FROM CRADLE TO CLASSROOM:

A GOVERNOR'S POCKET GUIDE TO EARLY LITERACY

Supporting governors in ensuring that every child reads on grade level by the end of third grade.



NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION


SCHOOL BUS

01
INTRODUCTION

IN 2019, NGA PUBLISHED THE **GOVERNOR'S POCKET GUIDE TO EARLY LITERACY,** AN EXPLORATION OF THE POLICY LEVERS AVAILABLE TO GOVERNORS TO HELP STRENGTHEN EARLY READING PROFICIENCY.

In the years since, states and U.S. territories have only deepened their commitment to ensuring that their youngest residents develop the skills they need to become successful readers.

This heightened attention comes at a crucial moment for early literacy. Fourth- and eighth-grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the Nation's Report Card, have declined over the past decade, and many states have seen widening gaps for those students who were already at risk of falling behind. In 2024, roughly 40 percent of fourth graders scored below NAEP Basic in reading, the largest share since 2002. Pandemic-era disruptions, including interrupted instruction and spikes in chronic absenteeism, only exacerbated this trajectory. Because evidence shows that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade typically struggle to catch up, these trends carry consequences well beyond students' earliest years in school.

Several states have provided valuable lessons in this area. For example, in the 2010s—well before evidence-based literacy instruction became a widespread bipartisan national priority—Mississippi began overhauling its approach to reading instruction through an all-encompassing statewide strategy rooted in evidence-based practices and meaningful accountability. Over the following years, the state saw some of the nation's strongest gains in fourth-grade reading.



Mississippi's experience is just one example of the significant efforts states have undertaken to strengthen early literacy. This updated Pocket Guide examines the broader landscape of changes to literacy policy and instruction over the past seven years, highlighting the strategies states have pursued to improve reading outcomes. While approaches vary, one thing remains clear: Governors across the country are seizing the opportunity to rethink how they support young readers.

THE "MISSISSIPPI MARATHON"



Mississippi's reading gains did not come from a single reform or a "miracle" but rather from a coordinated strategy launched in the early to mid-2010s. This was an all-hands-on-deck effort that brought together leaders across state government. The governor's office made early literacy a statewide priority and emphasized the importance of evidence-based reading instruction; the state legislature enacted the Literacy-Based Promotion Act in 2013, putting new measures in place to help identify and support struggling readers; and State Superintendent Carey Wright reorganized the Mississippi Department of Education to build the capacity needed to implement key reforms at scale.

As part of its comprehensive approach, the state paired Science of Reading-aligned instruction with intensive teacher support that included statewide professional development and practice-based literacy coaching, expanded early screening to identify students in need of additional assistance, required individualized reading plans and regular communication with families of struggling readers, and required specific levels of achievement to be promoted to fourth grade, with certain exemptions for good cause. Just as important, Mississippi stressed buy-in, alignment, and accountability across the entirety of the state's education system. These efforts were not limited to the state's elementary schools—Mississippi also committed to laying the foundation for early literacy for the state's youngest readers by passing the Early Learning Collaborative Act in 2013, which established a voluntary, state-funded pre-K program for four-year-olds.

Mississippi improved its national ranking in fourth grade reading by moving from 49th in 2013 to 9th in 2024 (NAEP, 2024). This all-encompassing strategy that is focused on prevention, not retention, is often credited with producing some of the nation's strongest fourth-grade reading gains.



02
NATIONAL BRIGHT SPOTS

FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

Strong foundational literacy skills, developed from birth through age five, lay the groundwork for lifelong learning and set children up for success once they enter elementary school. In early childhood education and child care systems, early literacy means

engaging children through play, read-alouds, and conversations in ways that promote brain development, language acquisition, and executive functioning skills. This can look as small as playing sounds while a baby is babbling or as significant as teaching letter sounds and consonant-vowel-

consonant (CVC) words
to children who are ready.
States and territories
can increase exposure
to these skills by first
ensuring families' access
to early childhood
education, and then
by implementing quality
standards or initiatives
that prioritize
early literacy.

THE FOLLOWING SECTION HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES that states have deployed to strengthen early literacy outcomes ahead of kindergarten, whether by improving pre-K quality or access or directly supporting the caregivers who guide emerging readers.

