



FOR STATE LEADERS

Here's How

State Sustainability Strategies

State Legislation and Policy

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Institutionalizing Your Evidence-based Reading Model in State Legislation and Policy

In order to sustain and scale up evidence-based reading programs at the state level, there must be support from the top (the governor, state legislators, the state board of education, and chief state school officer) recognizing the value of evidence-based reading programs as the best way to meet state goals in reading. Top-level support makes it possible to create a supportive, cohesive policy environment that provides focus and minimizes competing initiatives and efforts. A supportive policy environment provides a foundation for educators as they implement and sustain evidence-based reading models. In the words of one Reading First director: "So when teachers say, 'Why would I have to do professional development?' or 'Why do I have to do this?' Well, then, you know, I can say, it's in policy and point them right to it."

How do we get the process started?

States will approach incorporating principles of scientifically based reading instruction into policy from different starting points. The most fortunate may have well-defined and well-funded comprehensive state literacy programs that include elements that are very similar to Reading First, such as *Just Read, Florida!* and the *Alabama Reading Initiative*. Other states may have reading legislation that is supportive of scientifically based reading instruction, or have developed supportive policies and procedures for all schools, but not provided funding for implementation. Furthermore, other states might lack supportive reading legislation or even have legislation or policy that is contrary to the principles of evidence-based reading programs. Start by assessing where your state currently stands and strategize ways to make changes that are needed.

States work differently with regard to how legislation, regulations, and policies are developed. In general, every state has some way of framing what is required

(e.g., either the legislature enacts statutes and regulations, or operating procedures are specified by a state board or the chief state school officer) and a way that the process is communicated to practitioners (in the form of requirements, incentives, or other supports). For example, in Texas the state legislature approves statutes governing education, which become part of the Texas Education Code (TEC). These statutes identify whether the Chief State School Officer or State Board of Education is to develop rules to enact the legislation. The rules adopted by the Chief State School Officer or State Board become part of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC). Local school boards and administrators must follow all laws in TEC and rules outlined in the TAC. Local boards may also develop additional rules, called policies, that are specific to the individual district. These local policies as well as appropriate statutes and TAC rules are combined to make the local district policy manual.

It is never too late to begin the process of supporting state agency leaders; guiding state boards of education; and assisting governors, legislators and other policy developers as they incorporate the principles of scientifically-based reading instruction into state policy.

Excellent examples already exist where states have well-defined and well-funded state literacy programs. Sharing these examples with lawmakers and policy makers can be your starting point.

Sustainability is the ability of a program to operate on its core beliefs and values (its reading culture) and use them to guide essential and inevitable program adaptations over time while maintaining improved outcomes.

Adapted from Century and Levy, 2002

Learn About Your State's Legislative System

To find out how your state works, begin with questions like the ones below. Once you understand how your system works, you are ready to consider specific strategies.

- What is the impetus for development of legislation or policy?
- What is the process for development or revision of legislation?
- Who are the key individuals with influence?
- When a law is passed, how is it translated into regulation or policy and ultimately action?
- What are leverage points where you could exert influence?
- What are the implications for timeframe?

One Example: West Virginia

How they integrated Reading First into State Legislation and Policy

As an example of one approach, here is West Virginia's story, summarized from a recorded panel discussion on April 30, 2007.

First Steps

The first step West Virginia Reading First leadership took was analyzing **what** was currently in legislation and policy and what needs to be changed. The state Reading First staff started with the end in mind and asked: What laws, policies, and initiatives will promote and sustain K-3 reading? This list identifies the state statutes, state board policies, and Department of Education initiatives that the West Virginia Reading First team felt could be revised to strengthen support for evidence-based reading in West Virginia. Then they turned to what is currently in law or policy and identified where changes were needed.

Next Steps

Next, West Virginia strategically planned **how** they would make the desired changes.

