Legislative Council Staff
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The Colorado READ Act

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Reading competency is essential for the academic development of students. State law targets the early elementary grades as the pivotol time and location for developing the reading skills necessary for successful achievement in later grades. This issue brief provides an overview of the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act[1], and the state funding appropriated for READ Act implementation.

Overview

First enacted in 2012, the READ Act addresses literacy education for early grade students to master the literacy skills necessary to meet fourth grade curriculum and beyond. The State Board of Education adopts rules for implementing the law, and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provides oversight and administration.

Assessment of Reading Skills

Public schools are required to administer approved reading assessments to kindergarten students, and additional reading assessments in grades one, two, and three, in order to identify students with significant reading deficiencies. When assessing reading skills, local education providers must also screen students for characteristics of dyslexia in order to offer additional reading supports. Schools must report the number of students with a significant reading deficiency to the CDE each year. Additionally, a local education provider may decide if an English language learner should be tested for reading deficiencies in the student's native language.

READ Plans

For students identified with a reading deficiency, educators must develop an individualized approach to instruction, which is referred to as a READ plan. A READ plan is part of the student's academic record until the student is a competent reader, and must follow the student if he or she enrolls in another school or district.

A typical READ plan identifes areas needing remediation and the instructional services and interventions the student will receive in order to be successful in later grades. READ plans must use science-based reading instruction programs approved by the CDE.

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[1] Section 22-7-1201 et. seq., C.R.S

Student Advancement

The READ Act creates a process for parents and educators to determine whether a student with a significant reading deficiency should advance to the next grade level in the following academic year. If the student is completing third grade, the joint decision is subject to approval by the school district superintendent. If the student does not advance, the school must provide more rigorous instructional services to the student.

Grant and Intervention Funding

The READ Act established a competitive grant program to provide funding support for scientific and evidence-based reading instruction in schools and districts. Awards from the Early Literacy Grant Program may be used for supplemental staff, instructional programing, assessment and data interpretation, and professional development for educators.

The act also provides a method for determining a per-pupil intervention funding amount, and gives schools and districts additional funding based on the actual number of early grade students identified as having a reading deficiency. This money may only be used for literacy programs or tutoring and instructional services.

The CDE must contract for an independent evaluation of the grant program and per-pupil intervention money, and a multi-year evaluation of student outcomes achieved by participating students.

Other Instructional Resources

CDE maintains a list of approved instructional reading programs, early-grade reading assessments, technology tools, and professional development options for use by public schools to assess reading skills and improve reading instruction. The department also provides regional training, technical assistance, and coaching as necessary.

READ Act Funding

When first enacted, the READ Act required an annual appropriation of $34.0 million. Since FY 2020-21, the CDE has received about $42.5 million annually for early literacy programming. Of this amount, $7.5 million is awarded to schools and districts from the Early Literacy Grant Program, and another $26.3 million is distributed as per-pupil intervention money. The remaining appropriation is used to maintain an early reading assessment tool for use by districts, to provide training and coaching for educators, and for evaluation and administration. The majority of state funding is from the State Education Fund, with a small amount received from the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund.