
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways
Subject: **Act 28 - Literacy**
Date: January 5, 2024

Background and Introduction

- "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 besupported by teachers skilled in the teaching of reading."
- "While some special education teachers across the SU/SDs had a strong background inthe 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 of 2021](#)) to advise the Agency of Education (Agency), State Board of Education (SBE) and General Assembly (GA) on ways to improve 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.

Agency Activities to Support Act 28 Implementation

Supports for the Literacy Council

AOE presentations to Council:

- September 13, 2023: [Agency of Education Update for the Advisory Council on Literacy - September 13, 2023](#)
- April 10, 2023: [Act 28 Advisory Council - An Overview of the Early MTSS and VTmtss Frameworks - February 8, 2023, Questions and Answers](#)
- March 8, 2023: [Agency of Education Update for the Advisory Council on Literacy on Implementation of Act 28 - Slide Deck - March 8, 2023](#)
- February 8, 2023: [An Overview of the Early MTSS and VTmtss Framework](#) (Presentation)
- [January 13, 2022: Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade](#) (Presentation)
- January 12, 2022: [Act 28 Literacy Council Data Presentation: Questions and Answers Follow-Up](#)
- September 14, 2022: [Agency of Education Update for the Advisory Council on Literacy - Slide Deck - Sept. 14, 2022](#)
- October 27, 2021: [Review of National and Statewide Summative Assessment Data for English Language Arts](#) (Presentation)

AOE Developed Literacy Resources

- [English Language Arts and Literacy Resource Roadmap](#)
- [Annotated Guide for Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in K Through 3rd Grade](#)
- [Annotated Guide for Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#)
- [Annotated Guide for Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9](#)
- [Annotated Guide for Improving Reading Comprehension in K through 3rd Grade](#)
- [Annotated Guide for Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#)

- [A Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services PreK Through Third Grade](#)
- [Defining Literacy – A Brief Discussion](#)
- [Defining Literacy – Research Excerpts](#)
- [Glossary of Literacy Terms](#)
- [Literacy and the Smarter Balanced Statewide Summative Assessment System - Executive Summary](#)
- [The Relationship Between Reading Enjoyment and Proficiency](#)

Summary Of Agency Activities to Improve Literacy Learning

- *Recommend how federal funds can be used to implement 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 in the context of improving literacy outcomes*
- *Recommend evidence-based best practices in teaching literacy instruction to students in prekindergarten through grade 3.*
- *Recommend how to provide professional development for teachers and school leaders in methods of teaching literacy.*
- *Recommend policies, procedures, and other methods to ensure that improvements in literacy outcomes are sustained.*

Data-Based Decision Making

In previous year’s testimony the Agency proposed to 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. It also analyzed results from our 2022 Survey on Local Assessment Systems. A few key findings from those surveys are included below.

2022 Assessment Survey:

Forty-two unique supervisory union/district (SU/SD) respondents (81 percent of SU/SDs; 76 percent including technical center districts at the time of the survey).

The survey asked respondents to share information about their local comprehensive assessment systems specific to literacy, English language arts, and mathematics. This survey served two purposes to capture assessment data and inform an assessment grant to the field to build out local assessment systems that report in lexile and quantile measures so these data can communicate in a common language with state summative assessment data. The survey did not include a prompt to specify which assessment within a suite they use (e.g., which STAR or which DIBELS), and in those cases only some can be used as dyslexia screeners. This will be an area the Agency will build upon in a forthcoming survey. However, the following data provide an initial look at local assessment practices specific to universal screeners:

- 35/42 respondents use universal screeners (83%)
- Breakdown by type of reported universal screener:
 - Acadience Reading K-6 (formerly DIBELS Next) - 5/42 (12%) respondents report using some form of DIBELS
 - NWEA MAP Reading Fluency - 7/42 (17%) respondents report using at least one assessment from the MAP suite
 - STAR Reading CBM - 18/42 (43%) respondents report using at least one assessment from the STAR suite
 - i-Ready Dyslexia Screener - 5/42 (12%) respondents report using at least one assessment from the i-Ready suite

2022 Literacy Survey

At the end of 2022, over 84% of SU/SDs (Superintendent or Curriculum Directors) responded to [Survey to Understand District Level Needs and Supports to Improve Literacy Outcomes](#) lending important insights that have guided the AOE's work to implement Act 28 throughout 2023.

