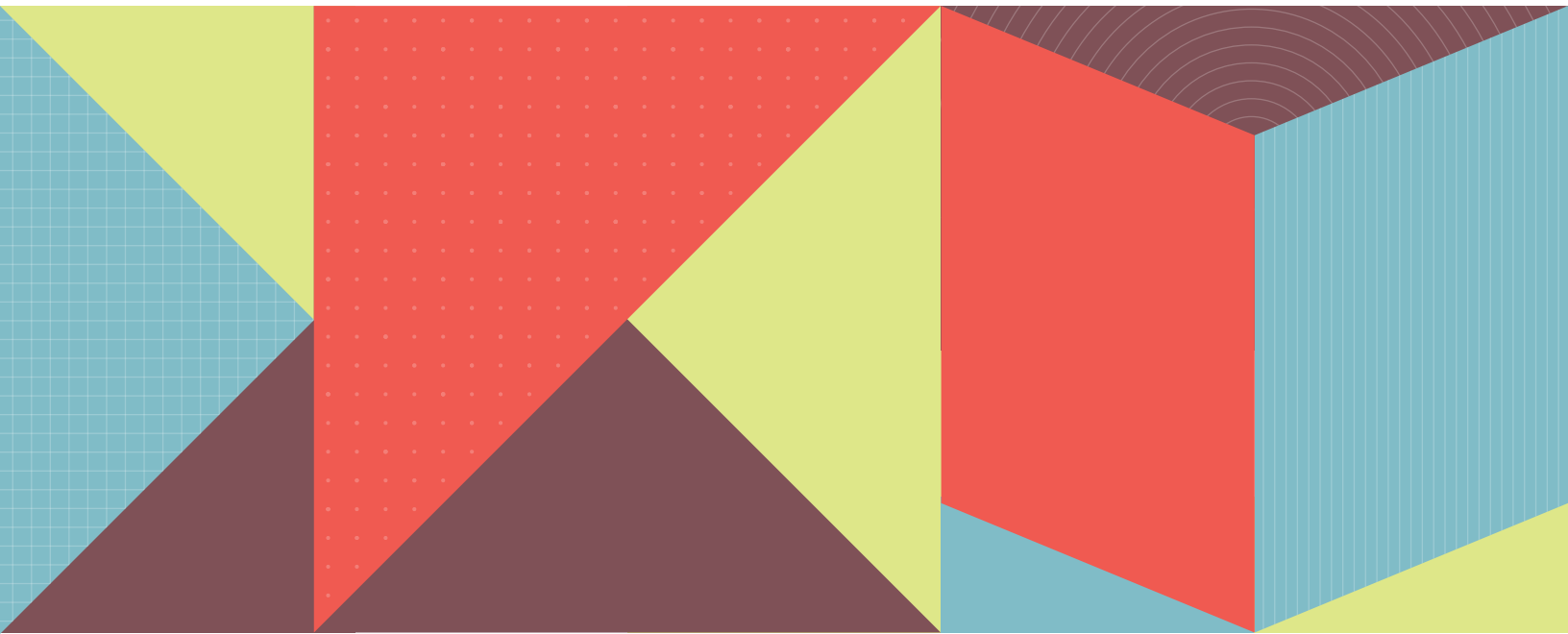


# A Call to Action on Literacy in Minnesota

Recommendations By

**MINNESOTA'S PATH FORWARD LITERACY TEAM**



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## **MINNESOTA'S PATH FORWARD LITERACY TEAM**

The contributors to this report come from a variety of backgrounds, including higher education, state government, policy research and advocacy, business, and non-profit organizations. Many are classroom teachers. Despite the diversity of their backgrounds, **they are united in their deep commitment to improving literacy outcomes in Minnesota.**

The Hunt Institute provided the framework for building the plan and strategy on how to carry it forward. The Hunt Institute is a nonprofit organization that aims to provide unbiased research, technical expertise, and learning opportunities that equip and empower educators and policymakers to drive equitable reforms and become audacious champions for education.

