HOW IS IT GOING? INSIGHTS FROM NYS EDUCATORS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCIENCE OF READING

A SNAPSHOT: NYS SCIENCE OF READING IMPLEMENTATION

SCIENCE OF READING CENTER
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK **NEW PALTZ**

www.newpaltz.edu/science-of-reading-center

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SCIENCE OF READING CENTER
AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

The Science of Reading Center at SUNY New Paltz, established in 2023, offers a hub for educators with a shared mission of improving literacy outcomes for children across the U.S., by promoting evidence-based knowledge and practices that are proven to help learners gain skills as readers (see SUNY New Paltz Science of Reading Center).

INTRODUCTION

In January 2024, Governor Hochul announced the Back to Basics Reading Plan and introduced legislation to ensure evidence-based reading practices throughout schools in New York State. By September 2025, all schools should attest to implementing practices that align curriculum, instructional strategies, and teacher professional learning with evidence-based reading instruction as a part of the implementation of science of reading.

The science of reading (SoR) refers to an extensive body of interdisciplinary research that has been conducted and replicated over decades and explains how children learn to read. To support New York State educators with this instructional shift and the implementation of practices and curriculum that align with the science of reading, the New York State Education Department have released Literacy Briefs, curriculum review guides, and a Prekindergarten through 3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Practices Guide.

To ensure successful implementation of science of reading practices across elementary schools in New York State, teachers and administrators must learn evidence-based reading practices along with new curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices. Many schools and districts previously adopted and learned to teach with curriculum and practices that were ***not aligned*** with evidence-based reading instruction.

So, how are schools and districts adapting to this required shift in curriculum, assessment and instructional practices? What do educators still need in terms of knowledge, tools and mindset to ensure the successful implementation of evidence-based reading instruction?

Back to Basics Reading Plan

Pre-k to 3rd Grade Literacy Instructional Practices Guide

METHODOLOGY

Survey

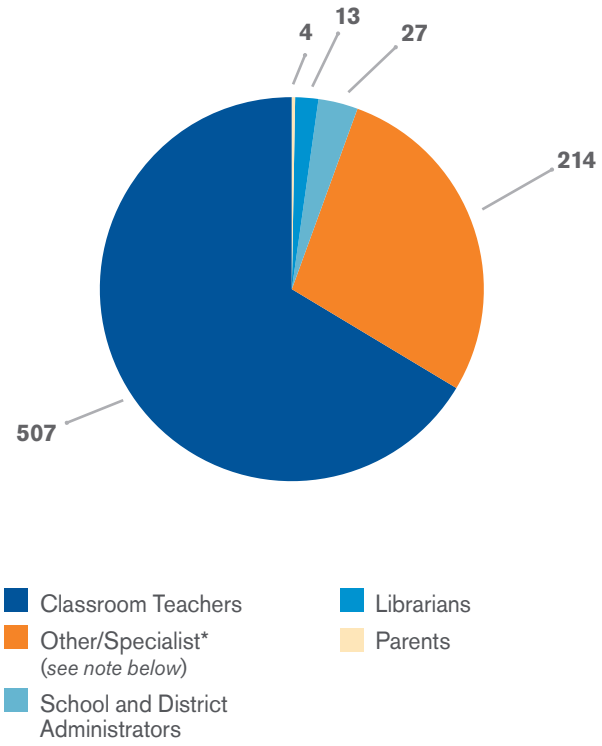
The Science of Reading Center at the State University of New York at New Paltz distributed a survey to New York State educators to understand progress toward the implementation of science of reading-aligned curriculum, educators' current knowledge, how educators are preparing for this shift in instruction, and what educators need as they learn more about evidence-based reading practices. The survey, administered in January 2025, consisted of 16 multiple-choice questions and 1 open-ended question.

Participants

All participants responded to an email with a link to a Qualtrics survey. Emails were sent to 11,389 educators including over 5,000 educators who are currently enrolled, or who have completed the *Science of Reading Fundamentals* microcredential offered by SUNY New Paltz's Science of Reading Center (see Science of Reading Fundamentals). Educators were offered an incentive; upon completion of the survey, they were eligible to enter a drawing for a $100 gift card.

Survey respondents included 765 New York State educators including teachers, specialists, administrators, librarians, and parents (see *Figure 1*). Of these participants, 388 (55%) educators completed the SUNY New Paltz microcredential and 54 (8%) educators were in the process of taking the microcredential. The findings from this survey are likely affected by voluntary response bias and may not accurately represent the views of all New York State educators.

FIGURE 1: **Educators' Roles**



* Most educators selecting "other" stated that they work as reading/literacy specialists and coaches, reading tutors, speech and language pathologists, English as a New Language teachers, teaching assistants, special education teachers/coordinators, math specialists, instructional coaches, interventionists, and consultants.

