



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

# Report to the Colorado General Assembly: House Bill 08-1223

Submitted to:

**Joint House and Senate Education Committees and the Colorado State Board of Education**

By:

**Colorado Department of Education**

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## Introduction

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House Bill 08-1223, *Concerning the Provision of Technical Assistance Pertaining to Colorado Public School Students with Literacy Challenges that Include Dyslexia*, encourages the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide support and training to educators in literacy. Specifically, the statute promotes technical assistance and training in the assessment and scientifically based interventions for students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. Training must include, but is not limited to, the areas of: awareness, assessment, identification, evidence-based progress monitoring, and scientifically based interventions.

Training and technical assistance should be reflective of a continuum of supports provided and is encouraged to be coordinated with current best practices. Furthermore, the statute encourages the department to “provide technical assistance and training to school districts, administrative units, residential treatment facilities, correctional facilities, and local education agencies in a coordinated effort with teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education” (section 22-2-133(2) C.R.S.).

## Literacy Technical Assistance and Training

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### Overview

The department’s focus on literacy has been accomplished through cross-unit collaboration among the Teaching and Learning Unit and the Exceptional Student Services Unit. The primary focus of the department’s literacy work for 2017 has been focused collaboration between units on how to best serve those who struggle with literacy, including those with dyslexia, on the continued implementation of the Colorado READ Act (House Bill 12-1238) and literacy training for teachers who serve students with disabilities. Through ongoing technical assistance and professional development, the department seeks to meet the needs of educators, administrators and instructional leaders in supporting all students, including those with literacy challenges, in becoming competent readers.

### Renewed Dyslexia Focus at the Department

The department launched this renewed focus on Dyslexia in March 2017 through a Dyslexia Forum. The purpose of the forum was to convene a wide audience to establish a common understanding of what dyslexia is and to publically share the Department of Education’s commitment to this work.

The forum built upon the current framework of early literacy policy in Colorado to support students in both general and special education to meet important reading outcomes. To support these efforts, participants were offered a keynote presentation by board-certified child neuropsychologist, Dr. Jack Fletcher. His professional work has focused on issues related to child neuropsychology. In the area of developmental learning and attention disorders, Dr. Fletcher has addressed issues related to definitions and classification, neurobiological correlates, and most recently, intervention. This learning was recorded and posted on the dyslexia website for all to utilize: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/dyslexia>.

The department has continued its renewed attention on Dyslexia through an ongoing Focus Group and is publishing its work through the CDE website.

*Dyslexia Focus Group.* Stakeholders representing various interest groups were invited to engage in further discussion about the ways we can work together to meet the needs of every student experiencing reading difficulties. This subgroup of stakeholders, now called the Dyslexia Focus Group, is comprised of 30 participants, representing over 10,000 stakeholders. This group will continue to meet together over the course of the next

12-18 months to discuss the opportunities that may exist for our work and what next steps might be. This focus group is committed to keeping the larger stakeholder group informed and involved during this process.

*Dyslexia Website.* In collaboration with the Dyslexia Focus Group, the department launched a webpage specifically focused on dyslexia: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/dyslexia>. The webpage is the initial step in the DFG's work around cohesive messaging and sharing of resources to stakeholders in supporting students at risk for reading difficulties. This page also shares how to contact the department for further support and information on the topic of dyslexia.

## Literacy Training Initiatives

*2017 READing Conference.* The flagship literacy training event for the department is the annual READing Conference. The Office of Literacy in partnership with the Exceptional Student Services Unit hosted its third annual conference which was open and free to K-3 teachers, interventionists, special educators, reading coaches, school leaders, and district leaders in October 2017. The conference was attended by nearly 800 individuals from all areas of the state. Topics included: latest research supporting our K-3 readers, understanding and supporting students who struggle to read (including those with dyslexia), 5 components of literacy, and a special thread to support higher education. The department received positive feedback from the field and is already making plans for next year's conference including plans for tracks related to advanced learning, higher education faculty and sessions specific to support for struggling readers including those with dyslexia.