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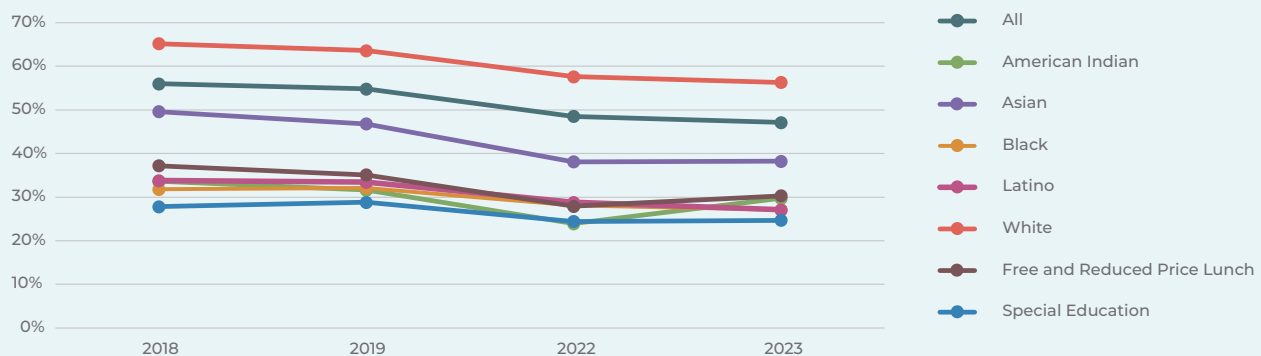
Advises CEO-powered organization leading efforts to ensure all children have access to quality education, accelerate strategies to closing education disparities, and develop a diverse, high-quality talent pipeline to power Minnesota's economy.

# Minnesota's Literacy Crisis

Minnesota's literacy problem is well-documented, persistent, and at a crossroads. The Read Act, a sweeping \$90 million literacy bill that passed in the 2023 legislative session, aims to better align teaching in all corners of the state with evidence on the way children in Minnesota learn to read. This shift in practice is a direct response to Minnesota's lackluster literacy scores.<sup>1</sup> While Minnesota's aggregate reading scores have historically placed it ahead of national averages, the numbers are still relatively low. Based on the most recent Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment exam (MCA), **just half of all students are proficient in reading.**<sup>2</sup>

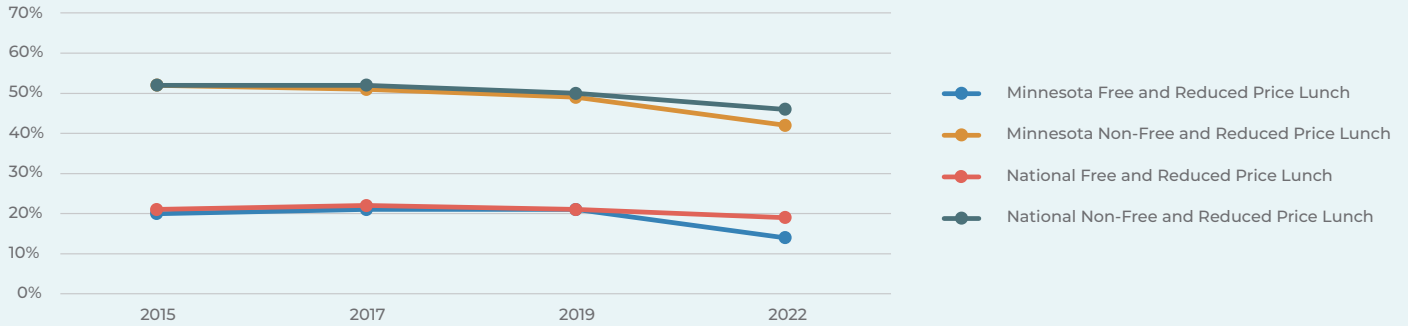
Furthermore, these averages mask extreme racial and socioeconomic disparities. **Students of color, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latino students, consistently score more than 25 percentage points lower than their white peers on the MCA.** On the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), low-income students in Minnesota perform an average of 30 points lower than their higher-income peers.<sup>3</sup> In 2023, only 34% of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch met or exceeded reading standards on the MCA. The COVID-19 pandemic only made the problem worse, with reading scores dropping across the board.<sup>4</sup> From 2022-2023, the first full year without significant COVID-related school disruptions, MCA scores remained stagnant, confirming what many already knew: we need to change our approach to literacy instruction.

## 3RD GRADE MCA READING: PERCENT MEETING OR EXCEEDING STANDARDS



Source: The Nation's Report Card, NAEP Data Explorer. Accessed October 2023

## 4TH GRADE NAEP READING: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT



Source: The Nation's Report Card, NAEP Data Explorer. Accessed October 2023

In addition to the evidence from student outcomes and standardized testing, a recent report published by the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at University of Minnesota found that **only 62% of public schools and charters in the state report what reading curriculum they use, despite it being a requirement in law.**<sup>5,6</sup> Of those that do report, 68% are not using curriculum aligned to the Science of Reading (SoR), a multidisciplinary body of research focused on how the brain learns to read, the pillars of which are widely considered to be essential to effective literacy instruction.<sup>7</sup> If literacy rates in Minnesota are going to improve, we must ensure that all districts and charter schools are using evidence-based curricula and being transparent with families and the general public about what literacy practices they employ.