SURVEY RESULTS

Over half of schools and districts are shifting instruction and implementing practices/curriculum aligned with the science of reading. Significantly, over 90% of educators surveyed are in favor of the implementation of these principles and practices. Most educators are familiar with, and interested in learning about, the science of reading principles. Most, however, did not learn about evidence-based reading instruction during their educator preparation programs and are actively seeking to learn more. Districts offer some professional learning opportunities. Still, many educators are looking for information from a wide range of sources. Educators' primary goals are to understand how to teach reading more effectively and to meet their students' varying needs.

The following survey results are divided into four categories: **implementation, educators' knowledge, how educators are learning about the science of reading**, and **educators' professional learning needs**.

FIGURE 2: **Frequency of the SoR during Literacy Instruction**

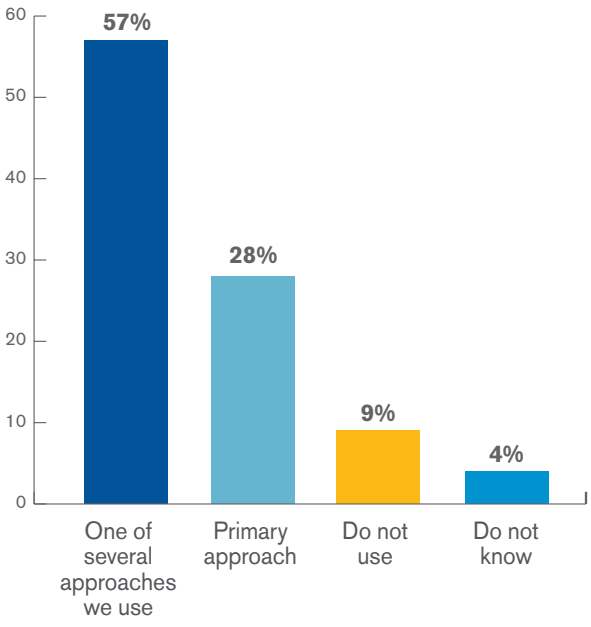
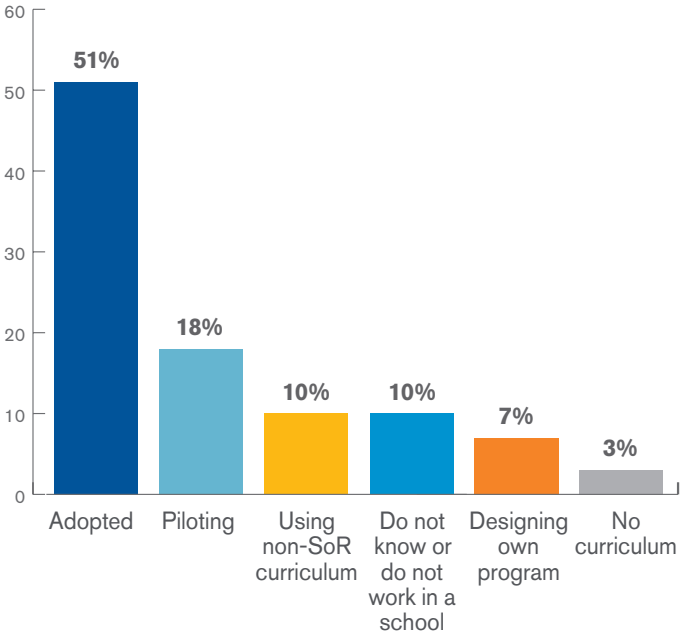


FIGURE 3: **Adoption Status of New Curricula**



Implementation of the Science of Reading

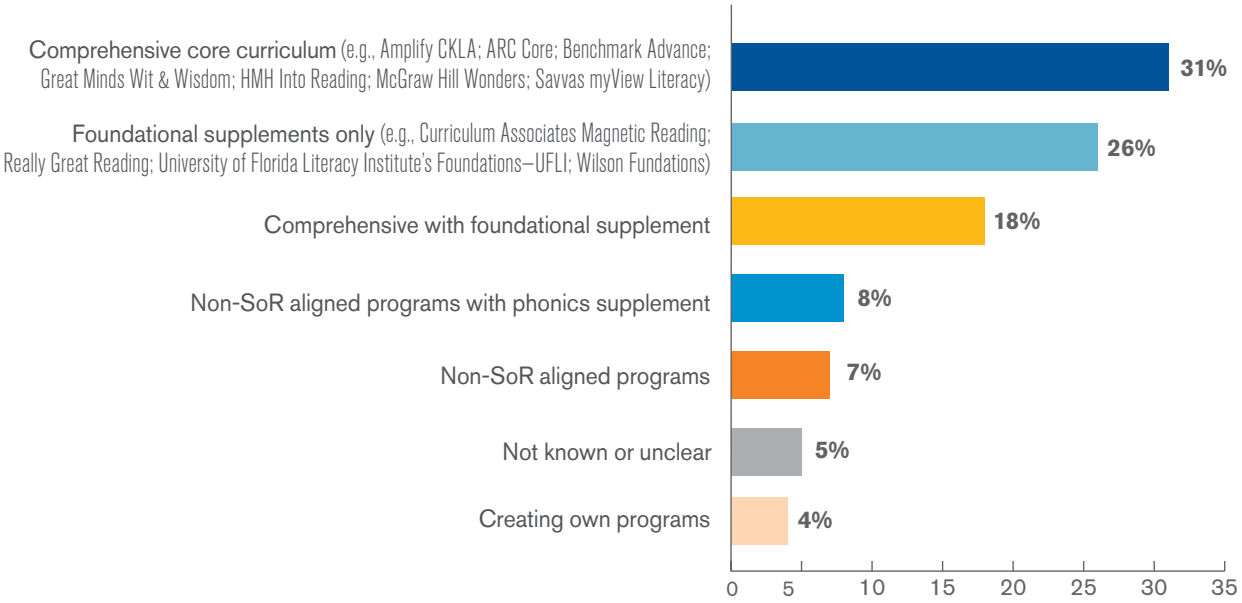
This section presents educators' responses concerning the implementation of the science of reading including the extent to which SoR-aligned approaches are embedded in daily literacy instruction, whether schools have adopted SoR-aligned curricula and/or programs, and what types of curricula schools have selected.

