



# **COLORADO COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE LITERACY PLAN**



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education



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## Executive Summary

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The Colorado Department of Education has set an ambitious target that spans across departments, divisions, and is inclusive of literacy across all ages, birth through grade 12. The goal is that all students will be proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Attaining literacy proficiency by the end of third grade is critical to a student's success and an essential step in a child's educational journey toward graduation. We will also strive for all students through grade 12 to meet or exceed state English Language Arts standards. The Colorado Department of Education acknowledges that there are many stakeholders in the support and delivery of instruction to developing a literate child. In order to achieve this goal, Colorado will need to secure shared ownership of literacy across all departments, divisions, and organizations working to support families and children birth through grade 12 as well as leveraging and connecting related work across the state, districts, schools, and classrooms for all students including early childhood, language acquisition, diverse learners, and family/community partnership endeavors.

This comprehensive literacy plan addresses birth-12th grade literacy that encompasses oral language, listening, speaking, writing, and reading for all students. This document outlines the reasons and objectives of the Comprehensive Statewide Literacy Plan. It details student ELA achievement data and why a comprehensive literacy plan is needed to drive this work forward. Additionally, the plan defines how research has informed the critical core components of a comprehensive literacy program including delivery of instruction through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework, learning standards and behavioral expectations, problem-solving, data and analysis, communication and collaboration of stakeholders, capacity building and leadership, and what is needed to meet the needs of historically underserved students. The Colorado Department of Education is an active partner and collaborator with the thousands of incredibly talented and dedicated educators across the state. In continuing collaborating and partnering with educators, CDE is engaging with a broad and diverse group of stakeholders to develop resources that outline high-impact evidence-based strategies to implement in schools and classrooms to meet the literacy needs of Colorado's students.

This plan is designed to help us meet our ambitious goal of literacy attainment for all students. Literacy proficiency is critical to developing thinkers and lifelong learners who will build communities and address the complex problems of our local and global communities. In developing readers, writers, and communicators, we are not only changing lives, but we are also changing neighborhoods, communities, and society. This literacy plan aims to provide an intentional, comprehensive, and coherent approach to literacy across the state that can help us close our achievement gaps and dramatically increase reading and writing performance for all students. Key principles guiding this evidence-based plan are equity and access for all students, flexibility, choice and innovation, continuous improvement of systems and structures, collaboration, and partnerships.

## Vision, Mission, and Strategy

### Our Vision

All students graduate reading for college and careers and are prepared to be productive citizens of Colorado.

### Our Mission

Ensuring equity and opportunity for every student, every step of the way.

### Our Strategy

- **Strong Foundations:** Support High Quality Early Learning and Literacy for All Students
- **All Means All:** Expand Access and Opportunity for Historically Underserved Students
- **Quality Schools:** Prioritize and Maximize Support for Schools and Districts Identified for Academic Improvements
- **More Options:** Expand High School Options to Ensure All Students Are Ready for College and/or Living-Wage Jobs
- **Educators Matter:** Develop a Strong Pipeline of High-Quality Teachers and Principals and Provide Deeper Support for School and District Leaders
- **Organizational Excellence**



#### GOAL:

By the end of third grade, all students can read at grade level.

Support High Quality Early Learning and Literacy for All Students



#### GOAL:

Regardless of demographics and learning needs, all students meet or exceed state academic standards.

Expand Access and Opportunity for Historically Underserved Students



#### GOAL:

All students and families have access to quality schools that meet their students' needs.

Prioritize and Maximize Support for Schools and Districts Identified for Academic Improvements



#### GOAL:

Students graduate high school with knowledge, skills, and experience needed for career and college success.

Expand High School Options to Ensure All Students are Ready for College and/or Living-Wage Jobs



#### GOAL:

High quality educators in every classroom; strong leaders in every building.

Develop a Strong Pipeline of High-Quality Teachers and Principals and Provide Deeper Support for School and District Leaders



Underpinning our success with each of our key initiatives will be our commitment to excellence with each of our core programs and operations. By holding ourselves to the highest degree of excellence in customer service and performance, we will effectively implement our key initiatives and accomplish our goals.

## Alignment of Efforts to Support Literacy

Colorado's vision is that all students graduate ready for college and careers and are prepared to be productive citizens. To achieve our vision, we recognize that all students must acquire literacy to be successful in life. We have identified six key initiatives to move us toward obtaining our vision: Strong Foundations, All Means All, Quality Schools, More Options, Educators Matter, and Excellence. We have adopted policies and procedures that guide our work in supporting all learners in obtaining essential literacy skills. As we move forward, it is essential that we synchronize our efforts to strengthen and guarantee success for all students. The Department encourages districts and schools to align their efforts and funding with a local comprehensive literacy plan, emphasizing the importance of having a clear and well-defined strategy to maximize the impact on student achievement.

### Strong Foundations

1. Colorado offers a universal preschool program aimed at helping students acquire early literacy and school readiness skills which are essential for students to become readers. To give children the best possible start to their education, Colorado has also developed a rating system so that parents may choose the best preschool program for their child.
  - [Quality Preschool Rating System - Colorado Shines](#)
  - [Universal Preschool - High quality early learning addressing preschool literacy standards](#)
  - In 2021, Governor Jared Polis authorized the formation of the [Colorado Department of Early Childhood](#) that oversees focused early childhood learning programs and efforts.
2. Coursework in literacy is available to early childhood teachers and childcare professionals. This will ensure that the youngest learners have teachers who are trained in research and evidence-based literacy instruction.
  - [CDHS PDIS](#) - (literacy course related to supporting childcare workforce)
3. The Office of Adult Education Initiatives supports adult education programs around the state with funding, program oversight, and technical assistance to help parents obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the education of their children.
  - [Adult Education](#)

### All Means All

1. The State of Colorado is committed to expanding the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model to support all students in becoming readers. The MTSS process identifies students who may be at risk for developing literacy problems and provides support based on their needs.
  - [MTSS model](#)
2. To serve all students, The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provides resources about what dyslexia is and how Colorado schools are supporting these students through legislation, teacher professional development, and structured literacy.
  - [Dyslexia](#) (Handbook, dyslexia working group based on legislation and dyslexia pilot project) all described in this link.
3. [Structured literacy](#) is an approach that is based in science, uses evidence-based strategies, and is direct, explicit, and systematic. This instructional approach provides essential skill instruction that all learners will benefit from, and our most challenged readers require.

4. [Structured Literacy Project \(ESSU\)](#) - The Structured Literacy Project, initiated in 2016, was designed to meet federal requirements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for the inclusion of a 'State Identified Measurable Result' (SiMR) into the Office of Exceptional Student Services' State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). The Project was designed to address and enhance the use of the Science of Reading (SOR) and Evidence-based Instructional Practices in early foundational reading skills for grades K-3 through teacher professional development, embedded coaching, and the provision of instructional resources. The Project assists schools in pairing SOR/EBI skills instruction with schools' core reading instruction/resources and during Tier II and Tier III interventions to create an aligned and consistent approach to early reading instruction across all tiers.
5. [Institute of Higher Education Reviews on Literacy Programs / Coursework](#) - All Educator Preparation Programs participate in a cyclical review/reauthorization process conducted by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Division of Educator Talent and the Colorado Department of Higher Education. At the direction of the Colorado State Board of Education, these reauthorization reviews and visits now include a focused review of *all* literacy-related courses. Course content, texts, instruction materials and practices are examined through the lens of alignment to the Science of Reading. These focused reviews are conducted by the state reauthorization team which includes a CDE literacy/dyslexia specialist from the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU).
6. Students who speak languages other than English need support both at home and in school. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) offers professional development to teachers so that they can best support students who are English language learners.
  - [Office of CLDE Professional Learning](#) - CDE delivered, World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) workshops, and WIDA online self-paced modules.
7. The Office of Migrant Education supports the needs of migrant children and youth to ensure that they receive full and appropriate educational services and opportunities. CDE strives to help migratory children overcome barriers to education so that they become successful readers and be ready for postsecondary or employment opportunities.
  - [Migrant Education Program](#) - (Language ENvironment Analysis (LENA) project)
8. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) offers [professional development for teachers](#) working with students with disabilities. To best serve these students, CDE offers coursework and in-service training in evidence-based literacy instruction to support students with disabilities.
  - Professional learning and technical assistance products from the Exceptional Student Services Unit specific to literacy and specific to students with special needs populations beyond dyslexia (e.g. Literacy Institute for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, emergent literacy for students with significant support needs and deaf-blindness, literacy strategies for students with Blind and Visually Impaired, Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, etc. are provided because the use evidence based practices and assessments we will meet the needs of all learners.
9. The role of the Colorado Instructional Materials Center (CIMC) is to provide braille and large print textbooks and serve as a repository for American Printing House (APH) educational materials for all Colorado students ages birth through twelfth grade who are blind/visually impaired.
  - [Colorado Instructional Materials Center \(CIMC\)](#) - Exceptional Student Services Unit funded repository service of braille books for all of Colorado's braille readers.



## Quality Schools

1. Colorado engages in a continuous cycle of improvement to improve student learning and system effectiveness using a template to meet state, federal, and program accountability requirements in compliance with the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act).
  - [Unified Improvement Process](#)
  - READ Team working with [Unified Improvement Planning](#) to provide technical assistance supports for school/district improvement planning for early literacy
  - READ Act (Preventative model with [universal screening](#), [teacher training](#), [ELAT](#), [Public Information Campaign](#))
2. The Colorado Turnaround Network accelerates student achievement for select schools through targeted support, resources, and flexibility. It assists schools in developing rigorous improvement plans around four research-based conditions to improve student literacy achievement. These conditions include culture shift, instructional transformation, talent development and leadership.
  - CDE [Turnaround Network](#) provides support in literacy to schools in turnaround status
3. The Early Literacy Grant Program is a comprehensive grant program focused on system-wide early literacy efforts and has been expanded to include preschool literacy. Through this program, CDE assists grant recipients in establishing literacy programs based on the science of teaching reading.
  - [Early Literacy Grant](#) and [Early Literacy Grant Preschool Expansion](#)
4. The Empowering Action for Student Improvement (EASI) grant matches schools' needs with evidence-based strategies and adequate resources through a streamlined application process.
  - [Empowering Action for School Improvement Grant - District Early Literacy Instructional Program Review](#)

## More Options

1. CDE has partnered with libraries and literacy organizations to offer as many literacy opportunities as possible to readers both inside and outside of school to improve their access to quality literature and instruction.
  - [Libraries Growing Readers](#)
  - [Imagination Library of Colorado](#)
2. The Colorado [BOCES](#) provides services to students to equalize educational opportunities.
3. Alternative pathways and [options](#) for high school and [post-secondary planning](#).

## Educators Matter

1. CDE supports teacher professional development by providing access to high quality courses, webinars, conferences, and other learning experiences. To better support students' literacy development, Colorado is investing in the education of its teachers to create a solid foundation in the science of teaching reading and evidence-based literacy instruction.
  - Under the auspices of a grant from the Collaborative for Educator Effectiveness, Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR Center), the CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) engages higher education faculty and specialists in projects related to first-best literacy instruction for students with disabilities. These include working with IHEs to enhance and expand curricula designed to improve prospective teachers' understanding of structured literacy, professional learning opportunities for university faculty who teach reading courses, and options for those in leadership programs to gain deeper knowledge about the importance of literacy instruction.

