ExcelinEd

EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM LITERACY POLICY PLAYBOOK

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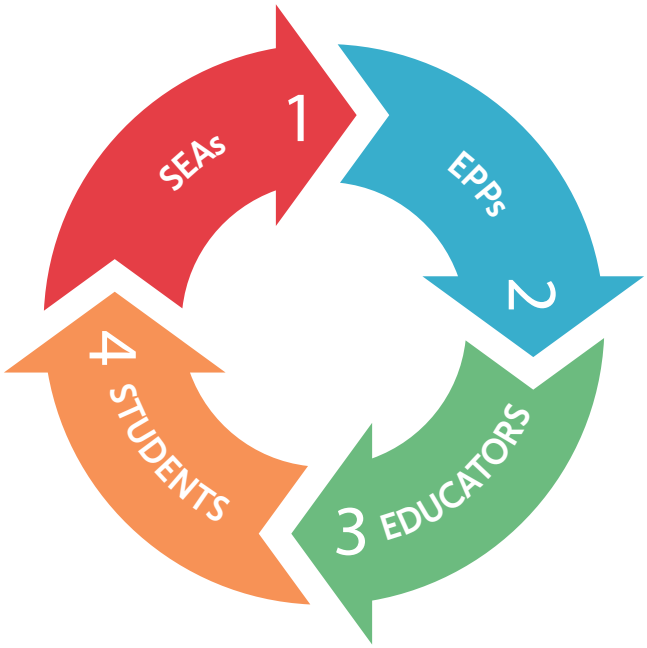
INTRODUCTION

The United States is experiencing a literacy crisis. On the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 40 percent of fourth graders scored below basic, indicating they have not yet mastered the skills necessary to become proficient readers. The data are equally sobering for older children: 33 percent of eighth graders and 32 percent of twelfth graders scored below basic on the 2024 NAEP. Persistently low NAEP scores are the result of many factors, but underlying them all is the reality that our nation is not preparing educators, whether new or experienced, to teach according to the science of reading, a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research that tells us how the brain develops as children learn to read.

Developing skilled readers is a key responsibility of a state's education system, which includes school districts and educator preparation programs (EPPs). The quality of instruction that teachers provide to students – which is directly impacted by their knowledge of instructional methods aligned to the science of reading, the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and regular, targeted feedback from a literacy coach – determines the level of preparedness of students that go on to matriculate into EPPs as teacher candidates. The quality of those EPPs affects the level of preparedness of new teachers entering classrooms and administrators leading schools and districts, which then impacts the quality of instruction provided to the next generation of students, starting the cycle over again.



Recognizing the connection between educator preparation, classroom instruction and student success, Excel*in*Ed developed eighteen fundamental principles of a comprehensive early literacy policy. These principles fall into four main categories: Supports for Teachers, Assessment and Parent Notification, Retention and Intensive Intervention and Instruction and Intervention. Within the Supports for Teachers category, two principles specifically address EPPs: Educator Preparation Program Alignment – whether coursework and practices are grounded in the science of reading, and Educator Preparation Program Assessment – whether candidates can pass a science of reading aligned assessment to obtain licensure. However, few states have adopted both principles. According to Excel*in*Ed's 2024 research, featured on EarlyLiteracyMatters.org, only six states – Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina and Texas – have required EPPs to include coursework that address the core components of scientifically based reading instruction, as well as how to administer reading assessments and how to identify students with reading difficulties, such as dyslexia. A greater number of states, 24 in total, require teacher candidates to pass an aligned licensure assessment for certification. These principles are essential for ensuring that teachers are prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver high-quality reading instruction on day one, and yet, most states lack policies that support them.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy playbook is to:

- guide state educational agencies (SEAs) to adopt standards and practices aligned to the science of reading,
- provide examples of how SEAs can actively collaborate with and provide ongoing support to EPPs throughout the alignment process and
- ultimately improve teacher preparedness and classroom instruction.

