

READ Act Guidance for Students who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing



READ Act Implementation for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students in Grades K-3

Achieving reading competency by the end of third grade is a critical milestone for every student and is a predictor of ongoing educational success. Early literacy development is not only critical to a child's success, but it is also one of Colorado's top education priorities. The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act), passed by the Colorado Legislature in 2012, highlights the importance of early literacy development for all students and especially for students at risk of not achieving third grade reading proficiency. The READ Act focuses on kindergarten through third grade literacy development, literacy assessment, and individual READ plans for students reading significantly below grade level.

Colorado local education providers (defined as a school district, a board of cooperative services, a district charter school, or an institute charter school) have the authority to approach implementation of the READ Act for students with hearing differences in ways that are appropriate for their local context and individual needs of students and are responsible for doing so in alignment with the requirements and intent of the READ Act and in compliance with other relevant state and federal guidelines. Recognizing the unique language and literacy needs and opportunities of students with hearing differences to become proficient readers in English, the Colorado Department of Education has created this guidance for implementation of the READ Act as it relates to learners who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (D/HH). This guidance has been designed to provide parameters for districts to use when creating and implementing local policies and practices to support the literacy development of students with hearing differences. This includes students who may receive language instruction in English and American Sign Language (ASL) as well as literacy instruction bridging ASL and English in print.

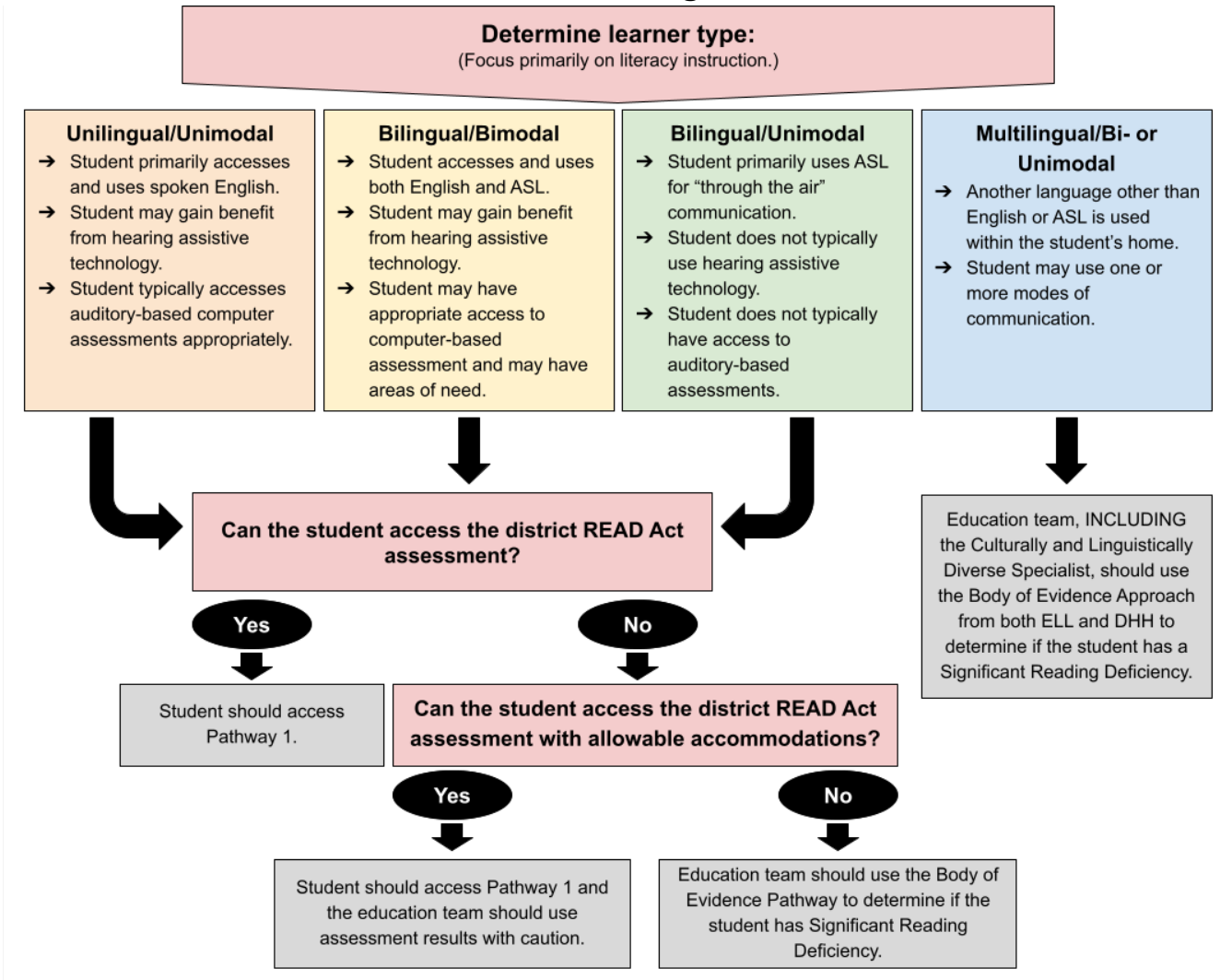
Supporting the language and literacy development of learners who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing requires instruction and programming reflective of their unique language and learning needs. Education teams should identify a student's primary language, i.e., ASL, English, or combination of languages and/or including another language as identified in the [Home Language Survey](#). The team may also identify that the student has experienced language deprivation and, as a result, possesses minimal language skills, and will need additional language development intervention.

