



For more information contact:

Aaron Churchill, Ohio Research Director

Mobile: (412) 719-7643

Email: achurchill@fordhaminstitute.org

Report shows significant progress implementing Ohio’s Science of Reading law

Curricula based on debunked methods have been disapproved; state distributing millions to help schools purchase literacy materials aligned to new requirements

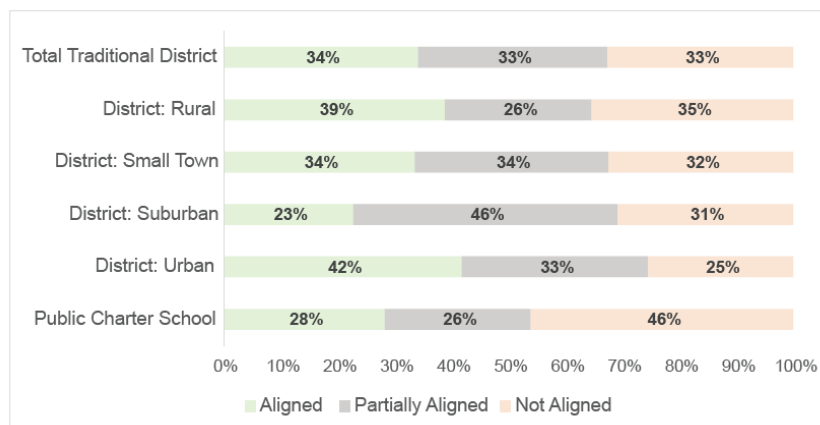
COLUMBUS (OH) – In July 2023, Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly passed landmark literacy reforms that require all public elementary schools (district and charter) to implement the Science of Reading. This method to literacy instruction emphasizes phonics, vocabulary, content knowledge, and comprehension. To assist schools, the legislature allocated \$169 million to support teacher training and curricula overhauls.

Today, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute [released a report](#) that analyzes the early implementation of these literacy reforms. Authored by Fordham’s Ohio Research Director Aaron Churchill, the study focuses on the reading curricula that the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) recently approved for use starting in 2024–25—the first school year in which the Science of Reading requirement goes into effect. It also examines a DEW survey of districts’ pre-reform programs that was released in March 2024, as well as the funding available to purchase new instructional materials.

Main findings include:

- DEW implemented an efficient curricula-approval process that yielded a strong list of state-approved programs. In total, DEW approved 15 core reading curricula for grades K–5, which include several well-respected curricula that incorporate phonics and strong knowledge-building elements. Disapproved curricula include those that embed “three-cueing,” a debunked practice that encourages students to guess at words rather than sounding them out.
- Roughly one-third of Ohio districts used non-state-approved literacy curricula in 2022–23 (pre-reform), while another one-third were using partially-aligned curricula. Just one-third of districts used state-approved reading programs prior to the recent reforms.

Figure ES-1: Districts and charters' alignment (2022–23) to the state's approved curricula list for 2024–25



For more information about the alignment categories, see page 5 of the report.

- Districts and charter schools recently received \$64 million to support literacy curricula purchases, with the bulk of the allotment going to schools with the greatest need to implement state-approved instructional materials aligned to the Science of Reading.

“Too many Ohio students struggle to read proficiently,” said Aaron Churchill, noting that 38 percent of third graders fell short of proficiency on state reading exams in 2022–23. “Given the universal need for skilled reading, state lawmakers were right to require scientifically-based reading instruction in all Ohio elementary schools.”

“Passing legislation was a crucial first step. To its credit, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce worked diligently to implement a key next step: Creating a list of high-quality reading curricula from which schools may choose. The department wisely kept notoriously bad curricula off that list—and out of Ohio classrooms—while approving ones that aligned with the elements of the Science of Reading.”

“The focus now turns to schools and classrooms where teachers will use these programs to put the Science of Reading into practice,” added Churchill. “Moving forward, state policymakers must protect these literacy reforms from being weakened and continue to provide supports that ensure rigorous implementation in every classroom. If policymakers maintain a steady course on the Science of Reading, more Ohio students will become strong readers.”

The report, *Off and Running: Ohio’s early implementation of its Science of Reading reforms*, is available at: <https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/research/and-running-ohios-early-implementation-its-science-reading-reforms>.

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