Figure 1 Colorado READing Conference 2017

## Teaching and Learning Unit Initiatives

The Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) provided numerous professional development opportunities for teachers and other school professionals with responsibilities for addressing the needs of students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. These opportunities included a statewide conference with a focus on dyslexia, coursework, webinars, forums, and online self-paced courses all focused to on high quality literacy instruction as well as specific literacy needs of students who are at risk for reading difficulties. They are delineated in this report primarily by projects led by varying offices within the TLU. The following section lists high level details of the literacy activities provided by the TLU in over the course of 2017.

*Office of Literacy.* The goals of the READ Act -- early identification of and effective intervention for reading deficiencies for children in grades K-3 -- are consistent with the intent of House Bill 08-1223. Thus, the implementation activities for the READ Act enacted by the Office of Literacy are reported here. The Office of Literacy provides support to Colorado districts, schools, and educators in effective reading assessment, instruction, and intervention through direct technical assistance and training as well as through online resources.

*Professional Development Related to K-3 Literacy Instruction.* The department provides READing Foundations Academies across the state at no charge for Colorado school districts. A READing Foundations Academy is a no-cost training focused on explicit and systematic universal instruction in reading with an emphasis on foundational reading skills based in the standards. Participants are able to dig deeper into the decoding and



language, study the connection to the Colorado Academic Standards, and explore methods for engaging students in comprehension and writing every day. This professional development opportunity is designed to support general education teachers, special education teachers, reading interventionists, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, instructional leaders and principals. Approximately 400 educators from across the state participated in the READING Foundations Academy from January to December 2017. Since August 2014, over 1,800 educators have attended this training.

*Professional Development Related to Early Literacy, Birth to Kindergarten.* The Early Learning Language and Literacy Sequence are self-paced courses and intended to provide teachers with background information in scientifically based research on early language and literacy, birth to kindergarten. These courses are available free of charge online on the Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System at <https://ecpd.costartstrong.org/ets/home>. The sequence was developed by nationally recognized early literacy experts from across the country. Training content provides evidence-based strategies to promote language and literacy development, prevent learning challenges, and support struggling learners. Additionally, these strategies assist with early identification of reading challenges.

*Technical Assistance Related to K-3 Literacy.* The Office of Literacy, through regional Literacy Consultants, provided ongoing literacy support and technical assistance to the field. The technical assistance consisted of providing support for reading data analysis, reading lesson modeling, classroom walk-throughs, and professional development sessions as requested by schools, districts, and BOCES.

*Early Literacy Grant Program.* This competitive grant program, part of the Colorado READ Act, supports comprehensive literacy support for all students to ensure they receive high quality literacy instruction along with the necessary intervention supports as needed. In 2017, the department supported 32 schools within this program between two cohorts. Grant schools are required to use scientifically based or evidence based reading research strategies. Schools in the grant program are provided ongoing technical assistance from CDE and, through their grant award, work with an external literacy consultant monthly to support instructional leaders and teachers with the implementation of grant. These grant schools are also provided access to professional development through the grant on the essential components of reading as well as data interpretation and analysis.

*Early Literacy Assessment Tool Project.* This project, funded through the School Finance Act, involves 146 districts, 582 schools and approximately 124,419 K-3 students throughout the state for the current school year. Support provided by this project continues to include professional development on data analysis, best practices with data-driven instruction, mapping of the assessment results to early literacy foundational skills and effective progress monitoring. All participants have the opportunity to access virtual recorded sessions on a variety of topics as well as courses offered through a learning platform and facilitated by consultants allowing for discussion, follow-up and application of learning. These options allow for a wider reach to rural districts and allow flexibility for teachers and leaders to opt into sessions that match their specific learning needs. Within the project a series of data analysis sessions designed specifically for principals was launched in the 2016-2017 school year with continued participation in this current school year.