This playbook consists of **13 recommendations** and is arranged into three sections that focus on policy adoption and implementation:

Section 1
Laying the Foundation

Section 2
Supporting Implementation Efforts

Section 3
Evaluating Effectiveness

Each section is divided into subsections that contain aligned actions and include state examples of effective implementation.

This playbook does not provide an exhaustive checklist of required actions – state governance structures vary, and states may take different approaches to achieve the same outcomes. Instead, these recommendations, which draw from implementation principles and successful models across the country, provide state leaders with recommendations that can be successfully adopted to align EPP curriculum and practice with the science of reading.

SECTION 1
Laying the Foundation

SETTING HIGH STANDARDS

To ensure that EPPs provide teacher candidates with a strong foundation in practices aligned to the science of reading, states should develop their own EPP literacy standards, to strengthen alignment between content, instruction and performance expectations. EPP literacy standards should address the following core components of scientifically based reading instruction:

- **ORAL LANGUAGE**
- **PHONEMIC AWARENESS**
- **PHONICS**
- **FLUENCY**
- **VOCABULARY**
- **COMPREHENSION**
- **WRITING**

Standards should also prohibit course materials that include the three-cueing system model of instruction, which is a harmful teaching method that encourages students to guess words that they do not know based on pictures or context clues. This approach undermines the development and use of critical word reading skills, including phonemic awareness and phonics.

Most EPPs are housed within colleges of education, which means deans and other personnel play a pivotal role in guiding alignment. As SEAs advance this work, they should invite EPP personnel and other stakeholders to provide feedback on and lead the charge to implement standards and practices aligned to the science of reading within and across their respective institutions.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS

As you consider the recommendations outlined in this playbook, it is essential to first identify which entity holds statutory authority to oversee, approve and/or implement changes related to EPPs. Governance structures vary widely across states, and understanding who or which entity has the legal and operational authority is critical to ensure that policy efforts are actionable and sustainable. Typically, one of the following entities is responsible for authorizing and approving EPPs:

- The state educational agency (SEA);
- The state board of education (SBE);
- The higher education commission; or
- The teacher standards board (or a similar, state-specific oversight board).

Each of these entities play a distinct role in shaping educator preparation policy; however, their authority may differ based on legislative mandates, regulatory frameworks or historical precedent. Additionally, some authorizing entities rely on outside accrediting groups to inform review and approval decisions. If the SEA does not have statutory authority, it is important to collaborate on efforts with the entity responsible and consider whether the governance structure aligns with and supports the state's goals.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ADOPT A POLICY ALIGNED TO THE SCIENCE OF READING TO STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS THAT PREPARE FUTURE EDUCATORS.

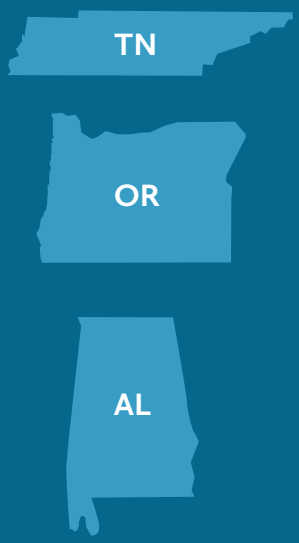
Policy can serve as the catalyst for change and may be the first step that SEAs consider when deciding how to ensure that EPPs are aligned to the science of reading. State legislatures or boards of education may adopt policies and regulations that affect EPPs. These policies and regulations should address two main components:

1) Educator Preparation Program Alignment and 2) Educator Preparation Program Licensure Assessment.

Aligning teacher preparation programs to the science of reading ensures that licensed educators have a strong foundation in evidence-based literacy instruction. Coursework should address all core components of scientifically based reading instruction, and should include how to administer reading assessments, and how to identify students with reading difficulties, such as dyslexia. Policy should explicitly prohibit the use of materials that include the three-cueing system model of instruction. To ensure that teachers possess the knowledge and skills needed to teach students how to read, policy should require that teacher candidates pass a science of reading aligned assessment to obtain initial licensure.

