



At Freedom in Education, our mission goes beyond just setting high standards for what students learn—we're committed to making sure it's taught in ways that truly work. While strong curriculum and content are essential foundations, they're only effective when delivered with clarity, purpose, and proven instructional strategies. A well-designed lesson loses its impact if it's not taught in a way that all students can understand. That's why we're focused on both the what and the how of teaching—ensuring instruction is research-based, results-driven, and designed to meet the needs of every child.

As recent NAEP results clearly show, students across the nation are not proficient in reading, a reality that calls for urgent attention to how reading is being taught in our schools. One contributing factor that's come under increasing scrutiny is the continued use of the three-cueing method. While once a popular strategy in many classrooms, this approach often encourages students to guess words based on pictures or context rather than sound-letter relationships. In the face of declining reading scores, it's critical to examine whether instructional methods like 3-cueing are truly serving our students, or holding them back.

### **What is the 3-Cueing Method of Instruction?**

The 3-cueing method is a widely recognized approach in reading instruction that encourages students to draw on three types of cues to make meaning from text: semantic (meaning), syntactic (sentence structure), and graphophonic (visual/letter-sound relationships). This method helps young readers develop a balanced strategy for decoding unfamiliar words by prompting them to consider the context, sentence structure, and letter-sound patterns as they read. For example, if a child encounters the word "horse," they might use picture clues (semantic), recognize it fits grammatically in the sentence (syntactic), and connect the letters and sounds (graphophonic) to determine the word accurately.

While the 3-cueing method has been a foundational element in many balanced literacy programs, recent research has prompted renewed discussions about its effectiveness. Critics argue that over-reliance on context clues can lead to guessing rather than accurate decoding, and many literacy experts now advocate for a stronger emphasis on systematic phonics instruction.

### **When Might You See 3-Cueing in Your Child's School?**

You might encounter the 3-cueing method in your child's school during early reading instruction, especially in kindergarten through second grade. It often appears during small group reading sessions or guided reading, where children are encouraged to figure out unfamiliar words by using context clues, pictures, sentence structure, and beginning letter sounds. If a teacher prompts your child with questions like, "What would make sense here?" or "Does that sound right?" or "Look at the first letter—what word could that be?" they are likely using elements of the 3-cueing approach.

You may also notice it in take-home reading materials or leveled books that include predictable text and supportive illustrations. These materials are designed to help children use multiple strategies to decode words and comprehend meaning. While many educators are now shifting toward more explicit phonics-based instruction, especially in light of the "science of reading" movement, the 3-cueing method may still be part of classroom practice as students build fluency and confidence in their reading journey.

## Has Your State Banned or Limited Three-Cueing?

As of May 2025, at least 14 U.S. states have enacted legislation to limit or ban the use of the three-cueing method in reading instruction. This shift reflects a growing consensus among educators and policymakers favoring evidence-based approaches, particularly those aligned with the "science of reading," which emphasizes systematic phonics instruction. Here is a list of states that have taken legislative or administrative action against the three-cueing method:

**Arkansas** – First state to ban three-cueing in 2021.

**Louisiana** – Implemented a ban in 2022.

**Florida, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, Wisconsin** – All enacted bans in 2023.

**Virginia** – Initially rejected cueing-based programs administratively before codifying the ban into law in 2024.

**Alabama** – Passed legislation banning three-cueing in 2024.

**Kansas, Minnesota** – Enacted bans on three cueing as of October 2023.

**Mississippi** – Banned the use of three-cueing methods in reading instruction in grades 4–8.

**Oklahoma** – Legislation prohibiting the three-cueing system is nearing final passage, with provisions set to take effect in the 2025–2026 school year.

**Georgia** - Passed legislation in 2025 that prevents using the three-cueing instruction as the primary means of providing literacy instruction, and requires the Professional Standards Commission to adopt rules to require that the content standards align with the science of reading for core curricula for state-approved educator preparation programs.

These legislative actions often accompany broader educational reforms, including mandates for teacher training in phonics-based methods and the adoption of curricula aligned with the science of reading. The movement gained momentum following increased scrutiny of the three-cueing approach, particularly after investigative reports highlighted its shortcomings and the subsequent decline in reading proficiency among students.

For instance, Indiana's new law gives schools until the 2024–25 school year to adopt curricula aligned with the science of reading and bans methods based on three-cueing. Similarly, Ohio's budget bill stipulates that by the 2024–25 school year, all schools must use state-approved reading programs, prohibiting any materials that employ the three-cueing method. The trend underscores a national shift towards evidence-based reading instruction, aiming to improve literacy outcomes by emphasizing phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

At Freedom in Education, we stand firmly with the shift toward proven, science-backed approaches to teaching reading. Our work is centered on ensuring that both the content and the methods used in classrooms are aligned with what actually helps students succeed. By supporting policies and practices that emphasize effective, research-based instruction, we're working to ensure that every child has the tools they need to become confident, capable readers.

### REFERENCES ON THREE CUEING INSTRUCTION:

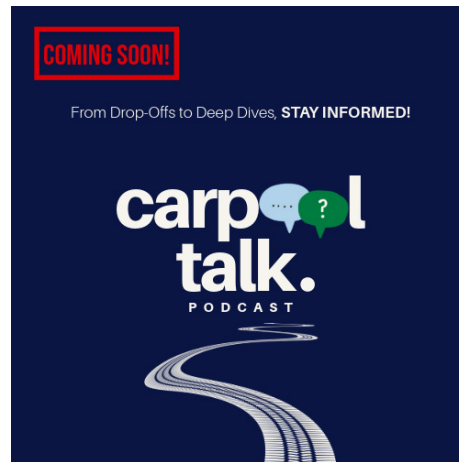
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