- 90% of SU/SDs report utilizing Local assessment data to inform Tier 1 instruction and 81% report having regularly scheduled opportunities to review student data. Direct quotes related to data used to inform instruction:
 - "Part of our SU goal is to strengthen universal instruction. We have some schools with regularly scheduled data days and we have some teachers incorporating ELA goals in their professional learning plans. We also have a cohort of teachers each year receiving specific ELA training from the Sterns Center with coaching."
 - "One school of 5 has a coach; others have open positions for coaches and use consultants; our EST Coordinator leads PK-4 Literacy PLC, scope & sequence implementation training, and literacy plan development in consultation with Curriculum Director"
- 50% of survey respondents noted that they did have a Local Literacy plan and 50% responded that they did not. Of the 50% who stated they did not have a Local Literacy Plan 42% noted that literacy planning is included in another document.
- Additional staff or contractor time, dedicated funding, dedicated time, and training or coaching were the top four supports identified as needed to develop, refine, or implement their local literacy plans. (well over 50% indicated needing these four supports)

Evidence-Based Support for the Field

Resources and Technical Assistance

- See Agency Response to Council Recommendations

Early Learning Network Improvement Community (NIC)

Over 90 educators from 6 SU/SDs participating in the Early Learning Network Improvement Community (ELNIC) job-embedded and needs-based professional learning and coaching

focused on bringing evidence-based literacy practices to the classroom with literacy experts Dr. Sharon Walpole (K-3) and Katherine Beauchat (PreK).

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.

Small Group Literacy Instruction and Family Engagement

Springboard Collaborative's small group instruction and family engagement program was piloted during the summer of 2023 and served 35 PreK through rising 4th-grade students at Milton Elementary's summer program. Milton Elementary will begin programming in early 2024 for 45 kindergarten – 3rd graders. Based on a survey provided to families:

- 83% of families agree that their family reading routine improved, their child was excited for Springboard, and their children's teachers met their learning needs.
- 26 Kindergarten through 3rd grade students who were tested on Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) reported an average reading achievement equivalent to 1.5 months of reading growth in letter-sound knowledge and blending. (DIBELS NWF administered at beginning and end of 5-week programming)

Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELs) training modules developed to be hosted in online learning platform

Building a Strong Foundation for Lifelong Literacy Success – Learning Modules Series

AOE invested just over \$2.1 million in an asynchronous series of six modules focused on the neuroscience of literacy titled "Building a Strong Foundation for Lifelong Literacy Success". The first two modules are available, and modules 3-6 will be available before the end of this school year. The series is accessible to all Vermont educators for five years.

- Over 215 educators from 45 SU/SDs, including CTE and Adults Education and Literacy providers, have registered and started taking the series.
- 100% of the participants who completed a survey at the end of Module 1 agreed or strongly agreed that the activities and materials supported their learning and would recommend the module to a colleague.
- Vermont Agency of Education provided an introduction between the module developers and Dr. Kelly Cartwright, who is carefully reviewing and providing input on the series.

What are folks saying?

I just wanted to let you know how THRILLED I am with the literacy resources you are providing! Understanding the Neuroscience of Literacy exceeded my expectations! I feel well-supported knowing there is a wealth of knowledge and information available as I develop a new program at the secondary level. -- Literacy interventionist, High School

Awesome - yes I got a lot out of module 1! I switched to a literacy interventionist position this year, so this is the type of PD I need! -- Literacy interventionist and EST Coordinator, Elementary School

I can attest that they [literacy modules] are aligned with the scientific evidence on reading - and effective reading instruction. -- Dr. Kelly Cartwright, Professor of Psychology, Neuroscience, and Teacher Preparation at Christopher Newport University

[I] was really appreciative of several factors: the evidence-based research and practices (and where to find them), Scarborough's Rope showing code [and] meaning together, and the VT context (statutes and NAEP). And, the modules are available asynchronously. – Curriculum Leader, District Level

Continued Collaboration with the Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC) at American Institutes for Research.

R1CC provides technical assistance and support to State Education Agencies through a contract with the United States Department of Education. See Blueprint and Literacy Collaborative Learning Group information further below. The AOE will continue to work with the R1CC as well as REL-NEI and US DoE on ongoing initiatives related to educator prep programs, adolescent literacy, and evaluation of state literacy plans.

Request for Proposal (RFP) drafted for statewide model curriculum for ELA/Literacy

In March, 2023, the AOE released an RFP seeking a contractor to develop an exemplar coordinated ELA/ Literacy coordinated curriculum. Three responses were received with a wide range in price, including several that were well outside of the AOE budget. The AOE did not award this contract and has reallocated funding to support SU/ SDs.

