Strong Readers, Strong Futures

Enhance Early Literacy Policy in Texas for Improved Student Success

A strong start in reading leads to later success. Few things matter more to a child's future than their ability to learn to read because it's an essential building block for later academic and life outcomes. Early in elementary school, students should develop foundational literacy skills that enable them to become strong readers. As students advance to later grade levels, it becomes extremely challenging to catch students up who fall behind.

Texas has struggled to accelerate learning after the critical milestone of 3rd grade. **Only 1 in 5 Texas 3rd graders who did not meet grade-level expectations in 2019 caught up within three years.** For economically disadvantaged students, only 15% caught up. [3]

Early reading skills are **predictive of students' later high school test scores** and academic success. [1]

Students who learn to read by 3rd grade are **four times more likely to graduate** high school. [2]

Texas' current outcomes demand more attention and call for new strategies so all students gain foundational academic skills

Only 46% of Texas third graders are reading on grade level, and for students experiencing economic disadvantage this rate falls to just 36%.[4]

Texas ranks 33rd in 4th grade reading proficiency, improving 12 spots from 2017 due to legislative action but with room for meaningful improvement.[5]

Low reading scores underscore the need to focus attention prior to 3rd grade, but we cannot improve what we cannot see. Under Texas' current early literacy policy, parents, educators, and policymakers lack sufficient visibility into students' early reading development.

This means, as a state, we **lack reliable literacy progress data for nearly 800,000 1st and 2nd graders.**[6] Without this information, parents are often unaware of their child's reading gaps and schools **miss opportunities for providing additional support** ahead of the 3rd grade benchmark.

Kindergarten	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade
Kindergarten Readiness	No Consistent Statewide Monitoring Policy		STAAR

1: Sparks, R. L., Patton, J., & Murdoch, A. (2014). Early reading success and its relationship to reading achievement and reading Vol.: Replication of '10 years later'. Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 27(1), 189–211. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-013-9439-2
2: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation
3: Commit Analysis.
4: TEA, STAAR 2024
5: Nation's Report Card, 2022

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With early identification and evidence-based supports, Texas can catch students up before learning gaps compound

Some Texas schools and many around the country provide a guide for next steps. Recent efforts have already better aligned Texas policy with national best practices including training teachers in the science of teaching reading and scaling access to high-quality instructional materials. Additional evidence-based strategies, however, remain unscaled and without supportive statewide policies.

Progress Monitoring: Effective progress monitoring occurs at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to provide information on phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and spelling development. Screening students' foundational knowledge to identify gaps can be quick, accessible, and folded into the school day, building off school systems' current practices to address the lack of early literacy visibility.

89% of Texas voters support requiring schools to **identify students struggling to read** prior to 3rd grade and as early as Kindergarten.[10]

Evidence-Based Interventions: All students can learn to read, but some need more support to get there. Additional support can be provided by classroom teachers in small groups as well as by interventionists and tutors. Nationally, targeted tutoring sessions have emerged as an "effective way to address students' reading problems."[7] In Texas, a school system found that providing tutoring to young learners caught students up, with the most profound growth for students furthest behind and those receiving support earlier on.[8]

91% of Texas voters support schools being required to **provide additional supports** to struggling readers early on so they can read at grade level by the 3rd grade.[11]

Texas has the opportunity to improve student success tomorrow by closing reading gaps today. With nearly 1.8 million K-3 students enrolled in Texas public schools,[9] lawmakers have the opportunity to pass policies in 2025 to invest early in students' academic success — saving the state and families from expensive remediation efforts later.

Robust Early Identification
Utilize evidence-based progress monitoring instruments in K-3 to identify students' foundational gaps and develop tailored plans to support.

Powerful Parent Notification
Equip parents with reliable and timely information and resources to support at-home learning.

Targeted Student Support
Ensure students struggling to read are provided high-quality supports to catch them up via effective classroom teachers and targeted interventions.

Resources to Scale Effective Practices
Train interventionists, increase resources via the Early Ed Allotment and other sources, and strengthen instructional coaching, focused on campuses with the most academically behind students.

6: PEIMS, 2023-2024 Student Enrollment
7: Novicoff, S. & Loeb, S. (2024). Lessons from the Early Literacy Tutoring Landscape. Kappan.
8: National Student Support Accelerator. (Oct. 2023). The Effects of Virtual Tutoring on Young Readers: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial
9: PEIMS, 2023-2024 Student Enrollment
10: Commit Statewide Poll, Nov. 2024
11: Ibid

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