



## The Colorado READ Act

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

### Overview

Enacted in 2012, the READ Act addresses literacy education for early elementary grade students to master the reading and literacy skills necessary to meet fourth-grade curriculum and beyond.

**Assessment of reading skills.** Public schools are required to administer a reading assessment to incoming kindergarten students, and administer additional reading assessments in grades one, two, and three, allowing teachers to identify students with significant reading deficiencies.

**READ plans.** When a student is identified with a significant reading deficiency, educators are required to develop an individualized approach to implementing instruction for that student, referred to as a READ plan.

A READ plan is part of the student's academic record until the student achieves reading competency, and must follow the student if he or she enrolls in another school or district. A READ plan must include:

- the specific reading deficiencies requiring remediation;
- goals and benchmarks for attaining reading competency;
- instructional services and interventions that the student will receive;
- a scientifically based reading instruction program;
- a plan for monitoring and evaluating the student's progress;
- strategies for the student's parents to assist the student's reading competency; and
- any additional services the teacher deems appropriate to accelerate the student's reading skills development.

### Student Advancement

The READ Act creates a process for parents and educators to determine if a student with a significant reading deficiency may 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 public school must provide more rigorous instructional services to the student.

### Oversight Authority

The State Board of Education adopts rules for implementing the law, and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is charged with oversight and administration. Public schools are required to report to CDE the number of early-grade students with significant reading

deficiencies. 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 use to improve reading instruction. The department also provides regional training, technical assistance, and coaching as necessary.

## **READ Act Funding**

Historically, the READ Act is funded with an annual transfer of \$34.0 million from the State Education Fund, and a direct appropriation of \$5.4 million from the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund.

Beginning with FY 2019-20, CDE is required to spend up to \$0.5 million of the annual appropriation for a public information campaign, up to \$0.75 million for an independent evaluator, and up to \$2.75 million to provide evidence-based training in teaching reading. Of the remaining amount, the CDE must distribute \$2.5 million for early literacy grants, and distribute the remaining appropriation to public schools and school districts as per-pupil intervention money.

Per-pupil intervention funding. Per-pupil intervention funding is calculated by dividing the total amount of the available appropriation by the total number of early-grade students in public schools who are identified as having a significant reading deficiency, and who received services under a READ plan in the previous budget year. That per-pupil amount is then paid based on the actual number of reading deficient early-grade students.

A school district that receives per-pupil intervention funding may use this revenue to enhance full-day kindergarten programs, operate a summer school literacy program, purchase tutoring, or to provide other targeted interventions. Public schools receiving intervention money must report specified information, including a budget with a narrative explanation for the use of the funding. Throughout the fiscal year, the CDE must monitor

and, if necessary, audit a public school's use of per-pupil intervention money. Public schools may retain up to 15 percent of annual intervention funding for use in the following budget year; however, if the school retains more than this amount, the CDE must reduce the following budget year allocation by the excess amount retained.

## **2019 Updates to the READ ACT**

Updates to the READ Act in 2019 require that the programs and services provided by public schools be evidence-based, and focus on reading competency in the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words, correlating sounds with letters, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. If a student's reading skills are below grade-level expectations, or the student is identified as having a significant reading deficiency, public schools must employ multi-tiered systems of support, which at a minimum include a daily literacy block of research-based instruction

Beginning July 1, 2020, the law requires that public schools identify designated curriculum and intervention programs in an annual READ plan, which must be submitted to the CDE

Public information campaign. Beginning with the 2019 academic year, the CDE must contract with an outside entity to develop and implement a public information campaign related to the importance of reading, and to highlight public schools and school districts that are achieving success

Professional evaluation. The CDE is also required to contract with an independent entity to evaluate the use of per-pupil intervention money, and money received through the Early Literacy Grant Program. The entity must also conduct a multi-year evaluation to determine whether student outcomes achieved by public schools participating in the grant program meet the goals of the READ Act.