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Beyond Identification:

Building the Systems Needed
for READ Act Success



Who We Are

We are Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows and current classroom educators working in schools across the state, including Harrison School District 2, Denver Public Schools, and De Beque School District 49JT. Together, we represent urban, online, and rural perspectives and serve students with a wide range of needs.

We undertook this research because we see daily how early literacy policies like the 2012 [READ Act](#) impact instruction, intervention, and student outcomes. While the policy is grounded in strong research, our experiences call attention to important gaps between intent and implementation, especially in under-resourced and rural settings. To develop this report, we synthesized state data from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), vetted READ Act policy documents, and consulted peer-reviewed research. We also conducted conversations and interviews with key stakeholders—including students, state and district representatives, parents, administrators, and community members—and triangulated these data sources to identify patterns in implementation, gaps in guidance, and disparities in student outcomes across different school contexts.

Grounded in both data and lived classroom experience, our goal is to ensure literacy policy in Colorado is equitable, effective, and responsive to the needs of all students.

Introduction

In Colorado, thousands of students are identified each year with a Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) through the [READ Act](#), yet far fewer successfully exit READ Plans by the end of 3rd grade and many remain on them well into middle school. In 2024, over [10,000 students](#) were still on a READ Plan in high school. This gap between identification and remediation shows a critical challenge: When identification continues for years without a successful exit, it signals that the systems needed to translate early literacy policy into consistent classroom practice are not keeping pace.

While the READ Act has succeeded in elevating early literacy as a statewide priority, uneven implementation, limited instructional guidance, and insufficient coaching infrastructure have constrained its impact, particularly for multilingual learners (MLs) and students beyond 3rd grade. Without targeted support for educators and school leaders, the READ Act risks identifying literacy needs without fully equipping schools to address them or to confidently exit students from READ Plans once progress is made.

Findings

The READ Act has successfully ensured that students are identified as struggling readers and placed on READ Plans in the early grades; however, the number of students exiting READ Plans after 3rd grade remains low. **More than 51,000 students in grades 4–12 remain on READ Plans statewide**, suggesting that many students continue to struggle with literacy well beyond the early intervention window. While [the policy](#) promises universal literacy proficiency through early identification and intervention, [implementation](#) data and educator experience reveal significant variation in fidelity, capacity, and outcomes across districts.

Schools are held accountable for early literacy metrics, yet there is limited statewide infrastructure to support consistent daily implementation of [Evidence-Based Reading Instruction](#) (EBRI). School leaders often lack the coaching and systems-level support needed to build and sustain effective literacy intervention programs, and educators report insufficient access to training, resources, and ongoing instructional coaching. These gaps become even more pronounced beyond K–3, where responsibility frequently falls on individual teachers to interpret guidance, adapt interventions, and fill systemic gaps—resulting in inequitable student experiences based on geography, staffing, and district capacity.

Recent READ Act updates require educators to identify MLs on READ Plans, and the CDE has provided some resources for [supporting multilingual learners](#). These state initiatives build educator capacity to address both literacy and language needs, promote culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, and offer frameworks for differentiating screening and instruction for MLs. However, the policy still provides limited guidance on how to implement these supports systematically within READ Plan processes, lacks consistent protocols for distinguishing between language acquisition versus reading disability, and has no mandated alignment between READ Plans and structured English language development frameworks, we learned from our research. As a result, educators are often left to interpret and apply these resources independently, increasing the risk of inconsistent implementation, over-identification, and inequitable literacy outcomes for MLs.

The process for [exiting students](#) from READ Plans is similarly unclear. While CDE has published guidance on considerations for exiting a READ Plan, including recommended data sources and instructional benchmarks, there is no established specific, measurable exit criteria or a standardized decision-making protocol. Teachers receive no formal training on when and how to apply multiple measures to determine readiness for exit, and districts are not held accountable for consistent or accurate exit decisions, particularly in grades 4–8, our research found. Without clear, required exit criteria and training, students may remain mislabeled and placed in interventions that no longer meet their needs, limiting access to grade-level instruction, enrichment opportunities, and continued academic growth.

This lack of clarity also increases administrative burden. Educators report duplicative documentation and misaligned data systems that divert time from instruction and student support. For instance, many students on READ Plans are also on [English Language Development \(ELD\)](#), [Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\)](#), or [Individual Education Program \(IEPs\) or 504 plans](#). Misaligned data systems occur when students have data from a READ Act–approved literacy screener (e.g., DIBELS), a separate English language proficiency assessment (ACCESS), local MTSS progress-monitoring tools, and a district student information system (SIS).

