

## **INTERIM REPORT ON SCIENCE OF READING EPP COURSEWORK IMPLEMENTATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pursuant to S.L. 2021-180, SECTION 8.4.(a), the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina was charged with contracting with an outside consultant for an evaluation on the progress of the implementation of the changes in requirements for approval or renewal of approval of educator preparation programs (EPPs) for training of (i) elementary education teachers in coursework in the Science of Reading and (ii) elementary and special education general curriculum teachers in early literacy intervention strategies and practices that are aligned with the Science of Reading pursuant to Section 4 of S.L. 2021-8. The information below provides a summary of work undertaken to date on this study, plans for conducting the review of educator preparation programs, and a timeline of anticipated activities and milestones between now and the completion of the project.

### **BACKGROUND**

Ensuring that teacher candidates are well prepared to provide effective reading instruction in their future classrooms is a priority within the University of North Carolina as evidenced by the [Resolution on Teacher Preparation](#) passed by the Board of Governors in April 2020. The resolution charged the system office with working with the UNC System educator preparation programs (EPPs) to create a unified framework for integrating the science of reading into elementary and special education-general curriculum programs. In fall of 2020, eight faculty members from UNC System institutions were selected from a robust pool of applicants to serve as Literacy Fellows. The Literacy Fellows developed the [Comprehensive UNC System Literacy Framework and Implementation Guidance](#) which reflects rigorous research on the essential components of reading and aligns with statutory requirements and other statewide literacy initiatives.

Working with the eight Literacy Fellows, System Office staff furnished opportunities for EPP faculty and leaders to provide feedback on the framework which was incorporated into the final document released in March 2020. The Literacy Fellows also developed a self-assessment to assist EPPs in reviewing the alignment of their current courses with the framework. Each EPP completed their self-assessment in three phases to determine the extent to which the competencies and sub-competencies identified in the framework were integrated into their literacy courses across their initial licensure programs. Each EPP created an action plan to outline how the EPP would address any misalignment, as well as articulate the necessary steps to ensure that all the framework components were fully integrated into their programs. Each EPP completed their self-assessment and action plans by December 2021 and are currently working on course revisions, syllabi revisions, and adjustments to course sequencing and field experiences.

Through private funding from the Spangler and Goodnight Educational Foundation, the UNC System also launched the *Literacy Innovation Leaders (LIL) Initiative* in July 2021 by selecting five EPPs located in or partnered with districts that were included in the first cohort of DPI-sponsored training in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS). Appalachian State University, Fayetteville State University, N.C. A & T, UNC Charlotte, and UNC Pembroke serve as Literacy Innovation Leaders and have engaged in a set of activities designed to prepare more teachers in the Science of Reading, including curriculum and field experience redesign, LETRS training for faculty, lab school teachers, and a sample of teacher candidates, and partnership events with schools. The ultimate goal of the *Literacy Innovation*

*Leader (LIL)* initiative is to help EPPs and P-16 education partners adopt common strategies in pre-service teacher training, internships, and in-service professional development that align with the Science of Reading. This collaboration of critical friends offers the opportunity to positively impact EPPs, teacher and principal candidates, and LEAs to improve student achievement in reading.

In the time since the publication of the Literacy Framework, the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) has led an effort to adapt and adopt the framework among private colleges and universities in North Carolina. In November 2021, NCICU applied for and received a grant from the Goodnight Educational Foundation (GEF) to support each of NCICU's 31 EPPs to enhance, redesign, and develop effective literacy coursework, practica, and internships based in the Science of Reading, as that term is defined in G.S. 115C-83.3(7a). This grant funded EPP support project began in January 2022.