COLORADO

CONNECTICUT

FLORIDA

KENTUCKY

Colorado's Universal Preschool Program provides up to 15 hours per week of free preschool for eligible children statewide. The program is funded through a voter-approved nicotine tax and is designed to increase access while supporting a mixed-delivery system. The UPK program requires that providers use a curriculum listed on the Colorado Department of Early Childhood's Curricula List, which all include activities to support literacy and language development.

Connecticut has restructured Early Start CT and created the Early Childhood Education Endowment with the goal of expanding childcare access and lowering costs for families. Moreover, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood recently updated the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) in partnership with providers and subject-matter experts to strengthen early literacy progressions—including new early literacy benchmarks for the state's youngest learners.

Florida's New Worlds Reading Initiative connects struggling young readers and their families with free, at-home literacy supports beginning in voluntary pre-K (VPK). The program provides eligible students with high-quality books delivered directly to their homes each month, along with family resources designed to encourage reading practice outside the classroom.

Kentucky is working to expand access to preschool through the Pre-K for All initiative, which aims to make high-quality pre-K available to every four-year-old in the state. Relatedly, a 2025 Executive Order from Gov. Andy Beshear established the Team Kentucky Pre-K for All Advisory Committee to develop recommendations for serving more young learners, strengthening quality, and building a sustainable statewide pre-K system.

NEBRASKA

NEVADA

NEW JERSEY

NORTH DAKOTA

Nebraska is putting more books into the hands of its youngest learners through Nebraska Growing Readers, a key initiative supported by First Lady Suzanne Pillen that targets children from birth to age five. Through partnerships with early childhood providers, families, and communities, the program distributes free books and promotes shared reading at home, with a particular focus on reaching communities where access to books is limited. In the 2023–24 school year, the program served 37,872 children.

Nevada Ready! State Pre-K (NR!PK) is a state-funded pre-kindergarten program providing high-quality early learning opportunities for 4-year-old children across Nevada. Over the past three years, NR!PK has expanded from 3,472 to 8,537 seats, increasing access to early learning statewide. All NR!PK programs use research-based curriculum and student assessment data to track academic and literacy gains, helping build the foundational skills children need for success in kindergarten through third grade.

New Jersey is continuing its push toward universal preschool through the Universal Preschool and Kindergarten Act, which codified the state's preschool funding formula and supports the growth of free, high-quality preschool statewide. Gov. Mikie Sherrill's 2026 budget built on this work, proposing approximately $1.4 billion for preschool education.

North Dakota supports early learning through its Best in Class program, a competitive grant serving children in the year before kindergarten. These efforts focus on supporting providers, expanding access, improving quality, and boosting children's literacy and school readiness by providing targeted coaching, play-based learning, and observation-based assessments. Best in Class shares North Dakota Legendary Family Learning: Building Literacy Skills, a storybook and resource to help families read, talk, play, and explore with their little learner every day.



03

K–3RD GRADE LITERACY

Much of the work to improve literacy outcomes in states across the country **HAS TARGETED KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3**, as these years are critical for building the foundational reading skills students need for long-term success. Some states have

implemented sweeping overhauls of their K-3rd grade systems, while others have opted for more targeted solutions.

The following section highlights some of the most innovative strategies that states have deployed to boost early reading proficiency.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, LITERACY COACHING, AND TEACHER PREPARATION

Teachers are best equipped to support student success when they understand how children learn—and their need for deeper expertise does not disappear once they

enter the classroom. States and territories in this section have taken steps to align teacher preparation and licensure with research and/or have implemented high-quality professional supports for educators tied to classroom materials.

ALABAMA

AMERICAN SAMOA

GEORGIA

GUAM

HAWAI'I

ILLINOIS

Alabama has made a significant investment in literacy coaches to support K-3 teachers in delivering high-quality reading instruction. These coaches operate within the accountability framework of the 2019 Alabama Literacy Act, which pairs job-embedded coaching with statewide K-3 screening and intervention requirements. This combination is often credited with helping move Alabama to 13th nationally in reading recovery since 2022, per the 2026 Harvard/Stanford Education Scorecard.

American Samoa's K5–3 Early Literacy Initiative emphasizes structured reading and language instruction aligned with the Science of Reading across all of the territory's 22 elementary schools. To support teachers in putting these practices into action, the territory provides year-round, side-by-side coaching in the classroom alongside ongoing professional learning. This includes data-driven workshops that help educators use student performance data to make targeted instructional decisions, monitor growth, and maintain program fidelity.

