

Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade Is Imperative

High-quality early reading instruction is key to students' success

Early Literacy Policy Recommendations for Maine's 76th Governor and the 133rd Legislature

Between August 2025 and May 2026, *Educate Maine* reviewed existing state and national early literacy data; conducted a landscape survey sent to all Maine school districts, resulting in a 60% response rate (representing 70% of all Maine public elementary schools including those in the unorganized territories); conducted focus groups with K-3 teachers; conducted a follow-up survey with select superintendents and elementary school principals; and hosted conversations with six higher education institutions that award elementary education degrees. The result of that work is the *Reading at Grade Level in Third Grade is Imperative* report. Here we offer priority policy recommendations to Maine's 76th Governor and Members of the 133rd Legislature focused on improving early literacy outcomes for Maine students. State education and policy leaders can and must provide guidance, direction, oversight, and targeted resources for school districts and their teachers, many of which would welcome and are asking for support. State-level leadership is needed to close widening literacy learning gaps, especially for our youngest students.

Top Policy Recommendations

1. Maine's next Governor should nominate a Commissioner of Education committed to promoting and supporting schools in adopting, and becoming proficient in, early literacy instruction aligned to the science of reading. The next Commissioner of Education will make fidelity to science of reading program implementation a **priority** and will **redirect education funding** to accomplish these policy priorities.

To meet ExcellnEd and National Council for Teacher Quality recommendations.

2. Maine Department of Education (MDOE) and The Literacy Advisory Council should select 5-7 approved science of reading programs and provide financial incentives to support the purchase and professional development needed for proper and full implementation for all elementary school teachers and school leaders.

To meet ExcellnEd and National Council for Teacher Quality recommendations.

3. Maine Department of Education should support districts to hire literacy coaches to bolster science of reading implementation, prioritizing districts that have been identified as not making adequate academic growth in literacy. MDOE should consider designating a Literacy Director at MDOE to direct and oversee this work.

To meet ExcellnEd and National Council for Teacher Quality recommendations.

4. In partnership with organizations experienced in this work in other states, Maine Department of Education's staff overseeing teacher certification and credentialing should review required collegiate courses and ensure that all approved courses include all science of reading components and best practices for early education certification.

To meet ExcellInEd and National Council for Teacher Quality recommendations.

5. Maine Department of Education should ensure that early elementary education teacher certification includes successful completion of a full science of reading course proven to meet evidence-based teaching practices.

To meet ExcellInEd recommendations.

6. The next Governor and/or the Legislature should direct the Maine Department of Education to utilize current funding available to schools identified as not making adequate literacy growth in K-3 to invest those funds in intensive evidence-based interventions and supports grounded in the science of reading.

To meet ExcellInEd recommendations.

7. Maine Department of Education should fund an annual statewide K-2 universal early literacy screener to help teachers identify students' strengths, learning gaps, and needs.

To meet ExcellInEd recommendations.

The Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcellInEd) is a national education thought leader that supports state leaders in transforming education to unlock opportunities and lifelong success for each and every child. ExcellInEd focuses on educational quality, innovation and opportunity – both within and outside of the traditional system. ExcellInEd advances a broad range of student-centered policy solutions to increase student learning, eliminate inequities, and ready graduates for college and career. In January 2026 ExcellInEd updated and published its state-by-state analysis of comprehensive early literacy policy implementation that includes all of the fundamental principles and focuses on a statewide approach to providing early literacy support to educators, students, and families, *Early Literacy Matters*. Of the 18 policies in this report, Maine currently partially meets just two; see the [Maine's Implementation Report](#).

The National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that every child has access to an effective teacher and that every teacher has the opportunity to be effective. NCTQ focuses on improving the policies and practices of those with the most influence over teacher quality: states, districts and teacher preparation programs. NCTQ embraces five major policy recommendations, and reviews both states' adoption of these recommendations and states' teacher prep programs. Maine fails on both assessments; see: [states' adoption of these recommendations](#) and [states' teacher prep programs](#).

