AOE Testimony:
Act 28

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways
Date: January 12, 2023

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/districts (SU/SDs) on implementing the statewide literacy plan,
- collection of literacy data,
- best practices for literacy instruction, and
- review of assessments and outcomes

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…" and charged the Agency **to provide the following technical assistance to supervisory unions:**

(1) recommend how **federal funds can be used to implement 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173** in the context of improving literacy outcomes;

(2) **recommend evidence-based best practices** in teaching literacy instruction to students in prekindergarten through grade 3;

(3) **recommend how to provide professional development** for teachers and school leaders in methods of teaching literacy; and

(4) **recommend policies, procedures, and other methods** to ensure that improvements in literacy outcomes are sustained.

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

Update on Agency Activities to Improve Literacy Outcomes

Recommend how federal funds can be used to implement 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 in the context of improving literacy outcomes

Staffing/Organization

- Established cross-divisional, interdisciplinary team representing Data Management and Assessment, Educator Quality, Federal and Education Support Programs, Student Pathways, and Student Support Services to coordinate Agency literacy efforts and the federal and state sources of funding to support literacy investment at the local and state level.
    a. This team met on a weekly basis beginning in September 2021 and has now moved to bi-weekly meetings starting in 2022.
    b. This team attends Literacy Council meetings to align and coordinate work with ongoing Council discussions.
- Act 28 Project Manager hired and on-boarded June 20, 2022

Communication/Stakeholder Engagement

- Regular Coordination with Literacy Council Chair; attend Council meetings
- Updates to membership organizations
- Continued and expanded Network Improvement Communities for early learning (PK-3)– PDSA cycles that allow for data to inform investment requests
- Technical Assistance (TA) on evidence-based practices further outlined below
- Presentations to VTCLA, VSA and VSBA membership on the relationship between Act 173 levers and decision-making at the local level
- Hosting a tabletop exercise at Vita-Learn on February 22, 2023, related to Early Warning Systems (EWS)

Summary of Local, Federal, and Recovery Plans and Investment Trends

- Nearly 100% of SU/SDs identified priority investments in improving literacy outcomes in their Recovery Plans or Continuous Improvement Plans.
- Four general local investment categories: (1) Professional Development; (2) Programs and/or curriculum; (3) ELA/ Literacy Coordinators or Coaches; and (4) ELA interventionists.

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Recommend evidence-based best practices in teaching literacy instruction to students in prekindergarten through grade 3

- Developed over 20 evidence-based resources, presentations, & reports:
  a. Five annotated summaries of WWC Practice Guides that outline best practices in literacy instruction:
     i. Annotated Guide for Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in K Through 3rd Grade
     ii. Annotated Guide for Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School
     iii. Annotated Guide for Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9
     iv. Annotated Guide for Improving Reading Comprehension in K through 3rd Grade
     v. Annotated Guide for Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices
  b. Report on Literacy Syllabi Project
  c. Briefs and glossary of common literacy terminology
     i. Defining Literacy – A Brief Discussion
     ii. Defining Literacy – Research Excerpts
     iii. Glossary of Literacy Terms
     iv. English Language Arts and Literacy Resource Roadmap
     v. Literacy and the Smarter Balanced Statewide Summative Assessment System - Executive Summary
     vi. The Relationship Between Reading Enjoyment and Proficiency
  d. Four presentations prepared and presented to the Literacy Council including two data presentations on summative assessment data, as well as a follow up Q&A, looking deeper at literacy outcomes of historically marginalized populations:
     i. Smarter Balance ELA Assessment Deep Dive
     ii. AOE Updates and Act 173 and Syllabi project results presentation
     iii. AOE Presentation on the Blueprint
     iv. Smarter Balanced & NAEP ELA results presentation and follow-Up and Executive Summary Literacy and the Smarter Balanced Statewide Summative Assessment System - Executive Summary
  e. Reading and writing checklists developed by Special Education team to document students have received appropriate instruction and intervention.
- Developing an evergreen webspace that will support:
  a. posting evidence-based practices and new research and recommendations versus within a static document
  b. an intake form for specialized/ad hoc field research requests and to support developing Q&A documents
  c. bi/monthly office hours to provide a predictable space for collaborative problem-solving

