LEGISLATIVE REPORT

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON LITERACY

Report to the House & Senate Committees on Education

December 15, 2022

Submitted by the Advisory Council on Literacy

Gwendolyn S. Carmolli, Chair

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Executive Summary

[Act 28 of 2021](#) established an Advisory Council on Literacy to advise the Agency of Education, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on improving and sustaining proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12 in the following areas.

- Reviewing statewide assessment data and student outcomes on literacy
- Reviewing the Agency of Education's [Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade](#)

Statewide assessment results demonstrate broad literacy trends of overall low achievement, large achievement gaps, and declining scores. 50% of Vermont students are meeting or exceeding English language arts standards. There are large achievement gaps for historically marginalized populations, underscoring the need to create equitable learning outcomes and improve literacy across the state.

The Council's review of the blueprint identified two areas of strength: Assessment and Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). The council also identified several recommendations to strengthen the blueprint, including:

- Provide resources on evidence-based instructional practices
- Provide professional development resources and training opportunities on early literacy
- Provide resources on a comprehensive system of assessment
- Add information about a comprehensive system of assessment of literacy on the AOE website, and in the next revision of the blueprint
- Change focus from struggling learner to all students, and expand information about instruction for struggling learners
- Provide necessary supports promptly, regardless of an individual student's eligibility for categorical programs

Though there is work still to be done it is important to highlight the efforts that have already been made focused on improving literacy outcomes is in-process at the Agency of Education, and in school systems across the state. This progress demonstrates a shared commitment to increase literacy achievement for all students.

Background

Act 28

[Act 28 of 2021](#) Section 5, an act related to improving prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy within the State of Vermont, was passed in May 2021 by the Vermont General Assembly and signed by Governor Phil Scott. Act 28 acknowledged the continuous nature of the work to improve literacy outcomes across the state and provided funding and support for efforts to improve and sustain literacy outcomes.

The act established funds for professional development on literacy, a position at the Agency of Education focused on literacy, technical assistance and support for supervisory unions to implement systems-wide evidence-based literacy approaches, a review of teacher preparation and re-licensure to ensure teachers have literacy instruction in training and re-licensure, and created an Advisory Council on Literacy to advise the Agency of Education, State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on how to improve and sustain literacy outcomes in prekindergarten through grade 12.

Advisory Council on Literacy

Act 28 established an Advisory Council on Literacy to advise the Agency of Education, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on improving and sustaining proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12 in the following areas

- Updates for Section 2903 of Title I6 (16 V.S.A. §2903), as well as implementation and maintenance of the statewide literacy plan
- Services to school districts on the implementation of the statewide literacy plan, and staffing needs at the Agency of Education to provide school districts' supports
- Plan for collecting literacy-related data that informs instructional practices, teacher professional development, and literacy assessments
- Best practices in literacy instruction for tiers 1, 2, and 3, within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to improve and sustain literacy proficiency
- Review of literacy assessments and outcomes and how to continuously improve and sustain literacy improvements

Additionally, the Council shall submit a written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education on or before December 15 of each year, with findings, recommendations for legislative action, and progress toward the outcomes outlined above.

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Membership

The Act outlined membership of the Advisory Council on Literacy, with representation across various roles and perspectives. Ex officio members hold a permanent spot on the Council, remaining positions are held for 2 year positions terms, with possibility of 2 consecutive terms.

Ex Officio Members

- Vermont Secretary of Education Designee, Emily Leute
- Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE), Bill Clark
- Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA), Bev Davis
- Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), Martine Gulick
- Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators (VCSEA), Darren McIntyre
- Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), Beth O'Brien, Vice Chair
- Vermont Independent Schools Association (VISA), Susan Gray
- Vermont-National Education Association (VT NEA), Donald Tinney

2-Year Term Members

- Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association (VTCLA), Gwen Carmolli, Chair
- Vermont-National Education Association (VT NEA) Teachers - Catherine Campbell, Jennifer Farnsworth, Susan Koch
- Community Members - Cynthia Gardner-Morse, Michael Flanagan, Charley Gunkel (December 2022)
- Vermont Agency of Education (VT AOE) Special Education Specialist, Betty Roy

Common Goal

The Council is composed of members with a wide variety of roles and expertise. Council members are deeply committed to increasing literacy outcomes for prekindergarten through grade 12 students and closing achievement gaps for historically marginalized students. The Council aims to build literacy skills in reading, writing, and communication, and an enjoyment of literacy, for students during the school years and beyond. To meet these goals, the Council expects Vermont students will have

