Early Literacy Matters

State-by-State Policy Implementation Report

Explore Iowa’s adoption and implementation of the 18 Early Literacy fundamental principles.
Early Literacy Policy Implementation Rubric

Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy establishes support and intensive reading interventions for all K–3 students to ensure they read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade. The policy also requires 3rd grade students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to 4th grade. For students severely below grade level and who do not qualify for a good cause exemption, retention provides struggling readers the additional time and intensive interventions they need to catch up with their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FULL IMPLEMENTATION</strong></th>
<th>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy, and there is evidence of full implementation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABOVE &amp; BEYOND BADGE:</strong></td>
<td>This badge recognizes efforts that exceed full implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION</strong></td>
<td>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy, but there is limited evidence of implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION</strong></td>
<td>The fundamental principle is adopted in policy with a future date for implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED</strong></td>
<td>The fundamental principle is not adopted in policy, does not meet minimum implementation requirements or is grant-based and not sustainable.</td>
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of states’ implementation of K–3 reading policies aligned to ExcelinEd’s fundamental principles of an early literacy policy. It builds on an analysis of states’ adoption of statutes and regulations establishing requirements for each component of the four fundamental principle areas, which are:

1. Supports for Teachers & Policy
2. Assessment & Parent Notification
3. Instruction & Intervention
4. Retention & Intensive Intervention

This report summarizes evidence of Iowa’s early literacy policy implementation using an implementation rubric designed to gauge state progress toward full implementation of early literacy policies. Each of the fundamental principles is addressed in a separate table.

ADOPITON IMPLEMENTATION

8 out of 18

STATE POLICY ADOPTION REFERENCE MATERIALS

- Iowa Code 279.68 Student progression – intensive reading instruction – reporting requirements
- Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Initiative
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT require K–3 teachers and administrators to participate in state-adopted science of reading training.

• Iowa policy DOES require districts to provide professional development services to enhance the skills of elementary teachers in responding to student’s reading issues and needs and to increase the use of evidence-based strategies, subject to an appropriation of funds.

• Iowa guidance DOES specify that funds HAVE NOT been appropriated specifically for that section of the law (as of 2018), so districts are NOT required to provide professional development. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require all K–3 teachers and administrators to participate in state-adopted science of reading training.

• In adopting this expanded policy, Iowa should create an implementation plan that is clearly communicated to all educators.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT address literacy coaches in state policy.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should ensure that a literacy coach that is trained in the science of reading is assigned to each elementary school to provide job-embedded professional development and coaching to K–3 teachers.
EPP required coursework is aligned to the science of reading and includes evidence-based literacy instruction.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES have standards for educator preparation programs that address the components of scientifically based reading; however, the state only provides minimal details for some of the standards. (NCTQ, Iowa Summary 2023)

• Iowa policy DOES require teachers with an endorsement to teach in an elementary school classroom to have received at least 9 semester hours in literacy development, which includes phonology and phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics and orthography, fluency, and others, as well as training on assessment, diagnosis and evaluation of student learning in literacy, including the knowledge of the signs and symptoms of dyslexia and other reading difficulties.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT require elementary education candidates to take a reading licensure test. ([NCTQ, Iowa Summary 2023; NCTQ, False Assurances: Many states’ licensure tests don’t signal whether elementary teachers understand reading instruction (Nov. 2023)])

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require elementary education candidates to pass an assessment that is aligned to the Science of Reading in order to obtain teacher licensure.
Funding for Literacy Efforts

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

Funding is dedicated to some but not all early literacy fundamental principles and may be temporary or grant based.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES provide direct funding specifically to support state and/or local implementation of early literacy fundamental principles. These include funding for:
  - Early Literacy Initiative ([Iowa Department of Education, 2023-24 ELI Allocations](#))
  - Early Readers Funding
  - Iowa Reading Research Center

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should determine the adequate funding level to ensure implementation of the fundamental principles are fully funded.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
FULL IMPLEMENTATION

