Research to Action: Improving K-3 Literacy Instruction for Students with Learning Differences

Executive Summary

March 2020
## Table of contents

1. **Introduction**
   - pg. 2

2. **The need**
   - pg. 7

3. **Key insights from research**
   - The science of reading, learning differences and equity
     - pg. 18
   - Key elements and shifts in the education system
     - pg. 26
   - Lessons learned from bright spots
     - pg. 32

4. **Promising strategies and recommendations**
   - pg. 38

5. **Appendices**
   - **Sources**
     - pg. 42
Oak Foundation partnered with Education First to research efforts to improve K-3 literacy, with special attention to students with learning differences.

Who we are

**Oak Foundation** commits its resources to address issues of global, social and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantaged. With offices in Europe, Africa, India and North America, Oak Foundation makes grants to organisations in approximately 40 countries worldwide.

**Oak Foundation’s Learning Differences Programme** (LDP) believes that together we can build a world in which schools unlock the creativity and power of every young person, especially the most marginalized, and equip them to shape more just and equitable communities.

The LDP focuses on equity as a proactive strategic approach that accounts for structural differences in power, opportunities, burdens, and needs to design targeted responses that improve outcomes and close gaps.

**Education First** is a seasoned team of trusted advisors to the leaders responsible for delivering what many Americans want most: public education that effectively prepares students for success in college, careers and a world of constant change. We devote our energy and expertise to improving opportunities for all children, especially students from low-income families and students of color.
Oak Foundation’s Learning Differences Programme supports efforts to improve K-3 literacy instruction, particularly for students with learning differences who also experience additional adversity due to racism and poverty.

The opportunity

The Learning Differences Programme is particularly interested in opportunities for improving early (K-3) literacy instruction, particularly for students with learning differences who also experience additional adversity due to racism and poverty.

Oak Foundation aims to contribute to this work by helping the field build educator knowledge and skill in the science of learning and early literacy. We focus particularly on educators’ initial preparation and ongoing development as well as high-quality instructional materials and support.

Why this deck

Across the U.S., there is a renewed focus on improving students’ early literacy, especially given stagnant reading scores across the nation. We offer this resource to help funders and others in the education sector make decisions to meet the challenge of improving early literacy for all students, particularly those who have learning differences, ensuring they have access to effective instruction and materials to support their reading acquisition.

Education First originally developed this landscape scan in January 2020 for the Oak Foundation to support its early literacy investments and adapted the scan in March 2020 as a public resource.
This scan explores potential levers and highlights opportunities for the education sector to support effective early literacy instruction

Key questions this scan seeks to answer:

**The science of reading, learning differences and equity**
What does the research say about how children learn to read and about effective teaching practice for reading instruction in the early grades, specifically for students with learning differences and those furthest from opportunity?

**Systemic levers for change in education**
What are the key areas where important shifts in the education system are needed to better serve all students, and specifically for students with learning differences and those furthest from opportunity, in learning to read proficiently?

**Bright spots**
What promising practices, approaches or models for implementing effective reading instruction currently exist in the field, specifically to support students with learning differences and those furthest from opportunity?

**Strategies for the field**
What are the high-potential strategies and solutions to improve K-3 literacy instruction, specifically for students with learning differences and those furthest from opportunity?
Education First conducted online research, interviewed education leaders and experts and facilitated a convening to inform this landscape scan.

### Research methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>In-depth research</th>
<th>Convening + Final analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preliminary research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Expert Convening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted a high-level review of publicly available reports, scholarly articles and other materials to understand the science of reading and effective reading instruction in kindergarten through 3rd grade.</td>
<td>Conducted in-depth phone interviews with 22 leaders in early literacy, educator preparation, professional development and curricula, including funders, researchers, policymakers and practitioners.</td>
<td>Convened a group of diverse stakeholders to review a draft of this deck and discuss high-potential levers and solutions to improve K-3 literacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Selection of areas for deeper research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Online Research</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed potential levers for change and selected three levers for deeper research (education preparation, professional development and curricula).</td>
<td>Reviewed additional publicly available reports, scholarly articles and other materials to complement the information provided by interviewees and fill any gaps in our knowledge of the field.</td>
<td>Refined the research findings based on input from the expert convening.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Developed recommendations for philanthropic investment in light of the research findings.</td>
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</table>
2 | The need
Nationally, two-thirds of students in the U.S. are struggling to learn to read and to do so proficiently.