- Access to high-quality early learning opportunities in literacy
- A strong foundation of literacy skills
- Instruction premised on state standards and evidenced-based instructional practices
- Foundational reading instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension
- Instruction from a teacher who is skilled in teaching reading
- Instruction that is based on a multi-tiered system of support

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Annual Work Plan

The Council developed and agreed to the following work plan

- Hold 8 meetings per year, with a first meeting in late August/early September.
- Meet online, with an in-person location available.
- Provide opportunity for public to view meetings and make public comment.
- Maintain information on the Vermont Agency of Education website.
- Begin each year with literacy and assessment outcome updates.
- Review and develop recommendations on the task/s for the year; and
- Report to the General Assembly, Vermont Agency of Education, and State Board of Education by December 15 of each year.

Decision Making Criteria

As the Council works through the tasks outlined in Act 28 in order to develop advice, specific criteria will guide discussion, consideration, and final advisory recommendations. Decisions and advice will be made in alignment with Act 28, Act 173 & Vermont's Education Quality Standards (EQS), based on the following criteria. Decisions and advice need to

- Address the need to increase literacy outcomes
- Address the need to close achievement gaps
- Support Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- Support evidence-based instructional practices and intervention
- Promote and sustain the improvement of literacy outcomes

Assessment Outcomes Review

The Council reviewed assessment results from two statewide summative assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), to understand Vermont's literacy outcomes and achievement gaps.

Overall Results

Vermont's Agency of Education reported trends of overall low achievement and large achievement gaps for historically marginalized groups.

Data from the most recent SBAC assessment are not yet available, so the Council reviewed assessment results from the past 7 years demonstrate a need to improve literacy outcomes for students. Data from NAEP showed Vermont scoring slightly above the national average, 3 points above the national average of 219. However, the average score of fourth grade students declined 8 points from 2015 to 2019, from 230 points in 2015 to 222 points, scoring well below the NAEP proficiency score of 238. Of further concern, the data demonstrates large achievement gaps for students with disabilities, and students in poverty.

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Data from SBAC demonstrated that approximately only 50% of third grade students met proficiency in English Language Arts. In other words, half of the third grade students in Vermont did not meet proficiency in ELA. The average scaled score for third graders on the ELA portion of SBAC assessment dropped 2 points from 2018 to 2019, from 2428 in 2018 to 2426 in 2019. Similar to the NAEP results, the SBAC results show large achievement gaps for historically marginalized student groups (defined by socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and disability) in every grade level. Marginalized groups scored 24-30 percentage points lower than their peers on the ELA portion of SBAC assessment. Moreover, the gap widens as students' progress through the grades.

The Agency of Education presented a detailed examination of English Language Arts summative assessment results focusing on performance by Race/Ethnicity and English Learner status.

English Language Arts summative assessment results demonstrated large performance gaps between English Learners compared to non-English Learners by Race/Ethnicity. With that important factor in mind, assessment results were then reviewed by Race/Ethnicity for non-English Learners only. Large achievement gaps were demonstrated for students in the Black racial group compared to their non-Black counterparts across all grades. For students in the American Indian or Alaskan Native racial group, compared to their non-American Indian or Alaskan Native counterparts, achievement gaps were minimal in the early grades but increased in the later grades. Students in the Asian racial group consistently performed well. The two racial groups that demonstrate the greatest disparities in performance, Black and American Indian or Alaskan Native, also have the greatest percent of economically disadvantaged students.

The statewide assessment results demonstrated broad literacy trends of overall low achievement, large achievement gaps, and declining scores that have an impact on learning throughout school and beyond. With 50% of third grade students failing to meet state standards, the state's commitment to improving and sustaining literacy outcomes is critical.

Changes in Statewide Assessment

In October 2022, Secretary French announced the completion of a protected procurement process for the Vermont general assessments of ELA, Math, and Science. Cognia was selected to carry Vermont's assessment program forward. Training on the new assessment will take place this winter (2022-2023), and the testing window for general assessments will open on April 12, 2023, and end on May 26, 2023. The AOE and Cognia have developed a training and implementation plan to support supervisory unions and districts (SU/SDs) during the transition. Cognia will perform a study using results from the first administration of the new assessment to show comparability of results between the new assessment and our former assessments developed with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (ELA, math) and Cambium (science).

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Additional information on our state assessments and the new vendor can be found on the AOE website.

