

EdSource

To: CNPA
From: EdSource
Re: Public Service Entry: “California’s Reading Dilemma”
Date: 2/4/23

To the Judges:

While other education reporters nationwide wrote about problems with reading, EdSource took on a unique effort to expose the state’s failure to teach reading to third graders and the roadblocks to making changes.

I am honored to submit EdSource’s 10-part special report, [“California’s Reading Dilemma”](#) in which California’s largest education staff set out during 2022 to hold public officials accountable on what it needs to do to turn around the state’s history of dismal reading test scores.

The context for the series is the [national push](#) to adopt a phonics-focused teaching approach described as science of reading. At the core of our reporting is pulling back the curtain on early literacy in California. A state that prides itself on being an education leader now uncomfortably finds itself behind other states like Mississippi, Florida and Tennessee in the teaching of reading.

Our findings include dismal test score performance across California even when data excludes children learning English and no plan by the state to change that. While the state spends record amounts for education, it makes no demands on local districts to teach reading using scientific methods that research has shown recognizes how the brain learns how to read. Despite its national distinction in education, California has a poor track record for teaching reading that led to the state settling a lawsuit that accused it of failing its neediest students.

The stories detailed the policies and the forces standing in the way such as a tradition of local control that has each district and even each school decide how it wants to teach reading. A major force turns out to be the state’s largest teacher’s union which opposes [testing](#) for dyslexia, a reading disability, and played a major role in the killing of a state bill to have the state fund such testing in the earliest grades.

The series struck a nerve with the public as illustrated by public comments following each story and from the state. After the first part published, Linda Darling-Hammond, education adviser to the governor who heads the State Board of Education submitted two commentary pieces laying out the state’s plans to do better. Our reporting continues to examine those promises.

Challenges included resources. As a small, foundation-funded non-profit, EdSource made a major staff commitment to this project which involved more than half of EdSource’s 12 reporters and other staffers. The project included [two podcasts](#), a [roundtable](#) discussion, and a video, all elements in our public service mission on a critical issue because children who cannot read by third grade, face a downward academic spiral.

As one reader commented on the opening story: “We are at a time of change. Thanks for writing this article. Children deserve the right to be explicitly taught how to read.”

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Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rose Ciotta". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Rose Ciotta
Investigations and Projects Editor
EdSource