

Strengthening Tennessee'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.¹ 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 Tennessee

In Tennessee, only **30% of 4th grade students read proficiently** based on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). That number falls precipitously for some of Tennessee'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**.

Tennessee's Reading Data

Student group	# of students in Tennessee	% who read proficiently in 4th grade
ALL STUDENTS	967,278	30%
Hispanic students	130,667	22%
Black students	205,914	13%
English language learners	50,037	4%
Students with disabilities	125,097	12%
Students eligible for National School Lunch Program	596,760	17%

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

Are Tennessee's teacher prep programs ensuring aspiring teachers learn the most effective methods to teach reading?

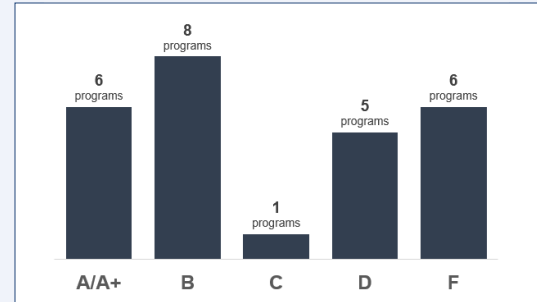
The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy nonprofit, evaluated nearly 700 programs across the country, including 26 in Tennessee, on how well they prepare aspiring elementary teachers to teach reading.

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).

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

In Tennessee, 23% of the 26 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.



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

- Programs are most likely to cover **comprehension** and least likely to cover **phonemic awareness**.
- **Three of 26 programs provide at least one practice opportunity** in each of these components.
- There are six programs in Tennessee that teach **multiple** techniques or approaches contrary to research-based practices, which can inhibit the reading progress of many students.
- Nineteen programs devote some instructional time to supporting **Struggling readers**.
- Fourteen programs devote some instructional time to supporting **English language learners**.
- **Exemplary (A+) programs in Tennessee include the undergraduate programs at Middle Tennessee State University and Tennessee Wesleyan University.**

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

State policy question	Answer for Tennessee
Does Tennessee 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 Tennessee 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?	Praxis Teaching Reading (5205)
Does Tennessee 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.

Questions? Contact Shannon Holston, NCTQ Chief of Policy and Programs at shannon.holston@nctq.org.

Program grades in Tennessee

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
Austin Peay State University	UG	D	No (5.57 pts)	No (6.66 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	6	0 pts	3 pts	0 pts
Austin Peay State University	G	C	No (7.29 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	5	4 pts	6 pts	4 pts
Belmont University	UG	F	No (3.64 pts)	No (4.41 pts)	No (4.69 pts)	No (4.88 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	4	2.75 pts	4 pts	0 pts
East Tennessee State University	UG	D	No (7.33 pts)	No (7.33 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	No (7.62 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	3	2 pts	5.5 pts	2 pts
Freed-Hardeman University	G	D	No (1.75 pts)	No (6.75 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	No (2.75 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	1	0 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Lipscomb University	UG	A	Yes (8.57 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	0	6 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Lipscomb University	G	A	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	1	4 pts	0 pts	0 pts

View this data online at 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
Middle Tennessee State University	UG	A+	Yes (10.61 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	6 pts	8 pts	0 pts
Milligan University	UG	B	Yes (8.09 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	1	6 pts	2 pts	0 pts
South College	UG	B	Yes (9 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	0	7 pts	6 pts	0 pts
Tennessee State University	UG	A	Yes (8.09 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.88 pts)	1	4 pts	5.12 pts	0 pts
Tennessee State University	G	F	No (0 pts)	No (3.56 pts)	No (4.12 pts)	No (3.75 pts)	No (5 pts)	0	0 pts	3 pts	0 pts
Tennessee Technological University	UG	B	No (7.71 pts)	Yes (8.25 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	6 pts	5.5 pts	2 pts
Tennessee Technological University	G	B	No (7.71 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.5 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	6 pts	6 pts	2 pts
Tennessee Wesleyan University	UG	A+	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (10.81 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	0	6 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Tusculum University	UG	D	No (7.07 pts)	Yes (8.34 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	No (6.83 pts)	1	6 pts	4.25 pts	0 pts
Tusculum University	G	D	No (7.07 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	No (7.88 pts)	No (6.83 pts)	1	6 pts	4.25 pts	0 pts
Union University	UG	F	No (2 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (6 pts)	No (5 pts)	No (5.67 pts)	1	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
Union University	G	F	No (3.54 pts)	No (6.84 pts)	No (5.81 pts)	No (4.88 pts)	No (5.5 pts)	1	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of Memphis	UG	B	Yes (8.29 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	No (7.56 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	2	6 pts	2 pts	1 pt
University of Memphis	G	B	Yes (8.29 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	No (3.56 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	2	3.5 pts	2 pts	0 pts
University of Tennessee	UG	A	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (8.89 pts)	Yes (10.92 pts)	Yes (10.91 pts)	1	5.11 pts	5.78 pts	2 pts
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	UG	B	No (7.89 pts)	Yes (8 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	6 pts	6 pts	0 pts
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	G	B	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (8.81 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	Yes (8.75 pts)	0	4 pts	3.5 pts	0 pts

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			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices (out of 9)	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
University of Tennessee at Martin	UG	F	No (1.5 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (0 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (0 pts)	0	2 pts	0 pts	0 pts
University of Tennessee at Martin	G	F	No (1.5 pts)	No (1.5 pts)	No (3 pts)	No (7.5 pts)	No (7 pts)	0	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts

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