

Quality Education Coalition (QEC) Position Paper To the Read to Lead Task Force

The Quality Education Coalition is a statewide coalition of parents, educators and advocates who work to improve Wisconsin's system of delivering education to children with disabilities. QEC members have developed the following position statement regarding reading instruction provided to **ALL Wisconsin students** in public schools. QEC strongly believes reading and comprehending at a level of an individual's highest level of proficiency or advanced level by the end of third grade is critical to both academic and economic success.

Summary of Recommendations

As many teachers and parents will attest, reading failure exacts tremendous long-term consequences for children's self-confidence and motivation to learn, as well as for their later school performance. Children who have difficulty learning to read include: **Struggling readers** (including those who have limitations in cognition and communication); **Economically disadvantaged youth**; **English language learners**; and students with **Dyslexia** and **Specific Learning Disabilities (SEEDS students¹)**. Therefore QEC submits the following recommendations for consideration by the Reading Task Force:

- QEC supports reading instruction and services that are **evidence-based, scientific, and** that have been **demonstrated** to increase reading and comprehension outcomes for **ALL** students, including those with disabilities receiving general and special education instruction, PreK-12.²
- The five essential components of reading instruction, as outlined by the National Reading Panel, should be taught and assessed systematically, explicitly and completely. The components include: phonemic awareness, phonics and word structure, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.
- QEC believes early reading comprehension struggles are most often tied to problems in phonological processing, letter sound knowledge, skill fluency, or lack of background knowledge and vocabulary.
 - Different students may need very different amounts of instruction and practice to master these skills. That level of instruction and support should remain available to them, regardless of grade level, as long as they need it.
- QEC also promotes **teacher preparation, professional development and examination to demonstrate** alignment with and competence in reading science and the core knowledge and practice standards for **all novice and practicing teachers of reading**.
- QEC encourages the creation of an **Office of Reading Accountability** that directs and coordinates reading policy throughout Wisconsin public schools and institutions of higher education.

Due to the complex nature of reading instruction, QEC provides specific information below to explain these recommendations supporting the necessary changes required to improve our educational system in Wisconsin.

1. Concern: Wisconsin has no system of early universal screening for a reading disability.

Recommendation:

Ensure schools and districts use a consistent method of identification and scientific and evidence-based instruction for all students regardless of the sunset provision to the SLD rule.³

- Require early and age-appropriate universal screening for reading risk factors (phonemic awareness, rapid naming, alphabet knowledge, oral language development, and oral vocabulary acquisition).⁴
- Ensure that appropriate assessment tools are used.
- Require every school/school district to have sufficiently educated and effective screeners to identify students who might be reading below grade level.
- Require normative screening results to be reported publicly by districts. The results and its role in a student's education plan will be shared in a percentile format with parents.
- Require frequent benchmark assessment of learning targets for all students.
- Require weekly progress monitoring of discrete skills for students receiving interventions by general or special education professionals.

2. Concern: Wisconsin has no requirement that science- and evidence-based reading instruction and intervention, including the utilization of appropriate assistive technology is used throughout all PreK-12 general and special education instruction in Wisconsin.

Recommendation:

- Require all districts to use scientific, systematic, evidence-based instruction and interventions for all grades PreK- 12, and throughout general and special education instruction. Ensure that reading instruction and interventions are aligned with science and the Common Core State Standards.⁵
- Require DPI to rewrite the Model Early Learning Standards to include evidence-based reading instructional standards and practices.
- Require DPI to develop grade-specific benchmark learning targets for evidence-based reading instruction.

- Require DPI to review all major reading standards, documents, and guides to ensure that they consistently use scientific, systematic evidence-based reading instruction and interventions.
- Require frequent benchmark assessment of learning targets for all students.
- Require weekly progress monitoring of discrete skills for all students receiving interventions.

3. *Concern: Wisconsin has no system to assure implementation fidelity of reading instruction by both general and special education reading teachers.*

Recommendation:

- Require the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to implement quality professional development in reading instruction and strategies to general and special education teachers of reading in all schools and school districts.
- Ensure that there is adequate supervision, mentorship and instructional practicum time in teacher preparation programs and as part of a novice and ongoing teacher professional development.
- Employ administrative personnel that will support effective science- and evidence-based reading instruction or enhance professional development for teachers and staff in the content knowledge of effective reading instruction for all students.
- Require that all teachers demonstrate competence in reading instruction which reflects teacher standards such as in the Knowledge and Content Standards for Teachers of Reading.⁶
 - Initial teachers and practicing teachers entering licensing programs for reading teacher or reading specialist licenses covering early childhood, early childhood through middle childhood, middle childhood through early adolescence and special education should be required to complete a course of study in reading research, including scientific findings about how children learn to read, why some children fail to learn to read, and what instructional methods have been validated by evidence.
 - Ensure all teachers of reading have sufficient knowledge and application skills for demonstration of successful student reading outcomes for all general and special educators teaching students reading.
 - Require preparing and novice teachers to complete a teaching practicum which includes supervised practice of whole group reading instruction and individual and small group intervention.
 - Require training and vetting of master teachers of reading to model, coach and provide oversight to practicing teachers to ensure effective evidence-based and appropriate instructional practices that meet the needs of each student.

