Structured Literacy Project FACTS

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the Structured Literacy Project within the Colorado Department of Education's Exceptional Student Services Unit.

What is Structured Literacy?

Structured literacy (SL) is an approach to literacy instruction based on the 'Science of Reading'. The 'Science of Reading' is the accumulated evidence from research on reading acquisition and instruction. Structured Literacy is the application of science and evidence during reading instruction. Structured Literacy refers to both the content and methods or principles of instruction. The two critical hallmarks of Structured Literacy are that it 1) teaches all the components that evidence has found to be foremost in ensuring reading success, and 2) employs principles that align to the necessity of each component.

Structured literacy teaching stands in contrast with approaches that are often found in many schools but that do not teach oral and written language skills in an explicit, systematic manner. Evidence is strong that the most students learn to read better with structured teaching of basic language skills, and that the components and application of Structured Literacy are critical for those who struggle with reading, especially students with disabilities including dyslexia.

What is the Structured Literacy Project?

The Structured Literacy Project is an initiative of the Office of Special Education (OSE) at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The Project's design is aligned with current research and uses evidence-based strategies to enhance reading instruction, and ultimately, the reading achievement of the most at-risk early readers. The Project addresses the needs of kindergarten through third-grade readers by aligning instructional practices across all tiers of instruction. This includes the use of a common sequence of instruction, common instructional routines, and common instructional language.

The project design ensures that all students receive daily research-based, first-best instruction in their classroom within both whole-group and small group instructional settings. Tier 1 instruction is informed by formal and formative assessment data. First-best instruction is augment by additional and instructionally-aligned tiered supports for students needing increased time and instructional intensity in small-group targeted instruction, during small-group intensive instruction, and within specially-designed instruction for those students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Is the Structured Literacy Project aligned to the CDE's emphasis on the 'Science of Reading' and with the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act)?

Yes, the Structured Literacy Project is fully aligned with current 'Science of Reading' research and implementation practices and can be used to supplement and enhance any Colorado school's use of READ Act approved core or intervention curriculum. The Project will utilize school assessment data from any CDE/READ Act approved interim, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessment tools.

Why is the Structured Literacy Project sometimes referred to as the 'SiMR Project'?

The acronym *'SiMR'* stands for *State Identified Measurable Result*. The *'SiMR'* is part of the OSE's *State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)*, a mandated requirement of all fifty states from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the federal level. The OSE at CDE is required to identify a project, based on stake-holder input, that addresses a specific, identifiable need in Colorado. The *'SiMR'* or indicator 17 was added to each state's *SSIP* requirements in 2016 and subsequent stakeholder meetings resulted in early literacy being chosen as the Project's focus. The Structured Literacy Project has completed one full six-year cycle, with some interruption as a result of COVID -19. The Project is now beginning a new implementation cycle, using initial Project outcomes and data to further enhance the Project's effectiveness.

How is the Structured Literacy Project implemented in participating school districts and/or schools?

Implementation of the Structured Literacy Project is customized to each participating school's needs and their current level of early reading achievement data. The Project commitment is 5 years. The Project typically includes:

- Initial professional development for all K and 1st grade classroom teachers, interventionists, and special educators and their principal(s). Professional development is offered in later years for 2nd and 3rd grades. These early professional development days encompass an understanding of the relevant scientific research and a Structured Literacy approach to reading instruction. Teachers learn how to implement effective daily lesson routines and utilize additional classroom strategies when needed.

- All initial training participants are given access to a range of support materials and resources, that can be used to enhance the implementation of Structured Literacy in their classroom or intervention setting.

- Principals also participate in professional development to ensure they understand Project implementation expectations and their role in the Project's success. Coaches work with principals in identifying additional instructional strategies required to support enhanced reading growth. This could include adjustment(s) to daily scheduling and grouping of students, enhanced use of data and data-team meetings, and the identification of further professional development for their staff.

- The Project provides implementation coaching to teachers, which allows them to see experienced coaches deliver model lessons and support teachers' implementation of effective lesson routines.

- Coaches also provide support in the interpretation of data to inform and adjust instruction, and in designing small group instruction for students needing additional support within a multi-tiered system of support.

- As students matriculate into the next grade, the Project provides initial training to second-grade teachers and interventionists (and any newly hired Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers), followed up with implementation coaching.

- At the start of the school's third year in the Project, initial training is provided to all third-grade teachers and interventionists along with any new K-2 teachers. Project coaches continue to support all new teachers and those still needing additional support with Structured Literacy implementation.

- During each school's fourth year in the Project, the emphasis is on consolidating Structured Literacy implementation throughout all tiers of instruction for students in grade K-3 and laying the foundation for sustainability.

- Depending on a school's level of implementation, during the fifth year some schools will be ready for a less intensive level of Project participation and will receive consultation from Project leaders and coaches. Other schools, having experienced changes in leadership or high levels of teacher turnover, may benefit from a fifth year of Project consolidation work.

What schools can participate in the Structured Literacy Project? How are schools chosen?

The Structured Literacy Project is designed to offer each participating school a comprehensive approach to improving their reading/English Language Arts achievement scores. The Project is specifically designed for schools who have significant numbers of 'at-risk' students including students with disabilities including dyslexia, those whose first language is not English, and those who due to poverty and other life circumstances have not had access to high quality early

learning and language opportunities. We ascribe to a philosophy that 'a rising tide lifts all boats,' meaning by improving the reading achievement of the most challenged readers, the Project elevates the reading achievement of all students through increased teacher effectiveness and implementation of evidence-based instruction. Once a school has expressed an interest in the Project, Project leaders will meet with school/district leadership to determine if the school's literacy goals and challenges are consistent with the Project's goals and opportunities.

Do schools pay to participate in the Structured Literacy Project?

No, schools do not pay to participate in the Project. Project professional development, coaching, consultation, and support materials are provided at no cost to each participating school.

How does the Structured Literacy Project purposefully plan for sustainability of the Project once a school completes the Project implementation cycle?

The Project is intentional in their work with each school and district to prepare district/school leadership to continue the Project. First, we provide access to all Project professional development and support materials via digitized resources. Second, we strive to work directly with principals, district personnel, and school leadership in the use of Project classroom walk-through and observation protocols to enhance sustainability of all implementation practices. Third, we will work with district or school-based coaches in the provision of the professional development necessary for them to provide all initial and follow-up Structured Literacy training(s) for their school and/or district. In situations where instructional coaching is not offered within a school or district, the Project will work with leadership to identify and train a 'cadre' of Structured Literacy trainers to sustain all components of professional development necessary for continued success.

Does the Structured Literacy Project offer any supports or professional development to address the literacy and reading needs of students beyond the 3rd grade?

Yes, like much of the Project's work within a school, our supports for intermediate teachers and their students are customized across all tiers of instruction, based on time availability of Project coaches, and leadership and school identified needs.

For More Information

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