2. Teacher certification and endorsement is based upon rules and standards in alignment with Colorado state standards to ensure that educators are trained in the science of teaching reading and evidence-based literacy instruction.
  - [Recertification](#) - Higher Education Programs
  - [Standards - Teacher knowledge](#)
  - [Reading Teacher Endorsement](#)

## Excellence

1. The state of Colorado aligns curriculum to the state standards to support literacy for all students.
  - [Elementary Teacher Literacy Standards](#)
  - [Reading, Writing, And Communicating Academic Standards](#)

Standards and Instructional Support (i.e. standards literacy, disciplinary literacy, Best First Instruction (BFI), Social-Emotional Learning, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Professional Learning Modules, Reading Writing and Communicating (RWC) Trainings/Professional Development, Best Practices for Teachers, regional, state and national Committee of Practitioners/Collaboratives/Conferences--WestEd, Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS), Colorado Language Arts Society (CLAS, the state affiliate of NCTE), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL), and assessment)



## Why a Comprehensive Statewide Literacy Plan?

It is estimated that approximately 5% of students have profound learning difficulties including those with significant cognitive delays and other significant support needs that will impact reading proficiency. According to Dr. Louisa Moats, the remaining ninety-five percent of students can be taught how to read at a level constrained only by their reasoning and listening comprehension abilities (2020). These points are critical to attend to as we review our incoming kindergarten data, monitor growth, and make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. As educators, we must embrace this evidence that all but a few students can learn to read proficiently and be willing to put into place, through collegiate collaboration, an environment and instructional opportunities that reflect practices founded in research and proven to work for all students. One major issue in education is that not enough attention is given to what the research reports. According to Daniel Willingham and Andrew Rotherham (2010) in *Educational Leadership*, “*We don’t, in the education sector, do enough to support a culture or politics that prizes empiricism and learning—including learning about which education practices work best and what empirical data indicates about which practices are most effective.*” Statewide literacy data in conjunction with information gleaned from the Literacy Needs Assessment underscore the need to reevaluate existing practices to better address the needs of students in Colorado.

### Summary Student Data

- The data collected and reported by the state in the [2023 Annual Report on the Colorado Read Act](#) reflect that students identified with a Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) has increased from 2016/2017 with the largest percentage of students with an SRD in school year 2020/2021. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)
- The number of students identified with an SRD has significantly increased due to pandemic learning loss and disruption to student learning. (Figure 1)
- Students in the sub-groups of Hispanic, Black/African American, Native American/Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander are identified more often for READ Plans and less likely to Meet Expectations on the CMAS than those from White or Asian sub-groups. (Figure 3)
- The percentage of multilingual students identified as having an SRD has increased post-pandemic. (Figure 4)
- Colorado third graders did almost as well on CMAS standardized tests in 2022 as third graders did before the pandemic, an encouraging sign after three disrupted school years. Nearly 41% of Colorado third graders met or exceeded grade-level expectations in literacy in 2022, almost as high as the 41.3% who did so in 2019. This number has once again dipped in 2023 to 39.9%.
- The percentage of K-3 students eligible for special education services with an SRD from 2016 to 2022 has increased. (Figure 5)

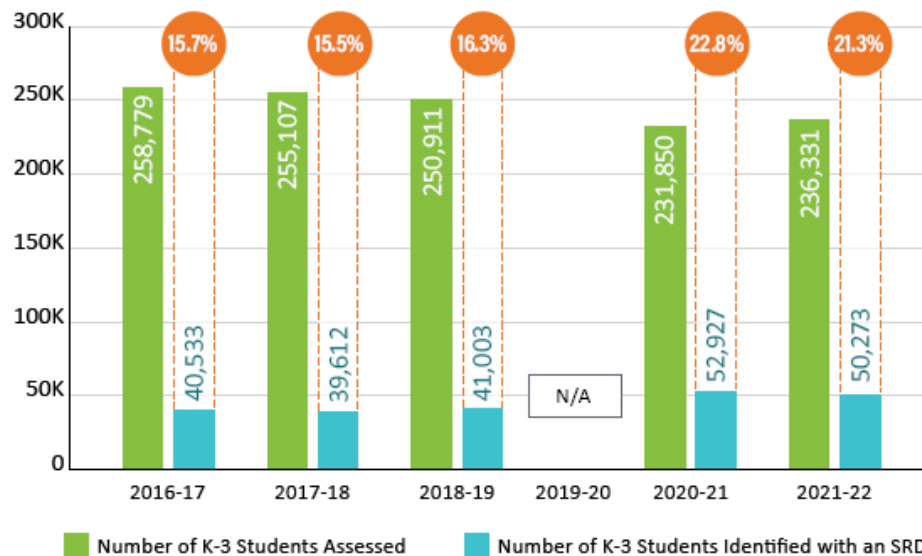


Figure 1: Longitudinal SRD Rates from 2016/2017 to 2021/2022 (2023 READ Act Annual Report)

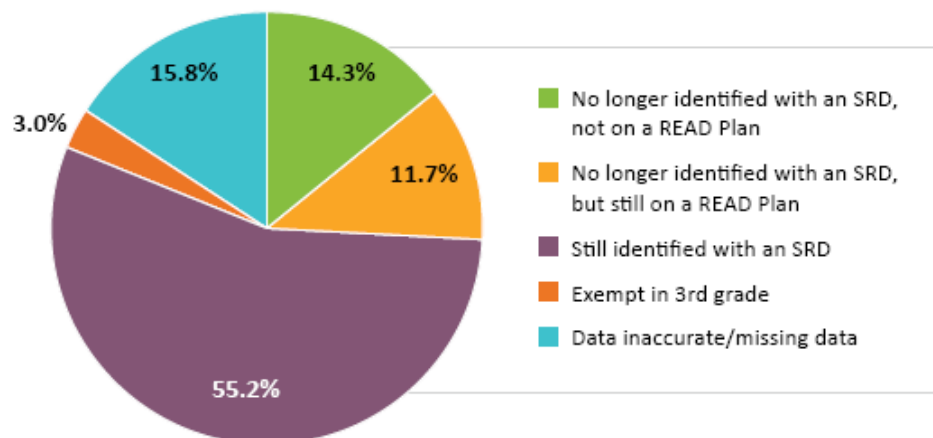


Figure 2: SRD Status at 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (2021/2022) of Students Identified with SRD as Kindergartners (2018/2019) (2023 READ Act Annual Report)



White	14.2%
Hispanic	32.2%
Black/African American	30.4%
Two or More Races	16.8%
Native American/Alaska Native	38.4%
Asian	14.3%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	32.0%

Figure 3: Percentage of K-3 students identified with an SRD racial/ethnic groups in 2022 (2023 READ Act Annual Report)

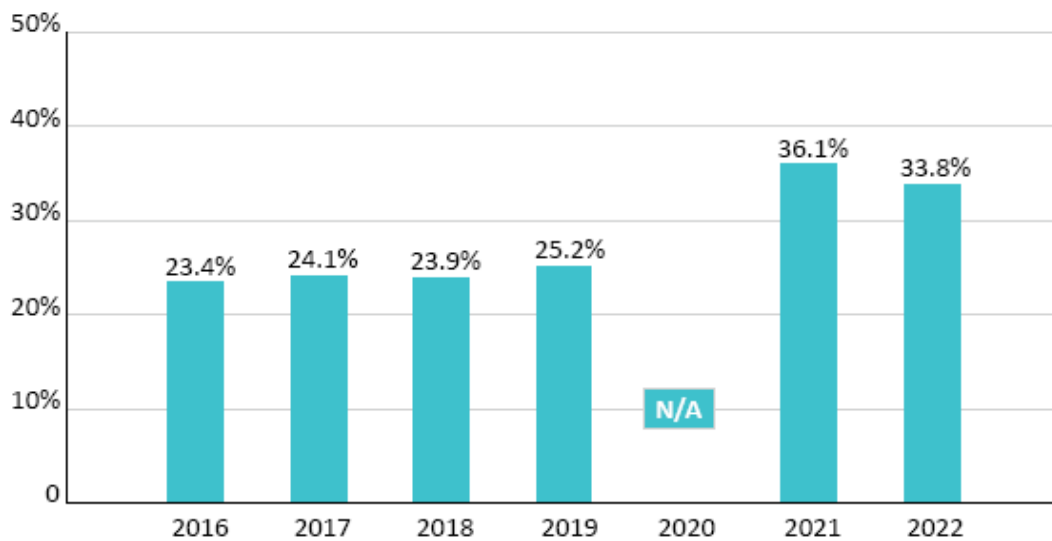
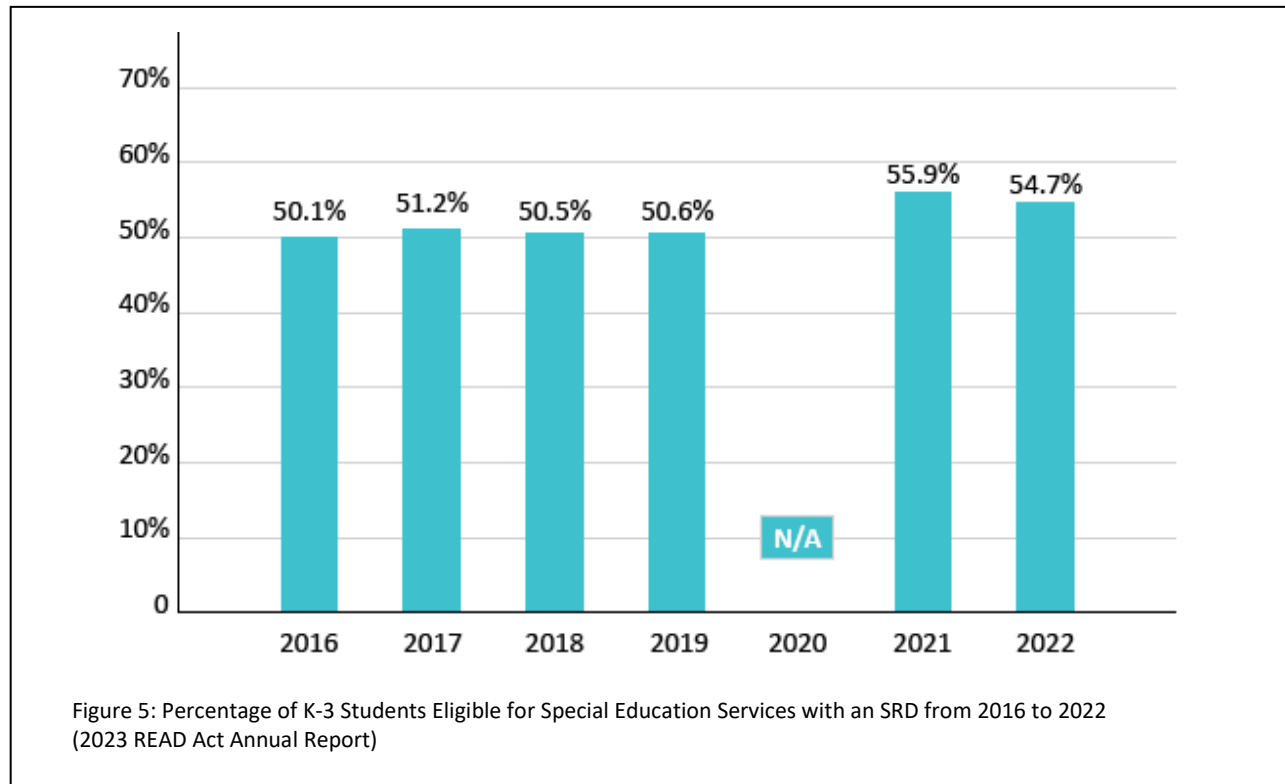


Figure 4: Percent of K-3 multilingual learners identified with and SRD from 2016 to 2022 (2023 READ Act Annual Report)



## Needs Assessment: Key Findings from WestED Report and CLSD Needs Assessment

- Systems and Sustainability:** There is both a need and a desire for a clear, consistent voice regarding literacy as well as clarity regarding literacy beyond 3rd grade. In addition to systems to support students who are struggling to learn how to read, we need to build the capacity of our leaders in the area of literacy and support them in creating district-wide comprehensive literacy plans.
- High Quality Workforce: Professional Development, Preparedness, and Retention:** There is a need for comprehensive professional development in the areas of Science of Teaching Reading, writing, language development, supporting diverse learners, using data to differentiate instruction, and evidence-based practices. We will continue to work with higher education in order to increase the knowledge of preservice teachers in these areas.
- English Learners (ELs):** We need clearer processes and differentiated types of support in place for educators to follow when identifying an SRD for a student who is Not English Proficient. Collectively, we need to have a more thorough understanding of language development and how that relates to learning to read.
- MTSS and Data-Driven Decision Making:** There is a desire to strengthen what is meant by literacy, including the content, concepts, and skills within the Colorado Academic Standards to be developed within English language arts (ELA) and across the disciplines. There is also a need to strengthen Universal Tier I instruction and ensure that all students receive a consistent, comprehensive, recursive curriculum. Differentiation of Tier I and plans for Tier 2 and 3 instruction must be based upon data. Furthermore, high expectations for all students, including students of poverty, English learners (ELs), and those with disabilities will help build and support self-efficacy.