RECOMMENDATION 2: CONVENE A TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE EPP LITERACY STANDARDS AND ENSURE ALIGNMENT TO EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES GROUNDED IN THE SCIENCE OF READING.

The SEA can convene a task force to review EPP literacy standards to determine their alignment to the science of reading. The task force should be composed of a diverse group of stakeholders, including Kindergarten through third grade educators and administrators, EPP faculty, recent EPP graduates, national literacy leaders, state partners and representatives from the SEA. It may be helpful for the task force to review how national organizations, such as the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), evaluate EPPs for alignment to the science of reading and determine what considerations, if any, should be included.



Some states, like Tennessee, require EPPs to adopt specific literacy standards, while others, like Oregon, implement these requirements through regulations. It is important to recognize that even when literacy standards are mandated by law, they may not explicitly encompass all components necessary to prepare teacher candidates to deliver scientifically based reading instruction.

In Alabama, the State Board of Education issued regulations under the Alabama Literacy Act to revise EPP standards. These regulations require that teacher candidates complete a minimum of nine credit hours of coursework in the science of reading, addressing four key areas:

1. Foundation of Literacy Acquisition
   (understand the developmental progression of literacy skills)
2. Structured Literacy
   (delivering explicit, systematic and cumulative instruction)
3. Knowledge of Diverse Reading Profiles, Including Dyslexia
   (identify and understand the characteristics of dyslexia and other reading difficulties)
4. Assessment and Instruction of Developing Literacy
   (select, administer and analyze evidence-based assessments to inform and differentiate instruction)

ESTABLISHING CLEAR GUIDANCE

The SEA can provide EPPs with clear guidance regarding requirements for the review process and best practices for field experience placements that provide all teacher candidates with meaningful opportunities to extend and apply their learning in classrooms already implementing evidence-based practices.

RECOMMENDATION 3: REQUIRE A REVIEW OF EPP SYLLABI AND COURSE MATERIALS AS PART OF INITIAL ACCREDITATION AND ONGOING RENEWAL PROCESSES.

After the SEA adopts literacy standards, it should require EPPs to identify courses designated to prepare teacher candidates for literacy instruction and/or assessment and submit their syllabi and course materials for both initial accreditation and ongoing review. To build the capacity of EPP faculty to fully participate in the review process, the SEA should develop a rubric to support EPPs in understanding whether their curricula and supporting instructional materials align with the state's adopted standards. To streamline the review process, the agency can divide the EPPs into cohorts that are reviewed in cycles.

To support the implementation of Rhode Island's Right to Read Act, which requires EPPs and districts to ensure that teachers have knowledge of structured literacy practices, the Department of Education created its Science of Reading and Structured Literacy Syllabi Refinement Tool. The tool documents key educator competencies which are broken down into smaller components, and provides lists of supporting resources, including books, articles, videos and podcasts.

As part of Arkansas's Comprehensive State Review process, EPPs are grouped into cohorts and evaluated on a rotating cycle, ensuring that all programs are reviewed within a two-year period. Arkansas's reviews include course observations, interviews, focus groups and assessments of annual data on licensure completion, employment rates and teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Programs that meet expectations are then moved into a six-year review cycle. Those that fall below expectations are required to implement a performance improvement plan and are reevaluated after three years.

Following the passage of the Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking and School Safety (LEARNS) Act, Arkansas additionally requires that each EPP undergo an audit for science of reading coursework every three years. This audit is conducted alongside the state review process and is required for EPPs that offer pathways for K–6 and special education certification. To support this review process, the agency developed the AR State Review Guide, which outlines the review standards and the types of evidence EPPs must submit and includes a scoring rubric to promote consistent evaluation.

NCTQ's *Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction* recommends that states conditionally approve EPPs whose syllabi do not meet expectations, granting programs additional time to align curricula. As part of the conditional approval, the agency can collaborate with EPP faculty and staff to develop a written improvement plan, which should include next steps based on classroom observations and interviews with teacher candidates and instructors. The SEA must also set a deadline for changes to be implemented to receive full approval. During this time, the agency may consider partnering with external review organizations for additional support.

