Across the nation, state leaders took bold action this year to help students, schools and education systems recover from pandemic impacts, with significant focus on the foundations of learning, parental choice and career pathways.

Legislators responded to troubling trends in the 2022 Nation’s Report Card with early literacy policies grounded in the science of reading. They realigned classroom curriculum and teacher professional development, eliminated the harmful instructional practice of three-cueing and held firm on third-grade promotion. Florida led by example by also prohibiting three-cueing instruction in educator preparation programs. Several states passed evidence-based math policy, with West Virginia’s Third Grade Success Act, Arkansas LEARNS and Florida addressing both early literacy and math to improve student achievement.

Many states significantly expanded parental choice. Florida made its robust education scholarship account (ESA) program universal; Arkansas, Iowa and Utah created new ESAs with pathways to universal eligibility; Ohio created universal eligibility for private school vouchers, while Indiana expanded its program to nearly universal; South Carolina passed its first ESA program; Nebraska adopted its first-ever private school choice program; and Oklahoma became just the third state in the nation to enact a refundable tax credit for school choice.

Fair funding for public charter schools gained momentum through revenue sharing, revolving loan programs for facilities and more equitable funding formulas that, collectively, will benefit more than 735,000 students.

To support student success beyond K-12, Indiana legislators created first-in-the-nation career scholarship accounts, providing Hoosier students with flexible funds for work-based learning, apprenticeships and other postsecondary opportunities. Texas adopted legislation to reward community colleges for successful student outcomes, serving as a model for other states.

One state stood out with a comprehensive approach to transforming education. Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders championed the Arkansas LEARNS Act, which aligned early literacy with the science of reading; established a universal ESA program; supported charter schools; provided performance-based raises for teachers; and strengthened education and career training programs.

ExcelinEd in Action is grateful to the visionary leaders and coalition partners who championed transformational policy. Changing policy is changing lives.
Our National Impact

108 Policies Passed and Improved in 26 States

12 Policies Protected in 6 States

2 Legislative Sessions Ongoing

234 Bills Engaged in 36 States

27 Expert Testimonies in 13 States

8 States Expanded or Adopted New ESAs

1st-of-its-Kind Career Scholarship Accounts (Indiana)

17 States Strengthened Early Literacy Policy

Financial Literacy New Graduation Requirement in 4 States

$431.3 Million for Charter Facilities in 4 States

Arkansas Comprehensive Education Reform

9 States Strengthened Teacher Pipelines

$160.5 Million for Workforce Readiness in 4 States

4.06 Million Students Eligible for Universal ESAs in 3 States

7 States Banned Three-Cueing Literacy Instruction

280K+ Students Supported by New Math Policy in 3 States

$302.6 Million for Microgrants & New ESAs in 5 States
Arkansas Leads the Way with Comprehensive Education Reform

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders introduced and championed the Arkansas LEARNS Act, which will transform education for Arkansas’s nearly half a million students. The comprehensive legislation—the most far-reaching of the 2023 legislative sessions—includes a focus on early literacy to ensure students are reading proficiently by the end of third grade and that curriculum is aligned with the science of reading; strategies to expand and replicate effective public charter schools; a universal education scholarship account program that allows parents to customize their child’s education; performance-based pay raises for teachers; and stronger education policies specifically grounded in the science of reading.

IN BRIEF

Apprenticeships and other postsecondary pathways to a meaningful career. Students can now use $5,000 in per-pupil funding and $175 million for charter school facilities.

Indiana Adopts First in the Nation Career Scholarships

Making history, Indiana is the first in the nation to create flexible spending accounts for work-based learning, apprenticeships and other postsecondary acceleration opportunities.

A Year for the Science of Reading

Legislatures across the country advanced early literacy grounded in the science of reading. Inspired by ExcelinEd’s policy solutions framed in Early Literacy Matters, more than 20 states engaged ExcelinEd in Action to strengthen existing or adopt new programs. Early literacy policies specifically grounded in the science of reading were adopted in 10 states (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New Mexico, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin), with 7 additional states (Illinois, Kentucky, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas) adopting early literacy improvements.

