exemplary job teaching reading instruction to aspiring teachers.

See how Missouri and all of their teacher preparation programs performed in the interactive *Teacher Prep Review* database: www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading

Watch a short explanation of the NCTQ methodology here:

www.nctq.org/pages/TPREarlyReadingMethodology. For a more detailed explanation see: www.nctq.org/review/standardDetails/Early-Reading#howWeGraded

Read the full NCTQ summary of findings and see top-performing programs:

www.nctq.org/publications/2020-Teacher-Prep-Review:-Program-Performance-in-Early-Reading-Instruction

Note: In Missouri, there were six programs NCTQ was unable to rate, in spite of repeated requests to the institution to look at their reading syllabi. Those programs are listed here:

www.nctq.org/review/search/standard/Early-Reading_CBD--

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To schedule an interview with NCTQ President Kate Walsh or the individuals quoted in this press release, please contact Nicole Gerber at ngerber@nctq.org or (202) 393-0020 ext. 712.

About the National Council on Teacher Quality: *The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession’s many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, www.nctq.org.*