Colorado serves as a strong example of how effective state oversight can lead to high-quality EPPs. In 2018, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) implemented a rigorous EPP review process. EPPs are required to submit syllabi and completed Educator Preparation Standards Matrices to demonstrate alignment to state-approved standards. Programs also undergo a site visit with CDE staff and literacy experts, while faculty, teacher candidates and graduates participate in interviews to assess learning. Outcomes for reviewed EPPs include full reauthorization, conditional reauthorization, placement on probation or a recommendation for termination of the program. As a result of these efforts, 13 out of the 15 reviewed EPPs in Colorado earned an A or B, and none scored below a C, according to NCTQ's *Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction*.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PROVIDE GUIDANCE WITH CLEAR REQUIREMENTS TO ALIGN TEACHER CANDIDATES' FIELD EXPERIENCES WITH EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES.

As EPPs partner with different school districts across the state, there may be variability in teacher candidates' field experiences, which impacts their level of preparation. To help align these experiences, the SEA can create requirements for what a high-quality field experience looks like. Requirements should include the following components:

- ***Highly Effective Mentors:*** The SEA should pair teacher candidates with highly effective, paid mentors. Research suggests that a qualified mentor impacts student outcomes by helping a first-year teacher perform at a level similar to teachers with two to three years of experience. To increase access to effective mentors, the agency should offer professional learning opportunities on setting expectations, modeling lessons, co-teaching and coaching mentees, areas that Tennessee SCORE's *Lead in Literacy* case study found beneficial to mentor teachers. Additionally, the agency can provide stipends to recognize their contributions and work with districts to ensure that they are provided with time during the school day to complete additional duties.

- ***Observations:*** The agency can create an observational tool to evaluate and provide feedback to candidates on their early literacy instruction. This tool should be aligned to the observation form that is used for current classroom teachers. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education created the "Early Literacy Observation Form," adapted from the state's teacher evaluation form, which includes a protocol for conducting the observation and grade-specific teaching and learning "look fors" related to foundational skills, engaging with complex text and writing. To successfully complete the field experience, candidates should meet the standards on the observation form and any additional program requirements.

- ***EPP-District Partnership Agreements:*** A partnership agreement between EPPs and school districts defines shared responsibilities over the execution of field placements and ensures joint accountability for teacher candidate outcomes. The Tennessee State Board of Education implemented a policy requiring EPPs to develop partnership agreements with school districts that host their teacher candidates for field placements. EPPs must have at least one Primary Partnership Agreement with a school district or charter management organization (CMO). For EPPs that place teacher candidates with additional districts or CMOs, both entities must complete a State-Recognized Partnership Agreement. These agreements allow the entities to jointly design and continuously refine field experience placements. NCTQ's *Clinical Action Practice Guide* also provides recommendations for strengthening field placements, including identifying EPP and district representatives who will regularly meet to share feedback and coordinate efforts.

TN

Tennessee SCORE collaborated with EPPs and school district partners to rethink teacher preparation around early literacy through its Lead in Literacy Network. As part of the Network's work, Tennessee Technological University's Dr. Amber Spears and Putnam County School System's Lindsey Braisted created the *Spears-Braisted Building Reflective, Intentional and Dynamic Guided Experiences (BRIDGE) Framework*. The framework approaches field experience placements in phases designed to build relationship between mentor and mentee, each with corresponding activities, rubrics and resources for learning. The phases are:

Phase 1

Relationship Building and Expectation Setting

Phase 2

Modeling and Guided Engagement

Phase 3

Co-teaching

Phase 4

Independent Teaching with Intentional Feedback

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS AND FACULTY WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The SEA can play a pivotal role in ensuring EPPs adopt research-based practices by establishing a formal review process for program approval, holding them accountable for outcomes, providing targeted support and prohibiting the use of flawed instructional practices. All educators – from the faculty who prepare teacher candidates to veteran teachers and reading specialists – impact student literacy development. As a pre-requisite to certification, they should be able to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to provide scientifically based reading instruction.