- **Community and Family:** The role of family as first teacher is critical in student learning. Starting at birth, parents and caregivers' interactions, conversations, engagement with printed materials, while supporting a nutritious and safe environment to play and learn, all contribute to early brain development and later to academic success. Research conducted preschool through high school supports engaging families in student learning and academic life as positive influences on student learning and achievement.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** There is general consensus among educators that the disruption of instruction, reduction of content, lack of access, virtual learning, and lack of social interactions due to changes in educational environment as a result COVID further exacerbated academic challenges experienced by our youngest learners, students of color, ELs, and students with learning disabilities across the birth to twelfth grade continuum. Statewide data reflects an increase in the number of students not on track for reading success as measured by universal screeners in K-3 and students not meeting expectations on state measures 4-12. It is important for systems to have a plan in place to address the gaps because of lack of opportunity and instruction from both a universal Tier 1 and Tier 2 perspective.

- **WestED Findings:**

The Colorado State Legislature passed the Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act in 2012 and updated the Act in 2019. The revised Act requires an independent evaluation to identify and assess strategies that the state, local districts, and schools have taken to support Colorado students in achieving proficiency in reading. In 2019 West Ed was chosen as the vendor to support this work and complete the evaluation.

West Ed's evaluation for the 2020-21 school year included:

- Conducting independent evaluations of Local Education Provider (LEP) schools regarding the use of per-pupil funds
- Conducting independent evaluations of Early Literacy Grant (ELG) schools regarding the use of per-pupil funds
- Evaluating CDE's READ Act Advisory List of Instructional Programming, Professional Development and Assessment

The full WestED Reports can be found here:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/read-act-independent-evaluation-of-colorado-read>

## Core Components for Successful Literacy Instruction

### Colorado Academic Standards for All Students

The [Colorado Academic Standards](#) are the foundation for teaching and learning. They help teachers ensure their students have the skills, knowledge, and understanding they need for postsecondary readiness by providing goals that articulate what students should know, understand, and be able to do at the end of each grade level or span. For students to achieve the goals set by the standards, teachers need to be standards-literate. This means they must:

1. Possess working knowledge of the terms and categories that structure the standards.
2. Effectively apply standards to develop and revise curriculum.
3. Demonstrate best, first instruction through high impact instructional strategies inherent within the curriculum aligned to the standards.

[Extended Evidence Outcomes](#) - The EEOs were developed for a very small and specific group of students, those who have been identified with a significant cognitive disability. These standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities in all grades must be clear and rigorous so that our public educational system gives all students the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed in postsecondary environments and the workforce, to be well-informed and responsible citizens, and to lead fulfilling personal lives.

### Best, First Instruction

Best, First Instruction (BFI) aims to give all students the best opportunity to learn standards-based, grade-level content and skills the first time they receive instruction. BFI can be understood as a framework combining culturally responsive teaching, practice-based teacher learning, and the implementation of high-quality academic standards and curriculum. Together, BFI should:

1. Build Relationships: BFI should deepen student agency through caring, positive, and authentic connections with peers and adults.
2. Meet the Needs of All Students: BFI should include accessible, equitable, and flexible instruction to meet the changing needs of diverse student populations. Accessibility infers that appropriate instruction meets the sensory, cognitive, and language needs of the child.
3. Create Relevancy: BFI should engage students in authentic, meaningful, real-world, and engaging work.
4. Foster Disciplinary Literacy: BFI should position students to read, write, critically think, and speak as experts in the different content areas or disciplines.

### Scientifically and Evidence-Based Strategies and Practices

Best, first instruction requires the use of scientifically and evidence based strategies and practices. Evidence in education is continually evolving and expanding. Driven by growing K-12 research and requirements in federal education law, specifically the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), use of evidence-based practices among teachers, school leaders, and district personnel has become more common over recent decades. Evidence-based practices and evidence-based interventions (EBIs) as defined by ESSA are crucial to improving student outcomes and closing gaps in student achievement.

ESSA defines an evidence-based intervention as an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.



The Science of Teaching Reading (SOTR) is based upon research from many disciplines and fields, including psychology, cognitive sciences, neurology, and linguistics. It considers the understanding of how the brain learns to read and what that means for student learning and adult instructional practices.

The SOTR is more than the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics. It incorporates how the brain processes language and print as well as considers and incorporates all the important skills and knowledge that is required to become a reader. It looks at how all the language elements (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, etymology, discourse, pragmatics) are related to reading, spelling, and writing. It considers the development of a reader and how students progress over time with increased knowledge and skills.

There are several effective models of using scientifically and evidence-based strategies and practices to support comprehensive literacy instruction across all age and grade levels. Some examples include Structured Literacy, Chall's Stages of Reading Development, Fisher and Frey Gradual Release Model, Scarborough's Rope, Sedita's Writing Rope, and the Simple View of Reading. Detailed information about the components of these models can be found in the Appendices section.

## Culturally Responsive Education

Teaching is complex, but its most fundamental elements are content, instruction, and students. Students need a welcoming, stimulating, and relatable learning environment to maximize their chances for success. For this reason, BFI requires culturally responsive education as a necessary starting point.

Culturally responsive education has grown in breadth and depth in the several decades since it was first formulated. Over two decades ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) described it as a form of teaching that calls for engaging learners whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded from mainstream settings. Geneva Gay has since refined culturally responsive education to be "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (2018, p. 36). This includes instructional techniques, instructional materials, student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and self-awareness to improve learning for students. Other scholars have helped connect culturally responsive education with other ideas, such as Hammond's (2014) work to connect culturally responsive education to neuroscience and Paris's (2012) arguments that the work of teaching should not just be culturally responsive, but to sustain cultural pluralism and cultural equality.

These scholars promote asset-based approaches as alternatives to popular deficit-oriented teaching methods which position the languages, cultures, and identities of students as barriers to learning. While these pedagogies are not identical, they share a common goal: defy the deficit model and ensure students see themselves and their communities reflected and valued in the content taught in school.

## Strong Disciplinary Literacy

The final piece of BFI involves the knowledge and skills we want students to learn. For most content areas, these goals are described by the Colorado Academic Standards. Putting the goals into action involves the creation, selection, and use of curriculum, the organized plan of instruction, and the associated materials such as textbooks, software, and other curriculum materials. "Learning the standards" is a misguided phrase that falsely implies that the outcome we want for students is that they know lists of facts or merely to accumulate skills. What is more accurate is that standards and curriculum should serve to guide students' development of disciplinary literacy.

Disciplinary literacy is the intersection of content knowledge, experiences, and skills necessary to demonstrate understanding through the ability to read, write, communicate, and think critically using approaches unique to a specific discipline. Shanahan and Shanahan (2012) contend that disciplinary literacy emphasizes the knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use knowledge within the disciplines. It honors the thinking within disciplines of study and invites students to engage in the academic discipline while developing a voice as a member of that community.

What does it mean to read, write, think, and communicate like a scientist? What about as a historian, writer, musician, artist, engineer, or mathematician? In today's diverse and global world, these are questions teachers and their students should be considering. Doing so supports students' literacy, learning, and ability to more readily engage in the disciplines they study (Moje, 2008). These considerations also serve to develop teachers' instruction so they can apprentice students to negotiate and create texts in discipline-specific ways (Brozo et al., 2013). For example, students will read and write narratives, poetry, and speeches within an English classroom, be expected to read and perform musical scores in their orchestra classroom, read and write about scientifically based phenomena in their science classroom, and understand and generate art in their art class.

Disciplinary literacy requires students to read and write in specialized ways for specific purposes determined by the discipline (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Each discipline requires students to employ particular knowledge, tools, and abilities to communicate, create, and use information within that discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Teachers must apprentice students through scaffolded instruction and guided practice, helping students "develop the capacity to read disciplinary-specific texts through an insider perspective" (Buehl, 2017, p. 9).

## Supporting Struggling Readers

Students may struggle learning to read for a number of reasons including neurological and biological disabilities, dyslexia, and/or low language proficiency (EL, disability, environmental). Students who are struggling to learn to read may benefit from targeted (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) instruction. These additional layers of instruction are more explicit and systematic in nature than Universal Tier 1 and are adjusted and flexed based upon individual student data. However, students requiring additional targeted and scaffolded instruction still benefit from and need access to grade level content through Tier 1 instruction.

Research conducted from preschool into high school demonstrates that targeted, specific, explicit, systematic skill instruction provided in small groups during Tiers 2 and 3 is effective in supporting students in becoming readers (Baker et al., 2015; Daffern et al., 2020; Dube et al., 2013). During intervention instruction, formative data is collected daily and utilized to adjust instruction to maximize student growth. Instruction during Targeted (Tier 2) is more explicit and provides scaffolding necessary to support learning. Mastery of skills is required before moving to the next skill in the continuum. Instruction includes connecting skills and strategies to text. Students may require 30 minutes of intensive instruction daily.

If students are not making enough progress, intensive (Tier 3) instruction will be required. Intensive (Tier 3) intervention is an additional 30 minutes beyond Tier 1 and Tier 2. The same targeted skills are taught during Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. The lowering of group size increases the intensity of instruction and allows for more repetitions, feedback, and positive reinforcement during instruction. This instruction is even more explicit and systematic than Tier 2.

READ Plans serve as a means to document the intervention and instructional plan for students in becoming readers for K-3 students. READ Plans must leverage data, be based in science, and employ structured literacy if they are going to be effective. In the fall, administer skill inventories/diagnostics in order to plan to meet the needs of students: scheduling, resource allocation, and grouping. Teachers meet weekly to review formative

data and adjust instruction and flex groups. The more frequently data is leveraged to adjust instruction, the more progress students will make. Through the comprehensive statewide literacy needs assessment process, CDE identified a need for more systematic and explicit support for students who remain on READ Plans beyond 3rd grade. It is imperative that older students who struggle with reading are identified and served in the same manner that k-3 students are. Students need to be identified as early as possible and data must be used to drive instruction focusing on the strengths and deficits in each component skill.

A few common reasons why students might struggle with reading are as follows:

**Dyslexia:** The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) along with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) adopted the following definition of dyslexia:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (International Dyslexia Association, 2002)

#### [Dyslexia Fact Sheet](#)

Every teacher in Colorado is likely to be a teacher of students with dyslexia. Research indicates that 12% to 20% of students fall on the continuum of reading difficulties, beginning with those who exhibit mild characteristics of dyslexia and spanning to those with significant impairments in learning to read, spell, and write. Chances are high, if not absolute, that a teacher at any grade level and in any subject area will encounter a student or students with dyslexia over the course of their career. All teachers need to know that dyslexia exists, that it is real; they must know how to recognize the sometimes obvious — and, at other times, subtle — characteristics and symptoms of dyslexia. Teachers without expertise in learning differences need to know which colleagues will help them in making essential adjustments and accommodations and in choosing and utilizing teaching strategies that will allow all students to learn and be successful.

For additional guidance on dyslexia and support for struggling readers see [CDE's Dyslexia Handbook](#).

**Insufficient Reading Instruction:** Ineffective or insufficient reading instruction can leave students without the necessary skills to decode words, comprehend text, or engage in higher-level thinking about what they read. There are many reasons for ineffective or insufficient reading instruction. One common cause is frequent absences and interruptions to instruction. When students are absent from school or when there are interruptions to instruction due to factors like school closures, teacher absences, or schedule changes, they may miss important reading lessons and activities. This can result in gaps in their understanding of fundamental reading skills and concepts.

Consistency and continuity are crucial for effective learning, especially in developing complex skills like reading. Reading skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension develop over time with consistent instruction and practice. When students move from one grade level to the next, they may encounter new instructional approaches, expectations, and curriculum standards. Interruptions in instructional continuity can exacerbate the challenges of transitioning between grades, particularly if students have not had the opportunity to master the skills and concepts taught in previous grades. To ensure instructional continuity between grades, schools and districts can implement strategies such as vertical alignment of curriculum standards and instructional practices, collaboration between teachers across grade levels, consistent curricular use, and ongoing assessment and monitoring of students' progress.

**Linguistic Diversity:** Students who are learning to read in a language different from the language used at home may face additional challenges learning to read due to differences in language structure and vocabulary. This includes multilingual students and students who speak a dialect or variation of a language that differs significantly from the standard form of the language used in instructional materials.

Multilingual learners, also known as English language learners (ELs), may be impacted when learning to read in a language that is not their home or preferred language. They may encounter challenges with phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and language structures that differ from their native language. Similarly, differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar between a student's home dialect and the academic language of school can impact reading comprehension and fluency.

Multilingual learners and students with dialectal differences may also be impacted by instruction that does not include scaffolds relevant to cultural differences in language use, idiomatic expressions, and storytelling conventions. Students may struggle to understand texts that are culturally unfamiliar to them or that do not reflect their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Differences in language proficiency levels among multilingual learners and students with dialectal differences can further exacerbate literacy gaps. Students who are still developing proficiency in the language of instruction will require additional support to access grade-level reading materials and participate fully in reading instruction.

Differentiated instruction is required to give multilingual learners and students with dialectal differences access to both language and content. Addressing instructional necessities for multilingual learners and students with dialectal differences requires teacher knowledge about language structures, culturally responsive teaching practices, differentiated instruction, integration of literacy content throughout the day, and support services. Examples of support services based on student need could be English language development programs and dialect-inclusive instructional practice. Providing opportunities for students to use and celebrate their linguistic and cultural backgrounds can also help create an inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive.

### **Accelerated Learning**

In any school year, there are students who miss learning opportunities or struggle to master the content, concepts, and skills within a specific subject area. To combat this, educators in Colorado and across our nation are strategizing ways to provide students opportunities to "catch up" or recover the content, concepts, and skills unlearned during the previous school year. It is broadly understood that the disruption of instruction, reduction of content, lack of access, virtual learning, and lack of social interactions due to changes in educational environment as a result COVID further exacerbated academic challenges experienced by our youngest learners, students of color, ELs, and students with learning disabilities across the birth to grade 12 continua. One way to support these students is through accelerated learning.

Accelerated learning is an intervention strategy that provides students with extra time and support to address unfinished learning. The information included below provides flexible, evidence-based guidance for schools and districts to consider as they develop and implement strategies to address unfinished learning in reading, writing, and communicating or English language arts.

**ESSER Recovery Funding:** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was enacted in March 2020, which included \$30.75 billion nationally for an Education Stabilization Fund. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund dollars were appropriated to state education agencies (SEAs) based on the previous year's Title I shares, with 90% allocated to local education agencies (LEA) that received a Title I allocation in the most recent fiscal year and the remaining 10% reserved for state activities. LEA allocations were



calculated using the Title I formula; however, relief funds will not be subject to Title I requirements. Colorado was allocated \$120,993,782 from the U.S. Department of Education from the ESSER Fund. The Colorado State Board of Education (SBE) met for a special session to vote on allocation of these designated funds. Slides from this special session of the SBE can be found on [Board Docs](#).

Updates about ESSER Fund designation can be found on the CDE website:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/caresact/esser1>

**Promising Practices for Accelerated Learning:** Accelerated learning doesn't mean speeding up or compressing content. Instead, the focus is on embedding instruction and support for concepts and skills that have not yet been mastered during grade-level learning. Through accelerated learning, teachers integrate new concepts and skills and weave in the prior knowledge needed to master them. Detailed information can be found on the CDE website: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coreadingwriting/accelerated-learning-in-english-language-arts>



## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Colorado is committed to continuous improvement to improve literacy outcomes at all levels of the educational system: classroom, school, district, and state department of education. The continuous improvement process integrates existing structures such as Colorado's Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement and the Unified Improvement Planning Process. It also involves the creation of local literacy plans to align with the state literacy plan, alongside evaluation and monitoring the success of Colorado's Comprehensive Statewide Literacy Plan.

### Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement Framework

Colorado's Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement framework was adapted from the Center on School Turnaround's (CST) Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement. This framework organizes the issues that state, district, and school leaders should consider when planning for successful and sustainable improvement. For each practice, the roles of the state, the district, and the school are briefly outlined in the Four Domains Final Report document found here: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/fourdomains/fourdomainsfinalreport>.

The framework should not be considered a "magic bullet" nor are the domains meant to be considered in isolation or step-by-step fashion. The framework reflects the multifaceted and interrelated aspects of rapid improvement as currently understood by research. Ideally, many practices will be implemented simultaneously, but it would be difficult and even counterproductive to focus on too many areas or practices at once. This Statewide Literacy Plan seeks to build upon and expand strategies beyond the original and highly successful Four Domains Framework. These expanded strategies will be embedded below under each relevant domain.

### Domain 1: Leadership for Rapid Improvement

The role of leadership, within an effective change process model, supports MTSS and engages leaders at all levels of the organization in order to meet the needs of students, educators, and families. Kotter (2020) found that 70% or more of all initiatives fail and identified an [8-step model to lead the change process](#). In subsequent years in partnership with Deloitte, Kotter found that indeed the eight steps are important, but in the cases where comprehensive change became institutionalized leaders led with emotion (2020). They believed in the initiative and led with "heart" in order to garner support for the initiative (Kotter, 2020).

### Literacy Needs Assessment and Literacy Plan

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) conducted a statewide literacy needs assessment in 2021 and developed this comprehensive statewide literacy plan. CDE will provide a template and guidance document for use by LEAs to conduct a needs assessment and create a local literacy plan. Literacy plans should be aligned with the specific needs of students as determined through the needs assessment and gap analysis. As part of the local literacy plan, it is important to set long-term goals and plan for "Quick Wins". Set goals and milestones that will allow you and your team to experience measurable success.

### Professional Development for School and District Leaders

[Senate Bill 22-004](#) amended the READ Act in April of 2022 requiring that principals and administrators are trained with the most up-to-date research-based knowledge of how students learn to read. By the beginning of the 2024-25 school year and continuing thereafter, the act requires each school district, board of cooperative services, and charter school (local education provider) to ensure that each reading interventionist employed to teach children in any of grades 4 through 12, the principal in each school that serves kindergarten or any of grades one through 3, and each school district administrator with responsibility for programs in kindergarten or

any of grades one through 3 successfully completes evidence-based training in the science of reading. This legislation and subsequent training encompasses the various steps in the eight step model to lead to change.

### Roles of Leadership in Supporting Change

#### State Level:

- Provide policy, vision, strategic plan, and support to LEA's work in implementing literacy change initiatives. Establish a sense of urgency through these initiatives.
- Provide support and guidance to stakeholders in regards to theory, frameworks, and evidence-based practices. Solicit feedback from stakeholders in order to modify and adjust supports.
- Share templates and tools to enable local leaders to make the best decisions for supporting school improvement plans and actions.
- Provide professional learning activities for district and school leaders to establish and strengthen organizational leadership.
- Create overarching expectations and accountability for improved student outcomes that are clearly articulated and measurable and that can be adapted for local contexts. Accountability at the state level comes from the [State Board of Education](#), the [Commissioner of Education](#), [literacy legislation](#), data pulled from state level assessments, and the [Accountability Office](#) housed within the SEA.
- Provide guidance and support for LEA's and schools in implementing change by sharing clear examples of high impact practices deployed at high-performing schools, along with aspirational examples of schools that have made rapid improvement.
- Establish, monitor, and refine effective grant management policies and practices to ensure high quality implementation and sustainability of state and federal grant funded literacy programs.
- Create and support a framework that establishes communities of practices that pair [high performing districts and educators](#) with lower performing districts and educators.

#### District Level:

- Create and share the vision for literacy as well as the process to achieve the desired outcome. Solicit buy-in from key stakeholders.
- Create a pathway for sustainable systems and processes to put in place through the development of a comprehensive local literacy plan.
- Provide customized, targeted, and timely support for improvement efforts based on local literacy needs assessment and gap analysis, existing capacity, and identified prioritized needs. This should be done by providing access to district level data, resources, concrete feedback, clear communication around the implementation of the comprehensive local literacy plan and professional learning opportunities.
- Build a coalition through a district level literacy leadership team to support the work and guide the ongoing development of the comprehensive local literacy plan.
- Provide professional development necessary to build the background knowledge about why the change needs to occur as well as opportunities to learn new content and skills necessary to implement the desired change to all leaders and building staff that support literacy.
  - Professional development should be aligned with recommendations from the [Learning Policy Institute](#) (data driven, collaborative, on-going, supports practice of new learning, job-embedded modeling, and coaching opportunities).

- Provide technical support, advice, and encouragement focused on implementation fidelity. Support building leaders in planning and creating building level literacy plans that align and support the district comprehensive literacy plan.
- Celebrate short term wins.

**School Level:**

- Building leaders create school level implementation and literacy leadership teams. Teams seek guidance, support, and resources necessary to implement the plan. Allocate time and resources to the plan.
- Facilitate and collaborate with the district team in order to schedule professional learning opportunities. Participate in learning in order to support initiatives and teachers in the implementation of new learning.
- Encourage stakeholders to implement new learning and initiatives. Monitor and support new learning and initiatives and develop a plan for rapid intervention if waning progress is detected.
- Actively work to support the implementation. Share and communicate with all stakeholders regarding school progress including students, family, and community members.
- All staff work collectively to implement the plan.