Georgia's Early Literacy Act of 2026 enacts a grant program designed to help place a literacy coach in every elementary school, with the goal of promoting a more coordinated, research-based approach to reading instruction statewide. The law also establishes the Georgia Literacy Task Force, which, among other charges, will seek to expand free professional learning opportunities for educators.

Guam aims to strengthen K-3 literacy instruction in the territory through its State Systemic Improvement Project (SSIP), a partnership between the Guam Department of Education (GDOE) and Guam Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (CEDDERS) that combines educator professional learning with data-driven continuous improvement. Teachers work collaboratively to analyze their students' reading data, identifying specific challenges and using findings to translate evidence-based practices into targeted classroom strategies. Additional trainings and events offered by GDOE across the territory for teachers and young readers alike have reinforced these efforts.

Hawai‘i is strengthening K-3 literacy through a statewide approach guided by strong implementation of its Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), creating greater coherence among instruction, screening, and intervention. A key component of this work is providing all educators with free access to high-quality, evidence-based literacy coursework through the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy's Cox Campus. By combining a strong MTSS framework with broad access to professional learning, Hawai‘i is building greater consistency and capacity in literacy instruction for its youngest learners.

Illinois has taken a systems-level approach to literacy by using state policy to align educator preparation, professional learning, coaching supports, curriculum evaluation, and district literacy planning around evidence-based practices. Public Act 103-0402 established a comprehensive statewide framework that creates shared expectations for literacy instruction while preserving local control over curriculum and implementation decisions. This balance of statewide coherence and local flexibility is a defining feature of Illinois' literacy strategy.

KANSAS

MAINE

MARYLAND

MISSOURI

NEW YORK

NORTH CAROLINA

Kansas is reshaping literacy instruction and educator preparation through its Kansas Blueprint for Literacy, established and expanded through legislation in 2024 and 2026. The initiative embeds the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy into teacher preparation and professional learning, with a goal of ensuring 100 percent of the elementary teacher workforce earns a literacy credential by 2030. Ultimately, the state aims for 90 percent of students to read at Level 2 or above and 50 percent to read at Levels 3 or 4 on the state English language arts assessment.

Maine has developed a statewide Literacy Playbook as part of its Literacy Hub to help educators translate evidence-based literacy practices into classroom instruction. Launched in 2026 as a companion to the state's literacy action plan, the interactive resource provides schools with a shared framework for strengthening literacy instruction across grade levels.

Maryland is making a significant investment in literacy coaching as part of its broader effort to improve reading outcomes. The state's newest enacted budget includes over $11 million to launch the Academic Excellence Program, which aims to place literacy coaches at schools across the state to provide direct, in-classroom support to teachers.

Missouri has embedded the Science of Reading into teacher licensure and preparation requirements statewide. Educator preparation programs must provide coursework aligned to evidence-based literacy instruction, and elementary teacher candidates are required to pass a Science of Reading-aligned assessment in order to earn licensure.

New York, as part of its Back to Basics initiative, has expanded the use of micro-credentials to support teachers in strengthening evidence-based literacy instruction. Through partnerships with SUNY and CUNY, educators can earn credentials aligned to the Science of Reading, often at no cost. By offering these flexible and practice-based learning opportunities for teachers, the state is building a more responsive and scalable approach to professional development.

North Carolina teacher preparation programs are emerging as national models for early literacy instruction grounded in the Science of Reading. Future educators in the state receive extensive training alongside hands-on tutoring and assessment experience in local schools. This alignment of practice in teacher preparation programs, the state's effort in training every NC Pre-K and K-5 teacher, and recent legislation to provide every middle school teacher training in the Science of Reading are helping better prepare all teachers to support student success in literacy.

NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

PENNSYLVANIA

RHODE ISLAND

SOUTH DAKOTA

WEST VIRGINIA

The Northern Mariana Islands has focused on strengthening teachers' capacity to deliver evidence-based foundational reading instruction through Science of Reading professional learning. CNMI Public School System is now in its third year of implementing the Science of Reading Summer Training Program, a five-week professional learning course designed to improve educators' understanding of evidence-based literacy practices. The program emphasizes foundational reading instruction and the five pillars of reading, with participants consistently highlighting the practical, classroom-ready strategies and direct relevance of the training to their instructional practice.

