

8 Recommendations & Equity Considerations for Advocates to Shape & Strengthen State Literacy Policies

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Implementing comprehensive policy to support stronger, more equitable reading outcomes involves several policy levers. The following recommendations and their associated “equity considerations” are intended to help advocates and state policymakers understand how various policies can be adopted — or strengthened — to explicitly support students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners as they learn to read.

1. Require or heavily incentivize districts to select and adopt evidence-aligned curricular materials that reflect a wide range of students’ backgrounds, identities, and interests. This sets the expectation for — and enables conditions for — educators to provide evidence-based instruction that students can connect with.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Policy or associated guidance requiring the state to produce a list of materials that considers how well core and supplemental curricular materials:
 - Align to evidence-based reading instruction
 - Represent students’ various backgrounds, identities, and interests
 - Integrate resources to support multilingual learners (MLLs) and struggling readers
- Funding or other incentives to ensure that under-resourced districts can procure and implement evidence-aligned materials
- Reporting requirements on school and district implementation and use of evidence-based materials
- State resources, technical assistance, and monitoring to ensure the equitable implementation of high-quality instructional materials for all students

2. Require current K-8 educators — including classroom teachers, special education teachers, and administrators — to complete evidence-based, rigorous professional learning opportunities. This helps empower educators to master — and build confidence in — delivering evidence-based approaches to teaching reading.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- In addition to the core tenets of evidence-based reading instruction, professional development opportunities that adequately address:
 - The additional and differentiated instruction and supports many multilingual learners require
 - The common indicators of dyslexia and the differentiated instruction and support dyslexic students require
 - The additional support that struggling older readers may require with foundational skills
 - Asset-based strategies to support students with various dialects
 - How to accurately interpret screening and diagnostic assessment results and differentiate instructional approaches accordingly
 - Communicate students' reading progress accurately, transparently, and in a culturally competent, asset-based manner to underscore students' strengths and areas for improvement
 - Approaches to meaningfully partner with students and their families to work together to support students' reading development
- Reporting requirements on professional development course offerings and completion by school and district
- Literacy coaches deployed strategically in schools and districts with the highest need

3. Require schools to administer evidence-aligned, K-3 assessments, including universal and dyslexia screeners, to evaluate students' reading development and identify students who may be at risk for dyslexia. For grades three through eight, require or incentivize districts to administer evidence-based assessments to identify older students who struggle with foundational reading skills in more complex, grade-level text. This provides schools and families with the high-quality data they need to support students as growing readers.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Policy and/or associated guidance requiring the state to produce an approved list of universal and dyslexia screeners that are normed and validated with a sample of multilingual learners and students with various dialects
- Funding and guidance to help under-resourced districts procure and implement evidence-aligned assessments

- 4. Require schools to notify a student’s family of assessment results and what those results indicate about their reading progress.** This empowers families with transparent and honest information about their child’s literacy development.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Policy or accompanying guidance stipulating that families must be notified of their child’s reading results in a timely manner, in their home language and in plain, accessible language, through multiple channels, and in context alongside their child’s strengths
- Requirement that schools must offer to meet with students and their families when their assessment results indicate that they are falling behind grade-level reading expectations to co-create individualized reading plans that outline specific strategies, interventions, and goals tailored to each student’s needs, as well as ways to support literacy development at home
- Professional development on how to discuss assessment results with students and their families and build shared responsibility
- If the state has a third-grade retention policy,¹ a requirement that schools provide transparent, timely information to students and families about this requirement and available opportunities to pursue exemptions or opt their student out of repeating the grade

- 5. Require schools to provide multi-tiered levels of evidence-based support for students who need additional assistance.** This helps ensure that students receive the targeted, differentiated support they need to become skillful, engaged readers.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Incentives or programs that support the hiring and retention of specialists effective at providing evidence-based, differentiated supports for various student groups — such as multilingual learners, struggling older readers, and students with disabilities — in schools with the greatest need
- Initiatives, funding, and other incentives to help under-resourced districts procure and implement evidence-aligned supports, such as purchasing supplemental curricular materials or matching compensation to secure highly trained tutors
- Requirements or incentives that encourage schools to assign their most effective reading teachers, specialists, and other support staff to teach students with the greatest levels of need

For all the recommendations discussed, strong policy is fundamental to setting a foundation for stronger, more equitable reading outcomes. But without thoughtful implementation, even the strongest policies may fall short.

For example, advocates play a crucial role in ensuring that all students receive the timely, targeted support they need to thrive as readers. EdTrust’s [Reading Interventions Policy Guide](#) identifies five questions that advocates can ask school and district leaders to ensure students have equitable access to early, targeted, and evidence-based reading interventions.

6. Increase access and funding to high-quality early learning and development programs for children from underserved backgrounds. This allows children to develop strong “pre-literacy” skills, which lay an important foundation for learning to read.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Adequate state-level funding to supplement the fractured, [endangered](#) federal funds that provide quality early care for children from low-income backgrounds.
- Requirement for states to collect and publish the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic demographics of enrollees in their state-funded preschool programs, which can be used to track progress in advancing access to high-quality early learning programs
- Expanding access to high-quality programs by adjusting subsidy reimbursement rates based on geography and providing funding and support to encourage providers to locate in underserved communities
- Home visiting programs that connect families with trained professionals who provide guidance on early language development
- Book programs that expand access to culturally diverse books and work with families to read with their children
- Programs that coordinate with community organizations, pediatric offices, and other trusted public service providers to nurture children’s holistic development and learning, including a strong “reading identity”

7. Set strong, specific standards and coursework requirements for teacher preparation programs. This ensures that incoming teachers receive a background in evidence-based reading instruction.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- In addition to the core tenets of evidence-based reading instruction that apply to all readers, standards and coursework that address:
 - Differentiated reading instruction for a range of learners, including multilingual learners and dyslexic learners
 - How to understand, use, and communicate assessment information to support equitable, asset-based reading instruction
 - Strategies for meaningful, asset-based family engagement opportunities to support students’ reading development
- Transparent monitoring and evaluation of teacher preparation programs’ adherence to state standards
- Strategic investments in strong, flexible pathways into the teaching profession, such as [Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs \(RTAP\)](#), that simultaneously provide candidates with a background in evidence-based reading instruction.

8. Verify that incoming elementary teachers have a baseline knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction via strong licensure requirements. This helps ensure that students are taught to read by well-prepared educators, especially given that [Black](#) and [Latino](#) students are more likely to be taught by novice teachers who are just entering the profession.

Equity Considerations to Look for:

- Strong, flexible pathways into the teaching profession that successfully prepare candidates to pass their licensure exam
- Funding for fee waivers or reimbursements that cover the cost of licensure exam fees or re-take attempts
- Transparent and accessible public data on the percentage of newly hired teachers who enter the classroom without full licensure status and the schools in which they teach

Some student groups — including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and older readers — require additional and differentiated instruction to thrive as growing readers. Specific, evidence-based policy recommendations can help schools support students' literacy success. However, these specific recommendations require additional context and are beyond the scope of this particular document. We aim to develop resources in the future that address these considerations.

Endnote

1. Third grade retention policies offer an inequitable and ineffective response to support students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes over time. However, in the several states where legislation makes this extra year required or optional for struggling readers, families and caregivers must understand the processes and timelines associated with grade retention.