**Domain 2: Talent Management**

Improved literacy outcomes require competent and committed personnel at every level and in every position. At all levels, educators must build, utilize, and hone their instructional and transformational leadership capacities that are crucial to improve student literacy outcomes. Adult learning should be provided through ongoing professional development versus “one and done” training sessions. Plan for teams to practice, reflect, plan, and refine application of learning. Actively engage in learning alongside teachers in order to support application of new learning as well as defining expectations.

**Professional Development**

As educators, learning is an ongoing and lifelong process. When implementing scientifically and evidence-based strategies, it is important to acknowledge that as educational researchers continue their work and refine their theories, instructional practices may need to be shifted in order to implement new information. This is why educator professional development for both leadership and practitioners should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time occurrence. While Colorado is a local control state, shifts in legislation can also influence professional learning and licensure requirements for educators.

In 2019, the legislature made several changes to the READ Act to help educators support reading success among our state's youngest learners. Not all of Colorado's educators have had the opportunity to learn the science of teaching reading in their teacher training programs, so one of the changes to the READ Act will require training on the latest evidence-based reading instruction strategies for all K-3 teachers.

In addition, all district leaders who influence decision making and building leaders are encouraged to participate in professional development in the Science of Teaching Reading, language development, disciplinary literacy, MTSS, data-driven decision making, and supporting instructions for struggling readers, writers, and communicators.



Through grant funding opportunities such as the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant, CDE has made training available in the use and implementation of scientifically and evidence-based literacy strategies and practices for preschool teachers and 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers.

CDE provides guidance and support for districts in designing comprehensive professional development that is ongoing, provides opportunities to practice new learning, engages adult learners in collaboration and problem-solving, and that embeds modeling and coaching in supporting adults in transferring learning into instructional practice. Learning Policy Institute's, [Effective Teacher Professional Development](#) provides guidance for planning adult learning.

### **Preparation of New Teachers**

The highest student outcomes are achieved when systems and structures are in place that work to develop, deploy, and support effective educators to serve in every school and classroom so that all students are prepared for college, career, and life. Visit [CDE's Educator Preparation page](#) for more information.

### **Roles of Leadership in Talent Management**

#### **State Level:**

- CDE works with institutions of higher learning and [Colorado Department of Higher Education](#) to ensure that pre-service teachers receive the foundational knowledge in scientifically and evidence-based literacy strategies and practices.
- CDE has a dedicated [Educator Talent, Effectiveness and Licensing](#) team that seeks to attract, prepare, support, and retain talented and well-prepared educators.
- Communicate high expectations for a level of professional performance for every role in the system. This should occur at the district and school level as well.
- Dedicated [resource page](#) to support district and school leaders.
- Set the guidelines and expectations around educator licensing including continuing education credits and endorsement area requirements.
- Develop processes to gather and [monitor data](#) around educator effectiveness.
- Provide a [hub for professional learning opportunities](#) in literacy and other academic topics for educators.

#### **District Level:**

- Develop a structured model and policies for teacher and school leader recruitment, hiring, placement, and retention. District Human Resources should be active participants in this process and ensure all practices and policies are equitable.
- Offer and evaluate high-quality, culturally appropriate, responsive professional learning opportunities using evidence-based adult learning principles, designed to build the capacity and knowledge base of educators.
- Provide induction, mentoring, and accelerated support to new or struggling teachers.
- Initial and ongoing teacher training should include clear communication around the district's literacy goals and the comprehensive local literacy plan, relevant district-level literacy outcome data, available systems and structures that support and monitor educator literacy competencies, processes for

delivering meaningful and actionable feedback, and training on implementation of district-wide performance management processes.

**School Level:**

- Plan and deliver regular opportunities for job-embedded learning that includes coaching, mentoring, and observation, including peer observations, and are clearly connected to the school's priorities.
- Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers, coaches, and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches.
- Work with the district to create a school level competency model that aids in hiring and professional learning selection decisions.
- Establish a school level literacy leadership team who monitor progress and contribute to the decision-making process for any needed changes. This team should also work to establish expectations for teachers and develop a schedule that reflects the literacy priorities of the school.

**Domain 3: Instructional Transformation**

Improving and sustaining equitable student learning outcomes depends on system-wide support for change in classroom instruction. Schools cultivate and maintain an environment of both high expectations and support for all students' academic and social achievement outcomes. Leaders must prioritize their time to focus on instructional transformation with a specific emphasis on historically underserved and struggling student populations to ensure their unique learning needs are being met. While there is often heavy emphasis and focus on academic and in-school factors that impact student outcomes, educators must also prioritize social emotional factors, both in and out of the school, that impact learning so that students are ready for learning with a sense of safety and belonging.

**Social Emotional Learning**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to education and human development. It is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions ([CASEL, 2021](#)). Social and emotional learning also advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. More than two decades of research demonstrates that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) yields undeniable results, particularly in regards to improved academic outcomes and improved behaviors. Research indicates that failure to integrate social and emotional practices is a mistake that will further amplify mental health issues and traumatic stressors students experience. Visit [CDE's website](#) for more information on the connection between literacy and SEL.

**Multi-Tiered System of Support**

Colorado's Multi-Tiered System of Support includes 1) Team Driven Shared Leadership; 2) Data Based Problem solving and Decision Making; 3) Layered Continuum of Supports; 4) Evidence Based Practices; 5) Family, School, and Community Partnership ([see CDE website for a complete description of MTSS](#)). A clear MTSS framework that includes an assessment plan is critical for success. An assessment plan defines how and when data will be collected and utilized to inform instruction. Provide clear expectations on the use of formative data to inform instructional decisions: planning, adjusting instruction, and differentiating. The MTSS framework supports

students, educators, and families as students need change based upon student data. The MTSS framework is designed to support all students to maximize their learning. All students are provided with a universal first layer of instruction and behavioral support.

### **Tier I: Universal Instruction**

The first layer of preventative approach is providing a strong best, first instruction leveraging both gradual release and Structured Literacy™. Tier I instruction is provided to all students. The use of data to inform instruction cannot be overstated as a means for meeting the needs of all learners. During Tier I instruction, it is important to deliver explicit instruction following a systematic sequence of skills and employ on-going formal and informal data collection systems in order to adjust, modify, and adapt instruction during the lesson and as part of planning future instruction.

Small group instruction based upon formative data is critical in providing guided practice, positive praise, and corrective feedback in a timely manner to support students in achieving mastery and automaticity. When students have mastery and automaticity of foundational skills this affords students the cognitive capacity to engage in higher Depths of Knowledge (DOK), such as application, synthesis, comparing, and contrasting (Webb, 2005). Formative assessment data informs small group instruction and grouping of students. Small group membership should flex and be responsive in order to maximize instructional time and meet the needs of students. Small group instruction is utilized to provide guided practice and check for understanding PreK through grade 12. Tier I instruction includes collection of criterion-based data that informs instruction at a systems, building, classroom, and individual student level.

### **Tier 2: Targeted Instruction**

Within the MTSS framework, teachers utilize data in order to provide layers of instruction and support to meet the needs of all students. This means that while some students may receive interventions or reteaching during Targeted (Tier 2) instruction, other students may need enrichment opportunities in order to accelerate learning. Data is used to inform instruction and layers of supports necessary. It may be that a few students need more Intensive support (Tier 3) in order to maximize learning:

- 20-40 minutes of daily instruction that extends beyond the universal instruction
- Small group - no more than 5 students
- Targeted skill instruction based upon skill inventory
- Utilizes a Structured Literacy approach
- Remain flexible and responds to student data; modifications, intensity, duration is adjusted based upon student response

### **Tier 3: Intensive Instruction**

When students are not making rigorous progress in order to close the achievement gap, then they may require an additional layer of support. Intensive instruction is more intensive and more explicit than Targeted intervention instruction:

- Another 20-40 minutes of instruction in addition to universal and Targeted instruction
- Small group - no more than 3 students
- Targeted skill instruction based upon skill inventory
- Utilizes a Structured Literacy approach
- Remain flexible and responds to student data; modifications, intensity, duration is adjusted based upon student response

## **Roles of Leadership in Instructional Transformation**

### **State Level:**

- Set high expectations for learning and student outcomes. Create a sense of urgency that influences action at the district and school levels.
- Provide training and technical assistance to LEAs and schools on assessments, data-driven decision making, meeting the needs of all students, supporting the learning and meeting the needs of historically underserved student populations, and selecting high impact evidence-based strategies that address local needs.
- Develop high quality academic standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening at all grade levels. Provide high-quality training that increases educator understanding of the standards.
- Support programs and funding for alternative pathways to graduation that increase options for students.

### **District Level:**

- Utilize district-wide data to identify gaps in curriculum and instruction. Utilize this information to inform and update the Comprehensive Local Literacy Plan.
- Examine curricular, behavioral, and instructional supports to ensure they are grounded in evidence, rigor, and the state standards.
- Work with schools' instructional leadership teams to refresh, update, and bolster teachers' content knowledge through ongoing professional learning opportunities on rigorous evidence-based instruction.
- Create a strong culture of family and community engagement with a focus that addresses both academic and social emotional needs.
- Identify supplemental needs for students and families. Partner with community organizations and CDE to meet these needs.

### **School Level:**

- Provide ongoing coaching and progress monitoring to ensure evidence-based strategies are used in instructional planning and facilitation of student learning.
- Utilize school and classroom specific data to identify gaps in curriculum and instruction. Utilize this information to inform and modify adjustments to instructional practices and materials, individualized and scaffolded where needed.
- Engage in professional learning opportunities that increase educator content area expertise grounded in scientifically and evidence-based strategies and practices.
- Collaboration across content areas and grade levels to support individual student needs across all tiered levels.
- Structure schedule and other school systems in a way that prioritizes the school's literacy goals and is aligned with what the research says is best practice for each age and grade band.

## **Domain 4: Culture and Climate Shift**

### **Build a Culture of Achievement**

Teacher belief in themselves and students are proven to impact outcomes such as teachers' persistence, commitment, and instructional delivery as well as student achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy.

District and building leaders must create an environment that supports a safe environment that embraces that 'all students can'. With strong instructional delivery and data decision making teachers can meet the needs of all students. Leaders embrace and cultivate the growth mindset for adults and students. This supports teachers and students in risk taking behavior that is necessary for learning.

### **Solicit Stakeholder Feedback**

Regularly gather, disaggregate, and analyze collective perceptions held by school personnel, students, families, and the broader community about school climate and its relationship to improvement efforts as well as decision making at all levels.

Utilize multiple methods to communicate and solicit feedback and data from all stakeholders, including historically under-served populations, to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning. Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism in a way that is timely, consistent, and predictable.

### **Engage Families**

Systematic parental involvement supports higher levels of student achievement (Benner et al., 2017; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; MacIver et al., 2015). Transitions between preschool and kindergarten, elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school require strategic planning that involves both the student and families in the process.

There are many factors that impact parental and family involvement at the high school level including culture, social-economic status, parental belief that their involvement matters or that they are able to support their child, and residual fear of school environment from previous life experiences (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; MacIver et al., 2015). Increasing a positive environment requires building leaders to create a welcoming environment that builds trust by establishing and maintaining respectful attitudes towards families and supports positive two-way communications. Building principals should arrange for professional development opportunities around how to support and build positive communications and interactions with families as well as arrange and participate in school committees that focus on increasing family engagement. Families must feel welcomed and valued members of their child's learning. Teachers also play a critical role in increasing the positive environment by establishing authentic relationships that welcome parents and family members in the problem-solving process. When building leaders and teachers clearly communicate with individual family members and share how they can support their child parents' beliefs in their ability to support their child increases.