*State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG).* The Department was awarded a State Personnel Development Grant, which provides funding and technical assistance to improve systems for personnel preparation and professional development. Through the SPDG, CDE is currently implementing Colorado's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (CO-MTSS) in 33 school districts and BOCES. CO-MTSS is a prevention-based framework of team-driven, data-based problem solving for improving the outcomes of every student through family, school, and



community partnering and a layered continuum of evidence-based practices applied at the classroom, school, district, region, and state level. CO-MTSS supports students with reading challenges or at-risk for reading challenges by establishing school systems for team-driven, data-based problem solving and the development of a layered continuum of evidence-based reading practices. CO-MTSS also works to establish strong family, school, and community partnering to best support the school's students. More information on CO-MTSS and SPDG can be found at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/mtss>

## Exceptional Student Services Unit Initiatives

The Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) provided numerous professional development opportunities for teachers and other school professionals with responsibilities for addressing the needs of students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. These opportunities included workshops, online courses, webinars, seminars, and literacy institutes developed to address the specific literacy needs of students with disabilities. They are delineated in this report primarily by disability category. Additionally, the Exceptional Student Services Unit addressed student literacy challenges through literacy-focused projects and technical assistance provided by ESSU disability or discipline specific specialists and/or the ESSU literacy specialists.

The following narrative lists high level details of the literacy activities provided by the ESSU over the course of 2017:

*READ Act / Differentiated Pathways for Students with Disabilities.* During 2017, the ESSU has continued to provide technical assistance and support to Colorado schools as they continue to implement the *Differentiated Pathways: Including All Students in the Colorado READ Act*. ESSU disability and literacy specialists provided ongoing technical assistance via a linked literacy web page which included webinars and supporting documents. In addition ESSU specialists were available for online and phone consultations to support school personnel as they determine how to effectively use the Differentiated Pathways to include all kindergarten through third grade students in the Colorado READ Act. The ESSU has continued to provide Colorado schools and administrative units (AUs) access to alternate testing formats and assessments at no cost. The continuing result of this project has been a significant reduction in the numbers of students with disabilities reported as excluded in the 2017 READ Act data collection.

*Professional Development Provided through Colorado Assistive Technology Partners Addressing a Variety of Populations of Students with Disabilities.* Federal funding from the ESSU has supported the following Statewide Assistive Technology, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (SWAAAC) trainings to support literacy achievement for students with disabilities.

- The June 2017 SWAAAC Summer Symposium included a wide variety of literacy related topics.
- A SWAAAC training was held in September 2017 as a make & take style workshop entitled *Google Chrome as AT: Create a Custom Solution for Each of Your Students*. Participants learned to install and manage a variety of free, low-cost literacy supports for students with high-incidence disabilities including: Google Dictionary, SpeakIt, ClaroRead, BeeLine Reader, Open Dyslexic, Readability Redux, Snapverter, Kami, Grammarly, Ginger, and Voice Typing.
- The SWAAAC monthly web conference for September 2017 featured an open discussion of current and future trends in assistive technology assessment. Conversations largely focused on assessment for literacy accommodations and supports.
- The October web conference hosted guest speaker, Dr. Melinda Roden from the Colorado Department of Education Assessment Unit, who provided a review and updates specific to assistive technology



accommodations on the annual state assessments. A significant portion of the presentation addressed Text-to-Speech (reading) and Speech-to-Text accommodations (writing).

- The SWAAAC program hosted an introductory two-day workshop entitled *Pragmatically Organized Dynamic Display* in October 2017. This workshop trained participants to use PODD books to teach communication and literacy skills to students with Complex Communication Needs. Two weeks later, a follow-up webinar was held to support and promote effective implementation of the tools and strategies. Two more webinars are scheduled for November 28 and January 16, 2018.

