Independent Evaluation of the Colorado READ Act: Per-Pupil Funding Year 2 Summary Report

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Colorado READ Act
EVALUATION

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- **Local education providers and schools report increasing alignment of materials and approaches to reading and credit the READ Act with this movement.**

- **There is a lack of clear guidance for English learners and students with disabilities under the READ Act.**

- **The state should define clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments at grades K-3 that align with expected and observed performance of students on third grade CMAS or other appropriate measures.**

In 2019, the Colorado General Assembly passed and signed into law SB 19-199, which included a provision mandating an independent, external evaluation of Colorado's Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act (see 2020 Annual Report on the Colorado READ Act for an overview of updates in SB 19-199).[1]

This report builds on the findings and data gathered during the first year of the evaluation. During the first year of the evaluation, evaluators identified three challenges that were addressed this year: 1) reviewing the approved READ Act Assessment Advisory List to make recommendations to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) about computing growth to standard (see Chapter 2), 2) addressing the needs of English learners (see Chapter 3), and 3) addressing the needs of students with individualized education plans (IEPs; see Chapter 4). Two broad research questions guide this evaluation:

1. To what extent has the implementation of the READ Act led to a reduction in the number of students identified as having significant reading deficiencies (SRDs)?
2. What are the most effective processes, procedures, methods, and strategies that local education providers (LEPs) receiving per-pupil funds and schools receiving Early Literacy Grant (ELG) funds use to achieve significant growth to standard?

The report relies on numerous sources of information (see Appendices 1-3 for a more detailed description of data collected and analytic methods used), including

- analyses of the READ Act legislation, CDE rules and regulations, and interviews with officials at CDE who administer the provisions of the READ Act to understand the theory of action for the READ Act and how CDE is organized to support that theory of action;

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[1] https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/readactreport

- reviews of existing data that school districts submit each year to the Colorado Department of Education;

- data from an inventory sent to all districts and ELG-funded schools by the evaluation team to gather information on their READ Act–funded activities and investments;

- data from inventories sent to all schools serving kindergarten through third grade students so that principals, reading coaches, and reading teachers could report on their engagement in professional development, classroom activities, and experiences with READ Act provisions; and

- information about kindergarten through third grade interim assessments to determine what aspects of reading they measure, how they map to the Grade 3 Colorado Measures of Academic Skills (CMAS) English Language Arts (ELA) assessment, the reliability and validity of significant reading deficiency determination, and the potential for computing growth to standard; and

- data gathered through a round of virtual site visits conducted with 23 LEPs and schools throughout the state during the 2021-22 school year.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

As in other states, the pandemic has had a negative impact on reading achievement statewide. While overall performance was worse, the underlying achievement patterns remain similar to those that existed prior to the pandemic. For the population the READ Act is designed to serve, students identified as having SRDs, the proficiency rates remain stubbornly low. In addition, many students not served by the READ Act do not achieve proficiency by the third grade. One bright spot of the READ Act is its increasing impact on curriculum and instructional guidance, with more LEPs adopting materials from Advisory Lists and working toward instruction aligned with the READ Act. We would expect student outcomes to be a lagging indicator of such shifts. Lastly, there is a need for additional READ

Act guidance around supports for students with Individualized Education Plans and those who are learning English as well as the establishment of clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and negative impact on reading levels.

- Trends in student data indicate that statewide challenges with reading have increased over the past two years, likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the percentage of students identified as having SRDs in the spring of each school year was consistent for the last several years (around 15 percent; i.e., from 2015-19), it jumped to 22 percent in the 2020-21 school year. In line with findings from previous years, patterns of identification indicate that more students were identified as having SRDs during the 2020-21 school year than were removed from that designation. This was especially true for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and students who are learning English.

Third grade CMAS ELA proficiency is still extremely limited for students who have ever been identified as having SRDs, especially for those with IEPs or who are learning English.

- Similar to trends noted in last year's evaluation report, during the 2020-21 school year, only 4 percent of students who have ever been identified as having SRDs met or exceeded proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam in the third grade, compared to 52 percent of students who had never been identified as having SRDs. Only 2 percent of students learning English who had ever been identified as having SRDs reached proficiency by the third grade, compared to approximately 21 percent of students learning English who had never been identified with an SRD. A similar

trend holds for students with dual IEP and SRD designations—
fewer than 2 percent reach proficiency by the third grade,
compared to 34 percent of their peers with IEPs who have never
been designated as having SRDs.

**Many students who do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS are not
served under the current READ Act.**

- The READ Act, as implemented, includes activities aimed at all
  K-3 students (e.g., requirements for training for teachers) and
  activities aimed only at some K-3 students (e.g., additional funds
  and READ Act plans for students identified as having SRDs).
  Analysis of third grade CMAS ELA proficiency shows that there
  are many students (48 percent in the 2020-21 school year) who
  are not classified as having SRDs, but who also do not achieve
  proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam. Additionally, the
  equipercentile equivalent CMAS scores that corresponded to the
  SRD cut score of each assessment clustered around the
  "Partially Met Expectations" CMAS performance level. This result
  may suggest a need for additional support, not just for students
  identified as having SRDs, but for other students as well. More
  broadly, an expected outcome of proficiency on the CMAS grade
  three exam appears to be at odds with the use of assessments to
  identify only students most "at risk" (in this case, those identified
  as having SRDs).
  - If the intended outcome of the READ Act is that more
    students are proficient at grade three, this goal should be
    operationalized through a theory of action that describes
    how the use of data and other activities will lead to this
    outcome for students at all levels of interim assessment
    performance.

- LEPs and schools report the need for additional resources to support continued interventions in grades 4-12 for students who do not exit their READ Plans by end of grade three since these students continue to require additional assistance and support in order to reach grade level proficiency
    - We recommend that Year 3 of the evaluation include an analysis of READ Plans, interventions, and outcomes for students in grades four through 12 to determine where additional supports may be needed beyond the third grade.

Local education providers and schools report increased alignment of materials and approaches to kindergarten through third grade reading and credit the READ Act with this movement.

- The READ Act and the Advisory List of Instructional Programming are contributing to increased school district investment statewide in evidence-based reading curricula and materials, and to a more consistent use of these materials both across and within schools. Similar to findings in last year's report, site visit districts and schools report that the READ Act has helped improve consistency in terms of language, materials, and understanding that is grounded in the science of reading. District and school leaders were also able to leverage the Advisory List of Instructional Programming to help phase out core, supplemental, and instructional materials that were not evidence-based or effective and advocate for the adoption of approved curricula based on the science of reading. These local efforts were inspired by the READ Act's requirements and were described by some local leaders as a move away from the "Wild West", where individual teachers were able to pick and choose the materials and approaches used in each classroom, towards instead a more

uniform adoption and use of an aligned set of state-endorsed, research-based K-3 teaching materials. This move towards consistency is balanced by a need for some flexibility at the school and classroom level to address varying student populations and local contexts.

- Data from the evaluation's inventory, however, indicates that over half of coaches and teachers inventoried indicated teachers utilize materials *not* provided in the core reading instructional programs on a daily basis.
  - Given these findings, we recommend that Year 3 of the evaluation focus on classroom-level implementation to better understand how districts and schools are monitoring and supporting the fidelity of the implementation of their approaches to early reading instruction.

There is a lack of clear guidance for serving English learners and students with disabilities under the READ Act.

- Site visit LEPs and schools report that state guidance on serving students learning English is vague. LEPs and schools develop their own guidelines on how to provide services under the READ Act to this student population. Due to the number of students that migrate to the state without prior instruction or exposure to the English language, educators struggle to provide appropriate support to students under the READ Act.
- Additionally, site visit LEPs and schools indicated that they often struggle to identify and support EL students and students with disability classifications under the READ Act.
  - Given these challenges, we recommend that CDE convene a panel of experts in literacy development for English learners to develop state guidance on serving English learners and students with disabilities under the

READ Act. Specific guidance and resources would help ensure that EL students are not misclassified and receive appropriate support.

The state should define clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments at grades K-3 that align with expected and observed performance of students on third grade CMAS or other appropriate measures.

- The READ Act describes sufficient growth for students found to be "at risk" (either identified as having an SRD or reading below grade level) as putting them on a path to "adequately demonstrating proficiency by the end of third grade." However, analysis shows that most students, identified as SRD or below grade level or not, do not meet expectations on CMAS at the end of third grade.

- Further, READ Act assessments from the approved advisory list tend to focus (particularly at the early grades) on specific foundational reading skills and behaviors, as described in the READ Act itself. A question for CDE to consider is whether the outcomes of the READ Act should be measured in terms of overall CMAS performance or a narrower construct of reading represented by CMAS reading subscores. The growth to standard metric required by the READ Act should be based on a standard that is attainable and aligned with the specific knowledge and skills that students identified as having an SRD or below grade level should be expected to achieve by the end of grade 3.

Introduction

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Two broad research questions guided the evaluation.

- **To what extent has the implementation of the READ Act led to a reduction in the number of students identified as having significant reading deficiencies?**

- **What are the most effective processes, procedures, methods, and strategies that LEPs receiving per-pupil funds and schools receiving ELG funds use to achieve significant growth to standard?**

The importance of achieving early grade reading proficiency for later student academic success is well-documented. Researchers and education leaders consider the achievement of reading proficiency by the end of the third grade to be crucial to a child's future academic success and financial independence.[2] In order to help schools and districts support all children in achieving this goal, the Colorado State Legislature passed the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act) in 2012 to replace the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA).[3] The READ Act provides school districts with funding and support to aid literacy development for kindergarten through third grade students, especially those identified with "significant reading deficiencies" (SRDs) who are at risk of not reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

Evaluation of the READ Act

In 2019, the Colorado General Assembly passed and signed into law SB 19-199, which included a provision mandating that an independent, external multiyear evaluation of the READ Act program be conducted (see 2020 Annual Report on the Colorado READ Act for an overview of updates in SB 19-199).[4] The evaluation is now underway and is being conducted by an independent research team led by WestEd that includes APA Consulting and RTI International.

The key legislative goals for this evaluation are as follows:

1. to help state policymakers and district leaders understand the impacts of READ Act funding and support on students, families, schools, and districts;

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[2] Hernandez, D. J. (2011). Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation; Fiester, L. (2013). Early warning confirmed: A research update on third-grade reading. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. https://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/

[3] The READ Act includes many of the same elements as the CBLA, including a focus on K-3 literacy, assessment, and individual plans for students reading below grade level with the addition of: (1) funding to support these efforts, (2) requirements for parent communication, and (3) an explicit focus on students identified as having a significant reading deficiency.

[4] https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/readactreport

2. to learn and share successes and best practices across districts and schools;

3. to inform improvements to the READ Act by understanding how funds were used; and

4. to get direct feedback from school and district leaders about how CDE can best support further improvement in READ Act implementation.

An additional goal that has been added to this work is to understand how the current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted district and school-level strategies for delivering K through third grade reading programs and how READ Act funding and CDE can best support districts and schools in delivering reading programs during the pandemic.

This report builds on the findings and data gathered during the first year of the evaluation. During the first year of the evaluation, evaluators identified three challenges that were addressed: meeting the needs of English learners, meeting the needs of students with individualized education plans, and reviewing the kindergarten through third grade assessment system to make recommendations to CDE about computing growth to standard. Two broad research questions guide this evaluation and are listed below.

1. To what extent has the implementation of the READ Act led to a reduction in the number of students identified with significant reading deficiencies?

2. What are the most effective processes, procedures, methods, and strategies that local education providers (LEPs) receiving per-pupil funds and schools receiving Early Literacy Grant (ELG) funds use to achieve significant growth to standard?

The report relies on numerous sources of information (see Appendices 1-3 for a more detailed description of the data collected and the analytic methods used), including

- analyses of the READ Act legislation, CDE rules and regulations, and interviews with officials at CDE who administer the provisions of the READ Act to understand the theory of action for the READ Act and how CDE is organized to support that theory of action;

- reviews of existing data that school districts submit each year to CDE;

- data from an inventory sent to all districts and ELG-funded schools by the evaluation team to gather information on READ Act-funded activities and investments;

- data from inventories sent to all schools serving K through third grade students so that principals, reading coaches, and reading teachers could report on their engagement in professional development, classroom activities, and experiences with READ Act provisions;

- information about K through third grade interim assessments to determine what aspects of reading they measure, how they map to the Grade 3 Colorado Measures of Academic Skills English Language Arts assessment, the reliability and validity of significant reading deficiency determination, and the potential for computing growth to standard; and

- data gathered through a round of virtual site visits conducted with 23 LEPs and schools throughout the state during the 2021-22 school year.

The Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act

Backward-mapping the intended outcomes identified in the READ Act through activities and inputs illustrates how the authors of the Act intended the pieces to fit together to improve reading outcomes (Exhibit X). In order to ensure that third grade students have the necessary reading skills to succeed in higher grade levels and beyond, the READ Act established mechanisms to ensure that all K through third grade students

receive reading instruction based on the science of reading, while those students who are identified as having SRDs receive appropriate science-based interventions to address their needs. Teachers complete evidence-based training that enables them to deliver instruction and provide support aligned with the science of reading. Local education providers can select core instructional programs, interventions, professional development programs, and assessments from the Advisory List of Professional Development and Programming that CDE has developed and disseminated. CDE also determines grade-level competency in reading, monitors LEP use of READ Act per-pupil funds, administers the ELG program, and oversees READ Act reports (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. READ Act Legislative Logic Model

LEGISLATIVE LOGIC MODEL

Inputs

Early Literacy Fund:
Per pupil funding
ELG Grants
LEP PD related to the READ Act

Theory of change

Stakeholders: LEPs, CDE, Teachers, Parents, Students

Assessments

Instructional programming

Professional development

Body of evidence of student reading ability

Activities

CDE
- Make rules about: K-3 reading competency skill levels; approved scientifically based reading assessments; recommended instructional programs; recommended PD
- Develop time frames and procedures for LEP reporting
- Oversee READ public information campaign
- Oversee per pupil funding dispersion and ELG grant program

LEPs
- Provide instructional programming and services that are evidence based
- Measure student reading competency using approved interim assessment, including identifying ELs and assessing them appropriately

Teachers
- For students identified as having an SRD, develop a READ plan and communicate plan to parents
- Teachers complete evidence-based training in teaching reading

Students
- All students receive instruction appropriate for their needs within a multi-tiered system of support
- Students with an SRD receive scientifically based intervention(s) as specified in their READ plan

Compliance Monitoring

Intended Outcomes

By the end of third grade, students can demonstrate a level of competency in reading skills that is necessary to support them in achieving the academic standards and expectations applicable to the fourth-grade curriculum

Each student attains proficiency in English, regardless of the student's native language

All children graduate from high school having attained skill levels that adequately prepare them for postsecondary studies or for the workforce

The system of free public schools throughout the state is thorough and uniform

Under the provisions of the READ Act, schools screen using an interim assessment from the Colorado State Board of Education approved advisory list in order to identify students with an SRD. After screening, students are given a diagnostic assessment to identify areas of need and

develop an individual READ Plan. The READ Act specifies certain components required in all student READ Plans; however, each plan must be tailored to meet individual student needs.

The Colorado General Assembly placed four broad requirements on the State Board of Education and CDE to administer the READ Act: rulemaking, accountability, information dissemination, and funding dissemination.

Functionally, CDE's activities can be placed into six categories: compliance, instruction, assessment, curriculum, the pre-kindergarten to kindergarten (K) transition, and State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR).

1. Managing compliance ensures that READ Act funds are used effectively and lawfully, and educators understand the READ Act requirements.

2. Informing human capital through training requirements and providing recommended lists of professional development programs ensures that teachers know how to provide reading instruction that is scientifically grounded.

3. Reviewing and approving K through third grade reading assessments allows students with SRDs to be effectively identified and receive appropriate interventions.

4. Reviewing and recommending curriculum and interventions ensures that students receive reading instruction that is scientifically grounded.

5. Aligning pre-kindergarten and kindergarten readiness standards with K through third grade reading standards supports effective pre-kindergarten practices.
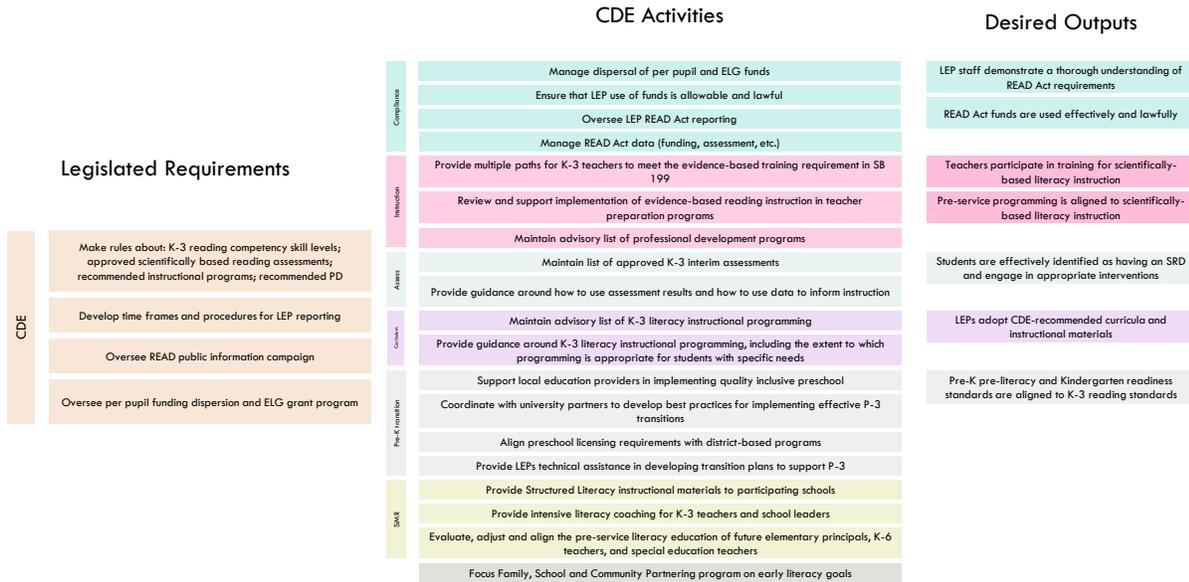
In addition to specifying that the Colorado State Board of Education must approve a set of reading assessments, the READ Act also charges CDE with creating advisory lists of instructional programming[5] and

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[5] https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/advisorylistofinstructionalprogramming2020

professional development programs[6] that are scientifically grounded and evidence-based.

Exhibit 2. CDE Read Act Roles and Activities Aligned with Outcomes

CDE Activities   Desired Outputs

	LEP staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of READ Act requirements
Manage dispersal of per pupil and ELG funds	
Ensure that LEP use of funds is allowable and lawful	READ Act funds are used effectively and lawfully
Oversee LEP READ Act reporting	
Manage READ Act data (funding, assessment, etc.)	
Provide multiple paths for K-3 teachers to meet the evidence-based training requirement in SB 199	Teachers participate in training for scientifically-based literacy instruction
Review and support implementation of evidence-based reading instruction in teacher preparation programs	Pre-service programming is aligned to scientifically-based literacy instruction
Maintain advisory list of professional development programs	
Maintain list of approved K-3 interim assessments	Students are effectively identified as having an SRD and engage in appropriate interventions
Provide guidance around how to use assessment results and how to use data to inform instruction	
Maintain advisory list of K-3 literacy instructional programming	LEPs adopt CDE-recommended curricula and instructional materials
Provide guidance around K-3 literacy instructional programming, including the extent to which programming is appropriate for students with specific needs	
Support local education providers in implementing quality inclusive preschool	Pre-K pre-literacy and Kindergarten readiness standards are aligned to K-3 reading standards
Coordinate with university partners to develop best practices for implementing effective P-3 transitions	
Align preschool licensing requirements with district-based programs	
Provide LEPs technical assistance in developing transition plans to support P-3	
Provide Structured Literacy instructional materials to participating schools	
Provide intensive literacy coaching for K-3 teachers and school leaders	
Evaluate, adjust and align the pre-service literacy education of future elementary principals, K-6 teachers, and special education teachers	
Focus Family, School and Community Partnering program on early literacy goals	

Legislated Requirements

Make rules about: K-3 reading competency skill levels; approved scientifically based reading assessments; recommended instructional programs; recommended PD
Develop time frames and procedures for LEP reporting
Oversee READ public information campaign
Oversee per pupil funding dispersion and ELG grant program

Local education providers may use READ Act funds to purchase instructional programming from the advisory list (LEPs may also purchase instructional programs that are not on CDE's Advisory List of Instructional Programming if they do not use READ Act funds). The 2019 revision of the READ Act requires all K through third grade teachers to complete 45 hours of evidence-based training in teaching reading. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline for meeting this requirement was extended to August 1, 2022 (see Chapter 6 for discussion of the evidence-based training requirement).

The Comprehensive Early Literacy Grant program was also created in 2012 as part of the Colorado READ Act. This fund was created primarily to provide resources through ELGs for Colorado schools and districts to

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[6]

https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/readactprofessionaldevelopmentevidenceteachertraining

implement interventions, programs, and supports specifically for K through third grade students with SRDs. Each year, approximately $38 million is appropriated to the fund, with nearly $33 million distributed directly to school districts. Schools may apply individually or as part of a consortium of schools. In order to help ensure that these funds are appropriately targeted, the state has provided districts with a list of approved, evidence-based education interventions that have been supported by the grant since 2012. Districts, in turn, are required by statute each year to provide information to CDE regarding their planned usage of funds to support students with SRDs. In 2018, House Bill 18-1393 allowed for the creation of two grant programs in addition to the original comprehensive ELG program. Sustainability Grants allow districts and schools who have completed ELG Comprehensive Grants to receive additional funding to continue their activities. Annual Professional Development grants provide funding to districts and schools to support the implementation of evidence-based reading programming and strategies.

Purpose and Organization of this Report

In this report, for the second year, the evaluation focused on describing READ Act implementation during the 2021-22 school year as well as findings related to two main topics identified in last year's report: the effectiveness of the current assessment system for READ Act purposes (Chapter 2); and how the READ Act functions for English learners (Chapter 3) and students with disabilities (Chapter 4). It also details general READ Act implementation in Chapters 5 through 8 and concludes with an analysis of student outcomes in Chapter 9.

