

Legislative Report

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON LITERACY

December 15, 2024

**Issued by the Advisory Council on Literacy
Gwendolyn S. Carmolli, Chair**

Executive Summary

[Act 28 of 2021](#) (Act 28) established the Advisory Council on Literacy (Council) to advise the Agency of Education (AOE), the State Board of Education (SBE), and the General Assembly. The Council's role is to advise on how to improve proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12, how to sustain those outcomes and provide advice on efforts to improve literacy achievement for all students.

The 2024 Council report outlines the efforts to enhance literacy achievement for Vermont students, focusing primarily on early grades (kindergarten through grade 3) as mandated by Acts 28 and Act 139 of 2024. The Council reviewed assessment results from the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), identifying significant achievement gaps and the need for improved literacy outcomes. VTCAP results showed a 52% proficiency rate, with notable disparities among different student groups, while NAEP results indicated a decline in reading proficiency from 2019 to 2022.

The Council recommended robust data collection practices to inform instructional planning and professional development, despite concerns about the capacity for effective data collection due to limited resources. Future work will focus on adolescent literacy, acknowledging low achievement levels and the need for professional learning opportunities.

[Act 139](#), signed in 2024, emphasizes evidence-based literacy instruction, requiring universal screening and interventions for students in early grades. The Council's recommendations align with this act, advocating for systematic, explicit instruction and multi-tiered support systems. The report concludes by highlighting the collaborative efforts of Vermont's educational community in improving literacy outcomes, while acknowledging ongoing challenges and celebrating recent achievements.

2024 Council Work

Act 28 and Act 139 outline a set of tasks for the Advisory Council on Literacy, to develop advice and recommendations that will improve literacy achievement for Vermont students. Both literacy bills focus on instruction for the early grades (kindergarten through grade 3) to provide the foundational skills and support needed for future literacy success. The broader intention of the bills and literacy efforts is to increase achievement for all Vermont students.

- Review of Assessment Results
- Recommendations for data collection
- Recommendations for future work
- Review of Act 139 & input to support implementation

Review of Assessment Results

The Council reviewed assessment results from two statewide summative assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) to understand Vermont's literacy outcomes and achievement gaps.

VTCAP, a new statewide assessment of literacy (reading, writing and listening) for students in grades 3-9, replaced Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for students in grades 3-9. Results of the spring 2023 assessment showed 52% of students proficient or proficient with distinction for students in grades 3-9. The results showed an achievement gap of 34 points between Historically Marginalized students and Not-Historically Marginalized students (35% proficiency for Historically Marginalized, 69% Not-Historically Marginalized). Though a new assessment, both VTCAP and SBAC assess Vermont state literacy standards; proficiency on the VTCAP 2023 assessment for all students was higher than VTCAP 2023 (52% VTCAP 2023, 44% proficiency SBAC 2022).

In grade 3, VTCAP results showed low achievement and large achievement gaps: 49% proficiency for all students, 29% proficiency for students in poverty, 14% proficiency for students with disabilities, 50% proficiency for non-white students (40% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 61% Asian, 33% Black, 47% Hispanic, 68% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander), and 49% proficiency for white students. There was a highlight: higher achievement for grade 3 students on VTCAP 2023 than SBAC 2022 (49% VTCAP 2023, 41% SBAC 2022).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a national assessment of reading and math given to students in grades 4 and 8, is given biannually; it is often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card." Vermont's results from NAEP 2022 also showed low proficiency, scoring lower than SBAC and VTCAP, and large achievement gaps: 34% proficiency for both grade 4 and 8 students; 23% proficiency for students in

poverty in grade 4, 25% proficiency for students in poverty for grade 8. Proficiency in reading declined from 2019 to 2022 (38% to 34%).

With low achievement and large achievement gaps, the need to increase achievement for all students is critical.

Recommendations:

- Maintain support for literacy improvement efforts
- Continue the Advisory Council on Literacy
- Provide funding for a literacy specialist position at the Agency of Education (1.0 FTE, permanent)
- Provide funding for resource development and professional learning opportunities

Recommendations for Data Collection

To address the last tasks for the Council, as outlined in Act 28, the Council gathered and reviewed input from constituency groups to develop a recommendation for literacy data collection.

