



# Reading and its impacts

January 2026

Originally passed in 1997, the Oklahoma Reading Sufficiency Act was meant to improve third grade reading skills. In 2011, requirements for grade level proficiency in reading were added for students moving from third to fourth grade. Good cause exemptions were also made available for certain circumstances. In 2016, the Oklahoma legislature amended the Act further to soften the literacy-based retention by adding a committee review to include parents. Then, in 2023, a pilot program for literacy coaches was created to help train teachers on the science of reading. Most recently, the Act was amended to add additional teacher preparation and tests to ensure high quality instruction was occurring in the classroom. It is now known as the Strong Readers Act (SRA).<sup>1</sup> See page nine for a full timeline.

As some of these changes were made in the last decade; the Act's initial goals of ensuring grade level proficiency were diminished, ultimately negatively impacting reading scores and outcomes. Oklahoma declined from mid-thirties ranking in average score in the early 2000's to 47th in the nation in reading for average score and 49th in reading proficiency for test year 2024.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to third grade, students are learning to read, but beginning in fourth grade, text is used as information to learn, which is why fourth grade reading scores are critically important. From fourth grade students are using the skill of reading to learn.<sup>3</sup>

So, when a student is not reading on grade level at third grade, a cumulative effect can occur: The lack of reading skills causes problems in all other subjects, which leads to overall lower educational attainment, lower earnings, poor health outcomes, higher dependency on social welfare programs and increased risk of incarceration. It creates a snowball effect on a person's potential earning capacity.

A 2013 study showed that students who are not proficient by fourth grade are four times more likely to become high school dropouts.

- High school dropouts are then three times more likely to be on some sort of social welfare program.<sup>4</sup>
- Moreover, high school dropouts are 63% more likely to be incarcerated than bachelor's degree holders.<sup>5</sup>

Kids who cannot read become adults who cannot read. These Oklahomans are entering the workforce without a vital skill for success in an advanced or innovative economy. In 2023, **Oklahoma's population was comprised of 20% of adults who do not read on basic level**—meaning they have difficulty reading and understanding text-based materials.<sup>6</sup> Of those, 431,890 have less than a high school degree and only 27% have a high school degree or GED.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 70 O.S. § 1210.508A to 1210.520 (OSCN 2025), [Strong Readers Act](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Nation's Report Card, [NAEP 2024 Results](#)

<sup>3</sup> CAP, [How Changes to Fourth-Grade Reading Standards and Research-Backed Approaches Can Improve Reading Achievement](#), Oct. 23, 2025

<sup>4</sup> Annie Casey Foundation, [Early Warning Confirmed](#)

<sup>5</sup> Literacy Mid-South, [The Relationship Between Incarceration and Low Literacy](#)

<sup>6</sup> Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), [What PIAAC Measures](#)

<sup>7</sup> PIAAC, [U.S. Skills Map State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy](#), Oklahoma

## Synergy in preparation, teaching, materials, and interventions

Research shows there are four main groups of policies that affect early literacy:

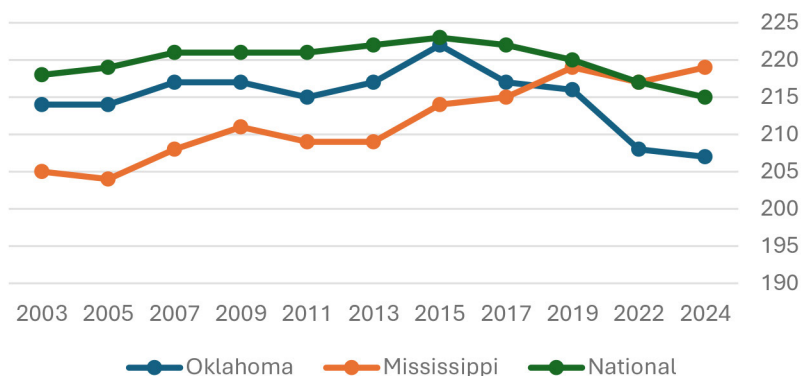
1. “Support for teachers,
2. assessment and parent notifications,
3. instruction and intervention and
4. retention and intervention”<sup>8</sup>.

