

Improving Early Literacy in Colorado: Realizing the Promise of the READ Act





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stand for Children believes that all children, regardless of their background, should graduate from high school prepared for, and with access to, a college education. In 2009, Stand for Children Colorado (Stand Colorado) began partnering with parents, communities, and organizations to improve educational outcomes for students. In 2012, Stand Colorado and our coalition partners spearheaded efforts to pass the Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act, which introduced innovative policies to support children reading by the end of third grade. The ability to read is a fundamental skill that students must possess in order to be successful throughout school and after high school. Children entering fourth grade with significant reading deficiencies (SRDs) are far more likely to struggle throughout the rest of their academic careers. As a result, it is critical that rigorous literacy interventions remain at the top of Colorado's education priorities.

This paper analyzes the implementation of policies that promote literacy in grades K-3. The READ Act is a significant first step to ensuring that students are successful readers, and it is vital that the Colorado State Board of Education (SBE) and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) take action to continue implementation of this legislation. These recommendations are intentionally limited in scope. This paper focuses on specific regulatory actions the state can enact quickly to directly improve implementation of the READ Act and consequently promote successful literacy outcomes for Colorado students. Consequently, this paper offers three recommendations that CDE and SBE should follow to support ongoing implementation of the READ Act and ensure that students achieve essential academic benchmarks.

- *Recommendation 1:* The SBE should align the regulations governing the content standards for teacher preparation program accreditation and reauthorization with the most recent legislative changes and explicitly include the components of literacy instruction required in the READ Act. The SBE must use its authority to ensure preparation programs thoughtfully comply with the standards.
- *Recommendation 2:* The SBE and CDE should replace the current educator licensing exam with both a rigorous literacy-specific exam that is aligned with all components of the READ Act and a performance-based general assessment. These two exams will capture more meaningful data for teacher preparation programs and teacher candidates about their areas of strength and areas for improvement.
- *Recommendation 3:* The SBE and CDE should use current reporting requirements to ensure that the lowest performing districts are successfully implementing the READ Act by requiring districts to demonstrate how they are complying with the READ Act, offering professional development for current educators, and using funding provided through the READ Act.

Colorado's READ Act is a first step to ensuring that students successfully graduate from high school ready for college and career. Stand Colorado is steadfastly committed to improving reading outcomes for students across Colorado. As literacy rates increase and more children succeed in school, the state will see remarkable results.

BACKGROUND

“College- and Career-Ready” Begins with Reading by Third Grade

Perhaps no milestone is more critical in a student’s academic career than their ability to read by the end of third grade. Mastery of other academic subjects requires a strong foundation in basic literacy skills. Building on this foundation, students will continue to hone and develop more complex reading and reading comprehension skills as they progress through school. For these reasons, students who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient students to drop out of school before earning a diploma.¹ Students who fall behind in reading between kindergarten and third grade (the early grades) are unlikely to catch up to their peers, and the gap between struggling and proficient readers only tends to grow over time.²

Perhaps no milestone is more critical in a student’s academic career than the ability to read by the end of third grade.

Similar to these national trends, too many Colorado students struggle with reading and are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, is a highly regarded, objective indicator of student knowledge and skills in reading and mathematics. In

2015, 61% of Colorado students in fourth grade scored below proficient on the NAEP reading assessment.³ The results are worse for some subgroups of students, specifically students of color and students in poverty. Of Colorado’s Black students, 73% scored below proficient, indicating that only 27% were proficient or advanced.⁴ Even more troubling, only 20% of Hispanic students scored at proficient or advanced,

which means that a staggering 80% were below proficient.⁵

For more than a decade, there has been a large gap between the performance of students of color and the performance of their White counterparts.⁶ Furthermore, the NAEP reading assessment highlighted that a mere 21% of students who were eligible for free-or reduced-lunch scored at or above proficient.⁷ These struggling readers will almost certainly face challenges throughout their education. If left unaddressed,

these challenges will most likely continue into adulthood.

Students who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient students to drop out of school before earning a diploma.

