

S.204 Review

Advisory Council on Literacy Update

Testimony To: Senate Education Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Gwen Carmolli, Chair, Advisory Council on Literacy

Date: February 15, 2024

S.204 Recommendations

Thank you for inviting me to testify on S.204. I serve as the chair of the Advisory Council on Literacy and President of Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association.

Both the organizations are appreciative of your support in the efforts to increase literacy outcomes for Vermont students and for your efforts to align drafted legislation with existing federal and state requirements.

Vermont schools have requirements in the areas of curriculum development, content standards, local assessment systems, systems of support, evidence-based resources and practices, support services for students with disabilities, and more. Each of these requirements outlines particular aspects that influence systems within our school systems and schools. Alignment with existing requirements and S.204 are critical in order to meet existing requirements and in implementing new requirements.

As you have worked through versions of the bill you have been working toward this alignment - thank you! There are two areas to consider as you continue to refine this bill: alignment with assessment requirements, and universal screeners.

Vermont school systems are required to have multi-tiered systems of support that includes assessment and needs-based layers of support, Educational Support Teams that review learning needs and make recommendations for systems of support, and are required to have a Common Local Assessment System that assesses state standards and local proficiencies. With schools having these requirements in place it is critical to align new requirements with existing ones in order to support coherence in the work to meet needs and improve literacy outcomes for all students.

One area still out of alignment is the language for screening for dyslexia. There are specific requirements in IDEA and Act 173 that outline processes for identification of an area of disability that includes multi-tiered systems of system of supports. School systems need to follow curriculum based on state standards, have local assessment systems that screen students on these standards, and then provide needs-based layers of support based to accelerate learning to grade level achievement. This is required before any identification of an area of disability.

Some suggested language to better align these requirements:

Recommendations: Section (b)(1)

Annually, the Agency of Education shall update and publish a list of reviewed universal reading screeners and assessments, used for determining reading skills and identifying students demonstrating reading struggles or showing characteristics associated with dyslexia, for use by supervisory unions and approved independent schools.

An area to clarify is the grade levels for the bill. Section (c) indicates K-3 for universal screening and screening for dyslexia characteristics in grades K-1. It would be useful to have the grade levels indicated in the executive summary, description of the bill, and in the first page/opening section of the bill.

Recommendation: Section (c)

Clarify in the description and full text that the bill is a K-3 literacy bill for needs-based follow-up screening to identify areas of need for intervention and support for students in grades K-3.

Clarify the grade levels for screening for dyslexia characteristics.

Advisory Council Recommendations

- ***Maintain the Act 28 Project Management literacy position at the AOE*** - the position has been invaluable in accelerating resource development and school system supports

Request: \$100,000 for a full-time equivalency position

- ***Support the development of resources and accountability measures (by the AOE)*** - these resources are guiding school system shifts in curriculum, instruction and assessment

Request: \$450,000 to continue work with contractor/s for instruction and professional learning resources

- ***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.

Request:

- ***\$24,000 for work related to the Advisory Council on Literacy***
- ***Include Vermont Curriculum Leaders in th Ex Officio group (making continuity in Council leadership possible)***
- ***Expand the focus of the Council to include literacy (reading and writing) instruction, assessment, support and outcomes in grades Pre Kindergarten to grade 12.***

Conclusion

Thank you for the continued interest and support of literacy improvement efforts; Vermont students are benefitting from your support.