Extent of the SoR during literacy instruction. Over 50% of educators responded that the science of reading is *one of several approaches* used but not the primary approach for literacy instruction (see *Figure 2*).

Program adoption. More than two thirds of schools and districts have adopted or are currently piloting new curriculum aligned with science of reading practices (see *Figure 3*).

Types of Curricula. Most schools reported that they have adopted comprehensive core curriculum aligned with the SoR. Nearly as many schools have reported adopting high-quality foundational reading supplements only (see *Figure 4*).

FIGURE 4: **Types of Curricula**



Educators' Knowledge of the Science of Reading

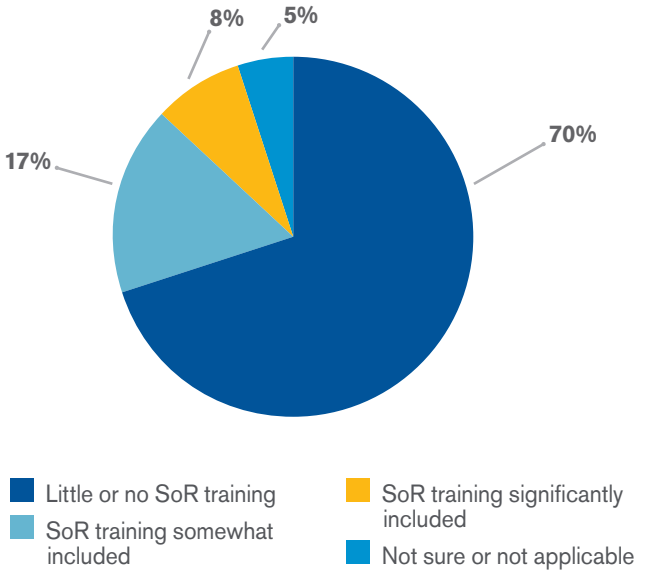
This section presents educators' responses concerning their knowledge of the science of reading including educators' familiarity with and opinion of SoR-aligned approaches. Educators also responded to questions about their prior education of the SoR practices and their interest in learning more about the SoR.

Familiarity with the science of reading. Most educators report they are very familiar (46%) or familiar (38%) with the science of reading. Only 15% of educators are somewhat familiar and only 1% of educators have never heard of it.

Opinion of the science of reading. Most educators (91%), when asked for their opinion of science of reading-informed practices for teaching children to read, reported that they in favor of the SoR instructional practices. Only 8% are neutral, and 1% are not sure. Looking at these data together, even those educators who are not familiar or somewhat familiar with science of reading are in favor of it.

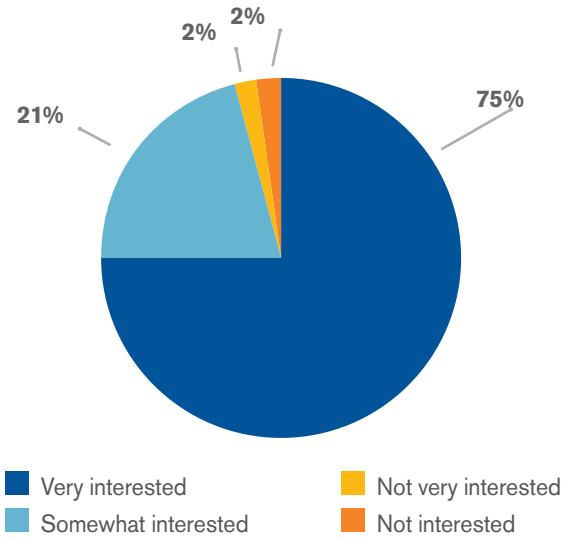
Prior education. When asked to describe prior education with science of reading-informed teaching practices, only 8% of respondents stated that SoR was taught during their educator preparation program (see *Figure 5*).

FIGURE 5: **SoR Training in Educator Preparation Programs**



Interest in professional learning. Owing to the instructional shift, the adoption of new programs, and lack of preparation during their educator preparation programs, it is not surprising that many educators want to learn more about SoR practices and are interested in professional learning related to the science of reading (see *Figure 6*).

FIGURE 6: **Interest in Learning about the SoR**



How Educators are Learning About Science of Reading

This section presents what educators are doing to learn about the science of reading.

Microcredentials. Educators are taking advantage of various professional learning resources to prepare for this shift in instruction. For instance, many have completed microcredentials from SUNY New Paltz (55%) or another institution (5%); 38% of educators have not completed a microcredential.

Learning about the science of reading. While 45% of educators reported learning about the SoR from their schools and districts, many are seeking information from various external sources. Educators selected three sources of where they get their information related to the science of reading (see *Figure 7*).

FIGURE 7: **Sources of SoR Information**

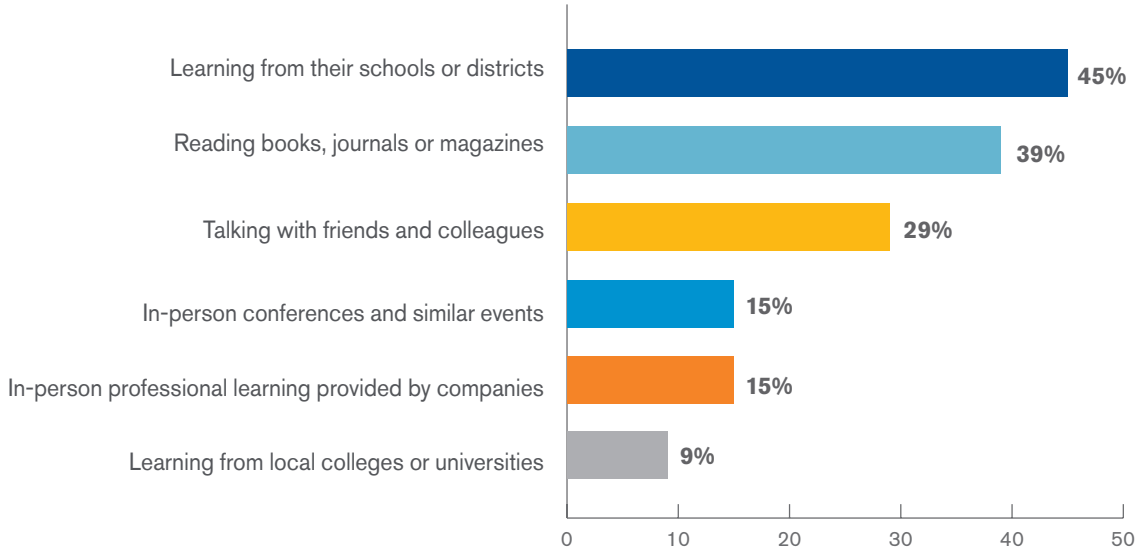
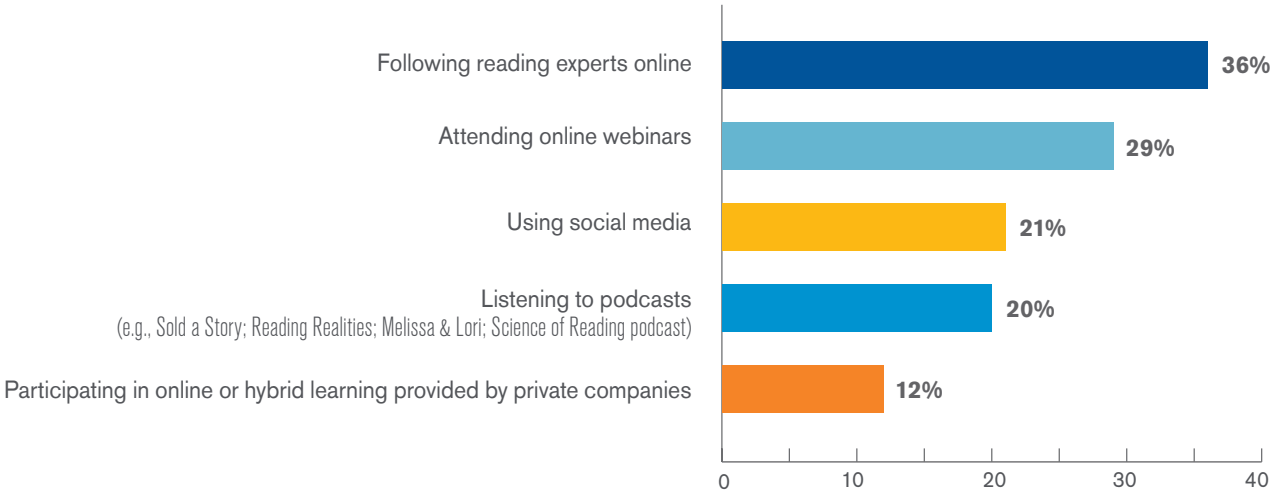


FIGURE 8: **Sources of Online SoR Information**



Unsurprisingly, educators reported that they are looking to the Internet. These online resources are common sources of information (see *Figure 8*).