NAEP 2019 scores reveal a decline in students scoring proficient or above in reading since 2017 with only 35% of 4th grade students scoring proficient or above in reading.

And there are particularly stark disparities for students of color and students from low-income families.

For example...

In the U.S., white male students are 3x more likely to read proficiently by 4th grade than their Black peers.

And even when controlling for income...

25% of white boys from low-income families achieve reading proficiency by 4th grade, compared to 10% of Black boys from low-income families.

The consequences for students are severe: Children who can’t read well by the 4th grade are more likely to...

- Have **behavioral and social problems**
- Be **retained** and have to repeat a grade
- Be involved with the **juvenile justice system**
- Stay poor readers through high school
- Drop out or not **graduate** high school

And the **consequences are even more severe for students experiencing poverty, children of color and English Learners**, who are also disproportionately placed in special education and removed from the general education classroom.

Many students who experience challenges with reading have learning and attention issues

Learning and attention issues are brain-based differences that can take a variety of forms and can affect all aspects of life

- Math
- Reading
- Writing
- Organization
- Focus
- Motor skills
- Listening comprehension
- Social skills

Students with learning and attention issues struggle with one or more of these issues...

Source(s): National Center for Learning Disabilities (2017); Understood.org (n.d.)
Overall, 1 in 5 students are estimated to struggle with learning and attention issues, but are not necessarily identified in school as having a disability.

Students struggle with learning and attention issues

Early and accurate identification of learning disabilities in schools can set struggling students on a path for success. But identification can be influenced by many factors—and too often is not happening early enough. For instance, signs of learning and attention issues get overlooked or misinterpreted, or some parents are hesitant to let schools “label” their child as having a learning difference.

For students of color and students experiencing poverty, the challenges of identification and getting the right supports may be even more acute

Researchers and policymakers have suggested that historically students of color and students experiencing poverty are far more likely to be placed in special education than their peers.

More recent research suggests that the problem may be more complex: students of color and students experiencing poverty may be both over-identified and under-identified and, as a result, may not be getting supports and services they need.

For example, a 2017 study found that...

- 12% of students below the federal poverty level are identified with a specific learning disability*
- 6% of students at 400%+ of the federal poverty level are identified with a specific learning disability*
- 44% of the lowest achieving black boys are receiving special education services
- 74% of the lowest achieving white boys are receiving special education services

*Under IDEA, children with disabilities in reading are categorized under the umbrella of ‘specific learning disability’ (SLD), which can also include dysgraphia and dyscalculia. However, in the absence of specific numbers on dyslexia, SLD is still a decent proxy for reading impairment, as 75–80 percent of children with SLD have deficits in language and reading.
Dyslexia is the most common reading-related learning difference, but there are other learning differences that can affect or even co-occur with dyslexia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading difference</th>
<th>Other learning differences that can affect reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
<td><strong>Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that makes it hard to focus. It can also cause trouble with organization and executive function—particularly, working memory—which is needed for reading but not specific to it.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Slow processing speed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slow processing speed means it takes longer to take in information and respond to it. Though it sometimes co-occurs with dyslexia (and ADHD), it is not specific to reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dyscalculia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dyscalculia makes working with numbers and mathematical concepts challenging. It sometimes co-occurs with dyslexia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dysgraphia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dysgraphia makes the physical act of writing difficult and labored. It sometimes co-occurs with dyslexia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With so many students struggling to read, those with dyslexia are often not identified for the extra support they need before the optimal intervention window ends.

The Dyslexia Paradox
Most students with dyslexia are not identified until the 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade—but the interventions that typically follow are most effective at mitigating dyslexia when delivered in kindergarten and 1\textsuperscript{st} grade.

“When schools produce kids who can’t read and spell, then you can’t find the five percent who are dyslexic.”*

—Dr. Timothy Odegard, Chair of Excellence in Dyslexic Studies, Middle Tennessee State University

*Estimates of the incidence of dyslexia vary, but most place the incidence of dyslexia between five percent and 17 percent of the general population.