The Council found strong support for schools to conduct and use assessment results for instructional planning, monitoring learning progress, and to identify areas of needed professional learning. The Council reviewed evidence-based research that demonstrates the efficacy of schools' conducting screening and needs-based follow-up assessment that is then used for instructional planning, needs-based intervention, and progress monitoring.

Though there was support for the use of data, there was significant concern about data collection. Council members and constituency groups raised questions about the collection process, type of data collected, frequency of data collection, and the purpose for the data collection. Additionally, with limited staffing and funding for the Agency of Education, there was concern about the capacity of the Agency to carry out data collection that would be used by schools to have a meaningful impact on literacy achievement.

The Council was aware that literacy legislation was under consideration that included data collection and could be finalized before the Council's recommendation. Chair Carmolli shared the Council's support and concerns regarding data collection with Senate and House Committees on Education during the legislative process - the use of data is a key component in increasing literacy achievement.

Recommendations:

- Keep data collection at the supervisory union/school district level, the location most needed to provide instruction and intervention
- Collect broad data such as the percentage of achieving below grade level proficiency or name of screeners used to gather data

Recommendations for Future Work

As the Act 28 Council work came to a close, the Council looked ahead to the possibility of future work. The focus of Act 28 was literacy in the early grades, grades kindergarten through grade 3, in order to increase achievement for all students. Early literacy, writing, and adolescent literacy were considered, based on council input and evidence-based resources.

The Council gathered input and recommended adolescent literacy as a focus for future Council work. Council members cited low achievement on state and national assessments. Additionally, the Council noted new evidence-based research on providing intervention for students in grades 4-9, and limited professional learning opportunities on adolescent literacy instruction. The Council affirmed their commitment to early literacy improvement efforts and identified the ongoing need to support students in any grade.

Recommendation:

- Expand the focus of the Council's work to include adolescent literacy to strengthen literacy efforts and literacy achievement for students in grade 4 and beyond

Review of Act 139

In May, 2024, Governor Scott signed Act 139: An act relating to supporting Vermont's young readers through evidence-based literacy instruction. The aim of the new law is to increase literacy achievement for all students by requiring universal literacy screening, evidence-based instruction, and needs-based follow-up assessment and intervention, for students in grades kindergarten through grade three.

Act 139 reflects evidence-based practices in literacy instruction, assessment, and multi-tiered systems of support. Many recommendations from the Act 28 Advisory Council on Literacy are reflected in the new literacy law:

General Assembly findings: Explicit and systematic instruction on code-based and comprehension-based reading skills and needs-based support are the most effective literacy practices for the early grades. A strong focus is needed on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension for all students, and needs-based tiers and layers of support are critical for struggling learners. Reading instruction is interwoven into the principles of creating culturally responsive and inclusive environments for all learners.

Review of universal reading screeners: The Agency of Education shall review and publish guidance on universal reading screeners based on established criteria that are based on technical adequacy, attention to linguistic diversity, administrative usability, and valid measures of the developmental skills in early literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Universal screening: Each public and approved independent school that is eligible to receive public tuition shall screen all students in kindergarten through grade three, at least annually, using age and grade-level appropriate universal reading screeners. The universal screeners shall be given in accordance with best practices and the technical specifications of the specific screener used.

Actions to meet student's needs: If such screenings determine that a student is significantly below relevant benchmarks as determined by the screener's guidelines for age-level or grade-level typical development in specific literacy skills, the school shall determine which actions within the general education program will meet the student's needs, including differentiated or supplementary evidence-based reading instruction and ongoing monitoring of progress.

Parental notification: Within 30 calendar days following a screening result that is significantly below the relevant benchmarks, the school shall inform the student's parent or guardian of the screening results and the school's response.

Additional assessment and instruction: Additional diagnostic assessment and evidence-based curriculum and instruction for students demonstrating a substantial deficit in reading or dyslexia characteristics shall be determined by data-informed decision making within existing processes in accordance with federal and State guidance.