Students who use ASL as their primary language are similar to multilingual learners as they are both acquiring more than one language and often navigate more than one language in most environments. Students who use ASL benefit from the opportunity to develop both languages simultaneously



through comparisons, translation, and explicit instruction in English and ASL. It is important to note that some students with hearing differences who use English as their primary language may still experience gaps in their syntax, vocabulary, and language comprehension development. It is essential to identify these gaps and provide specialized instruction to support the growth of grade-level literacy skills. The following section provides guidance to educational teams on how to determine an appropriate assessment pathway for determining the presence of a significant reading deficiency.

Determining Eligibility for READ Act Differentiated Pathway 3 for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing:



Step One: Identify the Student’s “Learner Type”

To evaluate whether a student is experiencing a significant reading deficiency, the educational team will need to determine the student’s learner type as related to **literacy instruction**. Throughout the rest of this document, students with hearing differences will be described as one of the following



types of learners: Unilingual/Unimodal, Bilingual/Bimodal, Bilingual/Unimodal or *Multilingual/Bi-or Unimodal.

These terms have been adapted from the work released by Lederberg, Branum-Marton, Webb, Schick, Antia, Easterbrooks, & Connor (2019).

Unilingual/Unimodal

Students identified in this category have auditory access to spoken language and primarily access and use spoken English. Many of the students within this category use amplification devices and will often have Bluetooth access to auditory assessments delivered through a digital device.

Bilingual/Bimodal

Students identified in this category have some level of auditory access to spoken language. They access and use some level of spoken English and ASL receptively and/or expressively. Some students may use sign language and spoken English simultaneously while others may use ASL or English depending on their communication partner and the communication environment. These students may have inconsistent or incomplete access to auditory assessments proctored through a digital device.

Bilingual/Unimodal

Students identified in this category have limited to no measurable auditory access to spoken language. They communicate through the air primarily using ASL or some form of sign language. Typically these students will not have access to speech sounds presented auditorily. English is accessed primarily through print.

Multilingual/Bi- or Unimodal*

Students identified in this category may use more than one primary language and may communicate in one or more modes of communication. Another language other than English or ASL is used in the home. Students in this category may have limited to no measurable English proficiency; however, they are still labeled as multilingual learners. For multilingual students using spoken language, refer to the [Read Act Guidance for English Learners \(ELs\)](#).

Multilingual/Bi- or Unimodal students may not follow a typical progression of skills, the education team is encouraged to collaborate with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Educators when determining the focus for skill development and instructional strategies specific to these students.