Source(s): Gabrieli et al. (2019); Vellutino et al. (1999); Education First interview (2019).
Research suggests that the reading challenges students with dyslexia experience can be significantly mitigated with appropriate reading instruction in the early grades.

Without assistance until age nine or later...

75% of these students will struggle throughout their entire school careers.

If these students get the right supports, with the right intensity by 1st grade...

Majority of these students can eventually read on grade level.

Source: Gabrieli (2009); Vellutino and Scanlon (1999).
3 | Key insights from the research
3a | The science of reading, learning differences and equity
Reading is not a skill that is naturally developed, like speaking—reading must be taught

In 2000, a Congressionally commissioned panel of reading experts (National Reading Panel) synthesized the scientific research on reading into a report identifying the most important components of reading development. Since then, the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education has published additional research and findings to share what works to support early literacy (e.g., foundational skills to support reading for understanding). This section highlights key elements of this research.

Research shows the kind of instruction that children at risk for reading difficulties need would also benefit the vast majority of students, including those experiencing poverty and racism.

Source(s): Fletcher & Lyon (1998); Gabrieli (2009); Seidenberg (2017); International Dyslexia Association (2018); Kilpatrick (2018); Salinger et al. (2010).
Reading for understanding is an equation that depends on both acquiring language and learning to access that language through print.

A framework called the “Simple View of Reading” summarizes what science has confirmed over many decades about what children need to read with understanding: language comprehension and word recognition.

If the child knows lots of words…

…and the child learns how to recognize words from print…

…then the child can read with understanding.

It follows that children who have gaps in either language comprehension or word recognition will struggle to read:

Source(s): Moats (2016).
Students with phonological difficulties and/or gaps in key vocabulary and background knowledge are at greatest risk—those with dyslexia, who speak different dialects, are from low-income families and/or are English learners.

**Phonological difficulty**
- **Students with dyslexia** typically struggle with poor phonological processing—one of the foundational skills for decoding. This can be due to genetic factors, environmental factors, or a combination.
- **Speakers of a non-mainstream dialect** (e.g., African American English) can struggle because of differences in how words are pronounced at school versus at home, which may complicate the process of learning to recognize a printed word based on its pronunciation (i.e., decoding).

**Mixed reading difficulty**
Students with challenges in both language comprehension and word recognition are doubly at risk for reading difficulty.

**Gaps in vocabulary and background knowledge**
- **Low-income students**, on average, experience fewer opportunities to acquire vocabulary prior to entering school. This can make it difficult for students to understand the words they read.
- **English learners** often have typical word recognition (decoding) skills; but may struggle, particularly in later grades, as they encounter texts with more advanced language that exceeds their conversational English vocabulary.

Source(s): Rivera et al. (2008); Washington et al. (2013); Kilpatrick (2015); National Research Council (2015); Moats (2016); Seidenberg (2017); Romeo et al. (2018); Kilpatrick (2018); International Dyslexia Association (2018); Romeo (2019).
In addition to receiving effective whole-class instruction, these students can benefit from more intensive, frequent and targeted intervention.

Even when a teacher uses an **effective approach as the first line of instruction with the whole class**, some children will still struggle with word-level reading. Fortunately, studies of interventions for children who need additional support have surfaced **practices that can be effective when layered onto effective whole-class instruction**.

Even when reading difficulty or adversity affect a child’s progress in reading development, what they need to learn does not change. What does need to change is the **time** they spend learning—in terms of instructional intensity, frequency, and/or duration—and the **focus** of their learning.

Students who struggle despite effective whole-class instruction can benefit from additional instruction focused on a **specific skill of need** (phonological awareness, letter-sound relationships, etc.) in a **small, homogenous group** of students with the same need, that continues to have all the qualities of effective reading instruction, but more **frequent progress monitoring**. In order to appropriately group students and tailor instruction to their need, teachers must be able to **identify and match different symptoms of need** with relevant skills and instructional strategies.

After a period of time (e.g., 8–16 weeks) in targeted small group intervention (Tier II), students who continue to struggle may alternatively benefit from **individualized instruction** in an **even smaller group**, delivered by the **most qualified instructor** with **even more frequent progress monitoring** and for a **longer duration of time** (in addition to continuing whole-class instruction).