Reading instruction or intervention for students significantly below grade level: Evidence-based reading instructional practices, programs, or interventions provided pursuant to subsection (c) of this section shall be effective, explicit, systematic, and consistent with federal and state guidance and shall address the foundational concepts of literacy proficiency, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Annual reporting: Each supervisory union and approved independent school that is eligible to receive public tuition shall annually report to the Agency, by school: (A) the number and percentage of students in kindergarten through grade three performing below proficiency on local and statewide reading assessments, as applicable; and (B) the universal reading screeners utilized.

Literacy professional learning: Each supervisory union and each approved independent school that is eligible to receive public tuition shall provide professional learning activities to kindergarten through grade-three educators, to include all teachers and administrators, on implementing a reading screening assessment, interpreting the results, determining instructional practices for students, and communicating with families regarding screening results in a supportive way. The instructional practices, programs, or interventions included in the professional learning activities provided pursuant to this section shall be evidence-based, effective, explicit, systematic, and consistent with federal and State guidance and shall incorporate the foundational concepts of literacy proficiency, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Reading instruction: All students need to receive systematic and explicit evidence-based reading instruction in the early grades from a teacher who is skilled in teaching the foundational components of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Students who require intensive supplemental instruction tailored to the unique difficulties encountered shall be provided those additional supports by an appropriately trained education professional.

School literacy plan for approved independent schools: Approved independent schools that are eligible to receive public tuition shall develop a grade-level appropriate school literacy plan that is informed by student needs and assessment data.

Reading instruction and intervention: 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 schools shall provide supplemental reading instruction to any enrolled student whose reading proficiency falls below proficiency standards for the student's grade level or whose reading proficiency prevents progress in school.

Recommendations for teacher preparation: The Agency of Education shall submit recommendations to the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators on how to strengthen educator preparation programs' teaching of evidence-based literacy practices.

Advisory Council on Literacy: The Council shall advise the Agency of Education, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on how to improve proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12 and how to sustain those outcomes. The Council was expanded to include the State Librarian or

designee and representation from higher education, and adjusted to 4 meetings per year.

Literacy position at the Agency of Education: In fiscal year 2025, the conversion of one limited service position created in 2021 Acts and Resolves No. 28, Sec. 4, to one classified permanent status position within the Agency of Education is authorized. The position shall provide support to the Agency in its evidence-based literacy work.

Report on early childhood literacy resources: On or before January 15, 2025, the Department of Libraries shall submit a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education with recommendations for expanding access to early childhood literacy resources with a focus on options that target low-income or underserved areas of the State. Options considered shall include State or local partnership with or financial support for book gifting programs, book distribution programs, and any other compelling avenue for supporting early childhood literacy in Vermont.

Input to Support Act 139 Implementation

The Council reviewed input from members and their respective constituency groups to provide guidance for the Agency of Education to prioritize implementation efforts and support. Council members expressed appreciation for the careful attention from the Agency related to early literacy and Act 139 implementation. Members made note of literacy efforts and highlighted the need for continued support. The following were identified as the highest needs to support Act 139 implementation:

Member	Highest Needs to Support Act 139 Implementation
VT-NEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funds for systems to support students with dysregulations difficulties ● Accurate information ● Time for planning and preparation
VSBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funds for professional learning ● Funds for instructional materials ● Clearly identified metrics to monitor progress and performance
VTCLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funds for professional learning ● Professional learning on instructional practices ● Funds for instructional materials

Member	Highest Needs to Support Act 139 Implementation
VPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds for training (including funding for substitute teachers, as needed) • Funds for instructional materials
VISA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for instructional practices and assessment • Funds for instructional practices and assessment • Professional learning on instructional practices and assessment
VCSEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds for professional learning
VSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds for instructional materials • Funds for professional learning
Literacy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow all parts of Act 139 • Train teachers & administrators of criterion-referenced screening assessments, • Take actions based on student’s needs & continually monitoring progress

About the Council

Act 28 of 2021 Section 5 (Act 28), an act related to improving prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy within the State, was passed in May 2021 to provide funding and support for efforts to improve and sustain literacy outcomes. The act acknowledged the continuous nature of the work and efforts to improve literacy outcomes across the state and established funds to continue the work: funds for professional development on literacy; a temporary position at the Agency of Education focused on literacy; technical assistance and support for supervisory unions to implement systems-wide evidence-based literacy approaches; a review of teacher preparation and re-licensure to ensure teachers have literacy instruction in training and re-licensure; and an Advisory Council on Literacy to advise the Agency of Education, State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on ways to improve and sustain literacy outcomes.