West Virginia created interest in scientifically based reading instruction by

"We were very meticulous to make sure when we introduced Reading First, how we introduced it at different meetings and workshops and then the teachers that were in non-Reading First schools who didn't have it, wanted it. Then they started putting pressures here, putting pressures there, so all we had to do was just sit back and watch the ball game at that point."

linking Reading First with other state initiatives and the professional develop-

ment provided through Reading First to all schools. By publicizing the supports Reading First schools were receiving—and later, the gains Reading First schools were making—they created demand for similar services in other schools.

Taking Ownership

Another positive thing West Virginia did was referring to what they were supporting as the "K-3 Reading Model." Reading First is a federal program and a federal funding stream—it provided seed money to establish evidence-based reading programs. Institutionalizing evidence-based reading programs is facilitated when a more neutral or state-developed name is used, thereby facilitating ownership of the approach to teaching reading throughout the state.

In addition, West Virginia actively sought to influence people who had the

"And on our state Reading First leadership team ... about half the folks have some direct connection with Reading First, while the other half do not—state leaders, state legislators, the president of our NEA organization, the president of our AFT organization, and the First Lady...We talk about [sustainability and capacity building] at our state leadership team meetings. And we always talk about the connection, correlation, and relationship between our screening assessment and WESTEST, our state test."

control or authority to make changes. For example, they chose influential individuals for the state literacy leadership committee and involved them in a dialog so they would understand the value of scientifically based reading instruction and would want to act as advocates

How Some States Have Done It

Embedding Evidence-based Reading Programs into Statute, Regulation and Policy

Any or all of the foundational Reading First elements are appropriate to address in legislation or policy. Here are some examples of how various elements have been included in particular state legislation and policies:

Assessment and Data

Use of research-based assessment practices: Arizona Revised Statutes section 15-704 directs schools to use research based reading principles and assessment systems. This example includes the statutory language and definitions used to implement the new policy.

Selection and use of diagnostic reading assessments: This section of the Texas Education Code (Title 2. Section 28.006 Reading Diagnosis Assessment) describes the requirements for schools to diagnose student reading development and report the results.

Teacher Testing/Instructional Competencies

Reading instruction competence assessment: California recognized that teacher competence in reading instruction is essential to the progress and achievement of pupils learning to read. This legislation requires a reading instruction competence assessment to

measure the knowledge, skill, and ability of first-time teaching credential applicants who will be responsible for reading instruction in the state.

Instructional Time

Devoting at least 90-minutes daily to reading instruction: West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2510 requires that all schools with grades K-2 must have an uninterrupted reading block of not less than 90 minutes each day.

Professional Development and Coaching

Comprehensive state legislation to provide state funding for reading professional development for teachers and instructional aides: This California legislation (CA AB 466 and Reauthorization of SB 472) cited as the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program, awarded funding to provide teachers and instructional aides and paraprofessionals who directly assist with classroom instruction in mathematics and reading with instruction and training in the areas of mathematics and reading.

Interventions

Section of state accountability law requiring individual intervention plans for students: Arkansas Act 35 is the state law establishing the state's accountability and assessment system. Section 5 (pp. 11-14) requires development of individual

intervention plans for students. Data show student achievement is improving as a result of this legislation.

State rules for students with disabilities revised to integrate RTI and the five components of effective reading instruction: West Virginia Legislative Rules (WV Policy 2419) describe the alignment of the Reading First plan and the Response to Intervention (RTI) plan for the state on pages 34-42.

Curriculum and Instruction

State rules detailing curriculum standards and objectives revised to incorporate the five components of effective reading instruction: West Virginia Legislative Rules (WV Policy 2520.1) describe the process used to revise the state's Reading and English Arts Curriculum Standards, incorporating the five components of effective reading instruction.

State legislation establishing a statewide reading initiative incorporating the components of effective reading instruction: Oregon House Bill 3941 created the Early Success Reading Initiative, which required elementary schools to use research-based teaching practices and learning strategies as well as provided funds to support the development of pilot sites.



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