A state-approved universal reading screener is administered to K–3 students three times per year to identify students at risk for reading failure.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa policy DOES require schools to assess all students in K–3 at the beginning of each school year and intermittently throughout the year using a universal screening assessment that meets Department-adopted minimum standards. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

• Iowa guidance DOES require administration of the universal reading screener three times per year: fall, winter and spring. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Implementation Technical Assistance Companion Document (2020))

• Iowa DOES monitor administration of universal screeners by requiring districts to report specific interventions and supports and data on universal screening and progress monitoring to the Department. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

• Iowa DOES allow districts to use a portfolio review of student work to determine an individual student’s proficiency in reading, as well as teacher observation. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

• Iowa DOES publish a list of assessments that meet the Department-adopted minimum standards on their website annually. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))
Universal Reading Screener

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
FULL IMPLEMENTATION

RESOURCES
- Iowa Department of Education, Literacy Assessments Meeting the Requirements of 279.68/ELI (2023-2024 school year)
- Iowa Department of Education, Request for Approval (RFAP): Early Literacy Assessments

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY
This principle currently meets full implementation.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa policy DOES require the universal screener, that is administered at the beginning of each year in K–3, to measure phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

- Iowa DOES not require schools to administer a state-approved screener for dyslexia.

- Iowa DOES specify that the reading curriculum for students persistently at risk in reading must provide assistance to include, but not be limited to, strategies that formally address dyslexia when appropriate. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to require schools to administer a state-approved screener for characteristics of dyslexia that assess all of the following skills, as developmentally appropriate: phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding, rapid naming, encoding and oral reading fluency.

- Iowa should require the dyslexia screener to be administered, at a minimum, to all students at the end of Kindergarten and at the beginning of 1st and 2nd grade.
Parental Notification

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

State requires parental notification of students identified with reading difficulties based on the state-approved universal reading screener and/or dyslexia screener results. Timeline and frequency of parental notification may vary.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state's policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa policy DOES require parental notification of students identified with reading difficulties annually. (See also Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

• Iowa DOES provide guidance on what the parental notification letters should include, such as universal screening data, a description of interventions, and strategies that may be implemented at home. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

• Iowa DOES encourage districts to provide quarterly progress reports to parents of students who are identified as persistently at risk in reading. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require parental notification of students identified with reading deficiencies within 30 days of each administration of the state-approved universal reading screener and dyslexia screener.
District Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT require school districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned to the science of reading and state standards.

• Iowa DOES require school district reading instruction to meet certain requirements, such as providing skill development in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; however there DOES NOT appear to be a requirement that these programs include high-quality instructional materials. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require school districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned to the science of reading and state standards from a vetted and approved list.

• Iowa should further require districts to post their adopted materials on the district website.
Elimination of Three-Cueing Instructional Materials

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES NOT, through policy, guidance, training, or other avenues, prohibit or discourage the use of instructional materials that include three-cueing.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should adopt a policy, in statute or regulation, that prohibits the use of three-cueing instructional practices and materials.
Individual Reading Plans

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state requires schools to develop and implement an individual reading plan for students who are identified as having a reading deficiency based upon screening results. Timeline and monitoring may vary.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES require schools to provide parents of students persistently at risk in reading with a plan for interventions and instruction that will be provided for the student. ([Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018)](https://example.com))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to require schools to develop and implement an individual reading plan for students who are identified as having a reading deficiency within 30 days of receiving screening results.
- Iowa should establish a process for monitoring the implementation of those plans and a specific timeline for notifying parents of the plan.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

FULL IMPLEMENTATION

The state requires schools to regularly monitor and document students’ progress within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) and utilize the data to inform instruction and interventions as needed and in a timely manner. Monitoring can take many forms (i.e., observations, screeners, assessments, and student work).

