

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly two-thirds of students across the country are failing to meet grade-level reading expectations. Research shows that children who cannot read proficiently by third grade are more likely to struggle academically, drop out, and face limited life opportunities. To address this, reading instruction must be grounded in the science of reading, which emphasizes explicit teaching of phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. When states align teacher training, materials, and interventions with this evidence-based approach, reading outcomes improve significantly.

Governors are uniquely positioned to set a vision, direct resources, align legislation, convene stakeholders, and hold systems accountable for ensuring every child learns to read. Strengthening reading outcomes today creates the foundation for America's future success – opening doors of opportunity for children, building more informed and engaged citizens, and fueling the long-term success of states and our nation.

What Is the Science of Reading?

The science of reading refers to rigorous research that tells us how children learn to read, which has been developed over the last 50 years or more. Based on this research, we now know that effective reading instruction should include a focus on five elements: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.**

National Reading Data Snapshot

NAEP – Grade 4	NAEP – Grade 8
30%	29%
The percentage of fourth graders nationwide who earned a score of Proficient or above on the 2024 assessment.	The percentage of eighth graders nationwide who earned a score of Proficient or above on the 2024 assessment.

George W. Bush Institute's Reading Framework

Strong policy efforts should focus on these four categories:

- A. **Educator Preparation:** Ensure new teachers learn how to teach reading correctly.
- B. **High-Quality Professional Learning and Development:** Ensure that sitting educators understand the science of reading and receive ongoing coaching and support.
- C. **High-Quality Instructional Materials:** Ensure that educators have access to instructional materials that align with the science of reading.
- D. **Screening and Intervening:** Ensure that educators use screeners and interventions that align with the science of reading to help identify and support struggling readers.



Policy and Implementation Snapshot

This section offers an overview of the **Bush Institute Reading Framework**, which is based on nationally recognized best practices in four categories of policy and implementation:

Educator Preparation

- ☐ The state has established comprehensive reading standards that educator preparation programs are required to implement.
- ☐ The state holds sole authority to approve and renew educator preparation programs.
- ☐ Educator preparation programs are required to use a Structured Literacy framework, encompassing explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- ☐ Educator preparation programs provide explicit instruction on meeting the needs of English learners and struggling readers.
- ☐ State licensure requirements for elementary teachers include a reading assessment aligned with the science of reading.
- ☐ Educator preparation programs publicly report licensure exam pass rates – both first attempt and best attempt – and this data is made available by the state education agency.

High-Quality Professional Learning and Development

- ☐ All elementary teachers are required to complete training in evidence-based reading instruction aligned with the science of reading.
- ☐ Middle-grade teachers are required to complete training in the science of reading, particularly as it applies to adolescent literacy and content-area instruction.
- ☐ The state reviews and identifies high-quality professional learning programs in reading instruction and either mandates or recommends their adoption by school districts.

High-Quality Instructional Materials

- ☐ The state promotes curriculum quality by reviewing materials – or endorsing third-party reviews – for alignment with the science of reading and state standards, and either recommends, incentivizes, or mandates the adoption of vetted programs by districts.
- ☐ The state provides districts with tools and guidance to support curriculum selection, such as evaluation rubrics aligned to state standards and criteria for assessing the quality of support for English learners and struggling readers.
- ☐ The state collects and publicly reports district-level data on adopted reading curricula or requires districts to publish this information.

Screening and Intervening

- ☐ Students are assessed using a universal reading screener three times per year in grades K-3 and in higher grades for struggling readers.
- ☐ The state requires schools to notify parents if their child has been identified as at risk of having a reading difficulty.
- ☐ Students who have been identified as having a reading difficulty receive an individual reading plan from their school, which provides them with access to supplemental support such as tutoring.

