

# Analysis of State K-3 Reading Standards and Assessments

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





# **Analysis of State K-3 Reading Standards and Assessments**

## **Executive Summary**

By

E. Allen Schenck  
Douglas R. Walker  
Carrie R. Nagel  
RMC Research Corporation  
Arlington, Va.

Loretta C. Webb  
The McKenzie Group  
Washington, D.C.

Prepared for:  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development  
Policy and Program Studies Service

2005

This report was prepared for the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-01-CO-0055/0011, Task 7. The project monitor was Beth A. Franklin in the Policy and Program Studies Service. The views expressed herein are those of the contractor. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

**U.S. Department of Education**

Margaret Spellings  
*Secretary*

**Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development**

Tom Luce  
*Assistant Secretary*

**Policy and Program Studies Service**

Alan L. Ginsburg  
*Director*

**Program and Analytic Studies Division**

David Goodwin  
*Director*

**October 2005**

---

This report is in the public domain, except for the photographs on the front and back covers, which are used with permission and copyright, 2005, Getty Images. Authorization to produce it in whole or in part is granted. Although permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Analysis of State K-3 Reading Standards and Assessments: Executive Summary*, Washington, D.C., 2005.

To order copies of this report, write:

ED Pubs  
Education Publications Center  
U. S. Department of Education  
P. O. Box 1398  
Jessup, MD 20794-1398;

via fax, dial (301) 470-1244;

You may also call toll-free: 1-877-433-7827 (1-877-4-ED-PUBS). If 877 service is not yet available in your area, call 1-800-872-5327 (1-800-USA-LEARN); Those who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) or a teletypewriter (TTY), should call 1-800-437-0833.

To order online, point your Internet browser to: [www.edpubs.org](http://www.edpubs.org).

This report is also available on the Department's Web site at:  
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/index.html>.

On request, this publication is available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette. For more information, please contact the Department's Alternate Format Center at (202) 260-9895 or (202) 205-8113.

## Background and Methodology

The National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report in 2000 that responded to a congressional mandate to help parents, teachers, and policymakers identify key skills and instructional methods central to reading achievement. The panel identified five areas that they found to be critical to effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (see Appendix A in the complete final report for a description of these areas).

Using these findings as a foundation, the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001* established the Reading First program under Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* to ensure that all children in America are reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. This initiative is designed to achieve this goal through the establishment of high quality reading instruction in kindergarten through grade 3 that includes the five essential components identified in the research. Congress also recognized that state academic content standards and assessments play an important role in supporting instruction in the classroom. Section 1205 of ESEA calls for an evaluation of whether state standards correlate with and assessments measure these essential components of reading instruction.

This report addresses the relationship between state content standards and assessments and the essential components of effective reading instruction. The extent to which the essential components are addressed in the standards and assessments indicates the extent to which states have integrated the essential components into their reading curriculum. This report describes reviews of state assessments and standards, the purpose of which was twofold:

- to evaluate the degree to which state reading content standards for K-3 students reflected expectations for learning in these five essential areas of effective reading instruction; and
- to determine the extent to which state assessments administered in the K-3 grade span played a role in the measurement of Reading First outcomes in the five areas.

The methods used to address these two purposes differed in both emphasis and approach. This study conducted an expert review in January 2004 of state reading content standards for grades K-3 from a random sample of 20 states. Five consultants with expertise in reading instruction, scientifically based reading research, staff development in reading, and familiarly with state content standards reviewed the standards from the 20 selected states. Teams of two reviewers determined how many of each state's standards represent the five areas of reading instruction and the degree to which this representation is clear, is appropriate for the intended grade level, provides complete coverage of each area, and provides an appropriate level of detail to guide instruction.

The analysis of state assessments was made simpler by existing data. State Reading First applications included information on which states were using their existing statewide

assessments to measure the five essential components of effective reading instruction. Project staff conducted a systematic review of approved Reading First applications for all states and the District of Columbia to determine which states' 2003-04 K-3 statewide assessments were identified as measures of the five essential areas of reading instruction.

## **Key Findings**

***Comprehension and, to a lesser extent, vocabulary are better represented by sampled states K-3 reading standards than are the other three essential elements of reading instruction.***

- Reading comprehension is the most represented of the essential elements in state K-3 reading content standards with an average of 57 standards per state, followed by vocabulary (19), phonics (16), fluency (6), and phonemic awareness (6).
- Most standards representing each essential element were judged to be placed at the appropriate grade by most of the states. A few states were found to have placed standards representing phonemic awareness and phonics at too high of a grade level.
- Most states have standards that adequately cover comprehension and phonics, while just over half of the states provide adequate coverage for vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and fluency. Comprehension standards were judged to cover most or all of the appropriate content in 90 percent of the states, followed by phonics (80 percent), vocabulary (60 percent), phonemic awareness (60 percent), and fluency (55 percent).
- Most states (75 percent) provide an appropriate level of detail for comprehension standards, followed by vocabulary (70 percent), phonics (60 percent), phonemic awareness (50 percent), and fluency (35 percent). In most cases, when standards were judged as not having an appropriate level of detail, it was because they were too broad.
- All of the 20 sampled states make comprehension clearly visible in their organization of reading standards. Almost all (18) make some of the other elements visible. Half make all five elements visible and they tend to do so at relatively high levels within their organizational hierarchy.

***States with larger numbers of K-3 reading standards organized to make the five essential elements more visible were judged to represent these elements better.***

- For each of the essential elements, states with larger numbers of standards have standards that provide better coverage, are more likely to be at an appropriate grade level, and are written more often at an appropriate level of detail.

- Both the number and quality of reading standards—within and across the five elements—were directly related to the degree of element visibility within the organization within the reading standards.

***With the possible exception of vocabulary and comprehension in grade 3, statewide reading assessments in 2003-04 do not significantly address expected student outcomes from reading instruction in the five essential areas.***

- Thirty states administer statewide reading assessments in grade 3, and very few do so at grades below 3.
- Twenty of these states identify their grade 3 statewide reading assessments as measures of Reading First outcomes, primarily for just vocabulary and comprehension.
- None of the states identify their statewide reading assessments as outcome measures in the area of fluency, presumably because it requires individual assessment of children.

***There is a slight relationship between how state standards and assessments represent the five essential elements of reading instruction.***

- States that identified their statewide reading assessments as Reading First outcome measures tended to have more reading standards that visibly represented the five essential elements of effective reading instruction.