MacIver et al. (2015) found that when schools and teachers clearly articulate graduation requirements and grading policy, engage in goal setting with families and students, and teach families how they can support their child that parental involvement increases. Successful transitions engage students by creating a positive sense of school belonging by supporting opportunities for incoming students to build relations with new teachers and other students within an inclusive and caring environment (Benner et al., 2017).

### **Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC)**

In education we strive for students to reach their highest academic potential. In order to achieve this, students need not only be challenged academically, but also need to be healthy, safe, engaged, and supported. Each student enters a classroom with unique needs related to learning, health (physical, social and emotional



wellbeing), safety and support. [The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) model uses an integrated, collaborative approach to address barriers and supports related to learning and health.



## Roles of Leadership in Culture and Climate Shifts

### State Level:

- Provide districts with tools for tracking, analyzing, and sharing data on school performance, professional practice, perception data, and student opportunities.
- Conduct the annual [Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado Survey](#). This survey provides schools, district and state policymakers with reliable data on teaching and learning conditions. It offers additional information for discussion and gives potential suggestions on areas that deserve attention in a school environment.
- Certain divisions, units, and offices within CDE conduct regular and ongoing surveys to better understand the current climate of education in their respective areas of expertise and how to best serve our constituents.
- Provide opportunities for educators, parents, and community members to provide feedback at state and local levels. State legislation mandates that some divisions, units and offices within CDE assemble stakeholder groups for feedback.
- Provide training and resources on family and community engagement. Visit the [Family-School-Community Partnerships \(FSCP\) page](#) for more information and to view CDE's robust [P-12 FSCP Framework](#).
- Set policies and [provide a framework](#) with tools for tracking, analyzing, and sharing data on school performance, professional practice, perception data, and student opportunities. Visit [CDE's School Accountability webpage](#) for more information.

### District Level:

- Establish systems, structures and policies that support collaborative district and schoolwork such as dedicated time for reflection and collaboration.
- Ensure the mission and vision are clearly communicated to all stakeholders and drive the work of improvement efforts in the district.
- Utilize multiple methods to communicate and solicit feedback and data from all stakeholders, including historically under-served populations, to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.
- Provide funding in the budget for resources related to family engagement for the specific purpose of supporting student learning, include information about the school's data-supported progress with family engagement in monthly board reports.
- Provide all students with equitable opportunities to connect their learning in school with their strengths, interests, aspirations, and post-secondary goals.

### School Level:

- Set and model high expectations, embed them in everyday practice and language, and reinforce them through shared accountability.
- Ensure the school's mission and vision are clearly aligned with the district's mission and vision.
- Maintain a positive, encouraging classroom and school culture for staff and students where they feel safe and supported to share their needs, struggles, and concerns.

- Celebrate successes collaboratively, starting with quick wins, with students, families, teachers, and leaders.
- Learn what constituents perceive by conducting surveys, forums, focus groups, and suggestion boxes. Take constituent input into account when making programmatic decisions and consistently demonstrate that all voices are heard.
- Partner with families using culturally responsive two-way communication to engage meaningfully in their child's learning, progress, interests, well-being and long-term goals and to maintain consistent support for all students.
- Programmatically and systematically build all students' skills in setting learning goals, managing their learning, and pursuing their goals by charting progress starting in the elementary grades.

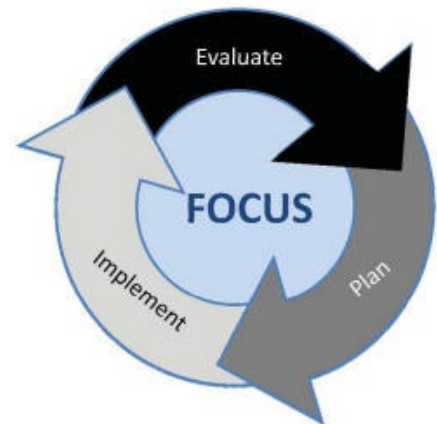
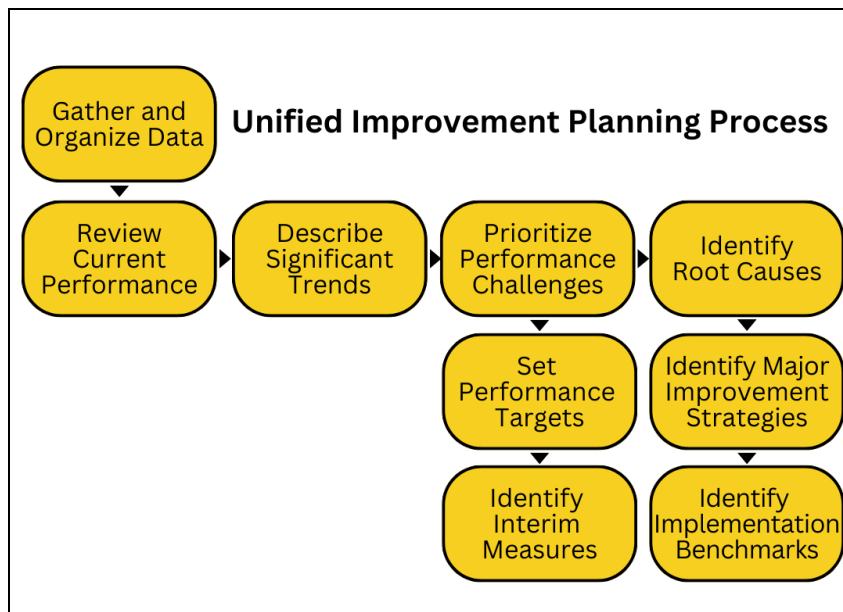


## Unified Improvement Planning (UIP) Process

The Education Accountability Act of 2009 outlines the need for each district to engage in a Cycle of Continuous Improvement. Once a district creates an implementation plan, it should become a “living document.” According to Reeves (2006), in *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*, it is not the compliance document that will yield results; it is the monitoring, implementation, and execution of the plan that improves student achievement.

The Colorado Department of Education currently has a plan in place for monitoring, adjusting, and supporting planning processes. The Unified Improvement Planning process will be utilized to guide the implementation of the Colorado Literacy Plan. Unified Improvement Planning was introduced in 2009 to streamline improvement planning components of state and federal accountability requirements. Based on the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (SB212-08), the primary purpose of improvement planning is to align efforts to:

*Ensure all students exit the K-12 education system ready for post-secondary education, and/or to be successful in the workforce, earning a living wage immediately upon graduation.*



## Measuring Success of Colorado’s Comprehensive Statewide Literacy Plan

Colorado will continue to utilize a number of data sources to monitor progress in literacy outcomes for Colorado’s students.

State literacy leaders and staff will consider the following questions and data yearly:

1. Are districts and early childhood programs literacy plans aligned with the state literacy plan? Do local comprehensive literacy plans outline a clear pathway to disciplinary literacy efforts and methods for supporting all learners?
2. Are the goals submitted on each district’s Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) supported by data?
3. Are early childhood centers using Colorado Shines and the state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as a means of improving site quality? Are Early Childhood Educators regularly engaging in

professional development on the use and implementation of evidence-based practices and early language development?

4. Are districts aligning with reading research and evidence-based practices for comprehensive literacy instruction? Evidence collected:
  - i) Higher education institutions adopt and teach the science of teaching reading
  - ii) Higher education institutions are training pre-service teachers on evaluating whether or not they are using evidence-based practices in their classrooms.
  - iii) Preschool programs' adoption of Colorado's Preschool Standards
  - iv) Improvement in Reading Matters data (preschool)
  - v) Approved Core Reading programs are adopted in each district and school
  - vi) Engagement of community partners in comprehensive literacy efforts birth to graduation
  - vii) Demonstrated commitment to support the needs of students performing below grade level in reading, writing, speaking and/or listening through the use of evidence-based practices throughout all district-wide literacy efforts
  - viii) Unified Improvement Plans reflect evidence-based strategies in literacy
  - ix) Comprehensive Local Literacy Plans that reflect the needs of all students in the district and are rooted in scientifically and evidence-based strategies
  - x) READ Plans leverage evidence-based strategies and practices
  - xi) Decrease in the number of students on READ Plans
  - xii) Improvement in student achievement: CMAS, PSAT, and SAT for all learners
5. Are the literacy outcomes from birth-12<sup>th</sup> grade improving for all students, including historically underserved learners? Evidence collected:
  - i) Early Literacy Screeners
  - ii) READ Plan data
  - iii) CMAS ELA data
  - iv) PSAT and SAT data
  - v) COAlternate Assessment
  - vi) ACCESS data



## Sustainability Planning

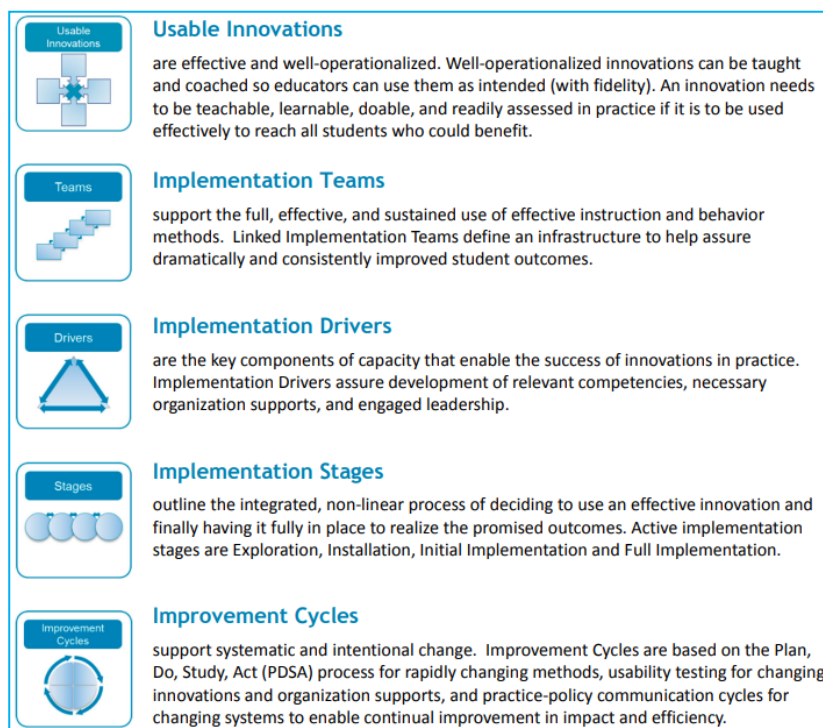
Programs and practices are sustained when the core elements are maintained or delivered with integrity after initial implementation support has been withdrawn, and adequate capacity exists to continue maintaining these core elements. Implementation support practitioners support the sustainability of programs and practices by helping communities to develop a shared vision and mutual accountability, and by facilitating existing relationships, problem solving and resource sharing. They also help to identify, understand, and address the dynamic changes that occur over time in the use of interventions/approaches, the characteristics of the practice settings, and in the broader system that establishes how services are delivered. Implementation research indicates that school- and district-level programs are more successfully sustained when certain factors are in place. These factors include:

- The staff's understanding of the current state of affairs and the reason for the change.
- An acceptance and commitment to the program.
- A feeling of determination by the staff.
- A perception that the program is practical, useful, and beneficial to students.
- Administrative support and leadership (including both school- and district-level leadership)

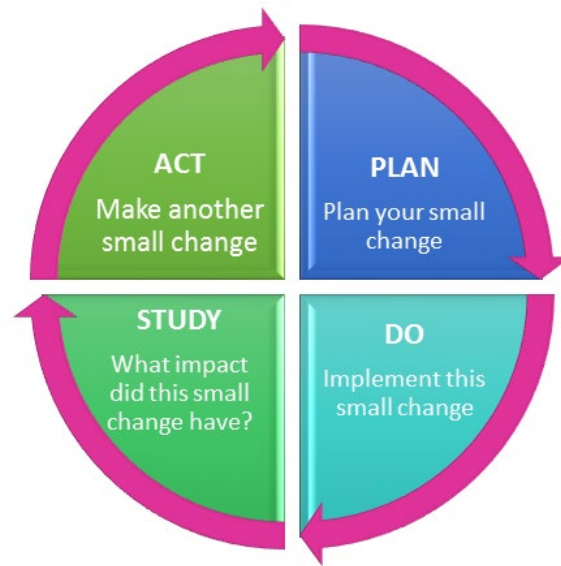
## Active Implementation Frameworks

The active implementation frameworks outline the necessary tools and activities for the three factors required for successful outcomes: effective practices, effective implementation, and enabling context. It is imperative that effective instruction is rooted in evidence-based practices that are teachable, learnable, doable, and accessible in practice. Effective implementation starts with implementation stages which starts with exploration moves to installation or planning initial use of the practice then moves to initial implementation and finally full implementation of evidence-based practice. To ensure enabling context, start with implementation teams which are groups of people working towards the same mission to improve student outcomes. The teams will then need to intentionally use improvement cycles to review progress and adjust as needed.

