



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

# Report to the Colorado General Assembly: House Bill 08-1223

Submitted to:  
**Joint House and Senate Education Committees**  
and  
**Colorado State Board of Education**

By:  
**Colorado Department of Education**

January 2019



## Introduction

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House Bill 08-1223 created statutory provisions that encourage the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide support and training to educators on issues faced by students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. See section 22-2-133, C.R.S.

Specifically, the statute promotes technical assistance and training in the areas of awareness, assessment, identification, evidence-based progress monitoring, and scientifically-based interventions. Furthermore, the statute encourages the department to provide technical assistance and training to school districts, administrative units, residential treatment facilities, correctional facilities, and local education agencies in a coordinated effort with teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education.

The department has a strong vision for Colorado that has been enabled by several years of education policy and is anchored by our key initiatives:

1. Strong Foundations – Support high quality early learning and literacy for all students
2. More Options – Expand high school options to ensure all students are ready for college and/or living- wage jobs
3. All Means All – Expand access and opportunity to historically underserved student
4. Quality Schools – Prioritize and maximize support for schools and districts identified for academic improvements
5. Educators Matter – Develop a strong pipeline of high quality teachers and principals and provide deeper support for school and district leaders

These five key initiatives working together ensure that we are supporting students every step of the way throughout their education.

## Literacy Technical Assistance and Training

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### Overview

The department's support for literacy has been accomplished through cross-unit collaboration among the Teaching and Learning Unit and the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU). The primary areas of focus for the department's literacy work in the 2017-18 school year has been providing supports to Colorado school districts to better serve students who struggle with literacy, including those with dyslexia, through the continued implementation of the Colorado READ Act (House Bill 12-1238), and literacy training for teachers who serve students with disabilities. Through ongoing technical assistance and professional development, the department seeks to meet the needs of educators, administrators, and instructional leaders in supporting all students, including those with literacy challenges, in becoming competent readers.

### Continued Dyslexia Focus at the Department

**Dyslexia Focus Group:** The department launched a Dyslexia Focus Group in March of 2017. The Dyslexia Focus Group is comprised of 30 participants, representing parents, educators, literacy experts, professional organizations, school districts, public schools, private schools, institutions of higher



education, and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). The Dyslexia Focus Group began meeting regularly in the summer of 2017 and recently completed its final meeting having accomplished its initial goals of creating a Dyslexia Fact Sheet, developing a common definition and understanding of dyslexia, and forming recommendations for a state Dyslexia Handbook.

The culmination of the work was the convening of a Dyslexia Forum, hosted by CDE on December 12, 2018. The Dyslexia Forum featured Dr. Margie Gillis, a nationally known dyslexia researcher and founder of *Literacy How*, who spoke to parents, educators, and district-level administrators on best practices in addressing the instructional needs of students identified with dyslexia.

**Dyslexia Website:** In collaboration with the Dyslexia Focus Group, the department has launched a webpage specifically focused on dyslexia: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/dyslexia>. The webpage was the initial step in the group's work to create cohesive messaging and share resources with stakeholders supporting students at risk for reading difficulties. During the past year, this work has expanded to include the provision of a state-wide dyslexia listserv and the dissemination of a periodic newsletter.

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## Teaching and Learning Unit Initiatives

During the 2017-18 year, the department's Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) provided numerous professional development opportunities for teachers and other school professionals with responsibilities for addressing the needs of students with literacy challenges, including dyslexia. These opportunities included a statewide conference with a focus on reading, coursework, webinars, forums, and online self-paced courses all focused on high quality literacy instruction, with a specific focus on the literacy needs of students who are at risk for reading difficulties. The following section lists high-level details of the literacy activities provided by the TLU. The literacy efforts in the TLU are managed by the Literacy Program in the Preschool through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (P-3) Office. The Literacy Program provides support to Colorado districts, schools, and educators in effective reading assessment, instruction, and intervention through direct technical assistance and training as well as through online resources. This work includes supporting districts with the goals of the READ Act: early identification of and effective intervention for reading challenges for children in grades K-3. Thus, the implementation activities for the READ Act enacted by the Literacy Program are reported here.

- **The 2018 REAding Conference:** The Literacy Program, in partnership with the ESSU, hosted the fifth annual conference, which was open and free to K-3 teachers, interventionists, special educators, reading coaches, school leaders, and district leaders. The conference focused on direct and explicit instruction. Notable presenters included Dr. Anita Archer and Lucy Hart Paulson who addressed topics on literacy instruction and the latest research on learning to read. The conference was attended by nearly 600 individuals from all regions across the state. Attendance continues to grow each year.
- **Fundamentals of Literacy Instruction:** The department continued to provide *Fundamentals of Literacy Instruction* training at no charge to Colorado school districts. This training opportunity focused on explicit and systematic universal instruction in reading with an emphasis on foundational reading skills grounded in the standards. This professional development opportunity was attended by general education teachers, special education teachers, reading interventionists,



instructional coaches, paraprofessionals and principals. Approximately 236 educators from across Colorado participated during the 2017-18 school year. Since the 2014-15 school year, 1,702 teachers, school, and district leaders have been trained in 72 sessions across the state.

