



900 S.W. Jackson Street, Suite 600  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1212  
(785) 296-3203  
www.ksde.org

Danny Zeck  
District 1

Melanie Haas  
District 2

Michelle Dombrosky  
District 3

Ann E. Mah  
District 4

Cathy Hopkins  
District 5

Dr. Deena Horst  
District 6

Dennis Hershberger  
District 7

Betty J. Arnold  
District 8

Jim Porter  
District 9

Jim McNiece  
District 10

In-Person Proponent Testimony HB 2839  
March 19, 2024  
House Committee on Education  
Ann Mah and Dr. Deena Horst, Liaisons, Kansas State Board of Education

Chairman Thomas and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2839. HB 2839 establishes the Kansas blueprint for literacy, prioritizing the science of reading and structured literacy in all teacher preparation programs across Kansas. The Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) supports the Kansas Board of Regents' (KBOR) and the Legislature's efforts to strengthen literacy training and increase investment in this area.

The KSBE believes that the Kansas blueprint for literacy is a good continuation of KSBE's Kansas Education Framework for Literacy, which began in 2019 with the board's adoption of the Dyslexia Taskforce recommendations. Since that time, we have implemented all recommendations related to KSBE's responsibilities and authority.

Specifically, we have made using structured literacy based on the science of reading a priority in K-12 teaching and in teacher preparation programs. We require universal screening for students through the fall of ninth grade and provide a list of recommended screening tools. We are in the process of requiring candidates for K-6 teaching licenses, English Language Arts endorsement, reading specialist teaching licenses, and special education teaching licenses to be trained in and pass a test in the science of reading. In 2021, we invested \$15 million of discretionary ESSER monies to fund the training of all administrators, and early childhood, elementary and special education teachers in the science of reading through the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS<sup>®</sup>) program. We also offered this training to teacher preparation program faculty.

Additional initiatives include the creation of a Literacy Advisory Council and the Kansas Dyslexia Handbook. Further, teacher preparation expectations and program standards have been updated for K-6 teaching licenses, English Language Arts endorsements, Reading Specialist teaching licenses and Special Education teaching licenses to ensure alignment with the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) standards. Educator preparation providers

were required to submit assurance forms that educator candidates' knowledge and skills are assessed in five identified science of reading criteria and that science of reading concepts are included in their literacy-aligned programs. We also updated the Kansas English Language Arts standards to more clearly reflect the science of reading and the adoption of structured literacy as the explicit, evidence-based model for reading instruction. You can read more about our literacy efforts in the Kansas Education Framework for Literacy document attached to this testimony.

To further confirm our commitment to creating and sustaining strong literacy practices in Kansas, the State Board adopted the following position statement.

*The Kansas State Board of Education requires all accredited schools in Kansas to use evidence-based methodology fully aligned with the Science of Reading, specifically Structured Literacy, to provide literacy instruction for students. The Kansas State Board of Education prohibits the use of practices and pedagogy identified in research to be counterproductive to reading acquisition. In addition, the State Board recommends literacy specific universal screening measures, and diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to be utilized by accredited schools and school districts.*

The focus HB 2839 places on developing stronger literacy programs for teacher preparation is welcomed. The Dyslexia Taskforce in 2019 recommended Kansas colleges of education develop a course of study with a specialization in dyslexia and struggling readers that is geared toward a Science of Reading endorsement and aligned with the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards. The proposed regional centers of excellence in reading could also be helpful to districts desiring assistance.

The KSBE has identified some areas of concern within the bill that need revising. There are places where it is not clear, for example, whether the language refers to the state board of education or the state board of regents. For example, line 14 on page 5 should say "state board of regents." However, if the bill does intend to read "state board of education," then we would object, as the KSBE can make its own reports to the Legislature. The same applies to Section 4 (c).

Sections 4 (b)(2)(D) and 4 (b)(3) are also concerning. The KSBE is responsible for and does make recommendations to districts on screening measures and developing assessments. KBOR has no authority in these areas and these sections should be removed.

We also do not find it necessary for the literacy advisory committee to monitor the progress of literacy training for in-service teachers (Section 2 (c)(1)) as the Kansas State

Department of Education already has a staff person responsible for that. Likewise, KSDE staff also monitor literacy methodologies in secondary schools (Section 3 (c)((5)(C) and 3 (c)(6).

In the Senate Education Committee, a number of amendments were adopted to SB 532, an identical literacy bill, that addressed our concerns. We recommend that this Committee adopt the Senate amendments.

We applaud the intent of HB 2839 and welcome this effort to partner with the Kansas State Board of Regents in making Kansas a leader in reading instruction. With a few clarifications, we support passage of the bill.

Attachment: Updated Kansas Education Framework for Literacy



# Kansas Education Framework for Literacy

Literacy has always been at the forefront of Kansas education, but the effects of the recent pandemic have required additional and specific intention in meeting the needs of all students.

