



Early Literacy Matters

State-by-State Policy Implementation Report

Explore Iowa's adoption and implementation of the 18 Early Literacy fundamental principles.






IA

PRINCIPLE ADOPTION
IMPLEMENTATION



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.

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

Early Literacy Policy Implementation Rubric

PURPOSE

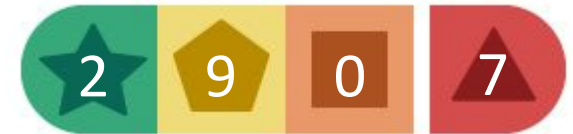
The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of states' implementation of K–3 reading policies aligned to ExcelinEd's [fundamental principles](#) of an early literacy policy. It builds on an analysis of states' adoption of statutes and regulations establishing requirements for each component 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.

ADOPTION IMPLEMENTATION

11 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 Implementation](#)
- [Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Comprehensive State Literacy Plan 2024–2032 \(May 2025\)](#)

Science of Reading (SOR) Training



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state offers science of reading training or requires districts to adopt a policy to identify science of reading training, providers of the training, and personnel who will be trained. Participation in science of reading training may be optional for teachers and/or administrators.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

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

- Iowa DOES offer [LETRS](#) training, at no charge, for educators and administrators. (*See also [Iowa Department of Education, Literacy Instruction](#)*)
- 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.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should adopt policy to require all K–3 teachers and administrators to participate in state-adopted science of reading training.
- In adopting this policy, Iowa should create an implementation plan that is clearly communicated to all educators.

Literacy Coaches



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.

Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Alignment



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

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 [legislation from 2024](#) DOES require the statewide literacy plan to address standards for educator preparation programs that promote evidence-based reading instruction and that includes phonetic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension.
- Iowa [policy](#) DOES require all teacher candidates to demonstrate competency in literacy and literacy curriculum must include evidence-based reading instruction. Teacher candidates in specified endorsement areas MUST demonstrate competency in direct and explicit strategies and systematic and sequential approaches to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension.
- Iowa [policy](#) DOES prohibit standards for educator preparation programs from including instruction or practical application that are designed to teach students using three-cueing. (See also [Iowa Admin. Code, Standards for Practitioner and Administrator Preparation Programs 79.15\(3\)](#))

Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Alignment

CONTINUED

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

- Iowa [policy](#) DOES require teacher candidates to demonstrate competency relating to addressing the needs of all students, including students with disabilities, students at risk of academic failure, students who have been identified as gifted and talented, English learners, and students with dyslexia.
- 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.
- Iowa [policy](#) DOES generally require educators to understand and be able to use multiple methods of assessment “to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress and to guide the teacher’s and learners’ decision-making.”

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should expand policy to ensure that *EPP required coursework* is aligned to the science of reading and prohibits the use of course materials that include three-cueing.

Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Assessment



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

FULL IMPLEMENTATION

Elementary education candidates must pass a science of reading aligned assessment to obtain teacher licensure.

EVIDENCE/GUIDANCE

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

- Iowa DOES require EPPs to administer a licensure test that is aligned to the science of reading: Foundations of Reading. ([NCTQ, Iowa Summary 2023](#); [NCTQ, False Assurances: Many states' licensure tests don't signal whether elementary teachers understand reading instruction \(Nov. 2023\)](#))
- Iowa [policy](#) DOES require higher education institutions to report to the Department no later than August 1 annually, the percentage of students whose scores on the assessment administered during the prior school year were above, at, and below the passing score, and shall report any services or opportunities to retake the assessment.

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

This principle currently meets full implementation.

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, Early Literacy Implementation: Allocations](#))
 - Early Readers Funding
 - Iowa Reading Research Center
 - Professional learning opportunities
 - Early literacy screeners
 - Panorama Student Success Dashboard (technology platform)
 - [Local literacy plans](#)
 - [Decodable book packs](#) for 1st grade students [\$3.5 million]

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

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



Universal Reading Screener



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

States require districts to adopt a universal reading screener to be administered at least one time per year with optional mid-year and end-of-year screening.

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 and Mathematics: Assessment and Intervention](#))
- 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](#))
- 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 DOES publish a list of [assessments](#) that meet the Department-adopted minimum standards on their website annually. ([Iowa Department of Education, Standardized Assessments in Literacy](#))

Universal Reading Screener

CONTINUED

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

RESOURCES

- [Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy and Mathematics: Assessment and Intervention](#)

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should make clear *in policy* that the state-approved universal reading screener must be administered to K–3 students *three times per year*.

