



The Reading Crisis in WNY: The Role of NYSED and Higher Education November 2022

Summary

- The WNY Education Alliance analyzed 4th grade reading proficiency scores by state from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Teacher Prep Review on early reading by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ).
- We reviewed this data to better understand the factors that have contributed to the relatively low reading proficiency scores in Western New York and the significant achievement gap that exists both between school districts and within individual districts in our area. Our previous reports showed that the significant differences in reading proficiency scores between and within districts are driven more by the variability in income levels than by differences in reading instruction in schools. **This is an important conclusion as we consider the ways in which we can work together to improve literacy rates and reduce the equity gap in Western New York.**
- The data shows that New York State ranks in the lowest quartile in the U.S. in terms of reading proficiency, according to the NAEP. At 4th grade, only 30% of children in New York State are proficient in reading and only 58% of students are able to read at or above a basic level.

National Assessment of Educational Progress - 2022 Reading Proficiency Scores				
4th Grade Reading Proficiency Data				
State	At or Above Proficient		At or Above Basic	
	Percentage	National Rank	Percentage	National Rank
Massachusetts	43%	1	70%	3
National Average	32%		61%	
New York	30%	39	58%	37

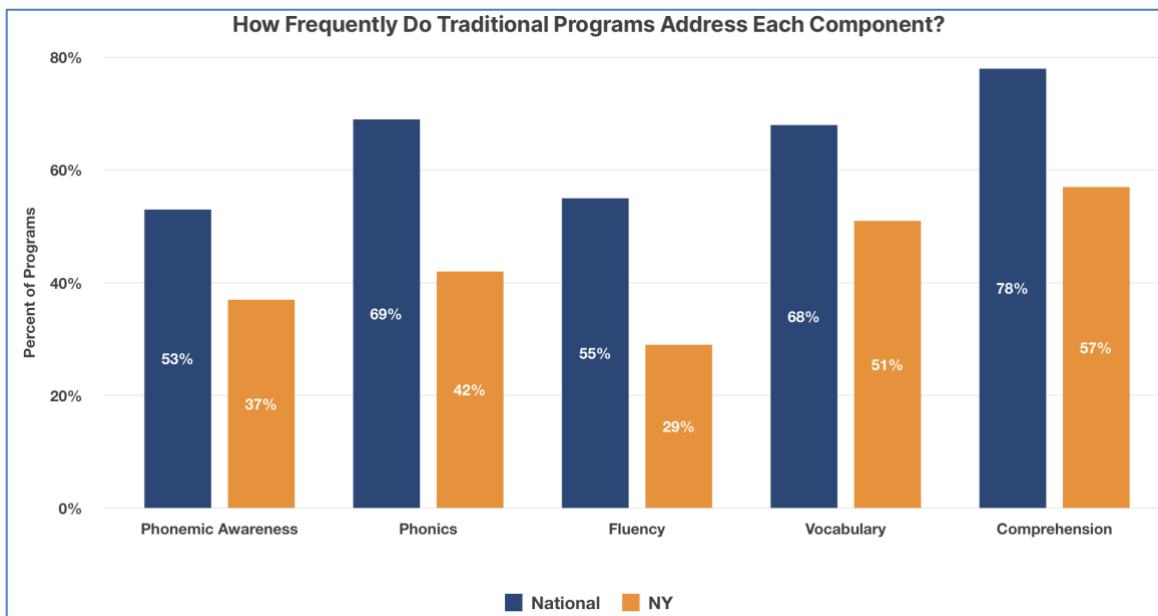
Source: NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Reading Assessment

- The data from NAEP is largely consistent with the reading proficiency scores recently reported by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Too many children are not able to read proficiently by 3rd and 4th grade in Western New York and New York State more broadly.
- The research shows that children who cannot read proficiently by 3rd grade are much more likely to drop out of school and have behavioral issues. **Early reading**



instruction is critically important to educational and life outcomes and, thus, any real attempt to reduce the equity gap.

- The reading crisis in Western New York is a microcosm of a much bigger reading crisis in New York State. This is another important conclusion. School districts in Western New York are not to blame for the relatively low literacy rates. They are part of a much bigger problem – one that does demand the attention of all education stakeholders, including NYSED and our teacher prep programs.
- While providing the necessary educational supports outside of school is important to addressing inequities in educational outcomes, the biggest in-school issue impacting literacy rates and the achievement gap is that many of our local universities are not training teachers in the “five components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.”
- While this is a problem nationwide, with only 50% of universities teaching 4 out of the 5 areas of reading science, New York State colleges rank particularly poorly in terms of training teachers in the science of reading, according to the NCTQ. **Of the teacher prep programs in New York State, the NCTQ estimates that only 37% teach about phonemic awareness, 42% phonics, 29% fluency, and just over 50% vocabulary and reading comprehension.** New York teaching programs rank well below the U.S. average in all components of reading science.



Source: NCTQ Teacher Prep Review: Early Reading



- Teacher prep programs in Western New York do not fare particularly well, either. While the graduate program at the University at Buffalo and SUNY Geneseo are training teachers in reading science, many teaching schools are not. Below are the early reading grades for undergraduate schools in our region.

National Council on Teacher Quality	
<u>University</u>	<u>Early Reading Undergraduate Grade</u>
Alfred University	A
Canisius College	B
Houghton College	B
Niagara University	B
SUNY Fredonia	B
Medaille College	D
SUNY Buffalo State	D
SUNY Geneseo	D
Daemen College	CBD
St. Bonaventure	CBD

Source: NCTQ Teacher Prep Review: Early Reading

- Ironically, many of these same schools have cognitive scientists who have researched how children learn to read. So, why are most teacher prep programs in New York State not training teachers in the science of reading when the research shows how important it is to early literacy and educational outcomes? We believe that the answer lies in the lack of guidance from NYSED and the lack of policy at the state level.
- Many teacher prep programs in New York State don't teach about reading science because they aren't required to do so. Similarly, many elementary schools in Western New York continue to use Balanced Literacy curricula that are not aligned with the science of reading because New York State is one of the few states that does not provide its schools with guidance about reading instruction. There is a common theme here.
- The lack of training in the science of reading at teacher prep programs in New York State, the continued use of failed Balanced Literacy curricula, the low literacy rates,

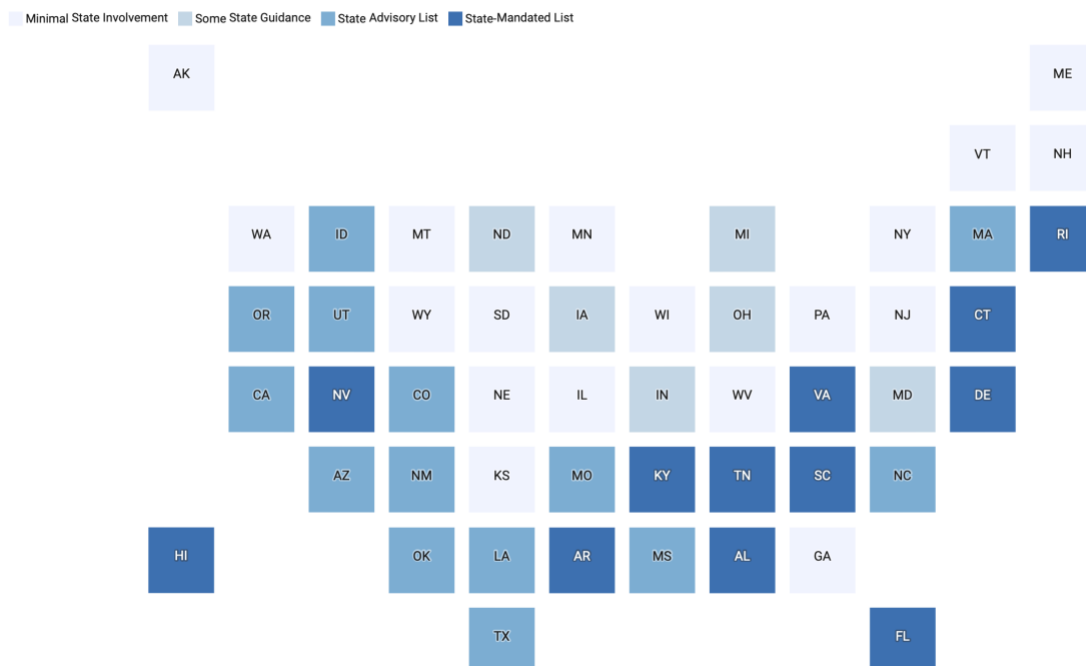


and the inequities in Western New York are not caused by our teachers or schools; they are doing their absolute best.

- **Rather, the reading crisis in Western New York is a failure of NYSED and state policy to provide schools with the proper level of guidance and support.** Many states require schools to use evidence-based reading instruction or mandate certain reading programs. Other states have advisory lists or provide guidance on curriculum. Some states, such as #1-rated Massachusetts, are providing schools with funds to replace Balanced Literacy curricula in favor of evidence-based reading curricula. **However, according to AMP Reports, New York State is one of only 18 states that does not provide its schools with guidance on reading instruction.** Given the increased focus on addressing educational inequities, the lack of guidance from NYSED seems irresponsible.

How states approach reading instruction

State laws vary considerably about what curricula schools can use to teach reading. APM Reports reviewed these laws and consulted with state departments of education. We found that 18 states have minimal or no involvement in which core reading programs districts adopt, aside from setting broad educational standards; 6 states have some general requirements about using evidence-based core reading programs; 14 states have an advisory list of approved core reading programs that meet the state's requirements; and 12 states have what's closer to a mandatory list of core reading programs that districts need a waiver to deviate from.



Source: AMP Reports, "How legislation on reading instruction is changing across the country", by Christopher Peak, November 17, 2022



- According to AMP Reports, the reading curriculum most widely used in Western New York schools is not approved in any of the 22 states that it reviewed which have approved curricula lists. In addition, EdReports, a third-party curriculum evaluator, gives this reading curriculum the lowest possible rating of “Does Not Meet Expectations.” The lack of input from NYSED and the aggressive marketing from publishing companies has directly contributed to the continued use of reading curricula that are not aligned with the science.
- In addition, many states now require teachers to be trained in the science of reading. According to AMP Reports, “at least 26 states have passed laws intended to help teachers learn about the science of reading or get schools to implement what researchers have found about how kids learn to read.” New York is not one of those states. The lack of policy at the state level explains why few teacher prep programs in New York teach about the 5 components of reading science.
- So, what to do? **We need all education stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, parents, board members, NYSED officials, deans of teaching colleges, literacy experts, and elected representatives to come to the table to discuss the reading crisis and the ways in which it can be addressed.**
- Specifically, we need to support our teachers, schools, and, most importantly, children, by: 1) providing administrators and teachers with training in the science of reading, 2) requiring local universities to train teachers in all aspects of reading science, and 3) eliminating the use of curricula that are not aligned with the science of reading.
- If stakeholders in other states are able to come together to help students learn to read, surely we can do the same thing here in New York.