Current research shows that between 2019 and 2022, the average student in grades 3 through 8 lost the equivalent of half a grade level in math achievement and a third of a grade level in reading achievement.<sup>1</sup>

Kansas assessment scores rebounded modestly in 2023, indicating that academic progress is being made. However, while math scores climbed back to pre-pandemic levels, English language arts scores did not. This follows the research findings of thirty states showing that between 2022 and 2023, students recovered approximately 30% of the original math loss and 22% of the loss in reading.<sup>2</sup>

While it is widely understood by educators that it could take several years to recoup the learning loss created by the pandemic, Kansas has been intentional in implementing targeted practices to accelerate its learning rebound. This includes comprehensive work to address dyslexia and a \$15 million investment in early literacy.

To understand Kansas' literacy initiative, it is important to first understand that Kansas is working on the statewide implementation of four, high-leverage fundamental elements of teaching and learning that it believes must be present in all schools to make meaningful and sustained academic gains. Among them, structured literacy is first and foremost.

Referred to as the **Four Fundamentals**, these include:

- 1 **Structured literacy:** Providing each student with the most effective literacy instruction aligned to the Science of Reading.
- 2 **Standards alignment:** All classroom instruction and resources are aligned to the Kansas Academic Standards.
- 3 **A balanced assessment system:** Student learning is assessed in a variety of ways and that data is used to adjust instruction and intervention practices.
- 4 **Quality instruction:** Creating a culture of high expectations for students and responsiveness when expectations are not met.

Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) is developing a coherent framework for the implementation of these fundamentals, which will be reflected in its new accreditation process, and will provide direct supports to ensure the success of each district. When practiced with consistency and fidelity, these fundamentals provide the base on which all student achievement is built.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Erin Fahle et al., The First Year of Pandemic Recovery: A District-Level Analysis (2024), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Fahle et al., The First Year of Pandemic Recovery: A District-Level Analysis, 2.

## STRUCTURED LITERACY

Kansas educators and legislators alike agree that early literacy must remain a key priority for schools. Considerable work has already been done and even more is in progress to create and sustain strong literacy practices in Kansas based on the Science of Reading.

During its February 2024 meeting, the Kansas State Board of Education adopted the following position statement.

*The Kansas State Board of Education requires all accredited schools in Kansas to use evidence-based methodology fully aligned with the Science of Reading, specifically Structured Literacy, to provide literacy instruction for students. The Kansas State Board of Education prohibits the use of practices and pedagogy identified in research to be counterproductive to reading acquisition. In addition, the State Board recommends literacy specific universal screening measures, and diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to be utilized by accredited schools and school districts.*

## EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROVIDERS (EPP) AND LICENSURE

### EPP Standards Revision

KSDE and the public and private educator preparation program providers began updating preparation expectations and program standards in November 2019, for K-6 teaching licenses, English Language Arts endorsements, Reading Specialist teaching licenses and Special Education teaching licenses to ensure alignment with the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) standards.

Kansas Reading Specialist standards were revised in 2020 to align with the International Dyslexia Association and the International Literacy Association standards.

In 2023, the Elementary PreK-6 preparation standards were revised to increase the emphasis on literacy. A committee of experts from PreK-12 and higher education representatives will begin work to revise the Early Childhood Unified Birth to Kindergarten and Birth to Grade 3 preparation standards in March 2024.

### EPP Program Reviews

EPPs are peer reviewed every seven years, as part of each provider's accreditation process, to ensure alignment to the preparation program standards. In 2021, KSDE identified five Science of Reading criteria that specific early childhood, elementary and special education preparation content areas are to address. EPPs were required to submit assurance forms that educator candidates' knowledge and skills are assessed in these five areas.

During the 2021-2022 academic year, EPPs were required to provide an assurance that Science of Reading concepts were included in their literacy-aligned programs. As of fall 2022, license and endorsement areas for early childhood, elementary and special education include five Science of Reading criteria as part of their regularly scheduled program reviews.

### Science of Reading Criteria

1. Understand the four-part processing system of proficient reading and writing.

2. Identify and explain aspects of cognition and behavior that affect reading and writing development.
3. Explain major research findings (i.e., The Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Rope) regarding the contribution of linguistic and cognitive factors to the prediction of literacy outcomes.
4. Understand/apply in practice the general principles of structured literacy teaching, including explicit, systematic, cumulative, teacher-directed instruction.
5. Understand that higher levels of literacy include syntax, paragraph organization, and discourse structure.

In fall 2023, EPPs were required to submit an updated assurance form identifying where Science of Reading concepts are taught in literacy-aligned programs. KSDE added Restricted licenses that lead to an English Language Arts 6-12 license to the list of program areas expected to address the Science of Reading.

KSDE's Early Literacy/Dyslexia Program Manager serves on all literacy-connected reviews to provide continuity of expectations and to train reviewers on Science of Reading expectations.

### *EPP Professional Development*

KSDE has provided EPP faculty the opportunity to participate in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training at no cost. LETRS provides the training needed for early childhood and elementary educators and administrators to be literacy and language experts in the Science of Reading. This training is essential for EPP faculty for them to provide rigorous instruction aligned with the Science of Reading.

