

AOE Testimony: Act 28

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director - Student Pathways Division and Meg Porcella, Assistant Division Director – Student Support Services Division

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Background and Rationale

- "Investing in the effectiveness of core reading instruction is critical for students in general education and students with disabilities"
- "Students with mild-to-moderate disabilities who struggle with reading may not be supported by teachers skilled in the teaching of reading."
- "While some special education teachers across the SU/SDs had a strong background in the teaching of reading, others indicated that they did not have the training or background to be effective supporting students struggling in reading."

The Advisory Council on Literacy was established by the General Assembly in 2021 (Act 28) to advise the Agency of Education (Agency), State Board of Education (SBE) and General Assembly (GA) on ways to improve and sustain literacy outcomes, advising specifically on

- updates to 16 V.S.A. § 2903 (preventing early school failure, reading instruction),
- assistance to supervisory unions (SU/SDs) on implementing the statewide literacy plan,
- collection of literacy data,
- best practices for literacy instruction, and
- review of assessments and outcomes

As noted by the Literacy Council Chair, Gwen Carmolli, in her testimony Act 28 describes an exciting and ambitious charge. With several interconnected components Act 28 offers an opportunity to engage in strategic implementation for sustained change. This should be conceived as a multi-year effort, worthy of that precious investment of time, and critical to the state's education recovery efforts.

The Act also appropriated one-time federal funds to support a contractor or limited-service position to coordinate statewide literacy efforts and one-time federal funds for "providing professional development learning modules for teachers in methods of teaching literacy and assisting supervisory unions in implementing evidence-based systems-wide literacy approaches that address learning loss..."

We're delighted to be here to provide you with a brief update.

Act 28 Agency Updates

Professional Learning - RFP

In August 2021, the Agency met with leadership from the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association (VTCLA) to review an outline of proposed professional development to support literacy instruction and to hear from them -- as systems and curriculum leaders -- what would be of greatest value for a sustained, statewide professional learning approach. The Agency described a continuum of professional learning and identified design elements that would be essential in making a lasting investment with the one-time federal funds appropriated for this work. A few of those professional learning design elements include that they:

1. are modular and stackable in nature;
2. can be stand-alone professional learning or as part of a mixed-delivery approach;
3. offer a learning progression from entry-level content for all content disciplines and educators to age/grade-level-specific content and approaches;
4. offer systems-level implementation content; and
5. can be maintained beyond the life of ARP-ESSER funding.

The AOE drafted a Request for Proposal (RFP) in September 2021 for a contractor to develop an online, self-paced professional learning training module that provides information about the neuroscience (science) of literacy—how the brain and language develop -- for all educators. This professional learning product will be designed so that it can stand alone as an introductory course to provide educators with foundational information regarding the neuroscience behind language acquisition and literacy skills development. We envision it as a sustainable resource that can be accessed by supervisory unions and districts (SUs/SDs) for initial and refresher PD for new and veteran educators who work in their districts.

As part of the State of Vermont's (SOV) procurement process any RFP that may involve acquiring new IT investments must go through a separate Agency of Digital Services (ADS) procurement process. Through discussions with ADS the determination was made that we would need to compete both for a web-based platform and the learning content that would be hosted on that platform and subsequently that we would need to proceed with an IT RFP – a process managed by ADS. The Agency is currently working with ADS staff on requirements gathering for the RFP; we anticipate the RFP will be posted in early spring.

Professional Learning – Early Literacy Network Improvement Community (NIC) Beginning in October 2021, teams of Pre-K and K teachers, their literacy or instruction coaches, the principals (if possible), and individuals from district central office (e.g., Director of Literacy, Director of Early Childhood) committed to engage in an improvement science approach to early literacy teaching and learning (called a Network Improvement Community or NIC). The experience is designed to support application of improvement science approaches to early literacy development, and professional learning opportunities in effective early literacy instruction. The shared aim/goal is to improve all PreK and K students' foundational reading and writing skills. As part of their participation, SU/SD NIC teams agreed to:

- meet as a cohort with teams from other participating states for eight 90-minute sessions between October and May where they hear content presentations from Nell Duke about

effective early literacy instruction and talk in breakout rooms with other teams from within their state

- attend a state-specific 60-minute meeting once per month with Nell Duke in which they share artifacts of their instruction and Nell Duke responds, informing their ongoing plan-do-study-act cycles
- meet as a district-specific team for 60 minutes twice per month to continue to work on the plan-do-study-act cycles and apply information from the above to their specific district context. They also could replace some of these 60-minute meetings with job-embedded coaching cycles.

During these convenings, the Council of Chief State School Officers coordinates professional learning and state planning time for all participating states. Partner researchers and subject matter experts provide professional learning and offer coaching and support at these convenings.

Pre-service Learning – The EPP Literacy Syllabi Project

The Agency began working with the Education Development Center/ Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC) last Spring to outline a project to assess the degree to which educator preparation programs (EPPs) are adequately preparing teachers in Vermont to incorporate literacy instruction in their classrooms and the degree to which preparation is in alignment with the state’s Literacy Blueprint.

The project includes a process for reviewing course syllabi (core/required courses for elementary, early childhood, and early childhood special education only) for evidence-based literacy strategies. Our goal was that each participating educator preparation program (EPP) would submit syllabi to the R1CC, and a syllabi review would then be conducted by a trained team of reviewers, representing a combination of EPP faculty and R1CC staff. Of the 10 EPPs, six participated, two declined to participate, one never responded to requests and one was excluded due to design issues. Reviewers received training from the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center ([CEEDAR Center](#)) on the CEEDAR Center’s Innovation Configurations course syllabi review process, which is a nationally recognized process for reviewing syllabi for the use of evidence-based practices.

In addition to the syllabi review, R1CC staff will conduct an interview with an appropriate representative from each EPP to share the results and allow EPP leadership to provide additional context and insight and weigh-in on the summary findings.

- As of last week, all reviews of syllabi for any courses that address literacy in ed prep programs for early childhood, early childhood special education, and elementary tracks were completed.
- R1CC began meeting individually with each of the 6 EPPs that agreed to participate in the project. These meetings allow R1CC to review the findings with each EPP and get their reactions to the findings and any additional context that would be helpful in the development of the report for the AOE.
- The anonymous report will be drafted in February, with a goal of submitting a first draft to the Agency for initial review in late February/early March. (Note, reports from our partners at R1CC must go through a review process for the Comp Center so a final report will most likely be available end of March/early April.)

- The Agency is meeting with R1CC on Thursday to discuss initial findings and work that might build from this work to increase the capacity building for the state.

Agency Staffing

A limited-service position funded by the \$450,000 appropriation is currently under active recruitment within the Student Pathways Division. In the interim, an interdisciplinary team (Act 28 Team) representing multiple teams/divisions within the Agency was convened in September. This team meets on a weekly basis to support the Literacy Council. The Agency has provided the following technical assistance to the Literacy Council all of which are posted or linked on the [Advisory Council on Literacy's](#) web page:

1. 10/27/21 – Comprehensive presentation describing state summative assessment literacy data from the Smarter Balanced assessment and NAEP assessment.
2. Defining Literacy – A Brief Discussion
3. Literacy and the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment – An Executive Summary
4. The Relationship Between Reading Enjoyment and Proficiency – A Research Review
5. A Glossary of Literacy Terms
6. 1/13/22 – Presentations of Questions and Answers on Literacy Data (based on Council questions collected at the November 2021 Council meeting) and on the State's [Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services Pre-K through Third Grade](#).