

North Dakota Science of Reading

What is this initiative?

This project provides opportunities for all North Dakota teachers to be trained in results-based teaching methods, as outlined in NDCC 15.1-21-12.1.

Why focus on reading?

North Dakota has room for growth in this area: 44 percent of the states' K-12 students are reading at grade level, with 39 percent of 3rd graders doing so. A student's level of reading comprehension is one of the most reliable predictors of their ability to learn other subjects, as virtually all areas of study require extensive reading. Even in hands-on subjects, like art or shop class, students excel when they can quickly and accurately find the information they're looking for in a reference text. While the internet can feel like it's overflowing with pictures, audio, and video, most reference materials online are text-based because it's the simplest to post and update. Likewise, almost all jobs involve composing and interpreting emails and other written exchanges. High school graduates with good reading comprehension skills tend to be more successful in the workforce, military, and higher education. By contrast, low reading comprehension correlates with increased rates of incarceration. Therefore, helping students learn to read is not just good for them personally, but also for the state as a whole.

What is the science of reading?

The science of reading is a vast body of evidence-based research on how children learn to read and what the most effective teaching methods are. Grades K-3 were found to be a critical time to learn to read and are given particular emphasis. Another key takeaway is how important sounds and language are to the reading process. All reading involves phonics (mentally decoding text into sounds) and comprehension (using vocabulary and language rules to understand the text). Appropriate teaching methods vary with grade level, so it is critical that teachers know how to teach students at a particular age and how best to intervene when they struggle.

What is North Dakota doing?

Starting in July 2022, as outlined in state law, each public and non-public school district was directed to implement scientifically and research-based literacy instruction, materials, and programs in kindergarten through third grade. The NDDPI has supported schools and districts through initial and ongoing professional development for teachers and leaders.

What are the results?

As of October 2022, the STARS (State Automated Reporting System) Reading Curriculum and Professional Development Report finds 50 percent of North Dakota's K-3 teachers have reported completing the training. An additional 33 percent were currently completing the training (which can take up to two years), while 15 percent had not yet started the training. Through ESSER funding, North Dakota has provided the training online and in-person through various program opportunities such as the well-known "LETRS" training, an online course on the North Dakota Educator's Hub which is provided free of charge to all North Dakota teachers, and a three-day intensive course during the summer.