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## **NEW DATA FINDS MAJOR GAPS IN SCIENCE OF READING EDUCATION FOR FUTURE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**

### *Better Teacher Preparation Could Cut Reading Failure Rates by More than Two-Thirds*

**Washington, D.C.** – New data and analysis released today shows that most programs at the colleges and universities that prepare future elementary teachers still do not fully cover the science of reading. The report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), [\*Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction\*](#), provides the most up-to-date information available on how teacher preparation programs prepare aspiring teachers to teach children to read.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated unacceptable and inequitable rates of reading failure among America’s children. National data shows that more than one-third of fourth grade students—over 1.3 million children—cannot read at a basic level. Even more alarming, because we have failed to provide equal access to effective literacy instruction, rates of reading failure climb precipitously for Black and Hispanic students, students with learning differences, and students living in poverty, perpetuating inequitable education and life outcomes. We can change these devastating results.

While some portion of children will learn to read naturally, over five decades of [research](#) have established the components of explicit, scientifically based reading instruction that help most students become successful readers. [Research suggests](#) that over 90% of children could learn to read if their teachers used instructional methods grounded in the science of reading.

“We’re in the midst of a long overdue revolution on the science of reading, but teacher prep programs haven’t fully caught up,” said **Dr. Heather Peske, NCTQ President**. “Prospective teachers—and certainly their students—deserve far better.”

Examining nearly 700 teacher preparation programs across the country, NCTQ looked for evidence that coursework for future elementary teachers includes all the core components of scientifically based reading instruction: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension**. The analysis breaks down how future elementary teachers are prepared in each aspect of the science of reading through **instructional hours, assigned readings, assignments and assessments, and opportunities to practice**.

“This report confirms what educators have been saying for years,” said **Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**. “To help our students become joyful and confident readers, we must understand that teaching reading is not just an art, but also a science.”

The data also shows whether or not programs include methods of reading instruction that have been debunked by the science—practices such as three-cueing and running records that hinder many students from becoming strong readers—and whether or not programs provide preparation in how to teach reading to English language learners, struggling readers, and students who speak language varieties other than mainstream English, such as speakers of African American English.

#### **Key national findings of the NCTQ data include:**

- **Only 25% of programs adequately cover all five core components of scientifically based reading instruction.** Perhaps more alarmingly, another 25% of programs do not adequately cover even a single component.
- **Many programs (40%) still teach multiple instructional practices that run counter to the research on effective reading instruction.** For example, nearly 10% of programs continue to teach the debunked three-cueing method to aspiring elementary teachers.

- **Two out of three programs fail to adequately address phonemic awareness**, meaning aspiring teachers from these programs may not be prepared to help students develop the ability to identify and manipulate the individual sounds within spoken words, the foundation that allows them to link those sounds to the written word.
- **Nearly one-third of programs do not provide any opportunities for future teachers to practice teaching using scientifically based reading instruction.** Despite widespread agreement among practitioners and researchers on the importance of practice, 30% of programs do not have a single practice opportunity linked to any of the five core components of the science of reading in their coursework.
- **Undergraduate programs are much more likely to cover scientifically based reading instruction than graduate-level programs.** While 30% of undergraduate programs cover all five core components of the science of reading, the same is true of only 10% of graduate programs.
- **Programs provide little preparation in how to teach a range of students with diverse needs in learning to read.** Most programs (58%) dedicate fewer than two instructional hours to supporting the needs of struggling readers, such as students with dyslexia. While English language learners are one of the fastest growing populations of students in our schools, 71% of programs dedicate fewer than two instructional hours to supporting the reading needs of these students. The vast majority of programs (more than 80%) do not provide any opportunities for future teachers to practice teaching strategies for struggling readers or English language learners.

“Far too many students are denied the right to an excellent education, including the right to read, because they don’t have access to effective literacy instruction,” said **Denise Forte, President and CEO of The Education Trust**. “Teacher preparation programs are in the enviable position of ensuring every child, especially students of color and those from low-income backgrounds, has access to a teacher who is well-prepared in the methods that we know work best. NCTQ is helping elevate teacher prep programs that are doing this well that can serve as a model for others.”

The NCTQ report identifies dozens of exemplary programs that serve as models for others, showing excellence is achievable. Forty-eight programs—39 undergraduate and nine graduate programs—earned an “A+” designation from NCTQ for comfortably exceeding the targets set by literacy experts for what constitutes adequate instruction in the science of reading and for not teaching aspiring teachers any methods that run contrary to the research.

“Literacy is at the center of our methods courses,” shared **Dr. Erin Scott-Stewart at the Southern University and A&M College** School of Education in Louisiana, one of the A+ programs highlighted in the NCTQ report. “We work with our candidates and partner schools to ensure that what we do aligns with evidence-based and culturally relevant practices that contribute to equitable educational experiences for the children of our communities.”

