

Recommendations of the  
North Carolina State Board of Education  
Literacy Task Force

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## Executive Summary

### **PURPOSE**

The North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) announced a Literacy Task Force in September 2019. The North Carolina Literacy Task Force was to develop a report that included recommendations for modifications to educator preparation and licensure that support the improvement of K-3 reading instruction.

Having a strong reading foundation impacts a student's educational success. While the primary focus is to impact performance in K-3, the SBE expects overlapping recommendations expanding beyond grades K-3.

The Task Force's specific purpose, per the SBE's original charge, was to include recommendations that addressed, but were not limited to, the following issues related to early reading instruction and teacher preparation:

- The minimum number of credit hours in literacy instruction that an educator preparation program shall include in its course of study. This shall include whether phonics instruction is adequately integrated into the course of study or if a separate course dedicated to phonics instruction is needed.
- The alignment of preservice educator preparation for early learning instruction with actual classroom instruction, including clinical experiences, that reflect well-designed, effective educator preparation programs for early learning instruction.
- Implications for teacher licensure and other teaching credentials, including potential incentives and compensation.
- The number and type of continuing education credits related to literacy that the State should require for the renewal of a teacher license.
- Professional development models for educator preparation program faculty and teachers throughout their careers on evidence-based instruction in literacy that is consistent with the most recent standards and curriculum established by the State and well-designed, effective educator preparation programs.
- Implications for administrator preparation programs and principal professional development to support evidence-based literacy instruction in the early grades.

The co-chairs of the Literacy Task Force, Ann Clark and Crystal Hill, developed subcommittees on professional development, curriculum and instruction resources, and pre-service preparation and licensure. These subcommittees were named at the December 2019 meeting and conducted their first meetings in January 2020. Following several formal and informal subcommittee

meetings, recommendations were developed by each respective subcommittee to inform the final recommendation for submission to the SBE.

### **Literacy Task Force Recommendations**

A comprehensive approach to literacy encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and listening and occurs in a safe, nurturing, and culturally responsive environment. Learning to read is a continuum of knowledge and skills, beginning at birth with oral language development and progressing to the development of written language skills and knowledge of the world that continues into adulthood.

High quality reading instruction is grounded in the current science of reading and addresses the acquisition of language (syntax, semantics, morphology, and pragmatics), phonological and phonemic awareness, accurate and efficient word identification and spelling, world knowledge, and comprehension. It is guided by state-adopted standards and informed by valid and reliable assessment data so instruction can be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. High quality reading instruction includes explicit and systematic phonics instruction, allowing all students to master letter–sound relations so that they can understand the meaning of increasingly complex text<sup>1</sup>.

When considering the evidence base for the current science of reading, it is useful to review the levels of evidence in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Pub. L. 114-95, 2015) as well as the definition of scientific inquiry from the National Research Council, the public face of the National Academy of Sciences:

At its core, scientific inquiry is the same in all fields. Scientific research, whether in education, physics, anthropology, molecular biology, or economics, is a continual process of rigorous reasoning supported by a dynamic interplay among methods, theories, and findings. It builds understanding in the form of models or theories that can be tested. Advances in scientific knowledge are achieved by the self-regulating norms of the scientific community over time, not, as sometimes believed, by the mechanistic application of a particular scientific method to a static set of questions (National Research Council, 2002, p. 2).

The recommendations of the North Carolina State Board of Education’s Literacy Task Force are:

#### **Pre-Service Preparation and Licensure**

**Recommendation 1:** Set clear expectations that early childhood, elementary, special education, and educational leadership preparation programs align their curriculum to the principles and practices identified in the Standards for the Preparation of Literacy

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<sup>1</sup> See *Compelling Scientific Evidence on Reading Instruction*, located [here](#).

Professionals 2017 (ILA, 2018) and the International Dyslexia Association Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading (2018).

**Recommendation 2:** Require all Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) to engage candidates in intentionally sequenced clinical experiences that include opportunities to:

- a) Observe literacy teaching practices (e.g., faculty, university supervisors, mentors) that reflect the principles and practices of the current science of reading
- b) Engage in early, deliberate and sustained practice opportunities during which candidates enact the principles and practices associated with the current science of reading (e.g., low-stakes practice with teacher educators and peers; authentic practice opportunities with children in early and elementary settings),
- c) Receive substantive and actionable feedback on enacted teaching practice using an observation instrument focused on the principles and practices identified within the current science of reading, especially as it relates to the teaching of reading.