Act 139 of 2024 (Act 139), an act related to supporting Vermont’s young readers through evidence-based literacy instruction, was passed in May 2024 to provide funding and requirements to strengthen literacy instruction and improve literacy achievement. The act found that effective teaching is based on evidence-based instruction of code-based and comprehension based skills; instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics,

fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension within a culturally responsive and inclusive setting. The Act creates funding and requirements in the following areas: assessment and intervention; parental notification; reading screeners; reading instruction; literacy plan for approved independent schools; literacy professional learning; teacher preparation recommendations; Advisory Council on Literacy; literacy position at the Agency of Education; and early childhood literacy resources report.

The Council is represented by roles outlined in Act 28 and Act 139. Council information, including agendas, minutes and related materials, is maintained and publicly available on the VT AOE web page for the Advisory Council on Literacy.

2024 Membership

- Catherine Campbell, Vermont-National Education Association
- Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Boards Association
- Gwen Carmolli, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, Council Chair
- Bill Clark, Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators
- Bev Davis, Vermont Superintendents Association, Executive Director Designee
- Catherine Delneo, Vermont Department of Libraries
- Jennifer Farnsworth, Vermont-National Education Association
- Michael Flanagan, Community Member
- Rommy Fuller-Young - Higher Education
- Cynthia Gardner-Morse, Community Member - Literacy Advocate
- Susan Gray, Vermont Independent Schools Association
- Charlie Gunkel, Community Member - Student
- Susan Koch, Vermont-National Education Association
- Darren McIntyre/Mary Lundeen, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators
- Beth O'Brien, Vermont Principals' Association, Council Vice Chair
- Anna Russo, Vermont Agency of Education Special Education Specialist
- Zoie Saunders, Vermont Agency of Education Secretary of Education
- Stacie Shields, Higher Education
- Donald Tinney, Vermont-National Education Association

Recommendations developed by the Council align with current state requirements Statute 2902 (16 V.S.A. § 2902), Statute 2903 (16 V.S.A. § 2903), Act 28, Act 173 & Vermont's Education Quality Standards (EQS), Act 139, and evidence-based practices in order to promote and sustain the improvement of literacy outcomes and close achievement gaps.

The Advisory Council on Literacy is deeply committed to increasing literacy outcomes for all students.

Summary of Council Work

Beginning in 2021, as established by Act 28, the Council has worked through tasks outlined in Act 28 and Act 139, to develop a set of recommendations that can be used to focus resources and efforts toward improving literacy outcomes. These recommendations reflect input from Council members and their respective constituency groups, alignment with evidence-based research and State literacy requirements, and voted approval from the Council.

Act 28 Task	Progress
Review literacy assessments and outcomes, and provide recommendations to continuously improve and sustain literacy improvements	Completed by the Council annually 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024
Provide recommendations on updates for Section 2903 of Title 16 (16 V.S.A. §2903), and support implementation and maintenance of the statewide literacy plan	Completed by the Council 2022
Provide recommendations for services to school districts on the implementation of the statewide literacy plan, and staffing needs at the Agency of Education to provide school districts' supports	Completed by the Council 2023
Provided recommendations for best practices in literacy instruction for tiers 1, 2, and 3, within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to improve and sustain literacy proficiency	Completed by the AOE as resources, reviewed by the Council 2023
Provide recommendations for collecting literacy-related data that informs instructional practices, teacher professional development, and literacy assessments	Completed by the Council 2024

Recommendations for 16 V.S.A. § 2903 Revisions (December 2021)

- Update language to conform with existing statutes and best practice language in the field (e.g. change “research-based” to “evidence-based” to align with current federal nomenclature)
- Expand literacy focus to early grades (PreK and kindergarten), as they are foundational learning years for future learning
- Expand supplemental reading instruction to learners who need support in any grade, not just after grade 4.