*Professional Development Related to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.* For school teams working with students on the autism spectrum, the ESSU offered the *Autism Literacy Institute* for the fifth year. Nationally recognized experts on literacy and autism spectrum disorder, Dr. Christi Carnahan and Dr. Pam Williamson, presented intensive trainings at no cost. To accommodate a more diverse range of administrative units, the trainings were held in Summit County (Frisco), as opposed to the metro region where it had been held in the initial three years.

*Professional Development Related to Executive Function and Emotional Regulation for Students with Brain Injury and Other Neurologically Based Disabilities.* During the 2016-2017 school year, over 1,500 educators, specialists, and parents participated in one or more of 19 trainings. Training topics included: understanding brain development and disruptions, and assessment strategies and interventions for students with executive function and emotional regulation deficits. Trainees from the five regional trainings took an efficacy measure eight weeks after the training that measured teaching implementation and practice changes and student outcomes. With a 71 percent response rate from participants,

- 95 percent of respondents indicated that as a result of the training they can better identify and analyze the needs of students with all types of disabilities (e.g., brain injury, ADHD, Serious Emotional Disability, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, etc.).
- 99 percent of respondents indicated they understood the typical impacts of brain injury and its effects on learning.
- 53 percent indicated that students receive more consistent and appropriate interventions and accommodations
- 82 percent of respondents had tried the newly learned strategies in their classroom/learning environment. And as a result:
  - 46 percent of respondents indicated increased student engagement in their classrooms,
  - 43 percent indicated students increased their time on task; 30 percent indicated student increased participation in class, and
  - 35 percent indicated students increased participation in appropriate social interaction.

*Professional Development Related to Students with Deaf-Blindness and/or Significant Support Needs.* The topic of the June 20-21, 2017 Summer Institute on Deaf-Blindness and Significant Support Needs was *Making it Routine: Connecting Communication, Schedules, and Literacy*. This one-semester, graduate course addressed current research on the literacy development and instructional needs of learners with multiple disabilities and deaf-blindness. The training specifically detailed strategies to connect communication, object schedules, and literacy related experiences to daily routines and regular school activities. The presenters were Dr. Julie Durando and Ira Padhye, staff of the Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness at the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Seventy-seven participants attended the two-day training, which was held in the Denver area. The content of the training was rated on a five-point scale to be of high quality (4.3), high relevance (4.5), and of high usefulness (4.5). A follow-up efficacy tool will be sent to the participants in January 2018.





The ESSU's Significant Support Needs Specialist continues to provide technical assistance by delivering training on the *Colorado Emergent Literacy Scales (CELS)* for their school personnel working with students who have a significant cognitive disability. The *CELS* training is designed for K-3 teachers who teach students who received their instruction on alternate achievement standards. Five of these trainings have occurred during the 16-17 school year in Montrose School District, Southeast Region, Adams 14 School District and Falcon 49 School District. Three of these trainings have occurred thus far in the 17-18 school year in Falcon 49 School District, Southeast Region and the San Juan BOCES. One more is currently being scheduled for the Weld District 6 District in Greeley for the current school year.

*Professional Development Related to Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.* The ESSU offers an annual Deaf Education Conference for professionals working with Colorado students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In 2017 this conference was held in May and over 160 professionals attended both at the onsite location and through distance delivery remote locations. Dr. Brenda Schick, a professor and chair of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder presented her research on the development of literacy skills in young students with hearing loss. Dr. Schick is nationally recognized for her work with students who are hard of hearing, especially students who use sign language. Dr. Nancy Bridenbaugh and Dr. Rachel Boll, also researchers, were also co-presenters. During the conference she highlighted the role of fingerspelling and how it promotes phonological awareness for students who often struggle with this essential foundational skill. Dr. Schick shared resources and curriculum specific to fingerspelling, which would enable teachers and other service providers to improve early literacy skills with signing students. This training provided support to early childhood teams and teams who are creating READ Act plans for students with minimal to zero access to sound.

