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**System Alignment for Early Literacy:**  
*Review of Delaware's Pre-Kindergarten to  
Grade 3 Licensure and Certification Landscape*

August 19th, 2021



## Today's Objective

- Provide an overview of research questions, findings, and recommendations.



# Research Team

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Public, not-for-profit,  
joint powers agency

Over 50 years of service in  
research, training, and  
technical assistance

Work on a range of topics:  
early childhood, K-12, and  
higher ed

Clients have included states,  
school districts, federal  
agencies, foundations, and  
IHEs





# Report Preview



- **Project Overview and Objectives**
- **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**
- **Questions and Discussion**



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## Project Overview

## Study Objectives

- Review of Delaware's early literacy teacher certification approach including the current structure, process for candidates, and historical context.
- Review of effective practice and research derived from other states and countries.
- Provide recommendations based on findings





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# Research Questions and Findings





## Research Questions

- 1. Based on available data, what is the current landscape of Delaware's early childhood and early elementary teacher pool?**
- 2. What is the evidence base for current best practices preparing teachers and support staff for teaching literacy?**



## Research Questions

**3. How do Delaware's current pathways for preparation and the current regulatory structure related to licensure and certification align to best practices for supporting literacy for young children, PreK-grade 3?**

3a: What is the regulatory structure for certification and ongoing professional development?

3b: What are the teacher preparation and professional development pathways for current Delaware educators and how are they prepared to support literacy development for children, Pre-K–grade 3?

**4. How does Delaware compare to states and countries that have seen increases in students' achievement and growth in reading and literacy over time, in their regulatory structure, certification process, and preparation pathways for supporting literacy?**

## Methodology

Mixed-methods approach with a document and data review, research literature review, and an abbreviated interview series with key system stakeholders:

- Professional Standards Board
- P-20 Council
- Department of Education Offices: *Office of Licensure & Certification, Office of Early Learning, and Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development*
- Reading Assist
- Preschool and Elementary Site Administrators





# Methodology: State and International Comparison

Identified states and countries were selected based on:

- Strong models in place or promising practices
- Average test scores in Grade 3 (reading and language arts)
- Existing pathways for specialization

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# Summary of Key Findings

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# Data Snapshot

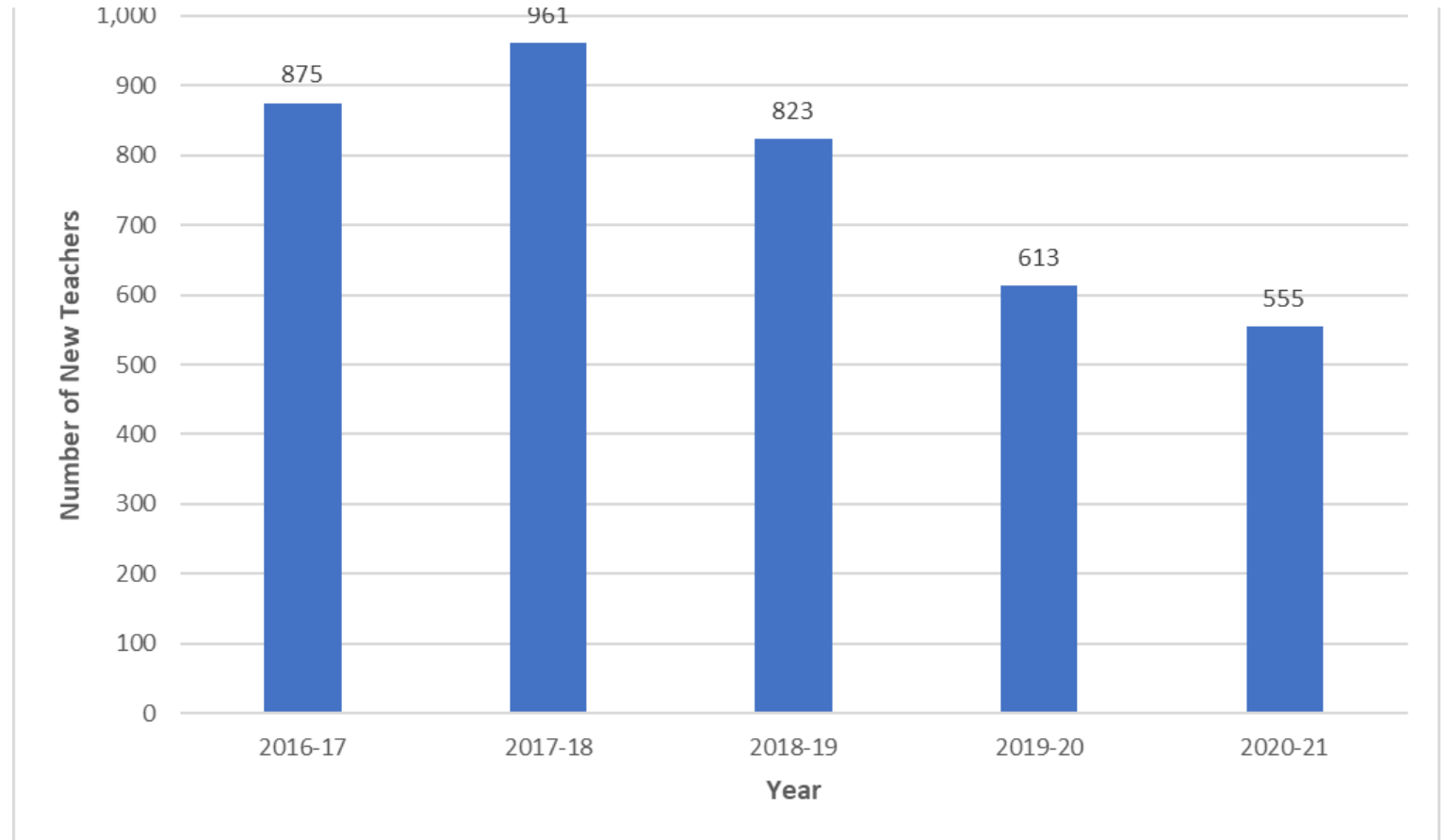
**RQ1: Based on available data, what is the current landscape of Delaware's early childhood and early elementary teacher pool?**