The Council will continue to monitor statewide literacy assessment and achievement results, aiming to increase literacy outcomes for Vermont's students.

Early Literacy Blueprint Review

The primary task of the Advisory Council on Literary for this past year, as outlined in Act 28, was to review and provide advice for revisions of the *Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade* (Blueprint).

Background

Statute 2903 (16 V.S.A. § 2903) - Preventing early school failure; reading instruction, is a Vermont statute to address early school failure and reading instruction in the early grades. The statute outlines a requirement to develop and implement a plan for a comprehensive system of instruction and services in the first 3 grades, that would be updated every 5 years. The original plan was submitted in 1998; the most recent plan was submitted in 2019.

The Blueprint, *A Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade*, is a guide for state and local policy makers and education leaders to develop and implement a comprehensive early literacy plan. The current revision was prepared by Research Making Change (RMC), with Vermont Agency of Education staff and a stakeholder group, adopted in 2019.

The Blueprint identifies two needs: 1) To improve student literacy skills and achievement for each and every student in Vermont PreK through Grade 3, and 2) To build capacity statewide to effectively support literacy development PreK through Grade 3 by designing and implementing appropriate early literacy learning experiences. The plan additionally identifies action steps, outlined as theories of action, to address these needs: 1) To implement an Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services Plan; and, 2) to strengthen capacity to improve early literacy instruction and support. The Blueprint provides information, research and evidence on a systemic service plan and evidence-based instructional practices that support the needs and action steps.

STRENGHTHS

In the current Blueprint, the Council identified several general areas of strength that align with state requirements, evidence-based recommendations, and meet the Council's goal of improving literacy outcomes for all students.

One area of strength of the existing Blueprint is the recognition of the critical role of early literacy instruction, assessment, and support in enabling all students meet literacy proficiency. The focus on early literacy aligns with the needs identified in assessment results, state requirements, and evidence-based instructional practices.

Another area of strength in the current Blueprint is that its development included representation from a wide array of stakeholders and organizations. Input was gathered from more than twenty organizations and educational leaders in the development process.

Moreover, the existing Blueprint is based upon research and evidence of effective instructional practices, providing a research and evidence-base context for planning, policy development, and systemic implementation for state and district leaders.

The Council identified two specific areas of strength within the existing Blueprint:

- Assessment
- Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)

Assessment

Assessment is a critical component of literacy instruction, Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS), systemic improvement.

"An efficient assessment approach is to combine screening and diagnosis into one system, with a gating process so that the diagnostic component is administered only to those students predicted to be at risk on the screen. Measuring growth is also important for determining learning gains and is accomplished through progress monitoring (also called interim) assessments. The outcome—the summative assessment—can be a norm-referenced or standardized test, which compares student performance with national peers' performance, or it can be a criterion-referenced test of proficiency on state standards. Diagnostic assessments may be considered formative assessments if they measure skills that are taught." (Foorman, 2020)

Recommendation

- Keep the information about an efficient assessment system in the blueprint & provide related assessment resources on the Vermont Agency of Education website
- Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a critical means to improving literacy outcomes for all students.

MTSS

As outlined in the VTmtss Field Guide, "Vermont educators are being called on to ensure that a multi-tiered system of supports is in place for all students." (Vermont Agency of Education, 2019)

Recommendation

- Keep information about multi-tiered systems of supports and provide links to VTmtss Field Guide and related resources on the Vermont Agency of Education website

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AREAS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

The Council recommends the following actions to support school systems, schools and educators, in their implementation efforts:

- Provide resources on evidence-based instructional practices
- Provide resources on a comprehensive system of assessment
- Provide professional development resources and training opportunities on early literacy

The use of evidence-based instructional practices has a demonstrated positive impact on student achievement. Numerous evidence-based resources include effective instructional practices and action steps for improving literacy outcomes.

- Resources such as the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guides provide recommendations for evidence-based instructional practices based on meta-analyses of research and evidence of effective outcomes.
- Resources such as State Policy Levers for Improving Literacy outline systemic actions to improve achievement

Recommendation

Provide resources on evidence-based instructional practices and implementation recommendations on the VT AOE website.