1 Fiestler, L. (2013). *Early warning confirmed: A research update on third-grade reading*. Baltimore, M.D.: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from: www.aecf.org

2 Ibid., 4.

3 United States Department of Education. (2015). *2015 reading state snapshot report, Colorado, Grade 4*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/naep2015gr48reading>

4 Ibid., 1.

5 Ibid., 1.

6 Ibid., 1.

7 Ibid., 1.

The READ Act: Colorado's Commitment to Early Literacy

Recognizing both the importance of proficient reading by the end of third grade and the significant number of students who need more help reaching that goal, Colorado legislators unanimously passed the bipartisan READ Act in 2012. The intent of the READ Act is to ensure that districts use effective assessments to identify whether a student's reading progress is on track and to focus resources and interventions to help the state's most struggling readers. This legislation, which replaced the Colorado Basic Literacy Act, requires schools and educators to identify students who are the most significantly behind in their reading abilities. The READ Act also allocates additional state funds for proven intervention services.

Colorado is a strong local-control state, therefore much of the work of READ Act implementation and effective literacy instruction is the responsibility of districts. Three years after the passage of the READ Act, the initial results are promising. Schools and districts that are implementing the READ Act with fidelity have seen a decrease in the number of students identified as having a SRD.⁸ The districts with the most immediate improvements have taken intentional steps to use data from READ Act-aligned assessments to inform instruction, update their instructional materials, and provide meaningful professional development to teachers to ensure that they can effectively teach literacy.⁹

Colorado's work implementing the READ Act is off to a solid start, but it is not yet complete. As Colorado's school districts, leaders, and educators work to implement the READ Act, the state can take a number of steps to ensure that new educators are adequately prepared to utilize the best practices in literacy instruction. The state plays a critical role in supporting the work of districts and reinforcing the focus on best practices for literacy instruction in the early grades.

8 Montgomery, P. & Hasbrouch, J. (2015). *The Colorado READ Act: An evaluation of implementation and outcomes after year one*. Denver, CO: Colorado Succeeds. Retrieved from: http://www.coloradosucceeds.org/publications/Colorado_Succeeds_READ_Act_Implementation_Study.pdf

9 Ibid., 24.

Key Provisions of the READ ACT

The READ Act focuses on K-3 literacy development, literacy assessment, and individual intervention plans for students identified as having a significant reading deficiency (SRD). A student with a SRD is defined as one who 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 for the student's grade level. Additional funding is provided to districts to help their most struggling readers in grades K-3. In order to receive these funds, districts and schools are required to:

- Assess student's literacy development in the five essential domains of reading;
- Identify which students have a SRD and need additional support to improve their reading skills;
- In coordination with a student's parents, develop an individual intervention plan, READ Plan, for each SRD-designated student;
- Allow grade-level retention as an intervention option for SRD-designated students;
- Report specific data to CDE about the status and progress of SRD-designated students. Districts are encouraged to report details about which interventions they use through their READ Act funds; schools and districts are expected to use this data in their school and district improvement plans.

Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act, Co. Gen. Assemb. 12-1238 (2012), § 22-7-1202.

Colorado Can and Should Do More

The READ Act identifies best practices in literacy instruction, and CDE has been working to align academic standards and classroom instruction to these practices. Throughout this process, Stand Colorado has been an advocate for improving practices

As Colorado’s school districts, leaders, and educators work to implement the READ Act, the state can take a number of steps to ensure that new educators are adequately prepared to utilize the best practices in literacy instruction.

in reading instruction. Our state’s teachers and students deserve support and access to information, yet they are not receiving the help or information that they need. Teachers regularly express that they feel unprepared to teach students to read when using the scientifically-based best practices, commonly referred to as scientifically-based reading research (SBRR). Studies have underscored teachers’ concerns, finding that “teachers often have minimal understanding of how students learn to read and write or why many of their students

experience difficulty with this most fundamental task of schooling.”¹⁰ This is likely the result of many factors within teacher preparation programs and school districts, all of which have contributed to a climate in which teachers routinely feel unprepared to effectively teach literacy.