Furthermore, knowledge and buy-in from large swaths of our society are required. While educators and schools will play a lead role in improving literacy outcomes, they are not the only stakeholders. For example, juvenile detention centers provide educational opportunities for Minnesota's youth. Pediatricians and other physicians often field questions from concerned parents regarding their child's struggles with reading. The scope of this report is focused on pre-service teachers and current educators, but they are not the only adults who need to know how to help. Any organization that provides youth services should be informed and engaged on literacy.



# The Read Act: A Promising Start

Before describing our proposed action plan and policy recommendations, it's important to discuss the Read Act, a \$90 million literacy bill passed in the 2023 legislative session.<sup>8</sup> Through a variety of investments and foundational changes, the Read Act will be integral to the efforts to close racial achievement gaps and overall unacceptable literacy levels. Despite its importance, it is not sufficient alone; our plan builds on and expands from the Read Act.

The Read Act comes at a time when many states have passed similar policies, most of which are framed around the Science of Reading (SoR), a multidisciplinary body of research focused on how the brain learns to read. SoR is the basis of Minnesota's Read Act, though that term is not used in the legislation, which instead refers to "evidence-based practices." The mechanisms are the same, based on the five pillars of literacy as defined in SoR scholarship: *phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension*.<sup>9</sup>

LITERACY PILLAR	DEFINITION
<b>Phonemic awareness</b>	The understanding that spoken words are made up of separate units of sounds that blend together
<b>Phonics</b>	Rules that specify the relationship between letters in the spelling of words and the sounds of spoken language
<b>Fluency</b>	Recognizing words rapidly and accurately; using phrasing and emphasis to make written words sound like spoken language
<b>Vocabulary, including oral language</b>	Words we need to know to communicate with others, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing
<b>Comprehension</b>	Connecting what has been read to what the reader already knows to construct the meaning of the text

The Read Act starts with the goal of every child in Minnesota reading at or above grade level every year, beginning in kindergarten. Here's how it proposes we get there:

- **Requiring Evidence-Based Instruction:** Districts and charter schools must provide “evidence-based” reading instruction based on the following principles of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, oral language, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. They are also prohibited from using “three-cueing,” a strategy disproven in the literature. Any new curriculum purchased must meet these requirements.
- **Teacher Training:** Districts must provide teachers and staff—starting with K-3 teachers and interventionists—with training on evidence-based reading instruction, which must be approved by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Each district will also be required to hire a literacy lead.
- **Regular K-3 Screenings:** All students in kindergarten through third grade will be screened twice a year for both reading mastery and dyslexia – once at the beginning and again at the end.
- **Monitoring Students Who are Behind:** Students in grade 4 and up who are not proficient in reading will continue to be screened for dyslexia and monitored until they are at grade-level.
- **Targeted Interventions:** All students not reading at grade level by the end of the school year will receive intervention services, including but not limited to: summer school, intensified instruction during the school day, and extended day. These interventions must be taught by a teacher who has completed training in evidence-based instruction. The law encourages but doesn't require these students to have a personal learning plan.
- **Annual Local Literacy Plans:** School districts are required to publish annual local literacy plans, including information on: how many students are (and are not) proficient in reading, the number of students with dyslexia, what interventions are planned for students requiring them, the number of staff who have completed training, the reading curriculum they use, and the process for notifying and involving parents in reading intervention.

The law also includes a partnership between MDE and the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota to help implement the policy statewide. They will work together to identify curricula that meet the new standards, create professional development for teachers and staff, identify evidence-based reading interventions, and more.

Another key provision is that teacher preparation providers must add instruction on evidence-based literacy practices. This will help ensure aspiring teachers are prepared to teach reading effectively.

While the wheels of the policy are already moving, it will take a few years for all changes to be fully introduced. The Read Act gives districts and schools a few years to train all their staff and implement new curriculum. For example, districts have until the 2026-27 school year until they are required to provide “evidence-based” instruction. While some schools and districts may shift their instructional practices sooner, others may not notice a change in their child's reading instruction until the fall of 2026.

Some pieces of the legislation are already underway. CAREI and MDE have started to identify appropriate curricula & universal screeners, develop the training that teachers and staff will receive, and select evidence-based interventions for struggling readers. As of January 1, 2024, districts and families can see the list of approved curricula on the Department of Education website. Approved professional development programs were made public on August 15, 2023. They are:

- Advanced Language and Literacy (CAREIALL); University of Minnesota
- Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Reading (CORE); Online Elementary Reading Academy + Language Conventions and Writing Fundamentals
- Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS); Lexia

The next change that the public can expect to see are districts' local literacy plans, which they are required to publish every year starting in June of 2024. That means that starting next summer, all Minnesota families will have access to information on how their district will implement all of these sweeping changes to literacy instruction and support.

