



Reading/Literacy

Trends in State Laws

Education Commission of the States

www.ecs.org

700 Broadway, Suite 810 • Denver, CO 80203-3442 • 303.299.3600 • ecs@ecs.org

Trends in teacher certification

Equipping teachers to prepare proficient readers

Julie Rowland

January 2015

Ensuring that students are reading proficiently by third grade is a key component of keeping students on track to graduate high school and pursue college and careers. Because of the magnitude of this academic milestone, states typically pursue policies that promote early identification and intervention for struggling readers.¹

However, teachers are the most important school-based factor in student success. To ensure that teachers are well-prepared to guide students toward meeting the critical milestone of reading proficiency by third grade, states have begun to require that teacher candidates pass a reading instruction-specific assessment prior to licensure. These assessments address the science of reading instruction and target early childhood and elementary teacher candidates.

States are expanding policies that hold teachers and teacher-preparation programs accountable for student success. Requiring rigorous, content-specific assessments prior to licensure is part of a broader trend of holding teachers to higher standards, requiring greater transparency in teacher-preparation programs and modernizing the teaching profession.²

Key Takeaways

Fourteen states require teacher candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the science of reading instruction on a stand-alone assessment prior to licensure:

- 6 states use a state or as-yet unspecified test (CA, MS, NM, OH, OK, VA).
- 5 states use the Foundations of Reading test (CT, MA, NH, NC, WI).
- 3 states use the Praxis Teaching Reading test (AL, TN, WV).

Making every teacher a reading specialist

In the absence of teachers who are well-trained in reading instruction, many states assign struggling readers to a certified reading specialist or literacy coach. However, these specialists are “more likely than other elementary teachers to have part-time or itinerant assignments,” often splitting their limited time among a number of classrooms and schools, which can diminish their impact on student achievement.³

Rather than relying entirely on interventions for struggling readers, some states have begun to emphasize the need for all elementary school teachers to possess the necessary skills to effectively teach reading. Access to highly qualified teachers provides students with the equivalent of a constant reading specialist, ensuring that struggling readers are identified and supported as quickly and effectively as possible and helping alleviate the need for later interventions. One strategy to ensure highly qualified teachers is to require teacher candidates to pass an assessment of reading instruction skills prior to licensure.

The emerging trend

While many states offer professional development opportunities focused on reading instruction, state policies requiring teacher candidates to *demonstrate* some level of understanding of reading instruction are increasing in popularity.

For example, Idaho teacher candidates at all grade levels must pass an assessment that includes “a demonstration of teaching skills and knowledge congruent with current research on best reading practices.”⁴ Like many states,⁵ Idaho satisfies this condition by requiring elementary teachers to pass a multiple subject exam that includes a reading and language arts subtest. In the Praxis Elementary Multiple Subject test, the science of reading instruction comprises 49 percent of the reading and language arts subtest, or just one-eighth of the entire exam.⁶ In contrast to these multiple subject tests, the tests highlighted below focus entirely on the science of reading instruction.

The 14 states highlighted below use assessments that meet the following key components:

- Required as part of initial teacher licensure.
- Required of all early childhood and/or elementary teachers rather than for a reading endorsement or reading specialist position.
- Explicitly required by state law or policy.
- Focused on the science of teaching reading and not a subtest of a general education assessment.

What is the science of reading instruction?

The National Reading Panel, established by Congress in 1997, identified five key components of research-based reading instruction.

These were later incorporated into the No Child Left Behind Act’s *Reading First* program.

1. Phonemic awareness
2. Phonics
3. Fluency
4. Vocabulary
5. Comprehension

Common elements of teacher candidate assessment laws:

1. Requires assessment as part of initial licensure.
2. Specifies grade levels for which assessment is required.
3. Requires scientifically research-based reading instruction.
4. Specifies entity who will set passing score.

Table 1: States requiring reading instruction Assessments

State-Developed or Unspecified Test of Reading Instruction ⁱ	Foundations of Reading Test	Praxis Teaching Reading Test
California ⁷ (EC, EM, SE)	Connecticut (EC, EM, SE)	Alabama (EC, EM)
Mississippi ⁸ (EM)	Massachusetts (EC, EM)	Tennessee (EC, EM, SE)
New Mexico (EM)	New Hampshire (EC, EM) ⁹	West Virginia (EC, EM)
Ohio ¹⁰ (EC, EM)	North Carolina (EC, EM, SE)	
Oklahoma ¹¹ (EC, EM, SE)	Wisconsin (EC, EM, SE)	
Virginia ¹² (EC, EM, SE)		

