



LEGISLATIVE REPORT

**REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON LITERACY**

Report to the House and Senate Education Committee

December 22, 2023

Submitted by the Advisory Council on Literacy

Gwendolyn S. Carmolli, Chair

LEADERSHIP

SUPPORT

OVERSIGHT

2023 Council Work and Recommendations

[Act 28 of 2021 \(Act 28\)](#) established funds for statewide literacy work and an Advisory Council on Literacy (Council) to advise the Agency of Education (AOE), the State Board of Education (SBE), and the General Assembly. The Council's role is to advise on how to improve proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12, how to sustain those outcomes and provide advice on efforts to improve literacy achievement for all students. The Council has been working through tasks outlined in Act 28 to support improvement efforts. The Council's work ends in September 2024, with a final report and set of recommendations in December 2024.

This year the Council focused on implementation efforts for the statewide literacy plan, Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade (Blueprint) - a review of the Blueprint, statewide assessment results, Vermont literacy related requirements, including Vermont Multi-tiered Systems of Support (VTmtss), evidence-based practices, and ongoing progress.

A review of statewide assessment results, requirements, evidence-based practices, and work underway shows a critical need to improve literacy achievement; tremendous improvement efforts are underway. Funds from Act 28 have supported resources and opportunities that are creating shifts in school systems and are paving the way for increases in literacy achievement.

The Council makes the following recommendations to guide future work:

Recommendations for the General Assembly

Provide funding to support literacy improvement efforts to:

- Maintain the Act 28 Project Management literacy position at the AOE - the position has been invaluable in accelerating resource development and school system supports
- Support the development of resources and accountability measures (by the AOE) - these resources are guiding school system shifts in curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Maintain the Advisory Council on Literacy - the Council is monitoring progress, reviewing research and evidence resources, and building consensus that is resulting in shifts in school systems/schools.

Recommendations for the AOE

Continue to develop resources to support implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction, assessment and necessary supports on:

- Stages of literacy (including both reading and writing) development, including early literacy
- Evidence-based instructional practices and assessment in reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and morphology,

highlighting evidence-based practices aligned to science of reading (SOR) research and Structured Literacy

- Evidence-based assessment and instructional practices in writing
- Statewide expectations for literacy curriculum and instructional practices, including prioritized standards and effective instructional practices
- Evidence-based literacy programs and assessments
- Specific screening and assessment tools that support needs-based literacy instruction and intervention
- Highly effective instructional practices that promote equity and cultural diversity
- Strategies to address staffing challenges
- Training/teacher preparation in evidence-based literacy, instruction, assessment and intervention
- Accountability measures to monitor use of research and evidence-based programs, practices and or assessments (Notes: The Council will be reviewing evidence-based assessment in 2024, further assessment recommendations will be made in the Council's concluding report)

Advisory Council on Literacy

[Act 28 of 2021](#) provided support for efforts to improve and sustain literacy outcomes. The Act acknowledged improvement efforts and provided funding for additional efforts. Funds were added for:

- professional development on literacy;
- a position at the Agency of Education focused on literacy,
- technical assistance and support for supervisory unions, including both professional development and coaching, to implement systems-wide evidence-based literacy approaches;
- a review of teacher preparation and re-licensure to ensure that teachers have required coursework in evidence-based literacy assessment and instruction in their training and re-licensure;
- and for an Advisory Council on Literacy (Council) to advise the AOE, SBE and the General Assembly on improving literacy outcomes.

Membership

Current Council membership includes:

Catherine Campbell, Vermont-National Education Association

Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Boards Association

Gwen Carmolli, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, Council Chair

Bill Clark, Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators

Bev Davis, Vermont Superintendents Association

Jennifer Farnsworth, Vermont-National Education Association

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

Michael Flanagan, Community Member

Cynthia Gardner-Morse, Community Member

Susan Gray, Vermont Independent Schools Association

Charlie Gunkel, Community Member

Susan Koch, Vermont-National Education Association

Emily Leute, Vermont Secretary of Education Designee

Darren McIntyre, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators

Beth O'Brien, Vermont Principals' Association, Council Vice Chair

Anna Rouseau, Vermont Agency of Education Special Education Specialist

Donald Tinney, Vermont-National Education Association

The Council, composed of members with varied roles and expertise, shares a commitment to increasing literacy outcomes for all pre-K- 12 students, closing achievement gaps for historically marginalized students, and address students needs in literacy, particularly for students with reading difficulties.

Council Work

Act 28 outlines tasks for which the Council is to advise and develop recommendations: Statewide assessment results; Statewide literacy plan; School system supports for implementation of the statewide literacy plan; literacy-related data collection; and evidence-based instructional practices. A report of the recommendations is submitted to the House and Senate Education Committees, Vermont Agency of Education, and the State Board of Education by December 15, each year that the Council is active.

The Council meets up to 8 times per year, online with option to attend by phone or in-person. Council information, including agendas, minutes and related materials, is maintained and publicly available on the AOE [web page for the Advisory Council on Literacy](#).