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES require schools to regularly monitor and document students’ progress within an MTSS and supported with differentiated accountability. (Iowa Department of Education, Differentiated Accountability System)
- Iowa DOES require schools to provide for weekly progress monitoring for all students identified as at risk and persistently at risk. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))
- Iowa DOES monitor administration of universal screeners by requiring districts to report specific interventions and supports and data on universal screening and progress monitoring to the Department. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))
Evidence-Based Interventions

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state requires school districts to target students’ needs by adopting evidence-based interventions grounded in the science of reading and may provide guidance in the selection of the interventions. Interventions are provided before, during, or after school.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa policy DOES require schools to provide students with intensive reading instruction if the student is not reading proficiently, including interventions such as small group instruction, reduced teacher-student ratios, more frequent progress monitoring, tutoring or mentoring, extended school day, week or year and summer reading programs. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Initiative)

- Iowa policy DOES provide that students who are identified as persistently at risk in reading at the end of 3rd grade shall remain entitled to intensive reading instruction.

- Iowa DOES specify that districts are required to provide 90 minutes of research-based reading instruction for students persistently at risk in reading – if the district’s core instruction is not at least 90 minutes and composed of scientific, research-based reading instruction, then the district must implement such a program. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

- Iowa DOES monitor administration of universal screeners by requiring districts to report specific interventions and supports and data on universal screening and progress monitoring to the Department. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to require school districts to target students’ needs by adopting reading interventions grounded in the science of reading from a vetted and approved list.
Summer Reading Camps

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES NOT require school districts to offer summer reading camps to rising 1st–4th grade students at risk of reading failure.
- Iowa policy DOES provide the option for schools to offer summer programs to students who are persistently at risk in reading.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to require districts to offer summer reading camps to rising 1st–4th grade students at risk of reading failure to remEDIATE learning loss and/or build reading skills.
- Iowa should further require all staff at summer reading camps to be trained in the science of reading.
PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state or district provides online resources to parents to support reading at home.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa policy DOES require parental notification relating to reading deficiencies to include strategies for parents to use in helping the student, including promoting parent supported at home reading.
- Iowa DOES provide online resources to parents to support reading at home. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Initiative)
- Iowa DOES provide guidance on what the parental notification letters should include, such as universal screening data, a description of interventions and strategies that may be implemented at home. (Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Guidance (2018))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to require read-at-home plans for parents to be provided as soon as a student is identified with a reading deficiency.
- Iowa should further ensure that strategies shared with parents are targeting students’ needs based on data and are aligned to the science of reading.
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

- Iowa DOES NOT have a policy that requires a student who is unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills on the state test-based options provided be retained.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to include 3rd grade promotion/retention requirements to ensure students are able to demonstrate skilled reading for promotion to 4th grade.
Multiple Options for Promotion

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT have a retention policy and DOES NOT offer at least three pathways for promotion to 4th grade.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require that 3rd grade students who are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills (on the state test-based options provided) be retained. Policy should include at least three pathways for promotion to 4th grade including achieving a predetermined level on the state reading assessment, passing an alternative assessment or retest, or successfully demonstrating sufficient 3rd grade reading skills through a portfolio of student work.
Good Cause Exemptions for Some Students

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
PRINCIPLE NOT ADOPTED

The state has not adopted policy (statute or regulation) that meets the fundamental principle for this area.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

Evidence of the state’s policy implementation and/or guidance in this area includes:

• Iowa DOES NOT have a retention policy and DOES NOT allow specific good cause exemptions for promotion to 4th grade.

• Iowa policy DOES provide that students who are identified as persistently at risk in reading at the end of 3rd grade shall remain entitled to intensive reading instruction.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

• Iowa should expand policy to require that 3rd grade students who are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills (on the state reading assessment) be retained. Policies should include specific good cause exemptions for promotion to 4th grade that recognize the special needs of some students with disabilities, English language learners and students who were previously retained.

• In expanding this policy, Iowa should further require intensive interventions to continue in 4th grade for students promoted for good cause.