



# UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF WISCONSIN'S LITERACY CRISIS

**Nearly two-thirds of U.S. fourth-graders do not read at grade level.** Many children, including those from well-resourced families, struggle with basic literacy skills. This doesn't stem from lack of intelligence or educators' effort but rather from reading instruction methods that do not align with the science of reading.

## Why is Wisconsin experiencing a crisis?



### Where the Challenges Began

A program called **Reading Recovery**, created by New Zealand teacher Marie Clay, promoted the idea for young readers to use meaning and context to decipher words instead of sounding them out (phonics). Three-cueing's prevalence grew and shaped popular programs like **Fountas & Pinnell** and **Lucy Calkins' Units of Study**.

### WHY DID THREE-CUEING CONTINUE?

The three-cueing method is not based in how the brain learns to read. Students are taught based on cues – essentially guesswork rather than phonics. **Three-cueing programs were heavily marketed and widely adopted** with future educators trained in it for decades. Until recently, states were not vetting reading programs using scientific evidence. In fact, science-based methods often were overlooked and not uniformly implemented.

### WHAT'S CHANGING NOW

States are requiring K-12 schools and universities to align with the science of reading. Wisconsin passed **2023 Act 20**, which requires K-12 districts to use science-based reading curricula and methods. Literacy materials are being reevaluated, teachers are being retrained, and schools are posting curricula, reading remediation plans, and intervention materials online.



### Action in Wisconsin

Forward Literacy is working to ensure compliance with 2023 Act 20 and educating parents and community officials about the requirements of the new literacy law.