It is also important to note several limitations regarding this year's reports. First, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, READ Act and CMAS data from the 2019-2020 school year is not available, and for the second year in a row, we were forced to conduct abbreviated, virtual site visits instead of the multi-day, in-person visits that were planned. This limited what we were able to cover during the interviews and eliminated our ability to observe the

implementation of READ Act–related instructional activities. In addition, despite multiple requests, CDE did not provide an evaluation with district-level READ Act budget data or school-level literacy curriculum data,[7] which limited our ability to present trends in READ Act spending and instructional material use. As a result, this report does not include a chapter on READ Act spending. CDE also provided student academic data late in the year and declined to provide CMAS subscores in reading, which limited our ability to conduct an in-depth analysis of the alignment between approved interim assessments and CMAS scores.

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[7] Required by the Literacy Curriculum Transparency Act

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Assessments

- **The state should define clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments at grades K-3 that align with expected and observed performance of students on third grade CMAS or other appropriate measures.**

- **Many students who do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS are not served under the current READ Act.**

The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act) requires districts to assess students in kindergarten through 3rd grade to determine reading competency levels using an assessment from a state-approved list of commercial assessments. Students who do not meet minimum skill levels are identified with a significant reading deficiency (SRD). Identified students are then given a diagnostic assessment to identify areas of need and provided with services aimed at getting them on track to reading proficiently by the end of grade 3. Each assessment vendor provides a cut score to CDE that indicates to schools using their assessments which students should be classified as having an SRD, but vendors can use different approaches to set their cut scores. Additionally, the approved assessments vary in their modes of administration, content assessed, and other characteristics.

The READ Act, as revised in 2019, requires CDE to define "sufficient … growth to standard" over time for students identified as reading below grade level or identified with an SRD. Given difference among assessments used to identify students with an SRD, one of the recommendations from a first-year READ Act evaluation report (McCrary et al., 2021) was to convene a panel of assessment experts to develop recommendations for measuring growth to standard and review the effectiveness of the assessment system for READ Act purposes.

To follow up on this recommendation, between November 2021 and May 2022, WestEd analyzed characteristics of approved READ Act interim assessments, along with score data from administration of the assessments, and met with an expert panel to discuss analyses and results. The purpose of the analyses was to examine the comparability of the assessments and their SRD cut scores and to test the feasibility of establishing a common growth scale across assessments; detailed findings from qualitative and quantitative analyses are available in separate reports. Overall, the results suggest that neither the content of the assessments nor student scores that identify students with an SRD are fully comparable. This document summarizes those findings and their implications, and offers recommendations related to developing a potential

growth-to-standard approach and for the READ Act assessment system more broadly.

Findings

Nine READ Act interim assessments were reviewed as part of WestEd's analysis of assessment characteristics; two (Star Reading and Star Early Literacy) were excluded from analyses of score data because the reported scores did not match expected scale values and analysts could not distinguish between the assessments, which include different content. Several other approved assessments (aimwebPlus Spanish, IDEL, PALS Español) were excluded from both analyses because they were only part of pilot programs and therefore not used continuously or were used by very few schools (data for approximately 50 to 500 students across the state per year). Data from school years 2014/15 to 2018/19 were included in analysis of score data.

As shown in Exhibit 3, two of the READ Act interim assessments are given to most students in the state, with 58 percent of students taking Acadience Reading and another 19 percent taking the i-Ready Diagnostic. The demographic characteristics of students taking different assessments varies. Exhibit 3 provides percentages of students with different demographic characteristics by assessment across years (2014–19) and grades (K–3). As shown, all assessments have similar percentages of special education students. However, higher percentages of White students and lower percentages of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch take Acadience Reading, aimswebPlus, FastBridge aReading, and i-Ready Diagnostic compared to other assessments. Students taking these four assessments also typically have higher 3rd grade CMAS ELA scores than students using the other interim assessments. Additionally, higher percentages of English learner (EL) students take ISIP Español, ISIP ER, and PALS than the other assessments. Not surprisingly, Spanish-language ISIP Español assessment test-takers are primarily Hispanic

EL students. However, most EL students (92%) overall are tested using an assessment in English.

Exhibit 3. Assessment Usage and Characteristics of Test-Takers

Assessment	Usage*	EL	Special Education	FRPL	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Average Grade 3 CMAS ELA Score & Percent Meeting/ Exceeding on CMAS**
Overall Sample		16%	10%	43%	3%	4%	33%	54%	
Acadience Reading	58% (n = 657,898)	12%	10%	45%	2%	3%	33%	56%	738 (39%)
aimswebPlus	0.6% (n = 6,451)	7%	9%	29%	2%	1%	17%	70%	737 (38%)
FastBridge aReading	0.5% (n = 5,911)	17%	12%	39%	0%	1%	27%	67%	743 (44%)
i-Ready Diagnostic	19% (n = 220,862)	15%	12%	30%	5%	5%	24%	60%	736 (38%)
ISIP ER	6% (n = 67,052)	24%	11%	58%	5%	13%	42%	34%	742 (45%)
ISIP Español	1% (n = 15,552)	93%	10%	89%	0%	0%	96%	4%	733 (35%)
PALS	8% (n = 94,862)	26%	11%	50%	4%	4%	43%	44%	732 (37%)

*Percent of Students Across Grades K-3 from 2014-2019 Taking This Assessment
**Average Score and Percent Meeting or Exceeding ELA Proficiency for Students Taking this Assessment

While there are commonalities between the assessments used to identify students with an SRD, there are many differences that suggest that the meaning of "significant reading deficiency" is different across the approved interim READ assessments. Exhibit 4 provides an overview of key characteristics of the assessments, including information about their stated purposes; content included; mode of administration; definition of SRD; technical characteristics; percentages of students classified as SRD on each assessment; and data on each assessment's relationship to CMAS.

Purpose. As Exhibit 4 shows, although all the READ Act interim assessments are used to identify students with significant reading deficiencies, not all were necessarily designed with this specific purpose in mind. For example, both i-Ready Diagnostic and Star Reading were originally intended to provide a measure of overall reading skill rather than focusing on students at risk of reading problems.

Content. READ Act assessments differ in the content they use to identify an SRD at each grade level and the emphases they place on different literacy areas. For example, five of the nine reviewed interim assessments (i-Ready Diagnostic, ISIP ER, ISIP Español, Star Early Literacy, and Star Reading) test vocabulary at kindergarten through grade 3, while other assessments test vocabulary only at a subset of grade levels. One assessment (Acadience Reading) does not assess vocabulary at any grade level. Five of the nine reviewed interim assessments (FastBridge aReading, i-Ready Diagnostic, ISIP ER, ISIP Español, and Star Reading) test skills associated with comprehension (listening or reading) across all grade levels. Four assessments (Acadience Reading, aimswebPlus, PALS, and CMAS ELA) use comprehension items only in the identification of an SRD at grade 2 and/or grade 3, and Star Early Literacy tests skills associated with comprehension at grade 1.

Exhibit 4. Summary of Findings

Assessment	Purpose Explicitly Claims to Identify Students "At Risk"?	Content Vendor-Identified Assessed Colorado READ Act Literacy Areas*	Administration Mode of Administration and Response Method	SRD Score Definition SRD Cut Score Interpretation	Technical Characteristics Validity, Reliability, Fairness	Percent SRD Ever Classified as SRD	Relationship to CMAS Correlation of Grade 3 Interim Assessment Scores to CMAS	% SRD and not SRD in Grade 3 Meeting CMAS Standards	Equipercentile Equivalent CMAS Scores for Spring SRD Identification
Acadience Reading	yes	PA, PH, F, C	paper-pencil with mostly verbal responses	10%-20% chance of meeting later benchmarks on this assessment	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: partially meets	20%	0.76	Not SRD: 45% SRD: 6%	696
aimswebPlus	yes	PA, PH, F	paper-pencil with mostly verbal responses	At or below 10th percentile	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: fully meets	17%	0.72	Not SRD: 50% SRD: 3%	699
FastBridge aReading	yes	PA, PH, V, C	online with selected responses	At or below 15th percentile	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: partially meets	16%	0.83	Not SRD: 47%: SRD: 0%	700
i-Ready Diagnostic	no	PA, PH, V, C	online with selected or created responses	More than one grade below grade level	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: fully meets	18%	0.83	Not SRD: 54% SRD: 0.4%	701

	Purpose	**Content**	**Administration**	**SRD Score Definition**	**Technical Characteristics**	**Percent SRD**	**Relationship to CMAS**		
Assessment	**Explicitly Claims to Identify Students "At Risk"?**	**Vendor-Identified Assessed Colorado READ Act Literacy Areas***	**Mode of Administration and Response Method**	**SRD Cut Score Interpretation**	**Validity, Reliability, Fairness**	**Ever Classified as SRD**	**Correlation of Grade 3 Interim Assessment Scores to CMAS**	**% SRD and not SRD in Grade 3 Meeting CMAS Standards**	**Equipercentile Equivalent CMAS Scores for Spring SRD Identification**
ISIP ER	yes	PA, PH, V, F, C	online with selected or created responses	At or below 20th percentile	Validity: partially meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: does not meet	21%	0.78	Not SRD: 41% SRD: 0.3%	686
ISIP Español	yes	PA, V, F, C	online with selected or created responses	At or below 20th percentile	Validity: partially meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: does not meet	19%	*	*	*
PALS	yes	PA	paper-pencil with mostly verbal responses	At or below 25th percentile	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: partially meets	24%	0.66	Not SRD: 43% SRD: 1%	698
Star Early Literacy	yes	PA, PH, V, C	online with selected responses	At or below 25th percentile	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: fully meets	**	**	**	**

| Assessment | Purpose | Content | Administration | SRD Score Definition | Technical Characteristics | Percent SRD | Relationship to CMAS | | |
	Explicitly Claims to Identify Students "At Risk"?	Vendor-Identified Assessed Colorado READ Act Literacy Areas*	Mode of Administration and Response Method	SRD Cut Score Interpretation	Validity, Reliability, Fairness	Ever Classified as SRD	Correlation of Grade 3 Interim Assessment Scores to CMAS	% SRD and not SRD in Grade 3 Meeting CMAS Standards	Equipercentile Equivalent CMAS Scores for Spring SRD Identification
Star Reading	no	V, C	online with selected responses	At or below 25th percentile	Validity: fully meets Reliability: fully meets Fairness: fully meets	**	**	**	**

*A very small number of students taking ISIP Español took CMAS in English (n=149), about 4% of ISIP Español test-takers.

**STAR assessments were excluded from analysis of score data.

The assessments also differ in the ways they describe and assess the READ Act literacy areas. For example, the READ Act requires the assessment of phonemic awareness. Three assessments (aimswebPlus, i-Ready Diagnostic, and PALS) describe their assessments as measuring phonological awareness instead of, or alongside, phonemic awareness. Acadience Reading and aimswebPlus assess reading fluency directly by having students read aloud with an assessor counting the number of words read correctly, while ISIP ER and ISIP Español assess fluency online through a task in which every fifth or sixth word of a text is left blank and students choose from three options to fill in each blank. Similar fill-in-the-blank tasks are used in several other assessments as a measure of comprehension. As a result of these differences, the meaning of the SRD designation can vary across assessments.

Administration. Three of the reviewed READ Act interim assessments (Acadience Reading, aimswebPlus, and PALS) are administered individually or in small groups by an assessor, while the other assessments (FastBridge aReading, i-Ready Diagnostic, ISIP ER, ISIP Español, Star Early Literacy, Star Reading) are administered online. The assessments administered by an assessor have items presented orally or via a paper form, and students respond aloud or write, depending on the measure being administered. For the online interim assessments, students select answers or move objects on a screen to respond. For some items, students listen to instructions or other text being read aloud and select a response; for other items, students read text presented onscreen and select a response. The online interim assessments use computer adaptive testing (CAT) algorithms that assign different items to students based on their performance. FastBridge aReading assigns items to students considering only item difficulty (not content), while five assessments (i-Ready Diagnostic, ISIP ER, ISIP Español, Star Early Literacy, and Star Reading) administer items using item difficulty in conjunction with content domains.

Assessments administered by an assessor are fixed-form assessments in which all students are administered the same test items.

Technical characteristics. A prior review of interim assessment technical characteristics (Friedrich et al., 2020) found that all but two reviewed assessments (ISIP ER and ISIP Español) fully met validity criteria and all met reliability criteria. However, five of the nine assessments did not fully meet fairness criteria, indicating that evidence was not available about how well the assessments function across different groups of students.

SRD Score Definition. Seven of the nine interim assessments established the cut score used to identify SRD based on normative performance ranging from the 10th percentile to the 25th percentile. Acadience Reading set its cut score based on likelihood of future reading achievement within the Acadience Reading assessment, and i-Ready Diagnostic established its cut score using a criterion-based method. According to some vendors, performance at or below the provided SRD cut score is performance below or far-below grade-level expectations; to others, this performance is linked to a risk of end-of-year reading deficits; and still to others, this performance is indicative of a need for reading intervention.

Relationship to CMAS ELA. Ultimately, CDE hopes to use information from the interim assessments to examine the extent to which students are growing towards becoming proficient readers (as measured by the CMAS ELA assessment in the 3rd grade). Therefore, additional analysis focused on how well the interim assessments map to CMAS and how their SRD cut scores compare to CMAS and to one another. All READ Act interim assessments reviewed were moderately or strongly correlated with CMAS ELA scores; meaning, performance on the interim assessments is at least somewhat predictive of performance on CMAS. The i-Ready Diagnostic and FastBridge aReading have the strongest relationships with CMAS ($r = 0.83$) and PALS has the weakest ($r = 0.66$). Of the assessments administered in English, the three assessments most highly correlated with

CMAS are administered online (i-Ready Diagnostic, FastBridge aReading, and ISIP ER), while the three assessments with the weakest correlations with CMAS are administered via paper and pencil (Acadience Reading, aimswebPlus, and PALS).

Across all assessments, nearly all of the students (98%) classified as having an SRD in the 3rd grade score below proficiency on CMAS (i.e., failed to meet expectations). However, the majority of students classified as not having an SRD (53%) also failed to demonstrate proficiency on CMAS by the end of 3rd grade. This number includes a large percentage of students who score above the SRD cut score (and consequently may not receive READ Act services) but who also score below grade-level expectations. Data also show that classification consistency (i.e., how well being identified as SRD corresponds to CMAS performance) is generally lower for students in specific demographic subgroups. Additionally, different assessments may classify students as SRD from some subgroups, such as students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, at different rates.

Although vendors used different approaches to setting their SRD cut scores, using an equipercentile approach to placing SRD cut scores on the CMAS scale shows that the SRD cut scores are relatively similar across assessments and generally cluster around a value of 700, the CMAS Partially Met Expectations cut score (see Exhibit 5).[8]

That is, students identified as SRD are scoring at least 50 points and about two performance levels below the CMAS Met Expectations cut score of 750. A sample growth-to-standard projection model estimated to test the feasibility of such an approach shows that students who are classified as having an SRD at any grade level are unlikely to grow sufficiently to be proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade, as measured by the CMAS exam. However, it does appear that students identified as SRD are

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[8] In the equipercentile approach, SRD cut scores are applied to the CMAS distribution (e.g., if the SRD cut score is the 15th percentile, the 15th percentile of the CMAS distribution is the equipercentile CMAS equivalent to that SRD cut score).

experiencing growth as measured by increasing percentages of students exceeding predicted cut scores corresponding to the Partially Met Expectations and Approached Expectations performance levels.

Exhibit 5. Equipercentile Linking of Interim Assessment Scores to CMAS Scores (3rd Grade)

Recommendations Based on Findings

This next section uses information from the analyses to suggest areas for CDE to consider in its future READ Act interim assessment-related work.

Assessment Selection

The READ Act requires that assessments approved for use in meeting READ Act requirements be vetted by an external organization and that a new approval process take place every few years. An initial set of assessments was approved in 2013 and a new approval process will take place in 2022. Based on analyses of currently approved assessments and their data, the following section provides recommendations related to potential future assessment selection criteria and processes.

Consistency in SRD Identification Across Assessments. The READ Act's approach to early reading is grounded in a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework, in which scores are used to identify students with significant reading deficiencies, so that additional resources and supports can be provided for these students through a READ Act plan. However, results of the qualitative analysis of the interim assessments show that the ways in which students are identified as having an SRD across assessments differ. The content used to assess students to determine if they should be classified as having an SRD can differ, the manner in which students are assessed can differ, and the method used to establish a cut score that identifies a student as having an SRD can differ. Results of the quantitative analyses show that SRD cut scores, when mapped onto a common scale (grade 3 CMAS ELA) using equipercentile linking, appear to be similar. However, further analysis matching students across assessments shows that SRD cut scores may operate differently for different groups of students—specifically, they are less precise for students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch, EL students, and American Indian, Hispanic. and Black students. If an important goal for CDE is to ensure that SRD determinations are consistent across students in the state, then a different approach to selecting interim assessments may be needed, such as selecting fewer assessments that are similar in their content or administration mode; selecting assessments that define SRD in similar ways; and/or considering evidence on how the assessments function for different subgroups of students. Additionally, some assessments (e.g., Fastbridge aReading) are used in very small numbers of schools, and the state may wish to consider current usage in conjunction with other criteria in its approval processes.

Situating all READ Act Assessments in an MTSS Framework. The READ Act's MTSS-type approach to early reading includes universal screening of all students through interim assessments, followed by additional diagnostic assessments to determine the specific needs of

students identified during initial screening as in need of additional support. Given that approach, CDE should consider reviewing and approving interim and diagnostic assessments together and approving "sets" of assessments that can meet both purposes. Some of the assessments approved for interim and diagnostic use, in fact, are the same (e.g., i-Ready Diagnostic). The state may wish to consider whether different criteria should be applied to assessments to be used for interim and diagnostic use. Rather than using a generic rubric about assessment quality, the state should consider a rubric more focused on the use of the assessments in an MTSS framework, such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention rubrics. In particular, the state may wish to keep in mind criteria for universal screening related to "practicality," which is about who can administer the tests and how long they take. Even more important than selection of assessments, according to MTSS framework criteria, is how data resulting from their administrations are used and how the assessments and their data align to approved instructional and intervention programs. The state's rules note that: "The list of evidence-based or scientifically-based instructional programming and supporting technologies, including software, for assessing and monitoring student progress must be aligned with the recommended reading assessments."

CDE could also consider an approval process that includes assessment and instructional materials. As with diagnostic assessments, some approved interim assessments are part of an instructional program to which student performance is connected in score reports (e.g., i-Ready Diagnostic, ISIP ER, ISIP Español). Assessment vendors could support this process by providing specific information about what scores they provide in each READ Act literacy area and describing how they could be used to determine next steps in those areas. This approach would also require application of a common definition of each literacy area by the vendors. The state could then consider developing guidance for districts on ways the instructional programs and assessments can best operate as a system.

Guidance could address questions such as: what data do I get from a given diagnostic assessment and how might that lead to choice of a particular intervention, or implementation of which instructional program follows best from reported student performance on an approved interim assessment?

Meeting READ Act Goals From a Content Point of View. Because different assessment vendors define and measure literacy areas differently, it is not easy to compare them accurately to one another or to READ Act requirements. That is, content described as "phonics" for one assessment may be described as a different literacy area (or no READ Act literacy area) for another assessment. Further, how each literacy area is assessed in practice can look very different across assessments, especially when student response mode varies (e.g., verbally responding to items versus selecting responses on a computer). To better facilitate consideration of how well assessments align to literacy areas required for assessment by the READ Act and to allow comparisons across assessments, we suggest CDE consider requesting several specific types of information from vendors, including:

A map of assessment content to the READ Act minimum competencies for each grade level and administration time period (fall, winter, spring)—more specifically, information about numbers of items and points associated with READ Act minimum competency areas, so the state can weigh how well each assessment's content represents the READ Act literacy areas, and a description or sample items that illustrate how the competency is addressed. As an example, a minimum competency standard at kindergarten is: "Identify and produce groups of words that begin with the same sound (alliteration)." Asking vendors to explain how their assessment addresses this minimum competency standard will allow CDE to consider not only the content assessed by each assessment, but also the ways in which the content is assessed.

A specific description of what SRD—connected to the READ Act definition of SRD—and "fall reading competency" means for each

assessment. Additionally, documentation about why each cut score is appropriate for its intended use, and a description of how and why cut scores changed from previous years for assessments that were previously approved would be useful. The state should also collect fall and spring grade-level benchmark scores from vendors (currently, only fall "competency" benchmarks are collected, and not all are available on the CDE website). Collecting this information from each vendor will allow the state to use the vendor's own information to assess student growth toward proficiency. Finally, the state may also wish to consider asking vendors to commit to developing predictive validity studies specific to Colorado's SRD classifications and performance on CMAS ELA.

Specific information about how any expected dyslexia identification criteria are met in each assessment. Such information will facilitate the state's move toward incorporating consideration of identification with READ Act assessments.

Spanish-Language Assessments. The READ Act requires that some interim assessments be available in Spanish, and previous criteria for approval of Spanish-language assessments do include some additional criteria for these assessments. They sought documentation "that the test specifically identifies students with a '*significant reading deficiency*' in their native language (i.e., test developers consider what constitutes a proficient reader in the target language rather than directly translating the measures of a proficient reader in English into the target language." Yet, the READ Act does not define what minimum competency might look like in Spanish, so it is unclear how these criteria should be met. Review of currently approved Spanish-language assessments, for example, shows that they include additional content (e.g., use of accents) and necessarily address other content differently (e.g., letter sounds). The definition of a significant reading deficiency in Spanish may also need to be different than the READ Act definition, which was developed for literacy skills in English. Finally, many students who take Spanish-language READ Act assessments also

take the Colorado Spanish Language Arts assessment (CSLA) rather than the English language Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). CDE may, therefore, wish to consider how Spanish-language READ Act interim assessments and their SRD cut scores relate specifically to the CSLA. As a starting point, CDE should consider approval criteria that reflect how Spanish-language assessments would be used in Colorado. For example, it should be defined for vendors which students in which types of instructional programs should take the Spanish-language assessments, and then requiring evidence from vendors about the validity and reliability of their assessments when used with the types of students who would be taking them in Colorado. More broadly, CDE may wish to consider how READ Act definitions and competencies apply to reading skill development in Spanish.

Relationship of READ Act Assessments to READ Act Policy Goals

The purpose of the Colorado READ Act, as defined in legislation, is to "provide students with the necessary supports they need to be able to read with proficiency by third grade so that their academic growth and achievement is not hindered by low literacy skills in fourth grade and beyond." The legislation requires some specific actions, such as assessing students each year, and offers definitions of SRD and "reading competency." The legislation, however, does not describe how all the various required actions and definitions might work together to achieve intended outcomes. Better specifying the mechanisms by which required actions—such as assessing students—are intended to lead to desired outcomes and clarifying those desired outcomes themselves will be important to determining how READ Act assessments can best support policy goals. This section offers suggestions for areas of additional policy discussion and refinement related to READ Act assessments.

