



COLORADO
Department of Education

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

Submitted to:
**Joint House and Senate Education Committees
and
Colorado State Board of Education**

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Introduction

H. B. 08-1223 authorizes the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide support and training to educators on issues faced by students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. *See* section 22-2-133, C.R.S. The statute promotes technical assistance and training in the areas of awareness, assessment, identification, evidence-based progress monitoring, and scientifically based interventions. Also, 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.

The department's technical assistance and training provided is required to represent a tiered continuum of intensity for intervention consistent with the response to intervention model. CDE is committed to these principles, which are embedded in the department's work.

Literacy Technical Assistance and Training

Overview

The department's support for literacy has been accomplished through cross-unit collaboration among the Teaching and Learning Unit and the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU). The primary areas of focus for the department's literacy work in the 2018-2019 school year have been providing training and support for teachers who serve students who struggle with literacy, including those with dyslexia, the continued implementation of the Colorado READ Act (H. B. 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.

Continued Dyslexia Focus at the Department

Dyslexia Focus Group

The department launched a Dyslexia Focus Group in March of 2017 in response to the elevated need to develop cohesive messaging and awareness of dyslexia. The Dyslexia Focus Group was comprised of 30 participants, representing parents, educators, literacy experts, professional organizations, school districts, public schools, private schools, institutions of higher education, and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). The Dyslexia Focus Group began meeting regularly in the summer of 2017 and completed its final meeting in December 2018 having accomplished its initial goals of creating a Dyslexia Fact Sheet, developing a common definition and understanding of dyslexia, and forming recommendations for a state Dyslexia Handbook. Per the focus group's recommendations, the Colorado Dyslexia Handbook has been created and is in the process of being developed as a fully accessible, web-based resource.

Dyslexia Working Group

During the 2019 legislative session, the Colorado General Assembly called for the creation of a Dyslexia Working Group (DWG) through the passage of H.B. 19-1134. *See* section 22-20.5-103, C.R.S. Under the statute, the Commissioner of Education was required to convene a working group to improve the educational outcomes for student with dyslexia. The DWG has six tasks outlined in statute:

- Analyze current national and statewide data related to students identified as having dyslexia, including but not limited to identification rates and achievement rates;
- Analyze the implementation and demonstrated effectiveness in other states of statewide legislation for dyslexia screening, educator training, and other dyslexia related laws;



- Identify and recommend appropriate dyslexia screening tools and processes as well as comprehensive assessments that address the recognized challenges of dyslexia, including phonological processing, phonemic awareness, and decoding and encoding skills;
- Identify and recommend a statewide plan for supporting students who are identified as having dyslexia, including specific intervention structures and their components, which must include evidence-based interventions, progress-monitoring systems, and data collection systems.
- Identify and recommend components of dyslexia awareness training for Colorado educators, including the content, target audience, time frame for training, and projected cost;
- Identify and recommend educator training for in-state approved programs of preparation for teacher and alternative teacher programs and recommended training for current educators, based on effective practice in other states, as well as recommendations from state and national organizations focusing on literacy. The recommendations concerning educator training may include the content, target audience, time frame for training, and projected cost; and
- Provide recommendations to CDE concerning the design and implementation of the pilot program.

In addition, the Dyslexia Working Group must, “analyze and integrate, as appropriate, the work and recommendations of other previous and ongoing state initiatives related to improving the identification and support of students who have dyslexia.”

The authorizing legislation for the DWG required the group to include the following members:

- A parent of a child identified with dyslexia;
- A parent of a child identified with dyslexia and a disability;
- A school district literacy specialist;
- A school district director of special education;
- A state or national literacy expert;
- A state or national dyslexia expert;
- Two elementary grade teachers, one of whom teaches in a rural or small rural school district;
- A principal of an elementary school in a rural school district or an employee of a BOCES who has expertise as a literacy specialist;
- A faculty member of an IHE who teaches in an approved educator preparation program for elementary grade teachers; and
- A member of the local chapter of an international dyslexia association.