- **Professional Development Related to Early Literacy, Birth to Kindergarten.** The Early Learning Language and Literacy Sequences, available through Colorado's Professional Development Information System, are self-paced, online courses that provided teachers with background information on evidence-based strategies to promote language and literacy development, prevent future reading problems, early identification of potential reading difficulties, and support struggling learners. These courses were available to Colorado teachers free of charge. Over 2,500 early childhood educators have participated in this professional development opportunity.
- **Technical Assistance Related to K-3 Literacy.** The department's P-3 Office, through regional literacy consultants, provided ongoing literacy support and technical assistance to schools and districts across the state. The technical assistance consisted of support for data analysis, coaching, consulting, and professional development sessions as requested by schools, districts, and BOCES.
- **The Early Literacy Grant Program:** This competitive grant program, part of the READ Act, supports comprehensive, high quality literacy instruction through a school-wide approach. During the 2017-18 school year, the department supported 32 schools through the grant program. Grant schools are required to use evidence-based reading strategies. Schools in the grant program are provided ongoing technical assistance from CDE and work with a literacy consultant to support instructional leaders and teachers with implementation. These grant schools are also provided access to professional development through the grant on the essential components of reading instruction as well as data interpretation and analysis.
- **Early Literacy Assessment Tool Project:** This project, funded through the School Finance Act, involved 142 districts and the Charter School Institute. Support provided by this project included licensing for approved READ Act assessments, professional development on data analysis, best practices with data-driven instruction, mapping of student assessment results to early literacy foundational skills, and effective progress monitoring. Participants also had the opportunity to access courses offered through an online learning platform providing easier access to teachers in rural Colorado school districts.

## Exceptional Student Services Unit Initiatives

The ESSU provided numerous professional development opportunities for special education teachers and other school professionals with responsibilities for addressing the needs of students that demonstrate literacy challenges, including dyslexia. These opportunities included workshops, online courses, webinars, seminars, and institutes developed to address the specific literacy needs of students with disabilities. The following section lists literacy activities provided by the ESSU during the 2017-18 school year.

- **Structured Literacy Project:** During the year, the ESSU continued implementation of the Structured Literacy Project. The Project was initiated in 2014-15 as part of Colorado's State Systemic Improvement Plan as required by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Services. The project is being implemented in 22 elementary schools, with the goal to significantly increase the total numbers of students in grades K through 3 reaching grade level reading performance. The project focused on professional learning, coaching, and leadership



training to teachers and instructional leaders. Each school had an embedded CDE literacy coach to support the implementation of evidence-based strategies. The ESSU continues to devote two literacy specialists and six literacy coaches to this project.

- **Colorado Assistive Technology Partners:** Professional development opportunities provided in collaboration with the University of Colorado Denver prioritized evidence-based practices in literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Funding from the ESSU supported three trainings to promote literacy achievement for students with disabilities utilizing assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder and Literacy:** ESSU provided a webinar series that provided an introduction to reading comprehension for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder for over 100 participants across the state. The training addressed the cognitive profiles common in autism and their influence on reading comprehension. In addition, the training provided a framework for developing quality literacy instruction for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- **Building Blocks of Brain Development:** These trainings were offered in 18 sites over the course of the 2017-18 school year. Approximately 1,000 individuals, including school administrators, child find teams, special education providers, facilities personnel, community providers, hospital teachers, case workers, and parents participated in the training. Participants learned about brain development, the types of disruptions that may occur in brain development, and how development differences may effect learning and behavior. A framework to address the needs of students struggling with the development of literacy skills, math, and language development was also presented.
- **Professional Development Related to Students with Deaf-Blindness and/or Significant Support Needs:** The Colorado Services for Children and Youth with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss Project, housed within the ESSU, offered four statewide trainings involving approximately 100 participants to support the emergent and/or the conventional literacy development of students with deaf-blindness and significant support needs.
- **Professional Development Related to Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** During the 2017-18 school year, the ESSU significantly increased its efforts to improve literacy skills for students who are identified as deaf and hard of hearing. ESSU utilized its annual Deaf Education Conference and the Colorado Deaf/Hard of Hearing Mentor Program to support deaf education teachers in using evidence-based practices to teach literacy skills to students identified as deaf/hard of hearing. Over the course of the 2017-18 school year, additional trainings were sponsored by CDE to improve literacy outcomes for students. These included the following training opportunities for Colorado's deaf education teachers and school leaders:
  - Foundations of Literacy;
  - Evidence Based Practice: Using Assessment to Inform Literacy Goals; and
  - Instruction for Learners Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
- **Professional Development Related to Students with Specific Learning Disability:** During the 2017-18 school year, several trainings were presented through ESSU which focused on meeting the needs of educational leaders, special education teachers, and special services providers to improve reading achievement and outcomes for students identified with a specific learning



disability. These included the following training opportunities for Colorado teachers and school leaders:

- Learning Disabilities: Identification and Evaluation Processes
  - Individualized Problem Solving within a Response to Intervention System
  - Getting Reading Accommodations Right: Practical Tools for Data Driven Decision Making
  - 2018 Mindfulness Professional Learning Series
  - Language and Literacy
- **Professional Development Related to Students with Visual Impairment, Including Blindness:**  
The ESSU's focus on support for students with a visual impairment, including blindness, has been to ensure that teachers of the blind/visually impaired demonstrate braille competency and have access to training and technical assistance that supports the use of effective strategies to deliver appropriate, evidence-based instruction.

## Conclusion

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The issues faced by students with literacy challenges can make it very difficult for these learners to experience academic success across the curriculum. Providing training and technical assistance to Colorado educators to support all students in reaching reading proficiency and ultimately academic success is an important aspect of the role of the department.

In the coming year, the department will continue to collaborate across units in working with varying stakeholders to support the needs of students who have literacy challenges, including those with dyslexia. We are committed to supporting educators and instructional leaders as they serve these students and determine ways to better support the families of these students.