

# K-3 Literacy Policy Brief

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Kansas and Missouri  
2025



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# K-3 Literacy

## Kansas and Missouri

2025

### Overview



A student's ability to read by fourth grade [shapes](#) their academic future, career options, and even [lifespan](#). Too many Kansas and Missouri students are not reading at grade level. The last 15 years have brought [stagnation](#) or decline in student achievement, all the while gaps by income and race that have [persisted](#) and, in places, worsened.

States have started to act: Teacher preparation is shifting toward the science of reading, materials are being realigned, three-cueing is being phased out, and universal K-3 screening is being tied to student reading plans and supports. is being tied



This brief translates that shift into the elements that matter now: preventing students from falling behind, intervening early with defined, monitored support, and retaining only as a last resort. We summarize national trends and show how Kansas and Missouri have put them into practice. Finally, we highlight near-term policy priorities for each state to keep literacy reform moving until proficiency is the baseline for every student.

[Southern states](#), led by Mississippi, have shown what it takes to raise reading quickly: clear screening schedules, real intervention time, coaching, and simple progress checks. Kansas and Missouri can apply those lessons without waiting a decade for results.

# The Literacy Policy Landscape Nationally



In recent years, states have transformed how they approach early reading instruction. According to the [National Council on Teacher Quality](#) (NCTQ), 32 states have enacted laws or regulations grounded in the science of reading since 2013. These increasingly reflect a [three-part framework](#) of prevention, intervention, and retention, with a growing focus on sustaining implementation through ongoing teacher support.



Prevention



Intervention



Retention

## Prevention

Prevention policies ensure that students receive high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction from the start. These policies focus on preparing teachers, aligning curricula, and assessing students early and often, throughout the year versus one summative test, to identify reading needs before they widen.

At least [26 states](#) currently have detailed standards defining what elementary teachers must know in scientifically based reading instruction. States such as Colorado and Utah now review syllabi, coursework, and outcomes to verify that teacher preparation programs teach the [five essential components](#) of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

State involvement in curriculum adoption has followed suit. According to [Education Commission of the States](#) (ECS), at least **17 states and the District of Columbia** specify requirements for K–3 reading curricula. States such as **Alabama** and **Arkansas** require districts to adopt evidence-based or state-approved instructional materials, while others, including **Missouri**, require all K–5 schools to provide an evidence-based reading program.

Assessment requirements now reinforce prevention as well. **Thirty-eight states and D.C.** [mandate reading](#) assessments in grades K–3 beyond the federally required third-grade test, often including screeners and diagnostics that guide instruction. Kansas and Missouri both require diagnostic or state-approved K–3 reading assessments aligned to state standards but differ in terms of frequency in administering them and timing (i.e., the beginning versus end of the year). These policies together ensure that reading instruction, curriculum, and teacher training are aligned at the earliest stages of literacy development

## Intervention

Intervention policies identify and support students who are not yet reading on grade level. Intervention strategies include early assessment, individualized reading plans, and targeted instructional time or tutoring to address skill gaps and prevent long-term literacy delays.

At least 39 states and D.C. [require interventions](#) for students reading below grade level in grades K–3. Common interventions include:

- **Individual Reading Plans (IRPs):** Mandated in states such as Mississippi, Missouri, Michigan, and Louisiana, IRPs outline targeted supports based on assessment data.
- **Extended or Supplemental Instruction:** Nebraska, Alabama, and Oklahoma require additional instructional time, tutoring, or summer programs for students identified as behind.
- **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** [Frameworks](#) in Colorado and North Carolina guide a continuum of escalating interventions using evidence-based practices.

These approaches reflect a growing consensus that literacy gaps are best addressed through prevention and responsive intervention rather than waiting for end-of-year accountability measures.

## Retention

Retention refers to policies that tie third-grade promotion to reading proficiency while providing multiple supports and exemptions. Retention is used as a last resort within a broader continuum of prevention and intervention to ensure every student attains foundational reading skills before advancing. Retention policies have become one of the most recognizable elements of state literacy reform. At least 27 states [require](#) third-grade retention policies, typically paired with early screening, individualized supports, and multiple exemptions to ensure fairness.

Some [research](#) surrounding third-grade retention can show short-term academic benefits, with mixed long-term outcomes for students. For instance, various state-level evaluations of [Florida](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Indiana](#) found that retained students made significant reading gains that persist for several years; other [research](#) reported mixed outcomes.

However, regardless of the short-term effect, [meta-analyses](#) consistently conclude that these advantages tend to fade over time unless paired with intensive interventions such as tutoring, extended learning time, and daily reading instruction. [Evidence](#) also suggests that retained students face higher risks of stigma and disengagement from school, with the policy's effect disproportionately falling on students from low-income background and students of color.

## Retention (cont.)

At a system level, retention is most effective as a part of a broader, comprehensive literacy strategy inclusive of prevention and intervention. In [Mississippi](#), where retention is coupled with early screening, reading coaches, and intensive interventions, fourth-grade reading scores on NAEP rose faster than any state from [2013-2015](#) — before any student was even retained. [One study](#) estimated that retention eventually accounted for only a quarter of Mississippi's reading gains to date, with most stemming from improved instruction and supports.

Researchers increasingly view retention as the last step in a continuum of support rather than a punitive measure. Twenty-four states now [require](#) parental engagement in the retention process, mandating timely notification, written plans, and opportunities for parents to participate in intervention decisions, since it is seen as much motivator for [adults](#) to address student performance and a measure of last resort.



## Teacher Capacity

Recent literacy laws also focus on sustaining [quality](#) implementation through teacher professional learning. States have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in science-of-reading professional development, and 36 states now [require](#) elementary teachers to complete structured literacy training.

Across the country, literacy reform has matured into a coordinated system of policies that align prevention, intervention, and retention. States that treat these elements as interdependent — linking teacher preparation, curriculum, and professional learning — are showing [stronger](#) and more sustainable [outcomes](#).



# The Literacy Policy Landscape in Kansas and Missouri



As the national landscape has shifted toward a prevention–intervention–retention framework, Kansas and Missouri illustrate two distinct approaches to putting those ideas to work. The tables that follow translate this framework into legal requirements: what each state mandates for early screening and curricula (prevention), how schools must respond when students fall behind (intervention), and if the state mandates retention.

Prevention		
Policy element	Kansas	Missouri
K–3 screening & cadence	Every K–3 student’s reading level is checked at least once each year using state-approved diagnostic or state assessments. <a href="#">K.S.A. 72-3567(a)</a> .	Assess K–3 at the beginning and end of each school year on a state-approved assessment; assess newly enrolled grades 1–5 upon entry. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(2)</a> .
Approved screener list	Kansas permits any state or diagnostic assessment that meets KSDE standards; there is no single statewide screener list in statute. <a href="#">K.S.A. 72-3567(a)</a> .	Required: use assessments from the state-approved list for K–3 screening and RSP reassessment. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(1)</a> .
Parent notification	Third-grade teachers communicate with families twice a year sharing proficiency data, identified needs, and recommended interventions. <a href="#">K.S.A. 72-3262(c)(3)(A)–(D)</a> .	Notify parents at least annually when a K–3 student has a substantial reading deficiency, with required elements in the notice. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(2)</a> .
Science of reading teacher preparation / Professional development	Kansas now requires teacher-preparation programs to be built on the science of reading, with explicit coursework and a common assessment; three-cueing is prohibited in prep. <a href="#">2024 SB 438</a> ; <a href="#">K.S.A. 74-32,295</a> et seq.	Required for new K–3 reading teachers: adequate training in the five components; K–5 programs aligned to SoR. <a href="#">RSMo 170.014(1),(2)(a)–(b)</a> .

# The Literacy Policy Landscape in Kansas and Missouri



## Prevention (*continued*)

Policy element	Kansas	Missouri
Core program / High quality instructional materials	Beginning July 1, 2025, districts may not use materials that rely on three-cueing or visual-memory methods for word recognition. <a href="#">K.S.A. 74-32,293(b),(3)</a> .	Effective Aug. 28, 2025: K–5 reading programs must include the five components; phonics is the primary strategy for word reading; no primary reliance on three-cueing/visual memory. <a href="#">RSMo 170.014(1),(2)</a> .

## Intervention

Policy element	Kansas	Missouri
Individual plan & required supports	Schools provide tiered, targeted support for students with literacy deficits and report results each year to KSDE. <a href="#">K.S.A. 72-3262(c),(2),(d)</a> ; <a href="#">72-3567(b),(c)</a> .	Provide a Reading Success Plan (RSP) for students with a substantial reading deficiency; services are intensive and scientific, evidence-based; dyslexia instruction is defined in statute. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(1),(5)(1),(5)(2)</a> .
Menu of supports & cadence	Statute allows schools to use individualized instruction, a restructured day, and extended time; districts design the details. <a href="#">K.S.A. 72-3567(b)</a> .	Use small-group or one-to-one instruction, reduced ratios, tutoring or mentoring, extended day/week/year; district may require summer programming; reassess on the state-approved list while the RSP is in place. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(5)(1)(a)–(f),(8)</a> .
Dyslexia-specific supports	Kansas provides a <a href="#">Dyslexia Handbook</a> and state resources as guidance; these are not statutory mandates.	For students with or at risk for dyslexia, instruction must be systematic, cumulative, explicit, and diagnostic across key components. RSMo 167.645(5)(2).