Pennsylvania has strengthened professional development for teachers by requiring statewide training aligned to Structured Literacy. By the 2027–28 school year, schools must select and implement professional development programs from a state-approved list, with the goal of ensuring a more consistent and rigorous approach to building educator expertise statewide. The state-approved professional development list is updated three times per year to maintain high quality and reflect the latest evidence-based literacy practices.

Rhode Island passed the Rhode Island Right to Read Act in 2019, requiring educators to exhibit either proficiency in or awareness of the knowledge and practices of the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy by 2025. Since then, the Rhode Island Department of Education has ensured that over 11,300 teachers meet requirements, worked with educator preparation programs to prepare teacher candidates to meet requirements, and established a Literacy Learning Laboratory to assist and promote professional learning for educators, families, and caregivers as a comprehensive resource hub connecting them with high-quality tools, training, and instructional supports.

South Dakota's Moving Literacy Forward initiative emphasizes expanding access to high-quality professional development through its Literacy Blueprint courses. Developed in partnership with the South Dakota Board of Regents, these courses are grounded in the Science of Reading and designed to equip educators and university students in ed prep programs with the knowledge and skills needed for effective instruction.

West Virginia is investing in educator expertise as a key component of its early literacy strategy. The governor-supported House Bill 5438 enables statewide implementation of Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS)—a professional learning program grounded in the science of reading that is designed to deepen educators' understanding of how students learn and translate that knowledge into effective classroom instruction.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, UNIVERSAL SCREENING, AND TIMELY INTERVENTION

Strong reading instruction depends on both high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and the ability to recognize when students need additional support. States and territories in

this section have taken steps to strengthen the quality of classroom materials, implement early literacy screening, and/or provide targeted interventions—like tutoring, individualized reading plans, and regular communication with families—to help struggling readers get back on track.

ARKANSAS

INDIANA

IOWA

LOUISIANA

Arkansas has expanded access to high-impact literacy tutoring as part of its broader early literacy strategy. Through the Arkansas LEARNS Act, the state's Literacy Tutoring Grant provides funding to help families of struggling K-3 readers access high-quality, state-approved literacy tutors at no cost.

Indiana has a robust literacy infrastructure with early intervention for students who need more intensive support. Beginning in kindergarten, schools administer a universal screener to help identify students who are not on track to becoming proficient readers, which allows for timely and targeted interventions. Utilizing evidence-based instruction and high-quality curriculum grounded in the science of reading, educators support Hoosier students in becoming skilled readers and lifelong learners.

Iowa has strengthened its early literacy strategy through a comprehensive system of early identification and support for struggling readers. State policy requires universal screening in grades K-3 and intensive, research-based instruction—including 90 minutes of daily reading support—for students who are persistently at risk, alongside personalized reading plans and regular communication with families.

Louisiana has implemented a comprehensive literacy strategy grounded in the Science of Reading that includes statewide literacy screeners with aligned interventions and the use of high-quality, vetted instructional materials—alongside ongoing training and support for educators and updates to statewide teacher preparation programs. This coherence across curriculum, instruction, professional development, and measurement has coincided with meaningful gains in student reading performance; the state's fourth graders led the nation in reading growth for the last two consecutive national testing cycles.

MASSACHUSETTS

NEW MEXICO

OKLAHOMA

PUERTO RICO

Massachusetts' early literacy strategy, launched through Gov. Maura Healey's 2024 Literacy Launch initiative, has been strengthened and accelerated through the passing of An Act Relative to Teacher Preparation and Student Literacy. The law requires districts to select K–3 reading curricula supported by scientific research and directs the state to develop a free, high-quality K–3 literacy curriculum for districts. It also codifies literacy and dyslexia screening requirements and strengthens the review of teacher preparation programs to promote evidence-based literacy instruction.

New Mexico's Summer Reading Program provides targeted literacy support for incoming kindergarteners through outgoing eighth graders. Districts, charter schools, and tribal education departments offer evidence-based summer interventions focused on bolstering students' reading skills. The state has recently built on this work with SB 37, further strengthening interventions for struggling students.

