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NEW DATA FINDS NINETEEN STATES LACK STRONG POLICIES TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE READING INSTRUCTION

For states to succeed in their efforts to improve literacy outcomes for students, they must ensure teachers are prepared to implement and sustain scientifically based reading instruction.

Washington, D.C. – New data and analysis from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) show that while many states seek to improve literacy outcomes for students, they focus too little on a key component to strong implementation and sustainability: effective teachers.

The new NCTQ report, [*State of the States: Five Policy Actions to Strengthen Implementation of the Science of Reading*](#), highlights five key policy actions states should take to strengthen teachers' reading instruction and examines the extent to which states focus on them. The five policy actions are:

1. Setting specific, detailed reading standards for teacher prep programs.
2. Reviewing teacher prep programs to ensure they teach the science of reading.
3. Adopting a strong elementary reading licensure test.
4. Requiring districts to select a high-quality reading curriculum.
5. Providing professional learning for teachers and ongoing support to sustain the implementation of the science of reading.

Given that there are 1.3 million children who enter fourth grade each year unable to read at a basic level (nearly 40% of all fourth graders) and that this number climbs even higher for students of color, those with learning differences, and those who grow up in low-income households, states have a responsibility to ensure teachers are well prepared to support students to learn to read. In fact, estimates suggest that with effective reading instruction, more than 90% of students would learn to read—meaning that every year nearly 1 million *additional* students would enter fourth grade as skilled readers. However, it is only when state leaders implement a literacy strategy that prioritizes teacher effectiveness that they will achieve a teacher workforce that can strengthen student literacy year after year.

“Helping all children learn to read is possible when you have teachers who’ve been prepared in the science of reading,” said **Dr. Heather Peske, NCTQ President**. “Much like an orchestra needs each section of instruments to come together to successfully create music, states need to implement multiple teacher-focused reading policies that work together to improve student outcomes.”

Across the nation, NCTQ found that:

- **Nineteen states are taking very little action—if any—in the five policy areas.**
 - Three states are categorized as unacceptable, meaning they have few or no policies in place in most of the five policy areas.
 - Maine, Montana, and South Dakota
 - Sixteen states are categorized as weak, meaning they have only a few policies in place in some of the five policy areas, and nothing in the other areas.
 - Alaska, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
- **Half of states (25)* do not provide specific guidelines to teacher prep programs** about what they should teach aspiring teachers in reading.
- **More than half of states (28)** leave it to outside accreditors to approve how teachers are prepared** in reading instruction, abdicating their responsibility and, ultimately, giving this power to entities that don't

have the time, directive, or expertise to determine if the program prepares elementary teachers aligned to scientifically based reading instruction.

- **More than half of states (28) use weak licensure tests** that don't tell you whether teachers understand the core components of reading, giving those teachers and the schools that hire them false assurances that teachers are prepared to teach reading.
- While states spend roughly 1 billion dollars on reading curricula, **only nine states require districts to select a high-quality reading curriculum.**
 - This matters because previous research external to NCTQ shows some of the most popular reading curricula being used by districts are not aligned with 50 years of research that shows how kids best learn to read.
- While more than half of states require some type of professional learning on the science of reading for elementary teachers and allocate funds for it, **over half a million elementary teachers may be left without any professional learning** in states that don't require research-aligned professional learning.

"Why do we see staggering numbers of children, especially children of color and from low-income backgrounds, without fundamental literacy skills? Because in many districts and schools nationwide, outdated teaching methods and curricula that have been proven ineffective, and even harmful, are still being used," said Denise Forte, The Education Trust President and CEO. "This NCTQ report calls upon state leaders to double-down on their efforts to support teachers to change reading outcomes for students with five clear actions they can take now."

"The Maryland State Department of Education applauds the NCTQ for its research into state policies and practices supporting reading instruction aligned with scientific research," said Dr. Carey Wright, Maryland's Interim State Superintendent. "The path to ensuring a future where every teacher is equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively teach reading requires a comprehensive set of policies that hold departments of education, educator preparation programs, and districts responsible for promoting and delivering evidence-based reading instruction grounded in science. Only then will all students, especially those who have been historically underserved, have the opportunity to receive the essential foundation needed to succeed in college or career, and more importantly, life. This is the time for state education leaders to intensify the call for action."

In addition to the report, NCTQ produced individual [state profiles](#) that provide a snapshot of the reading policy landscape and recommendations for each state and a [State Reading Policy Action Guide](#) that identifies concrete steps states can take to strengthen reading instruction and examples of states that are doing it well.

***CORRECTION: THE FORMER, EMBARGOED VERSION OF THIS RELEASE INCORRECTLY STATED THAT 26 STATES DO NOT PROVIDE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES. THE CORRECT NUMBER IS 25 STATES.**

****CORRECTION: THE FORMER, EMBARGOED VERSION OF THIS RELEASE INCORRECTLY STATED THAT 30 STATES LEAVE PROGRAM APPROVAL TO OUTSIDE ACCREDITORS. THE CORRECT NUMBER IS 28 STATES.**

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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.