

Strengthening Idaho's Implementation of the Science of Reading through Teacher Preparation

Literacy is critical for success in school and life beyond the classroom, and effective elementary teachers are essential to improving students' ability to read. Increasingly states are taking a lead role in ensuring teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to teach reading.

This work is critical given that research suggests that more than 90% of students would learn to read if they were provided strong reading instruction.¹ **In other words, approximately 6,833 more fourth grade students in Idaho would be skilled readers each year if they received effective reading instruction.**

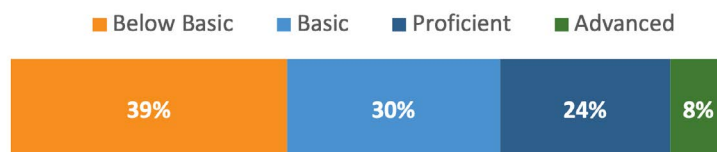
Teacher preparation programs are key partners in ensuring that the next generation of teachers understand scientifically based reading instruction and how to teach its five core components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Furthermore, all teachers must be prepared to teach a diverse range of learners, including English learners, struggling readers, and students who speak English language varieties other than General American English. **Yet, far too many elementary teacher preparation programs are failing to meet the mark.**

The stakes for students in Idaho

In Idaho, **only 61% of fourth grade students read at or above a basic level**, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Outcomes are even more troubling for some of Idaho's historically underserved students. This means an estimated 9,222 current fourth grade students are still struggling with foundational reading skills and are unprepared to engage in the more complex work appropriate for their grade, such as sequencing events from a story.

The consequences are long-lasting. Students who are not reading at grade level by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school,² increasing their risk of lower lifetime earnings,³ higher unemployment,⁴ and involvement with the criminal justice system.⁵

Idaho's Grade 4 2024 NAEP Reading Results

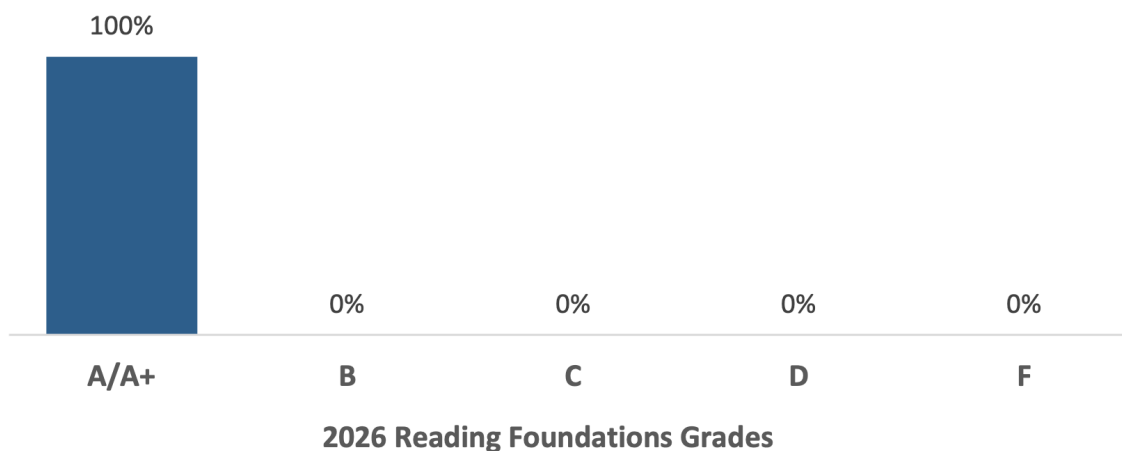


These outcomes are largely driven by inequitable access to high-quality reading instruction—a challenge that strong state policy can directly address.

Idaho's teacher prep programs are the key to unlocking change

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), an education research and policy nonprofit, evaluated **7 elementary teacher preparation programs in Idaho** to assess whether they provide sufficient instruction in the reading components, including opportunities to practice, objective measures of knowledge, use of high-quality instructional materials, and preparation to support diverse learners. To learn more, see the [2026 Teacher Prep Review: Decoding progress in reading preparation](#).