Oklahoma's new Strong Readers Act establishes a three-tiered system of reading support beginning in kindergarten. While all students receive core reading instruction, those who fall below grade level are eligible for additional interventions such as small-group lessons, tutoring, summer programs, and transitional classrooms designed to accelerate progress.

Puerto Rico has strengthened its approach to foundational literacy through a grades 1–3 reading mechanics assessment, now administered throughout the school year to track student progress and inform instruction. This focus on the early grades comes amid sustained gains in reading outcomes, with third-grade Spanish language arts proficiency rising from 57 percent in 2023–24 to 70 percent in 2025–26. English language acquisition is also a priority for Gov. Jenniffer González-Colón as part of the territory's efforts to prepare students for a global workforce, which is why Puerto Rico currently has 119 fully bilingual schools, with more being added to the list every year.

SOUTH CAROLINA

TENNESSEE

TEXAS

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

South Carolina's Read to Succeed law requires summer reading camps of at least ninety-six hours of instruction for students who are not reading on grade level at the end of 3rd grade. While these reading camps initially focused on third graders, eligibility has since expanded to include first and second graders who are not exhibiting grade-level reading proficiency as well. Districts identify eligible students and provide small-group and individualized instruction led by a teacher who has a literacy endorsement or who has demonstrated success in helping students achieve grade-level proficiency in reading.

Tennessee's Literacy Success Act established a comprehensive shift toward evidence-based foundational literacy instruction, including phonics. The law requires school districts to use state-approved, standards-aligned instructional materials, develop foundational literacy skills plans, and administer an approved universal reading screener to all K–3 students three times each school year. It also requires foundational-literacy professional development for K–5 teachers and provides students with summer programming and high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring opportunities.

Texas places a strong emphasis on keeping families informed about their children's reading progress and needs. State law requires schools to notify parents when students are identified as having reading difficulties or characteristics of dyslexia and to provide information about available interventions, allowing families to become active partners in addressing reading challenges. The state has built upon this work by offering Parent Access to Supplemental Supports (PASS) grants, designed to help these parents access tutoring and other supports.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has implemented a multi-tiered system of support territory-wide, including intervention blocks; has trained practitioners on the science of reading; and uses diagnostic screening of all students with targeted supports to close learning gaps. The data from these activities are driving decision-making and direct resources as needed.

UTAH

VERMONT

WASHINGTON

WYOMING

Utah's S.B. 241 (2026), which builds on the state's S.B. 127 (2022) science of reading expectation, sets a statewide goal to have 80% of third-grade students reading at grade level by 2030. The law requires individualized reading plans and targeted interventions for students who fall below reading benchmarks—and beginning in the 2029–30 school year, S.B. 241 provides for retention of third-grade students who do not meet reading benchmarks, with good-cause exemptions and a parent appeals process.

Vermont enacted Act 139, which requires universal reading screeners for all K-3 students. The state provides detailed guidance on screener selection and implementation, with tools evaluated for technical quality, usability, and alignment to key early literacy skills. Read Vermont, an initiative built on Act 139, further supports educators in implementing evidence-based literacy practices statewide.

Washington is advancing structured literacy through new statewide curriculum requirements. Beginning in September 2027, districts adopting or updating K-4 reading and writing curricula must select materials that include language comprehension, reading and writing fluency, orthographic knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language development and proficiency.

Wyoming is strengthening its statewide literacy system by aligning screening and assessment with evidence-based instruction, individualized reading plans, intervention, and progress monitoring. Through the Language and Literacy Act, the state established a common framework that helps ensure early identification of reading difficulties is followed by timely, targeted instructional support.

GOVERNOR LEADERSHIP AND INVESTMENT

Governors can use the bully pulpit—the public platform that comes with the office—to make reading a statewide priority and draw attention to what is working.

Many of the governors of the states in this section have backed that attention with targeted funding.