Source(s): Eberhardt and Hougen (2017).
Research indicates that nearly all students—even most of those at risk for reading difficulties—can learn to read proficiently with appropriate instruction (e.g., tiered, explicit instruction)

Scientists estimate that instruction based on reading science—that is, instruction that builds knowledge and vocabulary (language comprehension) while also teaching all of the foundational skills for decoding (word recognition)—can lead 95 percent of students to become proficient readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language comprehension</th>
<th>×</th>
<th>Word recognition</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Reading for understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

While there aren’t enough minutes in the school year to teach all of the vocabulary missing at school entry, if low-income children and English learners are exposed to enough words, they can “bootstrap” the meanings of other words when encountered, based on their context.

Explicit teaching of the foundational skills for decoding, such as phonological awareness and phonics, may reduce or prevent reading difficulties among students at risk for dyslexia* and speakers of non-mainstream dialects.

95% of all students can achieve reading proficiency

*Research notes that a small share of students with dyslexia have been found not to respond to interventions that are otherwise broadly effective. Scientists indicate an ongoing need for research specifically focused on these “non-responders.”

Source(s): Fletcher & Lyon (1998); Gabrieli (2009); Seidenberg (2017); International Dyslexia Association (2018); Kilpatrick (2018).
And the kind of instruction that children at risk for reading difficulties need, would also benefit the vast majority of students.

With just 35 percent of U.S. 4th graders proficient in reading, it’s clear that more students are struggling to read than just those with risk factors for reading difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language comprehension</th>
<th>×</th>
<th>Word recognition</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building vocabulary and background knowledge means <strong>restoring time to learning about science and social studies for all students</strong>, from today’s all-time low of just 35 minutes per day in K-3.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unlike learning to speak, which happens naturally with exposure to speech, <strong>learning to decode requires explicit teaching for most students.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If all K-3 classrooms delivered science-based reading instruction, most children would have their best chance of learning to read proficiently.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Science-based reading instruction matters to all students—and is especially critical for students with dyslexia and those experiencing additional adversities (e.g., those experiencing racism).

Source(s): Banilower et al. (2013); Seidenberg (2017).
While there is a dearth of research at the nexus of learning differences and SES, race and English learner status, cultural competency and culturally relevant teaching and materials matter.

**Science-Based Instruction** + **Targeted Supports** + **Cultural Competency + Culturally Responsive Teaching** = **Literacy for All**

- **Instruction that builds knowledge and vocabulary (language comprehension) while also teaching all of the foundational skills for decoding (word recognition, effective whole-class instruction).**
- **Additional instruction (small group or 1:1) focused on a specific skill of need, with frequent progress monitoring, and for a longer duration of time (Tier I or Tier).**
- **Valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions, and designing curricula that incorporates students’ lives.**
- **Enhanced opportunities for students to access reading materials resulting in equal outcomes for students, particularly for students with dyslexia, who are students of color, experiencing poverty and/or are English learners.**

Pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, including instructional materials.
3b | Key elements and shifts in the education system
Based on reading science, a K-3 classroom where all children have their best shot at reading proficiently, has three related building blocks

- **A reading classroom with a basis in science**
  - **Teacher**
    - Skilled reading teacher
  - **Curricula**
    - Focus on foundational skills
    - Focus on building knowledge + vocabulary

- The curricula helps **build background knowledge and vocabulary** with carefully selected, culturally-relevant texts on related topics from various content areas, written at the level of typically developing readers in students’ grade, and tasks that are cognitively rigorous for the age group.

- The curricula also helps build the **foundational skills** for decoding (e.g., phonological awareness and phonics) by supporting teachers to teach all skills explicitly and systematically, using diagnostic assessments to fill in student needs.

- Most importantly, a **skilled reading teacher** uses knowledge about reading development and instruction to deliver the curricula with fidelity and to supplement it appropriately, based on their particular students’ needs. The teacher also understands his/her students and works to affirm and celebrate their identities.

*Some commercially available products include both a core literacy curriculum and a foundational skills curriculum, while others focus on one or the other and should be paired with a complementary product designed to plug in what it lacks in a seamless way.
However, this knowledge has not yet translated consistently into practice

### Common instructional practices

#### Decoding

- Phonics skills are usually taught but not emphasized, even for beginners. Teaching is **often not highly explicit or systematic**. Prerequisite skills may not be taught first.