- **EC:** Early Childhood
- **EM:** Elementary
- **SE:** Special Education

Sample statutory language

Indiana: IND. CODE § 20-28-5-12(b)

“The department may not grant an initial practitioner license to an individual unless the individual has demonstrated proficiency in the following areas on a written examination or through other procedures prescribed by the department:

- (1) Basic reading, writing, and mathematics.
- (2) Pedagogy.
- (3) Knowledge of the areas in which the individual is required to have a license to teach.
- (4) If the individual is seeking to be licensed as an elementary school teacher, comprehensive scientifically based reading instruction skills, including:
 - (A) phonemic awareness
 - (B) phonics instruction
 - (C) fluency
 - (D) vocabulary
 - (E) comprehension.”

Ohio: OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3319.233(A)

“Beginning July 1, 2017, all new educator licenses issued for grades pre-kindergarten through three or four through nine shall require the applicant to attain a passing score on a rigorous examination of principles of scientifically research-based reading instruction that is aligned with the reading competencies adopted by the state board of education.”

Wisconsin: WIS. STAT. ANN. 118.19(14)(a)

“The department may not issue an initial teaching license that authorizes the holder to teach in grades kindergarten to 5 or in special education, an initial license as a reading teacher, or an initial license as a reading specialist, unless the applicant has passed an examination identical to the Foundations of Reading test administered in 2012 as part of the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure. The department shall set the passing cut score on the examination at a level no lower than the level recommended by the developer of the test, based on this state's standards.”

ⁱ Mississippi and Ohio have not yet selected an assessment.

Author

Julie Rowland is a researcher for the Education Commission of the States. Contact her at jrowland@ecs.org or (303) 299.3672.

Endnotes

¹ Emily Workman, *Third-grade reading policies* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2014), <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/16/44/11644.pdf> (accessed Dec. 2014).

² See, for example: the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed regulations to hold teacher training programs accountable for student success: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-proposes-plan-strengthen-teacher-preparation>; Jennifer Thomsen, *Teacher performance plays growing role in employment decisions* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2014), <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/12/42/11242.pdf> (accessed Dec. 2014).

³ National Center for Education Statistics, *Who Teaches Reading in Public Elementary Schools? The Assignments and Educational Preparation of Reading Teachers* (Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), 3, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004034.pdf> (accessed Dec. 2014).

⁴ Idaho Code Idaho Code Ann. § 33-1207A(1)

⁵ In New York, for example, all elementary teacher candidates are required to pass a multi-subject exam. Part one of three focuses on English and Language Arts and explicitly includes the science of reading instruction. See http://www.nystce.nesinc.com/PDFs/NY_fld221_222_245_objs.pdf

⁶ “Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects,” ETS, last modified 2014, accessed Dec. 15, 2014, <https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/5001.pdf>.

⁷ The Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) is required for the Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, which “authorizes the holder to teach all subjects in a self-contained classroom, such as the classrooms in most elementary schools, in grades preschool, K–12, or in classes organized primarily for adults.” See *Multiple Subject Teaching Credential* at <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/cl561c.pdf>.

⁸ Mississippi’s assessment requirement will be effective July 1, 2016. According to NCTQ, “a recommendation for an assessment will be made to the Licensure Commission in spring 2015.” See National Council on Teacher Quality, *Mississippi: Are New Teachers Being Prepared for College- and Career-Readiness Standards?* (Washington D.C.: NCTQ, 2014), http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2014_State_Teacher_Policy_Yearbook_Mississippi_NCTQ_Report (accessed Dec. 2014).

⁹ Elementary education teachers cover grades K-6 or K-8. N.H. Code Admin. R. Ed 507.11.

¹⁰ Ohio will begin requiring all teachers in grades pre-K through 9 to pass a “rigorous examination of principles of scientifically research-based reading instruction” beginning in July 2017. See R.C. § 3319.233. Currently, Ohio teachers of third-grade students who are on a reading improvement and monitoring plan or retained students now must meet special qualifications under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. One way to fulfill the requirement is to pass the Praxis [Teaching Reading: Elementary Education](#) test.

¹¹ 70 Okl.St. Ann. § 1210.508F specifies that all early childhood, elementary, or special education teacher candidates must pass the Oklahoma Reading Test *prior to graduation* of a teacher preparation program.

¹² Virginia and New Hampshire laws require candidates to demonstrate proficiency in the science of reading instruction, and the boards of education in these states have adopted a stand-alone reading instruction assessment.

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