DELAWARE

IDAHO

MICHIGAN

Delaware Gov. Matt Meyer made improving early literacy a statewide priority by declaring a 'literacy emergency' during his first year in office. That commitment is backed by an $8 million investment in Delaware's Literacy Plan focused on strengthening teachers' instructional practice, building school leaders' capacity to lead instructional improvement, and supporting the effective use of high-quality instructional materials. Together, these strategies are strengthening implementation across schools, with the goal of helping more Delaware students become confident, capable readers and improve their reading outcomes.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little has significantly elevated the state's focus and investment in early literacy as part of a broader push to improve reading outcomes. Since Gov. Little took office, Idaho has boosted annual literacy funding to nearly $78 million, more than a fivefold increase—supporting K-3 teacher training in the science of reading and evidence-based reading interventions in the early grades.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has used her platform to convene leaders and highlight the urgency of improving reading proficiency in the state. She co-hosted Michigan's first statewide literacy summit, bringing together nearly 300 leaders from education, business, and government. She also secured a $502 million investment in literacy in the state's budget with a focus on the state's Every Child Reads plan, expanding strong early starts, proven methods for teaching reading, and extra help for struggling readers.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

OHIO

VIRGINIA

GOVERNOR LEADERSHIP AND INVESTMENT

New Hampshire Gov. Kelly Ayotte highlighted early literacy as a top priority in her 2026 State of the State address, emphasizing the need to improve reading outcomes statewide. She also called for a closer examination of high-performing districts and tasked the Department of Education with identifying effective practices that can be replicated to drive stronger results across New Hampshire.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has long championed evidence-based literacy instruction through ReadOhio, a statewide initiative launched in 2023 alongside new requirements for schools to use approved instructional materials, complete professional learning, and assign literacy coaches to Ohio's lowest-performing schools. All efforts are grounded in the science of reading. In his last two budgets, Governor DeWine has secured more than $200 million in state resources to support the ReadOhio initiative.

Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger issued Executive Order 4 to strengthen implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act and improve early literacy outcomes statewide. Building on feedback from educators and school divisions, the initiative focuses on strengthening student reading plans, using literacy data to better identify and support struggling readers, and ensuring students receive effective, evidence-based literacy instruction and intervention.



04
BRIDGING BIRTH–3RD GRADE LITERACY

States recognize that **EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT BEGIN IN KINDERGARTEN**—and that stronger alignment between pre-K and the early grades is essential for sustained reading success. In response, many have taken steps to better connect early learning

systems with K-3rd grade instruction, whether through coordinated standards, aligned curricula, or shared data and assessments. The following section explores how states are working to create more seamless pathways from early childhood into the elementary years.

ALASKA

ARIZONA

CALIFORNIA

MINNESOTA

Alaska's READS Act establishes a comprehensive, statewide early literacy system that aligns early education with K-3 instruction. The law combines universal screening, evidence-based instruction aligned with the science of reading, individualized reading intervention plans, educator training, and family involvement to support early identification and intervention for students who need additional reading support.

Arizona Literacy Plan 2030 places literacy coaching at the center of its strategy to improve reading outcomes. Through the state's Foundational Literacy Coaching initiative, coaches work directly with PreK-3 teachers to implement evidence-based reading instruction, with the goal of expanding coaching statewide and building educator capacity.

California is advancing alignment across early learning and K-12 through its Literacy Roadmap and Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) expansion. These efforts connect preschool access with K-3 literacy instruction by promoting developmentally appropriate, evidence-based practices across systems. The state emphasizes continuity in standards, educator supports, and early identification of reading needs.

Minnesota's Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act requires schools to use evidence-based reading instruction aligned with the science of reading and provides extensive training for educators. The law also encourages districts to implement Minnesota Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MnMTSS), which strengthens PK–12 Tier 1 instruction through consistent, well-organized instructional practices. To support this work, the state has mobilized an aligned statewide system of professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance for districts, charter schools, and tribally controlled schools.