As we look forward to 2018, the ESSU has already partnered with the Illinois School for the Deaf and will be bringing training to Colorado that will focus on Cued speech. This is another researched based method that is being used in schools across the nation to promote early literacy skills for students who have significant hearing loss or trouble with speech discrimination. One large Metro District has piloted a Cued Speech program in their school and the ESSU collaborated with them to provide a training for parents and other service providers on the use of Cued Speech for literacy instruction in January 2018. The ESSU also continued to provide testing materials for alternative pathways for specific students and individual guidance for educational teams struggling to find appropriate ways to measure students' early literacy skills.

As a long-term initiative, literacy development for students with hearing loss has been a continued focus of the Colorado Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Mentor program (CO DHH Mentors). Utilizing research-based strategies of coaching and mentoring to improve literacy practices in educational settings for students with hearing loss, the CO DHH Mentors have supported special education directors, school principals, program coordinators, special education teachers, general education teachers, related service providers and families in 93 school sites. As a result of this program, improved strategies have been implemented in programming for students who are deaf across Colorado. Confirmation of the efficacy of this program is reflected in the improved performance in reading for this disability population.

*Professional Development Related to Students with Specific Learning Disability, Including Dyslexia.* The ESSU provides training which focuses on the literacy needs of students with Specific Learning Disabilities including Response to Intervention (RtI), Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for literacy, evidenced based practices, research, assessment, instruction and intervention, as well as eligibility determination, IEP development, and adaptations related to Specific Learning Disabilities. In 2017, several events were coordinated and/or presented



which focused on meeting the needs of educational leaders, teachers, special services providers, and families to improve achievement and outcomes for students with literacy challenges and/or SLD.

*SLD Literacy and Assistive Technology Institute.* Access and Instruction for Accelerating Literacy Skills in Grades 3-12 was a six-month hybrid professional learning project that included a face-to-face training with broadcast to distance learning sites across the state, webinars, and a virtual Professional Learning Community (PLC). The institute targeted teams of general and special teachers, instructional leaders, interventionists, special service providers, and families who support students who have persistent difficulties with reading and spelling, including children with SLD, dyslexia, and/or dysgraphia. Training content integrated reading and spelling assessment, evidence-based instructional strategies, and technologies to support access and acquisition of literacy skills. The institute was guided by renowned author and dyslexia expert Marcia K. Henry, Ph.D. and included presentations by Information Communication and Assistive Technology Specialist, Jim Sandstrum and Literacy Specialist, Claire Sabochik. The series began in fall 2016 and ran through March 2017.

*Affective Competencies Series Part 1.* The Missing Piece of the Puzzle - Reducing Stress and Addressing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Students with SLD, supported the literacy outcomes of students with SLD, including dyslexia, by providing participants with strategies to foster social and emotional learning and reduce stress. The series was designed to help teachers reduce stress in the classroom and support the development of affective competencies for students who have reading, writing, and math disabilities, as well as those with ADHD. This hybrid learning opportunity was led by with clinical neuropsychologist, researcher and author, Dr. Jerome Schultz, and included a face-to-face training with 174 participants on site and at eight distance learning sites across the state, three webinars, and virtual coaching/consultation sessions. The project included designing and implementing an action plan and collecting data. The project began in fall 2016 and implementation continued through February 2017.

*Affective Competencies Series Part 2.* Beginning January 2017 the ESSU hosted Part 2 of the Affective Competencies Series, the Mindfulness Institute, which was open to 50 participants. A series of five, four-hour trainings in which participants learned the research-based benefits of mindfulness practice, actively experienced mindful awareness through a variety of practices, developed a foundation for sustaining a personal mindfulness practice, and learned strategies to cultivate a safe and responsive learning environment intended to foster academic achievement. Additional strategies were introduced for integrating mindfulness practices with youth and included specific connections for students with learning disabilities (e.g., SLD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.). Content connected to the five core Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies with a focus on self-awareness and self-management including the refinement of mindfulness skills including observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-reactivity, and non-judgment of inner experience. Registrants were expected to complete pre and post surveys, 5 brief event evaluation survey as well as collect and report individual data.