- Add a provision to 16 V.S.A. § 2903 to address alignment of assessments across grade levels to better inform instruction and achievement across time

Recommendations for Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade Revisions (December 2022)

- Keep information about assessment and MTSS in the Blueprint
- Provide resources and implementation recommendations on VTmtss, evidence-based instructional practices, comprehensive system of assessment, professional development, and training opportunities on the VT AOE website
- Add information about a comprehensive system of assessment of literacy in the next revision of the blueprint
- Follow action steps outlined in Statute 2902:
 - Provide professional development in evidence-based instructional practices
 - Provide professional development, as needed, to support all staff in full implementation of the multi-tiered system of support
 - Assist teachers to plan for and provide services and accommodations to students in need of classroom support or enrichment activities.
 - Provide necessary supports promptly, regardless of an individual student's eligibility for categorical programs
- Add/expand the following areas to the next Blueprint with related evidence-based instructional practices: code-based and meaning-based instruction, writing as a component of literacy, evidence-based instructional practices, early literacy and literacy stages of development, foundational skills, and comprehension
- Add language to the description of High Quality Instruction and Intervention to include evidence-based components of Structured Literacy
- Remove “Balanced Literacy Instruction” Header and adjust to reflect the content in this section (ex. “Instructional Practices,” or “Important Instructional Components”)
- Change focus and terminology from “Struggling Learner” to “All Students”, and expand information about instruction for struggling learners
- Ensure all students receive explicit, systematic, cumulative and diagnostic Structured Literacy in PreK through grade 3, and beyond as needed
- Include specific language to ensure students with disabilities and reading difficulties have access to multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
- Revise the Balanced Literacy Instruction section to describe comprehensive literacy instruction that includes: literacy development, evidence-based instruction practices for building code and meaning, evidence-based instructional practices for struggling readers.
- Develop and post an instructional guide for early literacy instruction
- Remove reference to “learning styles” from the Blueprint
- Provide evidence-based resources on effective instruction practices prior to the Blueprint revision

- Develop a brief 1–2 page summary of the current Blueprint that includes links to key resources and references
- Develop an implementation plan for the next Blueprint
- Consider ways to support literacy instruction and achievement beyond grade 3

Recommendations for Improvement Effort Priorities (December 2023)

- Develop strategies to address turnover, recruiting, and retention
- Specify a core of required curriculum and instructional expectations that are implemented in all schools statewide
- Ensure any mandate for instruction, curriculum, or assessment is made with a strategy for funding (no unfunded mandates)
- Select valid and reliable assessments for the purpose of statewide assessment, including kindergarten readiness assessments, formative assessments, and required grade-level accountability testing
- Support institutions of higher education to train an adequate number of early educators to ensure all children have access to highly prepared teachers
- Identify and recognize evidence-based programs aligned with ESSA requirements
- Curate a database of literacy materials that reflect cultural and linguistic diversity. Literacy resources reflect the breadth and depth of diversity

Recommendations on Improvement Efforts and Data Collection (December 2024)

- Maintain support for literacy improvement efforts
- Continue the Advisory Council on Literacy
- Provide funding for a literacy specialist position (1.0 FTE) at the Agency of Education
- Provide funding for resource development and professional learning opportunities
- Maintain data collection at the Supervisory Union/School district level SU/SD collect
- Expand the focus of literacy efforts to Adolescent Literacy

Considerations to support Act 139 Implementation (gathered input, December 2024)

- Provide funds for professional learning on evidence-based instructional practices
- Provide funds for evidence-based instructional materials
- Provide funds and support for planning and preparation
- Implement all aspects of Act 139
- Provide funds and staffing to support students struggling with dysregulation (social workers, social-emotional learning interventionists)

- Provide clear and accurate information on Act 139
- Articulate metrics to monitor progress and performance
- Provide funds for substitute teachers and stipends to support training and planning

Conclusion

This report serves as the final report for Act 28, reporting to the General Assembly, Agency of Education, and State Board of education, and the first report on Act 139, reporting to the Secretary of Education, on the work completed by the Council in 2024.

The collective efforts of the General Assembly, Agency of Education, State Board of Education, and educational community have guided improvements in literacy instruction. This shared commitment is strengthening literacy skills and expanding opportunities for students in the classroom and far beyond.

Though there is a great deal of work to be done, the collective commitment and recent improvements to instructional practices and outcomes should be celebrated.

Quite simply, thank you.