Educators' Professional Learning Needs

Reasons for seeking professional learning. Educators were asked about their future learning goals and needs. When determining what is most important in their professional learning, educators selected all responses that apply. Most educators reported that they primarily seek learning opportunities to "understand how to teach reading more effectively" and to "meet my students' varying needs for reading." Credentials and licensure are additional reasons why science of reading professional learning is important.

Level of interest in science of reading topics. Educators then rated their level of interest in the following professional learning topics. These are ranked below in the order of preference using a 1–5 scale with 1 as most interested and 5 as least interested. The top five selections are presented in order of interest:

1. Integrating writing and reading together
2. Supporting students with learning disabilities and dyslexia
3. Small group instruction
4. Word recognition skills including decoding and fluency with automatic decoding
5. Text selection and using decodables

Other areas of interest include:

- Motivation
- Assessments
- Multi-lingual learners

DISCUSSION: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation Recommendation

Most schools and districts (69%) have either adopted or are piloting curriculum aligned with science of reading instructional practices. Most educators (57%) responded that the science of reading is one of several approaches used but not the primary one for literacy instruction. In fact, only 28% of educators considered the science of reading as the primary approach to literacy instruction. These responses suggest that educators interpret the science of reading as early word recognition skills (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency). Language comprehension requires a prominent role during daily instruction since the science of reading includes oral language, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing (Wexler, 2022; Willingham, 2006).

As school leaders know, implementing any shift in instruction requires careful planning (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). To effectively integrate science of reading practices, teachers benefit from focused and thorough professional learning. Professional learning requires more than learning the new curriculum. Teachers must gain a thorough and deep understanding of evidence-based reading practices. This understanding includes learning how to screen and assess students' skills, determining specific needs including intervention, differentiating tier 1 instruction based on those needs, selecting proven instructional materials, monitoring students' progress, and more.

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First, it is important for school leaders to identify and then broaden how professional learning occurs in their schools. One overall goal is to establish an active professional learning community around the implementation of the science of reading (REL Southeast, n.d.). When school leaders determine topics for professional learning, there is a compelling argument for "less is more" to deepen teachers' practices that leads to lasting impacts. Schmoker (2019) suggests that leaders "…ensure that schools pursue a severely reduced number of initiatives, and (2) select and focus on only the most urgently needed, evidence-based instructional initiatives." Gathering survey data and/or holding focus groups help leaders determine specific needs. For example, if all teachers are not yet familiar or comfortable with administering, interpreting, and planning instruction based on diagnostic assessments, then spending focused time practicing those assessments is needed. Teachers can review the assessment results at data meetings, group students, decide on resources, and then monitor students' progress. Another way to support teachers with job-embedded literacy coaching and to identify mentor teachers with model classrooms or lessons. Other options include scheduling times for teachers to meet for planning and/or to attend in-school professional learning. Some school leaders hire substitute teachers that rotate during the school day so that teachers can review data and plan lessons together.

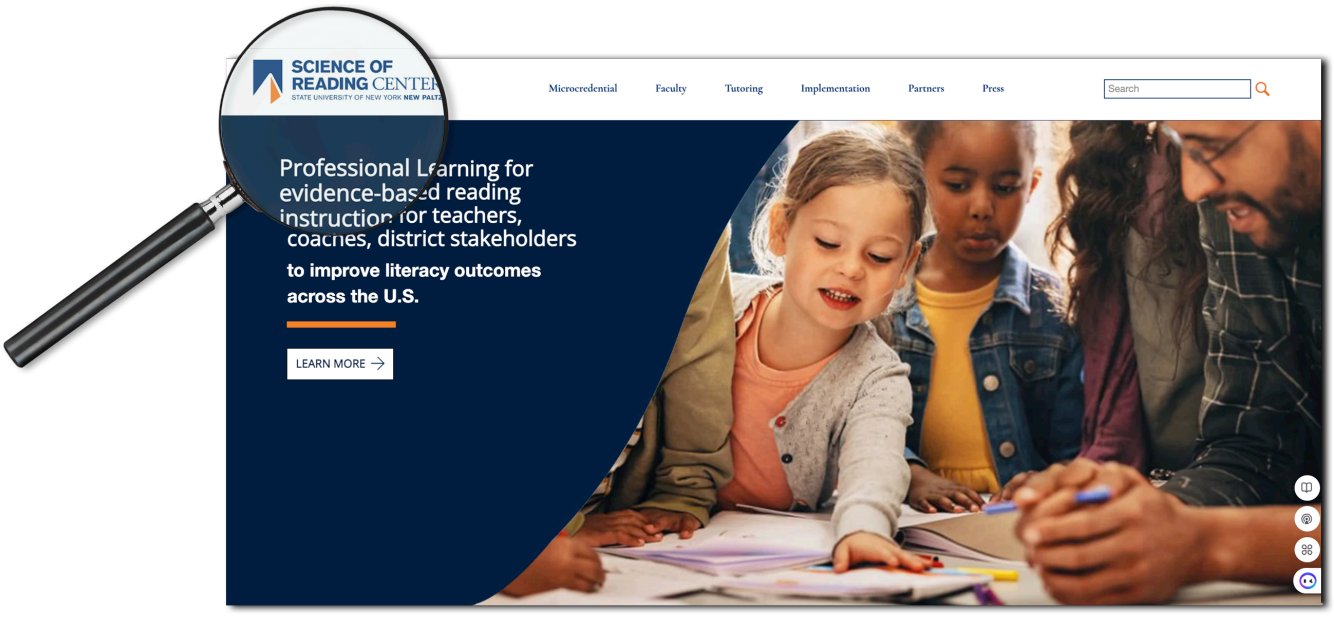
> "…ensure that schools pursue a severely reduced number of initiatives, and select and focus on only the most urgently needed, evidence-based instructional initiatives."
>
> Schmoker, 2019