- Collaborating with the Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC) at American Institutes for Research. R1CC provides technical assistance and support to State Education Agencies, local education agencies, and schools in our northeast region. The Agency is working with a team of research and literacy experts through this partnership to:
  a. Develop and facilitate a statewide Community of Practice for literacy educators (discussed further below)
  b. Develop a Blueprint Playbook: Stackable resource for systems leaders and educators to put the Blueprint into practice and engage in evidence-based/data-based decision-making to improve literacy outcomes for students
  c. Launched the <u>Survey to Understand District Level Needs and Supports to Improve Literacy Outcomes</u>
     i. 82% of Supervisory Unions/Districts completed the survey
     ii. currently reviewing and developing a summary of results
- Request for Proposal (RFP) drafted for statewide model curriculum for ELA/Literacy
- In procurement process to select a vendor to support professional learning and coaching to improve local comprehensive assessment systems and data-based decision-making
- Drafted Request for Proposal (RFP) to contract for professional learning to support SU/SDs developing local Early Warning Systems (EWS)
- Launched competitive [benchmark assessment grant application](#) to support SU/SDs in purchasing/expanding benchmark assessments that report Lexile and quantile measures (closes January 17)
- Continued participation in the CCSSO Early Learning Network Improvement Community discussed further below

Recommend how to provide professional development for teachers and school leaders in methods of teaching literacy

Pre-service Learning – The EPP Literacy Syllabi Project

The Agency began working with the Education Development Center/ Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC) in the Spring of 2021 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 included a process for reviewing course syllabi for evidence-based literacy strategies in the core/required courses for elementary, early childhood, and early childhood special education programs. The syllabi review was completed in January 2022 and the final report was submitted to the AOE in April 2022.

- Two main study questions:
  o To what extent are evidence-based practices in reading and writing instruction represented within program syllabi from the participating EPPs?
  o Do syllabi vary in the intensity and levels of practice-based opportunities associated with the evidence-based practices in reading and writing instruction? If so, how do they vary?

- 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.
- 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 conducted 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.
- Of the 10 EPPs in Vermont, six participated, two declined to participate, one never responded to requests and one was excluded due to design issues.
    - 20 courses reviewed
    - The 6 EPPs reviewed support 60% of educators recommended for certification in early childhood, early childhood special education, and elementary pathways in VT

In Service Professional Learning
- In procurement for self-paced online learning modules in the "five key areas of literacy instruction as identified by the National Reading Panel, which are phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and [reading] comprehension…"
    - are modular and stackable in nature;
    - can be stand-alone professional learning or as part of a mixed-delivery approach;
    - offer a learning progression from entry-level content for all content disciplines and educators to age/grade-level-specific content and approaches;
    - offer systems-level implementation content; and
    - can be maintained beyond the life of ARP-ESSER funding.
- Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELs) training modules developed to be hosted in online learning platform
- In procurement process for professional learning for Family Engagement in Literacy. This will provide professional learning for teachers and school leaders in two areas:
    - *Literacy family engagement workshops*— professional learning for educators around empowering families and schools to partner in support of students' literacy achievement; and
    - *Small group supplemental literacy sessions* – professional learning for educators around small group literacy instruction sessions that will supplement Tier 1 instruction following an evidence-based curriculum and explicit instruction of phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension.
- CCSSO Early Learning Network Improvement Community (NIC):
    - Job-embedded and needs-based professional learning facilitated by CCSSO with Dr. Sharon Walpol a professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware on the science of reading, foundational skill instruction, and formative assessment practices, in grades PreK-3rd.
    - Includes collaborative professional learning and sharing with a cohort of educators from New Jersey. In the 21-22 school year Nebraska and Maryland were in Vermont's learning cohort.

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- Collaborating with the R1CC to:
    - Develop and facilitate a statewide CoP for literacy educators
        - Network for literacy professionals and district leaders to engage in peer-to-peer-learning, share best practices, and learn from one another
        - Serve as a hub for coordination, communication, learning, and TA among literacy professionals in VT
        - Support the development and implementation of local literacy plans
    - Develop a Blueprint Playbook
    - Analyze results of the AOE Survey to Understand District Level Needs and Supports to Improve Literacy Outcomes to develop recommendations and supports that align with the needs of the field.

Recommend policies, procedures, and other methods to ensure that improvements in literacy outcomes are sustained.

1. **Initial recommendations from the Literacy Syllabi Project**
    a. Align the content of the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) performance-based approach to evidence-based reading and writing practices.
    b. Review EPP courses to learn about preservice teachers' opportunities to apply what they learn in their courses, practice skills, and receive explicit feedback on skill application.
    c. Develop and deliver PD for EPPs to ensure preservice teachers have opportunities in classroom settings and with students to apply, practice, and receive feedback on evidence-based reading and writing instructional practices.
    d. Develop and deliver PD for districts in writing, focusing specifically on the areas least reflected in the course syllabi.
2. **Compiling and analyzing the Results of the Survey to Understand District Level Needs and Supports to Improve Literacy Outcomes** to inform recommendations for policies, procedures and other methods (e.g., professional development opportunities that align with local needs) to sustain literacy efforts to improve student outcomes.
3. **Developing and expanding local assessment assets to support common reporting measures between local and state student academic assessment data** to support rapid data-informed decision-making at the local level to meet student needs in real time.