Some teachers are immersed in high-quality SBRR instruction during their undergraduate work only to be placed in a district or school that has not thoroughly

Recently, two highly-regarded educator organizations, the International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), echoed the concerns of teachers with regards to their literacy preparation.

implemented the READ Act. These teachers struggle to reconcile their training with the expectations of their new employers. Other teachers are enrolled in preparation programs that have not updated their training to acknowledge the methodology endorsed by the READ Act. These teachers are forced to invest additional time and energy in professional development. Making matters worse for all teachers, the current state licensure exam,

the PRAXIS II, offers minimal information regarding candidates’ level of preparedness to teach literacy using SBRR best practices.¹¹

Recently, two highly-regarded educator organizations, the International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), echoed the concerns of teachers with regards to their literacy preparation. In a panel presentation at the International Literacy Association Conference, William Teale noted “both ILA and NCTE agree with the general consensus that there is really a need for immediate and continuous improvement in the education of teachers throughout the school

10 Moats, L. (2009). *Still wanted: Teachers with knowledge of language*. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42 (5), 387. doi: 10.1177/0022219409338735

11 Reschly, D.J., Smart, S.M., & Oliver, R.M. (2007). Innovation configurations to improve teacher preparation in reading, classroom behavior management, and inclusive practices. In Dwyer, C.A. (Ed.) *America’s challenge: Effective teachers for at-risk schools and students*. Washington, D.C: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/NCCTQBiennialReport.pdf>

grades with respect to their preparation to teach reading and writing really well.”¹² Unfortunately, research indicates that teacher education programs are not fulfilling their crucial role in preparing teachers with these important skills.¹³ One study found that a mere 15 percent of education schools expose teacher candidates to the best practices of reading instruction and that only four of 227 texts used in educator preparation programs provided a comprehensive review of scientifically-based practices.¹⁴ In Colorado specifically, educator preparation programs vary greatly in their approaches to literacy instruction and their adoption of best practices for literacy instruction as outlined in the READ Act.

In an effort to determine how to address these concerns and identify how to better support teachers and students, Stand Colorado conducted a comprehensive review of current best practices in literacy acquisition; analyzed national organizations’ recommendations for improving teacher preparation in early literacy including ILA, NCTE, the National Council on Teaching Quality (NCTQ), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Education Commission of the States (ECS); spoke with multiple teacher preparation programs at Colorado institutions of higher education; and finally, analyzed relevant state statutes and rules that relate to reading. This analysis resulted in the conclusion that Colorado statute is very strong but specific areas of implementation of the READ Act can be improved through actions by the State Board of Education (SBE) and CDE. Outlined later in this paper are recommendations for three key areas of improvement that together would allow for full implementation of the READ Act and better literacy instruction in schools. While there are many opportunities to promote literacy in the early grades – from high quality, full-day kindergarten and preschool to family literacy initiatives – this report is limited to non-legislative recommendations that the state can quickly enact to support successful ongoing implementation of current statute, specifically the READ Act. In addition, while this paper recommends changes within several state-level systems, such as educator licensure, these recommendations are intended to be limited in scope to only those changes that directly relate to the READ Act. Most importantly, these recommendations will help Colorado students and the state to realize the promise of the READ Act - for all students to be successful readers by the end of third grade.

-
- 12 Teale, W.H. (2015). *Cultivating literacy achievement through quality teacher preparation*. Panel discussion at the International Literacy Association Conference, St. Louis, MO. Retrieved from: <https://ilamedia.eduvision.tv/default.aspx>
- 13 Smart, S.M., & Reschly, D.J. (2007). *Barriers to the preparation of highly qualified teachers: Teacher preparation in reading*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/June2007Brief.pdf>
- 14 Walsh, K., Glaser, D., Wilcox, D.D. (2006). *What education schools aren't teaching about reading and what elementary teachers aren't learning*. Washington, D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality.

OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES

Obstacle: Colorado does not have clear literacy requirements for teacher preparation programs and does not hold programs accountable.

