

AOE Testimony: Proposal to Address Literacy Outcomes

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education

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Background and Rationale

Addressing literacy outcomes is a key strategy for the successful implementation of Act 173. Findings from the DMG study that informed Act 173 support the urgency to improve Vermont's literacy outcomes relative to special education reform:

- "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 data indicates that Vermont needs to improve its literacy outcomes at the early grades:

- SBAC results from 2016 to 2018 indicate that only about 50% of 3rd graders were proficient in English Language Arts in each of these years.
- From 2015-2019, Vermont's average scale in Grade 4 reading on the NAEP dropped every year from a high of 230 to a low score of 222.

The COVID-19 emergency has adversely affected student academic and developmental progress. Failure to address literacy outcomes now could significantly impact student development for many years to come since literacy is foundational to the success of each student.

Proposal for Legislation

The Agency of Education recommends the following addition to statute to accomplish to bring coherence to the state's approach to literacy:

- Amend 16 V.S.A. § 261a (Duties of Supervisory Union Boards):
 - Require each supervisory union board to have a literacy policy that requires:
 - The implementation of a benchmark literacy assessment for all students in grades PreK-3 with scores that can be reported as Lexile scores to the Agency of Education;

- A process for identifying struggling readers, including students with Dyslexia, and a description of the intervention processes dedicated to address the needs of these students; and
 - The board to formally review and publish an annual monitoring report on student literacy outcomes.
- Require each supervisory union board to conduct an annual evaluation of superintendent job performance including goals for improving student literacy outcomes.

The Agency further recommends that the General Assembly direct the Secretary to review teacher preparation programs and report back to the General Assembly on to what extent these programs prepare teacher candidates to use science-based literacy materials and programs.

As the committee pursues these concepts, we can provide information about existing federal funds that could be allocated to this work.