**Recommendation 3:** Direct the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Local Education Agencies, Educator Preparation Programs (EPP), non-profit agencies, and community stakeholders to collaborate on the alignment between pre-service educator preparation of early childhood, elementary, and special education candidates and the expectations and professional development of in-service teachers. Related recommendations include:

Advocate for, identify, and distribute funds to support EPPs and their P-12 partners to develop and implement redesigned programs. To that end, EPPs should:

- a) Design and refine coursework grounded in principles and practices aligned with the current science of reading and the Standards for Reading Professionals.
- b) Provide high-quality clinical experiences and coursework that increase in complexity over time.
- c) Develop and implement meaningful and common assessment(s) of candidate learning; these data can also be used to inform the continuous improvement of EPPs.

And LEAs should:

- a) Design and refine professional development for in-service teachers grounded in principles and practices identified within current science of reading.
- b) Develop meaningful and common assessment(s) of teacher learning as well as clear methods for feedback to teachers; these data can also be used to inform the continuous improvement of instructional programs.

**Recommendation 4:** Provide compensation incentives for teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and school leaders with a master’s degree in reading or a master’s level reading specialist certification from an approved EPP.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop a comprehensive statewide strategic plan for recruiting and retaining underrepresented, diverse candidates to become early childhood, elementary, English Language Learner, and special education teachers trained in the current science of reading.

**Recommendation 6:** Require all EPP educational leadership programs to include meaningful and in-depth curriculum based on the current science of teaching reading.

**Recommendation 7:** Define a statewide common definition of “ready on day one” to distinguish between a novice teacher of reading and a master teacher of reading.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Resources**

**Recommendation 1:** Create guidance and resources to support the understanding of the current science of reading. (e.g., definition, model, framework, resources for teachers, caregivers, and families)

**Recommendation 2:** Identify, fund, and implement a valid and reliable literacy screener or diagnostic that aligns with the current science of reading and administer to all K-3 students and to fourth and fifth graders who are below grade level in reading.

**Recommendation 3:** Define criteria for selecting evidence-based instructional resources (core instruction, supplemental instruction, and intensive intervention) that are aligned to the current science of reading. Assist public school units with identification of instructional curriculum and resources that meet the criteria for alignment with the current science of reading.

**Recommendation 4:** Allocate funding for only evidence-based instructional resources (core instruction, supplemental instruction, and intensive intervention) aligned to the current science of reading so every K-5 student has equitable access to evidence-based literacy curriculum and instructional materials.

**Recommendation 5:** Allocate funding for only high quality professional development and job-embedded coaching so all teachers receive consistent feedback and support to implement the district-selected evidence-based resources (core instruction, supplemental instruction, and intensive intervention) aligned to the current science of reading.

**Recommendation 6:** In order to support the highest quality reading instruction, develop an implementation rubric aligned to the current science of reading. This tool could be used by teachers, school leaders, and district leaders to assess and reflect on the implementation of instructional practices and strategies aligned with the current science of reading.

**Recommendation 7:** Align all NCDPI created, purchased and shared literacy resources with the current science of reading, including, but not limited to, formative and summative assessments, shared resource banks, state-purchased literacy materials, or shared digital content.

### **Professional Development**

**Recommendation 1:** Allocate funding to support ongoing professional development for K-5 teachers, teacher leaders, literacy coaches, and school leaders. This professional development will address the current science of reading, utilizing multiple learning approaches, job-embedded coaching, and a variety of digital platforms.

**Recommendation 2:** Fund literacy coaches for every elementary school, with at least one coach dedicated to grades K-2 and one coach dedicated to grades 3-5.

**Recommendation 3:** Establish advanced degree compensation for K-5 literacy coaches trained in the current science of reading.

**Recommendation 4:** Require 30 contact hours of literacy professional development based on the current science of reading for elementary teacher licensure renewal.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop and offer an early literacy micro-credential (at least 60 contact hours) that requires candidates to demonstrate proficiency in the acquisition of language (syntax, semantics, morphology, and pragmatics), phonological and phonemic awareness, accurate and efficient word identification and spelling, world knowledge, and comprehension.

**Recommendation 6:** Require five contact hours for literacy professional development based on the current science of reading for principal licensure renewal.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide opportunities and incentives for educators who work with pre-service teachers, including clinical faculty, mentors, and university supervisors, to engage in professional learning opportunities to enhance their ability to support candidates' enactment of principles and practices identified within seminal and current research that result in a literacy credential. The State Board of Education should work with EPPs to convene a team of NC literacy experts to identify or develop online, self-paced and face-to-face training modules. Training modules should cover principles of the current science of reading focused on reading and evidence-based methods (e.g. modeling, practice and feedback).



## References

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016).

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