Highlights of efforts accomplished thus far include:

- Creation, through an application process, of a Science of Reading Task Force whose members represent 10 different NCICU EPPs.
- Development and dissemination of a self-study to assess the status of each campus in relation to their understanding and use of the Science of Reading in their teaching. The self-study included 104 competencies and all 31 NCICU EPPs completed the process. Anecdotal reports from EPPs indicated that they found the self-study instrument and process to be more enlightening than anticipated and revealed unanticipated strengths and needs at a granular level. Compass Research and Evaluation, NCICU's external evaluator for this project, compiled the responses and completed an analysis of the results. Reading comprehension was indicated as the greatest content area of need. Student evaluation was the greatest process area indicated.
- Current development by all 31 NCICU EPPs of subgrant proposals to fund 1- year projects to address their target areas as identified through the self-study process.
- Completion of a contract with Lexia-Sopris to provide LETRS training for 63 EPP faculty members (2 faculty members at each of NCICU's 31 EPPs and one of the project co-managers). LETRS training participants complete periodic surveys on how they will use the information in their coursework, and supports they need for this integration.
- Held a 2-day face-to-face faculty institute simultaneously at Elon and Lenoir-Rhyne Universities and offered a virtual option. Twenty-nine NCICU and 3 UNC EPPs, one UNC System-level representative, and 5 NCICU staff members participated in various components of the event. Participants' evaluations indicated they had gained a deeper understanding of various aspects of the Science of Reading and how to implement this knowledge in their coursework and practica. Another faculty institute is being planned for June, 2023.
- Ongoing development of an online Science of Reading "toolkit" of resources for faculty to use in their coursework, student evaluations, and support.

## **EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACT ([S.L. 2021-8](#) ) AND EDUCATOR PREPARATION**

In April 2021, the Excellent Public Schools Act (EPSA) passed and directed EPPs to provide coursework for elementary and special education-general curriculum teacher candidates focused on the Science of Reading, as defined in G.S. 115C-83.3. Shortly after the passage of the Excellent Public Schools Act, the General Assembly included a provision in [S.L. 2021-180](#) that called for the review described above in the introduction. Immediately following the passage of S.L. 2021-180, the UNC System Office issued a request for proposals (RFP) in December 2021 to comply with the directive to engage with an outside

evaluator to conduct a review of EPPs to determine the extent to which the science of reading is integrated into existing literacy courses offered at public and private universities. Although the RFP deadline was extended twice, no proposals were received. National literacy experts were consulted, and the Teacher Preparation Inspection-US (TPI-US) group was recommended as a reputable evaluator who had conducted similar evaluations of EPPs in other states. TPI-US was approached in early February after delays in processing the budget by OSBM were resolved. Given these delays, System Office staff requested an extension on the interim and final report, and those extensions were granted [in S.L. 2022-6](#), passed on March 11, 2022. An initial contract agreement with TPI-US to develop an evaluation rubric was signed on March 24, 2022, and work began immediately. TPI-US agreed to a second contract for the full review after the extension was granted, with that agreement negotiated in April and signed in May 2022.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE**

### *Development of Evaluation Instrument*

While the request for an extension was being made, TPI-US was contracted to facilitate the development of a rubric that would be used to review alignment of EPP literacy courses with the latest rigorous research on the science of reading. TPI-US assembled a team of literacy experts that included a literacy faculty representative from the UNC and NCICU systems. Over the course of spring 2022, this team developed the [rubric](#) which includes detailed review criteria for each of the nine major areas identified as being of critical importance to ensuring teacher candidates learn how to be effective reading teachers. Those areas include:

- Overview of the Science of Reading – foundational knowledge of the science of reading research
- Concepts of Print Instruction
- Oral Language Instruction
- Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Instruction
- Phonics, Orthography, Automatic Word Recognition Instruction
- Fluency Instruction
- Vocabulary Instruction
- Text Comprehension Instruction
- Writing Instruction

Each of the areas outlined in Section 4 of S.L. 2021-8 are incorporated into the rubric. The rubric will be applied to literacy courses within elementary and special education-general curriculum programs through analysis of syllabi, schedules, assignments, assessments, observations, and interviews to determine the extent to which the aforementioned areas of study are incorporated into those programs. Using the rubric, the reviewers from TPI-US will assess coverage of both the content necessary for literacy training of pre-service teacher candidates as well as the relevant intervention strategies and practices within the areas of study.

