

The READ Act: A National Commitment to Literacy

The Problem: America's literacy crisis

America is facing a literacy crisis that threatens the futures of millions of children and the fundamental skill sets of our future workforce. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed the lowest average 12th-grade reading scores since the exam began in 1992—with one third of students scoring below the Basic level and graduating without the basic ability to understand written texts. Millions of students are leaving high school without the ability to read proficiently, undermining their readiness for college, careers, and civic life. Ultimately, these low literacy rates cost taxpayers an estimated \$224 billion annually and American businesses nearly \$40 billion in lost productivity.

One state's solution: Mississippi's blueprint for success

This crisis has been building for over a decade, with declines beginning well before the pandemic. However, Mississippi has created a blueprint for progress, advancing from 49th in the country to the top ten in fourth-grade reading over the past decade. When adjusted for demographics, Mississippi climbs to the number one slot. Though these gains are referred to as the “Mississippi miracle,” they are a consequence not of luck but of a sustained commitment to evidence-based practices anchored in the science of reading.

So how did Mississippi do it? The state required every district to adopt phonics-based curricula aligned with the science of reading. Educators completed intensive professional development, and literacy coaches were sent to low-performing schools to ensure that teachers could effectively deliver the new curricula. Mississippi doubled down on accountability and implemented mandatory K-3 reading assessments to provide clear snapshots of whether students are on track. As a last resort, the state adopted a third-grade retention policy, creating a strong incentive for schools to intervene early with high-impact tutoring and other targeted supports to prevent students from being held back.

In short, Mississippi's success can be distilled into four key pillars:

1. Invest in curricula rooted in the science of reading
2. Ensure teachers are trained and coached in the new curricula
3. Provide interventions to students that are falling behind
4. Hold schools accountable for student outcomes

The Challenge: Scaling the Mississippi Miracle

States across the country have passed their own science of reading laws, loosely based on Mississippi's successes. Most states are still in the early stages of rolling out new policies, and while there are clear early wins in some places like Louisiana, the overall picture is uneven. Some states lack sufficient funding, others face resistance to changing entrenched practices, and many struggle to provide teachers with the sustained, high-quality professional learning needed to shift instruction. Meanwhile, most teacher preparation programs have failed to integrate the science of reading into their instruction, so new teachers are pushed into schools every year without adequate training on evidence-based literacy practices.

What families are left with is a patchwork of results. Some districts have carefully selected evidence-based curricula, embraced data on student progress, and built capacity for targeted interventions like tutoring. But unfortunately, most districts across the country are still waiting on the promise of the Mississippi miracle.

The Solution: A national commitment to literacy

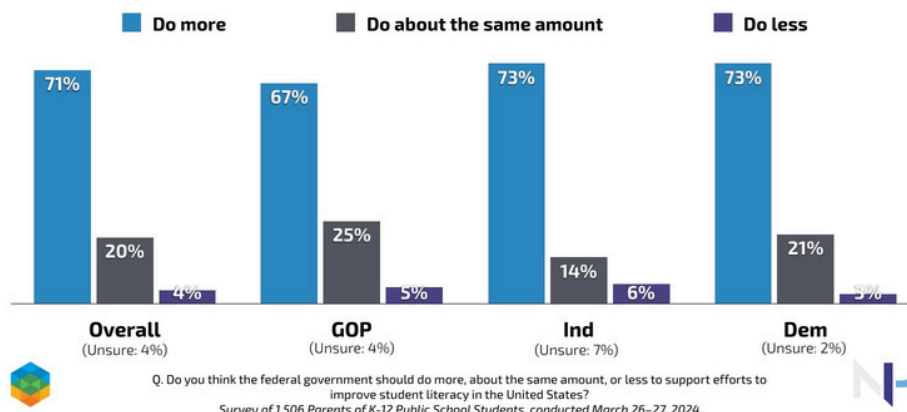
States like Mississippi and Louisiana demonstrate that progress is possible, but isolated state progress is not enough to reverse a crisis that affects millions of students across the country. Reversing this national crisis requires a partnership: federal policy to set the baseline, state laws to innovate and adapt, and local districts to execute with fidelity.

Congress has already taken one step forward by passing a resolution that designates September as National Literacy Month and calls on states and communities to address the literacy crisis. However, this is just the first step.

The Reading Excellence and Achievement for Development (READ) Act answers the call for national leadership in literacy. The READ Act strengthens and expands the current CLSD (Comprehensive Literacy State Development) grant program by ensuring that states receiving funding to improve literacy are actually investing in the programs and policies that will accomplish that goal. To achieve this, the legislation focuses on six key priorities:

1. Support State Education Agencies (SEAs) in implementing **evidence-based practices anchored in the science of reading**, including: Investing in literacy coaches, incentivizing the use of high-quality instructional materials, and expanding high-impact tutoring programs for struggling readers.
2. Add a **set-aside for the lowest performing states** to incentivize the advancement of evidence-based literacy policies.
3. **Improve teacher preparation** and professional development in the science of reading.
4. Promote early identification and intervention for students at risk of reading difficulties, including dyslexia, through **universal literacy screenings**
5. Establish **parental notification** requirements so parents know if their children are falling behind
6. Protect and strengthen **literacy research capacity** through comprehensive centers and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

Parents across the political spectrum agree the federal government should be doing more to support efforts to improve student literacy



In 2025, no family should wonder whether their child will learn to read. Literacy is the foundation of opportunity, yet too many students are being left behind. The READ Act delivers the comprehensive national framework our country needs, preserving state authority while incentivizing the use of methods that are proven to be effective. This legislation aligns states, schools, and educators—ensuring flexibility and fidelity in delivering results so that every child in every state can unlock their full potential.