Identification of Students With SRD. While schools are permitted to use a body-of-evidence approach to determine SRD classifications,

WestEd's analyses showed that school-provided SRD classifications for students nearly always matched the SRD classification that students would have received based solely on their READ Act interim assessment score. Therefore, should CDE wish to use the interim assessment scores themselves as a proxy for SRD classifications in future analyses (for example, in developing a growth-to-proficiency model), this method will work. However, if CDE's intent in allowing for the body-of-evidence approach is for schools to use multiple data points in making SRD determinations, schools may need more guidance or support in using additional data (or additional research into how schools apply a body-of-evidence approach may be needed).

Evaluating Effectiveness of READ Act. The revised READ Act of 2019 required CDE to engage an independent evaluator to describe "… effective processes, procedures, methods, and strategies used by local education providers … achieving significant academic growth to standard in reading for students identified as having significant reading deficiencies and as reading below grade level." Indeed, it is this requirement to develop an approach to measuring growth to standard for purposes of evaluating READ Act effectiveness that motivated WestEd's analyses of READ Act assessments and scores. Results of that work show that a single growth-to-standard model using equated READ Act assessment scores may not be possible. However, collecting additional READ Act assessment data might support this goal. Currently, CDE collects only one interim assessment score per student per year. Collecting multiple scores within the year (at least fall and spring, and potentially fall, winter, and spring) would enable comparisons of student progress within schools and districts using the same READ Act interim assessments without necessitating direct comparisons across assessments.[9] Rigorous evaluation methods intended

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[9] Such an approach would also, however, require interim assessments whose scales allow for meaningful measurement of growth and a way to interpret that growth. Such criteria would need to be included in an assessment selection process.

to provide causal evidence about which districts, schools, or programs are showing success could be carried out with such data.

Defining "Reading Competency" as Measured by CMAS. The READ Act defines "reading competency" as "a student meets the grade-level expectations in reading adopted by the state board." Given that the state's measure of whether students are meeting grade-level expectations in Grade 3 is the CMAS, this definition would suggest that the READ Act aims for students to meet or exceed expectations on CMAS. However, CMAS is a measure of the state's academic standards in English Language Arts, not just reading. CMAS measures reading, writing, and use of language. READ Act interim assessments tend to focus (particularly at the early grades) on specific foundational reading skills and behaviors, as described in the READ Act itself. A question for CDE to consider is whether the outcomes of the READ Act should be measured in terms of overall CMAS performance or a narrower construct of reading represented by CMAS reading subscores. Reading subscore data were unavailable for WestEd's analyses; so, it was not possible to evaluate whether a stronger relationship between READ Act assessments and CMAS reading subscores might be observed than between READ Act assessments and CMAS scores overall, or whether a subscore might increase error because it was based on fewer items. Another question (see the following section on growth to standard) is whether or not proficiency on the CMAS represents an attainable standard. Setting benchmarks for growth for students in grades K-3 through the READ Act should take into account both the specific skills and knowledge needed at the end of grade 3 as well as observed student performance on CMAS.

READ Act Activities and Goals. The READ Act, as implemented, includes some activities aimed at all students (e.g., requirements for training for teachers) and some activities aimed only at some students (e.g., additional funds and READ Act plans for students identified as having an SRD). Results of analysis show that there are many students who are not

classified as SRD, and therefore not receiving additional READ Act resources or plans, but who **also** do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam. Additionally, the equipercentile equivalent CMAS scores that corresponded to the SRD cut score of each assessment clustered around the Partially Met Expectations CMAS performance level (two levels below proficiency). This result may suggest a need for additional supports, not just for students identified as SRD, but for other students as well. More broadly, an expected outcome of proficiency on the CMAS grade 3 exam appears to be at odds with the use of assessments to identify only students most "at risk" (in this case, those identified as having an SRD). If the intended outcome of use of the READ Act assessments is that more students are proficient at grade 3, this goal should be operationalized through a theory of action that describes how use of the data and other activities will lead to this outcome for students at **all levels of interim assessment** performance.

Development of an Approach for Measuring Growth to Standard

As noted, the revised READ Act (2019) charged CDE with defining growth to standard for students reading below grade level or identified with an SRD. As part of the analysis of READ Act score data, WestEd tested several approaches to developing a model for measuring student progress toward meeting state standards. Results of this analysis form the basis of recommendations and considerations for future work in this area.

Utility of Growth-to-Standard Measures. The READ Act describes sufficient growth for students found to be "at risk" (either identified as having an SRD or reading below grade level) as putting them on a path to "adequately demonstrating proficiency by the end of third grade." Assuming that "adequately demonstrating proficiency by the end of third grade" means performing at least at the Met Expectations performance level on the grade 3 CMAS ELA assessment, a growth metric that uses this standard as the desired outcome is unlikely to provide much useful information. Results from analysis of data from 2014/15 through 2018/19 show that less than

two percent of students identified as SRD in grade 3 met expectations on the grade 3 CMAS exam. Further, only 47 percent of students who are **not** classified as having an SRD in grade 3 met CMAS expectations. Therefore, while the results of analysis show that it is technically feasible to create a relatively accurate growth-to-standard proficiency model, creating such a model for students identified as SRD is unlikely to provide useful information. That is, measuring whether or not students identified as SRD make sufficient progress from year to year to get on a path towards proficiency will likely simply tell us that they do not. Nor do students "reading below grade level." Choosing a different outcome (such as reducing the numbers of students identified over time as SRD or having SRD students move toward proficiency without having to reach it by grade 3) or extending the timeframe to meet the target might create more feasible expectations without significant additional supports for students.

Furthermore, results in this report show that it will likely not be possible to create a single growth-to-standard model including all assessments together. Should CDE wish to measure growth toward proficiency for students identified as having a SRD using interim assessment scores, it will likely be necessary to carry out analyses separately for each assessment, since results of the matched sampling, along with the qualitative results, suggest it is not appropriate to put all assessments on a single scale.

If the goal of a growth-to-standard model is to help identify whether READ Act SRD interventions (or READ Act activities, more broadly) are "working" by showing students' learning progress toward proficiency, a single model may not be possible. However, collecting additional data might support this goal. Currently, CDE collects only one interim assessment score per student per year. Collecting multiple scores within the year would enable comparisons of student progress within schools and districts using the same READ Act interim assessments without necessitating direct comparisons across assessments. Such an approach would, however,

require interim assessments with scales that allow for meaningful measurement of growth and a way to interpret that growth, whether this is linked to CMAS performance or not.

Improving Quality and Utility of READ Act Assessment Data

Analysis of READ Act interim assessment scores revealed some challenges with the data itself as currently collect. This section provides recommendations related to improving the quality and utility of future READ Act assessment data.

Consider Trying to Collect Data Directly from Vendors. CDE currently collects assessment score data from districts. Analysis suggests that in some cases, districts are reporting inaccurately (for example, including incorrect scales). To standardize the reporting of data, CDE could consider developing agreements with vendors and districts to collect READ Act assessment data directly from vendors themselves. Collecting data directly from vendors would necessitate working through issues related to student identifiers and privacy, but in the longer term, it might benefit both districts and CDE by reducing burden on districts and improving quality and consistency of data received by CDE. At minimum, CDE should create a template for vendors to report minimum and maximum scores for its assessments for each year they are approved for use and collect these data. This information will better enable CDE and other data users to verify the scores reported.

Clarify Data Collection Layouts and Other District Guidance. Assuming CDE is not able to collect assessment data from vendors, some changes to the data layouts provided to districts to guide their reporting could improve the consistency and quality of data. These changes include:

- **Dates and fall scores.** Specify that scores from fall assessments (for students who did not test in the spring because they showed grade-level competency in the fall)

should be reported, along with dates reflecting a fall administration. Reported dates in current data appear to all be spring dates, which may be accurate if districts are testing all students in the spring, but adding guidance on how to handle cases of fall-only testing for students might ensure that all data reported are accurately tied to a time period.

- **Scores used to determine SRD.** If a composite score is used for SRD identification purposes, that score should be collected; where subscores are used, those should be collected. To ensure districts provide the score used to determine SRD, improve the data collection layout documentation to make the description of scores needed more prominent.

- **Language of instruction.** Collect info (or map to info the state already has) on language of reading instruction to provide context to interpret performance of EL students.

- **Star Early Learning.** The currently approved Star Early Learning assessment consists of two separate assessments—Star Early Literacy and Star Reading (with Star Early Literacy targeting younger students who are beginning readers and Star Reading targeting more independent readers, typically with a transition between tests around grade 2). However, in the current data collection, results from these products are combined. Given that the assessments test different content, CDE should consider collecting scores separately for each test. In addition, there are different (and numerically overlapping) reporting scales available for Star assessments, and the scores in the current READ Act data may include different scales for the same assessments. Making information about which scale to include more

prominent in data layout documentation might help prevent such situations in the future.

- **Information on SRD cut scores.** Each assessment provides SRD cut scores to CDE, which posts them on its website. However, for at least one assessment, scores on the CDE website do not specify exactly how to apply the cut score (i.e., should students at the cut score be considered as meeting the SRD criteria, or not?). Additionally, to enable analyses over time, CDE should maintain a list of historical cut scores for each year an assessment is approved.

Collect multiple scores within a year. As noted, CDE currently collects only a single score per year per student. For the purposes of measuring growth and potentially evaluating effectiveness of READ Act activities, CDE might wish to consider collecting fall and spring scores (and winter, where available). Collecting multiple scores might also improve the utility of the scores overall, as CDE would be able to conduct additional analyses examining trends in early literacy attainment; for example, CDE would be able to examine how proportions of students meeting (or not meeting) benchmarks compare across grades and time periods. These trends could then inform decisions.

Addressing the Needs of English Learners

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- **Site visit districts and schools reported that state guidance on serving students learning English under the READ Act was vague.**

- **Site visit districts and schools reported that communication with parents and guardians was a challenge.**

- **Due to the number of students that migrate to the state without prior instruction or exposure to the English language, educators struggled to properly identify the source of reading challenges and provide appropriate supports.**

Site visit participants consistently indicated that state guidance on serving English learners under the READ Act was unclear. Schools and districts developed their own guidelines on how to provide services to this student population. As a result, there was a lack of alignment with the guidance provided by the state. Furthermore, over 45 percent of participants (n = 51) responding to the LEP inventory indicated that there were no LEP policies guiding EL instruction with respect to developing, implementing, and monitoring READ Plans.

While some districts did have explicit policies that outlined the READ Act and EL instructional practices, many did not. Site visit participants indicated a wide variety of approaches to addressing the lapse in guidance. One district explained that they developed a consent decree policy to guide how multilingual learners were supported. This policy was used in conjunction with a policy ensuring Spanish parity as well as a collaborative community-based model that provided guidance to the district on available resources.

Similarly, in terms of READ Plan implementation, there was significant variation in how site visit schools addressed the needs of EL students. Several schools with larger percentages of EL students used dual-language approaches where K through third grade instruction was provided through either an English or Spanish track for students. Schools also adopted a "co-teaching" model where EL-certified teachers in the district co-planned lessons with classroom teachers and supported classroom instruction. For schools with smaller EL populations, EL students tended to participate in the Tier 1 literacy block with their English-speaking peers. In some cases, an EL aide was present during at least part of this Tier 1 time to help support EL students. In other cases, the primary EL support was delivered by an EL specialist, while Tier 2 services were provided outside of the classroom.

Site visit participants reported that their core and supplemental literacy materials lack appropriate supports for EL students and voiced

concerns that there is an insufficient selection of materials on the state's approved lists targeted specifically to EL student needs. Similarly, site visit participants highlighted the lack of approved assessments that are tailored to meet the needs of EL students, and to support identification of SRD status for students whose primary language is not English which limited educator capacity to correctly diagnose and address the literacy needs of K-3 EL students.

According to the statewide school inventory, 29 percent of teachers (n = 71) felt either underprepared or very unprepared to support EL students who were also identified as having SRDs.[10] Further, many schools were not equipped with cultural and linguistically diverse learning models, teachers who had experience in dual language instruction, or dedicated, certified EL staff. In line with the findings from last year's report, schools and districts continued to request additional guidance about identification procedures for English learners – that is, when it was appropriate to identify an EL student with an SRD and how to correctly attribute challenges with reading to either language unfamiliarity or reading deficiencies. Furthermore, schools and districts reported that they needed better understandings of how to address the needs of EL students identified as having SRDs. Currently, schools use dual language approaches, co-teaching models, and other strategies to serve EL students. Site visit participants indicated that explicit guidance on developing, implementing, and monitoring READ Plans would be valuable.

Site visit participants reported that SRD identification and READ Plan development processes vary. Although CDE guidance requires that schools use a body of evidence, schools and districts generally developed their own

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[10] The Year 1 READ Act Evaluation Materials Summary report found that none of the professional development programs on the advisory lists had an EL focus. However, five of the six programs in the review showed evidence that the program supported teaching multilingual or English learner students. See pages 80-81 https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/readactevaluationmaterialsummary

approaches to determine EL classifications. Tools such as assessments, parent surveys, and geographic origin were used to inform SRD identification and the READ Plan development processes. Several school leaders indicated that they received minimal district guidance on how to assess the reading needs of EL students. As one school leader stated, "The only guidance we have from the district is that if a student is new to the country, they should be placed on a READ Plan for a year. That is the guidance that we follow, as we have a decent amount of newcomers every year to the country. Other than that, it is difficult." Another school leader specified that English learners often have two separate plans: an EL plan and a READ Plan.

A positive READ Act outcome related to EL instruction was dual immersion. One school leader noted that in bilingual classrooms, students were learning how to read and use both languages simultaneously. The leader asserted that this approach empowered students to become more confident and comfortable reading in English.

Challenges

Site visit districts and schools reported that supporting students identified as not English proficient (NEP) was a significant challenge. Due to the number of students that migrated to the state without prior instruction or exposure to the English language, educators struggled to provide personalized instruction to students who needed individualized assistance. As one school leader asserted, "the READ Act wasn't implemented or designed for students that speak different languages other than English. And so, that is a big challenge in our dual-language classrooms or full-immersion classrooms. Sometimes we have to sort of come up with our own policy as a district on how we handle certain language situations."

Further, site visit districts and schools indicated that a disconnect exists between EL and general education instruction. As one school leader shared, "I've also heard a lot of feedback across the system saying there's

not alignment between ELD [English Language Development] core resources and our general education core resources. So, some of our language acquisition learners are receiving two completely different cores that don't align." Along the same lines, another school leader stated, "there's disconnect from the grade level teacher to the CLD [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] teacher. There's no communication as far as strategies to support [students]."

Communication with the families of EL students was frequently cited as a challenge amongst school leaders. Language barriers interfered with faculty maintaining consistent, effective communication as schools often lacked bilingual (English/Spanish) faculty as well as a distinct lack of staff that speak foreign languages other than Spanish. In response, some schools and districts utilized the assistance of community liaisons who served as translators to bridge the gaps in communication.

Additionally, site visit participants described the lack of communication with families as an equity issue. Schools that did not have established relationships with community liaisons often did not have the means to effectively communicate challenges and concerns with parents. As a result, families lacked the ability to advocate for their children, and students lacked the resources they needed to be successful. However, one school leader noted an increase in family involvement since the COVID-19 pandemic and cited this as a success when asked about successes in teaching reading to English learners. Another school leader highlighted partnering with communities and celebrating their culture as a success brought about as a result of the READ Act.

Another challenge raised by LEPs and schools was concern over improperly diagnosing EL students as having SRDs. School leaders in these districts reported that students whose primary language is not English may struggle to read not because they have an SRD but because they are attempting to read in a language that is not spoken regularly at home. These leaders indicated treating EL students the same as native English

speakers for purposes of the READ Act can trigger a demoralizing and counterproductive process for students, their parents, and their teachers. This is because the SRD designation was viewed by some students and their families as a stigma.

While school and district leaders struggled with giving SRD designations to EL students whose reading challenges were language-based, school leaders also indicated the need for additional approved tools to assess students in their native languages. In reference to assessments, one school leader stated, "I think another barrier with the [READ Act] is, or what we've experienced, is inequitable access to assessments and resources or programming… we have been really struggling with our dual language students and trying to find assessments that meet their needs." The lack of appropriate tools contributed to the challenges schools cited when trying to exit EL students off of READ Plans and SRD status.

Site visit districts and schools also indicated that they often struggled to differentiate between EL students and students with disability classifications. This was especially true for schools that lacked faculty who felt prepared to serve English learners. Specific guidance, training or support provided by the State could help enable schools to ensure that EL students are not misclassified or double-classified as having learning disabilities.

4

Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities

- The majority of LEPs responding to the inventory indicated that there were specific district policies with respect to developing, implementing, and monitoring plans for children with multiple identifications. However, there was interest in more precise guidance on addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities.

- Site visit districts and schools reported that parents and guardians were aware of the READ Act. However, many parents did not fully understand how the READ Act was being implemented.

- The most commonly cited challenge related to serving students with disabilities was the lack of available resources such as sufficient instructional time, appropriate staffing, and specific guidance.

At the majority of the sites visited, participants indicated that they had received written guidance on serving students with disabilities from their local districts. Approximately 56 percent of districts (n = 67) responding to the inventory reported that they had policies with respect to developing, implementing, and monitoring plans for children with multiple identifications. However, the remaining school leaders expressed an interest in having explicit guidance on addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities. Site visit districts and schools noted that the current state of guidance was not useful.

Site visit districts and schools reported that parents and guardians were aware of the READ Act because the materials aligned with their students' IEPs. Generally, teachers meet with parents in person or virtually via Zoom to discuss their student's READ Plans. However, many parents did not fully understand what the Read Act was or how it was being implemented. Additionally, school leaders indicated that parents did not always voice their concerns regarding READ Plan implementation. As a result, school leaders feared that parental concerns were not being heard.

School leaders indicated that when students have IEPs with reading goals and then are then identified as having an SRD, they defer to the reading goals on the IEP. Although this is a standard practice across districts and schools, several school leaders suggested eliminating READ Plans for students with IEPs with reading goals, noting that they do not want to duplicate existing IEP reading goals with a whole other time-consuming document. As one school leader shared, "the biggest challenge is honestly for the Special Education teachers – they've already got this IEP document, and that's really important. And then they have to create another document that's also important. But it's the same thing, right? So, there's a lot of pushback on, how much paperwork can I do in a day? Why can't the IEP just supersede the READ Act?". Specific state guidance on this issue, especially for IEPs that already have reading goals, may help remedy this issue amongst school faculty and staff.

Several schools and districts cited the READ Act and, in particular, increased instructional time as particularly impactful for students with IEPs. One school leader noted that their students have benefitted from the 90-minute core reading block as well as designated time for pull-out intervention services. This was noted as a benefit for students with disabilities as it allowed for dedicated instructional time for these students to receive an individual focus.

Generally, site visit LEPs and schools reported that students with disabilities take the same assessments as students who are not classified as having a disability. However, exceptions were made for students who were non-verbal or had classifications like intellectual disabilities and were eligible to take alternate assessments. LEPs and schools used assessments to inform the SRD determination process and monitor progress.

Challenges

The most commonly cited challenge related to serving students with disabilities under the READ Act was a lack of available resources, such as a lack of sufficient instructional time, appropriate staffing, and implementation guidance . Teachers indicated that they often lacked the time necessary to effectively enact all aspects of the READ Plan. School leaders indicated that READ Plan development was time-consuming and took valuable instructional time away from teachers and students.

Many schools lacked the staff to address the needs of students with disabilities under the READ Act and, as a result, reported that READ Plan implementation was not effectively executed. This was especially true for schools with smaller populations of students with disabilities. While some schools had full special education teams, including special education teachers, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and other service providers who could support students' learning and development, other schools struggled to hire and retain faculty who were certified to teach special education.

As indicated above, teacher training was another challenge identified by school leaders. According to the statewide school inventory, 30 percent of teachers (n = 73) felt either underprepared or unprepared to support students with IEPs who also had SRDs. As one teacher shared, "Well…coming back to that lack of knowledge of the [READ] Act …, I would love to know what the state's vision or understanding of how READ Plans and IEPs should or shouldn't work together and what the relationship there is. Because I don't understand it at all." Specific teacher training explaining the functionality and application of the READ Act may improve the implementation process and benefit student instruction.

Additionally, school leaders indicated a need for clarity surrounding which student plans superseded others. With specific regard to students who had multiple plans, one teacher asserted, "a student might have an EL plan, an ESS plan or an IEP, and a READ Plan. And so, I think continuing to develop clarity around the expectations and how those plans work together and which one might take precedent, and where those goals within those plans can fit [would be helpful]." Lastly, school leaders identified challenges with assessments for students with disabilities. School leaders indicated that detailed guidance is needed to clarify exit criteria for students with disabilities to test out of SRD status.

5

Overall Approaches to Reading

- There was interest in aligning reading materials and approaches both across and within schools. This move towards consistency was balanced by a need for some flexibility at the school and classroom level to address varying student populations and local context.

- Site visit districts and schools reported that the advisory lists allowed for a more streamlined approach to teaching reading that is based on the science of reading. In line with last year's report, there is still frustration with materials coming off the advisory list.

- The most cited challenge with regard to reading approach was finding enough instructional time for supplemental and intervention programs. This was especially true for districts with staffing shortages, shorter weeks or days, and large numbers of students identified with significant reading deficiencies.