# Number of New Candidates Trending Down

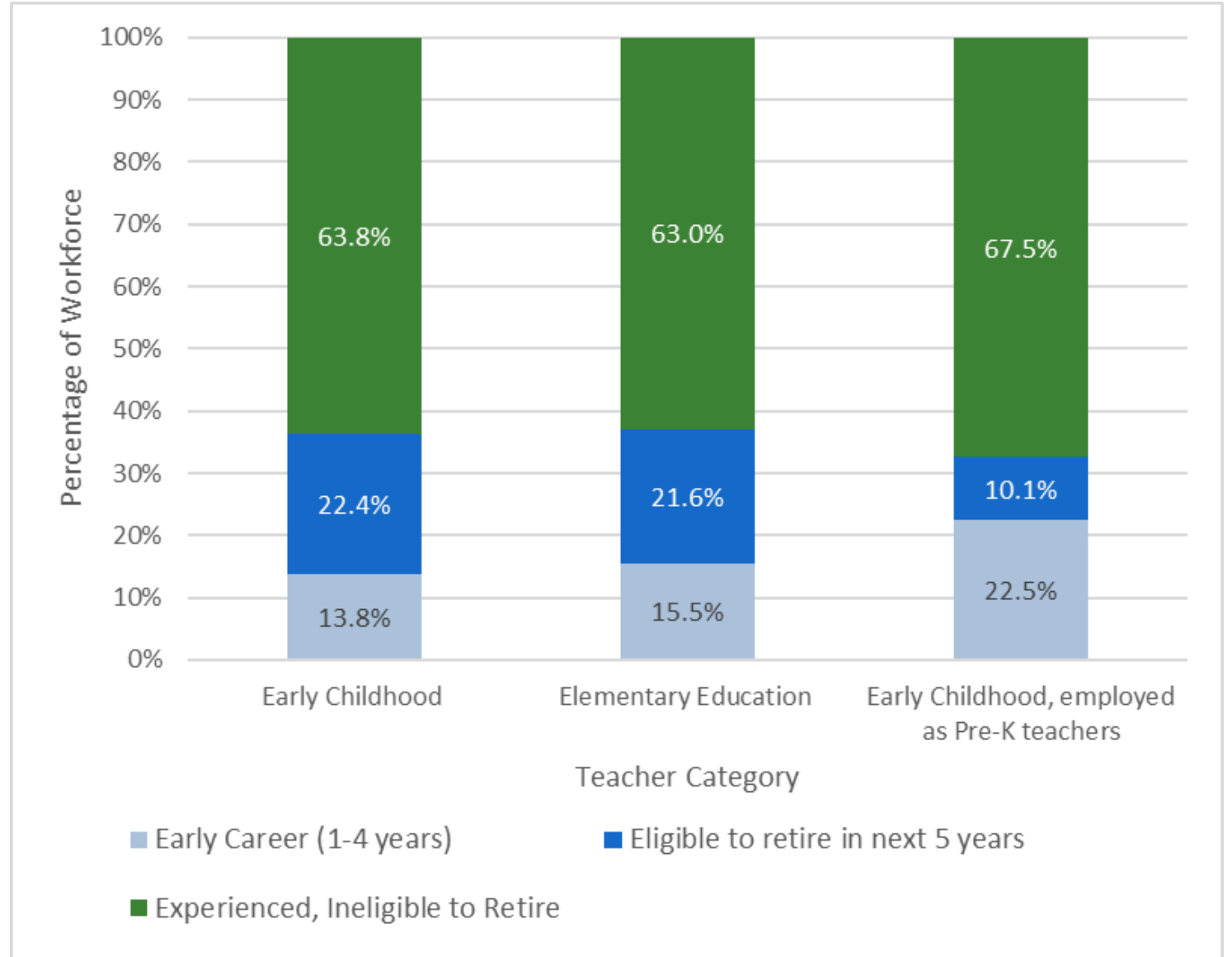
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*Newly Certified Delaware  
K–12 Workforce, 2016–  
2021*



