
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Vermont Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Emily Lesh, Literacy Project Manager & Read Vermont Lead, Agency of Education

Subject: H.480, Section 10

Date: Friday, April 18, 2025

Summary

The Agency of Education (AOE) supports the current language in H.480, Section 10 (language from S.15), which focuses on providing supplemental support for all students whose reading proficiency falls significantly below proficiency standards for the student's grade level or whose reading proficiency prevents progress in school. While the Agency would begin implementation preparation immediately, we respectfully request a revised effective date of July 2026 for students in grades 4-12 to ensure that all stakeholders—students, educators, school and district leaders, and the Agency itself—are positioned for successful implementation.

The AOE will begin to work upon passage to review capacity and resource needs for successful implementation while actively supporting the field to prepare for the take-effect date. The additional time will allow the Agency to issue clear recommendations, guidance, and an accountability plan early in the 2025-2026 school year, equipping schools with the support and information they need for implementation. The AOE's recommendation to adjust the effective date for grades 4-12 to July of 2026 reflects a strategic and student-centered approach to ensure the Agency is well-positioned to support effective and equitable implementation statewide.

The AOE shares the goal of increasing literacy achievement for all Vermont students—a goal championed by Vermont educators, school leaders, the Literacy Advisory Council, and advocates — and applauds the collaborative work that culminated in the proposed language. Section 10 of H.480 presents an important opportunity to ensure that students in grades 4–12 who are significantly below grade level receive the supplementary reading support they need to succeed. The AOE looks forward to ongoing partnership with the field and stakeholders to realize this vision.

It is important to note that under current law (16 V.S.A. § 2902), each public school is required to develop and maintain a tiered system of academic support to ensure all students can succeed in the general education environment. Each public school must provide instructional interventions and accommodations for any student who requires support and may provide intensive, individualized interventions. While all schools are obligated to support



students who struggle with reading under existing law, the addition of H.480 Section 10 would promote a statewide focus on adolescent literacy and ensure that no student is overlooked, regardless of grade level or current supports.

Recommended Language

§ 2903. Preventing early school failure; reading instruction

(c)Reading instruction. A public school or approved independent school that is eligible to receive public tuition that offers instruction in grades kindergarten, one, two, or three shall provide systematic and explicit evidence based reading instruction to all students. In addition, such for students in grades kindergarten through 12, public schools and approved independent schools that are eligible to receive public tuition shall provide supplemental reading instruction to any enrolled student whose reading proficiency falls significantly below proficiency standards for the student's grade level or whose reading proficiency prevents progress in school. Schools shall provide support and information to the parents and legal guardians of such students regarding the student's current level of reading proficiency, which shall be based on valid and reliable assessments.

(1)In addition, for students in grades 4 through 12, public schools and approved independent schools that are eligible to receive public tuition shall provide supplemental reading instruction to any enrolled student whose reading proficiency falls significantly below proficiency standards for the student's grade level or whose reading proficiency prevents progress in school.

(c)(1) To take effect: July 2026

AOE Process and Priorities

To arrive at this recommendation, the AOE convened an intra-agency working group with representatives from across the department—including VTmtss, data and assessment, continuous improvement planning, special education, and student pathways. This intra-agency team:

- **Reviewed relevant statutes**, including:
 - 16 V.S.A. § 2902, which mandates a tiered system of supports for students who need more than what the general education classroom can provide.
 - Act 173, which identifies best practices for delivering effective and equitable services to students needing additional support.
- **Analyzed existing guidance**, including the VTmtss Field Guide, which guides public schools to provide a wide range of layered supports, intentionally planned and closely monitored, for students who are experiencing struggle.
- **Engaged with key constituents** who championed S.15, including the Literacy Advisory Council Chair Carmolli, educators, and advocates.

Guideposts for Agency's Recommendation

Throughout this process, the following priorities were kept at the forefront:

- **Support for Adolescent Readers:** the AOE is committed to ensuring students in grades 4–12 who are significantly below grade level receive the support they need to succeed.
- **Implementation Feasibility and Readiness:** the AOE has engaged in careful consideration of what is needed to set students, educators, school systems, and the Agency up for effective and sustainable implementation.
- **Alignment with Existing Law and Guidance:** the AOE aims to promote coherence through building upon current statute, policy, and guidance—specifically Act 173, 16 V.S.A. § 2902, and the VTmtss Framework.

AOE's process has resulted in the Agency's recommendation to maintain the drafted language for grades K–3 while establishing a July 2026 effective date for grades 4–12 to ensure effective, equitable implementation.

AOE Implementation Plan

It is the responsibility of the AOE to provide leadership and implementation support to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and approved independent schools eligible to receive public tuition dollars. A July 2026 effective date will allow the AOE to provide leadership, guidance, and support to the field to ensure effective and equitable implementation through:

1. **Review of capacity and resources** within the Agency to support effective and equitable implementation statewide.
2. **Engagement** of educators, leaders, and constituents to understand needs and align implementation support.
3. **Review of evidence base and research** on adolescent literacy instruction and assessment.
4. **Issuance of recommendations and guidance** for that may include, but not be limited to:
 - a. Recommended reading and writing assessment for grades 4-12 and how to identify students whose reading proficiency is “significantly below”;
 - b. Evidence-based practices and supplemental instruction for adolescent students whose reading proficiency is “significantly below”;
 - c. Integration and alignment with existing law and guidance.
5. **Identification of accountability mechanisms** through using existing structures (e.g., Continuous Improvement Plans, VTmtss Survey).
6. **Providing professional learning** opportunities focused on adolescent literacy and assessment that ensure integration into existing Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems and MTSS.

In addition, the later effective date for grades 4-12 will allow time for school systems to adapt and refine local systems to ensure supports are in place for all students in grades 4-12 who are performing significantly below proficiency.

Act 139 and Read Vermont

Act 139, Vermont's most comprehensive literacy legislation to date, ensures that students in kindergarten through grade 3 are screened for foundational literacy skills and provided with evidence-based instruction and intervention. In aligning Vermont statute with this focus, Act 139 amended 16 V.S.A. § 2903 and removed language requiring supplemental reading instruction for all students in grade 4 and beyond who were not at grade level.

While current law (16 V.S.A. § 2902 and Act 173) requires schools to provide support to struggling learners through a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), section 10 of H.480 (also S.15) strengthens and clarifies the expectation that adolescent students (grades 4-12) whose reading is significantly below proficiency will receive additional supplemental reading instruction. The AOE respectfully requests a revised effective date for grades 4-12 to provide the necessary lead time for the AOE to develop and release targeted guidance and to continue adolescent reading professional learning through Read Vermont.

Although Act 139 (§ 2907) focuses on early literacy (K–3), the Agency launched Read Vermont to provide a broad and comprehensive approach to supporting educators and learners from prekindergarten through grade 12. Read Vermont includes professional learning for adolescent educators and promotes literacy success for all students, particularly those whose reading proficiency presents challenges in school and life. In March, over 75 educators participated in a live professional learning workshop focused on adolescent literacy and nearly 200 educators and administrators registered and received the recording for viewing after the live workshops. The proposed timeline will ensure educators and leaders have the tools and resources needed to effectively implement the requirements of this Act through forthcoming Read Vermont professional learning and guidance.