RECOMMENDATION 5: REQUIRE EPP PROFESSORS (FULL-TIME AND ADJUNCT) TO PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES GROUNDED IN THE SCIENCE OF READING.

EPP faculty are responsible for preparing the next generation of teachers with knowledge of evidence-based instructional practices. However, not all faculty may have a deep understanding of the science behind how students learn to read and the effective instructional practices that support reading development.

The state chief can advocate for the adoption or expansion of current science of reading training policy to include faculty at public universities. This policy should apply to all professors, tenured or adjunct, who teach foundational literacy courses. The SEA should develop a process for verification of completed faculty training in the science of reading and require faculty to complete a pre- and post-assessment to demonstrate the effectiveness of the training.

The SEA can leverage state or federal grant funding or partner with reading institutes or philanthropic organizations to provide these training opportunities. Additionally, the agency can partner with private institutions of higher education and alternative preparation program providers to assist in their development of an action plan to train faculty, thus ensuring that no matter the pathway, teacher candidates have foundational knowledge in the science of reading.

Alabama has paved the way in training EPP faculty. With Alabama Literacy Act funding, the state provided Lexia's Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training to all pre-K–12 teachers and EPP faculty and used American Rescue Plan funds to provide stipends to those who demonstrated mastery on the post-training assessment.

In 2022, Alabama passed HB 135, a budget bill mandating that all public institutions of higher education operating an EPP and receiving appropriations from the Education Trust Fund comply with the minimum requirement of nine credit hours of literacy coursework. Noncompliant institutions faced a financial penalty – a reduction in their Education Trust Fund appropriation by $1 million or one-half of one percent, whichever was greater. Prior to this recission, the SEA could place EPPs on a probationary accreditation period, providing them with the opportunity to make the changes necessary to come into full compliance.

CREDENTIALING EDUCATORS

The credentialing process can provide the SEA with another checkpoint to ensure that educators demonstrate proficiency in the science of reading, either through a licensure assessment for certification or a literacy endorsement for licensure renewal.

RECOMMENDATION 6: REQUIRE THAT TEACHER CANDIDATES PASS A LICENSURE ASSESSMENT THAT IS ALIGNED TO THE SCIENCE OF READING FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION.

The requirement of a licensure assessment for teacher certification that is aligned to the science of reading and evidence-based instructional practices is one of Excel*in*Ed's fundamental principles of a comprehensive early literacy policy. These assessments are considered an efficient and comprehensive way for future teachers to demonstrate that they possess the knowledge and skills needed to teach students to read.

In 2023, NCTQ released a groundbreaking report, *False Assurances: Many states' licensure tests don't signal whether elementary teachers understand reading instruction*, which tracked each state's adoption of licensure tests and evaluated whether those tests effectively prepare teachers with knowledge in the core components of scientifically based reading instruction. As of February 2025, NCTQ found that only 20 states have adopted assessments rated as "strong" or "acceptable" measures to assess teacher knowledge.

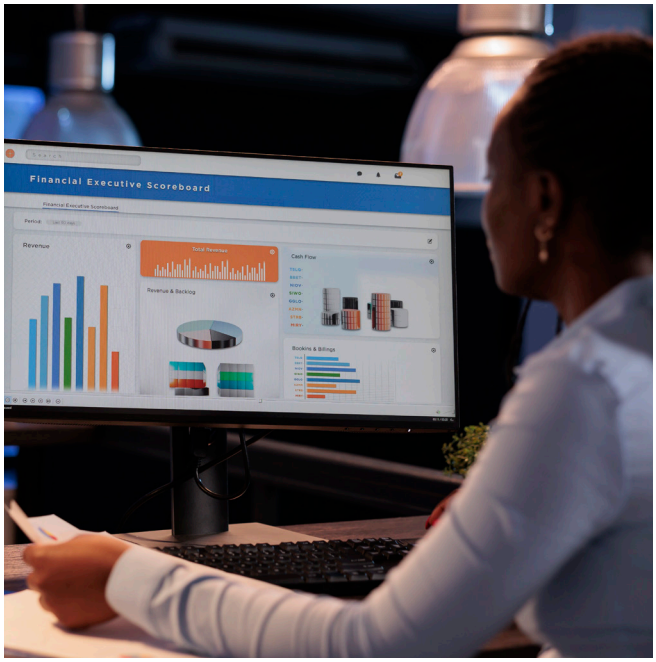
Iowa is one of only 18 states with a "strong" assessment – Pearson's Foundations of Reading assessment. In Iowa, EPPs are required to report passage rates to the Iowa Department of Education annually, along with any services or opportunities provided to candidates to retake the assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 7: AS A COMPONENT OF LICENSURE RENEWAL, REQUIRE THAT TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS DEMONSTRATE SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE IN THE PRACTICE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE SCIENCE OF READING.