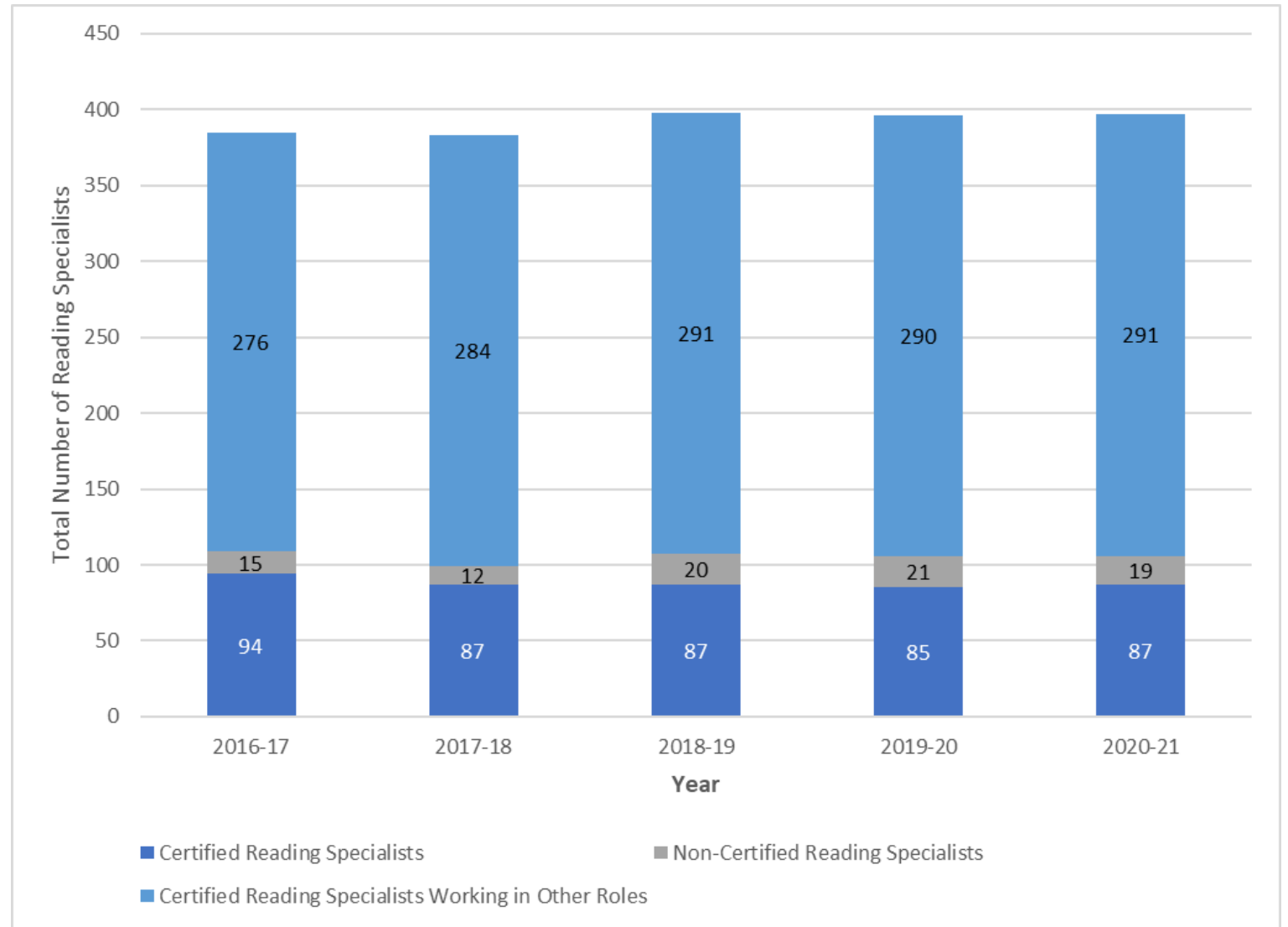
# Most Teachers are Experienced

## *Experience Levels of Delaware Teachers*



# Reading Specialists are employed in other roles

## *Current Reading Specialist Utilization*







# Evidence Base

**RQ2: What is the evidence base for current best practices preparing teachers and support staff for teaching literacy?**

# Key Findings: Evidence Base

- There is a clear evidence base for teaching literacy, and current state standards are aligned to the evidence base.
- There is a clear evidence base for utilizing job-embedded professional development to advance practice and the current regulations and professional development standards are aligned to that approach.

## What is Job-Embedded Professional Learning?

“...grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers’ content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning.” - Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (2011).

Models can include:

- Coaching/mentoring
- Collaborative teaching
- Peer-peer learning
- Time for teacher reflection and connection about their own classroom practices.



## **Pathways and Regulatory Structure**

**RQ 3. How do Delaware's current pathways for preparation and the current regulatory structure related to licensure and certification align to best practices for supporting literacy for young children, PreK-grade 3?**



# Key Findings: Pathways

## **Pathways are Clear:**

Pathways available for teachers to enter the profession and advance are accessible, clear, aligned to models in other states, and include support and incentives (via compensation or discounts for tuition), opportunities for specialization, and professional development credit.

## **Incentives Needed:**

Stakeholders reported a need for greater incentives to align to teacher support needs and that these incentives are not widely known by teachers.



# Key Findings: Regulatory Structure

## **Current Structure Aligns to Other States:**

The scan of the regulatory structure did not find any major gaps in the roles or requirements for certification when compared to other states or to the current evidence base.

## **Current Structure Misaligned to Ground-Level Reality:**

There are a number of critical roles at the school level focused on literacy that are not captured by the regulatory or certification structures (such as Reading Assist, reading interventionists, and literacy coaches).

# Key Findings: Utilization of Roles

## **Roles are Underutilized but Demand is High:**

Stakeholders report a high demand on specialists at the school level to support learning needs, with triage processes in place to refer children to special programs or for IEPs instead of lesson modeling, collaborative teaching, or direct student support.