Third-grade retention policy—a proven strategy for improving literacy outcomes—was added or protected in Arkansas, Nevada, Tennessee and West Virginia. Eight states—Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin—invested in teacher professional development focused on training in evidence-based instructional practices aligned to the science of reading.

Eliminating the Harmful Practice of Three-Cueing

To further strengthen early literacy policy, legislators took action to include an outright ban on three-cueing. This is a harmful instructional practice that teaches young students to guess at words rather than learning letter-by-letter reading, which is essential to build sound reading and spelling skills. Florida, Indiana, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin all banned the practice and required its elimination from school curricula. Florida, Texas and Wisconsin also banned it from teacher preparation programs.

Policymakers Double Down on Math

Following troubling trends on the Nation’s Report Card, three states doubled down on math to address the needs of students. As the first major piece of legislation to take aim at both early literacy and math, West Virginia’s Third Grade Success Act supports the state’s more than 68,000 K-3 students with evidence-based mathematics instruction to ensure they are proficient by the end of third grade. The Arkansas LEARNS Act requires progress monitoring and intervention plans for students who are performing below grade level and requires instruction from a highly effective math teacher and tutoring for struggling math students. Florida also adopted similar policy to identify, intervene and support students struggling in math.

Strengthening Teacher Pipelines: Apprenticeships, Scholarships, Bonuses

Legislative leaders took action to strengthen their state’s teacher pipeline. Notably, Florida established a Teacher Apprenticeship Program and mentor teacher bonus program, allocated bonuses for retired law enforcement personnel that pursue teaching, and created scholarships for educators who want to teach dual enrollment. Nevada created grant programs to support teachers in career & technical education and in earning advanced degrees. Arkansas allocated $12 million annually to its Teacher Academy Scholarship Fund; Colorado created a teacher-degree apprenticeship program as an alternative path to licensure; and Tennessee created the Future Teacher Scholarship.

Empowering Families with Opportunity

Education opportunity advanced in many states, with Nebraska adopting its first ever private school choice program. Oklahoma leaders created a universal refundable tax credit program to support families opting for private school or homeschool. South Carolina adopted an ESA program for the first time in state history. Private school choice programs also expanded in Alabama (tax credit scholarships), Kansas (low-income student scholarships), New Hampshire (Education Freedom Accounts), Tennessee (ESAs) and Wisconsin (K-12 vouchers).

Funding Charter Schools More Equitably

Fair funding for charter schools gained numerous wins this year. Indiana’s property tax and new referenda dollars will now be shared proportionally in four counties, home to 80% of the state’s charter students. Arkansas and Idaho created a revolving loan program to help high-performing charters secure facility loans, significantly reducing the cost of borrowing. Florida now requires school districts to share local revenue fairly with charters, giving the state’s more than 700 schools access to $96 million in local facilities funding this year and growing it to close to half a billion by year five. Ohio’s budget includes a $136 million increase in charter school facilities.
Transformational Progress in 23 States

ALABAMA

Protected A-F school grading
Adopted financial literacy as a graduation requirement
Provided new start-up funding for new charter schools in their first year of operation
Expanded eligibility for tax credit scholarships to all special needs students, additional low-income families and students in D- or F-rated public schools
Increased tax credit scholarships to $10,000 and raised the budget cap to $40 million, serving up to 4,000 additional students
Created cross-agency collaboration and connected data on career pathways to 4,000 additional students
Created new procurement programs for charter school transportation, task force to improve services for students
Increased funding for career development from $1 million to $9.5 million
Created the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact

ARIZONA

Adopted comprehensive education reform to support +500,000 students, including:
Comprehensive early literacy policy
Math intervention plans for 50,000 struggling students in grades 3-8
$476,000 students eligible for universal Educational Freedom Accounts
$10 million revolving loan for public charter school facilities
Career pathways aligned to in-demand jobs
$12 million for Teacher Academy Scholarships

