



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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Purpose

Pursuant to House Bill 08-1223 (C.R.S. 22-2-133), the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is required to submit an annual report to the education committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate concerning technical assistance and training it has made available related to students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. The report summarizes the training and technical assistance provided in 2015 through the CDE Office of Literacy, the Exceptional Student Services Unit, and the Office of Learning Supports.

Introduction

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 to provide support and training to educators. Specifically, the statute promotes technical assistance and training in the assessment and scientifically based interventions for students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia, within a response to intervention framework.

Training must include, but is not limited to, the areas of:

- awareness
- assessment
- identification
- evidence-based progress monitoring
- scientifically-based interventions

Training and technical assistance is to be reflective of a continuum of supports provided within a response to intervention framework 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.).

Technical Assistance and Training Summary for 2015

The department focus on literacy has been accomplished through cross-unit collaboration among the Office of Literacy, the Exceptional Student Services Unit, and the Office of Learning Supports. The primary focus of the department’s literacy work for 2015 has been on the continued implementation of the Colorado READ Act, House Bill 12-1238, and training for teachers who serve students with disabilities.

Office of Literacy Initiatives

The goals of the READ Act, early identification of and effective intervention for reading deficiencies for children in grades K-3, is 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. Professional development was provided to general education teachers, special education teachers, reading interventionists, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, instructional leaders and principals through the READING Foundations Academy. The 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 decoding and language, study the connection to the Colorado Academic Standards, and explore methods for engaging students in comprehension and writing every day. Approximately 850 educators from across the state participated in 2014 -2015 school year. The READING Foundations Academy has continued to be offered in the 2015-2016 school year. We have served approximately 150 teachers in the fall of 2015.

Technical Assistance. The Office of Literacy, through regional technical assistants, provided ongoing literacy support 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. Schools assigned Priority Improvement or Turnaround plans according to the state's accountability system had first priority for support. Additional schools and districts were served as requests were made to the Office of Literacy.

CDE's Early Literacy Assessment Tool Project. This project, through the School Finance Act, involved 132 districts, 518 schools and approximately 119,000 K-3 students throughout the state. Support provided by this project in 2015 included professional development on reading assessment, the reading continuum, data analysis, and best practices with data-driven instruction. A complete series of virtual learning opportunities was launched this school year to reach more teachers and school leaders. The virtual learning choices can be viewed on the Early Literacy Assessment Tool Project web page: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/elatwebinars>.

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework. The Office of Literacy in collaboration with the Office of Standards and the Exceptional Student Services Unit contributed to a comprehensive program that resulted in literacy-based homework assignments designed to support connections between what is being learned at school and a parent or family member at the student's home. For Kindergarten and first, second and third grade, schools will have access to approximately 25 TIPS homework activities per grade to use in extending literacy activities into the home at no charge. All the homework activities are research-based and aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards. Ongoing support for their use will be provided by the Department.

READING Conference. The Office of Literacy hosted a reading conference open to all K-3 teachers, interventionists, special educators, reading coaches, school leaders, and district leaders in October of 2015. The conference was attended by 300 individuals from all areas of the state and was offered at no-cost to attendees. Topics included: Bi-literate, Bilingual and Bidirectional Models for Instruction, Creating Better Readers through Teaching Spelling, Increasing Engagement and Learning from Text, Literacy for ALL Learners, Small Group Instruction, and Considerations for Appropriate Development of Early Reading and Writing in the Primary Grades. The Office of Literacy received positive feedback from the field and is currently collaborating with the Exceptional Student Services Unit for next year's conference which will enable us to expand the size of the conference for the fall of 2016.

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 by disability category. Additionally, the Exceptional Student Services Unit addressed student literacy challenges through literacy-focused grants and technical assistance provided by ESSU disability specific specialists and/or the ESSU literacy specialists.

Professional Development Related to Students with Significant Support Needs. A series of virtual Community of Practice (CoP) webinars was offered to teachers and other professionals working with students with significant support needs. This series focused on *The Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)* and provided educators with information about instruction on the alternate achievement standards in English Language Arts and Math. Gina Quintana, Significant Support Needs Specialist, and Linda Lamirande, Assessment and Accommodations Specialist, at the Colorado Department of Education have collaborated to produce the webinars targeting teachers whose students are receiving instruction on the alternate achievement standards or the extended evidence outcomes of the Colorado Academic Standards. These webinars are offered during the late afternoons to avoid teachers missing instructional time.

