



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

January 2017

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 2016 by CDE through the Office of Literacy and the Exceptional Student Services Unit.

Introduction

House Bill 08-1223, Concerning the Provision of Technical Assistance Pertaining to Colorado Public School Students with Literacy Challenges that Include Dyslexia, encourages CDE 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 2016

The department’s focus on literacy has been accomplished through cross-unit collaboration among the Teaching and Learning Unit - Office of Literacy and the Exceptional Student Services Unit. The primary focus of the department’s literacy work for 2016 has been on the continued implementation of the Colorado READ Act, House Bill 12-1238, and training for teachers who serve students with disabilities. Though 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.

Exceptional Student Services 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 grants and technical assistance provided by ESSU disability or discipline specific specialists and/or the ESSU literacy specialists.

READ Act / Differentiated Pathways for Students with Disabilities. During 2016, the ESSU has continued to provide training, technical assistance and support to Colorado schools as they began implementing the *Differentiated Pathways: Including All Students in the Colorado READ Act*. The statewide regional trainings that began in late 2015 were concluded during January and February of 2016. A total of 350 special education administrators and special education teachers were introduced to the three differentiated pathways. Schools began implementing the new assessment procedures specifically designed for students requiring significant accommodations or alternative testing formats throughout the spring of 2016. ESSU disability and literacy specialists provided ongoing technical assistance via a new linked literacy web page which included webinars and supporting documents. In addition ESSU specialists were available for online and phone consultations as schools began to determine which students in grades K-3 would require differentiated pathways for assessment and inclusion in the Colorado READ Act.

The ESSU has continued to provide Colorado schools and administrative units access to alternate testing formats and tests without cost through the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year. The initial result of this project has been a significant reduction in the numbers of students with disabilities reported as excluded in the 2016 READ Act data collection. The ESSU anticipates inclusion of all students, including those with disability status, in the 2017 READ data collection.

Professional Development Provided through Assistive Technology Partners Addressing a Variety of Populations of Students with Disabilities. 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.

Throughout the fall of 2016 SWAAAC hosted small group opportunities to complete a selection of the Dynamic Learning Maps Professional Development Modules including: *Essential Elements, Principles of Instruction in English Language Arts, Getting Started with Narrative Writing, Anchor/Read/Apply, Emergent Writing, Predictable Chart Writing, and Symbols, Core Vocabulary, and Communication*. The one- to two-hour online sessions encourage discussion, practical application of the content, and the sharing of resources.

The SWAAAC monthly web conference for November 2016 featured a vendor-sponsored in-service and highlighted their online tools, Co-Writer Universal and Snap & Read Universal.

The program hosted training, *Supporting Student Literacy through AAC*, in January 2017. Several other vendor-sponsored in-services were included in the Fall Team Coordinators meeting and included CaptiVoice, Learning Ally, and Colorado Talking Book Library.

The agenda for the SWAAAC Summer Symposium has not yet been finalized, but supporting literacy learning (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and access to literacy learning represents a majority of the work public education Assistive Technology professionals are called upon to provide.

This year the SWAAAC program embarked upon a new project specifically aimed at developing statewide knowledge and skills in the area of evidence-based, literacy intervention for non-verbal students. The Colorado Initiative for Model Practices in Augmentative Alternative Communication and Technology (IMPAACT) provides targeted, professional development and coaching to a select team of educators in order to cultivate and capture effective implementation of best practices in AT; specifically, in the development of language and literacy skills with children who use augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) as their primary means of communication. These best practices along with materials and resources will be shared with schools throughout Colorado who are serving children with Complex Communication Needs.

Professional Development Related to Autism Spectrum Disorder. For school teams working with students on the autism spectrum, the ESSU offered the *Autism Literacy Institute* for the 4th year, this school year adding Tier 3 for teams who completed Tiers 1 and 2 in previous years. Nationally recognized experts on literacy and autism spectrum disorder, Dr. Christi Carnahan and Dr. Pam Williamson, presented these intensive trainings. The institute content for the five-day Tier 1 training, held September 26-27 and December 6-8, 2016, focused on a balanced approach to literacy including instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing. Each aspect of literacy was linked to the unique cognitive, social, and communication issues inherent in autism spectrum disorder. The two-day Tier 2 trainings held on September 28-29, 2016 built on the content from the Tier 1 training and required participants to develop and bring assessment data from their students and develop balanced literacy lessons based on the assessment data. The Tier 3 training was held in December 9, 2016 will build on the prior trainings and delve deeper into instructional implications found in assessment data and address writing strategies for students with autism spectrum disorder.

To accommodate a more diverse range of administrative units, the trainings were held in Breckenridge as opposed to the metro region where it had been held for the last three years.

The October 2016 training included 38 school professionals at the Tier 1 level. These individuals completed the five-day Institute on December 8, 2016. Five involved administrative units have been working with the national presenters on video projects that will be shared when they return for the

remainder of the Institute in December. Also in October there were 35 people who completed Tier 2 (they completed the 5 day Institute in a previous year). There are 24 people registered for Tier 3 training in December 2016.

Professional Development Related to Challenging Behavior and Executive Function Deficits for Students With Brain Injury and Other Neurologically Based Disabilities. During the 2015-2016 school year, over 1,100 educators, specialists, and parents across the state participated in one or more of a series of 20 trainings. Other topics included appropriate assessment strategies and interventions for students with congenital (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) and acquired brain injuries. Implementation and practice changes were measured eight weeks after the training – 92% of participants reported they were more proficient at designing an appropriate program for students with complex needs, they understood impacts on student learning and behavior and were more skilled at analyzing the needs and providing strategies to meet the needs of students with brain injury and all types of brain based disabilities. Sixty-three percent of participants reported an increase in student engagement, time on task and participation in class as a result of this training.

Professional Development Related to Students with Deaf-Blindness and/or Significant Support Needs. The topic of the June 28-29, 2016 Summer Institute on Deaf-Blindness and Significant Support Needs was *The Communication Matrix: A Communication Skill Assessment*. The *Communication Matrix* (2004) by Dr. Charity Rowland is an assessment tool designed to provide clear and constructive insights into how learners with severe and multiple disabilities are expressing themselves and what next steps to consider to promote progress as competent communicators. This tool also offers insight into a learner's ability to use visual and tactile symbols for communication and literacy purposes. These skills are imperative for students to be an active participant and learner in instructional literacy activities. The presenter was Phillip Schweigert, an international expert on the *Communication Matrix*. Over 130 participants attended the two-day training. The content of the training was rating on a 5-point scale to be of high quality (4.4), high relevance (4.5), and of high usefulness (4.5). A follow-up efficacy tool will be sent to the participants in January 2017.

Project staff of the Colorado Services for Children and Youth with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss, housed within the Colorado Department of Education, gave a presentation on August 2, 2016 at the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP Project Directors' Conference) on the topic of *Differentiated Pathways for the Colorado READ Act: When All Means Every*. Attendees included personnel from state education agencies, higher education, and other state deaf-blind projects.

Professional Development Related to Early Childhood Education and Students with Developmental Delay and/or Speech Language Impairments. The Exceptional Student Services Unit offered virtual coaching in follow up to the fall 2015 two-part training, *How Oral Language Supports Emergent Literacy*. Facilitated by Doug Petersen, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Associate Professor in the Division of Communication Disorders at the University of Wyoming, the series supported 201 educators, speech-language pathologists, speech language pathology assistants, and family members from across Colorado

in learning how foundational skills of oral language development support emergent literacy skills in early childhood education.

The ESSU hosted a training entitled, *Raising Readers: Building Language and Early Literacy Skills through Interactive Reading*. It was presented by Dr. Shari Robertson, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, a Professor within the Department of Special Education and Clinical Services at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The presentation reached 193 special and general education administrators, teachers, teaching assistants, speech language pathologists, speech language pathology assistants, and families from across the state in learning to use six interactive reading strategies that have been proven to enhance reading, talking, social, and cognitive skills for young children across a variety of ability levels.

Professional Development Related to Students with Hearing Impairment, Including Deafness.

Colorado's READ Act provided an opportunity for professionals in the field of deaf education to take a closer look at literacy instruction and student performance. Using the insights from ground-breaking research on the topic of *Literacy for Deaf Students*, Ruth Mathers, CDE's state consultant on deaf education, was able to collaborate with university researchers to design a differentiated pathway for assessing literacy skills in students who are Deaf and to simultaneously provide guidelines for instruction to students with significant gaps in their literacy skills. The research revealed a specific assessment that will accurately and appropriately assess the literacy skills of a student who is hearing impaired. Copies of this assessment were purchased by the ESSU budgets to allow Colorado administrative units the ability to borrow in order to complete evaluation requirements. Three informative videos were developed and housed on the CDE website to assist the field with implementation of the READ Act for students who are Deaf. These training videos can be found at:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/literacy_disabilities

Intensive literacy training specific to professionals in the field of deaf education is scheduled for the early spring. This cutting-edge training will represent the collective expertise of authorities in deafness gathered from four universities in four separate states where deaf education is a strong focus at their centers of higher education: University of Colorado – Boulder, Georgia State University, University of California – Irvine, and University of Tennessee. This will be an in-depth training for Colorado professionals, spanning weekly sessions over 10 weeks. The information that will be shared are the findings of the research which was supported by the federal government through a multi-million dollar grant aimed at learning more about best practices in literacy for deaf children.

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), created and supervised by Ruth Mathers in the ESSU. 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 ninety-three 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. In 2010, Colorado students with hearing impairment scored below the state average for students with disability performance on state assessments and held the third lowest score for reading performance in the state. In 2015, with the influence of the DHH Mentor Program, the reading performance for these students reflected an impressive increase that places students with hearing impairment as the fourth highest performing disability group out of thirteen disability categories.

Professional Development Related to Students with Serious Emotional Disabilities. During 2016, 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, behavioral and academic strategies. Supportive materials were also provided. Series trainers were Julia Wigert, School Psychology Specialist for CDE, and Kristi Fozard, Special Education teacher. The ESSU also co-sponsored the pre-conference workshop for the Colorado Society of School Psychologists (CSSP) annual fall 2016 conference held on November 3, 2016 and contracted with Steven Feifer, Ph.D., to present a full day workshop titled *The Neuropsychology of Reading and Written Language Disorders; A Framework for Effective Interventions*. Workshop content focused on the identification, assessment, and intervention of Dyslexia and other reading and writing disorders. Sixty-two school mental health professionals were trained.

Professional Development Related to Students with Significant Support Needs. A Virtual Communities of Practice Webinar was provided on February 2, 2016 on the topic of *Reading Comprehension for Students with Significant Support Needs*. This was the fourth of a series of four literacy-focused webinars for teachers serving students with significant support needs in school year 2015-16.

The *READ Act / Differentiated Pathways* training series that occurred during school year 2015-16 included an afternoon presentation on the *Colorado Emergent Literacy Scales (CELS)*. The *CELS* is an assessment framework designed to assist teachers to determine if their student(s) with significant support needs have a significant reading deficiency. It also offers information to guide instruction and next steps. Information about the *CELS* can be found on the CDE webpage:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/literacy_disabilities

Following the *READ ACT / Differentiated Pathways* regional trainings, seven administrative units requested additional training on the *CELS* for their school personnel working with students with significant support needs. The *CELS* training are designed for K-3 teachers who teach students who received their instruction on alternate achievement standards or Extended Evidence Outcomes (EEOs). Five of these trainings have occurred thus far in Pueblo 60 School District (March 1, 2016), Douglas

County School District (March 8, 2016), Cherry Creek School District (May 8, 2016), Montrose School District (August 15, 2016), and the Southeast Region (October 14, 2016). Two more *CELS* trainings are scheduled for Adams 14 School District and Falcon 49 School District in January 2017.

A presentation was given at the June 2016 SWAAAC Conference on *Literacy Instruction for Emergent Communicators*. The session was geared to provide information about literacy instruction for students with significant support needs based on the results of a Communication Matrix assessment. There were approximately 50 people in attendance.

A presentation was given at the January 2016 Courage to Risk Conference on the topic of *Meeting the Communication Needs for Students with Significant Support Needs*. Over 40 people attended this session.

Professional Development Related to Students with Specific Learning Disability, Including Dyslexia. Jill Marshall, the ESSU Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Specialist, provides training which focuses on SLD specific literacy needs including Response to Intervention (RtI)/Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) support for literacy, evidenced based practices, research, assessment, instruction and intervention, as well as eligibility determination, IEP development, and adaptations for literacy and language based Specific Learning Disabilities. In 2016, several events were coordinated and/or presented by the SLD Specialist, which focused on meeting the needs of districts, schools, administrators and educators to improve achievement and outcomes for students with literacy challenges and/or SLD.

The 2016-2017 *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 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 live event and statewide broadcast had 96 participants and 30 participants are in the process of completing the full institute, which is scheduled to end in March 2017.

The 2016-2017 *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 educational teams including general and special education teachers, instructional leaders, special service providers and families strategies to foster social and emotional learning. The series was designed to support social emotional learning and the development of affective competencies for students who have reading, writing, and math

disabilities, as well as ADHD in order to improve educational outcomes. 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. Participants are in the process of completing the project which included team goal setting and action plan implementation and data collection. The project is scheduled to end February 15, 2017. The evaluation reports from the events have over 93% positive rating and 100% of participants stated they would share the learning with colleagues, clients, or families.

On October 7, 2016, the ESSU SLD Specialist and SLI Specialist presented to approximately 90 participants at the Reading in the Rockies conference in Vail, CO. The topic of the presentation was *Literacy, Language and Learning and Three Discernable Disabilities*. Content of the presentation included language, literacy, and learning connections by examining the domains and components of language as they relate to the 5 components of reading instruction; clarifying important terms and eligibility considerations associated with language, literacy, and the IDEA disability categories of Speech or Language Impairment, Developmental Delay, and Specific Learning Disability.

On June 2, 2016 the SLD Specialist hosted a live viewing of a webinar presented by the Center on Technology and Disability (CTD) followed by a community discussion. The webinar topic was *Supporting Students with Dyslexia: Standards, Accommodations, and Strategies*. The SLD Specialist, the president of the International Dyslexia Association- Rocky Mountain Branch, and an Assistive Technology Specialist from Assistive Technology Partners/ SWAAAC facilitated a community discussion. Thirty people registered for the event and 100 percent of evaluation respondents indicated positive ratings for all questions (strongly agree/agree). The webinar also was available virtually to participants who could not attend the live event via CTD.

On May 3, 2016 and May 17, 2016 the SLD Specialist co-presented two 90-minute webinars with the CDE Office of Learning and Supports /MTSS Specialist, Michael Ramirez. The webinars were entitled *Challenges with SLD Evaluation and Eligibility*. Content included MTSS, Response to Intervention, assessment practices, and clarification regarding challenging issues in SLD identification. The presentation also addressed cautions for identifying students with a Reading Fluency SLD including assessment, root cause analysis, instruction, and evaluation considerations. The two webinars had a total of 152 participants.

Professional Development Related to Students with Speech Language Impairments. Tami Cassel, the ESSU speech-language pathology (SLP) specialist, and Charlie Buckley, one of the ESSU autism spectrum disorders specialists, collaborated with a professor at UNC on the creation and delivery of a year-long course in *Social Communication and Engagement for Children with Autism and Complex Communication Disorders*. Currently 326 educators are enrolled in the course. The course includes six online modules, one face-to-face meeting and collaborative coaching to support teams of educators in developing skills to support students' social communication and engagement skills. The first step to literacy is through language and communication development.

The ESSU Learning Disability Specialist and Speech Language Specialist presented on language and literacy for the Reading in the Rockies Conference. The session address 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.

The SLP specialist provided technical assistance for the speech-language pathologists in 3 AUs on how to use the communication rating scales to determine the need for speech-language services for students with a disability.

Professional Development Related to Students with Visual Impairment, Including Blindness. The braille code in the United States has changed from the English Braille American Edition (EBAE) to the Unified English Braille Code (UEB), 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, the state consultant on blindness/visual impairment 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. This group has met three times since 2014.

CDE provided two comprehensive trainings on UEB (literary) to Colorado teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment and school braillists in school year 2014-15. It also implemented a 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

During school year 2015-16, three UEB Refresher Courses were offered to 88 licensed and endorsed veteran teachers of students with visual impairments and school braillists. Candidates for the UEB Refresher Courses had already demonstrated braille competency in the former English Braille American Edition Code. The two-day course was designed to provide overview support on key changes to the new code and to provide an opportunity for these personnel to demonstrate braille competency in UEB. As a result of this training, 83 personnel demonstrated competency in the UEB Code. The other five school personnel are still in process of demonstrating UEB competency with mentor support.

In addition to the provision of in-service training, the CDE Braille Competency Committee worked during school years 2014-16 with a national UEB expert to convert all CDE Braille Competency materials from the English Braille American Edition code to the Unified English Braille Code. This has involved revising the state braille competency test and 15 renewal modules. The revised Colorado Braille Competency Test is used for initial demonstration of UEB competency. It has now been passed successfully by four new licensed and endorsed teachers of students with visual impairments and three new school braillists. Eight other new teachers or braillists are in the process of demonstrating braille competency in the UEB Code. It is anticipated that 100% of all teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment

will be UEB competent by CDE standards by the end of school year 2016-17. This is undoubtedly a national best.