- Beginning readers usually read **leveled and predictable texts** (texts in which words are predictable based on sentence structure, repetition or pictures) that do not easily lend themselves to application of phonics skills. Partner reading and independent reading may be emphasized more than oral text reading with a teacher.

- When students read text orally, teachers may overlook some errors, especially if they do not greatly alter meaning. Teacher feedback may emphasize using **context or pictures to guess** the unrecognized word (a debunked strategy called “three-cueing”) rather than consistent application of decoding skills.

- Spelling is often not taught in an explicit or systematic manner. Students may learn lists of **spelling words that exemplify no particular phonics pattern** or spelling rule. Spelling program may be completely distinct from decoding program with different words in the two programs.

#### Comprehension

**Generic comprehension strategies** like summarizing, making inferences, and identifying the author’s purpose are emphasized more than carefully selected background knowledge and vocabulary. While some comprehension strategies are backed by science, students gains from strategy instruction diminish quickly. Students usually need sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to understand what they’re reading before they can apply these strategies successfully.

“Teachers are using flawed reading practices not because they're ignorant, ill-prepared, or incompetent. They are doing it because... **they are being told to use them—usually by deeply trusted sources, like cherished mentors, colleagues, or the popular curriculum** sitting in their classrooms.” (Sawchuk, 2019)

Source: Spear-Swerling (2019); Sawchuk (2019).
Our research elevates five key areas across the education system to better serve all students in learning to read proficiently.

**Educator prep programs (EPPs)** need to better prepare new teachers to deliver science-based reading instruction.

**Curricula** need to focus on foundational skills and building knowledge + vocabulary.

Skilled reading teachers need to focus on:
- Focus on foundational skills
- Focus on building knowledge + vocabulary

On-the-job training—commonly referred to as professional development (PD)—needs to consistently promote science-based reading instruction.

More districts need to adopt curricula that align with the science of reading and are culturally relevant.

Early literacy efforts need to be guided by a clear, system-wide vision and several other key components that help set the stage for comprehensive literacy reform.

Systemic improvements in literacy require an explicit focus on **equity** to meet the needs of and support all groups of students.
Enabling conditions and equity are two cross-cutting components that are foundational to supporting these shifts.

Educator prep programs (EPPs) need to better prepare new teachers to deliver science-based reading instruction.

Skilled reading teacher

- Focus on foundational skills
- Focus on building knowledge + vocabulary

More districts need to adopt curricula that align with the science of reading and are culturally relevant.

On-the-job training—commonly referred to as professional development (PD)—needs to consistently promote science-based reading instruction.

Early literacy efforts need to be guided by a clear, system-wide vision and several other key components that help set the stage for comprehensive literacy reform.

Systemic improvements in literacy require an explicit focus on equity to meet the needs of and support all groups of students.
With enabling conditions and a focus on equity as underpinnings, shifts in three specific elements of the education system—EPPs, PD, and curricula—would elevate and prioritize scientific, culturally relevant approaches to reading instruction in the classroom.

**Educator prep programs (EPPs)** need to better prepare new teachers to deliver science-based reading instruction.

**Skilled reading teacher**
- Focus on foundational skills
- Focus on building knowledge and vocabulary

**PD (Professional Development)** needs to consistently promote science-based reading instruction.

**Curricula** need to align with the science of reading and be culturally relevant.

**Enabling Conditions**
- Early literacy efforts need to be guided by a clear, system-wide vision and several other key components that help set the stage for comprehensive literacy reform.

**Equity**
- Systemic improvements in literacy require an explicit focus on equity to meet the needs of and support all groups of students.

**More districts need to adopt curricula** that aligns with the science of reading and are culturally relevant.

31
3c | Lessons learned from bright spots
Interviews with experts and lessons from eight select states and districts offer important insights about promising efforts underway.

Effort has been in place long enough to produce gains:
- LA
- PA
- FL
- MS
- Bethlehem
- Vero Beach

Effort began too recently to produce gains, but shows promising indicators:
- OH
- NC
- AR
- Baltimore, MD

*See appendix for a list of our interviewees.
Lessons learned about how to create the enabling conditions for comprehensive literacy reform

- Several of the states we looked at established some form of **statewide plan**, based on a **comprehensive vision** for what **science-based reading instruction** looks like and the **system conditions** it requires, that gave **coherent direction across two or more drivers** of early reading instruction—EPPs, PD and/or curricula. Often these plans were **precipitated by state leaders**—state superintendents, state boards of education, and/or state university system leaders—with an awareness of reading science and a bent for systems thinking.

- Choices about PD and curricula typically live at the district level, making a **districtwide vision for science-based reading instruction** crucial. In all of the districts we looked at, leaders articulated a vision for how they would create system conditions for better reading instruction. In the best cases, these visions **cut across both PD and curricula**, ensuring that both drivers of instruction reinforce science-based practice.

*The full landscape scan describes in further detail strategies states, districts and policymakers can use to create the overarching conditions for success.*
Lessons learned about how to promote equitable practices and outcomes for all students

- Some states and districts **provided targeted resources to students who needed them most** by:
  + Sending literacy coaches to their lowest performing schools;
  + Allowing extended time for literacy; and/or
  + Using a multi-tiered support system to help students struggling with reading.

- Additionally, some states **focused on increasing equitable access to high-quality materials for all students** by requiring or incentivizing the adoption of high-quality curricula at the local level, while some districts adopted a new science of reading-aligned curricula.

*The full landscape scan describes in further detail strategies states, districts and policymakers can use to prioritize equity.*
Lessons learned about how to support EPPs to better prepare teachers to deliver science-based reading instruction

When it comes to shifting EPPs at scale, states are indispensable. Two conditions for success showed up across multiple states that addressed EPPs specifically:

- **EPP policy** that promotes reading science by establishing baseline expectations for teacher prep programs, tied to indicators of teacher proficiency in science-based reading instruction. For example:
  - Reading science exams that teacher prep grads must pass to secure state licensure to teach
  - Program approval standards that promote coursework and clinical experiences proven to produce effective reading teachers

- Support to build **EPP capacity** to deliver on policy requirements through their programming

*The full landscape scan describes in further detail strategies states, districts and policymakers can use to strengthen EPPs to prepare teachers to deliver science-based reading instruction.*
Lessons learned about how to support district efforts to improve early literacy through PD and curricula

Three conditions for success showed up across multiple systems that tackled PD, curricula or both:

- District leaders need support to manage complex change efforts, such as using best practices to change culture in schools and build educator skill.

- Principals who provide consistent support to sustain early literacy efforts over time through allocation of instructional time and resources (e.g., budget, hiring, etc.).

- A system of school-based coaches expert in early literacy who help teachers apply professional development in their own classrooms using their own curricula, with tailored feedback/support.

The full landscape scan describes in further detail strategies states, districts and policymakers can use to improve curricula and PD to support early literacy.
4 | Promising strategies and recommendations
Lessons learned from states and districts that have made significant strides point to several key strategies to improve reading instruction at scale

- Educate and empower policymakers to build the will for change
- Support and incent district leaders to establish a comprehensive vision for early literacy that aligns educators’ initial preparation with curricula and PD

- Use an equity framework to guide systemic reforms and support early literacy for all students, particularly those furthest from opportunity

- Use data and advocacy to push for policy change in licensure and educator preparation
- Build EPP faculty capacity and expertise to redesign coursework and clinical experiences

- Provide structures and supports to help district leaders build the will, skill and capacity for change
- Educate and partner with school leaders on the science of reading to build will and capacity for change at the school level
- Invest in high-quality coaching to support immediate changes in teacher practice
The strategies and recommendations in this scan represent some of the most promising efforts in the field; we know that any effort to support early literacy will require an integrated approach.

This scan highlights ways the field can act on key system elements to improve early literacy, particularly for students with learning differences and those experiencing additional adversity due to poverty and/or racism.

Funders, in particular, are well-positioned to support the field to improve early literacy in ways that both integrate these system elements and that work at the intersections of the science of reading, learning differences and equity. For example:

- **Convene**: Bring system leaders, policymakers, practitioners and researchers together to better understand the research on early literacy, learning differences and equity—and learn from best practice.
- **Educate**: Highlight the urgency of the issue and lift up bright spots through storytelling.
- **Support**: Invest in stakeholders at multiple levels of the system to create the space for and implement best practice and create change.
We are committed to putting these ideas into action. We hope you will join us.