The legislature appropriated nearly \$90 million to implement the Read Act:

- \$35 million is dedicated to districts for purchasing new curriculum and materials that align with the new standards.
- \$50 million will go towards professional development costs for teachers and staff.
- CAREI is receiving \$4.2 million for their services, including reviewing materials and developing trainings.
- Finally, MDE will get \$500,000 over two years, where they will be required to add a full-time statewide literacy lead.

All of these funds are available until June 30, 2028, presumably to ensure that both the state and districts have ample time to select new curricula & materials, make sure their staff are well-trained, and implement such a big change.



# Where We Go From Here: Proposed Action Plan

In order to meaningfully improve literacy in Minnesota, many different systems and constituents need to work together, make changes, and follow action plans with fidelity. The Read Act provides a strong compass for this effort, but it is not enough. The policy is missing some critical pieces, and there are other necessary improvements that are outside the scope of the legislature. As previously discussed, this report is not an exhaustive compilation of how literacy rates can be improved.

Our proposed action plan focuses on three core areas of change: **science of reading knowledge, science of reading practice, and funding the science of reading**. Each core area is described, followed by what its desired state would look like. Then, we highlight any policies included in the Read Act that will contribute to the desired state of each core area. Finally, this section concludes with policy recommendations to advance our goals not included in the Read Act. All of the plans below are centered around the following goals:

<b>FOR STUDENTS:</b>	80% of Minnesota children reading at or above grade level, as measured by the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, via standard classroom instruction by 2033.
<b>FOR TEACHER PREPARATION:</b>	100% of teacher preparation programs are grounded in the Science of Reading theory, include practicum experiences for candidates, and offer training on the interpretation and actionable use of literacy data. Minnesota will create an accountability and continuous improvement system for teacher preparation programs based on student outcomes.
<b>FOR EDUCATORS:</b>	Every teacher candidate has the foundations of SoR and necessary coaching and mentorship to ensure 80% of Minnesota children are reading at or above grade level via Tier 1 instruction by 2033.

These overarching goals are aligned with the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework, a widely-used educational model that uses targeted support for struggling students. Four essential components of MTSS guided our recommendations: screening, progress monitoring, multi-level prevention system, and data-based decision-making. MTSS focuses on the whole child and when implemented correctly, allows adults to identify and quickly respond to challenges students are facing.

Our goals acknowledge that some students, including those with dyslexia, may need specialized instruction or additional instructional hours to reach proficiency. It is our firm belief that with proper instruction and resources, **every child in Minnesota can read at grade level**.

## **Change Area 1: Science of Reading Knowledge**

Science of Reading knowledge means ensuring that all educators, whether practicing or pre-service, are well-versed in the science of reading. They have received meaningful education and training on evidence-based literacy practices. In addition, SoR knowledge means our state is actively working to de-implement whole language and balanced literacy approaches to teaching reading, strategies we know are not effective. Furthermore, parents, families, and the larger community are informed and engaged on children's literacy. When it comes to science of reading knowledge, our desired state includes:

- All districts are equipped with the knowledge and support to implement and sustain SoR literacy within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework.
- Individual instructors and school- and district-based leadership select and implement high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials that are culturally and linguistically sustaining.
- Educators have a thorough understanding of how reading acquisition occurs and how to implement the five pillars of literacy.
- Teachers are no longer using ineffective practices not based in SoR.
- All reading methods instructors leading teacher preparation have professional development in SoR.
- Program-level assurance that candidates completing teacher preparation are receiving SoR knowledge to be effective literacy instructors when they enter the workforce.
- Pre-service teachers have free access to exemplary SoR textbooks.
- Early learning programs, libraries, community partners and families are engaged to align and support evidence-based language and literacy practices.
- Caregivers are engaged in intentional, collaborative, and equitable family-centered partnerships.
- Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) staff includes a program lead to guide change management from whole language to SoR-based practices.

## **Change Area 2: Science of Reading Practice**

Science of Reading practice looks at how foundational knowledge translates to what happens in the classroom. It means all teacher preparation providers offer ample and meaningful opportunities for teacher candidates to apply their knowledge in classroom settings. It also means that current teachers need to be trained in SoR in order to meet requirements for re-licensure. When it comes to SoR practice, our desired state includes:

- Coaching is provided to teachers and administrators to implement SoR methodology in classrooms.
- All practicing teachers have a baseline-level SoR knowledge, regardless of the content area of their teaching license.