Professional Development Related to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). Trainings for teachers and other school professionals addressing literacy needs of students with specific learning disabilities were provided through multiple activities and formats. Events focused on meeting the needs of districts, schools, administrators, and educators working with students with language, reading, and writing specific learning disabilities.

The 2014-2015 SLD Reading Project: Phonology, Advanced Decoding and Word Study for Students with SLD concluded in spring 2015 with a follow-up to a full-day workshop presented by Clare Sabochik. Educators who had participated in the year-long project submitted data related to the implementation of instructional strategies and interventions, including evidence of impact on student achievement in reading. The 2015-2016 SLD Reading Project: *The Breakdown: Addressing Deficits in Phonology and Beginning Phonics*, commenced with a full-day workshop, delivered in three regional locations, and an option to participate in an extended project. Of the 116 workshop participants, 48 are continuing in the extended project. The workshop addressed such topics as literacy assessments, data analysis and problem-solving, evidence based instructional strategies and tools, research, and resources.

Additionally, in the spring of 2015, the CDE SLD Specialist provided extensive technical assistance related to SLD Eligibility (including challenges related to over identification of Specific Learning Disability in the area of Reading Fluency, and special considerations including Dyslexia and SLD). These sessions were offered in nine regional locations throughout the state.

Professional Development Related to Students with Visual Impairment or Blindness. The braille code in the United States has changed from the English Braille American Edition to the Unified English Braille Code (UEB), now the official braille code for all English Speaking countries. It is used for both literary and math, reading, and writing purposes. Dr. Tanni Anthony, from the ESSU, serves on the UEB Transition Forum, a national workgroup to address the transition needs for full UEB implementation in the United States by January 4, 2016.



The Colorado Department of Education has provided comprehensive training on UEB (literary) to Colorado teachers certified in the area of visual impairment and school brailleists. Seventy-five participants attended training in late 2014. A second four day training entitled the *Unified English Braille Code: The Technical Aspects* took place in January 2015 in Denver, attended by 25 school brailleists and teachers certified in visual impairments. The training was presented by Darleen Bogard and Phyllis Landon, internationally renowned UEB experts. In addition, all Colorado teachers of students with visual impairment and school brailleists are members of a listserv specific to UEB. The listserv provides a vehicle for communication about the code changes and instructional needs of students. In addition to inservice training, the CDE Braille Competency Committee has worked to convert all CDE Braille competency materials from the English Braille American Edition code to the Unified English Braille Code. This has involved our state test and 15 renewal modules.

The Exceptional Student Services Unit offered a two-day training on the topic of *Cortical Visual Impairment and Literacy: Assessment to Instruction Strategies* in October 2015. Cortical visual impairment is a brain-based cause of visual impairment and the leading cause of pediatric visual impairment in developed countries. The training, conducted by Dr. Christine Roman Lantzy, was delivered to 106 service providers and included content on the unique literacy needs of this student population. Dr. Lantzy has authored the leading book on the topic.

Professional Development Related to Early Childhood Special Education. How Oral Language Supports Emergent Literacy, a two-part training series, provided by Doug Petersen, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Associate Professor in the Division of Communication Disorders at the University of Wyoming, was offered by the ESSU. The series, attended by 201 educators, speech-language pathologists, speech language assistants, and family members, focused on how the foundational skills of oral language development support emergent literacy skills in early childhood education. “Virtual” coaching follow-up was provided to support learning.

Professional Development Related to Students with Emotional Disabilities. During 2015, the literacy activities offered through the school mental health and behavior project included a webinar series designed to improve the achievement for students with significant emotional disabilities. This series, targeting special education directors and coordinators, teachers of SED, related service providers, and families, provided a focus on instructional strategies and evidence-based behavioral interventions with an emphasis on improving achievement outcomes for students with SED who are often cited in research as having the worst outcomes of any disability category. Content included improved use of diagnostic assessments and literacy instruction. Supportive materials were also provided. Series trainers were Julia Wigert, School Psychology Specialist for CDE, and Kristi Fozard, Special Education teacher.

Professional Development Related to Autism Spectrum Disorder. Support for teachers and other professionals in addressing the literacy challenges of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was also provided by the ESSU. After the initial 2013 and a highly successful 2014 ASD Literacy Institute, the unit again offered the ASD Literacy Institute in 2015. Presented by nationally recognized experts on literacy, Christi Carnahan, Ed.D., and Pam Williamson, Ph.D., this training focused on a balanced approach to aspects of literacy including phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. Each aspect of literacy was linked to unique cognitive, social, and communication issues inherent in ASD. The Tier I 5-day Institute was offered to building or district teams, who completed a year-long project with on-going coaching from the presenters. The Tier II ASD Literacy Institute was a two-day advanced course for those who had completed the 5-day ASD Institute in the prior year. The



expert institute trainers also provided intensive training and coaching to a cadre of CDE ASD coaches.

The ASD team at CDE also provided a one-day statewide training presented live and broadcast around the state to more than 200 participants. A webinar series that addressed *Autism and Literacy* and *Supporting Literacy in Individuals with Autism through Technologies* was made available, through collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education, Kansas TASN Autism and Tertiary Behavior Supports, and the Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders Network.

Grants to Support Professional Development. The ESSU continues to support the four multi-year *Increasing Achievement Literacy Grants*, initially awarded in 2012. The scope of these grants, which focus on improving literacy outcomes for students with disabilities, included 13 member school districts of San Luis BOCES, the seven member districts of Northwest BOCES, as well as the Poudre School District and the Jefferson County School District. Each grant site has developed a collaborative course of action which has included professional development for special educators as well as general education professionals, implementation of specific literacy interventions and strategies, and the on-going progress monitoring of student outcomes. Technical assistance and supportive literacy training has been provided to each of these sites by the ESSU Literacy Specialist. In addition, the ESSU provided funding to six additional literacy professional development grants during the past year. Grant awardees were able to offer specific training and professional development to their teachers with the grant funds. Grant activities included 5-day Orton-Gillingham Instructional Methods courses, on-site coaching and mentoring programs, development of Professional Learning Communities, and training for writing READ Plans.

Other Literacy-Related Technical Assistance. Through the ESSU Results Driven Accountability process, additional literacy technical assistance was made available to all administrative units in Colorado. This customized literacy support was offered throughout the year by the ESSU disability-specific specialists as well as the ESSU literacy specialist. The ESSU literacy specialist has also collaborated with the Family and School Partnering division in the ESSU in providing literacy-focused presentations at each of the Parents Encouraging Parents Conferences during 2015.

Office of Learning Supports Initiatives

During 2015, the Colorado Department of Education Office of Learning Supports (OLS) provided technical assistance, coaching and training related to implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The OLS offered several learning opportunities in a variety of formats, settings and forums. Professional development opportunities are designed to develop systems and adults' competency which promote effective practices (i.e., explicit instruction) for literacy improvements. The following literacy related trainings have been provided by the OLS:

In the MTSS Online Academy course *Effective Instructional Practices and Academic Systems*, educators engaged in personal, self-directed learning. They investigated tools for literacy development, analyzed systems, and reviewed standards-aligned units and individual plans.

In partnership with the CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and the Office of Literacy (OL), the OLS delivered three face-to-face MTSS Implementation Workshops where the focus was on building the collective capacity of the system's stakeholders. Additionally, the OLS conducted a face-to-face training,



MTSS Implementation in Early Grades, in which a member of the CDE Literacy team discussed the READ Act and provided resources. Content also included skill-building for emergent literacy and embedding developmentally-appropriate practices in instruction. Additionally, the OLS conducted a face-to-face training, *MTSS Implementation in Early Grades*, in which a member of the CDE Office of Literacy team discussed the READ Act and provided resources. Content also included skill-building for emergent literacy and embedding developmentally-appropriate practices in instruction.

Each of these learning experiences included a highlight of the Literacy Evaluation Tool, which was developed by the CDE Office of Literacy to help educational leaders self-assess what they are doing at the school level to facilitate literacy learning. Similarly, the tool was featured in a webinar entitled *Literacy Systems: Enabling Adults to Support Students*, sponsored by the OLS, with co-facilitation by ESSU and OL.

Conclusion

The department has a strong vision for Colorado that has been enabled by several years of education policy and is anchored on four goals:

- Start strong – ensuring all kids start school ready and supported to learn
- Read by third grade – ensuring all kids reach reading proficiency by the end of third grade
- Meet or exceed standards – ensuring all kids meet our Colorado Academic Standards as they progress through their schooling
- Graduate ready – ensuring all students leave our doors ready for the next door they open, whether that be college or career

These four goals, 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.