*Courage to Risk Conference.* In January 2017 the SLD Specialist and Speech and Language Specialist from CDE presented at the Courage to Risk Conference in Colorado Springs. The three-hour presentation addressed the following topics: Language is the embedded curriculum of school and the foundation for reading, writing, and communicating; the language, literacy, and learning connection through the examination of the domains and components of language in relation to the National Reading Panel's 5 components of reading instruction; eligibility criteria for SLI and SLD, and documenting a comprehensive body of evidence.

*Metro-Speech Language Network on Language-based Learning Disabilities.* In February 2017 the SLD Specialist and Speech and Language Specialist from CDE presented at the Metro-Speech Language Network on language-based learning disabilities. The session topics included eligibility criteria and critical considerations when





determining eligibility for speech or language impairment or specific learning disability, including the different types of reading profiles under the Simple View of Reading and the language/literacy connection.

*Reading in the Rockies Conference.* In October 2017, the ESSU SLD Specialists, in partnership with the International Dyslexia Association Rocky Mountain Branch brought educational psychologist and author, David Kilpatrick, Ph.D., to the Reading in the Rockies conference in Vail, CO. He shared two presentations in three sessions. The first session focused on the nature and causes of reading difficulties, the importance of explicit instruction in advanced phonemic awareness, and fluency as a byproduct of having instant access to most or all of the words on the page. The second session addressed reading assessment and high-yield, evidence-based interventions for students with word-level reading deficits. The SLD Specialist also hired a videographer to record the presentations which will be made available on the CDE website once they have been closed captioned. Over 300 people attended the conference and it is estimated over 175 attended the Kilpatrick session.

*Professional Development Related to Supporting Struggling Writers.* In September 2017 the SLD Specialists in collaboration with the SLI Specialist, OT/PT/APE Specialist, and Assistive Technology Partners launched the collaborative project: *Let's Write! A Team Approach with Dr. Denise Decoste*. The hybrid, professional learning project brought together cross-disciplinary collaborative teams and included a live workshop with broadcast to distance learning sites across the state, two webinars, and two virtual coaching sessions. The institute targeted teams of general and special teachers, instructional leaders, interventionists, special service providers, and families who support students who have difficulties with written expression including transcription (spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding), and composition. Content included research, strategies, resources and an assessment protocol for integrating assessment, instruction, and technology for struggling writers, including those with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Participants are required to collaboratively administer the protocol and implement intervention based on the results. An implementation plan and data collection were required. The project was guided by renowned author, presenter, accommodations and universal design for learning expert, Denise Decoste, Ed.D, OTR. Two-hundred forty-one people registered for the series that began in September 2016 and ran through December 2017.

*Literacy Professional Development Related to Students with Speech or Language Impairments.* Tami Cassel, the ESSU speech-language pathology (SLP) specialist, and Charlie Buckley, an part-time CDE employee working with the speech-language pathology consultant, collaborated with a professor at UNC on the creation and delivery of a year-long professional learning for Colorado districts/AUs/BOCES in Social Communication and Engagement for Children with Autism and Complex Communication Disorders. Currently this professional learning is being piloted in a Metro Denver district with the special education teachers, para-professionals, speech-language pathologists, and other IEP team members of four schools. The course includes online modules, face-to-face meetings and collaborative coaching to support teams of educators in developing skills to support their educators in developing comprehensive action plans to address the social communication and engagement skill of their students. One of the top skills employers consider is the person's ability to communicate.

The ESSU Learning Disability Specialist and Speech Language Specialist presented on language and literacy for two conferences, Metro Speech Language Symposium and for the Courage to Risk Conference, attended by 150 people.. These sessions addressed how language is the foundation for learning academic content, made connections between the domains of language and the five components of reading, and clarified IDEA disability categories, Specific Learning Disability, Speech Language Impairment, and Developmental Disability. ESSU staff also collaborated with the Occupational Therapist Specialist to provide an extensive written language workshop



for special education teams. This workshop included a face to face training which was streamed to distant locations in Colorado, follow up webinars, virtual coaching sessions and ongoing support through resources and training materials. There are 84 educators participating in this workshop.

