



## Ranking the Options: Nine Ways to Improve Literacy in Wisconsin

25 years ago, Wisconsin's schools ranked near the top in reading, but after moving away from phonics, our ranking has slid considerably. This downward slide needs to stop and there is a way to do it. States like [Mississippi](#) have come out of last place by embracing phonics, and Wisconsin can do the same. Last session, [AB 446/SB 454](#) from Rep. Kitchens started the literacy conversation in Madison. Now, this session, lawmakers are taking a fresh look at the issue and proposing reforms. In order to better understand the policy levers available to lawmakers, IRG Action Fund has ranked the available options to get students back on track in Wisconsin:

- 1. Switch back to phonics.** The “three-cueing” system of teaching literacy (also known as MSV) has been shown to be ineffective for most children and detrimental to slow readers and dyslexic kids. Phonics has been proven scientifically to be the most effective way to teach children how to read.
- 2. Move back to phonics-based curricula.** Any three-cueing/MSV-based reading curriculum needs to be removed from classrooms across the state and replaced with a phonics-based curriculum that works for every child.
- 3. Retrain teachers.** We need to retrain our teachers who were taught the three-cueing system. Teachers want the best for their students, and the science of reading empowers them to do it.
- 4. Screen early for reading problems.** We cannot know if students are falling behind in K to 3rd grade unless we screen them with very short quizzes.
- 5. Engage parents.** Parental involvement is key to a child's success. Starting in kindergarten, parents should be notified when screening indicates that their child is struggling with reading so that they can be partners in their child's recovery.
- 6. Hire reading coaches.** Reading coaches are specialists who can observe and guide teachers as they put their phonics-based retraining into action.
- 7. Personalized reading plans.** Screening will identify students who are falling behind; personalized reading plans will bring them back up to speed and put the data into action.
- 8. Align teacher colleges to phonics.** Teacher colleges need to transition back to phonics so that we don't have to keep retraining in the future. Policymakers should encourage colleges to move back to teaching students in phonics-based methods.
- 9. Set a 3rd grade benchmark.** Every school must make a promise to its students that they will graduate 3rd grade able to read. If not, 3rd graders should repeat the grade with extra help.

For more information, contact:

Alex Ignatowski, [ai@reforminggovernment.org](mailto:ai@reforminggovernment.org)  
Quinton Klaron, [qk@reforminggovernment.org](mailto:qk@reforminggovernment.org)