

# Strengthening Massachusetts’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 Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, only **43% of 4th grade students read proficiently** based on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). That number falls precipitously for some of Massachusetts’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**.

## Massachusetts’s Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Massachusetts	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	890,282	43%
Hispanic students	212,582	21%
Black students	85,872	24%
English language learners	98,055	6%
Students with disabilities	175,548	13%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	309,594	24%

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

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

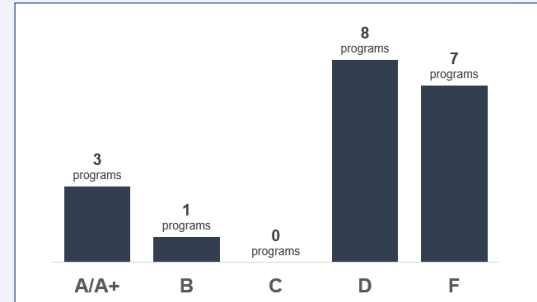
The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy nonprofit, evaluated nearly 700 programs across the country, including 19 in Massachusetts, on how well they prepare aspiring elementary teachers to teach reading.

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 Massachusetts, 16% of the 19 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.



Massachusetts ranks among the worst in the nation for the average number of components of reading its programs adequately address. In Massachusetts:

- Programs are most likely to cover **comprehension** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **One of 19 programs provides at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There are 13 programs (68%) in Massachusetts that teach **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- Six programs devote some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- Twelve programs devote some instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Massachusetts include the undergraduate program at Gordon College.**

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

State policy question	Answer for Massachusetts
Does Massachusetts have standards for teacher prep programs that address all five core components of scientifically based reading?	Yes, the standards address all five core components with details related to the knowledge and skills needed to teach them
Does Massachusetts require a licensure test that addresses reading?	Yes, the state allows multiple tests that address reading
What are the required or optional licensure tests that address reading?	Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) Foundations of Reading (190); Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) Reading Specialist (62)
Does Massachusetts require the review of reading course syllabi as part of preparation program renewal?	No

*“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).**

**Questions? Contact Shannon Holston, NCTQ Chief of Policy and Programs at [shannon.holston@nctq.org](mailto:shannon.holston@nctq.org).**

## Program grades in Massachusetts

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
Bay Path University	UG	A	Yes (10.61 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	6 pts	4 pts	0 pts
Boston College	UG	F	No (6.14 pts)	No (7.7 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	No (7.25 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	2	3.88 pts	6 pts	2 pts
Boston University	G	D	No (4 pts)	No (5.12 pts)	No (6.25 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	0	1 pt	4 pts	0 pts
Bridgewater State University	UG	F	No (1.5 pts)	No (7.41 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (6.75 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	3	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Bridgewater State University	G	D	No (5.57 pts)	No (7.12 pts)	No (7.12 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	2	0 pts	8 pts	0 pts
Elms College (College of Our Lady of the Elms)	G	F	No (2.64 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	No (5 pts)	No (7 pts)	No (6.5 pts)	4	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Fitchburg State University	UG	D	No (4.93 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	No (5.31 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	3	2.83 pts	0 pts	0 pts

View this data online at [nctq.org](http://nctq.org) for more details. Data updated September 2023.

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
Fitchburg State University	G	F	No (2.64 pts)	No (4.69 pts)	No (1.12 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (6 pts)	2	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Framingham State University	UG	F	No (6.93 pts)	No (6.12 pts)	No (6.25 pts)	No (4.5 pts)	Yes (10.67 pts)	3	1 pt	1 pt	0 pts
Gordon College	UG	A+	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11.5 pts)	Yes (11.29 pts)	0	6 pts	4.5 pts	0 pts
Lesley University	G	D	No (3.89 pts)	No (5.94 pts)	No (6.69 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	1	2 pts	7 pts	2.75 pts
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	UG	D	No (6.32 pts)	No (6.56 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	2	4 pts	6 pts	0 pts
Merrimack College	UG	D	No (6.86 pts)	Yes (8.12 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (7.17 pts)	3	2 pts	1 pt	0 pts
Merrimack College	G	B	Yes (8.32 pts)	Yes (9.94 pts)	No (6.53 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (10.88 pts)	0	0 pts	4 pts	0 pts
Salem State University	G	F	No (5.04 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (6 pts)	Yes (8.88 pts)	No (7 pts)	6	0 pts	0.75 pts	0 pts
University of Massachusetts - Boston	G	F	No (2.12 pts)	No (3.92 pts)	No (3.83 pts)	Yes (11.81 pts)	Yes (9.75 pts)	5	2 pts	7.27 pts	2 pts
Westfield State University	UG	D	No (7 pts)	No (5 pts)	No (3 pts)	Yes (10.62 pts)	Yes (8.83 pts)	0	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Westfield State University	G	D	No (6.96 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (5.62 pts)	Yes (8.75 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	3	0 pts	7 pts	2 pts
Worcester State University	UG	A	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	2	5.88 pts	2 pts	0 pts

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