To learn more about Oak Foundation’s efforts to improve early literacy for students with learning differences, contact: Julie.Kowal@oakfnd.org

Questions or comments about this scan? Please contact: info@education-first.com
5 | Appendix: Sources
## Interviews

### Early literacy researchers + experts

- **Timothy Shanahan**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago
- **Timothy Odegard**, Murfree Chair of Excellence in Dyslexic Studies, Center for the Study and Treatment of Dyslexia, Middle Tennessee State University
- **Julie Washington**, Chair, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Georgia State University
- **Louise Spear-Swerling**, Professor of Special Education, Southern Connecticut State University
- **Munro Richardson**, Executive Director, Read Charlotte
- **Emily Hanford**, Senior Producer and Correspondent, APM Reports
- **Sarah Schwartz**, Reporter, Education Week

### Professional development + curricula

- **Susan Atkins**, ELA Research and Design Specialist, TeachingWorks
- **Liz Woody Remington**, Co-Founder and Director of Professional Development, Learning Alliance
- **Kelly Butler**, CEO, Barksdale Reading Institute
- **Eric Hirsch** (Executive Director), **Lisa Potts** and **Stephanie Stephens** (ELA Leads), EdReports
- **Beth Anderson**, Executive Director, Hill Center

### Educator preparation

- **Marion Gillis-Olion**, Dean, College of Education, Fayetteville State University
- **Ellen McIntyre**, Dr. Ellen McIntyre, Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, University of Tennessee
- **Jean Rohr**, Professor of Education & Director of the Center for Access and Success, Elon University
- **Ben Riley**, Founder and CEO, Deans for Impact
- **Graham Drake** (Managing Director, Teacher Prep Review) and **Bob Marino** (Expert Analyst, Teacher Prep Review), National Council on Teacher Quality

### Policy experts

- **Paolo DeMaria**, State Superintendent, Ohio Department of Education
- **J.B. Buxton**, Member, North Carolina State Board of Education
- **Lindsay Jones** (President & CEO) and **Meghan Whittaker** (Director of Policy & Advocacy), National Center for Learning Disabilities
- **Kathleen Airhart**, Program Director, Special Education Outcomes, Council of Chief State School Officers
- **Johanna Anderson**, Executive Director, Belk Foundation
Convening Participants

- **Kathleen Airhart**: Program Director, Special Education Outcomes, Council of Chief State School Officers
- **Beth Anderson**: Executive Director, Hill Learning Center
- **Johanna Anderson**: Executive Director, The Belk Foundation
- **Alexis Bivens**: Program Director, Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation
- **Kelly Butler**: Chief Executive Officer, The Barksdale Reading Institute
- **Rupen Fofaria**: Storyteller, EdNC.org
- **Marion Gillis-Olion**: Dean, College of Education, Fayetteville State University
- **Crystal Gonzalez**: Executive Director, English Learners Success Forum
- **Eric Hirsch**: Executive Director, EdReports
- **Lindsay Jones**: President & CEO, NCLD
- **Ayanna Kilgore**: Cognitive Development Specialist, Georgia State University
- **John Pruette**: Senior Program Officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- **Jean Rattigan-Rohr**: VP/Access and Success & Professor of Education, Elon University
- **Munro Richardson**: Executive Director, Read Charlotte
- **Alice Wiggins**: Senior Director, ELA, UnboundEd
- **Yael Ross**: Managing Director, Early Childhood & Elementary Education, Teach For America
- **Shayne Spalten**: Director, Education, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
- **Liz Woody-Remington**: Co-Founder and Director of Professional Development, The Learning Alliance
- **Alexis Yowell**: Research and Design Specialist, ELA, TeachingWorks, University of Michigan
- **Ila Deshmukh Towery**: Principal, Education First
- **Brinton Ramsey**: Senior Consultant, Education First
- **Bethiel Girma Holton**: Program Officer, Oak Foundation
- **Heather Graham**: Director, Oak Foundation
- **Julie Hill**: Program Assistant, Oak Foundation
- **Julie Kowal**: Program Officer, Oak Foundation
- **Caroline Turner**: Trustee, Oak Foundation
- **Alex Dreier**: Instructional Design, Friday Institute
- **Mary Ann Wolf**: Director, Professional Learning & Leading Collaborative, Friday Institute
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Thank you!
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