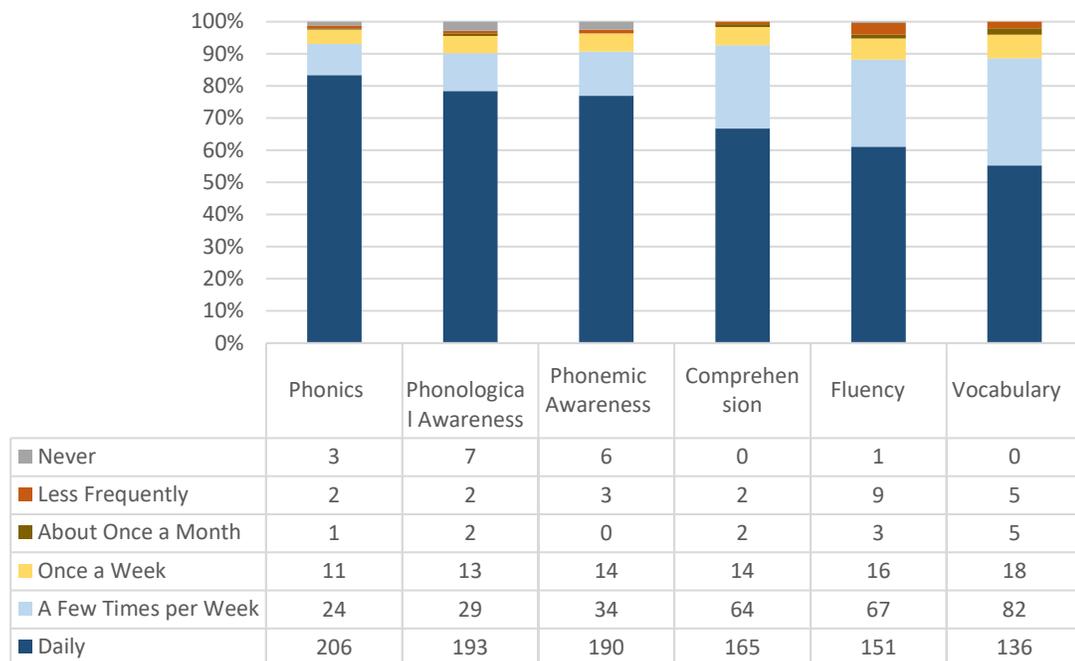## Continued Shift to a Science of Reading Approach

Similar to findings from last year's evaluation report, LEPs and schools reported that the READ Act has resulted in a shift towards utilizing reading approaches and instructional materials that are based on the science of reading. Districts participating in the site visits indicated that the law's emphasis on the science of reading and the Advisory List of Instructional Programming helped them transition from a balanced literacy approach to one that one district staff member described as "more sound instructional practice in teaching reading." The vast majority of teachers responding to the inventory reported that instruction focused on each of the five components of scientifically based reading was occurring at least a few times a week (88% to 93%), and over half of teachers reported it occurring on a daily basis (55% to 83%; see Exhibit 6).

> *[The READ Act] has helped us have some teeth when talking to teachers. When pushing getting the buy-in of the training and the science of reading, it gives us some teeth to say, this is really important. It's given us some teeth when we talk to parents that we didn't quite have before in our district or in our community.*

District and school leaders were also able to leverage the Advisory List of Instructional Programming to help phase out core, supplemental, and instructional materials that were not evidence-based or effective and advocate for the adoption of approved curricula based on the science of reading. Almost all site visit districts indicated that their process for choosing instructional materials was limited to programs on the advisory list. As noted in last year's report, district and school staff emphasized the READ Act's role in creating a common language and foundation for teaching reading across the state. As one school staff member noted, "I think it served a strong purpose in that alone, and because of the READ Act, then even the State and, and every organization that is literacy minded …started to be on the same page. So, when you went to conferences, everything was about the science of reading because we have to be united on this."

Exhibit 6. Frequency of Instruction by Science of Reading Component (n = 247)

	Phonics	Phonological Awareness	Phonemic Awareness	Comprehension	Fluency	Vocabulary
■ Never	3	7	6	0	1	0
■ Less Frequently	2	2	3	2	9	5
■ About Once a Month	1	2	0	2	3	5
■ Once a Week	11	13	14	14	16	18
■ A Few Times per Week	24	29	34	64	67	82
■ Daily	206	193	190	165	151	136

Balance Between Consistency and Local Control

There was **an interest and movement towards aligning reading materials and approaches both across districts and within schools**. Fifty-nine percent of districts responding to the inventory indicated that decisions about instructional materials are made at the district level and that all schools used the same materials (59%, n = 67). Nearly all of the districts and schools who participated in site visits reported that they were actively working to improve consistency in teaching reading and monitor the implementation of key components of their science-based approaches. This effort, inspired by the READ Act's requirements, was described by one district as a move away from the

District-level expectations included:

- Minimum literacy instructional time
- Approved instructional materials by grade level and subgroup
- Progress monitoring
- Literacy protocols
- Data-informed student grouping

"Wild West", where individual teachers were able to pick and choose the materials and approaches within each classroom, towards the adoption of an aligned set of state-endorsed tools accompanied by intentional district support and training to help teachers implement these materials consistently. Another district noted that they had intentionally aligned the goals and activities within their Uniform Improvement Plan (UIP), district literacy framework, and Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant.

This emphasis on alignment was also noted at the school level. This was exemplified at one elementary school where school leaders noted their efforts to align Title I teachers and classroom teachers so that students with significant reading deficiencies were receiving consistent support at the right time. Several site visit schools described their efforts to monitor the consistency of implementation through classroom walkthroughs and school-wide inventories. In line with the focus of the READ Act, much of this alignment was focused on grades K through third, with a few schools and districts indicating that future efforts will also focus on the consistent use of materials and approaches and support for teachers in grade 4 and beyond.

Additional examination of these efforts and classroom-level implementation may be necessary as over half of the coaches (55%, n = 77) and teachers (50%, n = 105) inventoried indicated that teachers utilize materials that are not provided in the core reading instructional programs on a daily basis.

This move towards consistency was balanced by a need for flexibility at the school and classroom levels to address varying student populations and local contexts. As noted by one school leader, "there are pieces that we are tight about, that must be

School-level decisions included:
- How to structure master schedule and required literacy blocks
- Staffing during literacy blocks
- Caseloads for literacy interventionists
- Hiring decisions for literacy specialists funded by the district

happening in every classroom, there are the loose pieces…Schools and LEPs have various programs that don't exist at other schools. So even though we provide guidance, there is some flexibility too, based on what the student population at each school is made up of." This was especially true among small and rural districts that endorsed more organic approaches that allowed for adaptation based on individual student needs versus a more formal, documented approach.

Classroom-Level Reading Activities

Similar to findings from last year's report**, the majority of districts and schools utilized a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework** (see Year 1 Evaluation Report for an extended discussion of the tiered approach to K through third grade reading[11]). According to this approach, students were grouped based on assessment data, regardless of SRD status. As one teacher noted, "it doesn't matter what plan you are on, or what color you are. If your data shows you need this skill, you're going to end up in that group. So it doesn't matter if you're on an IEP, on a READ Plan, or not on any plan, it's based on the skill deficits."

Within the three-tiered approach, there was considerable variation among site visit schools in terms of the support structures and how instructional minutes were divided between whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction. Most districts included at least a 90-minute core literacy instructional block. There were reported differences in terms of how much time students spent in small groups as part of that block. Several districts emphasized the importance of all students receiving core instruction and not being pulled out for targeted interventions during this time so that they would not miss foundational skills. As such, additional Tier 2 and Tier 3 support occurred outside of the core literacy block during a 30- to 40-minute intervention block. Again, there was significant variation in terms of how these supplemental and intervention activities were structured

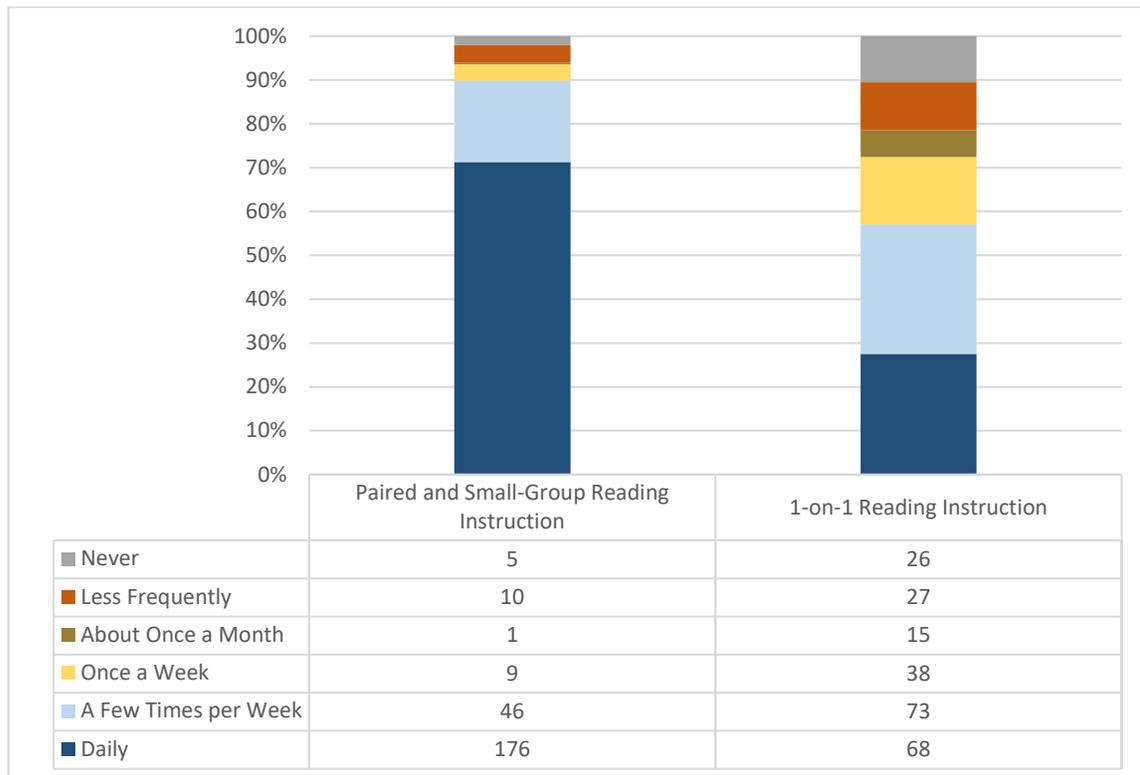[11] https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/perpupiljbcsummaryreport

and staffed. Some schools grouped students within the classroom based on their skill deficits, while others pulled students out of the classroom and grouped them across grades. At some schools, literacy interventionists and coaches provided all the interventions outside of the classroom. At others, tutors or paraprofessionals flooded into rooms to ensure that there were enough staff members to provide small group instruction. Due to staff constraints, most schools that implemented a pull-out approach utilized a staggered intervention approach so that the same interventionist or coach could provide multiple interventions at different times throughout the school day.

In terms of classroom reading activities, over 70 percent of teachers who responded to the inventory reported providing paired and small-group reading instruction to students classified as having SRDs on a daily basis, and 57 percent reported providing one-on-one instruction to students classified as having SRDs at least a few times per week (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Frequency of K Through Third Grade Reading Activities (n = 247)

	Paired and Small-Group Reading Instruction	1-on-1 Reading Instruction
■ Never	5	26
■ Less Frequently	10	27
■ About Once a Month	1	15
■ Once a Week	9	38
■ A Few Times per Week	46	73
■ Daily	176	68

Challenges

The **most cited challenge regarding the reading approach was finding enough instructional time and staffing for supplemental and intervention programs. Districts and schools struggled with balancing whole group and small group instruction**. This was especially true for districts with staffing shortages, shorter weeks or days, and large numbers of students identified with SRDs.

There were some challenges noted related to the Advisory List of Instructional Programming. Only 38 percent of district inventory respondents (n = 53) indicated that the approved instructional materials were successful or very successful in terms of raising third grade achievement levels. In line with last year's report, there are still challenges with approved materials coming off the list in subsequent years, especially

with the passage of the Literacy Curriculum Transparency Act.[12] One school leader expressed frustration that the state website now indicates that they use a program that is not on the approved list even though it was previously approved when they purchased it as part of an ELG. Another district suggested a "do not use" list in addition to the Advisory List of Instructional Programming, which would help communicate which programs have been reviewed and rejected versus those that did not submit materials for review.

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[12] https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/literacycurriculumtransparency

6

Human Capital and Professional Development

- Site visits highlighted the importance of instructional staff who are well-versed in the science of reading and who have support to implement those practices with fidelity.

- Similar to last year's report, there were challenges related to hiring and retaining staff who knew how to effectively teach reading, especially among small and rural districts who rely on candidates with alternative licenses.

- Districts and schools understood the importance of training in the science of reading for their staff to meet 45-hour requirement. However, there was also considerable criticism of the implementation of the requirement, with districts citing the major time commitment in the midst of COVID-19, teacher burnout, the high number of other required trainings, and the challenges the requirement poses for hiring and retaining staff.
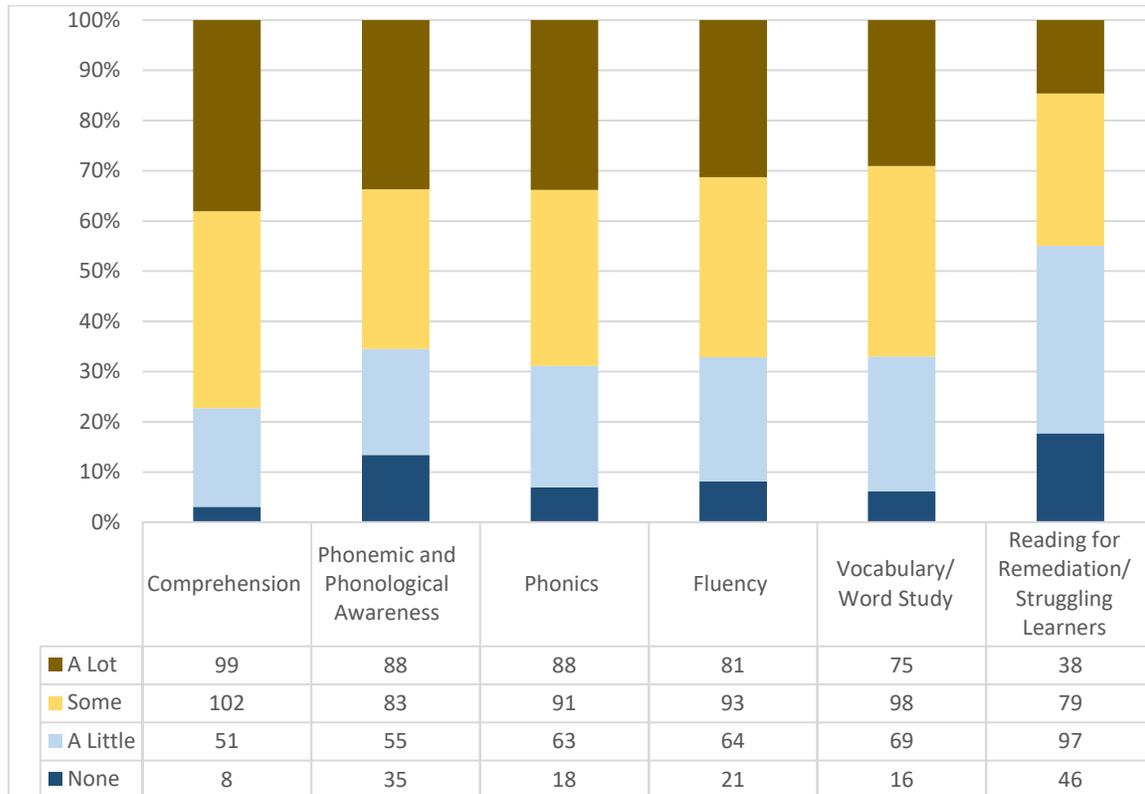
Site visit districts and school staff cited the **critical importance of instructional staff who are well-versed in the science of reading and who have support to implement those practices with fidelity**. District and school leaders emphasized the roles of specialized literacy staff, such as literacy interventionists and coaches, in providing classroom-level support to teachers and utilizing student data to guide intervention activities and monitor student growth. One principal summed it up as, "It's about the people, not the program," when asked to describe what has led to success in student growth, focusing on the impact of well-trained teachers versus a specific instructional program.

Similar to the findings in last year's report, **there were challenges related to hiring and retaining staff who knew how to effectively teach reading**, especially among small and rural districts that rely on candidates with alternative licenses. According to the teacher inventory, there was considerable variation in the emphasis that was placed on the five components of science-based reading and reading for remedial or struggling readers during pre-service training (see Exhibit 8). A sizeable minority of teachers (23% to 34%) reported there was little to no emphasis on the five components of science-based reading during their pre-service training. A majority of responding teachers (55%) indicated that there was little to no emphasis on reading for remedial or struggling readers. District and school staff who participated in the site visits also highlighted that new teachers were not sufficiently prepared to teach reading and suggested that future READ Act efforts should focus on postsecondary preparation.

Exhibit 8. Emphasis Placed on Specific Topics During Teacher Pre-Service Training (n = 248)

	Comprehension	Phonemic and Phonological Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary/ Word Study	Reading for Remediation/ Struggling Learners
■ A Lot	99	88	88	81	75	38
■ Some	102	83	91	93	98	79
■ A Little	51	55	63	64	69	97
■ None	8	35	18	21	16	46

These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and related teacher turnover. Shortages of available substitute teachers and a lack of candidates for qualified open positions have led districts and schools to rely on paraprofessionals instead of certified instructors, which has limited their ability to provide small-group interventions as desired. As noted in the previous chapter, finding enough staff to implement supplemental and intervention programs was cited as a major challenge by site visit districts and schools. School leaders cited difficulties hiring quality staff even if money was available. As one school leader noted, "Finding high quality, skilled people…that's definitely a challenge…we may have money through the use of grants and things like that. There is still the challenge of finding people."
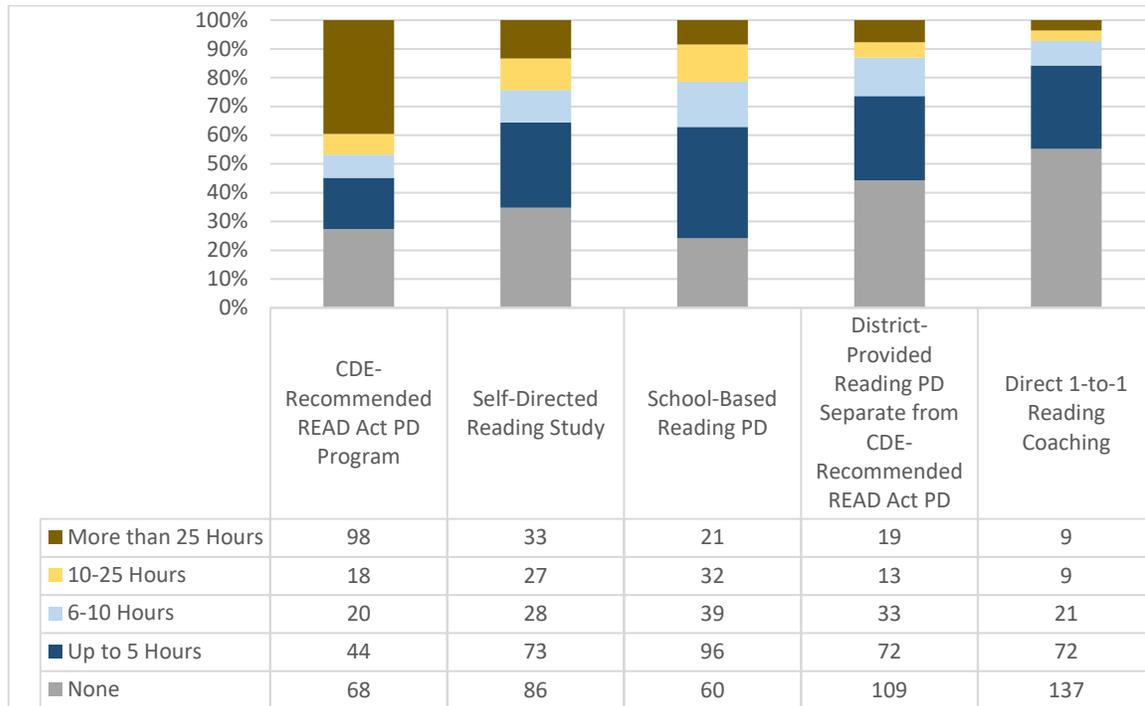
Nearly 70 percent of districts responding to the inventory required staff to undergo professional development or trainings on the list of approved READ Act programs. According to responses on the teacher inventory, nearly 40 percent of teachers reported spending more than 25 hours during the 2021-22 school year on READ Act-recommended programs, which likely reflects the upcoming deadline for having 45 hours of evidence-based training in teaching reading. According to the principals responding to the inventory, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling third Edition (LETRS, n = 29 districts) and Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education (CORE) Elementary Reading Academy + Language Conventions & Writing Fundamentals (n = 18 districts) were the most frequently used professional development programs. Both are on the advisory lists of professional development and programming. In contrast, teachers were much less likely to report district or school support related to K through third grade reading professional development that was separate from the Advisory List of Professional Development provided by CDE (See Exhibit 9). The vast majority of districts (95%) used student achievement data to at least some extent to determine district professional development offerings.