Provide Resources on a Comprehensive System of Assessment

A comprehensive system of assessment that includes screening, benchmark and progress monitoring, and diagnostic follow-up assessment is critical to increasing achievement for individuals and learners across the state. Recommendations from evidence-based research describe the importance of a comprehensive system of assessment that assesses early literacy skills to determine need for intervention, growth, achievement of grade level standards, and to guide instructional decision-making. "A coherent, articulated, balanced and comprehensive assessment system guides responsive teaching, informs educators and students about progress, and leads to effective decisions within a continuous plan for improvement for both students and systems." (Vermont Agency of Education, 2019; Foorman, et al, 2016; Gerson, et al, 2009; Foorman, 2020)

Recommendation

Add information about a comprehensive system of assessment of literacy on the AOE website, and in the next revision of the blueprint.

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Provide Professional Development Resources and Training Opportunities on Early Literacy.

Teacher training and development is a critical step in improving literacy outcomes:

- "Investing in the effectiveness of core reading instruction is critical for students in general education and students with disabilities." (District Management Group, 2018)
- "Of all the factors that drive student performance over which education systems have control, teacher quality is by far the most important." (District Management Group, 2018)
- "…[M]any general education teachers did not feel equipped to support learners who struggle, with or without IEPs, specifically those struggling in reading." (District Management Group, 2018)
- Districts, schools, and State Education Agencies must coordinate coaching and professional development plans to support administrator and teacher knowledge of reading research and evidence-based instructional practices. (Foorman, 2020)

Recommendation

Follow action steps outlined in Statute 2902:

- Provide professional development in evidence-based instructional practices
- Provide professional development, as needed, to support all staff in full implementation of the multi-tiered system of support
- Assist teachers to plan for and provide services and accommodations to students in need of classroom support or enrichment activities.
- Provide necessary supports promptly, regardless of an individual student's eligibility for categorical programs

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONS

The Council recommends adding the following areas to the next Blueprint:

- Expand information about Code-Based and Meaning-Based Instruction
- Include writing as a component of literacy
- Expand information about Evidence-Based Instructional Practices
- Expand information about Literacy Stages of Development

Expand Information About Code-Based and Meaning-Based Instruction

Code-based and meaning-based instruction are critically important in reading development. Evidence-based meta-analyses over the past two decades demonstrate the efficacy of instructional strategies that lead to successful literacy achievement.

- Systematic and explicit instruction is needed in the early grades: "To ensure that all students in grades K–3 are on track to proficient reading performance, classroom instruction needs to be systematic and explicit." (Foorman, 2020)

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- "Although many readers learn to proficiently read no matter what their reading instruction looks like, most students need instruction that is systematic and explicit." (Lane, 2014)
- "To develop literacy, students need instruction in two related sets of skills: foundational reading skills and reading comprehension skills." (Foorman, et al, 2016)
- The development of code-based skills is critically important in early reading: "Students need instruction in foundational reading to successfully develop literacy skills." (Langenberg, et al, 2000)
- Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children's reading proficiency and is particularly beneficial for children who are at risk for reading difficulties. (Lane, 2014)
- Meaning-based instruction in vocabulary and comprehension is critical to early literacy instruction: "Good readers use many forms of thinking and analyzing text as they read. It is therefore important to teach beginning readers strategies for constructing meaning from text. " (Shanahan, 2016)
- "To develop strong reading comprehension, children need experiences carefully designed to teach strategies, encourage vocabulary development, expand background knowledge, increase the ability to understand relationships between concepts, and actively use strategies to ensure understanding." (Lane, 2014)

Recommendation

- In the Instruction section (currently labeled "Balanced Literacy Instruction"), add sections for Foundational Skills and Comprehension that include evidence-based instructional practices for each area
- Add resources in the revised blueprint and on the VT AOE website regarding evidence-based practices in the areas of code and meaning-based instruction

Include Writing as a Component of Literacy

Evidence-based practices and resources include writing as a component of literacy development and make assessment and instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, more effective.

- "Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and *write* and recognize words." (Foorman, et al, 2016)
- "Teachers should recognize that acquiring phonemic awareness is a means rather than an end. PA is not acquired for its own sake but rather for its value in helping learners understand and use the alphabetic system to read and *write*." (Blevins, et al, 2019)
- "The most reasonable conclusion from the findings of the NRP analysis is that adding well designed PA instruction to a beginning reading program or a remedial reading program is very likely to yield significant dividends in the acquisition of reading and *writing* skills." (Blevins, et al, 2019)

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Recommendation

Include writing when listing components of a literacy program.

Expand information about Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

When teaching literacy, effective teachers are guided by scientific evidence from the robust body of high-quality, international research in reading and writing. "Decades of basic research and randomized controlled trials of interventions and instructional routines have formed a substantial evidence base to guide best practices in reading instruction, reading intervention, and the early identification of at-risk readers." (Petscher, Foorman, et al, 2020).