### *Pre-Evaluation Preparation*

In preparation for the review, the UNC System collected 123 literacy course syllabi from its 15 constituent EPPs to include undergraduate, Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT), and residency/licensure only programs in elementary and special education. To ensure the study remained within the timeline

and available funding and given the breadth of the review process, it was determined that focusing upon undergraduate literacy courses—where most teacher candidates are trained—was most appropriate for this initial review. For the UNC System, 92 undergraduate literacy courses will be reviewed using the rubric.

Because the Board of Governors and UNC System view teacher preparation in literacy as a priority, System Office staff successfully solicited additional philanthropic funding to also complete a review of the MAT and residency/licensure only courses using the same rubric. This will enable a full picture of the baseline level of integration of the science of reading across all program types in the UNC System.

In addition to the UNC System EPPs in the review, the contract with TPI-US includes 15 of 31 NCICU EPPs and up to 52 of their undergraduate literacy methodology courses leading to initial licensure in elementary education or special education general curriculum. This number of syllabi reflects the number of specific literacy methodology courses submitted for evaluation (an average of 3 courses per EPP). To ensure the study remained within the timeline and available funding, and given the breadth of the review process, the 15 NCICU EPPs engaged in the review include 10 of the 15 campuses with the largest number of teacher education candidates and an additional 5 programs representing various geographic locations and program types.

Per the evaluator contract, TPI-US will conduct reviews of a total of 142 literacy courses at 15 UNC System institutions and 15 NCICU institutions.

### *Campus Engagement*

An overview of the review process was provided to the senior leadership within the colleges of education at the UNC and NCICU institutions to provide a timeline on how the project will progress during the fall semester and to share participation expectations. A primary point of contact was identified at each EPP who will serve as a liaison between the evaluator and the EPP. TPI-US has conducted introductory calls with each EPP to be reviewed and provided additional information about logistics to include the process for uploading materials to a secure platform. Both the UNC and NCICU systems meet regularly with the TPI-US project management team to ensure the timeline of the project moves forward as planned.

### **PLAN FOR COMPLETION**

TPI-US has provided the following timeline for completion of the literacy course review:

- *Through September 15, 2022* – collection of syllabi, course schedules, assessments, and instructor contact information. Each EPP will provide this information for the courses that have been identified for the review.
- *By September 30, 2022* – submission of course videos by instructors through the secure platform. The videos will consist of up to one hour of the course instructor teaching literacy content and will be reviewed exclusively by TPI-US staff only.
- *By October 31, 2022* – TPI-US review teams will analyze all course materials and videos and conduct faculty interviews with each course instructor. These interviews will consist of one-hour discussions between the review team and the instructor.
- *By November 30, 2022* – the UNC System will partner with a subset of the original Literacy Fellows to complete the additional review of MAT and residency/licensure only courses.

- *By December 31, 2022* – Reports will be provided to the UNC and NCICU Systems.
- *By January 15, 2023* – Comprehensive report will be provided to the General Assembly.

As the review must be fully implemented during the fall semester, course materials for literacy courses that are taught in the spring will be reviewed, but associated videos are unlikely to be available.

## **CONCLUSION**

The UNC and NCICU systems are committed to ensuring that teacher candidates who complete their elementary and special education programs are well-equipped with evidence-based knowledge and strategies for teaching reading. The outcome of the review of literacy courses within EPPs will serve as a springboard for additional changes in curricula and field experiences such that candidates are successful in increasing student reading achievement. Both systems look forward to providing their plans for implementation of recommendations provided by the evaluator to include a timeline for addressing the relative needs identified within the review. University leaders are confident that this review of literacy courses across North Carolina’s educator preparation programs will identify best practices within our EPPs that can be leveraged by others across the state.