Exhibit 9. Hours of Support for Teachers During 2021-22 School Year by Type of Support (n = 248)

	CDE-Recommended READ Act PD Program	Self-Directed Reading Study	School-Based Reading PD	District-Provided Reading PD Separate from CDE-Recommended READ Act PD	Direct 1-to-1 Reading Coaching
■ More than 25 Hours	98	33	21	19	9
■ 10-25 Hours	18	27	32	13	9
■ 6-10 Hours	20	28	39	33	21
■ Up to 5 Hours	44	73	96	72	72
■ None	68	86	60	109	137

The **importance of coaches in supporting evidence-based reading instruction** was emphasized among site visit districts and schools. As one district staff member noted,

> *So, no matter the program, coaches will know how to adjust it. Coaches will know how to supplement. Coaches can find materials. Coaches can model good instruction. Coaches can give feedback where principals have this huge umbrella of things to worry about … when you have a consistent person that is their job to help increase the level of instruction in your building. It's huge. It's hugely impacting.*

Over half of the districts (55%, n = 63) responding to the inventory indicated that coaching of teachers in scientifically grounded reading practices was required. The majority of coaches responding to the inventory reported providing one-on-one coaching to teachers focused on scientifically grounded reading practices on at least a monthly basis (69%, n

= 73), with a similar percentage providing professional development in group settings to teachers at least once per month (63%, n = 67). Over half of the coaches (56%, n = 60) reported providing small-group reading instruction to K through third grade students identified as having SRDs on a daily basis (see Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10. Frequency of Coaching Activities (n = 107)

	Small-Group Reading Instruction to K-3 Students Identified with SRD	1-on-1 Reading Instruction to K-3 Students Identified with SRD	1-on-1 Coaching to Teachers Focused on Scientifically Based Reading	PD in Group Settings to Teachers Focused on Scientifically Based Reading
■ Never	18	39	13	15
■ Less frequently	5	15	20	24
■ About once a month	6	6	27	37
■ Once a week	4	5	23	18
■ A few times per week	14	21	16	11
■ Daily	60	20	7	1

45-Hour Requirement

As a result of changes to SB 19-199, Colorado school districts are required to ensure that all K through third grade teachers complete evidence-based training in teaching reading by August 1, 2022.[13] Local education providers who do not meet the requirements will be ineligible for READ Act per-pupil funds for the 2022-23 school year. Over 70 percent of teachers (71%, n = 17) and coaches (72%, n = 75) and 30 percent of
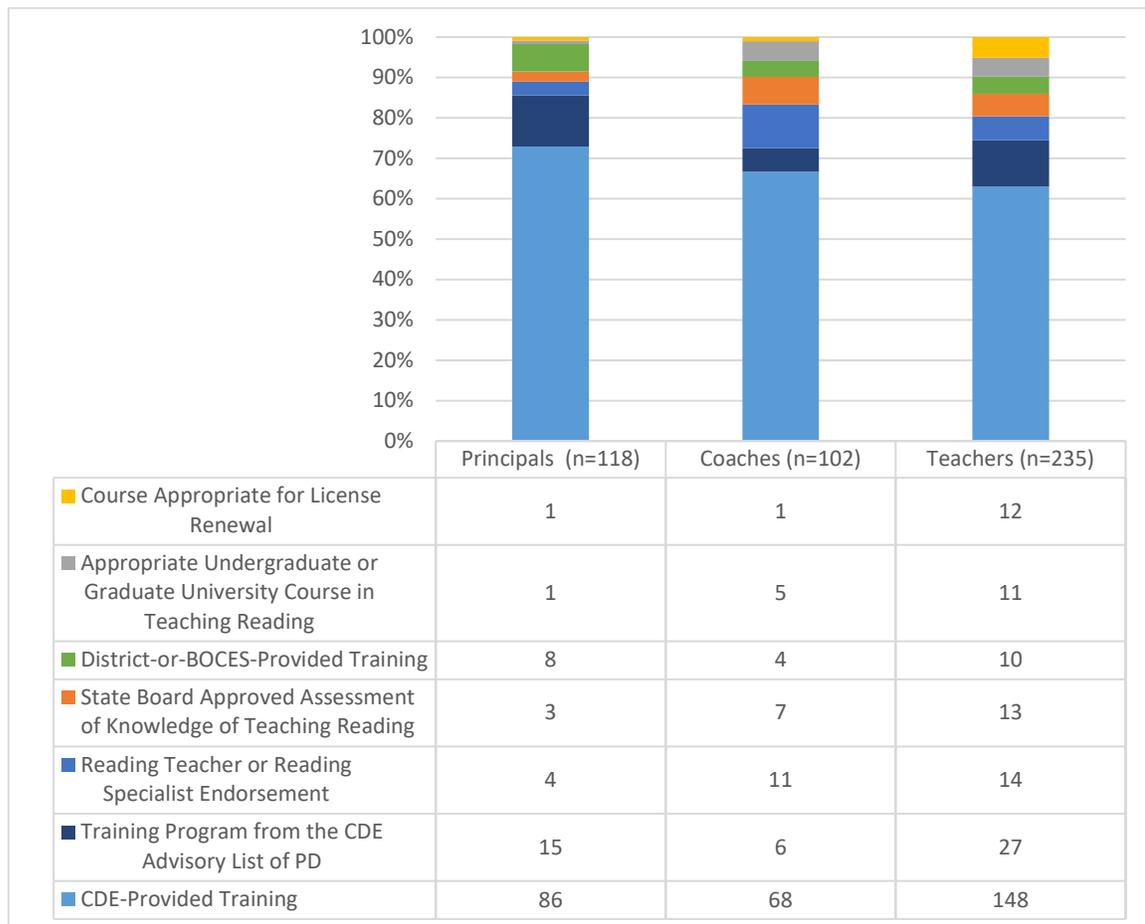
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[13] HB21-1129 extended the previous deadline of January 31, 2022, to August 1, 2022

principals (n = 43) responding to the inventory had already completed the state-required professional development as of April 2022. They were most likely to fulfill the requirement using CDE-provided training. Sixty-three percent of the teachers, 67 percent of the coaches, and 73 percent of the principals indicated they had completed or intended to complete the requirement with CDE-provided training (see Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11. Evidence-Based Training Program by Role

	Principals (n=118)	Coaches (n=102)	Teachers (n=235)
■ Course Appropriate for License Renewal	1	1	12
■ Appropriate Undergraduate or Graduate University Course in Teaching Reading	1	5	11
■ District-or-BOCES-Provided Training	8	4	10
■ State Board Approved Assessment of Knowledge of Teaching Reading	3	7	13
■ Reading Teacher or Reading Specialist Endorsement	4	11	14
■ Training Program from the CDE Advisory List of PD	15	6	27
■ CDE-Provided Training	86	68	148

There were varying levels of support and perceptions about the quality and applicability of the training. Site visit input indicated that provision of stipends was a valuable tool to recognize the added time educators needed to complete the training. About half of the teachers (49%, n = 117) reported that their district or school incentivized or otherwise supported the completion of the training requirement.

About half of the teachers (46%, n = 104) rated the training as high-quality compared to 16 percent of teachers (n = 35) who rated the training as somewhat low- or low-quality. Coaches provided more positive ratings of the training, with 64 percent of coaches rating the training as high-quality (n = 61) and only 5 percent of coaches (n = 5) rating the training as low- or somewhat low-quality. The majority of teachers (58%, n = 167) and coaches (77%, n = 77) reported that the training program was applicable to their needs in the classroom. Input received through site visit interviews uniformly praised the rigor and content provided through the LETRS training. Many interviewed school and district leaders indicated their belief that it would be highly beneficial to provide this training to all K-3 teachers. However, these leaders often expressed that the LETRS training was too expensive to provide absent an external grant or other source of funding.

There was also **considerable criticism of the implementation of the requirement (95 open-ended responses on the LEP inventory)**, with districts citing the major time commitment in the midst of COVID-19, teacher burnout, the large number of other required trainings, and the challenges the requirement posed for hiring and retaining staff. The most-cited criticism of the requirement was the extensive time commitment required, beyond educators' regular workload and did not come with additional compensation.

Site visit participants also uniformly expressed that, to get the most out of this training, educators need time to meet, collaborate, and discuss what they are learning, and that such time could take upwards of 90-100 hours. This was described by site visit participants as a serious burden to place on teachers across the state who are already under significant stresses that are causing many to flee the profession entirely. Site visit participants indicated that stipends should be provided to teachers to recognize the time required to complete this training.

Districts also criticized the additional work involved with tracking completion. Another area of notable frustration expressed through the site

visits was changing and unclear guidance from the state regarding which K-3 staff members were required to complete the training. For instance, site visit participants, expressed concern with the lack of clarity provided by the state over whether art, music, physical education, or other teachers and paraprofessionals were required to complete the training.

In addition, districts fear the requirement will exacerbate staffing issues, making it more difficult to hire long term subs and or recruit new teachers since they are required to complete the training. Lastly, there was concern that the requirement holds districts instead of teachers accountable for the requirement which makes it challenging to enforce.

7

Identifying and Supporting Students with Significant Reading Deficiencies

- Schools largely relied on interim assessments to make SRD determinations. While many schools and districts reported that they employed a body-of-evidence approach, that body of evidence was usually used to support an SRD determination that was based on an interim assessment.

- The READ plan process primarily relied on teachers to develop, communicate, monitor, and exit students. The READ plan process is onerous. Each READ plan is largely school-developed, with few systems in place to enable easier READ plan creation and student performance monitoring.

Identification of Students with Significant Reading Deficiencies

Guidance documents supplied by LEPs indicated that the process of identifying a student with an SRD typically includes multiple data points. The process begins with an interim assessment followed by a diagnostic assessment to determine specific skill deficits. If a student scores below the threshold to be identified with an SRD, then progress monitoring (PM) occurs to confirm the results, although the frequency and timing of PM varies significantly across the state.

A number of districts indicated that their schools attempt to make SRD determinations for students in grades 1-3 within the first 60 days of the school year to facilitate conversations between teachers and parents at fall parent-teacher conferences. This approach uses a beginning of year assessment to identify students performing well below grade level, and these students are then progress monitored over the next two months to confirm an SRD designation. Kindergarten students are often given more time before an SRD determination is made, since children arrive at school with varying degrees of preschool preparation and school readiness.

Several LEPs specified that PM occurs every 7-10 days, and duration can vary for as long as 60 calendar days. One LEP reported that, "any student that scored red at the beginning of the year and … 3 consecutive progress monitors" receives a READ Plan. [Other LEPs indicated that two consecutive red scores trigger an automatic SRD designation. Another LEP extends their screening process through the middle of the year (and through fifth grade).

Educators in Colorado also can use a body-of-evidence approach to identify or exit students with SRDs. The collected inventory results indicated that a majority of educators use a body-of-evidence approach. Sixty percent of LEPs indicated that they had used the option of a body of evidence to identify students with SRDs. Seventy-five percent of teachers and 92

percent of principals reported having used a body of evidence to identify or exit students from SRD status.

During site visits, participants indicated the various ways that they had used bodies of evidence to support making SRD determinations. Some described a body of evidence as a way to validate the results from interim assessments. For example, one site visit participant stated, "the approved assessment is the primary decision-making data point per CDE guidance. The body of evidence can only be used to confirm SRD. We would prefer to use a body of evidence for all aspects of [the] READ [Act], including identification." This is aligned with WestEd's analysis discussed in Chapter 2, which showed that students' school-provided SRD classifications nearly always matched the SRD classification they would have received based solely on their READ Act interim assessment scores.

When asked what constituted a body of evidence, most site visit participants mentioned the interim assessment, classroom work, curriculum-based measures, and informal classroom assessments. Sometimes data may be analyzed by a particular reading coach or by a team which generally includes grade-level teachers, special education teachers, specialists, and the principal."

Forty-seven percent of the teachers who responded to the school-based inventory indicated that they felt they received sufficient training to identify students with SRDs. An additional 35 percent received some training but said that it was insufficient, while 18 percent indicated that they had received no training. During several site visits, respondents indicated that they found flow charts to be helpful with the SRD determination process. One respondent described the process as follows:

> *We got a chart that gave us SRD cut scores, and you were to use that cut score and then go to the flow chart with the progress monitoring. And if it was, let's say their progress monitoring was red, red, red, that was the confirmation of SRD – you put them on a READ Plan. If it was red, yellow,*

yellow, you did this. It gave you the steps to follow on whether to put [the student] on a READ Plan or not. So, the intervention teachers worked together with the classroom teachers to make sure that the progress monitoring is done, to make sure we bounce off of each other. "Hey, what about this kid? Will we go back to the flow chart together to look at it, to make sure that we're doing the right thing?"

Thirty-eight percent of teachers who responded to the school-based inventory indicated that parents were never or rarely involved with identifying students with SRDs. Thirty-three percent indicated that parents were involved most or all the time. Parental involvement in the SRD identification process can lead to better parental involvement with supporting the child's reading ability at home. One site visit participant noted that an SRD identification process "provides the [ability] to have those conversations with parents … It's helped parents. Suddenly their kids are coming to school … So I think one of the big successes is just letting parents know, and it really does help early identify those kids."

Exiting Students from SRD Status

A wide variety of evidence is available to inform decisions about exiting students from SRD status (see Exhibit 12). Teachers and reading coaches were most likely to rely on goals established in READ Plans and interim, diagnostic, and summative assessments. Fewer teachers and reading coaches used parental input, student work, and formative classroom information.

Exhibit 12. Evidence That Teachers and Coaches Use for Decisions About Exiting Students From READ Plans

	Diagnostic or Summative Assessments		Formative classroom information		Goals established in READ Plans		Interim Assessments		Other ongoing reading assessments		Parental Input		Student Work	
	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches	Teachers	Coaches
Never	14	3	41	19	21	8	32	7	32	14	67	32	37	18
Sometimes	35	13	57	17	33	15	55	12	61	19	89	32	59	28
Most of the Time	80	19	67	32	75	21	66	26	63	29	33	15	62	22
All of the Time	91	63	54	26	90	50	66	53	61	32	30	14	61	28

Sixty-one percent of LEP respondents indicated that state guidance for exiting students from SRD status and READ Plans was clear and adequate. However, on the school-based inventory, only 32 percent of principals, 25 percent of reading coaches, and 17 percent of teachers

reported that they found CDE guidance for exiting students from SRD status very clear (see Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 13. Reported Clarity of CDE Guidance on Exiting Students from SRD Status

	Teachers (n=223)	Reading Coaches (n=95)	Principals (n=130)
Very Clear	38	24	41
Somewhat Clear	101	42	54
Somewhat Unclear	63	19	26
Very Unclear	21	10	9

Site visit interviews uncovered some of the reasons students might remain on READ Plans. First, teachers viewed it as a source of support for students that was only worth removing if there was clear and convincing evidence that the student no longer needed the added support, and such clear and convincing evidence was not always available Second, educators expressed concern with the number of students who were removed from plans initially, only to be placed back on a plan later as their assessment scores slipped. Educators indicated this type of regression could be demoralizing and perhaps more damaging to the student than if they had just remained on the initial plan. Third, if students are not exited from their READ Plans by the end of third grade, educators reported that, since READ funding is no longer provided starting in fourth grade, schools are often not able to provide the added interventions and supports needed to help the student reach proficiency and exit their plan.

The READ Plan Process: Development, Implementation, and Exiting

Once a student is identified as having an SRD, schools are required to develop READ Plans to guide interventions so the student can be reading at grade level by the time they complete the third grade. Local education providers and schools reported that the READ Plan development process can be time-consuming. As illustrated below, teachers and reading coaches bore the overwhelming share of responsibility for developing, implementing, and exiting students from READ Plans. One LEP official reported the following during one of the virtual site visits:

> *[A]ny teacher who has the student assigned to them in a class will have that student on their dashboard if they have a READ Plan. The guidance would be that a classroom teacher and a special education teacher, an interventionist, or anybody would work together. That doesn't always happen across the board. In most cases, it falls on the classroom teacher's shoulders.*

Some schools and districts report they may have relocated the responsibility for developing READ Plans from teachers to coaches or administrators to free up teachers' time. However, these schools also sometime report that the increased burden on the coaches or administrators may delay the development of READ Plans for every student identified with SRDs. Another potential delay in the READ Plan development process may be the systems supplied by vendors. Site visit interviews uncovered challenges in those systems, with vendors not understanding what should be in READ Plans, systems producing long reports that lacked important information, and changes in the systems being used. These factors may result in a delay to when a student begins receiving necessary reading interventions.
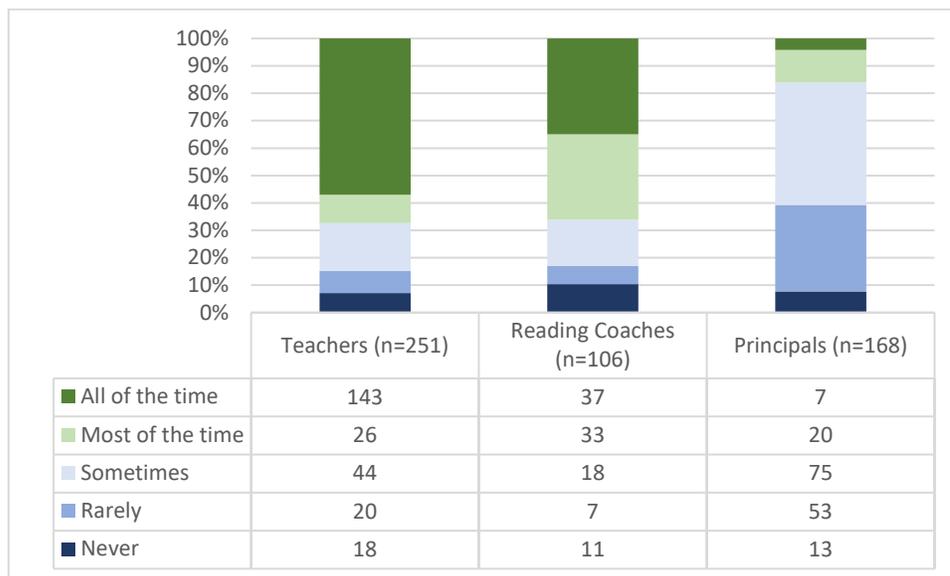
Developing READ Plans

In schools that responded to the inventory, most READ Plans were developed by teachers and reading coaches (see Exhibit 14). While the development of a READ Plan is mandated, there are no formal systems to support the development of the plan. One site visit participant reported the following:

> *So, each person is recreating it, and yes, they can make changes or whatever, but there's no place to hold it. So, for example, we had to buy a system in order to house our READ Plan. And I'm working with other people across the state who use the same system as us, but we all had to create it individually.*

Another described a READ Plan dashboard that teachers in a school had access to: "we take the state's cut scores for SRD status K through third grade for each of the benchmark windows. And each student has, if they are below one of those benchmark scores for any of the windows, then an SRD status appears on the school READ Plan dashboard for their teacher."

Exhibit 14. Involvement in Developing READ Plans by Position

	Teachers (n=251)	Reading Coaches (n=106)	Principals (n=168)
All of the time	143	37	7
Most of the time	26	33	20
Sometimes	44	18	75
Rarely	20	7	53
Never	18	11	13

One of the important components of a READ Plan is the set of progress goals for the student to achieve grade-level standards. One school described their process of goal-setting and identified several challenges, including a challenging computer system and how to address students who were reading at levels that were lower than their actual grade levels:

> *The actual setting of the goals – we've gone through an evolution, at least while I've been here. It would be great to set goals every six weeks. However, the system that we input in is incredibly bulky. It's a lot of clicks. And so, I think the biggest factor is that kids are getting the intervention that they need. … And so, yes, READ Plans are a compliance issue. But I agree that it needs to be done because we do need to ensure that for students across the state. So, I think that READ Plan goals for us, when I first started here, we tried to streamline them and make them based on reading level … We found that that didn't necessarily align to what our teaching was doing, especially in the younger grades.*

Communicating with Parents

Once READ Plans are developed, the job of communicating the plan to parents typically falls on teachers (see Exhibit 15). Most reading coaches and principals reported that they communicated with parents about READ Plans either sometimes or less frequently.

Exhibit 15. Communicating READ Plans with Parents by Position

	Teachers (n=251)	Reading Coaches (n=107)	Principals (n=168)
■ All of the time	146	12	8
■ Most of the time	29	16	16
■ Sometimes	42	36	75
■ Rarely	18	20	59
■ Never	16	23	10

Site visit participants report that educators view parent participation and input into the READ Plan process to be important in supporting the school's ability to exit students from READ Plans. Many schools attempt to make SRD determinations for students in grades 1-3 within the first 60 days of school. This is accomplished using a beginning of year interim assessment followed by progress monitoring to confirm SRD identification. The 60 day target for these schools is established in order to support the ability of teachers to include discussion of the student's SRD status and the need for a READ Plan during the fall parent-teacher conferences which typically take place in late October.

Kindergarten students in many schools are given more time before an SRD determination is made. Site visit participants report that this is because kindergarten students arrive at school with differing levels or preschool preparation and that educators often need additional time to observe the student's performance in school prior to making an SRD determination.

Site visit input suggests there is inconsistency across schools and districts in terms of the degree to which parents participate in conversations with teachers regarding their students' SRD status. Language barriers and
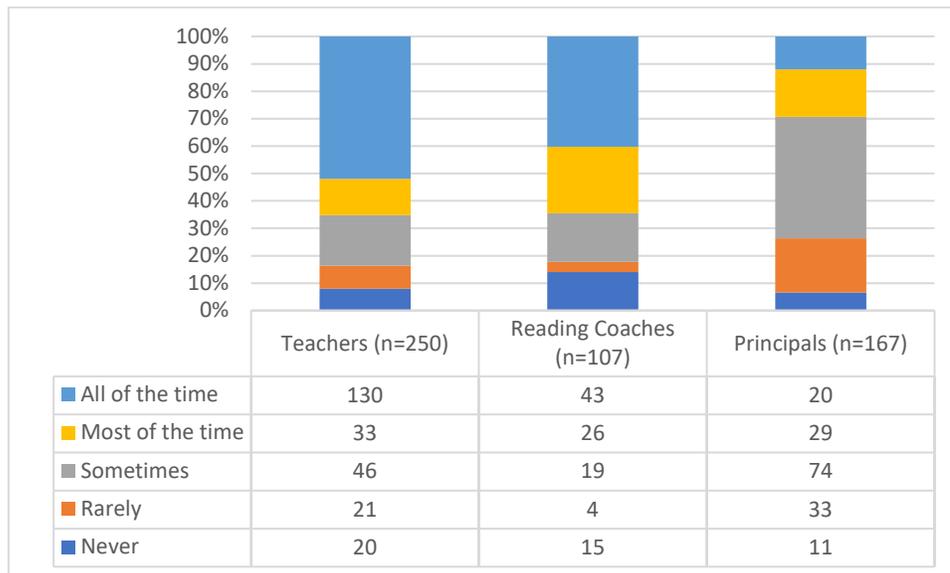
socio-economic status can impact this participation, according to site visit input. Single parents and those working multiple jobs may be less able to attend meetings with teachers to discuss SRD status or READ Plans.

Reviewing and Approving READ Plans

Just over half (52%) of the LEPs who responded to the LEP inventory indicated that schools were responsible for collecting and reviewing their own READ Plans to ensure quality. Among schools that participated in the school-based inventory, about 60 percent of teachers and reading coaches reported that they reviewed READ Plans most of the time or always, while only 30 percent of principals responded similarly (see Exhibit 16). Forty-four percent of LEPs stated that they collected and reviewed either all or a sample of READ Plans, and the same percentage said they monitored the implementation fidelity of all or a sample of READ Plans.

Exhibit 16. Reviewing of READ Plans by Position

	Teachers (n=250)	Reading Coaches (n=107)	Principals (n=167)
All of the time	130	43	20
Most of the time	33	26	29
Sometimes	46	19	74
Rarely	21	4	33
Never	20	15	11

Thirty-six percent of the LEPs who responded to the LEP inventory indicated that they monitored the implementation fidelity of all the READ

Plans. Amongst school-based personnel, monitoring READ Plan implementation was mostly left to teachers and reading coaches (see Exhibit 17); nearly 60 percent of each group reported monitoring READ Plan implementation most or all of the time. While fewer principals reported that they monitored READ Plan implementation all the time than either teachers or reading coaches, they also reported never or rarely monitoring READ Plan implementation less frequently than teachers or reading coaches.

Exhibit 17. Monitoring of READ Plan Implementation by Position

	Teachers (n=251)	Reading Coaches (n=106)	Principals (n=168)
■ All of the time	107	45	26
■ Most of the time	40	20	53
■ Sometimes	40	18	64
■ Rarely	23	9	17
■ Never	41	14	8

Most reading coaches reported that they used READ Plans to inform how they coached teachers and supported students in small groups or one-on-one (see Exhibit 18). However, nearly 20 percent of coaches also indicated that READ Plans had little or no influence on their coaching activities.

Exhibit 18. How Reading Coaches Use READ Plans to Provide Coaching Support*

	Coach K-3 Reading Teachers (n=92)	Work in Small Groups with Students (n=92)	Work 1-to-1 with Students (n=78)
Strong Influence	26	39	27
Some Influence	40	32	31
Little Influence	18	11	11
No Influence	8	10	9

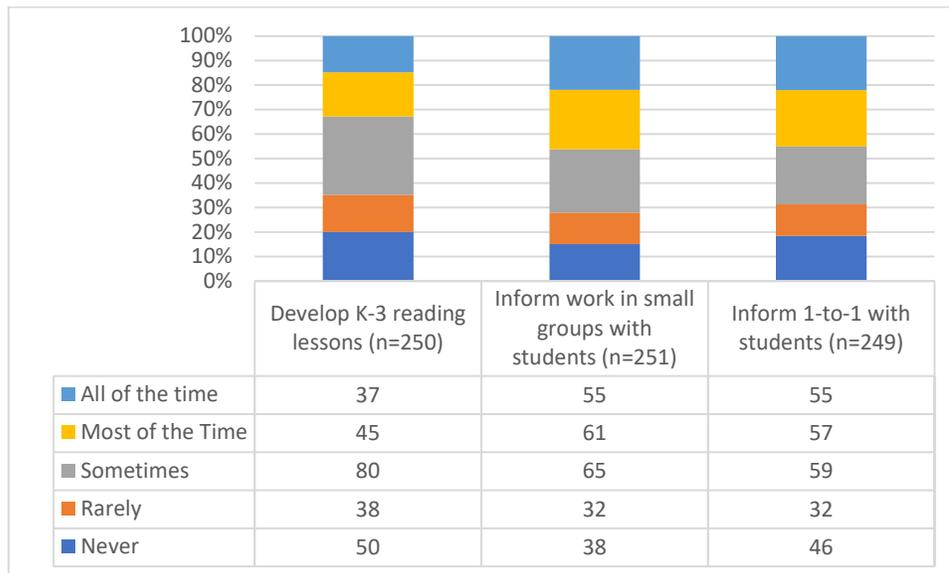**Coaches were also given the option to indicate that they did not provide that type of coaching. These responses were excluded from this chart.*

Teachers reported that they used READ Plans to inform their work with students in small groups and one-on-one instruction more than they used READ Plans to develop K through third grade reading lessons (see Exhibit 19). One teacher reported the following during a virtual site visit:

> [B]ecause of my experience, READ Plans don't help me. READ Plans give me a system. That's about it. That is with data that I can show a parent … I can show our team, these are the kids that we need to help, and this is why. In that regard, it's helpful to have a system. But does the plan actually help me? It does not help me personally, because I've taught long enough that I know what kids need.

Exhibit 19. How Teachers Use READ Plans to Inform Instruction by Position

	Develop K-3 reading lessons (n=250)	Inform work in small groups with students (n=251)	Inform 1-to-1 with students (n=249)
All of the time	37	55	55
Most of the Time	45	61	57
Sometimes	80	65	59
Rarely	38	32	32
Never	50	38	46

Teachers and reading coaches were also more involved with tracking progress on READ Plan milestones (see Exhibit 20) and exiting students from READ Plans (see Exhibit 21) than principals were.

Exhibit 20. Tracking Progress on READ Plan Milestones by Position

	Teachers (n=251)	Reading Coaches (n=106)	Principals (n=167)
All of the time	116	35	26
Most of the time	49	28	39
Sometimes	39	22	68
Rarely	24	7	25
Never	23	14	9

Exhibit 21. Exiting Students from READ Plans by Position

	Teachers (n=251)	Reading Coaches (n=106)	Principals (n=167)
■ All of the time	116	35	26
■ Most of the time	49	28	39
■ Sometimes	39	22	68
■ Rarely	24	7	25
■ Never	23	14	9

8

Early Literacy Grants

- School and district leaders cited external literacy consultants as having the greatest impact on their ELG funds.

- Early Literacy Grant funds transformed the practice and expectations of teachers

- Some schools and LEPs reported challenges with hiring qualified staff and struggled to utilize unspent personnel funds in allowable ways.

- Site visit participants described how the Comprehensive ELG program, and its implementation drove policy in the district.

Background

The two major sources of ELG program funding are as follows.

1. **Comprehensive ELG program funding** is competitively awarded to LEPs and schools to improve system-wide K through third grade literacy efforts. Comprehensive ELG grants have been awarded to six cohorts of LEPs and schools over a three- or four-year period: i) Cohort 1 from 2013-2016, ii) Cohort 2 from 2016-2019, iii) Cohort 3 from 2017-20, iv) Cohort 4 from 2019-22, v) Cohort 5 from 2020-24, and vi) Cohort 6 from 2022-26.

2. **ELG Annual Professional Development (ELG PD) program** funding is available to LEPs and schools that are already implementing evidence-based K through third grade literacy instruction to support scientifically grounded reading programming and strategies. ELG PD grants have been competitively awarded on an annual basis since 2019.

Of the 18 ELG-funded schools and LEPs that were interviewed, 12 received Comprehensive ELG funds, eight received ELG PD funds, and two received both. The average Comprehensive ELG award for the schools interviewed for all years of the cohort was $642,711.

Use of Early Literacy Grant Funds

According to site visit participants, first-year Comprehensive ELG Program funds were most frequently used for adopting scientifically grounded core reading programs for K through third grade, hiring CDE-approved ELG Implementation Consultants, sending the school's leadership team to the state literacy conference, purchasing materials, and paying support staff such as literacy coaches and interventionists. In subsequent years, the focus of Comprehensive ELG Program funds was on providing professional development, typically focused on training educators on implementation and use of the newly purchased scientifically based core reading program.

Other uses of Comprehensive ELG Program funds included purchasing supplemental and intervention curricula and materials, supporting onsite consulting, providing stipends for teachers for literacy training or participating in the school leadership team, and paying interventionists for participating in meetings outside of work hours. This is critical because **including interventionists in student grouping is viewed as an important factor in identifying student needs and targeting instruction effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became particularly challenging to find substitute teachers to cover classes to allow teachers and interventionists time to collaborate.**

Schools and LEPs used ELG PD funds to provide training to educators in core, supplemental, or intervention reading programs. As one school leader noted, "we got the one-year grant to provide training around the 95 % Group materials and approach. And that grant was just a one-year; it was last year. I think that was $25,000, and that allowed us to implement that intervention program." Sometimes this funding included facilitator training for staff to provide ongoing professional development for the various programs. ELG PD funds were also used to support the staffing costs of instructional coaches. Crucially, ELG PD grant-funded schools and LEPs were able to pay stipends to teachers for completing LETRS training, which was one of the seven pathways for meeting CDE's 45-hour evidence-based reading training requirement. This flexibility was appreciated because compensating teachers for training is not an allowable expense for READ Act per-pupil funds.

Several site visit participants reported receiving one-year ELG Sustainability Grants after their Comprehensive ELG Program funds ended. In general, sustainability grants helped to support a portion of the coaches' salaries, build capacity at the school or district level to sustain the practices by training a subject matter expert, and purchase supplies.

Early literacy grant-funded schools and LEPs reported using multiple funding streams to support literacy instruction. ELG funds were integrated

with READ Act per-pupil funds, Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELAT) Project funding, Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF), Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER), Title I funds, and general education funds. Schools and LEPs leveraged ELGs and other funding sources to implement core, supplemental, and intervention programs across the district. Using non-READ Act funds allowed schools and LEPs to expand training or programming to all K through fifth grade teachers. Schools and LEPs also commonly used multiple program sources to support the salaries of coaches and interventionists.

The Importance of External Literacy Consultants

School and district leaders most frequently cited the hiring of external literacy consultants as the greatest impact of ELG funding. This success was captured by one site visit participant:

> *"the most beneficial part of the early literacy grant was the consulting piece … She provided some professional development. We did a lot around coaching and working with staff, but she also recommended programming before we knew what was good … She was familiar with the really great reading programs that we now use as our primary intervention programming. She brought a lot of great expertise. … It's just made all of those programs so much more powerful for us now."*

Site visit participants indicated that these consultants provided professional development for teachers, providing information on instructional strategies, the effective use of core instructional blocks, intervention practices, grouping students, diagnosing deficiencies, and prescribing interventions. External literacy consultants also provided training to K through third grade literacy coaches and school leadership teams to help them support teachers more effectively. External literacy consultants were credited with providing a foundation in the science of reading that had not been part of the pre-service education of some staff.

This was especially critical for administrators with a background in secondary education. School and district leaders identified support in conducting data meetings, identifying the number of students well-below and below benchmark, determining how many students needed to move out of those categories to meet growth targets, and using data to shape intervention time as important roles of external literacy consultants. This support ensured that school leaders could continue to work independently after the end of the grant. Other participants viewed external literacy consultants as resources for identifying what has worked for other LEPs.

Challenges

Some schools and LEPs reported challenges with finding allowable ways to utilize unspent ELG funds. Some LEPs budgeted for full-time coaches but struggled to hire qualified staff. As one participant noted, "Finding high quality, skilled people, people who have both the skill and the will to do the work, that's challenging." Most LEPs had to reallocate funds that were earmarked for travel to the CDE annual literacy conference when it was canceled because of the public health emergency of COVID-19. These participants described the ELG funding restrictions as creating a challenge to spend all the grant money and spoke about the rush to find allowable ways to use the funds before the end of the year. Some respondents noted the limited options on the approved lists and the time limitations of scheduling professional development within the school calendar. Other respondents would have preferred to purchase resources for fourth and fifth grade students to provide additional support to students who had not exited READ Plans after the third grade.

The biggest [challenge] for me is just that it stops at third grade. A lot of these kids, when you're behind like that, you just don't get it together in three years. … I figure we basically have five years to get them what they need, and some kids need the five years. But if we only really can serve them for three years with the extra help, it really does hinder those kids and what we're allowed to give them.

Still others reported spending leftover funds to purchase additional supplies, but not all were well utilized. One school leader described this challenge by saying, "there was so much money involved, and it was great, but when you didn't need to spend $100,000 of it on a new core program upfront, and you'd been granted over $300,000, we were looking for ways to spend money … So, we spent money on things that honestly we don't use." Another respondent complained that budgeting felt unnecessarily complicated.

The ELG Program transformed the practice and expectations of K through third grade teachers. The shift in pedagogy to science-based reading instruction was challenging because many teachers, including veteran teachers, were not trained in the five essential components of literacy instruction. Prior to the READ Act, some school and district leaders reported that their teachers understood reading fluency but could not adequately distinguish between phonics and phonemic awareness. However, teachers were now held accountable through ELGs for implementing training with fidelity, identifying students' specific reading deficiencies, and using data intentionally to group students and devise interventions because schools risked losing the grants if students did not move from well-below and below the benchmarks. Site visit participants reported that the ELG grants provided the tools to target deficits students had in reading that would not have possible to target with the curriculum and instruction they were using before. One site visit noted this change: "I believe that when I go to a [Professional Learning Community] and teachers are discussing their student data and their instruction, it's at a whole new level that it never used to be. We truly understand the five components of reading now, which I don't think we used to."

Most LEPs did not report having an overarching approach to integrating Comprehensive ELG funds into their K through third grade literacy programs. Instead, site visit participants described how the Comprehensive ELG Program and its implementation drove policy in

> *[The ELG] drove us toward defining what literacy wouldn't look like in our district. And I would say we were so unstructured before. … But I think the early literacy, it helped us define, what is whole group reading? What is small group reading? How do we differentiate small group reading? How do we make sure we're reaching every kid? What interventionists can we get in place who can support us?*

their schools. CDE's advisory lists for professional development and instructional programming brought consistency to LEPs where there had been considerable variation in the approaches to reading. Some respondents noted that schoolwide consistency developed across K through third grade grades as general education teachers, special education teachers, and interventionists had the same training and materials and spoke a common language. Others noted that implementing the grant provided a unifying goal for staff to work towards together and a way to get staff buy-in on literacy initiatives. One district observed that its initial focus was not on changing its approach to literacy, and the larger impact of ELG in the district was an unexpected outcome. "I think, as a district, through the ELG process is when we really bought into the READ Act. Because we did have those consultants that were able to come in and say, 'Nope, we've got to do it this way,' and then give us the 'why' behind it. And that really changed a lot of mindsets. And then the outcome was our data in all of those schools has been very good, very consistent. So, it really has changed outcomes for students."
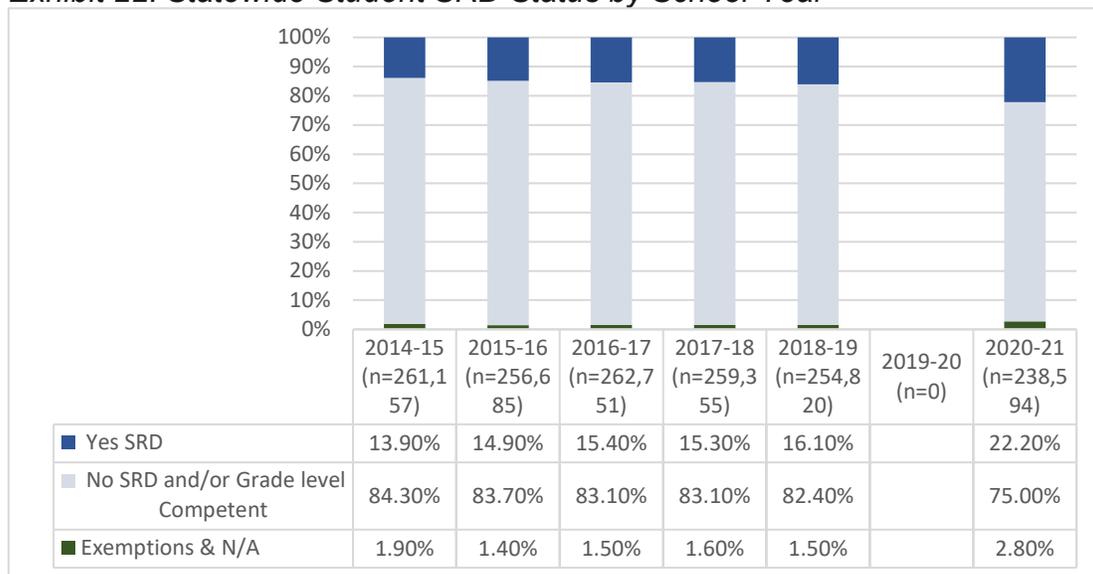
Student Outcomes

9

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on reading. While the percentage of students identified as having SRDs in the spring had been holding at around 15% for the last several years (i.e., from 2015-19), it jumped to 22% in the 2020-21 school year.**

- **Third grade proficiency is still extremely limited for students who have ever been identified with SRDs, especially those with IEPs or who are learning English.**

Changes in Students' SRD Statuses

The total number of students assessed fell in 2021, following enrollment trends in the state. Approximately 16,000 fewer students were assessed in the spring of 2021 than in the spring of 2019. Additionally, the total number of students identified with SRDs rose at a higher rate from the 2018-19 school year to the 2020-21 school year than in previous years (testing was not reported during the 2019-20 school year due to a statewide assessment pause during the COVID-19 pandemic). **While the percentage of students identified with SRDs in spring semesters had been holding at around 15 percent for the last several years (i.e., from 2015-19), it jumped to 22 percent in the 2020–21 school year** (see Exhibit 22).

Exhibit 22. Statewide Student SRD Status by School Year

	2014-15 (n=261,157)	2015-16 (n=256,685)	2016-17 (n=262,751)	2017-18 (n=259,355)	2018-19 (n=254,820)	2019-20 (n=0)	2020-21 (n=238,594)
■ Yes SRD	13.90%	14.90%	15.40%	15.30%	16.10%		22.20%
■ No SRD and/or Grade level Competent	84.30%	83.70%	83.10%	83.10%	82.40%		75.00%
■ Exemptions & N/A	1.90%	1.40%	1.50%	1.60%	1.50%		2.80%

Looking at movement between SRD designations gives a more nuanced picture of student pathways. Prior to the 2020-21 academic year, around 12,000 to 13,000 students moved from not having an SRD designation to having one in the following year, while approximately 7,200 to 8,400 students moved from having SRD status to no longer having SRDs. **In 2020-21, nearly 14,000 students moved from not having an SRD designation in the 2018-19 school year to having one, while only 4,000**

students moved off SRD status. That is, more students than usual were designated as having SRDs who did not previously (5.9%), and fewer moved off of SRD status (1.7%).

The Colorado Measure of Academic Success (CMAS) Proficiency and Significant Reading Deficiency Status

Students first take the Colorado Measure of Academic Success (CMAS) assessment in the third grade, the final year in which interim READ Act assessments are given. Since the goal of the READ Act is to identify struggling readers and provide them with the support they need to read proficiently by the end of third grade, third grade CMAS scores provide one way to gauge the extent to which early literacy instruction and interventions have moved students towards third grade proficiency. Since the 2014-2015 school year, fewer than 1,000 students per year who had ever been identified as having SRDs achieved proficiency on the CMAS English Language Arts (ELA) exam in the third grade. Their peers who had never been identified as having SRDs had a very different success rate: **more than half of students who have never been identified as having an SRD met or exceeded proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam in the third grade, compared to less than 5 percent of students who had ever been identified with an SRD** (see Exhibit 23)**.** Students with IEPs or who were learning English and were also identified as having SRDs reached proficiency at lower rates than their general education peers who had been identified as having SRDs**. Only 2 percent or fewer of students learning English who had ever been identified as having SRDs reached proficiency by the third grade, compared to approximately 20 to 25 percent of students learning English who had never been identified as having SRDs** (see Exhibit 24). A similar trend held for students with dual IEP and SRD designations: **fewer than 2 percent of them reached proficiency by the third grade, compared to approximately 30 percent**

of their peers with IEPs who had never been designated as having SRDs (see Exhibit 25).

Exhibit 23. Statewide Third-Grade English Language Arts CMAS Proficiency by SRD Status

		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2020-21
Ever SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	99.3%	98.7%	97.4%	96.4%	95.6%	96.0%
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	0.7%	1.3%	2.6%	3.6%	4.4%	4.0%
Never SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	55.0%	54.7%	47.9%	47.2%	45.9%	48.3%
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	45.0%	45.3%	52.1%	52.8%	54.1%	51.7%

Exhibit 24. LEP/NEP Students' Third-Grade English Language Arts CMAS Proficiency by SRD Status

		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2020-21
Ever SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	99.7%	99.3%	98.4%	98.0%	98.0%	97.9%
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	0.3%	0.7%	1.6%	2.0%	2.0%	2.1%
Never SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	79.5%	79.5%	74.3%	73.8%	73.8%	78.8%
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	20.5%	20.5%	25.7%	26.2%	26.2%	21.2%

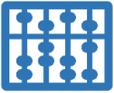*Exhibit 25. Students with IEPs' Third-Grade English Language Arts CMAS Proficiency by SRD Status*

		2014 −15	2015 −16	2016 −17	2017 −18	2018 −19	2020 −21
Ever SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	99.7 %	99.6 %	98.9 %	98.7 %	98.1 %	98.3 %
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	0.3%	0.4%	1.1%	1.3%	1.9%	1.7%
Never SRD	Did Not Yet Meet, Partially Met, or Approached Expectations	80.2 %	77.3 %	72.7 %	67.7 %	65.5 %	66.1 %
	Met or Exceeded Expectations	19.8 %	22.7 %	27.3 %	32.3 %	34.5 %	33.9 %

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Conclusions

- The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on reading levels.

- Third grade proficiency is still extremely limited for students who have been identified as having SRDs, especially those with IEPs or who are learning English.

- Many students who do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS are not served under the current READ Act.

- Local education providers and schools report increasing alignment of materials and approaches to reading and credit the READ Act with this movement.

- There is a lack of clear guidance for English learners and students with disabilities under the READ Act.

- The state should define clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments at grades K-3 that align with expected and observed performance of students on third grade CMAS or other appropriate measures.

As in other states, the pandemic has had a negative impact on reading achievement statewide. While overall performance was worse, the underlying achievement patterns remain similar to those that existed prior to the pandemic. For the population the READ Act is designed to serve, students identified as having SRDs, the proficiency rates remain stubbornly low. In addition, many students not served by the READ Act do not achieve proficiency by the third grade. One bright spot of the READ Act is its increasing impact on curriculum and instructional guidance, with more LEPs adopting materials from Advisory Lists and working toward instruction aligned with the READ Act. We would expect student outcomes to be a lagging indicator of such shifts. Lastly, there is a need for additional READ Act guidance around supports for students with Individualized Education Plans and those who are learning English as well as the establishment of clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and negative impact on reading levels.

- Trends in student data indicate that statewide challenges with reading have increased over the past two years, likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the percentage of students identified as having SRDs in the spring of each school year was consistent for the last several years (around 15 percent; i.e., from 2015-19), it jumped to 22 percent in the 2020-21 school year. In line with findings from previous years, patterns of identification indicate that more students were identified as having SRDs during the 2020-21 school year than were removed from that designation. This was especially true for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and students who are learning English.
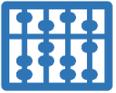
Third grade CMAS ELA proficiency is still extremely limited for students who have ever been identified as having SRDs, especially for those with IEPs or who are learning English.

- Similar to trends noted in last year's evaluation report, during the 2020-21 school year, only 4 percent of students who have ever been identified as having SRDs met or exceeded proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam in the third grade, compared to 52 percent of students who had never been identified as having SRDs. Only 2 percent of students learning English who had ever been identified as having SRDs reached proficiency by the third grade, compared to approximately 21 percent of students learning English who had never been identified with an SRD. A similar trend holds for students with dual IEP and SRD designations—fewer than 2 percent reach proficiency by the third grade, compared to 34 percent of their peers with IEPs who have never been designated as having SRDs.

Many students who do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS are not served under the current READ Act.

- The READ Act, as implemented, includes activities aimed at all K-3 students (e.g., requirements for training for teachers) and activities aimed only at some K-3 students (e.g., additional funds and READ Act plans for students identified as having SRDs). Analysis of third grade CMAS ELA proficiency shows that there are many students (48 percent in the 2020-21 school year) who are not classified as having SRDs, but who also do not achieve proficiency on the CMAS ELA exam. Additionally, the equipercentile equivalent CMAS scores that corresponded to the SRD cut score of each assessment clustered around the "Partially Met Expectations" CMAS performance level. This result may suggest a need for additional support, not just for students identified as having SRDs, but for other students as well. More broadly,

an expected outcome of proficiency on the CMAS grade three exam appears to be at odds with the use of assessments to identify only students most "at risk" (in this case, those identified as having SRDs).