4. Concern: Wisconsin does not have a dedicated authority to provide demonstrated expertise in guiding policies for reading instruction in Wisconsin.

Recommendation:

- QEC supports the creation of an Office of Reading Accountability which directs and coordinates reading policies throughout the state.
- Initial staffing of the Office of Reading Accountability to be determined with nationwide search on advice of experts from Florida Center for Reading Research.
- Creates a state literacy leadership team made up of state and national literacy experts and relevant stakeholders with reading knowledge to recommend and provide oversight of professional development for all teachers of reading.
- Requires DPI to offer professional development for principals and other administrators through Administrator Training Institutes.
- Creates Wisconsin Center for Reading Research and exploration of a higher education collaborative modeled after similar centers in Florida⁷ and Texas⁸ which would provide necessary expertise and knowledge in effective reading instruction and teacher preparation to educators.
- Approves teacher preparation programs which ensure content knowledge of effective evidence-based reading coursework has been taught through its program approval process
- Adopts a teacher licensure exam for teachers of reading aligned with reading science and the core knowledge and practice standards for reading as outlined in the Knowledge and Content Standards for Teachers of Reading. The examination should:
 - Require a basic level reading instruction competency exam for initial and practicing teachers with licenses covering early childhood, early childhood through middle childhood, and middle childhood through early adolescence.
 - Require an advanced level competency exam for new licenses in special education, as a reading teacher, and reading specialists.
 - Publicly report first time passage rates and overall passage rates of teacher examinations annually.
- Determines expertise and ability of alternative licensed and non-licensed individuals who are certified in reading remediation or language therapy by a national organization, and who pass the basic and advanced level exams to provide professional development to districts or appropriate instruction to SEEDS students.

Conclusion:

QEC believes that one of Wisconsin's biggest educational challenges is to improve our children's reading instruction. From the first moment a student walks through the school's doors, the ability to read will be the determining factor in the success of the rest of their life. We owe every student the opportunity to learn with proven, science-based reading instruction. Their futures and ours depend on it.

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ENDNOTES

¹SEEDS is the acronym for all students that are at-risk for attaining reading literacy and/or struggle to reach proficient, grade-level reading and literacy abilities. SEEDS are comprised of a variety of representatives: Struggling readers, Economically disadvantaged youth, English language learners, and students with Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disabilities. SEEDS includes students with cognitive impairments. See <http://state-literacy-law.org/>.

² Over 45 years of distinctive scientific research, supported by NIH, NICHD*, in reading, reading disabilities and learning disabilities has shown that the main reason for learning to read is to comprehend what we are reading. * The National Institute of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Branch. www.nichd.nih.gov/reading.cfm

³The formal incorporation of Response-to-Intervention (RTI) models in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA 2004; USDOE, 2004) signals a major change in approaches that schools may use to identify students as eligible for special education in the learning disability (LD) category. Making RTI an inclusion criterion represents a significant advancement in diagnostic decision making for LD. A person might be identified as having LD if they demonstrate low achievement and intractability to appropriate instruction. Additionally, low achievement and poor treatment response may be due to other disabilities, such as a sensory problem, mental retardation, or another pervasive disturbance of cognition. There is little evidence that the presence of a cognitive deficit indicates that the achievement deficit has a neurobiological origin. Increasingly, states and school districts are implementing (RtI) models in their schools aimed to help teachers determine and provide for the appropriate education interventions so that children can progress in their learning. *Identifying Learning Disabilities in the Context of Response to Intervention: A Hybrid Model* by Jack M. Fletcher, Ph.D., University of Houston, www.rtinetwork.org/learn/ld/identifyingld

⁴The best solution to the problem of reading failure is to allocate resources for early identification and prevention. Few school districts have in place a mechanism to identify and help children before failure takes hold. Indeed, in the majority of cases, there is no systematic identification until third grade, by which time successful remediation is more difficult and more costly. *Catch Them Before They Fall: Identification and Assessment to Prevent Reading Failure in Young Children*, Joseph K. Torgesen (1998).

⁵<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards/reading-foundational-skills/grade-1/>

⁶ Several national reports have suggested the usefulness of systematic, explicit, synthetic phonics instruction based on English word structure along with wide reading of quality literature for supporting development in early reading instruction. Other studies have indicated, however, that many in-service teachers are not knowledgeable in the basic concepts of the English language. *Why Elementary Teachers Might Be Inadequately Prepared to Teach Reading*, R. Malatesha Joshi, (June 19, 2009)

⁷ The Florida Center for Reading Research <http://www.fcrr.org>

⁸ The Texas Reading First. Higher Education Collaborative. <http://www.austincc.edu/teacher/files/documents/HECHandout-0220.pdf>