### [The Active Implementation Hub](#)



Teams can use Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Cycles to quickly troubleshoot issues as they arise at the local level and remove roadblocks that slow or derail use of new strategies.



#### [Lesson and Template for Employing the PDSA Cycle](#)



## Gaps in Colorado's Statewide Literacy Plan and Next Steps

The Colorado Department of Education acknowledges that this Comprehensive Statewide Literacy Plan may have some gaps and is committed to the process of continued improvement and ongoing work to address those gaps. CDE hopes that LEAs who engage in this process at the local level are able to look at this work through a lens of learning and discovery as we did. As educators we often hold ourselves to the belief that we are supposed to hold all the answers all the time. The reality is that nobody can know everything there is to know or that needs to be known.

Adaptability, flexibility and identifying areas of growth are all skills that we hope to bestow upon our students as 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Operating with those same values throughout this process will be invaluable, including acknowledging that sometimes the process *is* the product. CDE has utilized the information from the Statewide Literacy Needs Assessment and identified gaps in the creation of the Statewide Literacy Plan and have outlined some next steps. Next steps for CDE are to:

1. Revise and update the Colorado Comprehensive Literacy Framework.
2. Engage leadership and staff across all of CDE to collaborate and align efforts on comprehensive literacy birth to graduation.
3. Engage a broad and diverse group of stakeholders and practitioners in the field to expand the Statewide Literacy Plan and develop “how-to” practice guides.
4. Establish internal working groups to analyze and provide guidance on READ Plans beyond 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, including writing READ Plans for 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students and how to determine when a student no longer needs a READ Plan.
5. Expand professional learning opportunities in the Science of Reading and scientifically and evidence-based literacy strategies and practices for early childhood educators, 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade educators, administrators, and specialists such as EL and Special Education teachers.
6. Expand and adapt the [Literacy Evaluation Tool](#) (LET) used in Early Learning Grants (ELG) to evaluate systems and structures for comprehensive K-12 literacy at the LEA and school levels.
7. Continue close collaboration with the new state agency being formed to support early childhood learning and development across the state.
8. Develop a system to monitor the progress and success of this Statewide Literacy Plan.
9. Ongoing collaboration with other State Education Agencies (SEAs) on best practices for comprehensive literacy birth to graduation.
10. Create and support a framework that establishes communities of practices that pair [high performing districts and educators](#) with lower performing districts and educators.

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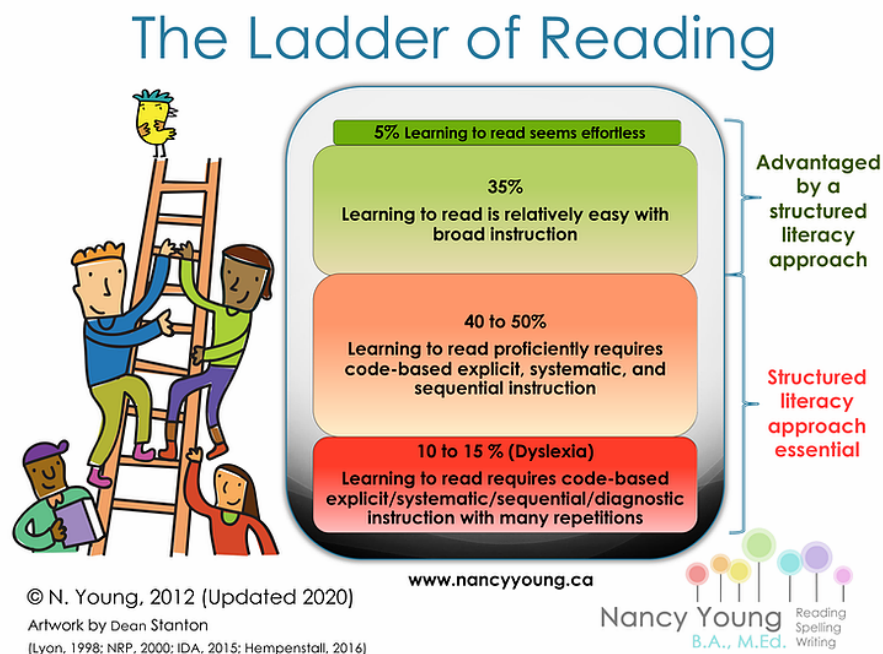
## Appendices

### Appendix A - Structured Literacy

#### What is Structured Literacy?

Structured Literacy™ is characterized by “the provision of systematic, explicit instruction that integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing and emphasizes the structure of language across the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), the relationships among words (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse” (IDA, 2018, p.6).

Structured Literacy™ is not a program, but an instructional approach to teach the structure of the English language. It is based on science and evidence that supports a greater percentage of students in learning to read. Nancy Young’s (2020) infographic represents the additional number of students that can learn to read through Best First Instruction and interventions when a Structured Literacy approach is applied. The evidence indicates that Structured Literacy™ significantly increases the likelihood of children reading by grade 3.



#### Guiding Principles of Structured Literacy™, according to International Dyslexia Association (2018, p.6)

1. Model and clearly explain new tasks or when a child is having difficulty.
2. Teach all skills and strategies of reading and writing using highly explicit instruction language and models.
3. Systematic delivery of skill instruction - moving from the simple to complex.
4. Engage in meaningful interactions with language during the lesson.
5. Provide repeated opportunities for practice.
6. Provide corrective feedback and specific positive praise.
7. Monitor and provide feedback during instruction and during independent practice.
8. Develop high levels of performance before moving to more advanced skills.

## Appendix B - Chall's Stages of Reading Development

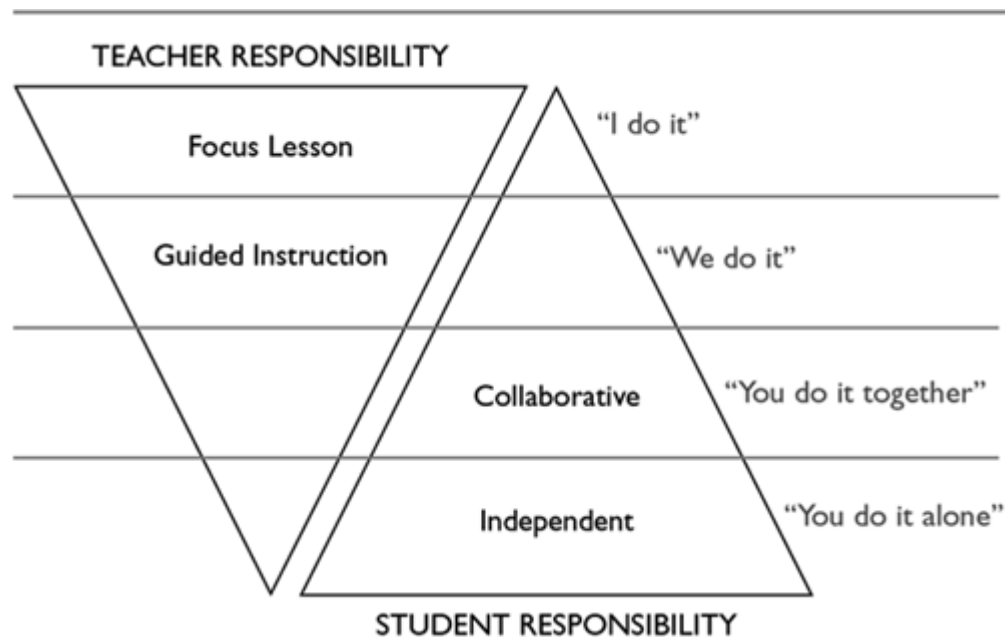
Chall's (1996) six stages of reading development as a framework, which accounts for reading development from birth to adulthood. These learners' lifespan is divided into six stages, which are summarized in the table below.

Stage, Approx. Age/Grade	Characteristics, Masteries by End of Stage	How Acquired	Relationship of Reading to Listening
<b>Stage 0: Pre-Reading</b>  6 months- 6 years old Preschool	Child "pretends" to read, retells story when looking at pages of book previously read to him/her, names letters of alphabet; recognizes some signs; prints own name; plays with books, pencils and paper.	Being read to by an adult (or older child) who responds to and warmly appreciates the child's interest in books and reading; being provided with books, paper, pencils, blocks and letters. Dialogic reading.	Most can understand the children's picture books and stories read to them. They understand thousands of words they hear by age 6 but can read few, if any, of them.
<b>Stage 1: Initial Reading and Decoding</b>  6-7 years old 1 <sup>st</sup> grade/ beginning 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	Child learns the relationship between letters and sounds and between printed and spoken words; child is able to read simple text containing high frequency words and phonically regular words; uses skill and insight to "sound out" new one syllable words.	Direct instruction in letter-sound relations (phonics) and practice in their use. Reading of simple stories using words with phonic elements taught and words of high frequency. Being read to on a level above what a child can read independently to develop more advanced language patterns, vocabulary, and concepts.	The level of difficulty of language read by the child is much below the language understood when heard. At the end of Stage 1, most children can understand up to 4000 or more words when heard but can read about 600.
<b>Stage 2: Confirmation and Fluency</b>  7-8 years old 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Child read simple, familiar stories and selections with increasing fluency. This is done by consolidating the basic decoding elements, sight vocabulary, and meaning context in the reading of familiar stories and selections.	Direct instruction in advanced decoding skills; wide reading (instruction and independent levels) of familiar, interesting materials that help promote fluent reading. Being read to at levels above their own independent reading level to develop language, vocabulary, and concepts.	At the end of Stage 2, about 3000 words can be read and understood and about 9000 are known when heard. Listening is still more effective than reading.
<b>Stage 3: Reading for Learning the New</b>  9-13 years old	Reading is used to learn new ideas, to gain new knowledge, to experience new feelings, to learn new attitudes, generally from one viewpoint.	Reading and study of textbooks, reference works, trade books, newspapers, and magazines that contain new ideas and values, unfamiliar vocabulary and syntax;	At the beginning of Stage 3, listening comprehension of the same material is still more effective than reading comprehension.