States and districts should establish scientifically based reading research and practices as the common language for literacy instruction. To ensure that all teachers, not just pre-service teachers, are provided with such training, the SEA could require that early childhood, elementary, secondary, multilingual learner and special education teachers as well as school leaders obtain a literacy endorsement or microcredential as part of licensure renewal.

In 2023, Indiana enacted House Enrolled Act 1558, requiring new early childhood, elementary, multilingual learner and special education teachers applying for their first professional license as well as those renewing their license to receive an early literacy endorsement. Educators receive the endorsement after completing 80 hours of professional development in evidence-based instruction grounded in the science of reading that is approved by the Department of Education and passing the Praxis Teaching Reading: Elementary assessment.

There is no shortage of vendors to provide professional learning in the science of reading, and many provide specialized training for teachers and administrators, respectively. However, SEAs must ensure that the offerings are vetted before recommending them to school districts. To assist agencies in their evaluation and selection of professional learning grounded in the science of reading, Excel*in*Ed created the Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric. This rubric is intended for use by evaluators who have completed in-depth professional learning in the science of reading and have experience applying this knowledge in the classroom. As a result, SEAs can make informed decisions about the best professional learning provider for educators in their state.



ESTABLISHING A DATA SYSTEM

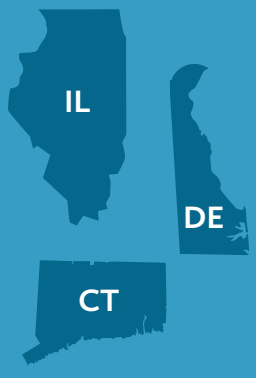
Data can play a transformative role in determining the effectiveness of state efforts to recruit, prepare and retain educators. EPPs and school districts may already report various types of data to the SEA and the U.S. Department of Education, and these data can be used to create EPP Report Cards that allow for clear visualization and tracking of key outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 8: CREATE AN EPP REPORT CARD THAT TRACKS PROGRAM PERFORMANCE, COURSE COMPLETION AND CANDIDATE OUTCOMES.

The information included in EPP Report Cards should help stakeholders understand the quality of each program based on concrete measures such as entry selection criteria, curriculum and completion requirements; science of reading requirements, field experience placements, graduate readiness and licensure exam pass rates; employment and retention data; graduates' impact in the classroom and satisfaction of graduates and employers.

This type of public transparency is critical for ensuring teachers receive the training and tools they need to have a positive impact on student outcomes. With the right information, states can assess whether programs successfully prepare candidates or whether interventions and support are needed. Unlike traditional accreditation reviews, which often occur in multi-year cycles

and may emphasize compliance over outcomes, report cards provide annual, data-driven insights into EPP effectiveness. Excel*in*Ed has an EPP report card model policy, frequently asked questions document and a sample template as a reference for states developing or updating their own system.



The Illinois State Board of Education has an interactive EPP report card dashboard that tracks enrollment, completion, certification and employment outcomes to determine a summative designation for all state programs. The Delaware Department of Education similarly rates each program on key indicators and publishes the data in a digestible report. Connecticut's EdSight data portal publishes data that can be viewed by individual EPP, compared across EPPs or aggregated for all providers in the state, and even tracks employment rates in high needs districts.