100% of Idaho's programs earn an A or A+ by adequately covering the five core components of scientifically based reading instruction



In Idaho, there is cause for cautious optimism. All of the reviewed teacher preparation programs have aligned to the reading research. However, programs also need to do more to attend to the needs of vulnerable student groups like English learners and struggling readers, including students with dyslexia.

- 57% of programs devote **fewer than two hours** of instructional time to supporting English learners.
- 14% of programs devote **fewer than two hours** of instructional time to supporting struggling readers.
- 100% of programs devote **fewer than two hours** of instructional time to supporting speakers of English language varieties.

Every teacher preparation program in Idaho was forthcoming about how they teach reading. This transparency provides state policymakers, advocates, and the public clear information about which programs are placing new teachers in classrooms with the knowledge of how to teach their students to read successfully.

100% *of programs we attempted to evaluate in Idaho provided documentation for review.*

Are Idaho's policies to improve reading comprehensive?

Strengthening reading instruction in Idaho requires coherent policy action. In 2024, NCTQ published a [reading policy framework](#) outlining five necessary policies to ensure your state's workforce can implement scientifically based reading instruction and sustain it over time. Three of those policies are related to teacher prep.

Idaho's performance on state teacher prep reading policy

✓ YES ✗ NO

Teacher prep standards	Does state law or regulation include specific, detailed standards for all five core reading components for elementary teacher prep programs?	✓
	Does the state include how to teach reading to English learners within the reading standards for teacher prep programs?	✓
	Does the state incorporate how to teach struggling readers, including those with dyslexia, in the reading standards for teacher prep programs?	✓

✓ YES ✗ NO

Teacher prep program approval	Does the state review the syllabi for reading courses to determine the integration of all reading standards and the science of reading as part of the program renewal process?	✗
	Does the state include reading specialists/experts in the review of reading instruction in elementary teacher preparation programs as part of the program renewal process?	✗
Elementary reading licensure test	Does the state use at least an acceptable reading licensure test for elementary teacher candidates?	✓

Recommendations for state leaders:

- Set specific, explicit, and comprehensive preparation standards for scientifically based reading instruction.
- Use the program review process to ensure that all prep programs are aligned to scientifically based reading instruction.
- Prevent teacher preparation programs from teaching practices contrary to the research.
- Adopt a high-quality reading licensure test aligned to scientifically based reading instruction.
- Reinforce the importance of attending to the needs of vulnerable students.
- Do not let programs hide from accountability.

Questions? Contact Ron Noble, Chief of Teacher Prep, at ron.noble@nctq.org.

¹ Torgesen, J. K. (2004). Preventing early reading failure. *American Educator*, 28(3), 6–9.

² Hernandez, D. J. (2012). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

³ Tamborini, C. R., Kim, C., & Sakamoto, A. (2015). Education and lifetime earnings in the United States. *Demography*, 52(4), 1383–1407.

⁴ Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., & Kewal Ramani, A. (2011). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 1972–2009*. (Compendium Report. NCES 2012-006). National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/dropout/intro.asp>

⁵ Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., & Kewal Ramani, A. (2011); Harlow, C. W. (2003). *Education and Correctional Populations*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>

Teacher Prep Program Grades in Idaho

School	Program Level	Grade	Adequate coverage of core components: Graded (Up to 12 points per component; 8 points for adequate coverage; 4 or more contrary practices results in letter grade deduction)						Support for a range of learners: Ungraded (Up to 8 points per group)		
			Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Count of Contrary Practices	Struggling readers	ELLs	Speakers of language varieties
Boise State University	UG	A+	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	0	8 pts	0.39 pts	0 pts
Brigham Young University - Idaho	UG	A	Yes (8.55 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (9 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	0	8 pts	2 pts	0 pts
Idaho State University	UG	A	Yes (11.6 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (10.5 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	1	1 pts	2.75 pts	0 pts
Lewis-Clark State College	UG	A	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	1	6 pts	7 pts	0 pts
Northwest Nazarene University	UG	A+	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	0	8 pts	8 pts	2 pts
Northwest Nazarene University	G	A+	Yes (10.72 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (12 pts)	Yes (11.75 pts)	0	8 pts	3 pts	0 pts
University of Idaho	UG	A+	Yes (10.62 pts)	Yes (9.77 pts)	Yes (11 pts)	Yes (10 pts)	Yes (8.87 pts)	0	6 pts	6 pts	0 pts