4 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> grade		systematic study of words and reacting to the text through discussion, answering questions, writing, etc. Reading of increasingly more complex text.	By the end of Stage 3, reading and listening are about equal for those who read very well, reading may be more efficient.
<b>Stage 4: Multiple Viewpoints</b>  15-17 years old 10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Reading widely from a broad range of complex materials, both expository and narrative, with a variety of viewpoints.	Wide reading and study of the physical, biological and social sciences, and the humanities, high quality and popular literature, newspapers, and magazines; systematic study of words and word parts.	Reading Comprehension is better than listening comprehension of materials of difficult content and readability. For poor readers, listening comprehension may be equal to reading comprehension.
<b>Stage 5: Construction and Reconstruction</b>  18+ years old College & Beyond	Reading is used for one's own needs and purposes (professional and personal); reading serves to integrate one's knowledge with that of others, to synthesize it and to create new knowledge. It is rapid and efficient.	Wide reading of ever more difficult materials, reading beyond one's immediate needs; writing of papers, tests, essays, and other forms that call for integration of varied knowledge and points of view.	Reading is more efficient than listening.

## Appendix C - Fisher and Frey Gradual Release Model (2013)



The gradual release of responsibility allows for students to own more of the learning as they master a concept, skill, or strategy over a period of time. When a concept, skill, or strategy is new or when students need explicit instruction, the teacher models and shows examples during the "I do" or explicit teaching segment of the lesson. During the We Do, or guided practice segment of the lesson, the teacher serves as a guide supporting the students in the application of the new learning. It is during this segment that students need lots of practice opportunities, positive praise, and corrective feedback. Based upon student performance during the guided practice, teachers make instructional decisions regarding next steps in the gradual release framework.

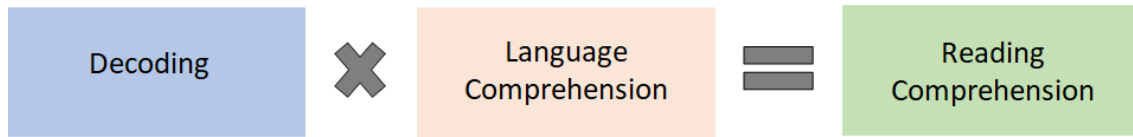
During the guided practice, if students struggle and are making a number of errors teachers may 1) reflect and determine that the prerequisite knowledge is not in place for students and make adjustments in their plans; 2) determine that it is necessary to go back and provide more instruction and modeling; or, 3) to continue providing supports during guided practice and not move to release more student responsibility.

During the guided practice, if students are following along but seem to be dependent upon the teacher as a guide, the teacher may 1) determine it is beneficial to remain in guided practice; or 2) determine that students would benefit from peer support during a "Collaborative You do."

During the guided practice, if students are following along and seem to understand there is minimal corrective feedback, the teacher may determine 1) to utilize a "Collaborative You do" to provide peer support and feedback; or 2) to release students to an "Independent You do."

The gradual release model provides a framework for teachers to consider anecdotal evidence that is observed during the lesson and to use that data to inform instructional practices during the lesson as well as in following lessons. The goal is to provide students the support they need to while building their capacity to own more of their learning as they build towards mastery.

## Appendix D - Simple View of Reading



The Simple View of Reading - Reading comprehension is the product of decoding and language comprehension. This mathematics equation reflects the understanding that to have reading comprehension a reader must be able to recognize the words on the page and then understand the meaning of the words (Gough and Tunmer, 1986). Gough and Tunmer' Simple View of Reading supports the argument that there is more to reading than decoding and language comprehension (1986). This model provides insights to reading disabilities.

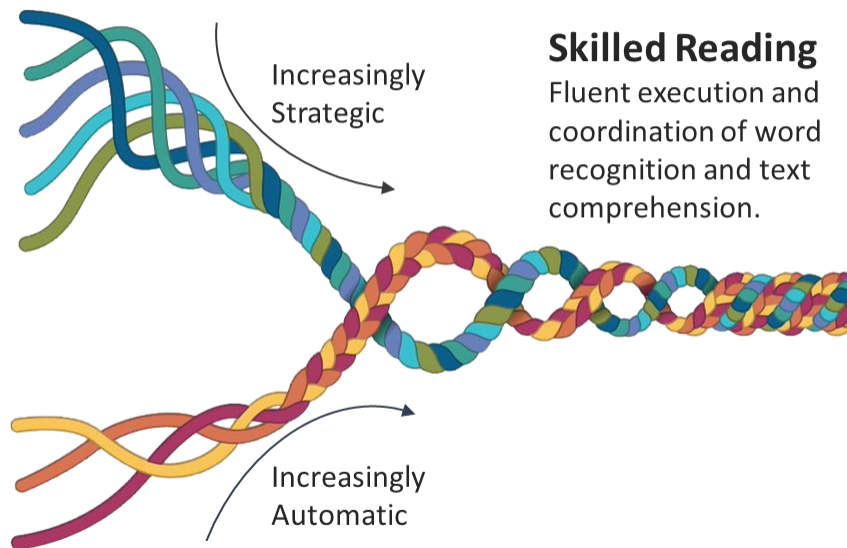
## Appendix E - Scarborough's Rope

### Language Comprehension

- Background Knowledge
- Vocabulary Knowledge
- Language Structures
- Verbal Reasoning
- Literacy Knowledge

### Word Recognition

- Phonological Awareness
- Decoding (and Spelling)
- Sight Recognition



Scarborough, H. 2001. Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. Pp. 97-110 in S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Literacy*. NY: Guilford Press.

Scarborough's Rope (2001) mirrors the Simple View of Reading by illustrating the importance of both language comprehension and word recognition. Both strands need to be developed through methodical, comprehensive, and recursive scope and sequence of skills. Each of the skills and subskills in each strand need to be explicitly taught, modeled, supported through guided practice, and applied independently. While each of the sub skills are taught and practiced in isolation, they must be connected to and practiced in text. It is a frequent and distributed practice that supports students in developing the fluent application of word recognition and language comprehension that is necessary for skilled reading.

The skills comprising word recognition need to be taught explicitly and systematically. Phonemic awareness follows a discrete developmental sequence that should guide instructional scope and sequence of skill instruction. Synthetic phonics which focuses on explicitly teaching sound symbol correspondences and uses this

knowledge to read and spell words is based in science. Students must master phonemic awareness and phonics to a level of automaticity that braids the skills together so that students can automatically decode text while employing language comprehension skills and strategies to comprehend the text. Orthographic mapping, which is dependent upon automatic mapping of sound to symbol, supports automatic word recognition or reading by sight.

The rope indicates that while it is important to teach each element of language comprehension explicitly, it is equally necessary to “twist” them together with supported practice in text. Students must be able to use them together to create meaning. Solidification of the skills allows readers to strategically leverage components of language comprehension to make meaningful connections with experiences, text, and self.

Oral language is critical to supporting literacy. Academic language is taught both implicitly and explicitly. Teachers can encourage the growth of academic language by modeling academic language and incorporating opportunities for students to engage in dialogue in the classroom. As readers mature and texts become more complex, students’ ability to rely on their developed oral and written language becomes more important for their comprehension. Strong oral language skills create a foundation for literacy skills, which are expanded through copious amounts of writing.

All five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension), with the addition of oral language and writing, are integral parts of literacy and should be taught daily during reading instruction (Moats, 2020; Scarborough, 2001). Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four language components that develop over time, but they do not develop consecutively or linearly. They intermingle: one supports the growth of the other. Oral language contributes to both reading and writing and writing supports oral language development (Harlaar et al., 2008; Shanahan et al., 2006). Reading, writing, and oral language development should be supported across the curriculum and be embedded into instruction throughout the day.

## Appendix F - Sedita’s Writing Rope

### The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing (Sedita, 2019)

#### Critical Thinking

- Generating ideas, gathering information
- Writing process: organizing, drafting, writing, revising

#### Syntax

- Grammar and syntactic awareness
- Sentence elaboration
- Punctuation

#### Text Structure

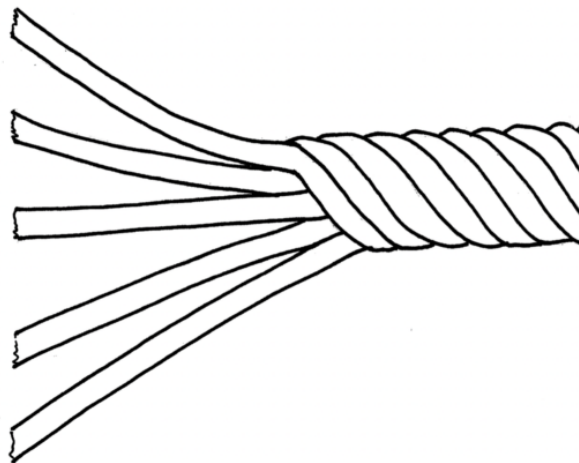
- Narrative, informational, opinion structures
- Paragraph structure
- Patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution)
- Linking and transition words/phrases

#### Writing Craft

- Word choice
- Awareness of task, audience purpose
- Literary devices

#### Transcription

- Spelling
- Handwriting, keyboarding



Writing is a complex task. It requires students to engage in “integrating multiple physical and cognitive demands, including transcription, spelling, sentence formation, idea generation and organization, and an understanding of audience, purpose, and genre” (McQuitty, 2014, p. 468). Writing affects oral language and since writing is not explicitly taught until students enter school, oral language affects the foundations of writing (Shanahan et al., 2006).

Reading and writing engage different cognitive functions that support opportunities for new learning (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Writing in content areas shows comprehension and it provides a space for the reader to work through the meaning of important concepts. Explicit instruction in process writing such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing can also improve elementary students’ writing skills because they are actively engaged in not only writing but talking about writing and listening to their own and their peers’ writing (McQuitty, 2014). Students need to both read, write, and talk about reading and writing. Using writing as a tool for interaction and manipulation of ideas can support student understanding.

Sedita (2019) proposed a writing rope that identifies five components that need to be taught explicitly, practiced, and applied over time to develop as a strong writer. Writing supports critical thinking and assesses a student’s understanding of new content. Writing tasks, in conjunction with reading, promotes critical thinking skills that come with writing that require the challenge of high levels of thought (Matsumura et al., 2002).

### **Writing Strands**

Critical Thinking- When students engage in the writing process, they engage in critical thinking. They consider what they want to write about and what they should include in their writing. Students benefit from explicit instruction in employing the writing process.

Syntax - Think about grammar. When students understand sentence structures (how words are put together to form academic language) it increases their listening and reading comprehension and writing composition skills.

Text Structure- This is the understanding of text structures and organization of narrative, informational, and opinion text. Patterns found in nonfiction text based upon its purpose and paragraph structures support writing and reading comprehension.

Writing Craft- Students need explicit instruction and then repeated opportunities to hone the purposeful selection of word choice, adjusting tone and style for audience and purpose, and leveraging literary devices to enhance their writing.

Transcription- The foundation of automatic handwriting and strong sound symbol correspondence must be in place. If this foundation is not solid, students will get caught up in thinking about how to form and connect letters, words, and sentences. They will not be able to translate the thoughts to the page that are needed for advanced writing assignments. More challenging writing assignments, in conjunction with reading, promotes critical thinking skills that come with writing which require the challenge of high levels of thought (Matsumura et al., 2002).

When students engage in writing tasks, from quick writes to complete works, they hone their skill sets within each of the strands. The strands become more secure and more tightly woven with repeated opportunities to write daily.