States that have increased their average reading scores and proficiency have adopted, implemented and funded policies across these areas. The states that have seen the most improvement in reading scores in recent years are states in the South.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, “there’s a series of reinforcing policies and practices that point the same direction. These states aren’t subjecting educators to whiplash and fad-chasing that are the hallmarks of “reform.” Chaos turns out to be a lousy recipe for school improvement.”<sup>10</sup>

### A Tale of Two States

In 2013, Mississippi enacted the Literacy Promotion Act focusing on teacher development in a proven way to educate students on how to read and ending social promotion. Mississippi also aligned its testing programs to NAEP by studying the test structure and questions. The funding for Mississippi’s programs, including interventions and teacher training, costs \$15 million annually. Research shows that the interventions through the Mississippi literacy program equate to about an extra quarter-year of schooling and an exponential increase in student NAEP scores.<sup>11</sup> Just these programs and interventions alone increase future earnings of Mississippi graduates by around \$1,000 per year.<sup>12</sup>

NAEP 4th Grade Reading Average Scores



While Mississippi’s state elected officials and education community had the fortitude to stick to the rigorous standards, Oklahoma’s policy makers scaled back the literacy-based retention policy. The results were clear. During the implementation of Mississippi’s plan, the state increased its NAEP standings from 49th in 2013 to 8th in 2024, whereas Oklahoma’s scores began and continued to decline.

<sup>8</sup> ExcelinEd, [Literacy Matters](#)

<sup>9</sup> National Review, [The Southern Surge in Education](#), August, 21, 2025

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Economics of Education Review, [Comprehensive early literacy policy and the Mississippi Miracle](#), December 2024

<sup>12</sup> The Conversation, [Mississippi’s education miracle: A model for global literacy reform](#), March, 26, 2025

# Oklahoma Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA)

Key Policy Milestones, 1997–2024

1997	2011	2013	2014	2016	2017–2019	2024
RSA enacted K–3 screening & intervention	READ Initiative Mandatory intensive intervention	Literacy-based promotion Good-cause exemptions	Probationary promotion Team discretion	Retention clarified Mid-year promotion	Reporting & accountability Expanded data	Strong Readers Act Science of Reading alignment

Statutory authority: 70 O.S. §§1210.508A–1210.520

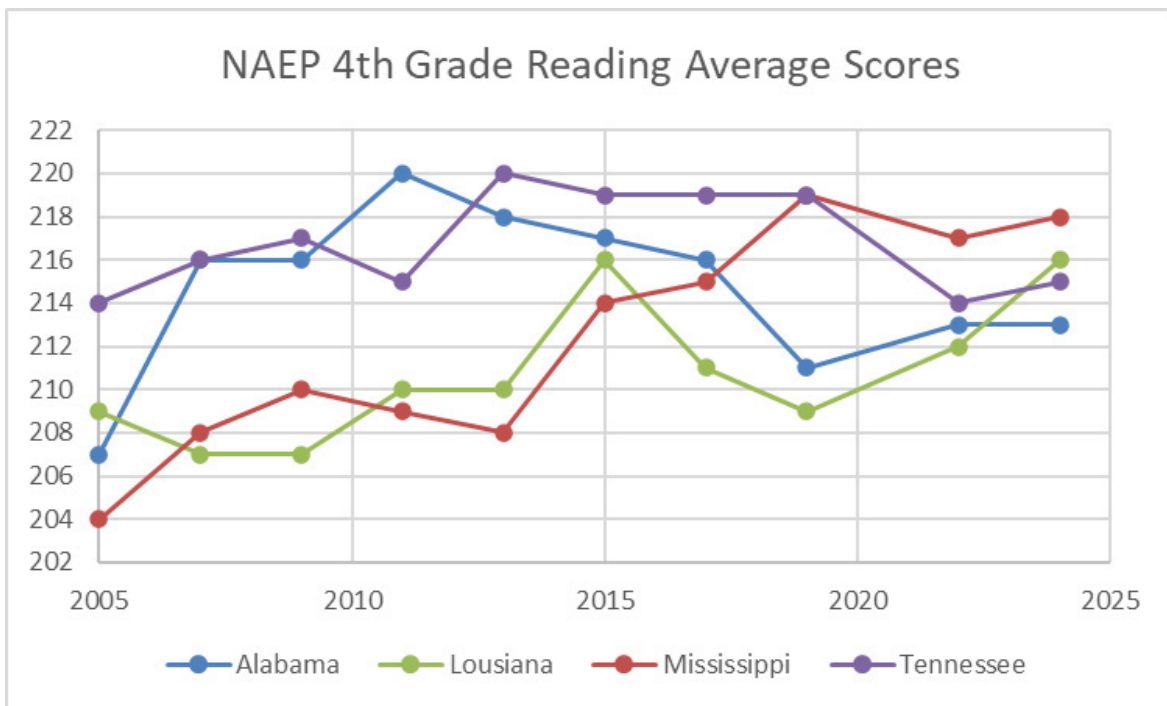
# Mississippi Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA)