Second, since assessments are a key component in the implementation of the science of reading, leaders are instrumental in setting up comprehensive assessment systems. Many leaders conduct inventories to determine screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and summative or outcome assessments (see Institute of Education Sciences). An inventory also helps to determine gaps and redundancy. It is critical to evaluate teachers' level of expertise in administering assessments, interpreting results, planning instruction based on data, and monitoring students' progress. Some school leaders set up assessment teams comprised of teachers so that these teams can support their colleagues. School leaders establish assessment schedules and build school-based discourse around assessments. Finally, teachers, along with their school leaders, create a school-based tiered model of assessment and instruction (see Reading Rockets). The goal is for all site-based educators to participate in the development the school's multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Then every educator in the school understands how to assess and target the specific needs of each student. At the time of writing, New York state did not have a list of assessments to support science of reading, however, there are several closely vetted lists here (California Department of Education; Connecticut State Department of Education; Mississippi Department of Education; National Center on Intensive Intervention; Reading Rockets).

Finally, leaders conduct resource inventories or literacy audits to identify what SoR-aligned instructional materials teachers already have, and what resources they still need. The inventory helps school leaders ensure consistency of proven instructional materials and select targeted resources to provide interventions. Most core reading programs include a scope and sequence; all teachers require access to it. There are a few quality websites available to guide school leaders in making curriculum decisions. These reports include comprehensive reviews of all pillars included in the science of reading. For example, the Reading League and Ed Reports review curricula and publish reports to support schools and districts with curriculum decision-making (see Explore Reports; see Lawson). Knowledge maps are another helpful resource; Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy analyzed ELA curriculum and mapped knowledge domains in science, social studies, and other areas found in texts across the K–12 curriculum (see ELA Knowledge Map).

Educator Knowledge

Educators reported that they are familiar with (84%), in favor of (91%), and interested in learning more (75%) about the science of reading. Most educators (70%) stated that they did not learn about the SoR during college. Therefore, it is important to continue to support all practicing educators by providing opportunities for them to learn more while also shifting the curricula and experiences for teacher candidates.



> "Teachers' understanding of evidence-based practices—beyond resources—deepens knowledge and thus deepens practice… Informed teachers address the needs of all students such as selecting diagnostic assessments, grouping students, tailoring lessons to specific needs, interpreting errors, providing corrective feedback, and modifying lessons when necessary."
>
> Moats, 2020

To prepare pre-service teachers, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is participating Hunt Institute's Path Forward initiative (see NYS Path Forward Initiative). NYSED is working with colleges and universities as they align reading-related coursework in educator preparation programs with SoR principles. The goal is for pre-service teachers to learn about the SoR through required college coursework. During field placements, colleges and universities will partner with school districts to ensure that future teachers learn evidence-based reading practices during student teaching. NYSED also plans to revise state certification exams to reflect SoR principles.

For the SoR to be effective and meet the needs of all students, it requires more than replacing an existing non-aligned curriculum with an evidence-based reading program. Many districts provide professional development offered by program publishers and developers, but it is unclear if this training includes only program implementation or if it also includes professional learning in the SoR (Professional Learning, n.d.). In some school districts, teachers are not only learning a new curriculum but are also learning evidence-based reading practices.

Teachers' understanding of evidence-based practices—beyond resources—deepens knowledge and thus deepens practice. This understanding helps teachers make instructional decisions beyond the directions in the curriculum. Informed teachers address the needs of all students such as selecting diagnostic assessments, grouping students, tailoring lessons to specific needs, interpreting errors, providing corrective feedback, and modifying lessons when necessary (Moats, 2020).

Professional Learning

Many educators (69%) surveyed indicated that their schools/districts have adopted SoR-aligned curriculum, and only 45% of educators reported professional learning opportunities offered by their schools and/or districts. Consequently, educators stated that they are looking elsewhere to learn more such as completing microcredentials, reading magazines and journals, and learning from colleagues. They are also seeking information from online sources including social media and webinars. For instance, two popular science of reading Facebook groups have many followers—over 150K educators each. Some of these unvetted sources, however, may not be aligned with the SoR.

Teachers are looking for professional learning opportunities. They want to know more. Accessing accurate information is critical. As teachers learn more, they will become better equipped to be able to determine high-quality resources on their own. In the meantime, providing support will deepen teachers' knowledge and thus students' reading skills.