MONTANA

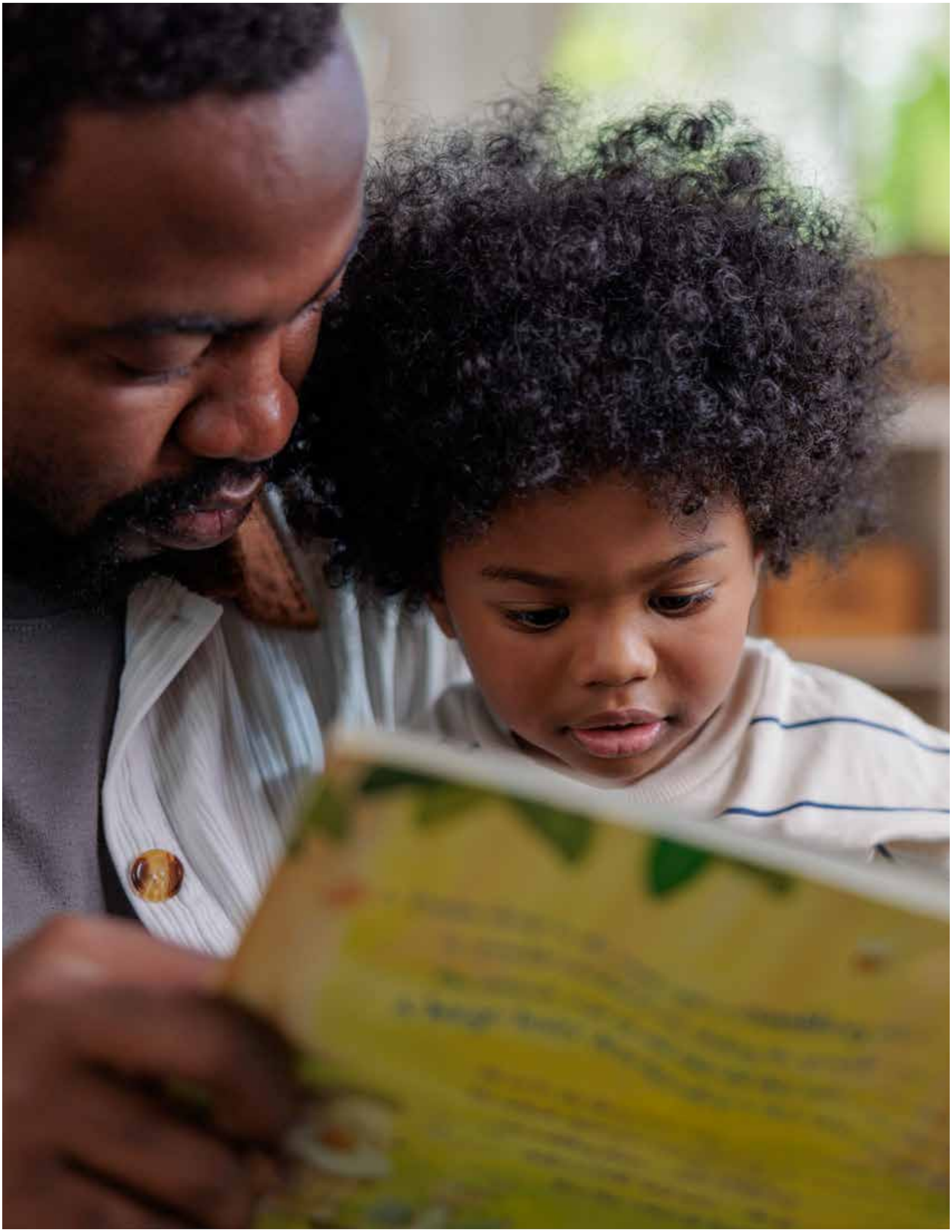
OREGON

WISCONSIN

Montana's cross-sector Early Literacy Advisory Council works to align early childhood and K-3 literacy strategies, promoting data sharing, coordinated supports, and consistent instructional practices across systems. The Council's efforts complement the Early Literacy Targeted Interventions Act, which is designed to offer flexible, parent-driven supports for young readers—including home-based, summer jumpstart, and in-classroom programs.

Oregon's Early Literacy Success Initiative, championed by Gov. Tina Kotek and backed by an initial investment of more than $100 million, has taken a system-wide approach to literacy reform. The initiative has supported training for K-5 teachers in the science of reading, the adoption of early literacy HQIM, and the placement of reading instructional coaches in schools—and $10 million was allocated specifically for community and Tribal literacy efforts. The state also dedicated roughly $10 million to implementing its Birth Through Five Literacy Plan, extending this work to Oregon's youngest learners through culturally responsive, family- and community-based supports.

Wisconsin's Act 20 establishes a comprehensive early literacy reform effort, including curriculum alignment, coaching, and teacher training grounded in the science of reading. The initiative emphasizes coordination between early childhood education and K-3 systems to ensure consistent instructional practices. It also supports early screening and intervention to strengthen transitions into elementary school.