Recommendations are developed using a consensus model, and are reviewed for alignment with current state requirements and evidence-based instructional practices. Each member has a role and expertise that supports the collective recommendations of the Council.

ESSER funding, which ends in September 2024, provides funding for the Advisory Council on Literacy. With low literacy achievement and declining scores, particularly for historically marginalized populations, the need to support the work in progress, provide advice on needed shifts in literacy, and to expand into other critical areas of literacy, such as preschool, adolescent literacy, writing, teacher preparation and professional development.

The aim of the Council is to increase literacy achievement for all students.

Literacy Related Requirements

Vermont has a series of literacy related requirements that guide literacy instruction and supports. These requirements are used in the consideration and development of Council recommendations:

- [16 V.S.A. § 2902](#) Statute to outline tiered system of supports (VTmtss) and educational support team (EST).
- [16 V.S.A. § 2903](#) Statute to outline prevention of early school failure and reading instruction.
- [Act 173 of 2018](#) Act to enhance the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to students who require additional support
- [Series 2000 - Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS) Rules for Vermont public schools to ensure equitable educational opportunities and outline of state standards.
- [Act 28 of 2021](#) Act to improving prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy within the State.

Assessment Review

The Council reviewed 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.

SBAC & NAEP Results

SBAC is an assessment of literacy (reading, writing and listening) given to Vermont students in grades 3-9. Results from 2022 show fewer than half of grade 3 and grade 4 students meeting proficiency (41% of grade 3 on SBAC, 44% of grade 4 on NAEP.) The average percentage of proficiency declined (10 point decline from 2018 to 2022.) At the time of the data review, disaggregated state data was unavailable.

NAEP, often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card", is an assessment of reading given to a random sampling of students in grades 4 and 8 in Vermont and across the country. Vermont's 2022 results show that fewer than half of students meet proficiency (34% of grade 4 met/exceeded proficiency.) Proficiency declined from 2019 to 2022 (4 point decline.)

Of additional concern, both the SBAC and NAEP assessments show large achievement gaps for historically marginalized populations (poverty, disability, English Learners, race). NAEP results show achievement gaps for students experiencing poverty (1 point below), and students with disabilities (7 points below). The gaps widen as students' progress across the grades.

These results demonstrate a need to improve overall achievement, and improve achievement gaps, particularly for students with disabilities. Addressing literacy achievement and improving equity by closing achievement gaps is critical. Research indicates that changes to current instructional practices can improve this.

New Assessment

In 2023 Vermont changed the statewide assessment of literacy, math and science to the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (, with implementation of the assessment in spring 2023. Individual, school and district results have been made available; release of statewide results is expected in December 2023. Additional information on the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment can be found on the [AOE website](#).

MTSS

[Vermont Multi-tiered System of Supports](#) (VTmtss) is a system of support, outlined in 16 V.S.A. § 2902 and Act 173 of 2018. As a systemic approach of continuous improvement and decision making for excellence and equity, VTmtss focuses on successful outcomes for all students. This systemic approach includes:

- Collaboration to address students' academic and social emotional needs
- High-quality standards and evidence-based instruction and intervention to improve outcomes for all students
- Comprehensive and balanced assessment system to inform decision-making and proficiency
- Expertise to ensure that all students are making progress

Vermont passed Act 173 in 2018 and updated the VTmtss Field Guide in 2019. Local school systems (districts/supervisory unions) and schools are in the process of updating systems to implement the outlined practices.

Evidence Based Practices

Evidence-based practices are highly effective literacy strategies and interventions that are based on scientific research and meta-analyses. The research and practices have been outlined in the National Reading Panel report, [Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction](#), CEEDAR Center report [Evidence-Based Reading Instruction for Grades K-5](#), and in the Institute for Education Sciences reports (listed and linked below.) These reports outline highly the evidence-based practices recommended for teaching foundational skills and comprehension, and supporting students who struggle with literacy learning.

The evidence is consistent and clear: explicit and systematic instruction on code-based and comprehension-based reading skills, and needs-based support are the most effective literacy practices for the early grades. A strong focus is needed on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension for all students, and needs-based tiers and layers of support are critical for struggling learners. The following is a summary of the recommended evidence-based practices for foundational skills, comprehension, and intervention/needs-based support.

<p><u>Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through Third Grade</u></p> <p>Recommendations for Tier 1 instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge. • Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters. • Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. • Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.
<p><u>Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through Third Grade</u></p> <p>Recommendations for Tier 1 instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies. • Teach students to identify and use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content. • Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text. • Select texts purposefully to support comprehension development. • Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension.
<p><u>Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades</u></p> <p>Recommendations for Tiers 1, 2 & 3 instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. (Tier 1) • Provide time for differentiated reading instruction for all students based on assessments of students’ current reading level. (Tier 1) • Provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark score on universal screening. (Tier 2) • Monitor the progress of tier 2 students at least once a month. (Tier 2) • Provide intensive instruction on a daily basis that promotes the development of the various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3).