# The Literacy Policy Landscape in Kansas and Missouri



Retention		
Policy element	Kansas	Missouri
Grade-3 promotion / retention	Kansas does not mandate third-grade retention in statute.	No automatic retention: end-of-grade-3 promotion/retention is a consultative decision with the parent/guardian and staff, with a specific plan; districts may condition promotion on summer program participation by local policy. <a href="#">RSMo 167.645(4),(8).</a>

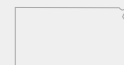
## Kansas Literacy Policy (2015–2024)

Over the past decade, Kansas has pursued a wide-ranging set of reforms to address persistent reading challenges and bring literacy instruction in line with the science of reading. What began as local concern over dyslexia and stagnant student outcomes has evolved into a coordinated, statewide effort focused on prevention, early intervention, and instructional quality.

The following timeline outlines the major laws, programs, and system changes that now form Kansas’s literacy framework, which offers a clear view of how policy has developed over time and where implementation stands today.



# Kansas Literacy Policy (2015–2024)



**2015**

## **Kansans Can Vision**

The Kansas State Board of Education set third grade reading and kindergarten readiness as statewide goals, laying the groundwork for future policy. This vision mirrored national efforts to tie early literacy to broader student success benchmarks ([KSDE](#)).

**2015 -2017**

## **Kansas Reading Roadmap**

[Funded through TANF](#), this initiative expanded after-school literacy support to high-needs elementary schools — one of the earliest state-supported interventions focused on prevention and acceleration outside the traditional classroom.

**2018**

## **Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia**

Created in response to rising dyslexia concerns and lagging scores, this task force was a turning point. It recommended statewide screening, teacher training, and structured literacy. The task force set Kansas on a path aligned with what national research has since confirmed about effective reading instruction ([H.B. 2602](#)).

**2019**

## **Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations Adopted**

The State Board formally adopted the task force’s recommendations, including universal screening, a statewide definition of dyslexia, and use of structured literacy across districts. This action marked Kansas’s [first](#) official alignment with the science of reading ([Task Force Report](#)).

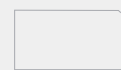
### **At-Risk Education Funding:**

This legislation required districts to use evidence-based programs for students not meeting grade-level standards, tying literacy funding to accountability. It echoed similar national moves to root intervention funding in proven instructional strategies ([SB 16](#)).

**2017-2021**

## **Literacy Network of Kansas (LiNK)**

Supported by a \$27M federal Striving Readers grant, this network connected districts in regional consortia focused on birth-to-grade-12 literacy work—effectively piloting multi-tiered literacy efforts before many states moved in that direction ([KSDE announcement](#)).



## 2020-2021

### Teacher Prep Standards Aligned:

The Kansas Board of Regents and State Board updated preparation program standards to ensure all elementary, early childhood, and special education teacher candidates receive instruction in evidence-based reading methods. Praxis subtests were added to validate this knowledge ([Kansas Board of Regents](#)).

## 2021

### LETRS Training Rollout:

KSDE used federal COVID relief dollars to make [LETRS](#) (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training freely available to educators. This move placed Kansas among early adopters of intensive, statewide professional development in structured literacy ([KSDE](#)).

## 2022

### Every Child Can Read Act

This landmark legislation required districts to provide reading instruction aligned to the science of reading, implement tiered supports for students with reading deficiencies, and notify families of student progress. It also introduced annual public reporting — cementing state-level accountability ([H.B. 2567](#)).

## 2024

### Kansas Literacy Blueprint

This comprehensive law created an Office of Literacy, funded regional reading centers, established a Literacy Advisory Committee, and banned the use of the three-cueing method in teacher preparation. It also set statewide goals for literacy outcomes and professional training benchmarks ([S.B. 438](#)).

### Seal of Literacy Requirement

By 2028, teachers in early childhood, elementary, reading, and special education roles must demonstrate structured literacy competency — either through state-approved training or an exam — to renew their license ([KSDE](#)).

### Dyslexia Screening Expansion

Kansas requires reading screeners three times annually for students from kindergarten through ninth grade ([KSDE](#)).

### KESA 2.0 Accreditation

The state's updated accreditation system now embeds structured literacy into school and district evaluations, requiring clear evidence of high-quality reading instruction and aligned materials ([KSDE](#)).

# Missouri Literacy Policy (2015–2024)



Since 2015, Missouri has built a statewide literacy strategy shaped by dyslexia advocacy, evidence-based reading research, and mounting concern over student outcomes. Policy momentum has moved steadily toward prevention, structured literacy, and statewide implementation support.