### *Licensure Testing Requirements*

Kansas is currently looking to replace its Praxis content knowledge tests for Elementary Education and Elementary Unified licenses with a new elementary content exam developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS), which has a stronger focus on the Science of Reading. This vote by the State Board will take place in the spring of 2024.

## **KSDE LITERACY INITIATIVES**

### *KSDE Literacy Advisory Council*

KSDE has created a KSDE Literacy Advisory Council that meets four times a year and is comprised of representatives from institutes of higher education (both private and regent), parents, education organizations including the International Dyslexia Associations of Kansas and Missouri and KSDE staff. The purpose of this council is to assure the work of the Kansas Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia continues to move forward and expands to provide support for all students.

### *Kansas Dyslexia Handbook*

In response to recommendations made by the Kansas Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia, KSDE in 2021 published the Dyslexia Handbook to provide guidance and information to a broad spectrum of educators and stakeholders. This document includes information on screening, evidence-based reading

instruction, structured literacy and reading intervention recommendations. KSDE updated this resource in 2023.

### *Kansas Dyslexia Screening Program*

Kansas' comprehensive screening program extends beyond what many states do. Because some students do not present with reading difficulties until they are older and are asked to navigate more complex texts, Kansas requires students be screened beginning in kindergarten through the fall of ninth grade. Students who are identified at risk for reading difficulty may continue to be screened beyond ninth grade.

### *Required Structured Literacy/Dyslexia Training*

Kansas requires annual structured literacy/ dyslexia training for teachers and additional training for teachers new to the profession (or new to Kansas). Teachers identified for this training include:

- All teachers endorsed elementary education.
- All teachers endorsed early childhood unified.
- All teachers endorsed high incidence special education in teaching in grades K - 12.
- All teachers endorsed English Language Arts grades 5 - 12.
- All teachers endorsed as reading specialists.
- All professionals endorsed as school psychologists.
- Highly recommended that paraeducators receive the training.

In keeping with the most current research, the KSDE Required Initial Dyslexia Training modules for new teachers have been revised and the updated modules will be available for the 2024-2025 academic year.

### *LETRS Training*

In 2021, the Kansas State Board of Education allocated \$15 million to fund the training of all early childhood, elementary and special education teachers in the Science of Reading through the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) program. To date, nearly 6,000 educators have received or are in the process of receiving this intensive training.

### *Updated English Language Arts Standards*

Kansas, in 2023, updated its English Language Arts Standards to more clearly reflect the Science of Reading and the adoption of structured literacy as the explicit, evidence-based model for reading instruction.

### *KSDE Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Guidelines*

The KSDE Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Guidelines is another tool provided to school leaders and teachers to address what effective reading instruction looks like. The guidance defines the structured literacy framework as well as the components of structured literacy.

### *Structured Literacy Components Checklist*

Additionally, KSDE has developed the Structured Literacy Components Checklist along with professional learning opportunities to support school leaders and teachers in the analysis of current literacy instructional practices and their alignment with the Science of Reading. The checklist encompasses the necessary components and principles of structured literacy discussed within the guidelines.

*Professional Development*

KSDE's Early Childhood/ Dyslexia team provides districts professional development opportunities, resources and onsite consulting based on the most recent research on evidence-based practices aligned to the Four Fundamentals.

## NEXT STEPS

The next phase of KSDE's literacy initiative features the build out of the state's new school improvement framework scheduled for implementation in the 2024-2025 academic year.

This comprehensive framework aligns the Four Fundamentals (structured literacy, standards alignment, balanced assessment system and quality instruction) with the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation model and provides a team approach to providing targeted supports to systems.

In preparation for the implementation of this new school improvement model, KSDE is undertaking the following work.

### *Curriculum Alignment Study*

KSDE has commissioned the study of all curricula currently used in Kansas classrooms to determine how well it is aligned to the Kansas Academic Standards. The results of this study will be shared with districts along with guidance on how to select high-quality instructional materials by the spring of 2024. KSDE will ask the State Board of Education to require all school districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials aligned to the Science of Reading.

### *High-Quality Instructional Materials Training*

Not only is it important for districts to adopt high-quality instructional materials, but educators must also be well trained in using these materials within the structured reading framework. The State Board will consider spending ESSER funding to assist in this training through 2026.

### *Extend Funding for LETRS Training into 2026*

KSDE is asking the State Board to allocate a portion of unused ESSER funds to continue funding LETRS training for Kansas educators through 2026. This training will be a key component of the structured literacy fundamental accountability measures.

### *Expand Assessment Options*

KSDE is working with the State Board to approve more assessment options at the classroom, school and district levels. These options would include the use of common assessments. Again, we will propose to use unused ESSER funds to assist in this development. This work will be considered for approval by the State Board in the spring of 2024.

### *Demonstration of Structured Literacy Knowledge*

KSDE is asking the State Board to establish the expectation that all Kansas early childhood, elementary and special education teachers, as well as administrators, instructional coaches and reading specialists will demonstrate knowledge of structured literacy. Options for demonstrating this knowledge would include the successful completion of all LETRS training modules, passing the new content exam required for Elementary Education and Elementary Unified licenses, or other options passed by the State Board of Education.