Professional learning opportunities for educational teams across the state was provided through an online format with the topic of *Teaching Approaches to Vocabulary and Word Learning*. One hundred and eighty four educators in teams of speech-language pathologists, speech-language pathology assistants, special and general educators participated in the regional training to discuss implications of the presentation on student outcomes and to develop an action plan on how to implement the strategies. This format was used this fall to provide training for three regions in Colorado on curriculum-based assessment and interventions for 62 speech language pathologists and speech language pathology assistants.

*Professional Development Related to Students with Visual Impairment, Including Blindness.* The Unified English Braille Code (UEB), is now the official braille code for all English Speaking countries. The Unified English Braille Code is used for reading, writing, and math purposes. Dr. Tanni Anthony oversees the braille competency testing procedure through the CDE ESSU. As of January 2017, all veteran teachers certified in the area of visual impairment (TVIs) working in Colorado administrative units have demonstrated reading and writing competency in the English Braille Code. Thus far in 2017, nine new individuals have earned their CDE Certificate of UEB Competency. Six additional candidates are in process of demonstrating braille competency. The ESSU maintains UEB listserv as a vehicle for information dissemination on the continuing UEB code changes and statewide discussion on best practices for preparing instructional materials for braille learners in Colorado administrative units. In addition to the listserv, a listing of UEB support documents and resources are posted on the CDE webpage at: [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-Vision\\_GuideDocs](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-Vision_GuideDocs)

The CDE Braille Competency Committee completed an item analysis of the multiple-choice section of the Colorado State Braille Competency Test in September 2017. As a result of the review, three items were modified to improve clarity. Information was also gleaned from items with a high error frequency for next-step training purposes to the field. A practice test is currently being finalized to support ongoing braille competency checks with veteran TVIs and to assist new TVIs with preparing for the Colorado Braille Competency Test. The practice test is scheduled to be posted to the CDE website in late December 2017.

Colorado students who are braille readers are receiving their instruction in the Unified English Braille Code. All Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) English Language Arts state assessments will be exclusively provided in UEB across all grade levels during the Spring 2019 test administration window.

The Colorado READ Act has two screening options for the K-3 braille reader. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Next (DIBELS Next) has a commercially available UEB protocols, which are housed at the Colorado Instructional Materials Center (CIMC) and can be loaned free of charge to Colorado administrative units. Also professionals licensed and endorsed as teachers of students with visual impairments or school braillists can braille the DIBELS or the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) for their students. The latter option allows for the involved staff to customize the up to 180 braille contractions of the UEB code to the skill set of each individual child. This allows for a more accurate testing of the child's reading ability.

The Exceptional Student Services Unit offered a two-day training on *Strategy to See: Strategies for Students with Cortical Visual Impairment* in September 2017. Seventy-one teachers of students with visual impairments attended this comprehensive by national-expert Diane Sheline. Cortical visual impairment is the leading cause of pediatric visual impairment in North American and requires unique assessment and instructional strategies. The



participants learned how to create and implement specially designed literacy materials for children in phase 1, 2, or 3 of CVI. The overall content of the training was rated on a five-point scale to be of high quality (4.9), high relevance (5), and of high usefulness (5). Since the training, there have been four Make-n-Take sessions across the state for TVIs to create books designed for learners with CVI. These sessions occurred in Grand Junction, Longmont, Castle Rock, and Denver. Over 100 books have been created by 45 teachers. Two more Make-n-Take sessions will occur in early 2018. Follow-up efficacy data will be collected in January 2018 for both the onsite training and the use of the Make-n-Take materials.

