

# Ready to Read by Fourth Grade

*Reading is the foundation for learning. Students who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely than their peers to drop out of high school. What can states do to ensure that students read proficiently by fourth grade?*

To read the complete SREB report on state policies for improving early grades reading, visit [www.sreb.org/ReadToSucceed](http://www.sreb.org/ReadToSucceed). The main points of the report are summarized here.

“The more you **read**  
the more **things** you know.  
The more that you **learn**  
the more **places** you’ll go.”  
-Dr. Seuss

## Teacher preparation programs leave gaps in reading instruction.

Effective reading instruction in the early grades must include explicit instruction in **the five essential components of reading**: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

**Preservice training for reading instruction is not adequate** in many teacher preparation programs. A 2016 analysis of more than 800 undergraduate programs for elementary teacher education found that only 39 percent of programs examined included instruction in all five of the essential components of reading.



## Alignment of resources and instruction is crucial.

To teach reading effectively, teachers need a clear framework of **research-based standards** for the key knowledge and skills students should master by the end of each year.



State standards should be taught using **developmentally appropriate curricula** and **engaging instructional materials and practices**.

Assessment in the early grades should take **multiple age-appropriate forms** and help teachers better individualize their students’ learning.

## Pre-K and kindergarten provide a critical boost for children.

Research supports **high-quality pre-K programs** as a critical tool to promote school readiness, especially for children from low-income families and dual language learners.

**Pre-K teachers need to be prepared specifically to teach children age 5 and younger** and should understand the progression of learning standards from pre-K through the early grades.



Kindergarten classrooms serve children with a wide range of skills, experiences and abilities. **Highly-effective kindergarten teachers** are adept at differentiating instruction and building upon each student’s existing skills, thereby helping pre-K gains to last.

Researchers report that state kindergarten policy needs to **empower teachers** to address students’ individual learning needs and **provide a recharging station** for children who complete pre-K.

## Early identification is key to preventing reading difficulties.



**Kindergarten readiness assessments** provide important data that teachers can use to individualize instruction and target the skills their students lack. States can use this data to identify pre-K programs or curricula that need improvement.

**Frequent formative assessment** enables teachers to better identify students who are not reading on grade level, provide additional support, and monitor their progress toward meeting grade-level goals. It also helps teachers adjust instruction to better meet students' individual needs.

**Measuring student proficiency and progress in reading at the end of each year** can help ensure that schools quickly identify students who continue to struggle and target them for intervention during summer or the following school year.

## Effective intervention is essential for struggling readers.

Helping struggling readers reach grade-level expectations is not as simple as providing more of the same type of instruction. **These students need high-quality interventions that are evidence-based and designed specifically for struggling readers.**

Intervention programs based on **intensive one-on-one tutoring** are more effective than programs provided in any other format, including small groups. While costly up front, effective intervention can provide a **significant return on investment** to schools and to society over the course of a child's lifetime.



## Retention can be expensive and ineffective.



**Mandatory retention alone is not a policy strategy that will improve student achievement in the long run.** In general, holding a student in-grade may help students perform better in the retention year, but it does not confer significant benefits that last.

**Retention policies for struggling readers need to be paired with high-quality systems of intervention and remediation** designed to provide the support poor third-grade readers need to improve.

Whether students are retained or promoted when they fall short on a reading benchmark, it is vital that they receive **intensive intervention** to help them catch up to grade level as quickly as possible. These students may benefit from **smaller classrooms** and **highly effective teachers** who can provide **individualized instruction** to meet their needs.

## Dyslexia is a barrier to learning to read.

Researchers estimate that **dyslexia affects at least one in 10 people**, although the true rate could be as high as one in five. Schools should be prepared to offer additional support to help children with dyslexia be successful.

**Teachers need to be able to recognize characteristics of dyslexia** and use **structured, multisensory approaches** to teach language and reading skills. These approaches benefit all children.

With early identification and appropriate teaching methods, students with dyslexia can learn as well as other students. **Identifying children who have dyslexia** as early in their school careers as possible makes it more likely that they will be able to reach grade level in reading.

