



Colorado READ Act

Communications Toolkit



Read Now Colorado

In 2017, Stand for Children Colorado launched, Read Now Colorado, a statewide endeavor to improve literacy rates in our state. Read Now Colorado helps parents learn more about how kids learn how to read and provides them with actionable tips and resources to support their young readers in partnership with their student's teacher. Ultimately, our goal is to double the number of third graders reading proficiently by the year 2025.



readnowcolorado.org



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K-3 Reading

Communications Toolkit

INTRODUCTION

By the end of third grade, students must make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. If they do not, they cannot do their coursework. Mastery of other academic subjects, including math, science and social studies, requires a strong foundation in basic literacy skills. 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.

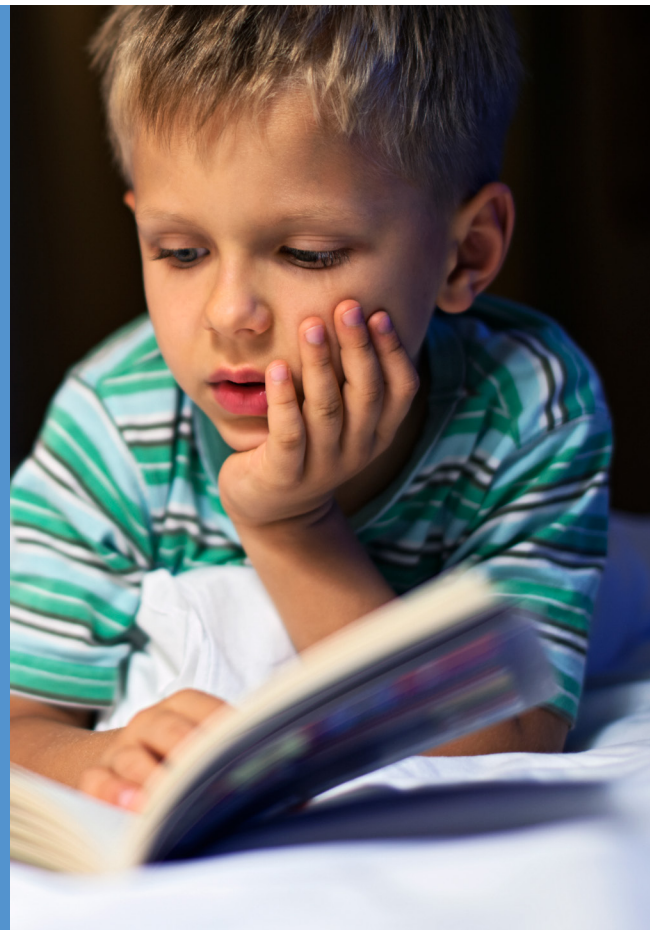
In Colorado, we have state law that is focused on ensuring students can read proficiently by the time they leave third grade. The Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act), unanimously passed the Colorado legislature in 2012. The READ Act focuses on K-3 literacy development by assessing students on their literacy skills and developing individual intervention plans for students who are behind. Despite passionately committed educators and a strong law we are not adequately preparing enough of our young readers.

Help Us Improve Literacy Rates:

At Stand for Children Colorado we are passionately committed to ensuring that every Colorado student is proficiently reading by the time they enter 4th grade so they are set up for success throughout their educational careers. We recently launched Read Now Colorado, a statewide effort to improve literacy rates. Our focus is providing parents tips and resources for supporting their young readers. This toolkit is intended to help you communicate about literacy in Colorado.

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KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS

A person's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success.

- ▶ Poverty, dropping out of school and incarceration are all more likely outcomes for a poor reader.
- ▶ Graduation, college and career preparedness are more likely possibilities for students who master reading skills.

Beginning in fourth grade and beyond, a student must be prepared to read to learn across all subject areas.

- ▶ There is general consensus among researchers that if a student enters fourth grade without achieving reading proficiency, he or she is far more likely to fall behind in all subject areas.
- ▶ Reading to learn enables a student to comprehend facts in social studies and science, understand word problems in math and interpret increasingly complex concepts in language arts.

The READ Act improves early literacy outcomes by identifying our state's most struggling readers in grades K-3 and offering resources to schools and families to help students reach proficiency.

- ▶ Through early identification of reading difficulties, high-quality intervention plans, and ongoing, targeted support, Colorado students have a greater chance of reaching proficiency by the time they complete third grade.
- ▶ The READ Act requires students in grades K-3 throughout Colorado to be evaluated by their teachers in the five essential domains of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension). These are the skill areas that students must master in order to become strong readers.
- ▶ Students who struggle with these skills are identified as having a Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) under the READ Act. These students receive extra supports and interventions, through a "READ Plan" to help them develop and achieve proficiency.

A student who still needs time to master reading must have every opportunity to strengthen and gain this skill before entering fourth grade—to better ensure a successful future.

- ▶ Conversely, students who enter fourth grade capable of reading and able to use their reading skills to learn, are positioned with a much higher probability for high school graduation and readiness for college or a good job.

Colorado provides extra resources to schools that identify students with SRDs and take action to develop READ Plans.