- If the intended outcome of the READ Act is that more students are proficient at grade three, this goal should be operationalized through a theory of action that describes how the use of data and other activities will lead to this outcome for students at all levels of interim assessment performance.

- LEPs and schools report the need for additional resources to support continued interventions in grades 4-12 for students who do not exit their READ Plans by end of grade three since these students continue to require additional assistance and support in order to reach grade level proficiency

  - We recommend that Year 3 of the evaluation include an analysis of READ Plans, interventions, and outcomes for students in grades four through 12 to determine where additional supports may be needed beyond the third grade.

Local education providers and schools report increased alignment of materials and approaches to kindergarten through third grade reading and credit the READ Act with this movement.

- The READ Act and the Advisory List of Instructional Programming are contributing to increased school district investment statewide in evidence-based reading curricula and materials, and to a more consistent use of these materials both across and within schools. Similar to findings in last year's report, site visit districts and schools report that the READ Act has helped improve consistency in terms of language, materials, and understanding that is grounded in the science of reading. District and school leaders were also able to leverage the Advisory List of Instructional Programming to help phase out core,
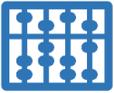
supplemental, and instructional materials that were not evidence-based or effective and advocate for the adoption of approved curricula based on the science of reading. These local efforts were inspired by the READ Act's requirements and were described by some local leaders as a move away from the "Wild West", where individual teachers were able to pick and choose the materials and approaches used in each classroom, towards instead a more uniform adoption and use of an aligned set of state-endorsed, research-based K-3 teaching materials. This move towards consistency is balanced by a need for some flexibility at the school and classroom level to address varying student populations and local contexts.

- Data from the evaluation's inventory, however, indicates that over half of coaches and teachers inventoried indicated that teachers utilize materials *not* provided in the core reading instructional programs on a daily basis.
  - Given these findings, we recommend that Year 3 of the evaluation focus on classroom-level implementation to better understand how districts and schools are monitoring and supporting the fidelity of the implementation of their approaches to early reading instruction.

There is a lack of clear guidance for serving English learners and students with disabilities under the READ Act.

- Site visit LEPs and schools report that state guidance on serving students learning English is vague. LEPs and schools develop their own guidelines on how to provide services under the READ Act to this student population. Due to the number of students that migrate to the state without prior instruction or exposure to the English language, educators struggle to provide appropriate support to students under the READ Act.

- Additionally, site visit LEPs and schools indicated that they often struggle to identify and support EL students and students with disability classifications under the READ Act.
  - Given these challenges, we recommend that CDE convene a panel of experts in literacy development for English learners to develop state guidance on serving English learners and students with disabilities under the READ Act. Specific guidance and resources would help ensure that EL students are not misclassified and receive appropriate support.

The state should define clear benchmarks for growth on READ Act interim assessments at grades K-3 that align with expected and observed performance of students on third grade CMAS or other appropriate measures.

- The READ Act describes sufficient growth for students found to be "at risk" (either identified as having an SRD or reading below grade level) as putting them on the path to "adequately demonstrating proficiency by the end of third grade." However, analysis shows that most students, identified as SRD or below grade level or not, do not meet expectations on CMAS at the end of third grade.

- Further, READ Act assessments from the approved advisory list, tend to focus (particularly at the early grades) on specific foundational reading skills and behaviors, as described in the READ Act itself. A question for the CDE to consider is whether the outcomes of the READ Act should be measured in terms of overall CMAS performance or a narrower construct of reading represented by CMAS reading subscores. The growth to standard metric required by the READ Act should be based on a standard that is attainable and aligned with the specific knowledge and skills that students identified as having an SRD

or below grade level should be expected to achieve by the end of grade 3.

- **Appendix 1: Site Visit Selection**
- **Appendix 2: Data Sources**
- **Appendix 3: Protocols**

Appendix 1: Site Visit Selection

Based on the findings from the first year of the evaluation, site visit selection in Year 2 shifted its focus to schools (and their LEPs) with high concentrations of students learning English and students with disabilities. WestEd chose sites in order to better understand how these groups of students are impacted by the READ Act and how schools and LEPs are serving their needs while also meeting the statutory goals of the evaluation.

WestEd created a dataset of school- and LEP- contextual data from publicly available CDE and U.S. Department of Education sources combined with CDE-provided funding information about ELGs. Analysts first determined which schools and LEPs were eligible for site visits. While all schools that had received ELGs (either as part of a cohort or as a professional development grant) or had LEPs that had received per-pupil funding were eligible, the analysts endeavored to not revisit schools or LEPs that had participated in site visits during Year 1 in order to reduce their administrative burden. In the case of particularly large LEPs, such as Denver Public Schools, this was not always possible. In addition, LEP site visits were limited to LEPs that had received at least one ELG grant. Next, analysts sorted schools by their concentration of English learners and, separately, students with disabilities. A set of school-level characteristics were examined alongside these concentrations to ensure a diverse set of site visit schools. Additional school-level characteristics in the analyses included:

- ELG types (for representation from all cohorts and professional development grant years, with an emphasis on more recent years and cohorts),
- Colorado regions (for a diversity of regions),
- urbanicity (for the representation of cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas),
- total enrollment (for the representation of different school sizes),

- poverty level (using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Neighborhood Poverty Index; for the representation of a diversity of neighborhoods), and
- READ Act funding level (to ensure that a certain number of students had received an SRD designation).

Analysts used the dataset to choose school sites using the procedures and rules of thumb that follow. The process is rooted in data but also relies on analysts' judgment. If another set of analysts were using the same data and followed the same procedure, we would expect the lists to be similarly composed but not necessarily include the same schools.

Procedure:

- Ensure that approximately half of the sample is made up of schools with high rates of students with disabilities, and the other half is made up of schools with high concentrations of students learning English.
- For ELG schools, include schools from each grant type and cohort.
- Include a range of urbanicities and regions.
- Include a range of neighborhood poverty levels.
- Examine the school size and READ Act funding allocation.
- Ensure that the school or LEP has not been previously visited, if feasible.

The analysts selected 20 sites to visit: 10 ELG sites and 10 LEP sites. Five of the sites included high concentrations of English learners, and five included high concentrations of students with disabilities. Due to travel restrictions, the site visits were all conducted virtually. If a site was unable to participate, the analysts selected an alternative site with similar student group concentrations and, if possible, school characteristics. Because student populations were not evenly distributed across the state, some regions and school types were over-represented in the site visit locations.

Because of the geographic realities of student distribution and the goals of the evaluation in Year 2, equal representation of all urbanicities, regions, and so on was a secondary consideration. After discussions with CDE, LEPs, and school sites, three additional rural or small rural sites were selected to increase their representation in the evaluation.

Appendix 2: Data Sources

The evaluation has drawn from a wide range of data sources to inform our analyses, including extant data from the Colorado Department of Education and publicly available data sets, interviews with CDE staff, a technical advisory group of assessment experts, inventories of staff in LEPs and schools that received READ Act funding and participated in READ Act activities, and virtual site visits with a sample of schools and LEPs that received READ Act funding, with a focus on schools with high percentages of students with disabilities and students learning English. Throughout the report, missing or null data is presented as blank. For non-publicly available data—for example, the data that underlies analyses of SRDs and student outcomes—any data aggregation that represents fewer than 16 students was suppressed, whether expressed as a count or a percentage of a total. This threshold is based on state law, following the more conservative standard for data suppression of student achievement and growth data in the State Performance Framework.

Extant Data

This evaluation relied on a variety of sources, including publicly available data obtained from the CDE website and select Federal data sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Unless otherwise specified, data analyses followed the subsequent guidelines and procedures. Data were received as Excel or .CSV files and lightly edited in Excel to remove extraneous rows such as sub-headers. Data were then imported into Stata. All major data manipulations were done in Stata, and .do files produced to document the data manipulations and enable replication. Data were cleaned according to a shared set of conventions, which included guidelines for naming and data formatting. Multiple analysts worked on each dataset and reviewed changes to ensure data integrity. Each dataset had an accompanying codebook that documented the data sources, data values, variable titles, variable labels, and similar elements. Datasets were longitudinal and combined multiple

years of data into single files. Preliminary files and codebooks were submitted as part of the Raw Data Deliverable Draft in January 2022. Updated files, including those powering analyses throughout this report and the online school and LEP dashboards, were included in the Raw Data Deliverable in April 2022 and will continue to be updated and submitted throughout the life of the evaluation, although changes will be made annually. From Year 1 to Year 2, analysts reconfigured the structure of the main analytical file. Rather than several independent data files within various analytical software, they created one primary analytical file containing four types of information:

- student-level data describing student characteristics, interim assessment reading achievement, CMAS or CoALT achievement, and relevant READ Act designations;
- LEP-level information on READ Act allocations and the use of those funds;
- school-level information on ELG fund distribution for both standard ELG and ELG Professional Development grantees; and
- LEP- and school-level contextual location and demographic composition data.

The dataset provides information on three levels—students, schools, and LEPs—over six school years (SY): 2014-15 to 2020-21. No data was included from the 2019-20 academic year due to an assessment pause because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were organized as a single longitudinal dataset with one observation per student, school, and LEP per year.

School or Local Education Provider Contextual Data

Contextual datasets of local education providers and schools were derived from publicly available data retrieved from the CDE website and select Federal data sources. Publicly available school- and LEP-level data from CDE for the 2014-15 to 2020-21 school years informed demographic,

grade-level, and instructional program enrollment; mobility; free and reduced-price lunch eligibility; small-rural designation; region; and LEP setting. Publicly available NCES data enabled the creation of a school-level locale file, including every school operating in Colorado between 2014-15 and 2018-19. Analysts combined the datasets into a single contextual data file that included the period of 2014-15 through 2020-21, when available. Not all datasets or variables were available at both the school and LEP levels for each year; for example, some student population enrollment counts were only reported in more recent years, and some race and ethnicity categories changed year to year.

Early Literacy Grant Funding

The ELG program was established in 2012 to provide funds to schools to support their efforts to improve student literacy. Schools can apply for ELG funding independently or as part of a consortium with other schools. To date, there have been five cohorts of ELG grantees, with over $30 million awarded in total (across the lifespans of the first four cohorts). Most ELG grant award information for Cohorts 1 through 4 was obtained directly from the CDE. Data for Cohorts 1 through 3 were provided as Excel worksheets, while data for Cohort 4 were provided as a PDF, which was then converted into an Excel sheet. Data from all five cohorts were merged into a single, school-level dataset, which was checked for missing and illogical values to ensure accuracy in reporting. School-level ELG funding was only reported for those schools that applied individually. For schools that applied as consortiums, the annual ELG funding was reported at the consortium level, as school-level funding amounts were unavailable. We also included, for each school, the total amount of the Comprehensive ELG funding for the entire cohort as we did not receive year-by-year funding information after the 2018-19 school year.

In 2018, the revised READ Act authorized the ELG PD program. These funds were specifically intended for early literacy professional

development for elementary educators. The Early Literacy Grant Annual Professional Development Program grants were awarded for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. CDE provided our team with a list of schools that received ELG PD grants but not the award amounts. In this report, we indicate whether or not a school had received an ELG PD grant. All ELG data was combined with the school- and LEP-level contextual data previously discussed.

Student-Level Data
READ Act Collection

Each year, CDE collects student-level interim assessment demographic data, including assessment types used to determine student SRD status, interim assessment scores, and SRD and READ Plan designations. The data spanned from 2013-14 to 2020-21 (with the exception of 2019-20, due to the statewide assessment pause) and included data for students in kindergarten through third grade. However, due to data irregularities in the 2013-14 school year (i.e., the first year of data collection for the READ Act) and discussions with CDE, the analysis began in 2014-15. These data were provided by CDE as a series of year-by-year .CSV files. The interim assessment and demographic data were received from CDE and carefully cleaned, using longitudinal codebooks to accurately and consistently name and represent each data element, some of which had changed sources, names, and values over time. For example, a variable indicating a student's gender existed in one source in the early years and then changed midway through the dataset, so a new variable was created to bridge the datasets and contradictory coding values. Many new values were added over time as, for example, more assessments were used across the state. Year-by-year files were appended into one longitudinal data file.

CMAS, CSLA, and CoAlt

To evaluate student growth and expand the understanding of READ Act interventions' relationships with outcomes, WestEd requested additional

data from CDE, in particular student-level data detailing achievement on the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) examination and its alternatives (which included the Colorado Spanish Language Arts [CSLA] assessment for eligible English learners and the Colorado Alternate Assessment [CoAlt] for students with significant cognitive disabilities). WestEd requested and received student-level data, including but not limited to demographic variables (some of which overlap with the assessment data described above), assessment scores in math and English Language Arts, and specific categories of READ Act interventions that students may have received, such as full-day kindergarten, summer school, and tutoring. These data spanned from 2014-15 through 2020-21 (with the exception of 2019-20) and contained students in kindergarten through third grade. The data was received in several parts, including a longitudinal .CSV file containing multiple years of data and additional files with single grades of data. The data were cleaned following the same general procedures described for the READ Act collection. Using the masked student IDs that uniquely identified each student across datasets, these data were merged with the READ Act collection to create a single student-level longitudinal file describing the characteristics and performance of each student in each year. Analysts created additional variables to aid analysis—for example, indicators of student movement between LEPs and schools and more granular categorizations of how students transition between SRD statuses.

School and LEP-level data about student performance were acquired by aggregating student-level data to show changes throughout the history of the READ Act in assessment use, SRD designation, READ Plan designation, CMAS English Language Arts scores, and other indicators of interest for stakeholders. This also allowed for analyses between LEPs or school-level populations and the sub-populations that were tested and belonged to the assessment dataset. Masked IDs permitted the tracking of students over time to explore how they transitioned through SRD and

READ Plan statuses and to examine their eventual proficiency levels on CMAS as they progressed through school.

Demographics

Each year, Colorado collects demographic information about the students enrolled in its schools. WestEd requested this data from CDE for all students in the state to facilitate analyses, including comparisons of students over time across a variety of peer and identity groups, perform assessment analyses, and validate and compare demographic characteristics contained in other data collections used in the evaluation. There were purposeful overlaps in the demographic data requested across collections. These demographic categories included but were not limited to gender, English learner status, IEP status, disability type, free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, and race and ethnicity. This data was received as a longitudinal .CSV file spanning 2014-15 through 2020-21 that contained students in all grade levels. The data were cleaned following the same general procedures described for the READ Act collection. Using the masked student IDs that uniquely identified each student across datasets, these data were merged with the READ Act data to create a single student-level longitudinal file describing the characteristics and performance of each student in each year. This data was also compared with the demographic information provided in the CMAS, CSLA, and CoAlt files to examine consistency across data sources.

Issues in Merging Student Data

Each dataset containing student data was unique and contained neither the exact same set of students nor the exact same demographic data for those students. This is a common feature of student-level longitudinal data and occurs for a number of reasons. Demographic and assessment data may be collected at different times, students may take one exam but not another (an interim assessment but not the CMAS, for instance), students may change schools or move out of state, and so on.

When merging each set of student-level data, analysts took care to include as many students as possible by including a masked external ID unique to each student and each school year. However, as documented below, some issues arose in merging the different student-level files.

Students in the years 2014-15 through 2018-19 were a perfect match between the READ Act collection and CMAS data collection, which is to say that each student present in the READ Act collection file was also present in the CMAS data provided. When merging the demographic file with the combined student-level assessment data and school and LEP contextual data (i.e., the working data file), approximately 97 percent of the student observations in the working data file had matches in the demographics file. All matched observations and all unmatched students from the working data file were kept. Approximately 9 percent of student observations had at least one conflict between the working file and the demographics file. This means that for at least one variable the files have in common, the values for a particular student in a particular year did not match. For instance, they could have been reported as being in second grade in one file and first in another. In these cases of overlap and disagreement, the value from the working data file was kept, preserving the value from the assessment data. Because the assessment data were key to the focus of this evaluation, those data were prioritized over other sets. For the same reason, there were no student-level observations for the 2019-20 school year when the state had an assessment pause.

Additionally, when merging in the third grade CMAS scores from the 2020-21 school year, approximately 97 percent of the students included in the third grade CMAS data file matched a student record in the working file. The 3 percent without a match (about 2,000 students) were dropped—analyses would be very limited for students without matches in the working file as they would not have associated READ assessment data and demographic information.

Finally, when merging the Colorado Spanish Language Arts assessment[14] data from 2015-16 through 2020-21, approximately 38 percent of the student observations in the CSLA file did not have matches in the working data file and were therefore dropped. This is not surprising— due to READ Act testing exemptions, not all students learning English participated in READ Act-related interim assessments.

The final Year 2 working data file contained 1,533,362 student-level observations and 2,630 school or LEP-level observations, with each student observation containing contextual information about the LEP and school they attended in a given year, and each school and LEP also constituting its own observation in a given year.

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[14] The Colorado Spanish Language Arts (CSLA) exam is an accommodation form of CMAS for third and fourth graders who meet the eligibility criteria (primarily students who are evaluated to be Not English Proficient or Limited English Proficient).

Data source(s)	Enrollment[15]	Race/Ethnicity Distribution[16]	Other Enrollment of Interest[17]	Mobility Rate[18]	READ Act Funding	Grade Level Distribution of Sample	Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Sample	Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status of Sample	Other Student Demographics	Interim Assessment Usage	Interim Assessment Scores	READ Act Interventions	Student Movement Between SRD Designations	CMAS, CSLA, and CoAlt Scores and SRD Status
Publicly Available LEP- and School-Level Pupil Membership Data[19]	X	X	X	X										
READ Act Significant Reading Deficiency and READ Plan Demographic Assessment Data, provided by CDE						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Colorado Measures of Academic Success English Language Arts Demographic Assessment Data, provided by CDE														X
READ Act (Per Pupil and ELG) Funding Data, provided by CDE					X									
Publicly Available ELG Data[20]					X									
Publicly Available CDE District Revenue[21]					X									

[15] Membership by District/School and Grade Level (2015–21)

[16] Membership by District, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender (for LEPs) or Membership by School, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Grade (2015–21)

[17] Membership by District/School and Instructional Program; Membership by District/School and Free or Reduced Lunch Eligibility (2015–21)

[18] District/School Mobility Rates by Instructional Program Service Type (2015-21)

[19] Data described above are available here: https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/rvprioryearpmdata

[20] Data are available here: https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/comprehensiveelg

[21] Data are available here: https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/revexp. Annual revenue for the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years were not available at the time these reports were published.

Interviews

Interviews with CDE Leadership

In November and December 2021, WestEd conducted one-hour interviews with CDE leadership, including the Associate Commissioner of Student Learning, the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, the Preschool Through Third Grade Office Director, and a supervisor in the Office of Special Education (See Appendix 3 for the full interview protocol). The purpose of these interviews was to better understand CDE's overall strategic approach to literacy, how the READ Act influenced that strategy, related literacy guidance, the offices and staff members responsible for components of that strategy, and the indicators CDE uses to assess their literacy strategy.

Technical Advisory Group

Between November 2021 and May 2022, WestEd analyzed approved READ Act interim assessments along with score data from the assessments and met with an expert panel to discuss the results and analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to review the comparability of the assessments and their SRD cut scores and to test the feasibility of establishing a common growth scale across assessments. Detailed findings from qualitative and quantitative analyses were available in separate reports; overall, the results suggested that neither the content of the assessments nor student scores that identified students with SRDs were fully comparable.

Inventories

LEP Inventory

The LEP Inventory issued in Year 2 focused on READ Act implementation during the 2021-22 school year. The primary topic areas inventoried were LEPs' approaches to literacy, the use of READ Act Funds, student reading level classification and growth to standard (particularly for

students with IEPs and those learning English), the development and implementation of READ Plans, the organization and provision of READ Act-specific instructional programs and assessments, and training for teaching reading. As part of the inventory, WestEd requested LEP documentation, including available LEP-level strategic literacy plans, sample READ Plans, IEPs, and any other student-level plans and LEP-level guidance related to how LEPs identify students with SRDs, how they exit students from READ Plans, and how they serve students with SRD designations.

The evaluation team began administering the inventories on February 3, 2022. CDE emailed a generic inventory link to their contact for each LEP (the total number inventoried was 184) and sent reminder emails on February 8, February 23, and February 28. WestEd initially closed the inventory on March 17. After hearing from several LEPs who still wished to submit their inventories, the inventory was reopened on March 21 and permanently closed on March 25. Throughout the inventory period, the project coordinator at WestEd fielded email and telephone requests to assist respondents. Eventually, 127 respondents accessed the LEP inventory and provided information. The LEP inventory data was cleaned, and one response was chosen per LEP by selecting the LEP response with the highest completion rate or the earliest completion date, resulting in 119 LEP responses used for the primary analysis. As shown in Exhibit X, the LEP inventory respondents were relatively representative of the overall LEP population in Colorado in terms of their geographic characteristics (i.e., rural designation status, region, and setting; See Exhibit A.2). For example, the LEP inventory had approximately the same percentage of rural and small rural districts as the overall state.

Exhibit A.2. Geographic Characteristics of LEP Inventory Respondents

Geographic Characteristic	Frequency (%) Among All LEPs in Colorado	Frequency (%) Among LEP Inventory Respondents
Rural Designation[22]		
Rural	27.2% (n = 40)	29.0% (n = 27)
Small Rural	72.8% (n = 107)	71.0% (n = 66)
Region		
Northwest Region	11.5% (n = 23)	8.4% (n = 10)
Southwest Region	12.5% (n = 25)	10.9% (n = 13)
Northeast Region	17.0% (n =34)	19.3% (n = 23)
Pikes Peak Region	15.0% (n = 30)	16.0% (n = 19)
West Central Region	7.0% (n = 14)	7.6% (n = 9)
North Central Region	10.5% (n = 21)	13.5% (n = 16)
Southeast Region	15.5% (n = 31)	13.5% (n = 16)
Metro Region	11.0% (n =22)	10.9% (n = 13)
Setting		
Remote	42.8% (n = 86)	45.4% (n = 54)
Outlying Town	24.4% (n = 49)	26.1% (n = 31)
Urban-Suburban	8.5% (n = 17)	10.1% (n = 12)
Denver Metro	7.5% (n = 15)	9.2% (n = 11)
Outlying City	6.5% (n = 13)	7.6% (n = 9)
Colorado BOCES	10.5% (n = 21)	1.7% (n = 2)

Teacher, Coach, and Principal Inventory

WestEd inventoried principals, K through third grade reading teachers, and K through third grade reading coaches as part of the Year 2 evaluation. Topic areas included staff's educational and professional backgrounds, the usage of READ Plans, the selection of READ Act-funded

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[22] *Rural Designation only pertains to standard school districts (i.e., not including BOCES, the Charter School Institute, or the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind).*

activities, experiences with reading coaching, experiences in determining students with SRD status as well as removing them from that status, experiences creating READ Plans for students as well as exiting them from READ Plans, instructional program use, professional development, and the 45-hour teacher training requirement.