Recommendation: *The SBE should align the regulations governing the content standards for teacher preparation program accreditation and reauthorization with the most recent legislative changes, and explicitly include the components of literacy instruction required in the READ Act. The SBE must use its authority to ensure preparation programs thoughtfully comply with the standards.*

Colorado currently has an accreditation system that is supposed to ensure teacher preparation programs meet state-mandated minimum requirements. While this system does not oversee every aspect of individual programs or endorsement and licensure areas within programs, it outlines basic content requirements and should guarantee that all programs at a minimum equip all teacher candidates with the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to be successful their own classrooms. Unfortunately, the state's system of accreditation and reauthorization of teacher preparation programs is flawed. It has not been updated to reflect recent statutory changes or state policies. This leaves teacher preparation programs without clear state-level requirements for their courses. In addition, the SBE has not used its authority in the accreditation and reauthorization process to ensure that teacher preparation programs are meeting the state's minimum requirements consistently within and across their programs.

In Colorado, teacher preparation programs are jointly accredited by the Department of Higher Education (CDHE) and CDE. CDHE approves all aspects of preparation programs except for their academic content. Specifically, CDHE reviews preparation programs according to a set of performance criteria.¹⁵ CDE reviews a preparation program's content according to the content standards defined in rule and applicable to each specific endorsement area. Since the adoption of several recent education reforms, the content standard requirements, which are described in rule, have not been aligned to statute. In particular, the content standards have not been aligned to READ Act requirements. This leaves teacher preparation programs with inconsistent criteria for program accreditation or reauthorization and a lack of clarity about the state-required content for their programs. CDE is nearing completion of an 18-month process to align literacy requirements for teacher preparation programs. The final step in the alignment process is for the SBE to approve and adopt the new, aligned rules.

The SBE uses the content standards defined in rule to determine whether the content for an endorsement area or initial licensure program meets the state requirements. If a program or area does not meet the requirements, the SBE has the authority to

¹⁵ Colorado Department of Higher Education. (2014). *Reauthorization process for educator preparation programs*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved from: https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/epp_index

recommend that accreditation be denied or placed at-risk of being denied. Statute requires that CDHE abide by the SBE's recommendation.¹⁶ However, according to the most current data available, the SBE has never recommended that a program or institution be refused accreditation nor be placed on "at-risk" status.¹⁷ This trend is similar to national patterns. According to a speech by former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, "out of roughly 1,400 teacher preparation programs nationwide, states have identified only 38 as low-performing... fewer states have taken action to actually improve a low-performing program."¹⁸ Even with broader criteria – including an at-risk designation as well as a low-performing one – only 24 states and Puerto Rico have indicated concerns about any preparation programs during the same period.¹⁹ Like many other states, Colorado's SBE is missing the opportunity to exercise its authority to ensure that educator preparation programs are successfully meeting the requirements laid out in statute and rule.

Obstacle: Colorado's current educator licensure exams fail to test candidates for their understanding of how to teach literacy.

Recommendation: The SBE and CDE should replace the current educator licensing exam with both a rigorous literacy-specific exam that is aligned with all components of the READ Act, and a performance-based general assessment. These two exams will capture more meaningful data for teacher preparation programs and teacher candidates about their areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Given the variation within and across teacher preparation programs²⁰ and the need for all teachers to be fully prepared to teach reading based on best practices identified in state statute and rule, there should be a checkpoint to ensure that all new teachers are adequately prepared to effectively teach literacy. This checkpoint should be the state-mandated educator licensure exam, which all teacher candidates must pass in order to teach in the state, regardless of which traditional preparation program they attended. A meaningful licensure exam has the potential to be a useful measure of

16 Colorado Department of Education. (2015). *Educator preparation program approval and reauthorization*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/epp_index

17 United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2013). *Preparing and credentialing the nation's teachers: The Secretary's ninth report on teacher quality*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/teachprep/index.html>

18 United States Department of Education. (2010). *Secretary Arne Duncan's remarks to National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-national-council-accreditation-teacher-education>

19 United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2013). *Preparing and credentialing the nation's teachers: The Secretary's ninth report on teacher quality*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/teachprep/index.html>

20 Council of Chief State School Officers. (2012). *Our responsibility, our promise: Transforming educator preparation and entry into the profession*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2012/Our%20Responsibility%20Our%20Promise_2012.pdf

Massachusetts' Teacher Licensure

Massachusetts checks its teacher candidates' preparedness to teach reading before they can receive a license. All Early Childhood and Elementary teaching candidates are required to demonstrate their understanding of best practices in literacy acquisition and instruction through an assessment called the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL): Foundations of Reading Exam. This is a stand-alone exam that candidates must pass in addition to other subject matter tests. Unlike Colorado's educator licensing exams, the pass rates for the MTEL Foundations of Literacy test are more selective. In the 2013-2014 academic year, roughly 4,300 teacher candidates took the MTEL Foundations of Literacy exam, and only 67.1% of those candidates earned a passing score.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2014). *Annual summary of candidate passing rates by test: Cumulative for all candidates and by gender, ethnicity, and primary language*. Retrieved from: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/2014ResultsByCategory.pdf>

candidate readiness and to help give teacher candidates and teacher preparation programs valuable feedback about individual and organizational areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Unfortunately, Colorado's current licensure exams do not provide teacher candidates or preparation programs with this information.

In Colorado, the state approved licensure exams are the PRAXIS II and the PLACE, both of which test a candidate's knowledge of subject matter content rather than teaching practices or demonstrations of instructional ability. Only a small portion of each exam, however, is dedicated to determining a candidate's knowledge of SBRR and literacy instruction. As a result, a candidate could pass the exam overall without demonstrating a strong understanding of SBRR components. For example, a candidate could score very low on the literacy-specific questions in the licensure exam and still pass if they answered most questions in the other sections correctly. Therefore, even when a candidate passes the state's current licensing exam, there is no guarantee that the candidate has the skills and knowledge to help their students master the ability to read.

Other states have experienced similar problems with their licensing procedures and have made improvements. One promising practice other states are using is including a literacy-specific assessment in addition to their general

educator licensing exam.²¹ Massachusetts, in particular, has adopted and implemented a scientifically-based literacy assessment that all early childhood and elementary educators must pass in order to obtain a Massachusetts teaching license. At this critical time in READ Act implementation, CDE should reevaluate Colorado's teacher licensing exams and recommend a new exam with literacy-specific, required components, which the SBE should adopt. Colorado would be able to better serve its teacher candidates and their students with the adoption of a high-quality literacy assessment, as part of the educator licensing process.

²¹ Rowland, J. (2015). *Trends in teacher certification: Equipping teachers to prepare proficient readers*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from: <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/16/81/11681.pdf>

Obstacle: Districts, which are responsible for READ Act implementation, have adopted READ Act aligned curricula, assessments, and supports for teachers to varying degrees, but the SBE has not utilized its authority to monitor implementation or push districts to implement READ Act with fidelity.

Recommendation: The SBE and CDE should use current reporting requirements to ensure that the lowest performing districts are successfully implementing the READ Act by requiring districts to demonstrate how they are complying with the READ Act, offering professional development for current educators, and using funding provided through the READ Act.

Individual school districts have the primary responsibility for implementing the READ Act. However, preliminary research indicates that districts implement state-mandated policies, especially regarding literacy instruction, with varying degrees of fidelity and effectiveness.²² Therefore, CDE and the SBE should use their authority and resources to ensure that districts with the greatest need – those designated as turnaround and priority improvement districts – are successfully and thoroughly implementing the READ Act.

Most districts with a “turnaround” or “priority improvement” designation have multiple areas in which they need to significantly improve. While there is not a direct correlation between the number of students who can read at or above grade level by third grade and the district performance framework status, nearly every district with a rating of “turnaround” or “priority improvement” has an unacceptably low number of students who are proficient in reading by third grade. When it comes to reading achievement in the early grades, the highest rated districts have an average of 25% more students who can read proficiently than the lowest rated districts.²³ Given the importance of literacy proficiency for all students, it is critical that struggling districts, in particular, focus on improving the literacy outcomes of their students in the early grades. This could be done through the state-required district improvement plans.

Currently, CDE requires that every school district annually submit a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), which demonstrates the work being done to promote student achievement and continuous improvement throughout the district. The SBE under advisement from CDE is responsible for reviewing the UIPs. District UIP templates for turnaround districts are very broad. They allow districts to focus on any issue that they deem important and any program that has some level of established success in struggling districts.

22 Piasta, S. (2004). *Beginning reading instruction in Massachusetts public schools: Research, policy, and teachers' knowledge and beliefs*. Retrieved from: http://crossworks.holycross.edu/fenwick_scholar/16

23 Colorado Department of Education Data base. SchoolView Data Center (2012-2014). District level third grade reading tests scores across districts. [Data File] Retrieved from: <https://edx.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/datacenter/>

The SBE and CDE should exercise their authority to require a thorough reporting in the UIPs of how “turnaround” or “priority improvement” districts are implementing the READ Act. The SBE and CDE should seek to find out what assessments and curriculum the district is using and identify whether or not they are aligned with the READ Act. They should also require that all districts identify and provide high-quality professional development to assist current teachers with fundamental skills they need to effectively teach literacy. While the cost of professional development can be exorbitant, there are affordable options, including CDE’s own program, READING Foundations Academy, a READ Act-aligned program that is provided at no cost to districts.²⁴ In addition, CDE and the SBE should require schools to demonstrate how they are complying with the parent notification requirement of the READ Act. The READ Act is one of the few, if not only, Colorado statutes that mandate communication from the school to the parent when a student is identified as having a (SRD). Parents can be powerful partners in the development of their child’s reading skills, and it is imperative that districts fully implement the READ Act by involving parents in their student’s individualized reading improvement plan, called a “READ plan.”

Finally, districts receive what is known as “READ Act funding” based on the number of students identified as having a SRD. As a condition of receiving those funds, districts are required to report the following to CDE’s Office of Literacy: the number of students identified as having an SRD, the academic progress made by SRD designated students, and the number of students retained between grades as a result of SRD designation. However, districts are currently not asked to report detailed information about the products or services that they purchase with READ Act funds. They are only required to report in which of four categories the funds are spent - full day kindergarten, intervention services, pull-out services, or summer school. It is in the student’s best interest to ensure that state funds are being spent on programs that effectively improve literacy and that are aligned with the READ Act.

24 Colorado Department of Education Office of Literacy. (2015). *Professional development opportunities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/professionaldevelopmentopportunities>

CONCLUSION:

Colorado recognizes the importance of reading by the end of third grade. To help ensure that all students meet this critical milestone, the state has adopted the READ Act, which provides information and resources for our most struggling readers to help get them on track. Schools and educators have been working for the last several years to fully implement the READ Act, but their efforts are hindered by the fact that many educators do not know how to help students master the most fundamental and critical skill of their entire academic careers: how to read. CDE and the SBE need to do more to support teacher candidates, strengthen educator preparation programs, and ensure high-quality literacy instruction in all districts.

Specifically, SBE and CDE should take the following actions to improve the implementation of the READ Act:

- Align the content standards for teacher preparation program accreditation and reauthorization with the most recent legislative changes and explicitly include the components of literacy instruction required in the READ Act and use its authority to ensure preparation programs thoughtfully comply with the standards.
- Replace the current educator licensing exam with both a rigorous literacy-specific exam that is aligned with all components of the READ Act and a performance-based general assessment in order to capture more meaningful data for teacher preparation programs and teacher candidates about their areas of strength and areas for improvement.
- Use current reporting requirements to ensure that the lowest performing districts are successfully implementing the READ Act by requiring that districts demonstrate how they are complying with the READ Act, providing professional development for current educators, and using funding provided through the READ Act.

Individually, these changes would create meaningful improvements to Colorado's education system and guarantee that more students are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Collectively, these recommendations combined with other recent reforms made in Colorado will ensure that children have an even greater likelihood of reaching this critical milestone. The ability to read is vital to a student's success throughout their education and plays a key role in helping all Colorado students graduate from high school ready for college, career, or military service.

Individually, these changes would create meaningful improvements to Colorado's education system and guarantee that more students are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Collectively, these recommendations combined with other recent reforms made in Colorado will ensure that children have an even greater likelihood of reaching this critical milestone. The ability to read is vital to a student's success throughout their education and plays a key role in helping all Colorado students graduate from high school ready for college, career or military service.

IMPROVING EARLY LITERACY IN COLORADO: REALIZING THE PROMISE OF THE READ ACT

©2016. All rights reserved. Stand for Children, Inc.

Permission to copy, disseminate or otherwise use information in this report is granted as long as proper acknowledgment is given.