CDE solicited nominations and applications for the DWG to determine appointment recommendations for the Commissioner of Education. The application was open from June 2019 through August 2019 with 79 applications received for the 11 positions on the DWG. CDE recommended applicants to the Commissioner for appointment based on the quality of their application packet and their ability to serve through the duration of the working group. At the direction of the Commissioner, CDE included a priority to include members who were representative from across the state, including small rural and rural districts, urban and suburban districts. Table 1 shows the membership of the DWG.

TABLE 1: Dyslexia Working Group Membership by Region and Role



Member	Region	Role
John Alexander	Out of State	A state or national literacy expert
Jamie Brackney	Pikes Peak	A parent of a child who is identified as having dyslexia and a disability
Alex Christy	Metro Area	Two elementary grade teachers, one of whom teaches in a rural school district or a small rural school district
Kathleen Collins	Northwest	A principal who is employed at an elementary school in a rural school district or an employee of a board of cooperative services who has expertise as a literacy specialist
Tamara Durbin	Northeast	A school district director of special education
Amanda Harris	West Central	Two elementary grade teachers, one of whom teaches in a rural school district or a small rural school district
Karin Johnson	Metro	A parent of a child who is identified as having dyslexia and a disability
Andrea Kamper	Northwest	A parent of a child who is identified as having dyslexia
Karen Leopold	Metro Area	A member of the local chapter of an international dyslexia association
Kathy McCall	North Central	A school district literacy specialist
Laura Santerre-Lemmon	Metro Area	A state or national dyslexia expert
Jennifer Urbach	North Central	A faculty member of an institution of higher education who teaches in an approved educator preparation program for elementary grade teachers

CDE contracted with an objective, skilled, third-party facilitator to manage the working group meetings and record the working group’s recommendations through the reports required within the authorizing statute. After conducting a transparent process to solicit proposals from interested individuals, the department considered the literacy expertise and content knowledge regarding dyslexia as well as facilitation experience in making the selection of Ms. Deborah Hunsaker, M.ED., as the facilitator of the Dyslexia Working Group. Ms. Hunsaker has been a dedicated educator for 25 years serving to improve literacy instruction at the school, district, and state level. Most recently, Ms. Hunsaker has served as the Division Administrator for Educational Opportunity and Equity Responsibilities at the Montana Office of Public Instruction. In this role, she has focused on school improvement programs including Reading First, Early Reading First, the Montana Comprehensive Literacy Project, and the Montana Striving Reader’s Project. Ms. Hunsaker has developed a strong connection to Colorado schools by providing consulting support for Colorado’s Early Literacy Grant schools as well as providing



professional development in evidence-based reading instruction for Colorado schools. Ms. Hunsaker shares CDE's strong commitment to improved dyslexia screening, identification, and support for Colorado's students.

For the 2019-20 school year, the department scheduled the DWG meetings for the following dates:

- September 20, 2019
- October 17, 2019
- December 6, 2019
- January 8, 2020
- March 12, 2020
- April 8, 2020
- May 22, 2020

All meetings of the Dyslexia Working Group are open to the public; however, only working group members have an active role in the meetings. CDE is keeping an updated DWG webpage (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/codyslexiaworkgroup>) where all meeting dates, locations, and notes are posted for transparency.

The Dyslexia Working Group was tasked with providing a progress report to the Commissioner of Education by December 31, 2019 (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/dwgdec2019progressreport>) and will report on its charge to the education committees of the House of Representatives and Senate by July 1, 2020.

Dyslexia Website

In collaboration with the Dyslexia Focus Group, the department launched a webpage to provide resources and guidance to support students with dyslexia: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/dyslexia>. The webpage provides resources related to dyslexia. CDE continues to update the website with relevant resources.

Teaching and Learning Unit Initiatives

During the 2018-2019 year, the department's 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. The following section lists high-level details of the literacy activities provided by the TLU. The literacy efforts in the TLU are managed by the Literacy Team in the Preschool through 3rd Grade (P-3) Office. The Literacy Team 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. This work includes supporting districts with the goals of the READ Act: early identification of and effective intervention for reading challenges for children in grades K-3. Thus, the Literacy Team's implementation activities for the READ Act are reported here.

- **The 2019 READING Conference:** The P-3 Office, in partnership with the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU), hosted the fifth annual READING conference in Grand Junction on October 10-11, 2019, which was open and free to K-3 teachers, interventionists, special educators, reading coaches, school leaders, and district leaders. The conference focused on the science of reading and evidence-based instruction for all students. Notable presenters included Dr. Margie Gillis, Dr. Nancy Mather and Dr. Steven Dykstra. The conference was attended by nearly 600 individuals from all regions across the state. Attendance at this annual event continues to grow each year.
- **Fundamentals of Literacy Instruction:** The department continued to provide *Fundamentals of Literacy Instruction* training at no charge to Colorado school districts. This training opportunity focused on



explicit and systematic universal instruction in reading with an emphasis on foundational reading skills. This professional development opportunity was attended by general education teachers, special education teachers, reading interventionists, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals and principals. Approximately 159 educators from across Colorado participated during the 2018-19 school year. Since the 2014-15 school year, over 1800 teachers, school, and district leaders have participated in the training.

- **Professional Development Related to Early Literacy, Birth to Kindergarten:** The Early Learning Language and Literacy Sequences, available through Colorado’s Professional Development Information System, are self-paced, online courses that provided teachers with background information on evidence-based strategies to promote language and literacy development, prevent future reading problems, early identification of potential reading difficulties, and support struggling learners. These courses were available to Colorado teachers free of charge. Over 8,350 early childhood educators have participated in this professional development opportunity since its inception.
- **Technical Assistance Related to K-3 Literacy:** The department’s P-3 Office, through regional literacy consultants, provided ongoing literacy support and technical assistance to schools and districts across the state. The technical assistance consisted of support for data analysis, coaching, consulting, and professional development sessions as requested by schools, districts, and BOCES.
- **The Early Literacy Grant Program:** This competitive grant program, part of the READ Act, supports comprehensive, high quality literacy instruction through a school-wide approach. During the 2018-19 school year, the department supported 62 schools through the grant program. Grant schools are required to use evidence-based reading strategies. Schools in the grant program are provided ongoing technical assistance from CDE and work with an approved literacy consultant to support instructional leaders and teachers with implementation. 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, included 138 districts and the Charter School Institute. The project annually funds licensing for approved READ Act assessments, professional development on data analysis, best practices with data-driven instruction, mapping of student assessment results to early literacy foundational skills, and effective progress monitoring. Participants also had the opportunity to access professional development offered through webinars providing easier access to teachers in rural Colorado school districts.

Exceptional Student Services Unit Initiatives – Office of Special Education

The Office of Special Education provided numerous professional development opportunities for special education teachers, special service providers, and other school professionals with responsibilities for addressing the needs of students who demonstrate literacy challenges, including dyslexia. These opportunities included workshops, online courses, webinars, seminars, and institutes developed to address the specific literacy needs of students with disabilities. The following section lists literacy activities provided by the ESSU during the latter part of the 2018-19 school year and the beginning of the 2019-20 school year.

- **Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties Online Course:** This on-demand, online course was created in collaboration with David Kilpatrick Ph.D. and launched in the spring of 2019. Participants who engage in all thirteen modules are provided a comprehensive learning experience encompassing research, impact, and critical elements of assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties including dyslexia.