- SoR knowledge is explicitly required for re-licensure.
- Reading endorsements on all teacher licenses are aligned to SoR standards.
- Expanded Communities of Practice for school leaders to build SoR knowledge and collaborate on implementation of best practices.
- Pre-K children are more regularly screened to identify necessary early interventions.
- More at-risk students are matched to an appropriate early intervention service.
- All teacher candidates in elementary education, special education, English as a Second Language, and reading complete teacher preparation with a high-quality, field-based experience in early literacy.
- Teacher candidates are trained in evidence-based curriculum, assessments, and progress monitoring to inform instruction.
- Teacher prep providers and school districts work together to offer all teacher candidates high quality field placements, including student teaching. “High-quality” means grounded in evidence-based curriculum and data-informed progress monitoring with a host teacher trained in SoR.

### **Change Area 3: Funding the Science of Reading**

Funding the Science of Reading means giving districts, schools, and individual educators the resources to effectively implement SoR practices. Strong accountability measures and data systems need to ensure that state funding for literacy is being used appropriately and effectively. Furthermore, policymakers must ensure that the maintenance of statewide data systems is adequately funded so they are truly effective. Our desired state for SoR funding includes:

- All funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis, to the school building level rather than the district level, and earmarked specifically for SoR implementation and support. This would eliminate the requirement to complete a grant application in order to receive literacy funding.
- In order to qualify for Literacy Incentive Aid, recipients must demonstrate progress based on student outcomes through transparency and accountability requirements established by the state.
- State-level data collection and analysis procedures related to literacy outcomes are improved and funded appropriately, including PreK-3 reading data that is centered on individual growth and development indicators.
- School leaders and educators use actionable data on student outcomes, program and curriculum efficacy, and statewide literacy trends to make decisions.

## **What's Included in the Read Act?**

The following provisions in the Read Act will contribute to the goals described in the desired state section for SoR knowledge, practice, and funding:

- School districts are “strongly encouraged” to utilize an MTSS framework for reading intervention. MTSS, or “multi-tiered systems of support,” is the state’s systemic, continuous school improvement framework for ensuring positive social, emotional, behavioral, developmental, and academic outcomes for every student.
- All districts must provide “evidence-based” literacy instruction by the 2026–27 school year, including selecting curriculum from an approved menu of options prepared by the MDE and CAREI at the University of Minnesota.
- All PreK–12 teachers are required to have training in SoR instruction by 2027; some educators, depending on their role, are required to complete such training earlier, by 2025.
- The professional development offered by districts must be selected from an approved list, developed by MDE and CAREI to be consistent with SoR.
- Teacher preparation programs are required to offer coursework in “evidence-based best practices,” specifically including the five pillars of literacy instruction.
- Parents of students who are not reading at grade level must be notified about their child’s proficiency, the services being offered to them, and strategies they can use at home to improve reading skills.
- PELSB is required to adopt rules for Tier 3 and 4 license renewals to be consistent with the new provisions in the Read Act.
- Anything purchased using Read Act funding for curriculum and intervention materials must fall under “evidence-based” literacy practices.
- \$34.95 million is allocated for professional development that is aligned with SoR.
- While districts are still required to apply for Literacy Incentive Aid, its uses are now explicitly defined in statute and may only be used for SoR implementation.

## **Further Recommendations: Beyond the Read Act**

While the Read Act represents a huge step forward in literacy practices for the state of Minnesota, it is not exhaustive. As described in the previous section, there is room for improvement in each of the three core areas. The policy recommendations below build on the Read Act and would allow for an even more robust culture of literacy in Minnesota. These recommendations are a mix of the legislative, state agency, and implementation levels.

### Recommendations for Increasing SoR Knowledge

- In statute, require, rather than “encourage,” districts to use the MTSS framework in instruction and intervention plans.
- Require all reading methods instructors in teacher preparation programs to complete professional development in SoR, both in rule and statute.

- Expand literacy training and professional development requirements to include Tier 1 and 2 teachers.
- Ensure that the Board of School Administrators strengthens licensure and relicensure for school administrators to include a focus on SoR in guidance and in any future rulemaking.
- Create a statewide, free-access database of exemplary SoR textbooks for pre-service teachers.
- Hire a program lead within PELSB to collaborate with MDE's literacy lead to guide change management from whole language to SoR-based practices.
- In addition to education on SoR, ensure that professional development for practicing teachers includes strategies to explicitly phase out ineffective practices like whole language and three-cueing.
- Ensure each district enlists their literacy lead and/or site-based instructional coaches to observe, educate, and support teachers through the de-implementation process.
- Ensure alignment of Principal Academy modules and other professional development for school administrators to Read Act provisions.

