

Action Guide for State Policymakers

The majority of older students in the United States aren't reading at grade-level.

What can state policymakers do to change that?

Reading Reimagined undertook five years of research and development to better understand what's holding readers back, especially in the later grades—and how to help. Our research found that a gap in advanced decoding skills underpins the literacy crisis for older readers.

Conservative estimates indicate that many older readers struggle to decode grade-level texts:

1 in 3

Fourth graders
struggle

1 in 4

Sixth graders
struggle

1 in 6

Eighth graders
struggle

These students may be able to decode simple words using the basic phonics skills they learned in early elementary grades, but they have not yet developed advanced skills to decode the more complex, multisyllabic words that appear in later grades. Without sufficient decoding skills to drive automatic word recognition, reading development stalls—and students cannot comprehend what they read.

Why are so many older students missing these skills? Because they aren't being taught in school.

State policymakers play a key role in ensuring all students develop the skills they need to become automatic and fluent readers.

[Read the Full Report Here](#)



1 **Revise academic standards to include advanced foundational skills for students in grades 4-8.**

Becoming an automatic reader requires the development of two interrelated components: **accurate word reading** and **fluent sentence reading**. Because text complexity increases as students advance in school, effective development of these components requires explicit instruction in foundational skills in the context of grade-appropriate texts and content. Academic standards must include the foundational skills that underpin both components of reading through grade 8. But the majority of state standards for upper grade literacy do not currently include any advanced foundational skills—and those that do are often incomplete.

- State leaders should start by **auditing their current literacy standards**. Do state standards through grade 8 include knowledge of morphology and orthography, vocabulary, multisyllabic word reading (or decoding), sentence structure, and fluency?
- Using the tables [linked here](#) as a guide, **update state literacy standards** to include the development and practice of these skills progressively from grades 4-8.

For our full recommended standards, plus additional guidance on aligned instructional practices, visit [Standards & Instructional Practices for Adolescent Foundational Literacy Skills](#).

STANDOUT STATES

Minnesota includes standards on phonics and word knowledge through grade 6. **Arkansas** does so through grade 12.

Hawaii includes fluency standards for grades 6-8, and **Idaho's** fluency standard extends across grades K-12.

West Virginia includes "Literacy Foundations" standards in grades 6-12. In grade 6, the Literacy Foundations domain transitions to focus on applying previously learned skills to increasingly complex texts and tasks.

2 **Require districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for core instruction that meet these standards.**

Instruction in advanced foundational skills for older students is separate from remediation of early foundational skills they should have learned in the earlier grades. These skills must be taught to all students via whole-class instruction through grade 8, with students who need additional support receiving it in addition, not in lieu of, Tier 1 instruction. For this reason, teachers of older students must have ready access to HQIM that include robust units on foundational skills, as well as technology-enabled tools that are specifically designed to enable grade-appropriate word work for older students.

- State policymakers should **audit their current guidance** (or requirements) for high-quality instructional materials to ensure that educators in grades 4-8 have access to HQIM that include **units on advanced foundational skills**.
- Through updated guidance, state policymakers should only recommend or approve HQIM that **include comprehensive units on advanced foundational literacy skills** at every grade level through middle school. These units should provide ample opportunities for students to develop and practice advanced foundational skills in the context of grade-level content and appropriately challenging texts.

STANDOUT STATES

Delaware's literacy plan supports students in grades 4-8 through high-quality instructional materials, training to support implementation, and evidence-based instruction in vocabulary, fluency, morphology, and comprehension.

Indiana's list of recommended HQIM includes science-aligned literacy programs for grades 6-8 to guide districts in selecting evidence-based core materials. State law also requires the identification of students in grades 4-8 who are at risk of falling below proficient in reading for their grade level, and IDOE provides guidance to schools on how to support these students.

Michigan, Nevada, and **Oregon** all have adolescent literacy frameworks that focus on disciplinary literacy, offering guidance and resources for embedding evidence-based literacy practices across content areas for grades 6-8 (and through grade 12 in Oregon's case). In Nevada, Tier 1 teachers across all content areas are expected to embed literacy instruction in their classrooms.

- Given that the current market is limited in terms of offerings that meet all the necessary standards for advanced foundational literacy skills, state policymakers should also **exert pressure on curriculum developers** to ensure their materials meet this bar. State policymakers make clear that instructional materials must include units on advanced foundational skills for the upper grades, in order to meet updated criteria for approval.

3 Require universal, high-quality literacy screeners for all students in grades K-8.

The majority of states do not currently require universal literacy screening for older readers. When schools do assess older students for foundational skills, it's often with tools designed for testing early literacy—not the multisyllabic decoding and other advanced skills that older students need. As a result, teachers have limited insight into their students' skill gaps.

To address this, state policymakers should pair updated standards with assessment tools that are designed to measure developmentally appropriate literacy skills in order readers:

- The Rapid Online Assessment of Reading (ROAR), developed by Stanford University in partnership with Reading Reimagined, is a free, computer-adaptive tool that measures grade-appropriate foundational literacy skills among students in grades K-12, in 30 minutes or less.
- CAPTI-ReadBasix is a comprehensive digital screener that can identify areas of literacy needs, including foundational skills, for children in grades 3-12. Administration takes around 45 minutes.
- Both tools are designed to give teachers specific, actionable information about their students' foundational literacy skill gaps.

STANDOUT STATES

Kansas screens for early literacy skills through grade 8, adds comprehension in grades 6-8, and screens all students on comprehension in 9th grade, following up with fluency (ORF) as needed.

Idaho requires universal screening for dyslexia through grade 5.

Maryland is working on a comprehensive literacy plan for grades 4-12 that includes extended universal screening through high school.

For more information, read the full report here:

