

Alignment for Early Literacy

Review of Delaware's Prekindergarten to Grade 3 Licensure and Certification Landscape

Summary 3 of 4¹: How does Delaware compare to states and countries that have seen increases in student achievement and growth in reading and literacy over time in their regulatory structures, certification process, and preparation pathways for supporting literacy?

¹ See the full report for detailed analysis as well as the associated summaries (1–4).

Key Findings

- Model states have a unified approach to prioritizing the science of reading and building teacher capacity to adapt literacy practices to match through professional development and/or coordination with preparation institutions. Some include specific assessments or measures of performance related to teacher proficiency in the science of reading.
- For international comparisons, there is a range of different approaches to identifying the boundary between early childhood education and childcare. Additionally, entry into the education sector in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is very rigorous, with most countries only recruiting teacher candidates from the top of graduates. Lastly, internationally, the definitions of mandates and incentives do not consistently align to American definitions.

Methodology

States were selected due to their use of microcredentials, state funded pre-K access, and citation in recent research for innovative practices related to teacher certification and/or early literacy. The countries were chosen based on their PISA ranking relative to the United States. Each country's early childhood teaching certification program and pathways were reviewed. In addition, caveats that may impact the comparison between the country and United States were identified.

Relevant Report Highlights

State Comparison

Four of the model states, Colorado, Kansas, Mississippi, and Rhode Island, utilize accreditation by ILA CAEP and/or IDA for teacher preparation programs. Only one model state, Iowa, does not use accreditation by ILA CAEP or IDA for teacher preparation. The review found that the use of accreditation by ILA CAEP or IDA varies across Arkansas teacher preparation programs, and it is unclear if or when programs are accredited by ILA CAEP or IDA in the state of North Carolina. Each of the model states, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, align literacy standards taught in teacher preparation programs.

By grade structure, four model states, Colorado, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, teaching certification is comparable to the state of Delaware. Three states’, Arkansas, Iowa, and Kansas, grade structure for certification have more variations than Delaware. Five of the chosen model states require teachers to pass a literacy assessment for initial certification: Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, and Mississippi. The literacy assessment required across the five states varied between state-specific and Praxis exams. North Carolina and Rhode Island are the only states that do not require teachers to pass a literacy assessment for certification; however, they both require teachers to complete a course focused on the science of reading during their teacher preparation program.

Four of the seven model states offer different types of specialization like microcredentials and specialist roles for educators. One state, North Carolina, does not currently offer additional specialization. The review of Iowa was unclear; it currently offers a microexternship that would need to be further researched to validate as a specialization. Two identified states require teachers to pass a literacy exam for advanced certification while five do not; however, three of these four states require that teachers complete additional credits in literacy. For more details, see Appendix B.

Due to its literacy reforms, Mississippi has achieved significant gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, with Grade 4 students making the largest score gains from 2017 to 2019 in reading and mathematics, Grade 8 students outpacing the nation for growth in mathematics, and Grade 8 reading holding steady.

The shift toward instruction that is embedded with a strong grasp of the “science of reading” operates on a theory of action that tightly binds together research, policy, and practice. Policies in model states center the state’s instructional strategies around research on the science of reading and, in turn, teachers are trained on a specific set of research-based literacy domains. In Mississippi, the approach was first codified in the 2013 Literacy-Based Promotion Act. In Colorado, it was included in the 2012 Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act. In North Carolina, it was recently promulgated in the Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021. And in Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Right to Read Act passed in July 2019.

International Comparison

As cross-national examples are presented, it is important to note that international comparisons are context dependent. Among others, four caveats should be considered for this study:

- U.S. students tend to start school at a later age than most international students.
 - United States has more reading specialists than other countries.
 - United States spends more per student on education but has mixed graduation rates.
 - The education system in the United States is layered by federal and state structure while the majority of international systems centralize their education system. The National Center for Education Statistics’ latest comparison of education in the United States and other G-20 countries found that in the United States, only 10% of children enroll in school settings before age 6, and 3- to 4-year-old enrollment was 64%, higher than only six other G-20 countries.
 - In addition to lower enrollment for the early childhood years, American teachers were far more likely than G-20 country teachers to indicate that they had access to a reading specialist for supplemental classroom support.
4. The NCES report found that the United States spends more public and private dollars on education than any other country included in the study yet continues to have mixed graduation rates, lagging behind many other G-20 countries.

What is not specifically clear is the literacy context within the teacher preparation programs and the certification processes for candidates. For a more in-depth analysis, further research will be required.

Selected Considerations and Recommendations

- Endorse a requirement for an assessment of teaching literacy competencies for candidates.
- Examine and ensure alignment of the literacy preparation requirements for early childhood professionals to ILA standards and strengthen the link between preschool educators to educators in the K–3 grade bands.