#### Recommendations for Increasing SoR Practice

- Expand the screening and monitoring requirements in the Read Act to include pre-K students.
- In both rule and statute, require teacher preparation programs to provide field experience or student teaching for all teacher candidates in each of the five pillars of literacy.
- In coordination with AmeriCorps or another third-party provider, create paid literacy internships for teacher candidates in literacy labs, reading centers, or as tutors.
- Ensure teacher preparation programs are evaluated based on the success of programs' graduates once they are in the classroom, rather than exam scores or student teaching ratings for pre-service candidates, which is how we currently evaluate programs.
- PELSB rulemaking should clarify SoR requirements in initial licensure, reading endorsement, and relicensure policies.
- In field placements and student teaching, require supervising teachers to have SoR training.

#### Recommendations for Increasing SoR Funding

- Create a single accountability system that measures schools' literacy plans and student progress across systems tied back to literacy aid and funding.
- Create and regularly update a public database of how teacher preparation completers are performing, in the aggregate for each provider, based on student outcomes. (The framework for such a database already exists in state law.)<sup>10</sup>
- Defend statewide comparable data systems to allow policymakers and researchers the ability to link funding with school-based plans and student outcomes.



# Minnesota's Current System: Baseline Strengths and Challenges

To provide context for our recommendations, we conducted an assessment of Minnesota's strengths and challenges in literacy education. That analysis is included here to illustrate the rationale behind our recommendations. Minnesota's education system has a unique landscape of strengths, challenges, and stakeholders. Like any other system with a large number of players, each with their own responsibilities, this can lead to a sense of fragmentation. For an overview of the state governance structures influencing education, see Appendix A.

While the education system in Minnesota is large and complex, with countless factors influencing its effectiveness, this section will focus on the strengths and challenges in areas that mirror our recommendations: **educator preparation program design, teacher licensure, and state education funding.**

## **Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Design: Strengths and Challenges**

EPPs in Minnesota include traditional, university-based programs and alternative routes to teacher licensure. Regardless of their format, all approved EPPs in Minnesota must follow the same guidelines. When it comes to preparing teacher candidates to teach literacy, Minnesota has many strengths already in place.

- All EPPs must be approved by PELSB and undergo the following<sup>11</sup>:
  - Review for both initial and continuing approval, including interviews with key stakeholders like teacher candidates and program completers.
  - Meet standards that each program must provide "effective instruction on research-based practices in reading."
  - Undergo program review every three years (programs seeking initial approval in early childhood, elementary, or special education have their reading standards reviewed separately by reading reviewers).
  - Follow specific qualifications for methods of reading instructors, including ongoing professional development.
  - Have program syllabi reviewed to ensure standards alignment.
- EPPs also have statutory requirements for their programming, many of which were updated by the Read Act, including:
  - EPPs must provide "instruction on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension," otherwise known as the five pillars of literacy in the Science of Reading literature.<sup>12</sup>
  - The addition of "multilingual learners and students demonstrating characteristics of dyslexia" to the section in statute requiring EPPs to teach specialized reading instruction for students of all ages and proficiency levels.<sup>13</sup>

- EPPs must also follow standards set by PELSB, sometimes referred to as rules.<sup>14</sup> These include:
  - Reading standards for elementary, early childhood, special education, reading, and reading leader educators were strengthened and fully implemented in 2010. Middle level, secondary, and K-12 licenses also have standards requiring knowledge in teaching reading. These marked a big improvement, but that means we only have about ten years of graduates (new teachers) educated under these standards.
  - Reading methods courses require the application of the five pillars of literacy.
  - Requiring teacher candidates to apply their knowledge. Some institutions have entire classes of future educators working with a partner school and reading teachers to work directly with children.
  - PELSB has a current partner initiative with MDE to review all reading standards in the syllabi of all EPPs statewide.<sup>15</sup>
- All teacher candidates must complete field experience. These requirements are in rule<sup>16</sup>:
  - Field experience must be supervised.
  - 100 hours of field experience are required prior to student teaching, 60 of which must be aligned to the content or scope of the license.
  - Candidates must have experience with diverse groups of learners.
  - Field experience host teachers must be licensed.
  - Mentor teachers for student teaching must have a license aligned to what the candidate is pursuing, have at least three years of experience, and not be on an improvement plan.
  - Candidates in early childhood, elementary, special education, and reading are required to have a field experience tied to reading.<sup>17</sup>

While there are many positive aspects of EPP design, Minnesota’s current system faces challenges. Aspects of EPP design that need improvement include:

