

COMMENTARY

Reading Preparation of Secondary ELA Teachers

Are California's Teachers Ready for the Common Core?

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Sobering statistics have repeatedly shown that many middle and high school students in the U. S. struggle with reading, prompting the declaration of an *adolescent literacy crisis*. The role teacher preparation can play in addressing the crisis remains unclear; however, there is intensifying demand for secondary preservice teachers to be knowledgeable of and prepared for the extensive and varied developmental reading needs of adolescents. The instructional focus in secondary [English Language Arts](#) (ELA) classrooms shifts from mastering *literacy* skills to mastering *literature* concepts, despite rising concern with the reading achievement of adolescents. The ELA classroom experience is crucial to an adolescent's literacy development and yet research has suggested that secondary teachers are often unprepared, or even averse, to addressing the developmental reading differences present in their classrooms

With 46 states (including California) currently in the process of implementing the [Common Core State Standards](#) (CCSS) for Grades 6–12, meeting the new standards for ELA will require all teachers to help their students comprehend texts of unprecedented complexity. The new challenges presented by the CCSS require that ELA teachers possess an understanding of both reading development and reading instruction if they are to serve those students who are reading significantly below grade level. In [this study](#), my purpose was to describe the current status of reading development requirements for initial secondary ELA licensure by conducting a survey of the 51 (50 states and the District of Columbia) [State Educational Agencies](#) (SEAs).

The regulations for each of the 51 SEAs were examined to determine if coursework or competencies in reading development were required for initial licensure in secondary ELA. I began with each SEA's website and searched for links to licensure or certification requirements, teaching standards, and/or teacher competencies. In the few cases in which there was ambiguous or little information regarding development coursework or competencies and yet where demonstration of this knowledge was required on initial licensure assessments, I classified the SEA as requiring knowledge of reading development. To further understand the reading development knowledge expected for licensure, I reviewed each SEA's testing requirements for secondary ELA licensure. I reviewed the materials for all 51 SEAs on four separate occasions over the course of more than eighteen months (March 2011 to November 2012).

I found that large discrepancies exist in the amount and type of reading preparation delivered in secondary teacher preparation programs across the United States. At the time of this study, only 18 SEAs required knowledge of reading development at both the middle and secondary levels, with California among them. However, only five of these SEAs expect demonstration of reading development knowledge on required licensure exams: Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Washington, while three

assess it only at the middle level: Illinois, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. California's licensure exam does not include an assessment of reading development knowledge. The most common requirement across the SEAs that did not require knowledge of reading development was the completion of coursework or demonstration of competencies in content area reading strategies at either one or both of levels of secondary licensure; however, the vast majority of these SEAs did not assess this knowledge on the required licensure assessments.

There are many broad implications of this study with the primary one being the successful implementation of the CCSS in the vast majority of states. Although one goal of the CCSS is to provide SEAs with a common set of standards to guide instruction, the discrepant expectations for the reading development knowledge of secondary ELA teachers across SEAs may prove to be a barrier to effectively implementing the standards in ELA. Specifically, the predominant requirement that secondary teachers be knowledgeable only in content area reading strategies may not be enough to fully prepare ELA teachers to work with adolescent struggling readers.

The full study is in Gail E. Lovette, *Reading Preparation of Secondary ELA Teachers: A U.S. Survey of State Licensure Requirements*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Volume 57, Issue 3, pages 193–203, November 2013.

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