- **Autism Literacy Institute:** Fifty-two school-based providers are involved with the Autism Literacy training, which features national-level researchers and trainers. The institute is being held in Durango. It was launched in October 2019 and will be completed in February 2020.
- **Braille Competency:** The ESSU continues to focus on the state requirement for all Colorado public school teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of blindness/visual impairment to demonstrate braille competency within their first instructional year. Mentor support is offered to support the knowledge and skill set of reading and writing the Unified English Braille Code.
- **Building Blocks of Brain Development Framework:** The training in Building Blocks of Brain Development framework addressed typical brain development, various types of disruptions that may occur in children and youth, and how these differences may effect learning and behavior. Instructional strategies for children with neurological differences were provided in literacy, math, language, attention, sensory-motor, social emotional competency and executive function. This training was provided at 27 sites across the state in 2018-19, with approximately 1,270 school administrators, child find team members, special education providers, facilities personnel, community providers, higher education faculty, case workers, and parents participating.
- **Colorado Assistive Technology Partners:** Professional development opportunities provided in collaboration with the University of Colorado Denver prioritized evidence-based practices in literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Federal funds made available by CDE supported a two-day Assistive Technology conference, which included 245 participants from all regions of the state. In addition to the conference, three webinars, and two technical support documents featuring evidence-based communication and literacy interventions for students with complex communication needs were disseminated. The statewide assistive technology loan library offers 15 Literacy Kits that include adapted books and materials, simple technology tools, manipulatives, communication and visual supports, and lesson planning guides rooted in the application of evidence-based intervention strategies.
- **Communication Toolkit Training for Autism Spectrum Disorder:** This two-day training with virtual follow-up hours focused on the development of early and emergent communication. In the 2018-19 school year, 108 school staff from across the state were trained.
- **Introduction to Reading Comprehension for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder:** This online webinar is posted on the CDE professional development website and addresses the cognitive profiles common in autism spectrum disorder and their influence on reading comprehension.
- **Customized Technical Assistance Specific to the Literacy of Students with Hearing Impairment, Including Deafness:** The ESSU's Office of Special Education continued its efforts to improve literacy skills for students who are identified as deaf and hard of hearing. The Office of Special Education utilized regional trainings and the Colorado Deaf/Hard of Hearing Mentor Program to support deaf education teachers in using evidence-based practices for assessment and methods to teach literacy skills.
- **Literacy Needs of Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and English Learners:** The Office of Special Education partnered with UNC to provide an on-line course to help teachers of the deaf support the literacy needs of students who are both deaf and hard of hearing and English Learners.
- **Customized Technical Assistance Specific to the Literacy of Students with Visual Impairment, Including Blindness:** The ESSU continued its efforts to improve literacy skills for students who are identified with visual impairment, including blindness. ESSU utilized the services of three state expert coaches to support teachers of students with blindness/visual impairment in using evidence-based practices for assessment and methods to teach literacy skills.
- **Individualized Problem Solving within a Response to Intervention Framework:** ESSU and the Office of



Learning Supports designed and delivered a five-part training on intensive assessment and instruction. This training was designed for multi-disciplinary student problem solving teams who support students with reading disabilities, students suspected of having a reading disability, and those identified with intensive intervention needs. Teams and leaders were required to provide a readiness application and assurances. Fifty educators across the state were trained in 2018-2019.

- **Structured Literacy Project:** During the year, the ESSU continued implementation of the Structured Literacy Project. The Project was initiated in 2014-15 as part of Colorado's State Systemic Improvement Plan as required by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Services. The project is currently being implemented in 30 elementary schools, with the goal to significantly increase the total numbers of students in grades K through 3 reaching grade-level reading proficiency. The project is focused on professional learning, coaching, and leadership training for teachers and instructional leaders. Each school has access to a CDE literacy coach who works directly with teachers and to support the implementation of evidence-based strategies. The ESSU continues to devote one literacy specialist and six literacy coaches to this project.
- **Western Region Early Intervention Conference:** The three day training was held in Broomfield, Colorado and was a collaborative efforts across Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming educational agencies. CDE co-hosted and sponsored a speaker at this training, which involved over 300 participants from over 28 states and one Canadian province. The focus on the conference was on birth to age 5 assessment and intervention and instructional practices to support communication and emergent literacy of young children with sensory disabilities.
- **Writing Informational Text for Secondary Students Project:** Strategies to *Write Informational Text for Secondary Students* is a self-paced course that provides resources to support the writing process. Participants learn how to teach students to become effective writers of informational text by understanding the fundamentals of the writing process, scaffolding instruction of the writing process and implementing data-driven instruction through the use of rubrics. The course started in 2018-2019 with participants training as a team of two or three educators representing general education, special education, and special service provision. The training will repeat in subsequent years.

Conclusion

Success in school and in life is greatly influenced by students' ability to read. Students with reading challenges, including dyslexia, need additional support in order to master foundational reading skills. CDE is committed to supporting educators, schools, and districts to continue to improve their instructional and intervention programs to provide the skills all Colorado children need to succeed. This report outlines the multiple programs and training opportunities that the department has implemented over the past year. In the coming year, the department will continue to collaborate across units and with stakeholders to support the needs of students who have literacy challenges, including those with dyslexia.