The evaluation team began administering the inventories on March 24, 2022. CDE emailed a generic inventory link to their principal listserv, requesting their participation and asking them to share the link with staff at their schools, specifically K through third grade teachers who taught reading and coaches who supported these teachers. CDE sent a reminder email to principals on April 7, and the inventory was closed on April 19, 2022. A total of 730 respondents accessed the school inventory and provided some information. The school inventory data was cleaned by selecting one observation per individual and sufficiently completed responses, resulting in 559 responses that were used for the analysis (183 principals, 111 reading coaches and interventionists, and 265 K through third grade teachers). As shown in Exhibit A.3, the school staff respondents were relatively representative of the overall school population in Colorado in terms of school locale. Teachers, coaches, and principals from "city" schools were more likely to respond than staff members at schools that were designated "town" or "rural."

Exhibit A.3 Geographic Characteristics of School Inventory Respondents

Geographic Characteristic	Frequency (%) Among All Schools in Colorado	Frequency (%) Among School Inventory Respondents
School Locale		
City: Large	23.4% (n = 260)	27.6% (n = 72)
City: Mid	9.8% (n = 109)	12.3% (n = 32)
City: Small	2.3% (n = 26)	3.5% (n = 9)
Suburb: Large	28.1% (n = 312)	25.7% (n = 67)
Suburb: Mid	3.0% (n = 33)	3.1% (n = 8)
Suburb: Small	3.0% (n = 33)	1.5% (n = 4)
Town: Fringe	1.8% (n = 20)	2.7% (n = 7)
Town: Distant	2.0% (n = 22)	3.5% (n = 9)
Town: Remote	5.8% (n = 64)	5.4% (n = 14)
Rural: Fringe	7.2% (n = 80)	4.6% (n = 12)
Rural: Distant	5.0% (n = 56)	3.1% (n = 8)
Rural: Remote	8.6% (n = 96)	7.3% (n = 19)
Rural Designation		
Rural	27.2% (n = 40)	57.9% (n = 22)
Small Rural	72.8% (n = 107)	42.1% (n = 16)
Region[23]		
Northwest Region	10.5% (n = 19)	14.1% (n = 9)
Southwest Region	12.7% (n = 23)	9.4% (n = 6)
Northeast Region	17.7% (n =32)	9.4% (n = 6)
Pikes Peak Region	15.5% (n = 28)	15.6% (n = 10)
West Central Region	6.6% (n = 12)	7.8% (n = 5)
North Central Region	11.1% (n = 20)	17.2% (n = 11)
Southeast Region	15.5% (n = 28)	4.7% (n = 3)

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[23] The values in Column 2 pertaining to the LEP region and setting of schools in Colorado differ from the previous exhibit (from the LEP inventory) in that 19 BOCES were dropped as they were not connected to schools in the contextual dataset.

Metro Region	10.5% (n = 19)	21.9% (n = 14)
Setting		
Remote	47.3% (n = 86)	21.9% (n = 14)
Outlying Town	26.9% (n = 49)	29.7% (n = 19)
Urban-Suburban	9.3% (n = 17)	17.2% (n = 11)
Denver Metro	8.2% (n = 15)	21.9% (n = 14)
Outlying City	7.1% (n = 13)	9.4% (n = 6)
Colorado BOCES	1.1% (n = 2)	0% (n = 0)

Site visits

From February through May 2022, evaluation team members conducted 13 virtual LEP level site visits and 10 ELG level site visits (see Appendix 1: Site Visit Selection Criteria for a full discussion of the selection process, Exhibit A.4). Prior to each site visit, district and school staff members were asked to provide artifacts such as sample redacted READ Plans that could provide additional context regarding READ Act implementation. They were also asked to identify district and school staff who could answer questions about the use of READ Act and ELG per-pupil funds and READ Act implementation. Evaluation team members then scheduled one- to three-hour interviews and focus groups via Zoom based on staff availability.

During each interview or focus group, evaluation team members asked a series of questions about participants' K through third grade reading programs, use of READ Act funds, identification of students under the READ Act, training for teaching reading, student advancement decisions, changes in demographics, and READ Act reporting during the 2021-22 school year (see Appendix 3 for site visit protocol).

Exhibit A.4 Site Visit LEPs and Schools

	LEP	School
LEP Site Visits	Charter School Institute	Community Leadership Academy
	Fort Morgan RE-3	Pioneer Elementary School
	Jefferson County R-1	Deane Elementary School
	Yuma 1	Kenneth P Morris Elementary School
	Canon City RE-1	Lincoln School of Science and Technology
	Mesa County Valley 51	Tope Elementary School
	Englewood 1	Wm E. Bishop Elementary School
	Littleton 6	Field Elementary School
	Pueblo County 70	Avondale Elementary School
	Denver Public Schools	Charles M. Schenck Community School
	Park County	Edith Teter Elementary School
	Burlington	Burlington Elementary School
	Archuleta	Pagosa Peak Open School
ELG Site Visits	Denver Public Schools	Cole Arts and Science Academy
	Colorado Springs 11	Wilson Elementary School
	Fort Morgan RE-3	Green Acres Elementary School
	Harrison School District 2	Stratton Meadows Elementary School
	Harrison School District 2	Monterey Elementary School
	Delta County 50(J)	Hotchkiss Elementary School
	School District 49	Evans Elementary School
	Fountain County School District 8	Aragon Elementary School
	Moffat County RE	Sandrock Elementary School
	Charter School Institute	Pinnacle Charter School
	Denver Public Schools	Cole Arts and Science Academy

Qualitative Methodology

First, all site visit transcripts were transcribed. Next, these transcriptions, along with all the documents collected as part of the inventories and site visits, were uploaded to Dedoose. The evaluation team

developed a priori codes based on the major components of the READ Act. Next, evaluation team members calibrated by coding the same two transcripts and two documents and meeting to discuss consistency in coding, codes that could be merged or eliminated, and emerging codes to be added to the coding scheme. This calibration process occurred on a weekly basis during the coding. Once coding was finished, evaluation team members conducted thematic analyses of the coded experts to identify overarching patterns and themes.

Appendix 3: Protocols

CO READ Logic Model
CDE Interview Protocol

High-level goal is to understand:

1. CDE's overall strategic approach to improving literacy
2. How the READ Act influences this strategy
3. The literacy guidance that stems from this strategy
4. Which staff/offices are responsible for which components
5. The indicators CDE uses to assess this strategy

Interview Questions:

1. First, please describe your role and the responsibilities of your office.

2. What is your office's overall strategic approach to K-3 literacy?
   a. Are the latest goals and approaches outlined in **CDE's most recent Strategic Plan** representative of your office's current strategic approach to K-3 literacy improvement? Are there other related documents we should be aware of?

3. What are the factors that influence your office's strategic approach to literacy?

4. In CDE's current strategic plan, literacy is presented with the preschool-to-Kindergarten transition under the goal "Strong Foundations." To what extend does your office focus on Pre-K as a part of your literacy strategy?
   a. Does the READ Act have any influence over this approach?

5. In addition to READ Act funding, what other financial resources are dedicated to improving K-3 literacy?
   a. e.g., Comprehensive State Literacy Grant, Early Literacy Grant

6. In addition to the READ Act, is there other legislation that impacts K-3 literacy?

7. Which CDE staff and offices are involved in strategic planning related to literacy?
   a. Related to READ Act implementation?

8. In what ways are parents, community organizations, or other stakeholders involved in your office's K-3 literacy strategic planning process?
   a. In the implementation process?

9. How does your office use student-, school-, or district-level data to inform state policy and approach related to K-3 literacy?

10. What are the primary activities or components of your office's approach towards K-3 literacy? Which of these are influenced by or related to the READ Act?

11. What state-level guidance or technical assistance does your office provide to support districts in developing strategies to improve K-3 literacy?

12. Do you monitor whether the activities and support provided by your office are leading to changes in district practices or teacher or student experiences? If so, how?

13. What are some of the short-term indications that districts are moving towards improving K-3 literacy?
    a. i.e., what kind of feedback or data are you receiving that shows improvements based on the activities outlined in the strategic plan?

14. Conversely, what are some indications that districts are having a hard time improving their K-3 literacy practices?
    a. Managing READ funds?
    b. Building capacity?

15. What are CDE's short- and long-term literacy goals (as related to *or* unrelated to the READ Act)?
    a. Are CDE's goals similar to (or the same as) the 2021 strategic plan goals?
    b. Are there literacy goals in addition or other than these goals?

16. How would you know if your office's efforts towards improving K-3 literacy were working?

Site Visit Protocol

For Year 2 READ Act Site Visits

Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in today's interview, we greatly appreciate your time and willingness to share your expertise and experience. As you may know, today's interview is being conducted as part of a six-year evaluation of the Colorado READ Act (Reading to Ensure Academic Development).

This evaluation, which began in March 2020, was mandated by the state legislature and is being conducted by an independent research team led by WestEd that includes APA Consulting and RTI International.

The key goals for this evaluation are to:

- Help state policymakers and district leaders to understand the impacts of READ Act funding and support on students, families, schools, and districts;

- Learn and share successes and best practices across districts and schools;

- Understand how READ Act funds were used to inform improvements to the Act; and

- Get direct feedback from school and district leaders about how the Colorado Department of Education can best provide support to further improve READ Act implementation in the future.

The evaluation team has identified your district/school as a candidate to conduct a case study to help gather data to address the key goals outlined above. We would like to be able to share the lessons learned from your experience to benefit other districts and schools across the state.

We will be conducting similar case studies across 10 districts in Colorado to gather information from the district and school leaders in a variety of urban, suburban, and rural settings. We thank you very much for your time participating in this effort.

For the second year of the evaluation, we are focusing on the implementation of the READ Act over the past school year (2020-21) and the current school year (2021-22).

Are you comfortable with us recording this interview? We won't be reporting any identifiable information in any of our reports.

Background Information

Data and Documentation Review Notes:

Participants

Other documentation

2020 non-site visit report

Interview Questions and Notes:

1. **What is your role? What aspects of the READ Act are you involved in?**

2. **What has facilitated implementation of the READ Act? Probe: what has been helpful with implementation like CDE guidance, approved lists, specific stakeholder involvement?**

3. **What barriers have you experienced in implementing the READ Act? Probe: what challenges did you face, like understanding CDE guidance, decisions about approved programs, specific stakeholder involvement?**

4. **What additional supports would be helpful relative to the READ Act?**

Use of READ Act Per Pupil Funds

Data and Documentation Review Notes:

Data

2020-21 READ Act Per Pupil Amount:

2021-22 READ Act Per Pupil Amount:

2020-21 READ Act Spending by category

Planned 2021-22 READ Act Spending by category

Documentation

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **Is there an overall district approach for how READ Act funds fit into the district's strategy for supporting K-3 reading instruction? What were the key factors influencing this approach?**

2. **How did your district spend READ Act funds during the 2020-21 school year? (go through each of the 7 categories as necessary:**
   - **Summer school literacy program**

   - **Core reading instructional programs included on the READ Act advisory list**

   - **Tutoring services**

   - **Other targeted evidence-based or scientifically based intervention services**

   - **Technology which may include software on the advisory list or PD for technology use**

   - **Services of reading specialist from BOCES**

   - **Professional development to support K-3 educators teaching reading**

3. How does your district plan to spend READ Act funds this 2021-22 school year?
   - Summer school literacy program

   - Core reading instructional programs included on the READ Act advisory list

   - Tutoring services

   - Other targeted evidence-based or scientifically based intervention services

   - Technology which may include software on the advisory list or PD for technology use

   - Services of reading specialist from BOCES

   - Professional development to support K-3 educators teaching reading

4. Please describe how you selected these READ Act activities? (Probe: data, stakeholder involvement, who was involved in these decisions/at what level)

5. How did READ Act per-pupil funds fit into your overall expenditures on K-3 reading?

6. What were other large investments and their funding streams used to support K-3 reading?

7. What resources are most critical to your district in addressing challenges for struggling K-3 readers (staffing, funding, technology, assessment)

8. What role, if any, did the investment of READ Act per-pupil funds play in your district's successes around reading?

9. *Have there been any challenges associated with use of per-pupil funds in your district? Probe: what supports are most needed to address these challenges?*

Early Literacy Grant

Data and Documentation Review Notes:

Data

ELG Funding, type, group, years

Documentation

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **Can you please start off by telling us about your Early Literacy grant? Probes: What type(s) of ELG (comprehensive, sustainability, professional development) funding did you receive? When did you receive it?**

2. **Is there an overall district approach for how ELG funds fit into the district's strategy for supporting K-3 reading instruction? What were the key factors influencing this approach?**

3. **On what key K-3 activities were ELG funds utilized for each year of the grant? Probe: Was the usage of funds consistent over time? How did you decide what to spend ELG funds on (i.e., data)? Who was involved in this decision? Were changes in staffing required to support ELG activities?**

4. **How did the ELG funds fit into your overall expenditures on K-3 reading?**

5. **What role did the investment of ELG funds play in your district's successes around reading? Probe: What measures best capture the successes you achieved using ELG funds?**

6. **What have been the biggest overall challenges with how ELG funds were utilized? Probe*: what supports are most needed to address these challenges?***

District Level Literacy Organization

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

Demographic data

ELAT Y/N

CLSD subgrant Y/N

SiBR Y/N

Documentation

District Level Literacy Plan

Logic Model

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **What other literacy-related grants or subgrants has your district received (i.e., ELAT, CLSD)? (Prompt: have you applied for a Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant?)**
2. **How do the activities from these grants align with READ Act activities?**
3. **Can you describe your district's approach for K-3 literacy, specifically in reading? Probes: what is your approach to decision-making on policy; is it mostly at the district or school level? What is the approach to the teaching of reading; is there a district-level policy or guidance?**

4. **How does the READ Act fit in with this approach?**

5. **Have there been any major demographic changes in your district? If yes, how has that affected your approach to literacy?**

Organization and Provision of Instructional Materials, Assessments, and Other Reading Curricula

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

UIP data on instructional programs, assessments, and interventions by school

ELG data instructional programs, assessments, and interventions by ELG-funded school

Documentation

LEP level literacy staff

School level literacy staff

School level literacy plans or guidance

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **Can you describe the instructional materials used for K-3 reading in your district? Probe:**
   a. **Which ones are the approved core, supplemental, and intervention programs used?**
   b. **Are any of these materials supplemented by other materials not on the approved lists? What was the reason for selection of these additional materials?**

2. **What are the reading assessments used in grades K-3? Probe:**
   a. **Which are used for READ Act interim (screening) purposes? Are any students exempt from the interim assessments?**
   b. **Which for diagnostic purposes?**
   c. **Are there other assessments used that are not on the approved list? Why were these selected?**

3. Can you provide a short summary of the roles and responsibilities of district-level staff who are responsible for coordinating and implementing literacy programs including READ Act-funded activities? Probe: For example, is one person responsible for the selection and policy guidance and another person for supporting school-level implementation or monitoring needs?

4. To what extent does the district approve for school use specific instructional programs, assessments, and PD programs? Probe: **Are these decisions concentrated at the district level, are they school-level decisions, or a shared decision? What is the specific process for instructional program and assessment selection?** For example, does the process include consulting the list of READ Act approved materials or soliciting input from school-level reading specialists?

5. What are the biggest challenges your district has faced over the past two years with the process of identifying and serving students identified with SRD in grades K-3? What supports are most needed to address these challenges?

6. *What successes has your district achieved with the process of identifying and serving students identified with SRD in grades K-3? Probe: What are the factors that contributed most to the successes?*

READ Plan Development and Implementation

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

Documentation

District level READ Plan template

District level IEP template

District level School Readiness Plan template

District level guidance body of evidence to identify SRD

District level guidance when to exit student from READ Plan

Sample (5) redacted READ Act Plans

Sample (5) redacted IEPs

Sample (5) redacted school readiness plans

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **Can you describe the district-endorsed process for identifying students with significant reading deficiencies? Probe: What are the specific steps? Which staff are primarily responsible for identifying SRDs, interim assessments used, diagnostic assessment data used for SRD identification, and READ Plan development?**

2. **Is there district guidance or a district definition of what body of evidence is used to identify a student as having a significant reading deficiency? If yes, please describe the evidence referenced in this guidance or definition. Probe: does the evidence include results from interim and/or diagnostic assessments? Does the evidence include results from previously administered interim, diagnostic, or classroom assessments?**

3. Have there been any challenges with the identification of students as having SRD? If yes, please describe.

4. Can you describe the district-endorsed process for the development and implementation of READ Plans? Probe: What are the specific steps? What staff are primarily responsible for developing the READ Plans? What staff are primarily responsible for implementing the READ Plans? What staff are responsible for monitoring student progress on READ Plans?

5. Do staff at the district level review READ Plans for fidelity or consistency of development and implementation? Probe: What is the focus of the review – fidelity? Consistency across schools? Or something else like completion? How often does this review occur? Is there a standard for how often?

6. Do curriculum and instruction (C&I) staff (or the equivalent) use READ Plans for instructional policy or guidance decisions? Probe: What is an example of how district staff have used READ Plans for instructional policy or guidance?

7. Are READ Plans integrated with other plans like IEPs or School Readiness Plans? Probe: How are READ Plans integrated with IEPs or the IEP implementation process? How are READ Plans Integrated with School Readiness Plans?

8. Is there parent/family involvement with the development or implementation of READ Plans? If so, what specific steps does your district take to promote or support parent/family involvement in the development or implementation of READ Plans?

9. What kinds of district supports are available for the development and implementation of READ Plans like READ Plan templates or examples, staff support, professional development outside of reading PD, consultation, or coaching?

10. Is there district-level guidance or procedures about student exit from a READ Plan/SRD status? If yes, describe the procedures for exit and any guidance for schools about the procedures.

11. *In general, is the READ Plan process viewed as being be worth the needed investment of time and resources? Why or why not?*

12. *What are the biggest successes (if any) associated with READ Plan development process?*

13. *What are the biggest challenges with the READ Plan process?*
    Probes:
    a. **What are the biggest challenges associated with exiting students from READ Plans/SRD status?**
    b. **What additional resources are most needed to address these challenges?**
14. **What are they doing to monitor the implementation of READ Plans?**

Needs of English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

District and school level demographic data

Documentation

Redacted IEPs

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

Students with IEPs:

1. **Are there specific district policies or guidance about students who are classified with a disability and the SRD identification process? If yes, please describe. Probe: are there differences in guidance between students who are classified as having a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading and other disability classifications? Is there guidance specifically for students with disability classifications like intellectual disabilities who generally take alternate state assessments?**

2. **Do students with IEPs take the same interim and diagnostic assessments as students without IEPs? Probe: are there differences between students classified as SLD and students classified as having other disabilities? Are some students exempt from interim and diagnostic assessments (like those with intellectual disabilities)?**

3. **What differences are there on READ Plans for students with IEPs compared to students without IEPs? Probe: are the assessment results used in a different way than with students not on IEPs?**

4. **What is the greatest challenge you face in serving students with IEPs?**

5. *Has the READ Plan process strengthened, weakened, or had no effect on your success in serving students with IEPs?*

English Learners:

1. **Are there specific district policies or guidance about students classified as English learners and SRD identification process? If yes, please describe.**

2. **Is there a district-level model for teaching K-3 reading to ELs? If yes, please describe. Probe: for example, some models include two-way bilingual, transitional bilingual, English immersion teaching approaches.**

3. **Do ELs take the same interim and diagnostic assessments as native English speakers?**

4. **What kinds of curricular or instructional changes are made based on ELs assessment results?**

5. **What is the greatest challenge you face in serving ELs?**

6. *Has the READ Plan process strengthened, weakened, or had no effect on your success in serving ELs?*

Teacher Professional Development

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

UIP data on professional development if purchased with per-pupil or ELG funds*

Documentation

District level professional development, technical assistance K-3 literacy

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **What is the approved reading PD program used in your district? Probe: Do schools select the PD program from the approved list instead? If you use a reading PD program other than a program on the approved list, what is the reason for selecting that program?**

2. **How is your district addressing the new READ Act Teacher Training requirement for 45 hours of professional development related to the teaching of reading? Probe: is there district-level guidance on how schools implement the Teacher Training Requirement?**

3. **Is there district-level tracking of Teacher Training Requirement compliance? If you are tracking, what information do you have about what teachers are selecting to fulfill the requirement? Specifically, do you have information about the percentages of teachers who fulfill this requirement with the PD program selected by the district on the approved list? Have there been any challenges related to this requirement in your district?**

4. **What district-level supports are in place for teaching reading? Probe: does the district provide reading professional development, including any technical assistance or coaching, or is this done at the school level? What supports or guidance are from the district level, including in in classroom practice support? With what frequency are these supports offered?**

5. **Are these supports required? Optional?**

Data Systems and Usage

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

READ Act data

ELAT data

Documentation

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **What data systems are in place in your district related to K-3 literacy? (Probe: language and literacy assessment data, READ Act interim assessment data, ELAT data, READ Act plans, IEPs, School Readiness Plans, monitoring/tracking READ Act activities i.e., professional development attendance)**

2. **How are you using these data systems? (Probe: student placement into tiers for appropriate intervention, choice of intervention, mode of intervention i.e., one-on-one, small group, whole group)**

3. **Who has access to these data systems? (Probe: coaches, interventionists, teachers, administrators, others)**

4. **Are schools in your district using data systems as part of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)?**

Growth to Standard

Data and Documentation Review Notes

Data

Documentation

District/school approach to literacy

Other documentation

Interview Questions and Notes

1. **Does your district establish any benchmarks for student literacy growth by grade based on assessment data? If yes, please explain how you developed those benchmarks.**

2. **What data systems are in place to use growth to standard measures?**

3. **What aspects of the READ Act have been the most successful in moving students off of SRD status?**

4. **What aspects of the READ Act have been most successful in moving students' growth to standard?**

Links to Qualtrics Inventories

LEP Inventory

Principal, Coach, K-3 Teacher Inventory