The timeline below outlines Missouri’s major K–12 literacy reforms and initiatives, offering a clear view of how policy has evolved and where the state stands today.



## Missouri Literacy Timeline



**2016**

### **Dyslexia Screening Law**

Missouri passed a foundational law requiring all public schools to screen K–3 students for dyslexia risk, provide classroom supports, and ensure teachers receive dyslexia training. The law also created a Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia to guide further recommendations ([S.B. 638](#))



**2017**

### **Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations Adopted**

The task force recommended universal screening, targeted interventions, and incorporation of dyslexia science into teacher preparation. These guidelines laid the groundwork for future implementation ([DESE](#))



**2018**

### **Statewide Screening Begins**

All public elementary schools began universal K–3 dyslexia screening, using DESE-issued guidance. Districts were required to offer appropriate interventions and ensure teacher training on early reading and dyslexia ([DESE](#))

# Missouri Literacy Timeline



**2020**

## **CLSD Grant Awarded**

Missouri received an \$18 million Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support early literacy initiatives, teacher training, and local district capacity-building ([U.S. Department of Education](#)).

**2022**

## **Reading intervention policy**

This landmark law required Reading Success Plans for all K–3 students with reading deficiencies or dyslexia risk. It mandated early-year and end-of-year reading assessments, interventions grounded in the science of reading, and alignment of teacher prep programs with structured literacy. The law also established an Office of Literacy at DESE ([S.B. 681](#)).

**2023**

## **Read, Lead, Exceed Initiative Launched**

DESE launched a \$60 million statewide literacy initiative using state and federal funds. It offered LETRS training to thousands of K–3 teachers and supported schools in adopting evidence-based reading curricula and coaching ([DESE](#)).

**2025**

## **Three-Cueing Ban**

Legislation banned the use of the three-cueing method as a primary instructional approach. Districts must certify annual compliance and use phonics-based instruction as the core of early literacy ([H.B. 941](#)).

## **CLSD Grant Renewal & Reading Coaches Expansion**

Missouri secured a second round of CLSD funding, up to \$49 million over five years. The funds will expand reading coaching, teacher training, and structured literacy implementation statewide ([DESE](#)).

## Policy Considerations



Kansas and Missouri have settled many design questions: standards aligned to the science of reading and three-cueing off the table. The work now is delivery: timely identification, concrete intervention “dosage,” coaching to sustain practice, light transparency to steer support, and guardrails for retention. The recommendations below focus on execution that can reliably translate policy into reading gains.

<b>1. Set a 4–6-week progress-monitoring cadence for each student on a reading plan.</b>	<b>2. Make interventions concrete and track minutes delivered.</b>
Make review dates a part of each Individual Reading Plan or Reading Success Plan and record a decision after each check-up (i.e., continue, intensify, or change intervention). <a href="#">Federal guidance</a> has previously recommended small-group instruction 3-5 times per week for ~20-40 minutes and monitoring certain students at least monthly, so a more frequent review window keeps adjustments to interventions timely.	Define minimum weekly time and format (i.e., 1:1, 1:2 or 3, or daily small group) requirements for interventions and require districts to log minutes delivered for students on reading plans. <a href="#">Research</a> show that high-dosage tutoring shows large average gains for students, especially those in early reading and when delivered in school by trained adults, because frequency and duration are specified.
<b>3. Standardize statewide screening windows.</b>	<b>4. Invest in coaching to backstop implementation.</b>
Require beginning and end-of-year universal screening (and entry screening for new enrollees). This is how strong state models practice early identification. For instance, Tennessee <a href="#">requires</a> a universal reading screener for all students during three windows annually and provides an approved/state option.	Providing funds to pay for literacy coaches can help expand coaching across each state. A <a href="#">meta-analysis</a> across dozens of studies found that coaching substantially improves instructional practice and produces meaningful student gains.





### 5. Publish light, useful transparency twice a year

Both states could post a simple snapshot by district: on-time screening, share of K-3 students with reading plans, average weekly intervention minutes for those students, adoption status of aligned instruction materials, and teacher-training completion. Regular reporting creates gentle pressure to follow through, lets the state aim resources where gaps show up fastest, and keeps the focus on doing the work.

### 6. Treat third-grade retention as a last resort guardrail.

Require document prevention and intervention first, with standard good-cause exemptions, before retaining students. Provide guaranteed summer learning and daily structured literacy instruction for the following year and monitor subgroup patterns. [Research](#) on Florida's test-based retention found short-term gains that tend to fade without sustained, intensive support for retained students.

*Aligned is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of business leaders committed to improving education in Kansas and Missouri.*