Key Policy Milestones, 2013–2024

2013	2014–15	2016	2018–19	2020–2022	2024
LBPA enacted Ends social promotion; K–3 literacy framework SB 2347	Promotion requirement begins State or approved alternative assessment	Standards strengthened Higher promotion benchmark authorized SB 2157	Higher cut score takes effect Must exceed bottom two levels	Implementation refinement Reading plans, interventions, reporting	Continued enforcement Science of Reading-aligned supports

Statutory authority: Mississippi Code §§37-177-1 et seq. | Literacy-Based Promotion Act

## The 2024 Southern Surge : Policy Shifts Changes



Louisiana was the only state to increase its NAEP scores in both reading and math.<sup>13</sup> This considerable achievement began with Louisiana’s overhaul in its comprehensive education plan, Let Teachers Teach.<sup>14</sup> This plan included modifications in professional development, more teacher support and ensuring teachers had high quality instructional materials. Every teacher and principal completes a professional development course in the science of reading.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Alabama required nine hours of science of reading training for kindergarten through 6th grade teachers<sup>16</sup>, and like Oklahoma, requires a Foundations of Reading assessment for teacher candidates.<sup>17</sup>

Louisiana provides high quality instructional materials to teachers that are evidence based and focus on the science of reading.<sup>18</sup> Louisiana found that rather than mandating schools to use the same curriculum, they incentivized schools through free resources that align to provided professional development, funding, and contract negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

Like Mississippi<sup>20</sup>, Louisiana<sup>21</sup> and Alabama<sup>22</sup> use retention of third graders as a last resort. Both states provide assessments from kindergarten to third grade and provide interventions once a child fails an assessment. This all happens prior to retaining a student.

Other factors to consider when addressing low reading scores include dyslexia, hearing and vision. Screeners to determine what students are struggling with provide another avenue of intervention for student support.

Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee screen for dyslexia at various points rather than after a student shows reading difficulties, like in Oklahoma<sup>23</sup>. In Tennessee, literacy screeners are administered to all students at the end of kindergarten and the beginnings of both first and second grades.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Mississippi screens in the spring of kindergarten and fall of first grade.<sup>25</sup> Louisiana recently moved the state’s dyslexia screener from third grade to kindergarten to intervene earlier.<sup>26</sup> Oklahoma screens students for dyslexia when the student is not meeting grade-level targets after the beginning year assessment in first, second or third grade.<sup>27</sup>

States Dyslexia Screening Frequency					
State	K	1st	2nd	3rd	How screening works in practice
Mississippi	✓ (spring)	✓ (fall)	—	—	Stand-alone dyslexia screener required in <b>spring of K</b> and <b>fall of 1st</b> only
Alabama	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	Universal literacy screening <b>3x/year (BOY/MOY/EOY)</b> ; dyslexia characteristics evaluated through this process
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	At least <b>once per year</b> universal literacy screening in each K–3 grade that identifies dyslexia risk

<sup>13</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, [Louisiana Students Achieve Their Highest National Rankings on the Nation’s Report Card](#), January 29, 2025

<sup>14</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, [Let Teachers Teach Recommendations](#), May 2024

<sup>15</sup> Governing, [How Louisiana Managed to Boost Reading Scores](#), October 30, 2025

<sup>16</sup> The Hunt Institute, [How Alabama Improved NAEP Reading Scores with Evidence-Based Literacy](#), May 2, 2025

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> Governing

<sup>19</sup> EdReports, [Louisiana’s Education Model: A Student Improvement Blueprint](#), February 4, 2025

<sup>20</sup> Mississippi Department of Education, [Promotion and Retention Policy](#)

<sup>21</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, [Third Grade Promotion Guidance](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Alabama Literacy Act, FAQ](#)

<sup>23</sup> [70 O.S. § 1210.520](#) (OSCN 2025), Strong Readers Act

<sup>24</sup> [TN Code § 49-1-229](#) (2024), Tennessee Department of Education, [Dyslexia Advisory Council Annual Report](#)

<sup>25</sup> [MS Code 37-173-15](#) (2024).