ARKANSAS

Equalized per-pupil funding for +125,000 charter school students
$12.5 million for charter school facilities and operational needs
$27 million to further equalize funding for +20,000 students in state-authorized charter schools, increasing to +43 million in 2024-25
Created a school transportation task force to improve services for students
Increased funding for career development from $1 million to $9.5 million
Created the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact

COLORADO

Improved early literacy through:
High-quality curriculum and instructional materials
Universal reading screeners
Teacher training aligned to science of reading

IDAHO

$30 million for microgrants to serve 10,000+ families
Improved funding for charter school facilities
$50 million revolving loan fund
Expanded access to state’s financial backing
Created 8,000 scholarships for training for in-demand professions

FLORIDA

+3.1 million students eligible for universal Family Empowerment Scholarships
+10,000 ESAs for students with unique abilities
20,000 new Personalized Education Program scholarships for homeschooling families
Elimination of three-cueing instruction in classrooms and teacher preparation programs
$16 million for Science of Literacy & Tutoring program for K-5 struggling readers
New framework for identifying and supporting K-4 students struggling in math
Facilities funding equity for 700+ charter schools.
$269 million state and local funds for charter school facilities
Paycheck protection for 175,000+ teachers
$9 million for teacher apprenticeship and mentor teacher bonus programs
Streamlined certification, flexibility and reciprocity for teachers
$200 million in School Recognition funds to reward high-performing schools
$100 million for students with unique educational needs
Created $8,000 scholarships for training for in-demand professions
Strengthened financial literacy with a standalone course requirement
Joined the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact

GEORGIA

Supported charter school teachers with purchasing cards for school supplies
Protected pathways alignment
Protected A-F school grading and assessments

INDIANA

First in the nation Career Scholarship Accounts for work-based learning, job training or youth apprenticeships
$15 million to serve 3,000 high school students with Career Scholarship Accounts
Expanded Choice Scholarship vouchers to serve 97% of Indiana families
Expanded eligibility for Special Education ESA

IOWA

Created the state’s first ESAs, with universal eligibility for +485,000 students

KENTUCKY

Strengthened the teacher pipeline
Created a reading research center
Required a comprehensive reading program in all public schools
Protected A-F school grading and assessments

LOUISIANA

Funded the Governor’s teacher pipeline
Created the Governor’s teacher pipeline

MISSISSIPPI

Protected educational programs
Supported charter school authorizers

MISSOURI

Strengthened financial literacy with a standalone course requirement

NEVADA

Protected early literacy by ensuring extra time in 3rd grade for struggling readers
Strengthened teacher retention programs
Expanded charter school authorizers
Funded transportation for charter school students

NEBRASKA

Strengthened financial literacy with a standalone course requirement

NEW MEXICO

Supported charter school students in 3rd grade for struggling readers

OKLAHOMA

Adopted financial literacy as a graduation requirement

TEXAS

Banned three-cueing
Strengthened charter school funding to $150 million
Charter school scholarships
Funded the Governor’s teacher pipeline

UTAH

Strengthened financial literacy with a standalone course requirement

VERMONT

Adopted comprehensive education reform to support +500,000 students, including:
Comprehensive early literacy policy
Math intervention plans for 50,000 struggling students in grades 3-8
$476,000 students eligible for universal Educational Freedom Accounts
$10 million revolving loan for public charter school facilities
Career pathways aligned to in-demand jobs
$12 million for Teacher Academy Scholarships

WYOMING

Adopted comprehensive education reform to support +500,000 students, including:
Comprehensive early literacy policy
Math intervention plans for 50,000 struggling students in grades 3-8
$476,000 students eligible for universal Educational Freedom Accounts
$10 million revolving loan for public charter school facilities
Career pathways aligned to in-demand jobs
$12 million for Teacher Academy Scholarships

