Six Driving Principles

Under the leadership of its 2001-02 chairman, Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) convened an advisory council of distinguished national literacy experts to create a process to guide states in developing policy to ensure virtually all students read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. While mindful of research evidence that learning to read and write begins well before the school years, the council limited its focus to literacy achievement in kindergarten through grade 3.

The advisory council chose the National Assessment of Educational Progress’ (NAEP) definition of proficient reading as a uniform and rigorous standard from which each state could set its benchmarks. The council also defined six principles that should drive an effective, comprehensive literacy policy. These principles, outlined below, can serve as tools for policymakers in their efforts to implement literacy initiatives and, at the same time, help them meet or exceed requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Key questions states need to address to ensure comprehensive state policy are provided for each principle. The questions are not inclusive and should be adapted to individual states’ needs.

1. All reading programs – comprehensive, supplemental and intervention – are based on scientific evidence of their effectiveness.

Nationally, less than 33% of students read proficiently or better; less than 20% of all students from low-income families read proficiently or better. Yet, research now provides strong guidelines for what to teach and identifies instructional strategies necessary for at least 95% of students to read proficiently. The National Reading Panel’s review of rigorous scientific research found that systematic instruction in five essential elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies – was significantly more effective than less explicit and less focused approaches.

2. State reading standards are based on scientifically based research and are rigorous enough to prepare virtually all students to read proficiently.

Standards hold all students to the same rigorous academic expectations and provide a focus for the alignment of curriculum, assessment and professional development. To be effective, standards must be clear, measurable, comprehensive, challenging yet attainable, and balanced between what students should know and be able to do.

3. The assessment system includes assessments that are frequent and comprehensive enough to screen, diagnose, monitor progress and provide timely evaluation data.

Assessments should serve several interrelated purposes: (1) identifying students who may be at risk for reading difficulties; (2) diagnosing students' particular strengths and instructional needs; (3) providing teachers with ongoing information throughout the school year to fine-tune their instructional
approaches; and (4) providing timely evaluation data to inform school, district and state decisions on curricula, institutional changes, professional development and student interventions. Regardless of the purpose for which assessments are used, they must be valid and reliable, and include the five essential elements of reading appropriate for the assessment’s purpose and the grade level addressed.

4. The data-management system is integrally linked to the assessment system, has a high degree of utility and minimizes teachers’ record-keeping burden.

A data-management system is essential for providing needed information to those responsible for student performance at all levels. Immediate and flexible access to data facilitates screening, diagnosis, intervention, instructional fine-tuning and more informed decisionmaking at the school, district and state levels. Given the breadth of information needed to support these various purposes, the data-management system must accept and link multiple categories of longitudinal data. It also must be designed so the time and effort to enter and access data do not take significant time away from instruction.

5. Teachers, principals and other education personnel master the knowledge, skills and practices that result in early reading proficiency, and preservice and inservice educator programs are held accountable for achieving these results.

Teachers, principals and other education personnel must understand the five essential elements of reading and be able to effectively teach these elements to all students. To produce higher student achievement, educators’ knowledge and abilities must be aligned with the instruction students should receive in the classroom.

6. Reading standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education and professional development are aligned at every level of governance.

The alignment/coherence between and among reading standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education and professional development is critical to classroom implementation and to improved student achievement. Also critical is the coherence between state policy and support, and district and school instructional management and practices.

Key Questions Related to the Six Driving Principles

Following are some critical questions related to each driving principle for effective, comprehensive literacy policy. The questions provide a tool for policymakers to use before writing literacy-related legislation. They focus on the research-based components that reading policy must include, and on ways to ensure state policy is completely and consistently implemented in the classroom.

1. All reading programs – comprehensive, supplemental and intervention – are based on scientific evidence of their effectiveness.

- How do we ensure schools are using reading programs based on scientifically based reading research?
- How do we ensure reading programs follow an instructional format that integrates the five essential elements of reading along with appropriate assessment strategies and effective instructional approaches?
- How do we ensure scientifically based reading programs are implemented with consistent quality over time?
2. **State reading standards are based on scientifically based research and are rigorous enough to prepare virtually all students to read proficiently.**

- How do we ensure standards and benchmarks are based on scientifically based research, are sequential across kindergarten through grade 3 and lead to proficient reading by the end of grade 3?

- How do we know reading standards meet criteria for effectiveness (e.g., clear, measurable, comprehensive, challenging yet attainable, and balanced between what students should know and what students should be able to do)?

3. **The assessment system includes assessments that are frequent and comprehensive enough to screen, diagnose, guide instruction and provide timely evaluation data.**

- How do we ensure each assessment type measures the five essential elements of reading, and is valid and reliable for its purpose?

- How do we determine whether the assessments provide the necessary data to inform decisionmaking?

- How do we ensure assessments are given appropriately and in a timely manner, and data are used to inform instruction?

4. **The data-management system is integrally linked to the assessment system, has a high degree of utility and minimizes teachers’ record-keeping burden.**

- What are the design requirements for a data system that streamlines data entry, allows data transfer, includes longitudinal data, and fosters the sharing of usable information in appropriate formats and reports with the appropriate audiences?

- How do we ensure the appropriateness and timeliness of reports to inform decisionmaking at the classroom, school, district and state levels?

- In particular, how do we ensure the link between timely assessments, reports and the use of data to inform instruction and improve student achievement?

5. **Teachers, principals and other education personnel master the knowledge, skills and practices that result in early reading proficiency, and preservice and inservice educator programs are held accountable for achieving these results.**

- How do we ensure preservice teacher preparation is based on scientifically based reading research (content and instructional approaches), uses research-based delivery approaches for preservice preparation and is accountable for teacher outcomes?

- How do we ensure professional development is based on scientifically based reading research (content and instructional approaches), focuses on the reading program and assessments teachers use in the classroom, uses research-based delivery approaches for professional development, and is accountable for teacher and student outcomes?

- How do we select effective professional development providers?

6. **Reading standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education and professional development are aligned at every level of governance.**

- How do we ensure reading standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education and professional development work together to result in virtually all students reading well?
• How do we ensure alignment between and among the state, district, school and classroom in implementing the reading standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education and professional development?

• How do we ensure reading standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment are aligned and implemented in the classroom to improve student reading achievement for every student?