Screeners for Characteristics of Dyslexia



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 [policy](#) 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.

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 [law](#) and [policy](#) DOES require parental notification of students identified with reading difficulties annually. (See also [Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Implementation](#))
- 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 Implementation](#))

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 HAS established an HQIM statewide contract list for districts to use during their adoption process – these contracts have negotiated pricing for HQIM that are aligned with Iowa’s academic standards for English language arts/Literacy. ([Iowa Department of Education, High-Quality Instructional Materials Statewide Contracts for English Language Arts and Mathematics](#))
- Iowa policy 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.

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.
- Iowa [policy](#) from 2024 DOES require the Director of the Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive review of curriculum, core content standards, and educational standards. This review must result in recommendations for policy changes including a statewide literacy plan which must address standards for practitioner preparation programs and must not include instruction that uses 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 [policy](#) DOES require schools to provide students who are not reading proficiently in grades K–6 with personalized reading plans. (See also [Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Implementation](#); [Iowa Department of Education, House File 2618: Section 2: Early Literacy Implementation FAQs](#))
- Iowa HAS created a [model personalized reading plan](#) to provide guidance to districts in meeting the requirements of [policy](#).
- Iowa [policy](#) 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 Administrative Code 281-62 State Standards for Progression in Reading](#); see also [Iowa Department of Education, Early Literacy Implementation](#))

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.

Regularly Monitor Student Progress



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 a MTSS and supported with differentiated accountability. ([Iowa Department of Education, Differentiated Accountability System](#))
- 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, MTSS Data & Early Warning System](#))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

This principle currently meets full implementation.

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 Implementation](#))
- 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 Implementation](#))
- 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, MTSS Data & Early Warning System](#))

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 *vettted and approved list*.

Summer Reading Camps



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

The state provides for summer reading camps in policy, but it is optional and not required of schools.

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 for an intensive summer literacy program – facilitating the summer literacy program is in statute, but participation is optional.
- Iowa DID offer a [summer reading grant program](#) through 2025 that was available to all public elementary schools. Participation was optional and priority was given to schools that included the state-provided digital literacy program in their summer school plans.
- Iowa [policy](#) DOES provide the option for schools to offer summer programs to students who are persistently at risk in reading.
- Iowa DOES provide funding through the [At-Risk Early Elementary Students](#) grant to assist schools in addressing the needs of Kindergarten through 3rd grade students who are “at-risk of educational failure”. These funds may be used for academic support during summer school, but are not specific to literacy.

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.

Parent Read-At-Home Plan



IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

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 Implementation](#))
- 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 Implementation](#))
- Iowa DOES provide decodable book backs to all 1st grade students to take home, which are based on the science of reading and will reinforce classroom instruction. ([Iowa Department of Education, Press Release: Gov. Reynolds, Iowa Department of Education invest \\$3.5 million to bolster classroom instruction with reading at home](#))

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.

Initial Determinant Retention at 3rd Grade Based on State Assessment



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 school districts to retain students who are not reading proficiently if the student's parent or guardian submits to the district a request that the student be retained in the current grade level. (See also [Iowa Department of Education, House File 2618: Section 2: Early Literacy Implementation FAQs](#))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should adopt policy to require that students who are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills (on the state test-based options provided) be retained. Policy should include multiple pathways for promotion to 4th grade including achieving a predetermined level on the state reading assessment or qualifying for a good cause exemption.

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 [policy](#) DOES require school districts to retain students who are not reading proficiently if the student’s parent or guardian submits to the district a request that the student be retained in the current grade level. (See also [Iowa Department of Education, House File 2618: Section 2: Early Literacy Implementation FAQs](#))

CONSIDERATION(S) FOR STRENGTHENING POLICY

- Iowa should adopt policy to require that 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 [policy](#) DOES require school districts to retain students who are not reading proficiently if the student’s parent or guardian submits to the district a request that the student be retained in the current grade level. (See also [Iowa Department of Education, House File 2618: Section 2: Early Literacy Implementation FAQs](#))
- 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 adopt policy to require that students who are unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills (on the state test-based options provided) be retained. Policy 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.
- Iowa should further require intensive interventions to continue in 4th grade for students promoted for good cause.