<sup>26</sup> Governing and [Act 266, 2023](#)

<sup>27</sup> [70 O.S. § 1210.520](#) (OSCN 2025), Strong Readers Act

States Dyslexia Screening Frequency					
State	K	1st	2nd	3rd	How screening works in practice
Tennessee	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	Universal reading screener <b>3x/year</b> ; used for dyslexia identification and follow-up screening
Oklahoma	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	Reading Sufficiency Act requires <b>BOY/MOY/EOY screening</b> ; students below benchmark must be screened for dyslexia characteristics

## Recommendations

What has made these states' students successful is implementing policy priorities that align to the science of reading. From teacher preparation, to training, to high quality materials and intervention, the plans all use the same underlying theory. To see success, Oklahoma should consider:

- Ensuring all teachers receive science of reading training either as professional development or while at college,
- Adopt and approve only high-quality instructional materials that align with the science of reading and offer the resources to districts for free,
- Fully fund and implement literacy coaches for interventions,
- Establish early detection, identification and parent engagement, and
- Reestablish literacy-based retention at an early elementary grade.

### Ensuring all teachers receive science of reading training, either as professional development or while at college.

Effective reading instruction begins by teaching future teachers the best methods on how to teach.<sup>28</sup> The teacher must be trained in how to systematically teach phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.<sup>29</sup> A 2023 survey by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that nationally 72% of teacher training incorporates practices that were debunked and only 25% of teaching programs encompassed all five elements.<sup>30</sup>

Mississippi made teacher preparation a key priority in its literacy legislation. This not only propelled their students' test scores but also made them an exemplary state for the National Council on Teacher Quality with all of their 10 programs passing, 7 of which received an A or A+ evaluation.<sup>31</sup> In Oklahoma, only 5 (out of 12) of the teacher preparation programs evaluated on literacy made a passing grade.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, [Ready to Read Ready to Succeed](#), May 2018

<sup>29</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality, [Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction](#), 2023

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality, [Mississippi: Recommendations to Strength Implementation of Science of Reading Through Teacher Preparation](#), 2023

<sup>32</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality, [Oklahoma: Recommendations to Strength Implementation of Science of Reading Through Teacher Preparation](#), 2023

University	Level Assessed	Grade
Cameron University	Undergraduate	B
East Central University	Undergraduate	F
Langston University	Undergraduate	B
Northwestern Oklahoma State University	Undergraduate	C
Oklahoma Panhandle State University	Undergraduate	F
Oklahoma State University	Undergraduate	D
Oklahoma State University	Graduate	F
Southeastern Oklahoma State University	Undergraduate	C
Southwestern Oklahoma State University	Undergraduate	D
University of Central Oklahoma	Undergraduate	F
University of Oklahoma	Undergraduate	B
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma	Undergraduate	F

**Source:** National Council on Teacher Quality, [Oklahoma: Recommendations to Strengthen Implementation of Science of Reading Through Teacher Preparation](#), 2023

**Adopt and approve only high-quality instructional materials that align with the science of reading.**

The systematic use of only high-quality instructional materials will ensure alignment between what the teacher candidate is learning and what is being taught in the classroom. High quality instructional materials “have been vetted by the state or a designated partner against a set of standards.”<sup>33</sup> High quality instructional materials increase student outcomes.<sup>34</sup> Currently, Oklahoma recommends a list of high-quality instructional materials but does not require their use.<sup>35</sup>

**Fully fund and implement literacy coaches for interventions.**

The Help Elevate Reading Outcomes for Every Student (HEROS) was created in 2023 as a three-year pilot program, therefore up for renewal in the 2026 legislative session.<sup>36</sup> Currently the HEROS literacy team has 14 coaches serving all of Oklahoma’s 500+ school districts.<sup>37</sup> Expanding the number of coaches and dedicating more funding to the HEROS literacy team will increase the impact.

**Reestablish literacy-based retention at an early elementary grade.**

Retention alone is ineffective.<sup>38</sup> There must be interventions for students and teachers alike, as well as high-quality instruction, throughout a child’s elementary school years prior to the decision to retain a student. Once retained, a student must continue to receive interventions and instruction with intensive supports so that they can move through to the fourth grade.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality, [Five Policy Actions to Strengthen Implementation of the Science of Reading](#), 2024

<sup>34</sup> C. Kirabo Jackson and Alexey Makarin, [Can Online Off-the-Shelf Lessons Improve Student Outcomes? Evidence from a Field Experiment](#), 2016

<sup>35</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality, [Five Policy Actions to Strengthen Implementation of the Science of Reading](#), 2024

<sup>36</sup> 70 O.S. § 1210.508H (OSCN 2025), [Strong Readers Act](#)

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Eagleson, NonDoc, [‘Phalanx of literacy coaches’: Experts, state leaders eye Oklahoma expansion](#), 2025

<sup>38</sup> Annie Casey Foundation

<sup>39</sup> ExcelinEd, [Comprehensive How-To Guide: Approaches to Implementing Early Literacy Policies](#), 2022