Educators who are eager to learn more go to the Internet to find SoR-aligned resources to support instruction. There are excellent and teacher-friendly SoR resources on the Internet—but not all websites stating that they are aligned with the science of reading are aligned. One way to ensure that the materials found on websites align with the schools' curriculum and goals is to establish a curriculum team of teachers as a vetting committee (Simmons, 2023). Some schools establish resource centers with materials for teachers. In addition to intervention materials, the center can include links to resources, newsletters with teaching tips, and videos of teachers sharing evidence-based practices. These centers can also support new teachers as they learn the curriculum and evidence-based instructional practices.

Educators' Needs

Practicing educators, interested in learning more about the science of reading, stated interest in various topics. When determining what is most important in their professional learning, most educators stated that they want to teach reading effectively (85%) and address students' various needs (81%).

At the school level, educators can deepen understanding of these topics when district or school leaders highlight an initiative or focus topic for everyone to learn more about. Expert teachers model lessons in their classrooms for their colleagues. For instance, BOCES, districts or schools can hold school-wide meetings to introduce a topic that is relevant for everyone. If the topic is phonics, first-grade teachers learn more about early phonics lessons and intervention lessons for students still learning, while fifth-grade teachers learn about teaching multi-syllabic words. Teachers design and practice lessons using the curricula and resource library.

District and state-level leaders can extend professional learning opportunities by developing and offering focused microcredentials targeting various and specific topics such oral language, motivation and engagement, reading multisyllabic words, reading informational text, using assessments to inform instruction, leadership, and more.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Most educators are learning new curricula. Simultaneously, they are learning how to provide evidence-based, assessment-driven reading instruction—and assessments. Educators reported that they are interested in learning more. As classroom teachers transition to science of reading–aligned practices, leaders at the state, district, and school levels are instrumental in leading this major shift in classroom instruction. When leaders set professional learning goals, they ensure every teacher can utilize assessments effectively, and leaders select and purchase evidence-based literacy resources to support instruction. This transition requires focus, persistence and a dedication to a multi-year journey to improve students' reading outcomes

The science of reading as a set of evidence-based practices, has been around for decades, and continues to evolve. We know it works as it is constantly tested and replicated. It is not a fad. According to Margaret Goldberg (2019), "…many of us are wondering: is this just another swing of a pendulum? It's hard to believe that investing in new reading practices is worthwhile if the new practices will fall out of favor in a few years. But for district leaders who want to make a lasting impact, there is no better focus than reading instruction—and if we proceed thoughtfully and bravely, we have the power to stop the pendulum."

The success of the science of reading will be evident in its careful implementation—not by just adding programs, assessments, and one-off, haphazard professional learning. Educators who learn how to determine what students need and then meet those specific needs with targeted instruction will see fewer students who do not meet grade-level benchmarks, reducing special education referrals (see AFT) and opening academic, and life, opportunities to many more students in New York state. It is important to remember that the instructional shift to science of reading practices is well worth the time and effort.

> "…is this just another swing of a pendulum? It's hard to believe that investing in new reading practices is worthwhile if the new practices will fall out of favor in a few years. But for district leaders who want to make a lasting impact, there is no better focus than reading instruction—and if we proceed thoughtfully and bravely, we have the power to **stop** the pendulum."
>
> Margaret Goldberg, Right to Read

Making Changes That Last: The End of the Pendulum

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Appendix

SCIENCE OF READING
EXISTING/NEW USER SURVEY – FALL 2024

1. Please choose the option that best describes you:
- ☐ Classroom teacher
- ☐ School administrator
- ☐ District administrator
- ☐ School support staff
- ☐ Librarian
- ☐ Parent of school-age child(ren)
- ☐ Other (please specify): ___

2. How would you describe your familiarity with the Science of Reading?
- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ I have never heard of the Science of Reading

3. How would you describe your prior education with Science of Reading-informed teaching practices?
- ☐ The Science of Reading was a significant component of my college education.
- ☐ The Science of Reading was included somewhat in my college education.
- ☐ There was little or no Science of Reading training in my college education.
- ☐ Not sure/Not applicable.

4. What is your opinion of Science of Reading-informed practices for teaching children to read?
- ☐ I am in favor of Science of Reading teaching practices.
- ☐ I am neutral on Science of Reading teaching practices.
- ☐ I am opposed to Science of Reading teaching practices.
- ☐ Not sure/No opinion.

5. To what extent is the Science of Reading embedded in how literacy is taught in your school or district?
- ☐ The Science of Reading is our primary approach to literacy instruction.
- ☐ The Science of Reading is one of several approaches we use in literacy instruction.
- ☐ We do not use the Science of Reading in our literacy instruction.
- ☐ I do not know if we use the Science of Reading in our literacy instruction.
- ☐ I do not work in a school or district.

