

# Strengthening Rhode Island’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 Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, only **34% of 4th grade students read proficiently** based on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). That number falls precipitously for some of Rhode Island’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**.

## Rhode Island’s Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Rhode Island	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	135,732	34%
Hispanic students	39,656	19%
Black students	12,333	14%
English language learners	17,116	8%
Students with disabilities	23,949	7%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	67,574	21%

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

### *Are Rhode Island’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 three in Rhode Island, 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 Rhode Island, all of the three 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.**

**In Rhode Island:**

- Programs are most likely to cover **phonics** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **One of three programs provides at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There are no programs in Rhode Island that teach **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- One program devotes some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- No programs devote any instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Rhode Island include the undergraduate program at Rhode Island College.**

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

State policy question	Answer for Rhode Island
Does Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island require a licensure test that addresses reading?	Yes, the state requires a licensure test that addresses reading
What are the required or optional licensure tests that address reading?	Praxis Multiple Subjects Test 5001 (Note: All new teachers must demonstrate proficiency in the science of reading and passing the Foundations of Reading test is one option)
Does Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island

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
Rhode Island College	UG	A+	Yes (10.68 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11.63 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	0	8 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Rhode Island	UG	A	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	0	2 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Rhode Island	G	A	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9.25 pts)	0	2 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.