Thanks to the leaders for passing legislation embracing the science on three-cueing and banning the harmful three-cueing reading model where students are taught to guess instead of sound out words. All go! upp.png

Aligned literacy curriculum and materials with science of reading
Banned three-cueing
Adopted financial literacy as a graduation requirement
Improved charter funding

Funding for charter school operations and capital projects $30 million to further equalize funding for +20,000 students in state-authorized charter schools, increasing to +43 million in 2024-25
Created a school transportation task force to improve services for students
Increased funding for career development from $1 million to $9.5 million
Created the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact

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NEW HAMPSHIRE

- Expanded private school choice to an additional 15,000 students, with 90,000 students now eligible for an Education Freedom Account
- Strengthened early literacy support for students with dyslexia

NEW MEXICO

- New mechanism to fund high-quality reading instructional materials for school districts
- Protected up to 14,000 charter school seats

OKLAHOMA

- Expanded reading coaches and literacy teams to support the science of reading
- Expanded school choice by creating a refundable tax credit with universal eligibility to support families opting for private school or homeschooling
- Created a workforce commission to support pathways into in-demand careers

OHIO

- Improved charter school funding parity by increasing per-pupil funding for +119,000 students and adding $136.5 million to the Quality Community Schools Fund
- Invested $175 million in facilities funding for +320 charter schools
- Aligned early literacy instruction with the science of reading
  - Banned three-cueing reading instruction
  - $64 million for instructional materials and professional development
  - $18 million for literacy coaches
- Created universal eligibility for the state’s private school voucher program, prioritizing students with the greatest need
- Invested $28 million over two years in career & technical education
- Strengthened pathways by aligning K-12, higher education and workforce development in a single state agency, the Department of Workforce and Development

SOUTH CAROLINA

- Created the state’s first ESAs, providing $6,000 scholarships for +5,000 low- and middle-income students
- Banned three-cueing reading instruction and required teacher training in the science of reading
- $39 million to support K-3 teacher literacy training in the science of reading
- Improved education to workforce governance through a newly created Office of Statewide Workforce Development

TEXAS

- Banned three-cueing reading instruction
- Improved processes for charter schools to open or expand
- Increased student access to postsecondary degrees through performance funding for community colleges
- Protected school accountability

UTAH

- Established the Utah Fits All Scholarship Program, the state’s first ESA
- $42 million to serve +5,000 students with dyslexia

VIRGINIA

- Extended science of reading instruction to +470,000 4th through 8th grade students

WEST VIRGINIA

- Adopted first-in-the-country comprehensive early literacy and math policy to support +8,000 K-3 students through:
  - Universal, dyslexia & numeracy screeners
  - Banned three-cueing instruction
  - Teacher training in the science of reading
  - Evidence-based interventions
  - Investing in high-quality curricula and classroom aides
  - Parent notification and supports
- Established dual enrollment pilot program to accelerate college

UTAH

- Expanded access to summer and after-school learning camps to reverse learning loss
- Protected third-grade retention and comprehensive early literacy policy
- Improved charter school enrollment for economically disadvantaged students
- Expanded eligibility for ESAs
- Created the Tennessee Future Teacher Scholarship to strengthen the teacher pipeline

WISCONSIN

- Aligned early literacy with the science of reading
  - Banned three-cueing reading instruction
  - Added 64 full-time literacy coaches
  - Required teachers to be trained in the science of reading
  - Added screeners to identify young students with literacy challenges
  - Mandated summer school programs for struggling readers
  - Invested $50 million to assist schools with curriculum and interventions
- Improved school choice by increasing K-8 vouchers to $9,874 and high school vouchers to $12,368
- Leveled the playing field for +50,000 charter school students by increasing per-pupil funding to $11,366
About ExcelinEd in Action

ExcelinEd in Action is the 501(c)(4) sister organization to the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd). ExcelinEd in Action works with state lawmakers and advocacy partners to pass legislation that empowers families with educational choice, prepares students for college and career, prioritizes early literacy, expands innovation and strengthens school performance.

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