6. To your knowledge, has your school or district purchased a program that aligns to the principles of the Science of Reading in the past few years?
- ☐ We have adopted a curriculum/instructional product that aligns to the principles of the Science of Reading.
- ☐ We are currently piloting a curriculum/instructional product that aligns to the Science of Reading.
- ☐ We have designed a curriculum internally to align to the Science of Reading.
- ☐ We are using a curriculum/instructional product that does not align to the Science of Reading and are not planning to make a change, at this time.
- ☐ We do not use any curriculum for reading instruction in our school/district.
- ☐ I do not know if we use a curriculum or instructional product like this.
- ☐ I do not work in a school or district.

7. If known, what curricula or instructional product does your school/district currently use for literacy?

8. Have you enrolled in the Science of Reading Fundamentals Microcredential at SUNY New Paltz?

☐ Yes
☐ No

9. Have you completed the Science of Reading Fundamentals Microcredential from the Science of Reading Center at SUNY New Paltz?

☐ Yes, I completed a microcredential from SUNY New Paltz.
☐ No, but I completed a microcredential from another source.
☐ No, and I have never completed a microcredential.
☐ Not sure.

10. How would you describe your level of interest in professional development related to the Science of Reading?

☐ I am very interested.
☐ I am somewhat interested.
☐ I am not very interested.
☐ I am not interested at all.

11. Where do you get information related to the Science of Reading? Please select your top three sources

☐ I get information from my school or district.
☐ I am involved with a local college or university.
☐ I participate in online or hybrid learning provided by a private company.
☐ I participate in in-person professional learning provided by a private company.
☐ I use social media.
☐ I follow reading experts online.
☐ I talk with friends and colleagues.
☐ I read books, journals or magazines.
☐ I listen to podcasts.
☐ I attend online webinars.
☐ I attend in-person conferences and similar events.
☐ I do not seek out information about the Science of Reading.

12. When you are pursuing a course for teacher (or other) certification or licensure, do you prefer online, in-person, or hybrid (mixed online and in-person) courses?

☐ I prefer online courses.
☐ I prefer in-person courses.
☐ I prefer hybrid courses.
☐ I don't have a strong preference.
☐ I am not interested in any courses or professional development.

13. If there is a cost associated with a course for teacher certification or other professional development, how does that affect your decision to participate?

☐ I am comfortable paying for professional development myself, as long as the cost is reasonable.
☐ I am comfortable paying for professional development as long as I know I will be compensated for the time associated with completing it.
☐ I expect my school or district to cover any/all costs for my professional development upfront.
☐ I am not interested in any courses or professional development.

14. I am interested in professional development courses that allow me to:
Select all that apply

☐ Earn required professional learning credits.
☐ Meet school/district requirements for Science of Reading training.
☐ Update my licensure.
☐ Support my graduate studies to advance my career.
☐ Understand how to teach reading more effectively.
☐ Meet my students' varying needs for reading.
☐ Support new literacy curricula.

15. Please rate your level of interest in the following professional development topics or resources related to the Science of Reading and literacy instruction (5 = most interested, 1 = not interested at all)

___ Phonemic awareness strategies
___ Decoding strategies
___ Assessment of early reading skills
___ Using decodable books to build decoding and comprehension
___ How to conduct small group instruction for the Science of Reading
___ How to select texts for a Science of Reading classroom
___ Building fluency with automatic decoding
___ Students with learning disabilities and the Science of Reading
___ Multilingual learners & the Science of Reading
___ Adolescent literacy & the Science of Reading
___ Content area literacy & the Science of Reading
___ Student reading motivation and the Science of Reading
___ Technology integration with the Science of Reading
___ The Science of Reading & Writing together
___ Diagnosing and supporting dyslexic readers
___ How to implement Science of Reading in your school district
___ A leadership walk-through guide for the Science of Reading

16. Please rate your level of interest in the following offerings from the Science of Reading Center at SUNY New Paltz (5 = most interested, 1 = not interested at all)

___ Ongoing webinar series in literacy development
___ Online book study
___ Interviews with Science of Reading experts
___ 1 college credit and transcript of professional learning for your records
___ 2 college credit course transcript that includes a graded "bridge to practice" classroom application component
___ Advanced Certificate in the Science of Reading
___ Master of Science in Reading & Literacy -- Online
___ Master of Science in Reading & Literacy -- Hybrid
___ Other

17. I am interested in hearing how I, or my school/district or organization, can collaborate with the Science of Reading Center at SUNY New Paltz.

☐ Yes
☐ No

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

SCIENCE OF READING CENTER AT SUNY NEW PALTZ

offers a hub for educators with a shared mission of improving literacy outcomes for children across the U.S. by promoting research-backed knowledge and practices proven to help learners develop reading skills.

The Center is a source for:

- Continuing education microcredentials
- Live events and webinars
- In-person professional learning
- Professional networking
- School district and education department partnerships

Through high-quality professional development, evidence-based resources, and meaningful partnerships with schools and communities, the Center empowers educators to implement effective, inclusive literacy instruction that benefits all learners throughout New York State and beyond.

www.newpaltz.edu/science-of-reading-center

SCIENCE OF READING CENTER
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK **NEW PALTZ**

1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, NY 12561