While individual preparation programs can lead the way in redesigning coursework to improve the outcomes for aspiring elementary teachers and their future students, the NCTQ data also points to state policy as a way to improve the quality of teacher preparation in reading. In recent years, states like **Colorado** and **Mississippi** have enacted strong, comprehensive policies to promote the science of reading, with focused implementation, and these states now stand out for high scores for their teacher prep programs and minimal evidence of methods that run contrary to scientifically based reading instruction.

“We need more states to step up, as Colorado and Mississippi have done, not just to adopt science of reading curricula and training for elementary schools, but also to ensure their elementary teachers are prepared to teach reading effectively,” explained **Dr. Peske**. “If education leaders are serious about making sure scientifically based reading instruction reaches every classroom in their state, they need to establish robust teacher preparation standards, support teacher prep programs as they implement them—and then hold those programs accountable.”

“Teachers have clamored for the tools, skills, and supports to enhance their reading instruction and help them reach all children, including those who struggle to read, especially students with dyslexia and English Language Learners,” continued **AFT President Randi Weingarten**. “Initiatives like AFT’s Reading Opens the World can enhance kids’ love of reading and teachers’ skills, but pre-service preparation is the essential foundation for reading instruction. The entire educational community must unite in advocating for the programs, policies, training, and resources that bring the science and the joy of reading to life.”

NCTQ spent more than two years engaging with literacy experts, researchers, teacher preparation leaders, educators, education policymakers, measurement experts, and reading advocates to develop a methodology for the new analysis grounded in the most up-to-date research on scientifically based reading instruction. After reaching out to more than 1,000 traditional teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities across the country, NCTQ was able to obtain materials and publish analysis for 693 programs.

A team of expert reading analysts reviewed course syllabi, including ancillary materials such as lecture slides or assignment descriptions, and background materials such as textbooks, articles, and videos to look for evidence of coverage of each of the five core components of the science of reading as well as evidence of coverage of reading instruction for a range of learners. Each program received its detailed preliminary analysis from NCTQ in early 2023 and was provided with an opportunity to submit additional materials to update its evaluation.

The final NCTQ evaluation assigns a letter grade to each program based on the number of core components adequately covered and the number of topics contrary to research-based practices that are taught in the program. Importantly, due to the significant changes to the NCTQ methodology, 2023 program grades are not comparable to previous years' grades. See full details on the revision process and new NCTQ methodology in the [Reading Foundations Technical Report](#).

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### **Statements of support for the NCTQ analysis and recommendations:**

"This report confirms what educators have been saying for years: To help our students become joyful and confident readers, we must understand that teaching reading is not just an art, but also a science. Teachers have clamored for the tools, skills, and supports to enhance their reading instruction and help them reach all children, including those who struggle to read, especially students with dyslexia and English Language Learners. Initiatives like AFT's Reading Opens the World can enhance kids' love of reading and teachers' skills, but pre-service preparation is the essential foundation for reading instruction. The entire educational community must unite in advocating for the programs, policies, training, and resources that bring the science and the joy of reading to life."

#### **Randi Weingarten**

President

American Federation of Teachers

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"Far too many students are denied the right to an excellent education, including the right to read, because they don't have access to effective literacy instruction. Teacher preparation programs are in the enviable position of ensuring every child, especially students of color and those from low-income backgrounds, has access to a teacher who is well-prepared in the methods that we know work best. NCTQ is helping elevate teacher prep programs that are doing this well that can serve as a model for others."

#### **Denise Forte**

President and CEO

The Education Trust

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"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. Most teachers eventually figure out balanced literacy is not moving the needle, and have to begin the education process all over again. This time on our own time and our own dime."

#### **Virginia Quinn-Mooney**

First grade teacher

Woodbury, Connecticut

“Now is the time for educator preparation programs to truly understand their role in improving K-12 student outcomes. Aligning educator prep coursework to evidence-based practices grounded in the science of reading will directly impact how well teachers are prepared to teach children to read.”

**Kymyona Burk, Ed.D.**

Senior Policy Fellow, Early Literacy  
Foundation for Excellence in Education

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“When he was seven, we moved our son with dyslexia from a school district that did not adhere to the science of reading to one that did—and his academic and emotional life improved dramatically. In his first few years of school, our son cried every single day because he was expected to read, yet nobody was teaching him explicitly how to do it. Though well meaning, the teachers from his original school simply did not have the tools to teach him. It was frustrating and soul crushing. In the new district where teachers leveraged scientifically based reading instruction, our son—with time and intervention—learned to read and is now at the top of his class academically. He is happy to go to school and has a deep love of learning.”

**Alejandra Rojas Silva**

Mother to a 13-year-old son with dyslexia  
Honolulu, Hawaii (formerly Upper Arlington, Ohio)

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“It is our duty as state education leaders to ensure the programs that prepare our public elementary school teachers are teaching the methods of effective reading instruction. We are incredibly proud of the results of the NCTQ analysis; the improvements in how we prepare teachers in reading will lead to real, meaningful differences for Colorado's students.”

