



2021 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE Colorado READ Act



COLORADO
Department of Education





Table of Contents

Letter from Commissioner of Education	4
About the Colorado READ Act	5
Impact of COVID on READ Act	8
Implementation of SB19-199	9
K-3 Teacher Training Requirements	10
Independent Evaluation	13
READ Per-Pupil Intervention Budget Approval	14
LEP Reporting through Unified Improvement Plans	16
Public Information Campaign	17
Early Literacy Grant Program	18
Early Literacy Assessment Tools	24
Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant	26
What's on the Horizon	27



Letter from Commissioner of Education

The 2020-21 school year finds Colorado schools continuing to adapt to the unique challenges of responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Colorado educators, education leaders, and families worked hard to support students through the challenges of learning amidst uncertainty.

In many cases, they had to adapt repeatedly to changes in learning mode -- supporting students while learning remotely, learning in school with health safety measures in place and learning with a hybrid approach that incorporates some in-person and some remote instruction.

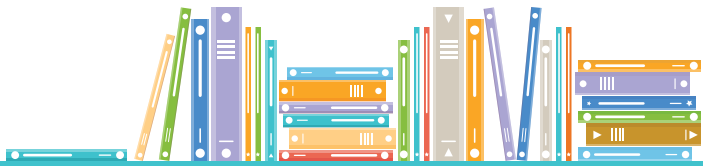
The pandemic created challenges for implementation of some aspects of the Colorado READ Act, so the information the Colorado Department of Education is providing in this annual READ Act legislative report will look a little different. Due to the suspension of in-person instruction in the spring of 2020, teachers were unable to administer annual READ Act assessments and reporting so unlike past years, CDE does not have reading achievement data to report. Instead, this year's report will focus on implementation progress on key components of Senate Bill 19 - 199 (S.B. 19-199), which instituted significant changes to the READ Act to improve early reading outcomes. The report will also provide information on the impact of the pandemic on these implementation efforts.



While the content and format of this year's report has changed, CDE's commitment to advancing evidence-based reading instruction and reading achievement has not changed. The department is dedicated to supporting teachers, school and district leaders, the State Board of Education, and the legislature in meeting the intent of the Colorado READ Act: all children reading at grade level by third grade.

Sincerely,

Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner



About the Colorado READ Act

For a number of years, the state of Colorado has prioritized early literacy because of its foundational importance to academic success.

Research shows that students who struggle with reading in third grade rarely reach the academic level of their grade-level peers and are four times more likely to drop out of high school, creating a lifelong impact. Realizing the significance of these consequences, the Colorado legislature passed a third-grade reading initiative, referred to as the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act in 2012.

The READ Act was designed to ensure every student in Colorado achieves reading competency by the end of the third grade. To achieve this goal, the READ Act requires early identification of reading difficulties and the use of effective interventions to overcome the identified reading deficiencies. The statute calls for educators to administer interim assessments each fall to all students in kindergarten through third grade to determine whether they are making adequate progress toward grade level-reading competency. If students are found to be reading significantly below grade level, educators then administer an additional diagnostic assessment to uncover the areas of greatest need for reading development for the student. A plan for progress toward grade-level competency (called a READ plan) is developed in collaboration with the educator and the student's family, and remains in place until the student reaches the goal of reading at grade level. Figure 1 illustrates the READ Act in action.





Figure 1: The READ Act in Action





In 2019, with the full support of the Colorado State Board of Education, the Colorado General Assembly re-doubled its efforts to prioritize early literacy by strengthening the READ Act through the unanimous passage of Senate Bill 19-199 (S.B. 19-199). This update to the READ Act initiated changes for Colorado districts including increased accountability for the use of READ per-pupil dollars, the requirement to use evidence-based reading instructional and intervention programs, and a new requirement to ensure that teachers in kindergarten through third grade complete training in scientifically or evidence-based reading practices to support high quality reading instruction and interventions. S.B. 19-199 also required CDE to partner with an external evaluator to determine bright spots of implementation as well as areas for improvement.

Furthermore, the update to the law required CDE to provide greater monitoring of READ fund use, and collect information on reading instructional and intervention programs used by districts through unified improvement plans. Finally, S.B. 19-199 provided funding to CDE to initiate a public information campaign to increase awareness of the importance of early reading to the future academic success of students.





Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the State Board of Education adopted rules to support the implementation of the new provisions of S.B. 19-199.

This action occurred during the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly thereafter, Gov. Jared Polis, along with governors across the country, took the unprecedented step of halting in-person learning to ensure public safety. This abrupt change to the delivery of education has had an impact on the implementation of the new rules and this law.

The sudden switch to remote learning upended the routines of families, students, and educators and required consideration of how to implement many state education policies in a remote environment. CDE reviewed READ Act requirements to determine which elements would need to be adjusted or suspended to accommodate this new reality. Once the review was completed, CDE staff worked with the State Board of Education and the Governor's Office to make necessary policy adjustments. The department determined that it was necessary to suspend the collection end-of-year READ assessment information due to the challenge of remote administration of assessments. The department also recommended the temporary suspension of a new provision which restricts districts from carrying over more than 15 percent of unspent READ per pupil intervention funds from one budget year to the next. This action enabled districts to carry over unspent funds from the 2019-20 budget year to the 2020-21 budget year without penalty.





With pandemic conditions improving throughout the summer of 2020, many were hopeful for a statewide return to in-person instruction in the fall. However, as the school year began health conditions required some school districts start the year with a combination of hybrid learning or remote learning, while others operated in person. These differences in instructional approaches presented unique challenges in the department's efforts to support districts in their work to meet the needs of Colorado's youngest readers. Despite these new obstacles, the importance of ensuring the implementation of the READ Act was not diminished but, in fact, has elevated its importance.

As a result of the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person instruction during 2020, and the absence of performance data, the format of this year's READ Act legislative report is different from previous years. This year's annual report will focus on providing information on implementation of key provisions of the READ Act required by S.B. 19-199 and the impacts of COVID-19 on that implementation.



Implementation of S.B. 19-199

During the 2020-21 school year, the state began to meet important milestones in implementing key provisions of S.B. 19-199:

- Release of READ per pupil funds to school districts was contingent upon CDE review and approval of a budget and narrative that aligns to allowable uses of funds.
- CDE launched two no-cost K-3 reading course options to enable teachers to meet the new teacher training requirements.
- CDE reviewed and determined which approved professional development providers meet the new teacher training requirements providing more options for districts and teachers.
- The independent evaluation was initiated to enable the department, districts, policy makers, and the public to begin to understand what has worked and what needs improvement with READ Act implementation.
- "Food. Water. Shelter. Love. Reading." , -- the department's public information campaign, was developed and launched emphasizing that reading by third grade is a fundamental need for all children to thrive.



K-3 Teacher Training Requirements

S.B. 19-199 required that beginning in the fall of 2021, each district that receives per-pupil or early literacy grant funding must annually ensure that all K-3 teachers have completed evidence-based training in teaching reading.

During the spring legislative session, the general assembly passed H.B. 21-1129 to extend this deadline to the fall of 2022. Districts, BOCES, and charters that do not meet the requirements will be ineligible for READ Act funds for the 2022-23 school year. In subsequent years, districts will need to ensure that teachers new to teaching kindergarten to third grade also meet this requirement.

State Board of Education rules require that the evidence-based training in teaching reading must:

- Consist of a minimum of 45 hours of content.
- Address the content of the educator preparation literacy standards referenced in the state board's [Rules for the Administration of Educator License Endorsements, 1 CCR 301-101, section 4.02\(5\) through 4.02\(12\)](#).
- Include an end-of-course assessment that teachers can provide evidence of passing.





Training Pathway Options

State law and board rules allow the following options for teachers to meet the training requirement:

<p>Successfully completing* the CDE-provided reading training</p>	<p>Teachers may participate in a no-cost training by CDE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Building a Strong Foundation: Developing Early Literacy Skills</i>, an online program developed by Public Consulting Group. • <i>Keys to Beginning Reading</i>, a CDE delivered live training program developed by Keys to Literacy.
<p>Passing* a CDE-approved undergraduate or graduate reading course</p>	<p>Teachers can submit an application including evidence of passing* an undergraduate or graduate reading course for CDE review and approval.</p>
<p>Passing* a CDE-approved district or BOCES reading course or a course appropriate for license renewal</p>	<p>Districts and BOCES can submit an application for a course for CDE to review for approval to meet the teacher training requirement.</p> <p>Teachers can submit an application including evidence of passing* a course appropriate for license renewal for CDE review.</p>
<p>Holding a Colorado endorsement as a Reading Teacher or Reading Specialist</p>	<p>Teachers who hold a Colorado endorsement as a Reading Teacher or Reading Specialist meet the training requirement.</p>
<p>Successfully completing* a training program included on the department’s advisory list</p>	<p>Teachers can submit evidence of passing* a training program on the advisory list.</p>
<p>Only for teachers who have completed one of the approved evidence-based training options but who lack proof of passing an end-of-course assessment:</p> <p>Passing an alternative assessment authorized by the State Board of Education.</p>	<p>Teachers who lack evidence of passing an end of course assessment for an approved training may take and pass the Praxis Teaching Reading: Elementary 5205 with a score of 159 or higher.</p>

*Includes passing an end-of-course assessment





Independent Evaluation

S. B. 19-199 also required the department to contract with an independent contractor to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the implementation of the READ Act and the early literacy grant program.

Upon completion of a request for proposals, CDE staff began working with WestEd in the winter of 2020 to fulfill the evaluation requirements outlined in statute. Those include:

- Evaluating local education provide (LEP) use of per-pupil intervention and early literacy grant funding;
- Reviewing the department’s list of approved reading assessments, instructional programs, professional development programs and reading technologies to ensure they are aligned with the requirements of the READ Act;
- Evaluating and identifying effective practices that LEPs use to implement the READ Act;
- Measuring the reading outcomes achieved by LEPs; and
- Evaluating the degree to which LEPs work effectively with parents and members of the community.

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, WestEd developed plans that included conducting on-site visits in numerous schools and districts to complete the evaluation. However, due to the suspension of in-person learning in the spring of 2020 and the continuation of social distancing requirements in the fall and winter, WestEd adjusted components of their research approach and relied on survey data and virtual meetings to complete evaluation activities. Despite these challenges, WestEd is on track to complete the evaluation requirements, which will be included in a report presented to the Joint Education Committee at the end of 2021.



READ Per-Pupil Intervention Budget Approval

The READ Act provides per-pupil intervention funds to assist LEPs in providing intervention support to students identified with an SRD. In the 2020-21 school year, the legislature allocated approximately \$26 million of READ Act funds to LEPs.

The department calculates per-pupil intervention funds by dividing the amount of money available by the total number of kindergarten through third-grade students identified with an SRD in the preceding budget year.

Per-pupil intervention funds are only authorized to be used in the following ways:

- Operate a summer school literacy program
- Purchase core reading instructional programs that are included on the READ Act advisory list of instructional programming
- Purchase and/or provide approved targeted, evidence-based or scientifically based intervention services to students which may include services provided by a reading interventionist
- Purchase tutoring services focused in increasing students' foundational reading skills
- Provide technology, including software that is on the advisory list of instructional programming; may include professional development for use of technology
- Purchase from a BOCES the services of a reading specialist or reading interventionist
- Provide professional development programming to support K-3 educators in teaching reading

S.B. 19-199 expanded the allowable uses of per-pupil intervention to include purchasing CDE-approved core reading instructional programs and purchasing technology, including software, to assist in assessing and monitoring student progress.



The updated law also changed the READ Act per-pupil budget process districts must follow, moving from a general plan for use of funds by allowable use categories to requiring districts to submit a detailed budget and narrative for department review and approval. A district must now also submit a budget, including a narrative description of how they plan to use READ funds in the upcoming school year at the beginning of each budget year in order to receive a distribution of per-pupil intervention money. The department is required to monitor and, if necessary, audit district use of the money throughout the budget year.

During the spring of 2020, districts submitted their budgets and narratives for the 2020-21 budget year for department review and approval. CDE staff worked with districts to ensure their budgets were in alignment with allowable uses. At the end of each budget year, CDE will follow up to ensure that funds have been spent on allowable uses. In the event an LEP has not used READ Act per pupil dollars for an allowable use, per statute, CDE will withhold future funds until the budgetary issue is resolved.

As noted previously, in the spring of 2020, the READ Act data collection was paused due to COVID-19. Therefore, 2020-21 READ funds were calculated based on the SRD count reported during the 2018-19 school year (40,976). The per-pupil funding for the 2020-21 school year was \$640.40. A complete list of districts and distribution amounts is included in the Early Literacy Grant Program section beginning on page 22.

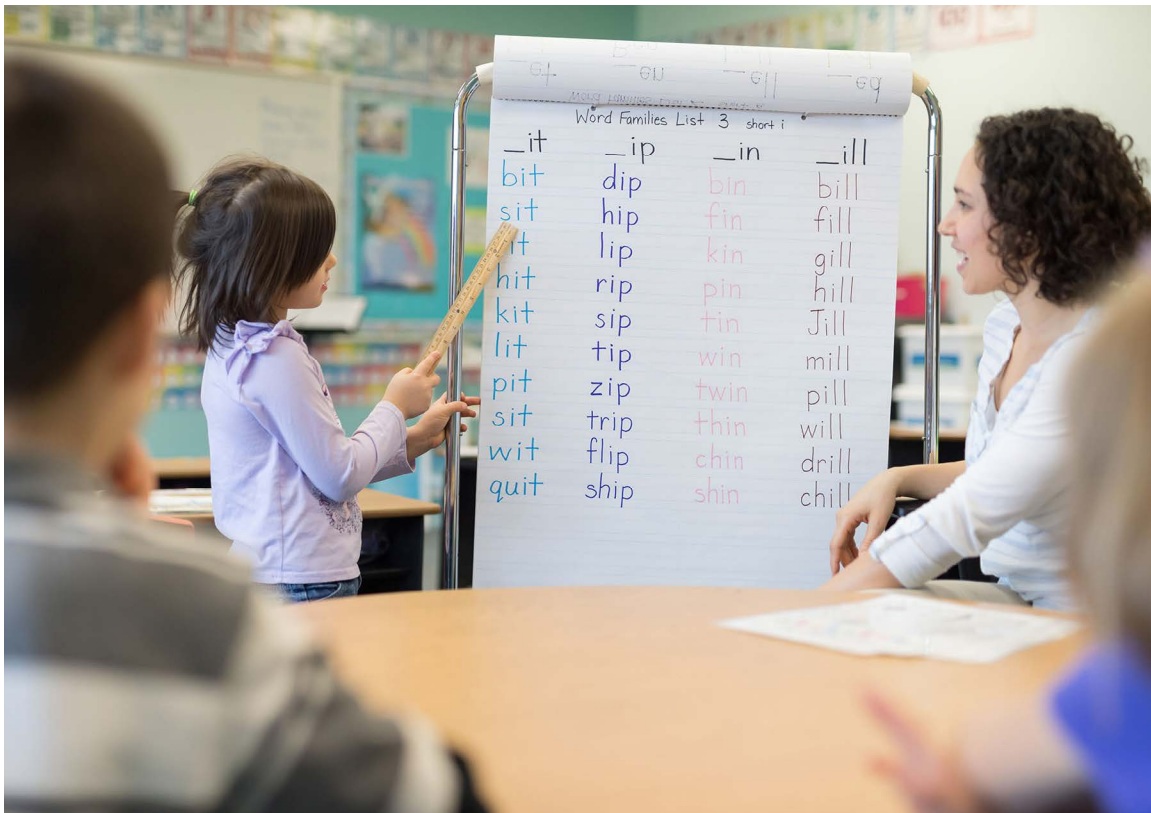


LEP Reporting through Unified Improvement Plans

Beginning in 2020-21, district unified improvement plans (UIPs) must include information about the district's K-3 reading assessments, instructional programs, and intervention services and supports.

Districts that use per-pupil intervention or Early Literacy Grant program funds on professional development must also include information about the professional development plan. This information is publicly posted with each district's UIP.

This provision relates to an important component of the READ Act. Under the READ Act all LEPs in Colorado are required to use instructional programs in reading that are evidence- and scientifically based and that focus on reading competency in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency including oral skills, and reading comprehension (section 22-7-1204 C.R.S.) regardless of funding source. The information provided in the 2020-21 UIPs will be the first public reporting of instructional programs and will enable the department to work with districts to ensure their programs meet statutory requirements.





Public Information Campaign

S.B. 19-199 required the department to develop and implement a public information campaign to emphasize the importance of learning to read by third grade.



The intent was to disseminate information statewide emphasizing the important roles that educators and parents have in teaching children to read by providing school and home environments that promote reading.

CDE contracted with the communications firm Cactus to support in the development of the public information campaign. The firm conducted research with parents and educators, and developed the theme “ Food. Water. Shelter. Love. Reading.” The goal is to remind parents and caregivers that they are their child’s first teachers, and encourage them to make reading an essential activity from day one. The target audience for the first year of the campaign is parents and caregivers of children birth through age 5.

Primary assets produced for the campaign are the 15-, 30-, and 60-second video advertisements, the campaign website at ReadWithMe.today, animated graphics for social media advertising. Flyers, stickers, posters and other materials for parents and their children were created and will be distributed to key libraries through the Colorado State Library. All assets are produced in English and Spanish. Using a multi-screen strategy, advertisements will be seen on social media, traditional broadcast television and digital video platforms to reach parents and caregivers wherever they consume content and drive them to the campaign website for more information about how to support their child’s reading success.



Early Literacy Grant Program

The comprehensive Early Literacy Grant (ELG) Program is designed to provide funds to LEPs to ensure the essential components of reading instruction are embedded into K-3 teaching structures in all participating schools.

The ELG Program funds LEPs for a period of four years, with the potential for a fifth sustainability year. The grant program was established in 2012 and has distributed over \$30 million since the 2013-14 school year.

Through the comprehensive ELG Program, CDE:

- Assists grantees establish instructional systems based on scientifically based reading research to improve the quality of reading instruction for all kindergarten through third grade students.
- Helps schools implement a multi-tiered support system (MTSS) to reduce the number of students reading below grade level.
- Provides professional development to principals, teachers, and intervention teachers on effective instructional practices and the underlying teaching infrastructures to improve reading achievement among kindergarten through third grade students.
- Helps grantees administer and interpret approved interim and diagnostic assessments pursuant to the READ Act.
- Supports the implementation of school-wide literacy programs as well as programs designed for targeted and intensive instructional interventions.
- Assists grantees with testing schedules and interpreting assessment data.

Requirements of participation in ELG include:

- The selection and use of evidence- or research-based reading instructional materials from the CDE Advisory List;
- Use of Acadience Reading for an interim assessment and progress monitoring tool;
- Monthly consulting with an approved ELG Implementation Consultant; and
- Annual achievement and growth goals based on the interim assessment data.

Four cohorts have participated in ELG and the fifth cohort began in the 2021-22 school year. Figure 2 provides an overview of the ELG cohorts since the inception of the program.



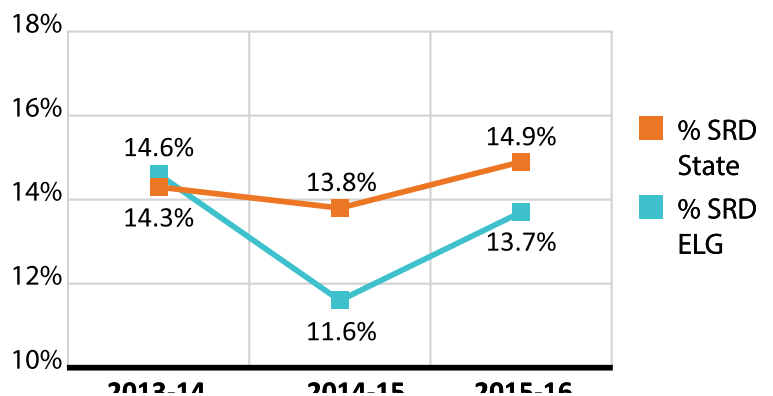
Figure 2: Existing and Anticipated ELG Cohorts - 2013 to 2024

GRANT	YEARS	STATUS
COHORT 1	2013-16	Complete
COHORT 2	2016-19	Complete
COHORT 3	2017-20	Complete
COHORT 4	2018-21	Entering Year 4
COHORT 5	2021-24	Starting in the fall of 2021

CDE has conducted some descriptive analysis of the outcomes for the ELG program, which is provided in this report. The external READ evaluator, WestEd, will be providing a more thorough evaluation of the grant program.

The first ELG cohort ran from the 2013-14 school year through the 2015-16 school year. It included participants from 30 schools, representing 15 districts in seven regions of the state. Twenty-four of these schools were awarded small awards in 2016 to help with sustainability of grant processes. The schools in Cohort 1 started their ELG phase with an SRD percentage higher than the state average. Those schools decreased their SRD percentages to below the state average over the course of their participation (Figure 3).

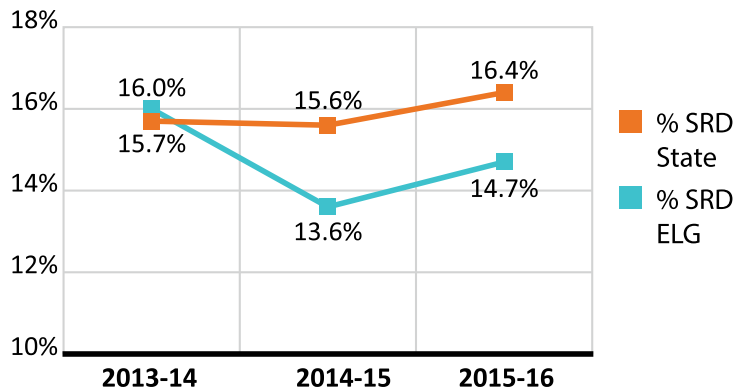
Figure 3: K-3 SRD Rates: ELG Cohort 1 Schools Compared to the State





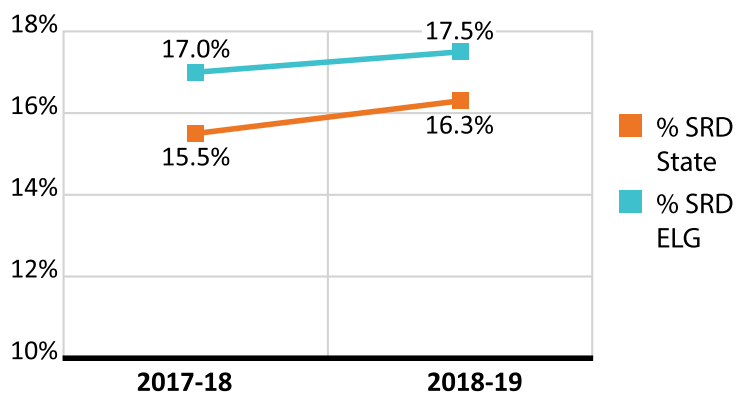
ELG Cohort 2 included 21 schools from 14 districts, which received funding from the 2016-17 school year through the 2018-19 school year. Seventeen of these schools received sustainability funding for the 2019-20 school year. Like Cohort 1, the second cohort of schools started their ELG phase with a higher rate of students identified with an SRD than the state average. After three years of the ELG grant, those schools demonstrated a reduction in their SRD percentage, and are below the state average for SRD (see figure 4).

Figure 4: K-3 SRD Rates: ELG Cohort 2 Schools Compared to the State



ELG Cohort 3 participated from the 2017-18 school year through the 2019-20 school year. This cohort included 11 schools from 6 districts. All 11 schools received sustainability funding for the 2020-21 school year. Figure 20 illustrates that the Cohort 3 schools started with a higher rate of students identified with an SRD than the state average. While the cohort's SRD percentage increased in the second year, the rate of increase was smaller than the increase in the overall state SRD percentage (see figure 5).

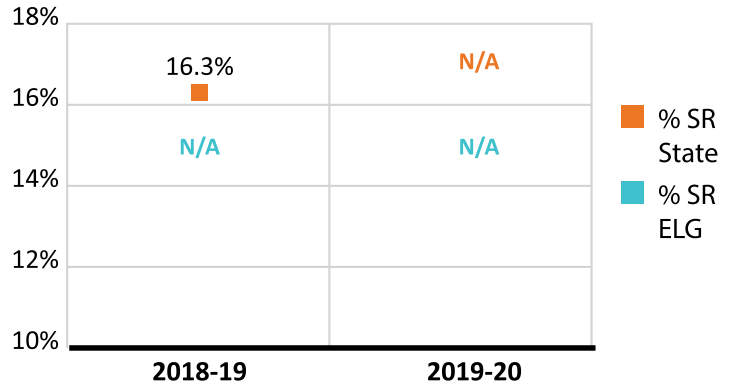
Figure 5: K-3 SRD Rates: ELG Cohort 3 Schools Compared to the State





Thirty schools from 12 districts received funding to participate in Cohort 4. These schools will participate on a four-year grant cycle, from the 2018-19 school year through the 2021-22 school year.

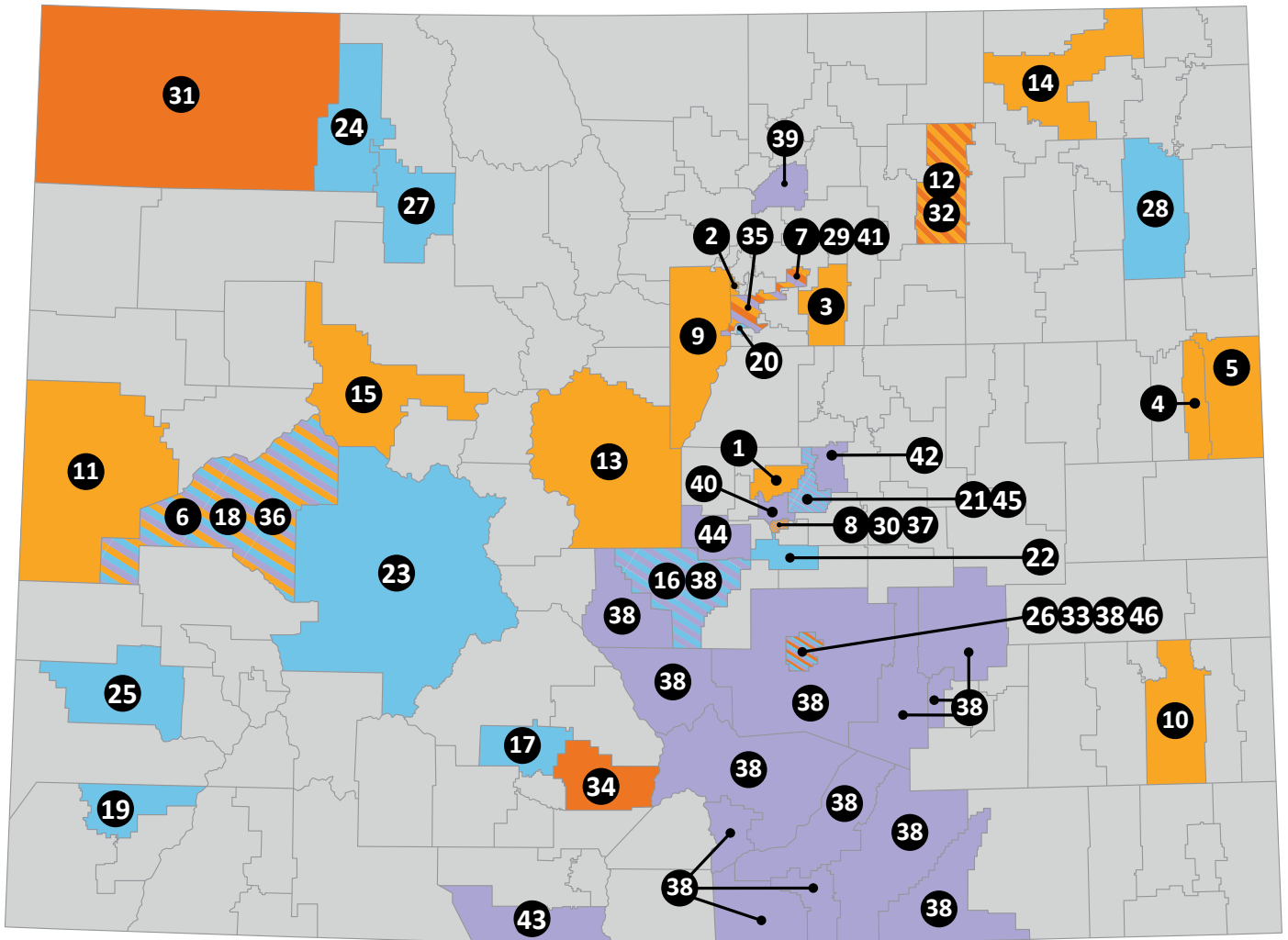
Figure 6: K-3 SRD Rates: ELG Cohort 4 Schools Compared to the State





The Early Literacy Grant Program includes participation of schools from across the state. Figure 7 illustrates the geographic distribution of Colorado school participation by cohort.

Figure 7: Colorado’s ELG Districts by Cohort





COHORT 1

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Academy 20 | 5 Burlington School District Re-6J | 9 Jefferson County Public School District | 13 Park County School District Re-2 |
| 2 Adams County School District 50 | 6 Delta County School District | 10 Lamar School District Re-2 | 14 Re-1 Valley School District |
| 3 Bennett School District 29J | 7 Denver Public Schools | 11 Mesa County Valley School District | 15 Roaring Fork School District |
| 4 Bethune School District | 8 Harrison School District 2 | 12 Morgan County School District Re-3 | |

COHORT 2

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 16 Canon City School District RE-1 | 20 Englewood School District | 24 Hayden School District RE-1 | 28 South Routt School District RE-3 |
| 17 Center Consolidated School District 26JT | 21 Falcon School District 49 | 25 Jefferson County Public School District | 29 Yuma School District 1 |
| 18 Delta County School District | 22 Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 | 26 Norwood School District RE-2JT | |
| 19 Dolores School District 4A | 23 Gunnison Watershed School District RE-1J | 27 Pueblo City Schools District 60 | |

COHORT 3

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 30 Denver Public Schools | 32 Morgan County School | 34 District RE-22J | 36 Sangre de Cristo School |
| 31 Harrison School District 2 | 33 Moffat County School District RE-1 | 35 Pueblo City School District 60 | |

COHORT 4

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| 37 Charter School Institute | 40 South Central BOCES | 43 Denver Public Schools | 46 Cripple Creek Victor School District RE1 |
| 38 Delta County School District | 41 Weld County School District RE-1 | 44 Peyton School District 23JT | 47 El Paso County Colorado District 49 |
| 39 Harrison School District #2 | 42 Colorado Springs School District 11 | 45 South Conejos School District | 48 Pueblo City Schools #60 |



Early Literacy Assessment Tool

Through the School Finance Act, CDE contracts with assessment vendors to supply an early literacy assessment tool (ELAT) free of charge to Colorado school districts.

This program serves to support state purchase of software that provides teachers with individualized assessments with immediate results, stores and analyzes those results, and recommends activities based on those results. The current contracted assessment publishers are Amplify and Istation. The contracts last for five years, through June of 2023. Pending legislative allocation of funds during the 2021 session, CDE will offer the ELAT project again for the 2021-22 school year.

By participating in the ELAT Project, applicants select a state board approved READ interim assessment from one of the two vendors:

- Amplify for Acadience Reading (formerly named DIBELS Next) and Indicadores Dinámicos del Éxito en la Lectura (IDEL) and DIBELS Deep diagnostic reading assessment, an approved diagnostic measure, or
- Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP) Early Reading and ISIP Lectura Temprana.



Figure 8: Number of Districts, Schools and Students Participating in the ELAT Program from 2014 through 2019

Year	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Participating Local Education Providers	123 DISTRICT/ CSI	126 DISTRICT/ CSI	132 DISTRICT/ CSI	137 DISTRICT/ CSI	146 DISTRICT/ CSI	141 DISTRICT/ CSI <small>(See note below)</small>	141 DISTRICT/ CSI
Participating Schools	417/ 1,110	482/ 1,110	517/ 1,110	574/ 1,110	579/ 1,110	587	597
Participating Student Count	91,565	112,232	119,204	127,604	126,055	127,858	127,000
Percentage of Total Colorado K-3 Students Participating	34%	40%	44%	47%	47%	49%	50%

In 2019-20, four districts had at least one school use Amplify and one school use Istation. Details can be found in Appendix C: Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELAT) Participating Districts for 2019-20.

Three districts had at least one school using Amplify and one school using Istation. Details can be found in Appendix C: Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELAT) Participating Districts for 2018-19.

A portion of the ELAT contract payment to each vendor is based on two deliverables:

- A 15% reduction in SRD rates from the beginning of the year to the end of the year
- A customer satisfaction rating of at least 75%.

The ELAT project has met these deliverables each year the project has been in existence.



Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant

While not a part of Colorado’s READ Act, the recently awarded federal Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD) will enable Colorado to build on its K-3 reading initiative and expand support for literacy programs across the birth to grade 12 continuum.

CDE applied for and was granted the CLSD from the U.S. Department of Education to support the state in its advancement of literacy skills of children from birth through grade 12 using evidence-based practices, activities, and interventions. The grant program includes a focus on pre-literacy skills, reading, and writing, with an emphasis on disadvantaged children, including children living in poverty, English learners, and children with disabilities.

CDE was awarded \$16,212,160 to implement grant activities over five years starting in 2013. The grant requires that CDE subgrant 95% of funds to local education providers to improve literacy skills for disadvantaged children from birth to grade 12. The project will target resources to school districts, both rural and urban, that are geographically diverse and will direct funds to at least three Qualified Opportunity Zones throughout Colorado. The project will include:

- Professional development and technical assistance
- Literacy coaching
- Disseminating family literacy information

These activities will help create an infrastructure for districts to develop their own local comprehensive literacy plans and to apply for funding to implement research-based literacy strategies and interventions.

The activities for the 2020-21 award year included primarily startup activities including completing a state literacy needs assessment and developing the state literacy plan to form the basis for the development of the LEP application process. CDE intends on presenting awards recommendations to the State Board of Education in July of 2021.



What's on the Horizon

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought about unprecedented changes to nearly every aspect of life across the globe. The impact on education has been unimaginable with educators and education leaders making wholesale changes to delivering instruction without warning.

The resilience and hard work of educators and education leaders have enabled schooling to continue amid ever-changing circumstances. And the long-term impact of the health crisis will not be known for years. However, it is clear that students who had reading challenges before the pandemic continue to need a prioritized focus as recovery efforts are planned and implemented. For this reason, the READ Act is more important now than ever before.

And it is important to note that despite the pandemic, districts and the department have continued to make progress on the implementation of S.B. 19-199 to improve outcomes for Colorado's youngest readers. Steps taken during the year have supported teacher training in implementing evidence-based reading instruction and helped districts understand the requirements of the READ Act. Looking ahead, the outcomes of the READ Act evaluation will provide a roadmap for continued progress in meeting the goal of all children reading at grade level by third grade.





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