**This indicates a need for review of staffing structures at the classroom, school, and district level.**





# Key Findings: Professional Development and Preparation

## **Professional Development is the Key Lever:**

Due to the majority of teachers in the talent pool in the veteran but not retirement-eligible group, professional development is a critical lever to aligning current teacher practice to the research base.

## **Preparation pathways are strong and match regulations:**

While preparation courses appear to match regulatory requirements, a further analysis of course content could indicate areas for improved alignment to the ILA standards.





# Comparative Examples

**RQ 4: How does Delaware compare to states and countries that have seen increases in students' achievement and growth in reading and literacy over time, in their regulatory structure, certification process, and preparation pathways for supporting literacy?**

# State Examples

- Prioritize the science of reading
- Build 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.







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# Recommendations



A photograph of a sidewalk and a road with trees and a car in the background. The sidewalk is made of concrete slabs and runs along the edge of a road. There are several trees with thick trunks in the background. A silver car is parked on the road. A green fire hydrant is visible on the right side of the sidewalk.

# Update the System to Match Needs on the Ground

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Focus on Encouraging Site-Level  
Coordination and Elevation  
of Educators and Literacy Professionals



# Recommendations

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- **Complete further research on the utilization of literacy-focused roles across pre-k to the grade 3 band.**
- **Improve strategic utilization of specialized literacy roles and teacher teams through site-based coordination.**
- **Consider incentives to schools and districts to examine their use of current literacy professionals and encourage (through grants and principal evaluations) the development of literacy teams.**

# Recommendations (con't)

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- **Identify and review the impact of current incentives for professional development through compensation and flexible use of time for collaboration for literacy across grade bands. Consider expanding incentives according to insights on impact.**
- **Examine the overlap between early childhood certification and elementary certification and analyze the literacy approach within preparation for the two different pathways.**
- **Consider adding a specific literacy-based assessment for licensure and certification.**



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# Questions and Discussion





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**Thank you!**