- PELSB review panels for EPPs are unpaid peer volunteers. Furthermore, reviewers are not required to have training on the science of reading.
- PELSB does not have a paid literacy expert on staff.
- There is no program-level or statewide data on teacher candidates and their literacy knowledge.
- Requirements for instructors, as determined by PELSB, can make it difficult for universities to fill teaching positions with qualified candidates.
- PELSB does not require reading methods faculty to be trained on the science of reading.<sup>18</sup>
- In teacher preparation coursework, textbooks and other learning materials are the responsibility of instructors, in consultation with other program faculty and the program lead. A recent analysis found that of the thirteen most commonly used reading textbooks in Minnesota EPPs, six were classified as “unacceptable” and none were classified as “exemplary.”<sup>19</sup>
- In terms of standards, or rules, determined by PELSB, Minnesota’s current system faces the following:
  - A lack of centralized rules around reading standards, as standards are spread throughout various rules and in multiple locations across multiple licenses.
  - PELSB rules do not include neuroscience and brain research, reading acquisition models, or the process of orthographic mapping; all key aspects of learning to read.

- There are also areas of improvement in the field placement portion of EPP design:
  - There is no regularly updated database on services or coursework offered by each EPP in the state, making it difficult for potential students and the public to understand what individual EPPs are teaching.
  - The required 100 hours of field experience do not require or guarantee early literacy experience in each of the five essential components of reading instruction.
  - There is a lack of uniform assessment of teacher candidates, what they are learning, and how they are performing.
  - Host teachers are not required to have expertise in literacy or science of reading. Many districts are not currently using curriculum aligned with the science of reading, making it difficult to place students with a host teacher who can meet their needs.<sup>20</sup>

### **Teacher Licensure System: Strengths and Challenges**

Minnesota’s teacher licensure system is an innovative, tier-based model. In response to a 2016 report from the Office of the Legislative Auditor calling the licensure system “broken,” the state changed course the following year and implemented a tiered system.<sup>21</sup> There are four tiers of licensure, ranging from community experts without formal teacher training (Tier 1) to formally trained teachers with three or more years of experience (Tier 4).<sup>22</sup>

Some aspects of tiered licensure were modified with the passage of the Read Act in 2023. While it’s too early to know the effects of these changes, their explicit purpose was to improve reading instruction and outcomes for all Minnesota students, which includes teacher licensure practices. Strengths of the current system include:

- As described in the EPP section, in order to earn initial licensure, teacher candidates must complete preparation programs that are required to offer coursework in the science of reading.
- A specific reading teacher license was established in 2005 (though only twelve programs currently offer this endorsement).<sup>23</sup>
- Teacher licensure renewal requirements include professional development in all five pillars of literacy instruction.

While the passage of the Read Act addressed several aspects of the teacher licensure system, there is still work to be done, including:

- Tier 1 and 2 teachers are not required to have a literacy background or complete reading standards.
- Licensure renewal and professional development opportunities must be universal, not just offered to Tier 3 or 4 teachers.
- The cost of licensure, in time and dollars, is high for both providers and candidates.

## Minnesota Education Funding: Strengths and Challenges

Like most state-level school finance, Minnesota's education funding system is highly complex. Districts receive a base per-pupil dollar amount for each enrolled student, with additional funding for students meeting certain characteristics, such as English Learners and students receiving special education services. The 2023 legislature passed a 4% increase to the per-pupil amount, which will reach \$7,281 by 2025. (After that, the formula increase will be tied to inflation, capped at 3% per year.) There is also additional funding given to districts based on school- or district-wide characteristics, such as the concentration of low-income students or sparsity, for small districts in rural areas that cover a large geographic area. Funding is also sometimes used as an incentive to improve student outcomes.

When it comes to literacy, Minnesota's funding system has several strengths:

- Two-percent of the base funding amount is given to districts for teacher development purposes.<sup>24</sup>
- Literacy Incentive Aid, a specific funding stream for literacy, was improved under the Read Act by mandating that it be used "to support implementation of evidence-based reading instruction," with an established list of acceptable uses.<sup>25</sup>
- The Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System, often referred to as Quality Compensation or Q Comp, is state funding to support teacher effectiveness in advancing student achievement. After the most recent legislative session, this funding will reach nearly \$90 million by fiscal year 2026.<sup>26</sup>

Despite those strengths and the increased funding delivered by the legislature in 2023, there are still improvements to be made in school funding that impacts literacy:

- Funding for school delivery challenges, such as concentration of poverty or sparsity, flow to the district level, which can result in funds not reaching the school sites that generate them. The legislature made some improvements on this in 2023 by requiring 80% of compensatory revenue to remain at the site that generates it.<sup>27</sup>
- Teacher development funding is unreliable because several times it has been eliminated to balance the budget.
- The Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System, or Q Comp, was intended to incentivize best practices in teaching and school leadership, but the lack of focus and accountability around the program's implementation has rendered the funding ultimately ineffective.
- In order to receive literacy incentive aid, districts are required by MDE to submit a Read Well by Third Grade Plan, which not all districts do. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the plans are monitored.