*Specific ESSU Literacy Projects.* The ESSU has continued to actively support the SiMR Literacy Project during 2017. The ESSU is required to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) for the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). As part of the SSIP the ESSU was required to identify and create a State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR). During the 2017 the Project continued implementing the K-3 literacy portion of the SiMR project, with goals of significantly reducing the number of early readers that fall within the well-below benchmark range. A significant proportion of students who fall within the below and well-below benchmark ranges of performance are students with disabilities. Following the completion of the third year of this project (2019) we expect to not only move students out of the well-below benchmark range but also see significant reductions in the number of students identified as having a significant reading deficiency (READ Act), and reduce the number of literacy-related referrals for special education services.

The project began in late 2015 with the identification of two pilot schools. In the spring of 2016, 20 additional schools were added to the project. Participating schools are located in urban, suburban and rural locations. The continuing focus of the project during 2017 has been to provide professional learning, coaching, and leadership training to teachers and leaders in all participating schools. Training in *Structured Literacy* and evidence-based literacy practices was provided to all kindergarten, first grade, interventionists and special education teachers at each of the schools during 2016. During 2017, training was provided to all second grade teachers as well as to any newly hired kindergarten, first grade or intervention teachers. Each participating school continues to have an embedded literacy coach 1-2 days per week to support implementation of the *Structured Literacy* routines and evidence-based strategies during the 2017-2018 SY. Third grade teachers and students will be added to the project during the 2018-2019 SY. The ESSU continues to devote two literacy specialists and six literacy coaches to this project, with an expectation of refining strategies that can be implemented state-wide following the completion of the Project's three-year implementation cycle.

*Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center Grant.* The Exceptional Student Services Unit received a project grant from the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) Center for the purpose of collaborating with three Colorado institutions of higher education. The focus of the project is the preparation of educators to provide literacy instruction with an emphasis on students in PK-3 and students with disabilities. The goals and activities of the project are aligned with those in our State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and related to our State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR). CEEDAR's mission is to create aligned professional learning systems that provide teachers and leaders effective opportunities to learn how to improve and support core and specialized instruction in inclusive settings that enable students with disabilities to achieve college and career readiness standards. A State Leadership Team comprised of relevant stakeholders has defined Colorado CEEDAR Project goals that include revising higher education curriculum in the area of training teachers to teach literacy. There is evidence that teachers in Colorado, both general and special educators, need greater knowledge and strategies required to teach reading. In 2016-2017, a survey was conducted with all higher education faculty responsible for literacy courses. The survey was designed to gather information about what is occurring in teacher education programs in Colorado relative to literacy instruction. Additionally, focus groups were held with



relevant constituent groups including teachers, principals, literacy coaches, and special education directors. Responses to the survey and transcripts of focus group discussions were analyzed by a qualitative analyst engaged by the ESSU. The report was presented to the CEEDAR Leadership Team at its December 2017 meeting and is available upon request. As the CEEDAR Center has been renewed for a second 5-year cycle, Colorado will continue in this partnership as we work to improve teacher preparation in literacy.

## Conclusion

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The department has a strong vision for Colorado that has been enabled by several years of education policy and is anchored by our key initiatives:

- Strong Foundations – Support high quality early learning and literacy for all students
- More Options – Expand high school options to ensure all students are ready for college and/or living-wage jobs
- All Means All – Expand access and opportunity to historically underserved students
- Quality Schools – Prioritize and maximize support for schools and districts identified for academic improvements
- Educators Matter – Develop a strong pipeline of high quality teacher and principals and provide deeper support for school and district leaders

These five key initiatives working together ensure that we are supporting students every step of the way throughout their education.

The issues faced by students with literacy challenges can make it very difficult for students to experience academic success across the curriculum. Providing training and technical assistance to Colorado educators to support these students in reaching reading proficiency and ultimately academic success is an important aspect of the role of the Colorado Department of Education.

In the coming year, the department will continue to collaborate across units in working with varying stakeholders to support the needs of students who have literacy challenges, including those with dyslexia. We are committed to supporting educators and instructional leaders as they serve these students and determine ways to better support the families of these students.