Recommendation

Include resources and links on evidence-based instructional practices for PreK-3 in the Blueprint and on the Agency of Education website

Expand Information About Literacy Stages of Development

Effective literacy instruction requires different emphases for different developmental stages, as readers progress through the pre-alphabetic, early alphabetic, later alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic stages or phases, with vocabulary/morphology and comprehension taught throughout.

- "Just as teachers of science must understand scientific concepts and teachers of mathematics must understand math concepts, teachers who teach students to read and write must understand the foundations of oral and written language. This includes understanding phonology and phonetics, orthography, morphology, semantic organization, the etymology of English words, syntactic structures, and pragmatics" (Moats, 2009). In addition, reading teachers must understand key theories about reading development, the language processing requirements of proficient reading and writing, and the elements of cognition and behavior that affect reading (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001). It is also important to understand Page 10 of 72 the typical developmental phases in reading development and reasonable goals and expectations for learning at various phases (Ehri & Snowling, 2004)." (Lane, 2014)
- "English is an alphabetic language. We have 26 letters. These letters, in various combinations, represent the 44 sounds in our language. Teaching students the basic letter–sound combinations gives them access to sounding out approximately 84% of the words in English print. Of course, equal amounts of time need to be spent on teaching the meanings of these words, but the learning of these basic phonics skills is essential to becoming a fluent reader." (Blevins, et al, 2019)

Recommendation

- Include information and links about early language and stages of literacy development
- Include evidence-based instructional resources for early language and stages of literacy development

Expand the Components of Literacy

Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary/ Morphology, and Comprehension/ Sentence, Paragraph and Text Structure are evidence-based components of effective literacy instruction, as identified in the National Reading Panel (Langenberg, et al, 2000) and subsequent major reviews of effective literacy practice (Foorman, et al, 2016). These components are consistent with recommendations from evidence-based instructional practices for universal instruction, and instruction for students with reading difficulties.

- "Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. This means that students are explicitly taught sound-spelling patterns and morphological elements such as prefixes and suffixes. Teach students to encode (i.e., spell) the words they learn to decode so that they can recognize them quickly and use them in their writing" (Foorman, 2020).
- "Ensuring that all students become proficient readers during their first years in school is the responsibility of all educators. When teachers have in-depth knowledge of the essential components of reading and how to provide the necessary instruction it is likely that most students will learn to read. This includes knowledge about the foundations and processes of language and literacy development, the structure of language, the role of text and EBPs (Evidence-Based Practices) for reading instruction and intervention." (Lane, 2014)
- "Teaching reading requires specialized knowledge about oral and written language, how children learn and acquire literacy skills, and a variety of instructional strategies to address students' diverse needs." (Lane, 2014)
- Components of Structured Literacy include: " (a) explicit, systematic, and sequential teaching of literacy at multiple levels— phonemes, letter–sound relationships, syllable patterns, morphemes, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and text structure; (b) cumulative practice and ongoing review; (c) a high level of student teacher interaction; (d) the use of carefully chosen examples and nonexamples; (e) decodable text; and (f) prompt, corrective feedback (Spear-Swerling, 2018).

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Recommendation

- Begin with what is already written in the Blueprint:

  Focus Area 3: High-Quality Instruction and Intervention that is Responsive and Differentiated: A Culture of Instructional Excellence and Engagement Research and Evidence-Based Practices: Focus on explicit and systematic instruction in foundational reading skills based on student need (e.g., phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, academic vocabulary, comprehension, and writing)." (Vermont Agency of Education, 2018)

- Elaborate to include evidence-based components of Structured Literacy

AREAS TO CHANGE

Remove "Balanced Literacy Instruction" Header

The Council identified "Balanced Literacy Instruction" as a header that may be confused with a program or pedagogical approach, rather than describing the content within the section, referencing evidence-based instructional practices for code, and meaning related skills. The term "balanced" is sometimes politicized and could be misinterpreted as an endorsement of a particular instructional program or approach to teaching reading. While the blueprint is evidence-based and provides an overview that includes code and meaning-based instruction, keeping Balanced Literacy as a header creates confusion.

Recommendation

Change the heading "Balanced Literacy Instruction" to something descriptive of the range of content in this section, for example, "Instructional Practices" or "Important Instructional Components."

Change Focus from Struggling Learner to All Students, and Expand Information About Instruction for Struggling Learners

- School systems need to ensure that Tier 1 universal instruction in the elementary grades meets the needs of most students and provides a multi-tiered system of support for students struggling to read. Educational equity is a critical goal of literacy instruction.
- "Any investments in the quality of primary instruction benefits all students. Providing effective core literacy instruction for all students helps both general education and students with disabilities." (District Management Group, 2017)
- Educational equity means that every student has "access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income." (Vermont Agency of Education, 2019)

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Recommendation

- Ensure all students receive explicit, systematic, cumulative and diagnostic Structured Literacy in PreK through grade 3, and beyond as needed
- Change "struggling learner" and similar limiting terminology to "all students "because "any investments in the quality of primary instruction benefits all students" (District Management Group, 2017)
- Include specific language to ensure students with disabilities and reading difficulties have access to multi-tiered systems of support

Update Balanced Literacy Instruction Section

Literacy instruction is a complex process that involves building code and meaning for all students, and a needs-based instruction and intervention within a multi-tiered system of support. Evidence-based meta-analyses over the past two decades demonstrate the efficacy of instructional strategies that lead to successful literacy achievement.

- Systematic and explicit instruction is needed in the early grades, "To ensure that all students in grades K–3 are on track to proficient reading performance, classroom instruction needs to be systematic and explicit." Foorman, 2020)
- The development of code-based skills is critically important in early reading, "Students need instruction in foundational reading to successfully develop literacy skills." (Langenberg, et al, 2000)
- Meaning-based instruction in vocabulary and comprehension is critical to early literacy instruction, "Students who read with understanding at an early age gain access to a broader range of texts, knowledge, and educational opportunities, making early reading comprehension instruction particularly critical." (Shanahan, et al, 2010)
- Response to Intervention (RtI), an evidence-based approach, can improve reading outcomes for all, including struggling readers. "[A] coordinated multi-tier instruction program that screens and monitors students accurately and addresses the core components of reading instruction can prevent struggling beginning readers from becoming struggling adolescent readers and reduce unnecessary referrals to special education" (Shanahan, et al, 2010)
- Instructional decisions and strategies need to be differentiated to meet learning needs (Gersten, et al, 2009)

Recommendation

- Revise the Balanced Literacy Instruction section to describe comprehensive literacy instruction that includes an overview of literacy development, evidence-based instruction practices for building code and meaning, and evidence-based instructional practices for struggling readers.
- Develop and post an instructional guide for early literacy instruction

Remove Learning Styles

The idea of "Learning Styles", while once exerting great influence in the field of education, was updated as not being evidence-based after a major report investigating learning styles was completed in 2009. Current research on learning styles indicates there is no evidence to support the idea of "learning styles" such as auditory or visual learners.

> "We conclude therefore, that at present, there is no adequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning-styles assessments into general educational practice. Thus, limited education resources would better be devoted to adopting other educational practices that have a strong evidence base:" (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008).

Recommendation

Remove reference to "learning styles" from the Blueprint

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Evidence Based Resources on Effective Instruction Practices Prior to the Blueprint Revision

Teachers and school systems could benefit from evidence-based resources on literacy instruction, assessment, and MTSS prior to the revision on the Blueprint.

Develop a Brief 1–2 Page Summary of The Current Blueprint That Includes Links to Key Resources and References

The Blueprint is a comprehensive document designed as a guide for state and local policy makers and education leaders. As such, it is lengthy and not yet well known by literacy instructors around the state. A brief summary of the guide could serve to highlight key features within the Blueprint and provide a coherent focus on early literacy instruction across the state.

Develop an Implementation Plan for The Next Blueprint

The current Blueprint is not yet widely known, nor fully implemented. Developing an implementation plan for any new Blueprint could provide a set of action steps for the policy makers, school systems, and teachers to follow.

Consider Ways to Support Literacy Instruction and Achievement Beyond Grade 3

With literacy achievement scores showing large achievement gaps for historically underserved groups in all grade levels assessed, resources and focus on literacy instruction for grades levels beyond grade 3 could support literacy achievement for all students and all grades.

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Conclusion

A great deal of work focused on improving literacy outcomes is in-process at the Agency of Education, and in school systems across the state. While there is a great deal more work to do, the work in progress demonstrates a clear commitment to improve literacy outcomes.

The Advisory Council on Literacy wishes to thank the Agency of Education, House and Senate Committees on Education, State Board of Education, educational leaders, and educators across the state for their efforts on behalf of Vermont students.

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