



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
*Institute of Education Sciences*

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** September 27, 2006

**TO:** Rachel Potter, Office of Management and Budget

**FROM:** Tracy Rimdzius, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

**SUBJECT:** OMB Package for the Study of Teacher Preparation in Early Reading Instruction (OMB #1850-0810)

**Introduction**

OMB Package 1850-0810 (Study of Teacher Preparations in Early Reading Instruction) was submitted in Fall 2005. The package went through both the first 60-day public comment period and the second 30-day public comment period. However, in February 2006, we withdrew this package, because the study TWG expressed concerns about the proposed strategy of coding syllabi at a meeting in January 2006. Upon withdrawing the package, OMB agreed to waive the 60-day comment period when we resubmitted it. This memorandum briefly summarizes the original study plan and the changes made in response to the TWG's suggestions. More details on the current study design and instrumentation is presented in the supporting statement.

**Original Research Questions**

The original study design focused on addressing two major research questions:

1. Is the content of elementary reading courses aligned with the principles of the National Reading Panel report?
2. Are recent graduates of schools of education prepared to teach the essential components of reading instruction?

**Originally Proposed Methods**

The contractor proposed to address these questions with a two-part data collection approach: coding course syllabi and administering a test of teacher content knowledge.

**TWG Review and Advice**

The study team presented their proposed design to the TWG at a meeting held on January 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The TWG was concerned about the accuracy of the proposed approach to code syllabi. The proposal was to conduct a word-level search of syllabi text. It seemed problematic to equate the presence or absence of terms in syllabi with alignment or misalignment with principles presented in the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP). The concern was that this approach would yield alignment results due only to natural variation in syllabi length and

depth of description, not actual course content. The TWG advised strongly against coding syllabi as the primary method of determining coursework alignment with the NRP. Unfortunately, the study does not have the resources to observe teacher preparation coursework. The TWG discussed a faculty survey or interview, but cautioned that such an instrument could make recruitment more difficult and might not yield accurate information.

The TWG advised the study team to replace the coding of syllabi with a pre-service teacher survey regarding their teacher education program. While the TWG stressed that the survey would need to be carefully crafted, they felt a survey would provide more accurate information than syllabi. The purpose of the survey would be three-fold:

- Determining exposure: the extent to which the pre-service teachers have been exposed to the material presented in the NRP and to scientifically based reading research on early literacy
- Gauging emphasis: the approximate emphasis of this exposure
- Determining perceptions of preparedness: the extent to which pre-service teachers feel prepared to teach beginning reading by using research-based strategies as outlined in documents such as the NRP.

Over the past several months, the contractor developed and refined the survey instrument through focus groups and cognitive labs to measure pre-service teacher perceptions of exposure, dosage, and preparedness.

### Current Study Design

The TWG pointed out that our original research questions were too ambitious given the data that would be available. The TWG suggested that neither the syllabi analysis nor the pre-service teacher survey would accurately address alignment of course content with the NRP. They suggested refining the first research question accordingly. The TWG suggested refining the second research question as well since they felt that “preparation to teach” requires more than knowledge and the teacher assessment focuses on knowledge. In light of the data collection proposed, the TWG suggested these refinements to the original research questions:

1. To what extent does the content of teacher education programs focus on the essential components of early reading instruction?
2. To what extent are graduating pre-service teachers knowledgeable about the essential components of early reading instruction?