# CONCLUSION

Literacy is the cornerstone of education and necessary for a thriving, healthy society. Kids in Minnesota are counting on us, and in order to meet the moment, we must be willing to take bold action. While it's tempting to rely on old systems, and there's no doubt the transformative change we propose will be difficult, it is our duty to pursue better literacy outcomes for children.

Our report and its recommendations are just a first step. While we aimed to identify immediate strategic priorities, this document is a starting point. Our next steps are to **bring in more community voices to further hone our recommendations, design effective policy, and work to implement best practices.**

As educators, advocates, elected officials, and policy professionals, we insist that the gaps and deficiencies in our current system demand urgent action. Our report provides concrete strategies, grounded in research, to make Minnesota a leader in improving literacy rates and educational attainment of all students, regardless of background. While its focus is relatively narrow in scope, the report offers a blueprint for impactful change. **More action is needed beyond our recommendations, but the time to start is now.**

# Appendix

The governance structure influencing education in Minnesota consists of:

- **Minnesota Department of Education (MDE):** Their team works to develop legislative proposals for consideration by the Governor's office and the Minnesota Legislature. MDE also works with the Office of the Revisor throughout the rulemaking process to post notifications, take public comments, and finalize proposed rules. MDE also ensures that schools and districts are in compliance with federal and state education law and regulations.
- **Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB):** A 13 member governor-appointed board tasked with licensing teachers, establishing and maintaining teacher licensure standards and requirements, and approving and overseeing teacher preparation providers. PELSB has rulemaking authority for teacher licensure and relicensure, program licensure, and unit licensure.
- **Board of School Administrators (BOSA):** This 10 member, governor-appointed member board is responsible for licensing school administrators, approving and overseeing preparation programs for school administrators, and processing requests for continuing education units, the mandatory professional development for school administration. Like PELSB, BOSA has rulemaking authority.
- **Minnesota State Legislature:** Consisting of 134 members in the House of Representatives and 67 members in the Senate, the legislature passes and/or repeals all laws relating to public education. Depending on the legislative session, there are 1–2 K–12 education committees in each body, plus additional committees that address early learning, workforce, and other related issues.

Unlike most states, Minnesota does not have a State Board of Education.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Report Card. Accessed October 2023. <https://rc.education.mn.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Nation's Report Card, NAEP Data Explorer. Accessed October 2023. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE>

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Report Card. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>5</sup> K. Gibbons et al, "Toward addressing and resolving disparities in reading outcomes: A statewide database of curriculum, instruction, and assessments in MN." *Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota*. June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 122B.20, subdivision 4a, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Gibbons, "Toward addressing and resolving disparities in reading outcomes."

<sup>8</sup> Minn. HF. 2497 art. 3, sec. 1. (2023), online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Education Resource Information Center, U.S. Department of Education, "A Closer Look at the Five Essential Components of Reading Instruction: A Review of Scientifically Based Reading

Instruction for Teachers." 2004. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512569.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 122A.091, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>11</sup> PELSB. Teacher Preparation Manual. Accessed October 2023. <https://mn.gov/pelsb/providers/teacherpreparationmanual/>

<sup>12</sup> Minn. HF. 2497 art. 3, sec. 7, subd. 5. (2023), online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Minnesota Rules, chapter 8705, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>15</sup> PELSB, email message to subscribers, May 10, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Rules, parts 8705.0100–2600, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Rules, parts 8710.3000, 8710.3200, and 8710.4725, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Minnesota Rules, part 8705.1010, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Abbey Payeur, "A Content and Thematic Analysis of Foundational Reading Courses in Minnesota's Teacher Preparation Programs." *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*. 2022. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/252518>.

<sup>20</sup> Gibbons, "Toward addressing and resolving disparities in reading outcomes."

<sup>21</sup> Beena Raghavendran, "Minnesota legislative auditor calls state's teacher licensing system 'broken'" *Star Tribune*. March 4, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Minnesota Rules, parts 8710.0311–0314, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>23</sup> PELSB. "2023 Biennial Report: Supply & Demand of Teachers in Minnesota." Accessed October 2023. <https://mn.gov/pelsb/board/reports/>.

<sup>24</sup> Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 122A.61, subdivision 1, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Minn. HF. 2497 art. 2, sec. 64, subd. 23. (2023), online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 122A.415, subdivision 4, online. Accessed October 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Minn. HF. 2497 art. 1, sec. 13, subd. 3. (2023), online. Accessed October 2023.