Further evidence of the efficacy of the UEB professional learning and support provided in Colorado are the results of how many CMAS state assessments in English Language Arts have been requested in UEB format for the Spring 2017 administration of this state assessment. Of 33 tests requested in braille format across the 3-9 grades, 30 or 91 percent have been requested in UEB format. The three tests still requested in EBAE format are for students in 8th or 9th grade, who have a long history of receiving their textbooks and instructional materials in EBAE. Colorado is close to the “other side” of all students receiving their reading instruction in exclusive UEB despite the fact that most textbooks are still in the former code.

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 full-day training on the topic of *the revised Learning Media Assessment* (LMA) in October 2016. The Learning Media Assessment is an objective process of systematically selecting learning and literacy media for all students with visual impairment. It is a required assessment for all Colorado public school learners with visual impairment, including deaf-blindness. The Individualized Education Program of all students with visual impairment or deaf-blindness must have a Learning Media Plan as the result of the LMA. The tool is in the process of revision by author Dr. Cay Holbrook. Colorado was the first state to receive the update on changes to the LMA. Close to 70 professionals licensed and endorsed as teachers of students with visual impairments attended the training. Follow-up efficacy data shows the participants have made changes to their assessment and teaching practices as a result of the training.

Literacy Grants and Other Specific Literacy Projects. The ESSU has concluded the four Increasing Achievement and Growth-Literacy Grants during the fall of 2016. A total of \$4.2 million was awarded throughout the three-and-a-half year grant cycle. The purpose and goal of these grants was to enhance literacy outcomes for students with disabilities in four administrative units which included: Jefferson County Schools, Poudre School District, Northwest BOCES and San Luis Valley BOCES. Final grant data was due to the ESSU on December 1, 2016 and is currently under review. These grants allowed participating administrative units to provide professional learning and technical assistance to classroom and special education teachers, and supported the hiring of coaches and expert consultants in the area of specific disabilities and literacy.

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 is required to identify and create a State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR). The 2016 year was a pivotal time in 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 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 twenty additional schools were added to the project. Participating schools are located in urban, suburban and rural locations. The focus of the project to date has been to provide professional learning, coaching and leadership training to teachers and leaders in the twenty-two identified schools. Training in *Structured Literacy and Evidence-Based Literacy Practices* has been provided to all kindergarten, first grade, interventionists and special education teachers at each of the schools. Each school has been provided with an embedded literacy coach 1-2 days per week to support implementation of the Structured Literacy routines and evidence based strategies during the 2016-2017 SY. Over the course of the next two school years the project will expand to include second and third grade teachers and students. Currently the ESSU has devoted 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 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. Our experience has indicated that teachers in Colorado, both general and special educators, are not sufficiently well versed in the knowledge and strategies required to teach reading. A survey was conducted with all higher education faculty responsible for literacy courses, and a series of focus groups with the field is underway. Both the survey and the focus groups are designed to determine what skills and knowledge teachers need to instruct reading. This work will continue into 2017.

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 -- 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. 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 the decoding and language, study the connection to the Colorado Academic Standards, and explore methods for engaging students in comprehension and writing every day. Approximately 300 educators from across the state participated in the READING Foundations Academy from January to December 2016. Since August of 2014, over 1,400 educators have attended this training.

Technical Assistance. 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 first, best instruction along with the necessary intervention supports as needed. In May 2016, the department awarded 22 grants to schools across the state. 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, through the School Finance Act, involves 137 districts, 576 schools and approximately 132,339 K-3 students throughout the state for the current school year. Support provided by this project in 2016 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>.

2016 READING Conference. The Office of Literacy in partnership with the Exceptional Student Services Unit hosted this year's reading conference which was open to all K-3 teachers, interventionists, special educators, reading coaches, school leaders, and district leaders in September of 2016. The conference was attended by nearly 600 individuals from all areas of the state and was offered at no-cost to attendees. Topics included: Response to Intervention, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Essential

Components of Reading, Reading Routines, Early Writing, and more. The Department received positive feedback from the field and is already making plans for next year's conference including the inclusion of a specific track for advance learning, a track for higher education faculty and sessions specific to support for struggling reading including those with dyslexia.

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.

In the coming year, the department will initiate a convening of various stakeholders to discuss the needs of students who have literacy challenges, including dyslexia, and to determine how we can best support educators and instructional leaders as they serve these students and how we can better support the families of these students.