After collecting and reviewing the data, the SEA can determine whether interventions, support or probationary action are needed. Interventions may include initiating a full approval review which may result in probationary accreditation or denial. For example, the state can place EPPs that have low-first time pass rates on a two-year probationary accreditation period. During this time, EPPs can review and revise their curriculum to ensure alignment to literacy standards and incorporate best practices to improve outcomes on the licensure assessments. To support these efforts, the SEA can conduct a "targeted assistance" visit where faculty and agency staff can meet, collaborate and create an action plan to address areas of deficiency.

As part of the continuing approval process in Mississippi, EPPs must submit an annual report which includes the following:

- performance and demographic data on teacher candidates and completers, including impacts on student learning outcomes;
- the number of program completers that scored at or above the proficiency level on the assessments required for state licensure, including the ETS's Praxis II (subject) assessments and Pearson's Foundations of Reading test and
- data on faculty qualifications and participation in ongoing professional learning.

EPPs that do not meet state requirements for approval may be identified as needing further development and may undergo a targeted assistance visit.

SECTION 2: Supporting Implementation Efforts

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

While a state can adopt a sound policy, the key to its success lies in its implementation. A strong partnership among the SEA, EPPs and other agencies is essential to foster collaboration and ensure successful outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 9: BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND FACILITATE COLLABORATION BETWEEN EPPS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

Establishing a collegial relationship between the SEA, EPPs and school districts can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources around the science of reading.

Meet with faculty and staff of public and private EPPs to discuss legislation and/or state efforts to align EPP syllabi and curricula with the science of reading.

After the passage of a new policy or rules related to EPP alignment, agency staff can convene in-person or virtual meetings to brief EPP staff on its potential impact. Additional check-in meetings could occur during annual "dashboard conversations," when the agency meets with EPPs to review graduation and licensure rates. Agency staff can also attend local educational conferences to provide updates regarding legislation and initiatives that will impact EPPs.

Just as school districts may be unaware of the resources available from the SEA, EPPs may face similar challenges. To address this issue, the agency could convene a conference for EPP faculty and staff from both private and public institutions to promote available resources, support program alignment and foster collaboration across institutions.

A strong example of this approach comes from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning, which hosted a Collaborative Educator Preparation Program Science of Reading Summit. The Summit convened faculty from both public and private institutions of higher education to share details about available LETRS training opportunities and tools to align their curricula.

Connect EPPs with school districts that have trained teachers in the science of reading and adopted high-quality instructional materials.

Candidates should be placed in classrooms where the mentor teacher is trained in the science of reading and where the district has adopted high-quality instructional materials. A field placement experience that does not allow a teacher candidate to observe and practice scientifically based reading instruction can detrimentally impact future performance. In states where science of reading training is required and reported to the SEA, the agency can create a "Student Teacher Placement Portal," that shows the number of classroom openings (consisting of trained teachers willing to mentor candidates) in each district for field experience placements. A related example is the Strengthening the Colorado Workforce Pipeline, created by the Region 12 Comprehensive Center and the Colorado Department of Education, which displays educator workforce data and vacancies on a map that can be filtered.

RECOMMENDATION 10: FOSTER GREATER COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITHIN AND ACROSS AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING EPP ALIGNMENT.

Just as offices within the SEA may sometimes operate in silos, other state agencies may experience similar challenges. To ensure alignment in efforts between the SEA and other agencies, such as the higher education commission or the state standards board, a concerted effort should be made to foster greater communication and collaboration.

Within the SEA, the state chief can establish standing inter-office meetings, such as between the Offices of Early Learning and Educator Preparation, to promote shared ownership of the alignment work, coordinated planning and consistent messaging. In instances where the SEA does not oversee EPP accreditation, the state chief can support the creation of standing working groups or steering committees with the agency responsible, to ensure coordination and maintain a unified vision for alignment.

SUPPORTING AND RECOGNIZING PROGRAMS

SEAs will likely take differing approaches to align EPPs to the science of reading; however, it is important that all provide resources and support to programs as well as recognize successes along the way.