Some examples of considerations may include:

- Use of a Language Screener - determine if the student possesses an adequate amount of home language to assess literacy skills in the home language/s and identify the student's strengths for each language used.
- Access the student has in all languages used in their different environments - do they have access to single/multiple spoken home language(s)? Is this in addition to the use of ASL and/or other formal sign languages at home?
- Cultural literacy considerations such as:



- Oral/Signing storytelling traditions rather than the reading of printed books at home
- Cultural schema/experiences impacting prior knowledge i.e. landscape, foods, traditions, homes, stores, places within the community
- Phonemes, inflectional tones and accents in languages which provide meaning to words in language that students with hearing differences may not have access to
- Length of time in country, in school and access to literacy in their first language

**More information for students who are Multilingual/Bi-or Unimodal will be released in the 2025-26 school year.*

Step 2: Measure Auditory Access

Education teams can begin by reviewing the student's audiogram to determine the expected level of access. Next, it is essential to look beyond hearing acuity and consider equipment that will be used for assessment to determine if the expected level of output matches the actual level of access. This could be done using one or more of the following:

- Computer based FLE
- Computer based Ling Sounds
- Practice Test Items
- Audiobooks (ask clarifying questions after a student has listened to a short story)
- Teacher observation
- Performance of other programs/platforms (i.e. iStation, Lexia, DreamBox, i-Ready, Vooks, Epic Books)

Determining a Student's Level of Access to Computer-Based Assessments Containing Auditory Components

Many of the assessments used for the READ Act are conducted exclusively on the computer. While many students can appropriately access these assessments in digital format, it is crucial for team members to carefully evaluate each student's ability to access an automated computerized voice. Overlooking this could affect the student's achievement score and result in inappropriate goals and interventions. Review the following statements to ensure the team accurately determines the student's access to the assessment.

- Preview the assessment to determine what components and to what extent audition is required.
- Determine individual student access to each component of the assessment: i.e., is the section focused on letter/sound matching, listening for morphological components or reading comprehension?
- Is the student familiar with all of the test functions and accessibility options? Many young students may not be familiar enough with the test to know they must click a button on each section: therefore, instruction, practice and reminders are essential to using accessibility features.
- Check student knowledge of assessment buttons (i.e., each section has a "speaker button" to click along the way in order to hear the auditory presentation).



- Confirm the assessment is accessible/valid by listening in and compare to known performance skills.
- For students who use assistive technology to access spoken language, the following equipment options may support improved access to computer generated assessments resulting in more accurate assessment results: Bluetooth connection, direct audio input cords, computer type, DM/hearing assistive technology, speaker system, splitter for staff member to listen in, headphones, etc.
- Consult with the district educational audiologist to determine the best amplification and connectivity option/s for the student.
- Technology troubleshooting techniques may include:
 - Educational Audiologist/Teacher of the Deaf should perform technology checks of all equipment being used each time prior to administering an assessment.
 - Type and age of computers may impact connectivity and sound quality. If a student comments about the sound quality or if assessment results differ from classroom performance, the education team may want to consider giving the assessment using a different device.
 - Regularly check cables and ports. Over time with “student use,” auxiliary cables and ports tend to fray or break.
 - Check Bluetooth connected devices with a functional listening check. A device may indicate it is connected when in fact it is not. Use open ended questions to determine connectivity. For example, rather than asking “Is it working?” or “Can you hear the computer?” ask the student specifically what they are hearing such as “What phrase did you hear the computer voice say?” or “What sound did the computer ask you to repeat?”

Step 3: Determine Appropriate Assessment Pathway

Students with Proven Auditory Access to Assessments:

These students should follow the same pathway as their peers without hearing differences, and the determination of a significant reading deficiency (SRD) should be conducted in the same manner, without any alterations.

Students with Some Auditory Access to Assessment:

These students may be assessed using allowable accommodations, a pencil/paper version of the assessment, or an alternate assessment used by the district. This group of students may also access accommodations such as a human reader, extended time, and additional visual supports, as appropriate. All accommodations must be documented. If an "unallowable" accommodation is used, it should be noted that the resulting score is no longer standardized, and additional information may need to be gathered. For students in 1st grade and higher, the overall comprehension score should be prioritized. Students who are unable to comprehend written English at grade level, should be flagged for a significant reading deficiency (SRD). Before creating a READ Plan, the team should identify any gaps in the data and decide what additional assessments or information might be needed to fully understand the student’s strengths, challenges, and areas requiring support. This process



ensures that the READ Plan is tailored to the specific needs of the student, providing targeted interventions and support.