Together, these findings suggest that while the READ Act has strengthened accountability for early literacy identification, it has not yet established the guidance, training, and systems-level support necessary to ensure consistent, equitable implementation—or appropriate exit—across districts and student populations.

Recommendations

1. Allocate recurrent state funds to build district capacity for those in grade 4 and beyond to address literacy intervention and implementation for students with significant reading deficiencies, including—but not limited to—the hiring of literacy interventionists, reading specialists, and literacy coaches.

A recurring state funding stream would support district capacity to implement sustained literacy intervention systems by enabling investment and training of interventionists, reading specialists, and literacy coaches. Funding should prioritize Title I and rural schools to reduce inequities driven by staffing constraints and resource disparities. This investment would allow schools to build ongoing literacy programs to support struggling readers throughout their K-12 schooling in Colorado and help them exit READ Plans.

2. Issue explicit READ Act implementation guidance tailored specifically to multilingual learners.

The state should develop explicit implementation guidance for identifying and supporting MLLs on READ Plans that:

- + Clarifies how to distinguish between language acquisition needs and reading disabilities.
- + Outlines the appropriate use of literacy screeners and diagnostic assessments for MLs.
- + Requires schools to assess students in their home language during initial evaluations whenever feasible.
- + Aligns with existing [English Language Development Frameworks](#).

Clear guidance would ensure accurate identification of students with significant reading deficiencies, strengthen instructional decision-making, and provide MLs with equitable and appropriate literacy support.

3. Establish a statewide literacy coaching framework with differentiated grade-band models.

The state should establish a literacy coaching framework for grades K-12 to support literacy implementation as outlined by READ Plans. This ensures that literacy teachers are equipped to identify struggling readers and provide the support they need to become fluent, confident readers. Currently, schools across Colorado are identifying students for READ Plans, yet teachers and leaders lack a specific guide for implementing literacy interventions. While READ Plans require teachers to identify an intervention program to support struggling readers, educators do not receive coaching to support effective implementation. Other states have prioritized coaching to strengthen literacy implementation; for example, [Mississippi](#) developed a statewide handbook to guide literacy coaches, and [Georgia](#) placed structured literacy coaches in elementary schools to increase educator capacity and effectiveness in K–3 instruction.

Targeted coaching would equip teachers with practical strategies and support the use of trackable, evidence-based interventions through at least grade 8, thus ensuring literacy efforts remain data-driven and consistent. Clear coaching structures grounded in EBRI will improve implementation fidelity and drive measurable student growth. The CDE could pilot this model with current [Early Literacy Grant](#) recipients already engaged in literacy improvement work with systems to support implementation. A pilot would allow CDE to gather feedback, assess impact, and refine the model before scaling statewide—reducing risk, building educator buy-in, and ensuring the approach reflects current classroom realities.

4. Provide grade band-specific professional training for grades 4-12.

Rather than requiring teachers in grade 4 and above to complete the current K-3 READ Act Science of Reading Training, CDE should develop targeted modules focused on grade-band-specific literacy acquisition, intervention strategies, and disciplinary literacy. Other states have adopted differentiated professional learning structures to address secondary literacy needs. For example, [Ohio](#) provides tiered literacy professional development aligned to grade bands. [New Mexico](#) requires grades 6-12 English language arts, English language development, and special education teachers, interventionists, and literacy coaches to complete secondary literacy training, supported by dedicated state funding. Colorado could draw on these models to design relevant, role-specific professional learning that increases student engagement, respects educators' time, and strengthens implementation—ultimately leading to improved literacy outcomes for students.

5. Create an educator task force or working group to develop a standardized READ Plan exit framework for grades 4-12.

Colorado should develop clear, statewide guidance outlining the criteria, diagnostic processes, and required data points for exiting students from READ Plans through an educator working group or task force.

The working group or task force should include 4th-12th grade literacy teachers, with representation from Title 1 and rural districts. The group should identify best practices for literacy diagnosis, progress monitoring, and READ Plan exit decisions. Based on the working group's recommendations, CDE should issue formal statewide guidance for districts and require them to provide annual training for 4th-12th grade educators aligned to the finalized exit criteria and processes. Assembling a working group or task force ensures policy decisions reflect current instructional practices, clarity, and alignment in READ Act implementation.

Conclusion

By providing clearer structure and stronger guidance for school leaders and teachers, Colorado can support educators in closing reading gaps for all students in grades K-12 and become a national model for equitable literacy instruction.

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Members of our working group are available to share our perspectives as classroom teachers. We are also available to discuss the impact of strengthening the READ Act's implementation, especially for multilingual learners and students beyond 3rd grade.

About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students. teachplus.org/co



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