**Katy Anthes, Ph.D.**

Commissioner  
Colorado Department of Education

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“Given the critical role of reading ability to impact a child’s future and the influence of teachers, it is essential that aspiring teachers have a firm knowledge base of the components of scientifically-based literacy instruction and the pedagogical skills to enact effective instruction. This knowledge empowers teachers to be agents of change and to leverage evidence-supported instruction to improve the lives of children.”

**Cindy D. Jones, Ph.D.**

Professor of Literacy and Director, Literacy Clinic  
School of Teacher Education and Leadership  
Utah State University

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“It is imperative for educator preparation programs to continue preparing graduates with the skills and knowledge of the science of reading so they may provide excellent reading instruction to students that will ultimately improve their academic performance. As we have worked on incorporating the science of reading in our programs, the support and feedback we have received from NCTQ has been incredibly instrumental in our curriculum alignment to the science of reading. NCTQ’s thoughtful feedback continues to be an influential component to our ongoing curriculum and program improvement processes.”

**Art Rouse, Ph.D.**

Interim Dean, College of Education  
East Carolina University

“For too long, the professionals responsible for teaching children to read have been sidelined from the knowledge of instructional practices that would result in maximally effective outcomes. Instruction that includes practices based on the findings from scientifically-based reading research is necessary to ensure that ALL children are given what they deserve—the opportunity to learn to read. Teacher preparation programs that train pre-service teachers in these practices are playing a critical role in ensuring that this can happen. I commend those that are prioritizing this work and hope they receive the recognition they deserve.”

**Maria Murray, Ph.D.**  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Reading League

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“Despite being a quick learner in every other subject, our daughter, Vivian, consistently tested in the 12th percentile on the district reading proficiency test—from first through fifth grade. Diagnosed with dyslexia, she was headed to middle school unable to spell or even read multisyllabic words. Luckily, starting in 6th grade, Vivian received instruction aligned to the science of reading. With additional support from a reading specialist and tutoring at home, Vivian was finally at grade level by the end of 8th grade. The science of reading isn’t a curriculum. It’s an understanding of how the brain learns to read, which teachers must know if they are truly going to be prepared to help all students—especially students like Vivian—succeed.”

**Jenine Hanson**  
Mother of three children  
President of the Dyslexia Action Group of Naperville  
Naperville, Illinois

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“Without learning about the science of reading, we—as teachers—cannot help children achieve their goals in the future.”

**Nicole Gregory**  
First grade teacher  
New Milford, Connecticut

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“Teachers deserve to be well-apprenticed for the calling of preparing children to be literate for life based upon proven science. NCTQ’s attention to this upstream issue elevates universities who embrace the calling of preventing educator failure. Their visionary efforts bring honor to teaching—the mother of all professions—while advancing literacy success at every grade level, and across all content areas. Our national moonshot must be a focus on literacy as a human right in an Information Age, and a knowledge economy.”

**Tracy Weeden, Ed.D.**  
President & CEO  
Neuhaus Education Center

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“As future teachers, we need to know how students learn. We don’t need old school, ineffective methods. We need to know how to properly teach students to help them learn to read.”

**Laura Morales**  
Recent college graduate / Aspiring teacher  
New Milford, Connecticut

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“It is important that literacy instruction is informed by research. This helps ensure that teachers are focusing on the key knowledge, skills, and abilities that students need to learn to read, and that they employ practices that are maximally beneficial to student learning. Teacher preparation has an extraordinary opportunity to ensure aspiring teachers are trained in these methods.”

**Timothy Shanahan, Ph.D.**  
Distinguished Professor Emeritus  
University of Illinois at Chicago

**Links to report materials and resources:**

**Full report:** [Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction](#)

**Executive summary:** [Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction - Executive Summary](#)

**All program scores:** [View, sort, and filter all program grades; click on an individual program to see detailed analysis and findings for that program](#)

**Recommendations:** [See recommendations for teacher preparation programs, state policymakers, school districts, advocates, teachers, and parents](#)

**Individual state profiles:** [Use the dropdown menu to select a state and download a brief summary of state data, analysis, and recommendations](#)

**Methodology video:** [Short \(2-minute\) video with an overview of how NCTQ conducts this review](#)

**Full methodology and summary of research:** [Teacher Prep Review: Reading Foundations Technical Report](#)

**Full data download:** [Detailed program-level and course-level data download](#)

**List of institutions that refused to participate:** [Appendix E of the full report](#)

**Catalog of graphs and graphics:** [A folder of high-resolution images of the graphs and infographics in the full report](#)

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To schedule an interview with NCTQ President Dr. Heather Peske or to connect with any of the individuals quoted in this release, contact Nicole Gerber at 202-393-0020 ext. 712 or by email at [ngerber@nctq.org](mailto:ngerber@nctq.org).

***About the National Council on Teacher Quality:*** *NCTQ is a nonpartisan research and policy organization on a mission to ensure every child has access to an effective teacher and every teacher has the opportunity to be effective. We believe a strong, diverse teacher workforce is critical for providing all students with equitable educational opportunities. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).*