RECOMMENDATION 11: PROVIDE EPPS WITH RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

As EPPs take on the work to align their programs to the science of reading, the agency can provide helpful resources and technical assistance.

Provide opportunities for faculty to participate in coaching with trained state or regional literacy coaches.

Literacy coaching can benefit both in-service teachers and EPP faculty. Trained state or regional literacy coaches can provide professional development and targeted feedback to EPP faculty as they model evidence-based reading instruction for teacher candidates.

In Mississippi, literacy coaching was extended to EPP faculty through a three-year partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education, the Barksdale Reading Institute and the Kellogg Foundation. Together, they launched the Mississippi Momentum Partnership, which provided both professional development and coaching services to early literacy faculty across fifteen public and private EPPs in the state.

Offer regular check-in meetings and/or virtual drop-in office hours for EPP faculty and staff to receive guidance and support from the agency in revising their curricula.

Reviewing EPP curricula and instructional materials can be a complex and time-consuming process. To support faculty and staff with this work, the SEA could offer regular check-in meetings and virtual drop-in office hours. These designated times would allow agency staff to provide individualized support, answer questions and share relevant resources to help EPPs align their programs to state expectations and evidence-based practices.

RECOMMENDATION 12: RECOGNIZE EXEMPLARY EPPS THAT EFFECTIVELY PREPARE TEACHER CANDIDATES TO DELIVER INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO THE SCIENCE OF READING.

Upon completion of a successful review, the SEA may consider inviting EPP faculty, staff and/or teacher candidates to present at a SBE meeting or a convening of EPPs. These presentations could highlight how EPPs achieved alignment, impacted teacher preparation and student outcomes, and help inform future regulations or guide other EPPs in their alignment work.

The SEA can also collaborate with state or local news organizations to highlight the work of EPPs in preparing and placing new teachers in school districts. For example, a news story might feature how a field experience partnership between an EPP and a rural school district led to those teacher candidates filling high need teaching roles.

The Mississippi Department of Education created the "Educator Preparation Program Science of Reading Award" to recognize exemplary EPPs that have made programmatic changes to strengthen teacher candidates' knowledge in the science of reading, have engaged in Department-supported professional learning and have established strong partnerships with local school districts. Award recipients are featured in an article on the Department's website, and EPPs have included this recognition on their own websites and social media accounts. One recipient, the Mississippi University for Women, was even featured during a local news segment.

SECTION 3:
Evaluating Effectiveness

EVALUATING AND IMPROVING ALIGNMENT EFFORTS

Education funding is important but limited, and as stewards of public funds, it is important to ensure that the SEA is investing in initiatives that demonstrate a return on investment and improve student outcomes while redirecting investments from those that do not.

RECOMMENDATION 13: UTILIZE INTERNAL RESEARCHERS OR PARTNER WITH EXTERNAL RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ALIGNMENT EFFORTS OVER TIME.

To determine which initiatives are worth the investment, the SEA should consider authorizing a study on the impacts of statutory requirements or agency initiatives on EPP outcomes. The SEA can utilize its internal research team or collaborate with external partners, such as state institutions of higher education, to evaluate the effectiveness of its efforts.

A strong example of this approach comes from North Carolina, where the legislature passed S.L. 2024-57 (Section 2A.8) in 2024 to establish the Office of Learning Research within the North Carolina Collaboratory, a research agency supported by the University of North Carolina system. In partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the Collaboratory assessed the impacts of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding to support academic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the Collaboratory's work includes research on the impact of the state's LETRS training initiative on teacher knowledge of effective literacy instruction and implementation of instructional practices.

CONCLUSION

State education chiefs have the power to ensure every student can read and a first step is supporting and incentivizing EPPs to align coursework and instructional practices to the science of reading. By setting clear expectations, offering targeted support and fostering strong partnerships, state chiefs can initiate the systemic change necessary to ensure that all new educators are prepared to deliver evidence-based reading instruction from day one, so that all students can become confident, skilled readers.

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