Students with Minimal or no Measurable Auditory Access:

These students should be assessed using a body of evidence approach. In this method, certain components linked to phonology may be adapted to include ASL phonology, and/or phonemic awareness may be replaced with visual tools such as visual phonics or cued speech. It is crucial to recognize that this group of students may be at a higher risk for experiencing language deprivation, which can significantly affect their overall development, particularly in acquiring language and literacy skills. The next section will offer guidance on how to begin using the Body of Evidence Documents associated with the READ Act Differentiated Pathway 3 for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students.

The Body of Evidence Document

A specific Body of Evidence tool exists for each grade level from Kindergarten through Third Grade. These documents outline the minimum literacy skills that a student should master by the end of each grade, along with the corresponding ASL standards that align with those literacy skills. Within each category, skills are listed from the simplest to the most complex, and the categories themselves are also arranged from simplest to most complex. BEFORE using these documents review how they are set-up and the functions within the document below:

- [Body of Evidence Kindergarten Document](#)
- [Body of Evidence First Grade Document](#)
- [Body of Evidence Second Grade Document](#)
- [Body of Evidence Third Grade Document](#)

Body of Evidence Document Design

Each Body of Evidence tool contains five sheets with tabs at the bottom notating the purpose of each sheet. Below is a picture of the tabs that are available within each grade-level tool.

Student Profile ▾ Beginning of the Year ▾ Middle of the Year ▾ End of the Year ▾ Data Collection ▾

The green filled cells are coded to auto-populate information from another sheet. DO NOT write in green filled cells as it will cause formula deletion removing the intended function. If you write in these cells, it will delete the formula and take away the intended function.:

1. **Student Profile:** This first sheet includes the student's name, grade, and the current school year. Once this information is filled out it will auto-populate this in all of the proceeding sheets. Other information details about the student's audiological access to literacy instruction, current language skills, modes of communication used, and relevant considerations is also included. Below this information is a chart listing the literacy skills appropriate for the student's grade level. The "Area of Focus" column automatically populates with focus areas identified in sheets 2-4. The



team can use the other columns to document goals related to these focus areas and track progress. If the district uses another tool for documenting goals and progress monitoring, it is up to the district to decide how to use this part of the document.

2. Beginning of Year: The next three sheets—Beginning, Middle, and End of Year—have the same features and functions. They are designed to help identify the student's current performance level at different points in the school year. At the top of each document, there is a link to the Minimum Reading Competencies, which provides further details about the skills listed and offers suggestions for interventions. There is also a link to videos showcasing the ASL standards referenced throughout the document. Additionally, links to the ASL skills are included in the rows where each ASL standard is listed.

- When measuring skills, the team should assess whether the student is performing at grade level or above (marked as 3 - On Track), within 6 months of their grade/age level (marked as 2 - Some Risk), or more than 6 months behind their peers (marked as 1 - High Risk).
- Keep in mind that skills are listed from simplest to most complex. If the student is at some risk or high risk with the top skill, the team can stop assessing the student.
- There may be several skills listed as High or Some risk. In this case, focus on the “simpler” skill as an area of immediate focus before moving on to the next skill.

3. Middle of Year: This sheet functions similarly to the Beginning of Year Tab, providing an opportunity to assess and record the student's progress in the middle of the school year.

4. End of Year: This sheet mirrors the previous ones but is used for the final assessment at the end of the school year.

5. Data Collection: This sheet is used to compile and organize information about how data was collected for the student. It includes details such as the specific assessments or work products that were used, the methods of administering the assessments, and any accommodations or modifications that were applied during the assessment process.