Progress

Throughout the year the Council heard updates from the Agency of Education and invited sharing from Council members, representing perspectives and effort from across the state. Two things are clear: a focus on improving literacy achievement, and a tremendous amount of work is underway!

AOE Achievements

Since 2022, the AOE has:

- Updated the literacy website to include resources on evidence-based instructional practices and engagement from:
 - What Works Clearinghouse/Institute of Education Sciences,
 - Literacy Essential Practices,
 - Achieve the Core,
 - Learning for Justice, and
 - PBS Learning Media.
- Developed Vermont Literacy Blueprint Playbook, a guide for school systems to develop local literacy plans based on the Blueprint .
- Created an online platform for professional development with 6 essential Literacy Learning Modules:
 - Understanding the Neuroscience of Literacy,
 - Exploring Language and Phonology,
 - Understanding Phonics and Word Study Instruction,
 - Creating Fluent Readers, 5) Developing Vocabulary, and
 - Increasing Reading Comprehension.
- Continued the Early Learning Network Community with Dr. Sharon Walpole and Dr. Katherine Beauchat, an in-person series of professional learning and coaching on evidence-based instructional practices.
- Provided funding for Family Engagement Literacy Program, an afterschool program to support literacy instruction and family engagement.
- Provided funding for school systems to attend Vermont Framework for Proficiency with Great Schools Partnership, a professional learning series to guide local proficiency development.
- Provided professional learning and coaching on Effective Use of Local Assessment Data for educators to learn ways to use data to improve student learning.
- Provided professional learning and resources on data and lexile levels, including a Lexile Framework, Lexile/Quantile Hub, and an Educator Academy for Lexile Frameworks.
- Provided professional learning on Early Warning Systems for systems to learn ways to develop decision making for intervention and supports.
- Maintained Council agendas, minutes, presentations and resources on the AOE website.

School System Work

Vermont school systems are in the process of:

- Providing literacy professional development on evidence-based instructional practices, literacy development and multi-tiered systems of support.

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Reviewing and updating literacy curriculum, instructional programs, and instructional materials aligned with evidence-based instructional practices - many school systems and schools are adding new programs (e.g., LETRS, Heggerty).
- Creating instructional frameworks to outline evidence-based instructional practices and literacy supports.
- Updating systems of support aligned with VTmtss.
- Updating data systems, including screening and benchmark assessments, aligned with evidence-based practices and VTmtss - many are adding new assessments (e.g., STAR Reading, iReady).

Prioritized Recommendations

The Council reviewed the statewide literacy plan, *Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade* (Blueprint), reviewing the thirty-three recommendations for statewide and school system work, as well as information from reviews of VTmtss, assessment results, evidence-based practices, and progress underway. The Council adopted the following recommendations to provide focus on improvement efforts:

- Develop strategies to address turnover, recruiting, and retention,
- Specify a core of required curriculum and instructional expectations that are implemented in all schools statewide,
- Ensure any mandate for instruction, curriculum, or assessment is made with a strategy for funding (no unfunded mandates),
- Select valid and reliable assessments for the purpose of statewide assessment, including kindergarten readiness assessments, formative assessments, and required grade-level accountability testing,
- Support institutions of higher education to train an adequate number of early educators to ensure all children have access to highly prepared teachers,
- Identify and recognize evidence-based programs aligned with ESSA requirements,
- Curate a database of literacy materials that reflect cultural and linguistic diversity. Literacy resources reflect the breadth and depth of diversity,
- Add resources on the stages of literacy development,
- Include information and resources for early literacy,
- Add/expand resources about morphology, spelling, and vocabulary, and
- Continue the Advisory Council on Literacy and expand the focus to other areas of literacy (e.g., adolescent literacy, writing).

Conclusion

With fewer than half of Vermont students meeting proficiency on state and national measures and reading a key factor in academic achievement and beyond, focusing efforts on increasing literacy achievement is urgent.

Achievement efforts are in-progress and growing, with improvements in literacy practices noted at each Council meeting. This year there has been notable growth in understanding of the statewide literacy plan, resources, and implementation of practices and programs that align with research and evidence. School systems and educators are working incredibly hard to improve literacy instruction and meet students' needs. The goal to increase achievement for all students is growing beyond requirements into changes within the school systems.

Support is needed to sustain the momentum and **improve achievement outcomes** - support to develop resources, provide training, and monitor results can strengthen and deepen the efforts to increase literacy achievement.

This work is possible because of the collaborative efforts from the Agency of Education, House and Senate Committees on Education, State Board of Education, educational leaders, and educators to increase literacy achievement. Thank you!

References

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: Reports of the Subgroups (00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Foorman, B.(2020). State Policy Levers for Improving Literacy. National Comprehensive Center, Retrieved from: <https://compcenternetwork.org/>

Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., &Wissel, S. (2016). Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade (NCEE2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance(NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: <http://whatworks.ed.gov>

Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C.M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., and Tilly, W.D. (2008). Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide. (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>.

Lane, H. (2014). Evidence-based reading instruction for grades K-5 (Document No.IC 12). Retrieved from University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center website:

<http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: A practice guide (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: <http://whatworks.ed.gov>