- ▶ In the 2015-2016 school year, districts received \$905 for each student with a SRD, which ultimately totaled \$33 million in per-pupil funds.
- ▶ These funds must be spent on proven strategies to help students read proficiently, including full-day kindergarten, scientifically or evidence based interventions, summer school, and tutoring services.

Parents can play a critical role in supporting their child in learning to read.

- ▶ There are several ways that parents can support their child in learning to be a strong reader including:
 - 1) Reading 20 minutes each day, which is a proven method for helping improve literacy skills.
 - 2) Partnering with their child's teacher to develop a "game plan" for ensuring that their child is on track toward becoming a strong reader. Teachers and administration are the most important in-school factors for a student's success, so it's important to develop a strong relationship with the other adults in a child's life. By attending school conferences and one-on-one meetings, parents are able to share important information about their child and ask questions about how their student is progressing in school. Most importantly, you should know if your child is on a READ Plan and ask what the school is doing to help your student improve their literacy skills.

OP ED EXAMPLE

Opinion submissions are a great way to spread the word via local newspapers. Please use the following example to customize op-ed submissions for your local state/community. Copy and paste the example and customize where indicated.

The Ability to Read to Learn Is Mission Critical For Our Children and in Colorado. We Have Work To Do.

What seems like the most basic step in a child's education - the ability to read - is actually the foundation of a child's success. Right now, about 60 percent of our students in Colorado are not reading on grade level in 4th grade. Despite strong early literacy policy and committed educators, we have a lot of work to do to ensure that every child cannot just read but possesses the ability to read to learn.

Even with all the technological advancements and devices available, a child still must learn to read. It is this ability that remains a basic predictor of a person's educational and lifelong success.

Reading to learn by fourth grade is mission critical for our children. If a child does not master this skill, he or she will not understand facts in social studies and science. Word problems in math will be unsolvable and navigating the rich world of literature and crafting complex sentences next to impossible. These students almost never catch up and their future is in peril. This is not just a group of children struggling, but a systemic reality that does not have to be true. If we do not prioritize reading to learn, this issue will continue its long-term implications on our economy and the fabric of our own city and state. Students who cannot read by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Nearly 85 percent of teenagers in the juvenile justice system cannot read to learn and seven out of ten adult prisoners cannot read above a fourth grade level. This is a real problem.

In Colorado, implementation of the Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act, is making a difference. The READ Act starts by making sure kindergartners know the A-B-Cs and the sounds they make. This focus continues, relying on approaches supported by research, until by third grade each student can read with ease, understands the material and can think critically. This requires easy-to-use diagnostic tests to help our teachers know which students are having problems and what solutions will help them. Students identified as struggling are provided with specific and targeted resources to help them. **When students receive the full benefits of the READ Act, reading difficulties are reduced by 60%.**

There is also a strong role for parents to play in supporting their child's reading at home. For instance, reading with or to them for at least 20 minutes a day is a great way to start. Parents also can form a strong partnership with their child's teacher so they understand how they can best support their work outside the classroom. Read Now Colorado, a project to improve literacy rates in our state, is working to support parents so they can support their kids. Parents can start out by signing a pledge to support their child's reading at www.readnowcolorado.org and they will receive regular information about how they can do just that.

Regardless of socioeconomic circumstances, every child deserves a fighting chance to reach his or her full potential; to fully embrace the American dream. Let us work together, parents, teachers, administrators and city leaders to ensure all our kids can read to learn.

MYTH VS. FACTS

Myth: Failure to read is only an education problem.

Fact: Failure to read is both an education and an economic problem. Seven out of every ten prison inmates cannot read above a fourth grade level and 85 percent of teenagers in the juvenile system have difficulty reading. Nearly 90 percent of students who drop out of high school are struggling readers in third grade.

Myth: Students can learn to read after third grade without challenge.

Fact: Students rarely catch up if they have not mastered reading by third grade. Students must learn to read in K-3 in order to read to learn in fourth grade and beyond. Reading to learn means comprehending facts in social studies and science, understanding word problems in math and interpreting complex materials in language arts.

Myth: The decision to promote a student to the fourth grade is based on one test score.

Fact: Promotion decisions are based on a comprehensive view of the student's mastery of third grade reading skills.

The Colorado READ Act creates a process for parents and educators to determine if an individual third grade student should advance to the next grade level based on multiple data points, with this joint decision subject to approval of the school district superintendent.

Myth: The ability to read by third grade does not have any correlation with the ability to graduate from high school.

Fact: The ability to read by third grade is imperative for a student's ability to graduate from high school.

This includes the years of high school and beyond, to career and/or college. Students who are not reading proficiently in third grade are four times more likely to not graduate high school. Low-income minority students are eight times more likely to drop out of high school. In fact, 88 percent of students who failed to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade.

Myth: There is no support for the implementation of the READ Act.

Fact: Implementing the READ Act should not be overly burdensome to schools. In fact, the state provides extra resources to schools that identify students with Significant Reading Deficiencies and take action to develop READ Plans.

In the 2015-2016 school year, districts received \$905 for each student with a SRD, which ultimately totaled \$33 million in per-pupil funds. These dollars must be spent on proven strategies to help students read proficiently, including full-day kindergarten, scientifically or evidence based interventions, summer school, and tutoring services.