Soon to Release Grant to Improve Literacy Outcomes

By the middle of January, the AOE will launch a grant opportunity focused on improving academic outcomes in the areas of computer science, ELA/ literacy, and mathematics. When released applicants may apply to 1) develop, purchase, or refine high-quality instructional materials and/or coordinated curriculum; 2) fund needs-based professional learning; and/or 3) provide systems-level coaching to support and sustain the implementation of coordinated curriculum, evidence-based instruction, or local comprehensive assessment systems (LCAS). There will be no maximum on funding requests but must demonstrate that requests are allocable, reasonable, and necessary. Applications will be due 6-8 weeks from the grant launch in early January. You may preview the grant guide [on the AOE website](#).

Statewide professional learning and coaching to improve local comprehensive assessment systems and data-based decision-making

Through a contract with Demonstrated Success, the Agency has been offering professional learning and coaching available to SU/SDs K-12 Vermont educators and building leaders to support the effective use of data to improve student learning.

Specific details on the professional learning can be found on the [Vermont Data Use](#) webpage.

Statewide professional learning to support SU/SDs developing local Early Warning Systems (EWS)

Six Early Warning System (EWS) professional learning series workshops have taken place over the last four months with representatives over 24 different SU/SD. The workshops have focused on what Early Warning Systems are, essential components/data in EWS, why EWS are integral to ensuring student success, and how they can inform interventions. These workshops enable SU/SD leaders to build upon the capabilities of their existing systems and create robust Early Warning Systems. Professional learning has resulted in SU/developing and expanding Early Warning Systems (EWS) to better identify student, school, and district data patterns; inform team decision-making, investment requests and student interventions; and further the development of existing layered systems of support.

Launched and completed three rounds of a competitive [benchmark assessment grant application](#) to support SU/SDs in purchasing/expanding benchmark assessments that report Lexile and quantile measures

Fifteen SU/SDs received 17 awards totaling \$292,083 to support expanding local comprehensive assessment systems and assessment practices in the areas of literacy and mathematics. Of the fifteen SU/SDs who received Benchmark Assessment Grant monies:

- 93% requested training in both the Lexile and Quantile Academies.
- 12,778 students will be affected by this work.
- 356 educators engaged in professional learning.

A Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services PreK Through Third Grade

Developed and published [The Vermont Literacy Playbook: An Implementation Guide for System Leaders to Improve Student Literacy Learning](#)

The purpose of the Playbook is to act as a companion to Vermont’s state literacy plan, Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade (i.e., the Blueprint). It supports the pivotal role that “local policymakers and education leaders” (e.g., curriculum leaders, superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and other District leaders) play in “overseeing the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan” for literacy (Blueprint, p. 6) and guide decision making and planning efforts to improve literacy learning and outcomes at the local level. The resources, strategies, and tools in this Playbook provide action steps, templates, and guidelines that District leaders can adapt based on local needs when developing, implementing, and continuously improving their local literacy plans (LLPs).

Developed [Local Literacy Plan Template](#)

Working with Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association (VTCLA) to launch the Literacy Collaborative Learning Group. Over 45 curriculum leaders from across the state participated in a joint session with the AOE, R1CC and VTCLA on January 5, 2024, to learn about the Playbook and identify next steps for how the AOE can best support the development of Local Literacy Plans.

Highlights included:

- Leaders sharing best practices and learnings from engaging in Local Literacy Planning processes.
- An eagerness to launch a Literacy Collaborative Learning Group. The AOE will coordinate with VTCLA to schedule a launch of the Literacy Collaborative Group in late Jan or early February.
- Leaders interested in integrating literacy planning into existing Continuous Improvement Plans or other District planning documents.
- Leaders noted that time, resources, and funding are obstacles to establishing and implementing Local Literacy Plans. This feedback aligns with the data from the Literacy Survey completed in 2022 (above).

Agency Observations and Recommendations

Accountability measures to monitor use of research and evidence-based programs, practices and or assessments

- Continue 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;
- Leverage existing and developing Education Quality Review process in a supportive accountability framework;
- Support the development of Local Literacy Plans for predictable (e.g., annual) submissions in Grants Management System;
- Leverage roll out of [District Quality Standards](#) and build into Rule Series 131 District Quality Review Process evaluation and target supports based Local Literacy Plans, Continuous Improvement Plans and student literacy outcomes.

Begin work on initial recommendations from the Literacy Syllabi Project with R1CC

- Align the content of the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) performance-based approach to evidence-based reading and writing practices.
- 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.

- 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.
- Develop and deliver PD for districts in writing, focusing specifically on the areas least reflected in the course syllabi.