



Adolescent Literacy

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Overview:

The term “adolescent literacy” refers to the set of skills and abilities that students need in grades 4 through 12 to read, write, and think about the text materials they encounter. Becoming literate is a developmental and lifelong process, which in the 21st century includes becoming literate with electronic and multimedia texts as well as conventional written material. Grade 4 is when students experience a shift in emphasis from learning how to read to learning from reading text. America’s adolescents need to be literate not only to succeed in school, but also to succeed in life.

*--Reading to Achieve: A Governor’s Guide to Adolescent Literacy
(National Governors’ Association, 2005)*

Reading below a proficient level contributes to decreased ability to comprehend, to apply knowledge and to communicate effectively. Traditionally reading is taught in the primary grades. However, a growing awareness of the need to address the reading skills of adolescents has resulted in states incorporating literacy instruction in their secondary-level teacher preparation and certification requirements, modifying and aligning curriculum standards, and establishing state policies to guide change.

In summary:

- Twenty-three states require interventions such as tutoring, additional reading time and/or the use of a different instructional approach.
- Thirteen states target students who get poor grades for diagnostic reading assessments.
- Seven states have established initiatives such as literacy report cards to build momentum for improving adolescent literacy. A literacy report card might include progress being made in student test scores, curriculum alignment and teacher training. Other states might simply include adolescent literacy gains in their annual report cards.
- Fourteen states have aligned the literacy standards across levels.
- Eleven states provide support for local efforts. “Support” can be a cadre of state department staff offering guidance in drawing up the plan, state convening of regional literacy summits, or monetary supports for research materials.
- Teacher preparation/certification requirements for teaching adolescents to read have been strengthened in 17 states.
- A specialized certification/endorsement in adolescent literacy is available only in Florida.
- Fourteen states offer schoolwide professional development in adolescent literacy instruction.
- Missouri and North Carolina have included a literacy component in their mentoring/induction programs.
- No state has offered incentives to school principals to strengthen literacy programs.
- Policy in only one state (Florida) designates a centralized office or coordinator. In practice, seven additional states have designated a centralized office or coordinator.
- State standards explicitly reflect adolescent literacy expectations in 13 states.
- Sixteen states have significant activities occurring that are not reflected in state statute or board rules and regulations. Many meaningful initiatives have occurred without state statute or board action driving the activity.

	State Requires Intervention	State Requires Diagnostic Assessment	Literacy Report Card	Aligned Literacy Standard	Support Local Literacy Plan	Strength. Teacher Prep./Cert.	Spec. Certif.	School-wide Prof. Dev.	Mentoring Induction Program	State Office of Adoles. Literacy	Standards Reflect Expect.	Other Efforts
NE												
NV												
NH												
NJ					X							X
NM	X		X		X	X		X				X
NY	P	X		X	P	X				P	X	
NC	X			X	X	X			X		X	X
ND												
OH	X ¹				X			X		P		
OK	X	X		X		X		X				
OR												
PA												
RI	X	X	X		X			X		P		X
SC	X											X
SD												
TN	X		X			X		X				
TX	X	X		X		P		X				
UT												
VT												
VA	X	X		X	X	X				P	X	X
WA	X	X			X			X				
WV				X							X	
WI	X			X	P	X					X	X
WY												
Total X	23	13	7	14	11	17	1	14	2	1	13	15
Total P			1		4	1				6		

This StateNote was compiled by Melodye Bush, researcher with the Education Commission of the States, September 2008.

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Note:

¹ High school students only.