05
RESOURCES FOR GOVERNORS

BELLWETHER'S ON THE SAME PAGE: A PRIMER ON THE SCIENCE OF READING AND ITS FUTURE FOR POLICYMAKERS, SCHOOL LEADERS, AND ADVOCATES:
A publication and webinar providing a clear fact base for discussions about reading instruction and lessons from past large-scale reform efforts

THE BUSH CENTER'S A REPUBLIC OF READERS:
Insights, partnerships, and strategies guiding the 2025 Governors Forum on Reading

THE CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING'S RESOURCE PAGE:
Publications, videos, and graphics emphasizing on-track development by the end of kindergarten and grade-level reading by the end of third grade

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS' A NATION OF READERS:
A guide to support state chiefs in ensuring every child learns to read

EDUCATION WEEK'S WHICH STATES HAVE PASSED 'SCIENCE OF READING' LAWS? WHAT'S IN THEM?:
An analysis tracking which states have passed laws or implemented other policies requiring schools to use evidence-based methods for teaching young students to read

EXCELINED'S EARLY LITERACY MATTERS INITIATIVE:
A look into comprehensive state-level literacy solutions for supporting teachers, administrators, students, and families

FUTUREED'S THE READING REVOLUTION: HOW STATES ARE SCALING LITERACY REFORM:
A report on how Mississippi, Tennessee, and other states have redesigned reading instruction and raised student achievement

RAISING A READER PROGRAM RESOURCES:
A program aimed at supporting families in the development of literacy skills

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON TEACHER QUALITY'S HOW STATES CAN IMPLEMENT AND SUSTAIN STRONG READING INSTRUCTION:
A guide to steps states can take to strengthen implementation of reading policies



06
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

THE **EARLY LITERACY LANDSCAPE HAS SHIFTED SIGNIFICANTLY** SINCE NGA PUBLISHED ITS FIRST POCKET GUIDE IN 2019.

Pandemic-era disruptions, further declining NAEP scores, and a renewed national focus on the Science of Reading have placed early reading squarely on governors' agendas. The state examples featured in this guide reflect that shift and make clear that states and territories in every corner of the country are taking action.

Across these examples, several common themes emerge. States are increasingly grounding teacher preparation and professional development in evidence-based practices, promoting the adoption of high-quality instructional materials, and aligning screening and intervention systems with research on how children learn to read. They are also elevating early literacy as a policy and funding priority, investing in literacy development before kindergarten and strengthening connections between early childhood programs and the elementary grades. At the same time, states are using data to identify struggling readers earlier and strengthen accountability for student outcomes, while pairing these efforts with meaningful family engagement and ongoing support for educators.



And even then, state leaders recognize that while early literacy is the foundation, the work does not end in third grade. As texts grow more complex, students in the upper grades continue to need strong reading and writing instruction.

Governors are uniquely positioned to lead this charge. As the officials with the authority to align state agencies, create budgets, convene stakeholders, and mobilize public attention, governors can set a clear vision for early literacy and ensure that vision endures.

The National Governors Association stands ready to support governors and their teams as they advance this work. The organization will convene an 18-month math and literacy community of practice beginning in early 2027, offering governors' education policy advisors from participating states and territories a forum to exchange strategies, navigate common challenges, and learn from emerging evidence. Through this shared learning, as well as further technical assistance and new policy resources, NGA will remain a partner in helping states ensure that every child enters fourth grade ready to read—and ready to thrive.



NGA PROJECT TEAM

- Seth Gerson, Policy Director, K–12 Education
- Devon Nir, Senior Policy Analyst, K–12 Education
- Eli McCabe, Special Assistant to the Chief Policy Officer
- Jess Kirchner, Senior Policy Advisor, Children and Families
- Lily Klam, Policy Analyst, K–12 Education

For more information about NGA's efforts to support governors and states on literacy, please contact Seth Gerson.

ABOUT NGA



Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the voice of the leaders of 55 states, territories, and commonwealths. Our nation's Governors are dedicated to leading bipartisan solutions that improve citizens' lives through state government. Through NGA, Governors identify priority issues and deal with matters of public policy and governance at the state, national and global levels.

NGA is the premier resource for not only Governors but also for their cabinet members, state policy experts, the U.S. Congress, and private enterprise. NGA offers an array of services to help collaboratively tell the states' story.

Thanks to decades of broad expertise, NGA teams are able to work side-by-side with state leaders to identify challenges, help governors stay ahead of the curve and offer solutions before challenges become problems.


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