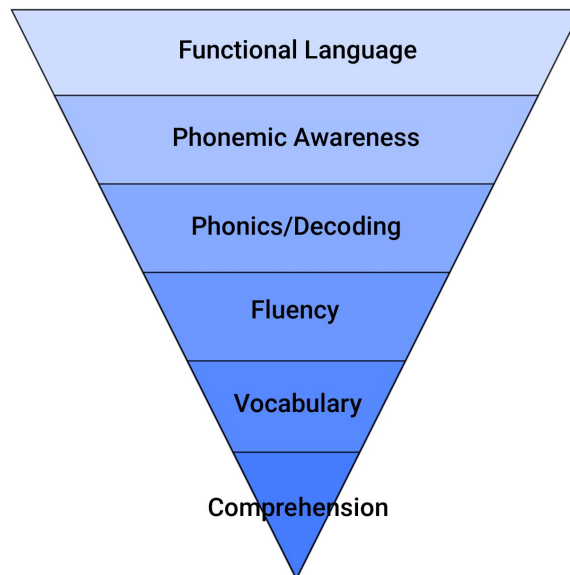
Entry Point for Using the Differentiated Pathway

There are four distinct categories of students that educational teams may consider when reviewing individual needs, which differ from the four types of D/HH learners. Each category has a unique entry point for assessment. The four categories include:

1. New Kindergarten students.
2. New 1st-3rd grade students.
3. 1st-3rd grade students currently on a READ plan.
4. 1st-3rd grade students on an IEP but not on a READ plan.

The skills listed in the documents are based on the assumption that the student has foundational “through the air” language skills, whether spoken or visual. If the educational team believes that a student may lack foundational language skills, they should start the evaluation or record review process by assessing the student’s language acquisition and development. This approach applies to students in any of the four identified categories.

The next section will describe how to begin using the Differentiated Pathway. Throughout each section, references will be made to Reading Fluency and Pedagogical Hierarchy. The graphic has been adjusted so that the foundational skills that should be taught or acquired first are now positioned at the top, progressing to more complex skills listed below. This layout corresponds with the sequence in the Body of Evidence Documents, except for the Functional Language component, which is not explicitly detailed in the BoE document.



1. New Kindergarten Students

First, it’s important to understand how your district implements the READ Act for all first-time kindergarten students and ensure that your process aligns with these guidelines. After the team is familiar with district policy and procedures the team should follow these steps:

- Educational team should review all available information about the student’s current language abilities, considering both ASL and English as applicable.
- For students who have already received interventions or attended preschool, the team should examine records and track progress in both language and pre-literacy skills.
- In alignment with district practices, the team may need to administer additional assessments to measure current language skills and pre literacy skills to establish a beginning of the year.
- When appropriate, the ASL “replacement” skills should be assessed for students unable to access specific phonological and phonemic awareness tasks on an assessment.



- Students who show a delay of more than 6 months in either language acquisition and/ or phonological and phonemic awareness should be provided with a READ Plan, and interventions should be targeted to address their specific skill gaps.

2. New 1st - 3rd grade students

Teams working with students who are new to the district or the state who have not been assessed to determine the need for a READ Plan, the team should follow these steps:

- The educational team should review existing records that detail the student's language achievement.
- If the documentation shows that the student's language skills are significantly below grade or age norms, the team should determine whether additional assessment data is needed in the area of language development, considering both ASL and English skills as appropriate.
- The educational team should then review the Body of Evidence for the grade level below the entry grade (e.g., if the student is entering 2nd grade, the team should review the 1st grade BoE document).
- If the student does not demonstrate mastery of the skills listed in the BoE document, **starting with the most complex skill** of comprehension, the student will qualify for a READ Plan.
- The educational team should establish a starting point for the student by assessing and/or observing their skills to determine an appropriate baseline.
- When appropriate, the ASL “replacement” skills should be assessed for students unable to access specific phonological and phonemic awareness tasks.
- Once a baseline is established, the educational team should develop a READ Plan with targeted interventions that address the student’s specific skill gaps.

3. 1st - 3rd grade students currently on a READ plan

Teams working with 1st-3rd grade students who currently have a READ plan should follow these steps:

- Review the current READ Plan and compare the goals and focus areas with other evidence from various data sources.
- If the educational team believes that the current plan is comprehensive and contains enough information for interventions that address the student's language and literacy needs, continue using it as is.
- If the educational team believes that there are gaps in the plan, they should review the steps listed in the “New 1st-3rd Grade Student” section and determine appropriate next steps.
- Use the information from the Body of Evidence to create or adjust the READ plan, ensuring that it includes targeted interventions to address the student's specific skill gaps.

4. 1st - 3rd grade students on an IEP but not on a READ plan

Teams working with 1st-3rd grade students on an IEP but the student does not have a READ Plan should follow these steps:



- Administer the grade-level reading comprehension assessment used by the district
- If the student is able to show mastery of grade level comprehension (with extended time as appropriate) there is no need for further action.
- If the student does not show mastery of grade-level comprehension, continue assessing the student's skills in vocabulary and fluency.
- If the student shows more than a 6-month delay in these areas, the team should review language skills in both English and ASL as appropriate.
- Based on the evaluations, refer to the guidance provided in the categories listed above to determine the next steps for assessment and create an appropriate intervention plan.



READ Plans and Intervention Programming for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Before creating an appropriate READ Plan for a student with a hearing difference the educational team should have:

1. **Comprehensive Understanding of Language Abilities:** The educational team must thoroughly understand the student's language abilities, including which languages they use (e.g., ASL, spoken English) and how effectively they can access each language. For students whose first language is American Sign Language, early identification and intervention is critical because research has shown that students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing with a strong foundation in ASL are capable of developing literacy skills at the same rate as hearing peers (Maybeberry & Locke, 2003).
2. **Assessment of Language Access:** It's essential to evaluate the student's ability to access language, considering both receptive (understanding) and expressive (communication) aspects in their preferred languages.
3. **Qualified Intervention Providers:** Professionals delivering reading interventions should have:
 - Expertise in research-based reading instruction methods.
 - A deep understanding of the student's individualized needs, including their strengths and challenges.
 - Knowledge of how the student's hearing difference specifically impacts their ability to access reading instruction and develop literacy skills.

The focus is on ensuring that interventions are tailored to the unique needs of the student, considering both their hearing differences and language use, to support effective literacy development.

Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing with limited auditory access, and who use ASL should have access to ASL language models **and** direct instruction of ASL by a qualified professional. Students should be instructed in the five core components of literacy including the aligned ASL standards embedded in the Body of Evidence document. Reading intervention should supplement, rather than supplant, the core reading instruction provided to all students as part of a layered continuum of tiered supports. For students displaying significant language acquisition delays, intervention should focus on language development, in all modes used by the child. Measurable goals should be set, with both short-term and long-term benchmarks related to language acquisition.

The rules for the implementation of the READ Act also define the attributes of effective targeted and intensive literacy intervention instruction that may be necessary when a student is at risk for reading difficulties. Provided in addition to core literacy instruction, literacy intervention instruction should meet the following standards regardless of hearing levels:

- address one or more of the five components of reading with intentional focus on identified area(s) of deficit according to interim and diagnostic assessments (phonemic awareness,



phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency including language in the air), and reading comprehension).

- be delivered with sufficient intensity, frequency, urgency, and duration.
- be guided by data from diagnostic, interim, and observational assessments focused on students' areas of need.
- be directed by a qualified teacher in the teaching of reading and language acquisition as appropriate.
- utilize a scope and sequence that is delivered explicitly with judicious review, allowing for active and engaged students.
- be delivered in a one-on-one or small group format.

Literacy intervention instruction for students with hearing differences should be carefully planned to provide the individualized linguistic supports and scaffolds necessary to ensure that these students can access the content of the intervention and should be provided in addition to, not in place of, core literacy instruction unless otherwise determined by the IEP team.

Creating opportunities in core programming and intervention instruction to honor and utilize a student's primary language and/or mode and the student's experiences can enhance and encourage development of new literacy skills. Providing support to family members to enable continued communication and language development at home will also help support the growth of the student's language and literacy skills across all environments.

Definitions

ASL- American Sign Language (ASL): A formally recognized visual language used primarily by Deaf communities in the United States and most of Anglophone Canada. ASL relies on manual signs, facial expressions, and body movements. ASL has its own unique rules of grammar and syntax, distinct from English. It serves as the formal sign language of the United States and English-speaking Canada.

Body of Evidence: A collection of information about a student's academic performance which, when considered in its entirety, documents the level of a student's academic performance. A body of evidence, at a minimum, shall include scores on formative or interim assessments and work that a student independently produces in a classroom, including but not limited to the school readiness assessments adopted pursuant to section 22-7-1004(2)(a), C.R.S. A body of evidence may include scores on summative assessments if a local education provider decides that summative assessments are appropriate and useful in measuring students' literacy skills. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Communication: The process of exchanging messages or information between two or more people.

Diagnostic Assessment: A state board-approved assessment which schools are required to use for students' identified weaknesses and provide in-depth information about students' skills and instructional needs.

Educational Team: Includes individuals providing reading instruction/intervention and professionals who have knowledge of the student's unique learning needs

Interim Assessment: A universal screening assessment administered to all students to identify who may experience lower than expected reading outcomes and who may be at risk for reading challenges.

Language: A structured system that includes grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. It enables individuals to express complex ideas and emotions.

Language Delay: A condition a child experiences when the child's language skills develop more slowly than typical for their age. This can affect their ability to understand or use language effectively. There are two main types: **receptive language delay** (difficulty understanding language) and **expressive language delay** (difficulty speaking or forming sentences).

Language Deprivation: Occurs when an individual, often a child, lacks sufficient exposure to language during critical developmental periods. This can significantly impact their ability to acquire and use language effectively. This may be due to late identification of the hearing loss, lack of



consistent hearing technology use, lack of responsible benefit from hearing technology, lack of early intervention, and/or lack of exposure to sign language. Significant language intervention is required to support language and effective communication acquisition.

Local Education Provider: A school district, a board of cooperative services, a district charter school, or an institute charter school. *In this guidance, the terms local education provider and district are used synonymously.

Multilingual Learner (ML): For the purpose of this document we will use the federal definition of English Learner (EL) when referring to ML students. The federal government defines EL learners who are either born in another country or whose native language is something other than English or ASL. Although some states have changed their state law to include native ASL users, Colorado is still using the federal definition.

Other Primary Language: Students who use another primary language other than ASL or English are considered Multilingual Learners, as described by the federal definition, and the guidance for instruction and READ Act requirements are a combination of this document and the document specific to [Multilingual Learners](#).

Rating Scale for the Body of Evidence Document:

- **1 (High Risk)** = showing more than a 6-month delay in skill development
- **2 (Some Risk)** = showing 1-6 month delay in skill development
- **3 (On-Track)** = on grade/age level or above in skill development

Reading to Ensure Academic Development Plan (READ Plan): An intervention plan created to remediate a student's significant reading deficiency. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD): A student does not meet the minimum skill levels for reading competency in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral skills, and reading comprehension established by the state board for the student's grade level. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Sign Language: For the purpose of this document, "Sign Language" is a more global term that refers to different Sign systems (i.e. SEE or ASL signs, PSE) that are often presented in English word order using English syntax and grammar rules.

Through the air: Language presented in the air whether it is through a visual or spoken mode.



Other Resources

[READ Plan Checklist](#): The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act) states specific processes and elements to be a part of READ Plan creation and ongoing support. This resource document will review the required elements designated in legislation for READ Plan creation as well as what is required for ongoing, active READ Plans.

[Kindergarten School Readiness and READ Plans](#): This webinar includes background information on required Kindergarten assessments in Colorado, how to use the problem-solving process across these assessments, and the requirements and flexibilities in documentation in creating and maintaining individual student plans.

[Parent Communication](#): Talking points to cover with parents upon implementing a READ Plan

[READ Plan Template](#): Fillable PDF document includes all essential components of a READ Plan

References

[Mayberry, R.I., & Locke, E. \(2003\). Age constraints on first versus second language acquisition: Evidence for linguistic plasticity and epigenesis. *Brain and Language*, 87\(3\), 369–384. \[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0093-934X\\(03\\)00137-8\]\(https://doi.org/10.1016/S0093-934X\(03\)00137-8\)](#)

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WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- To learn more visit the [Colorado READ Act website](#)
- Learn more about the [Colorado READ Act Assessments](#)
- Contact Shauna Moden @ Moden_s@cde.state.co.us with specific questions about the READ and implementation for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing