

# State Highlights: K-3 Comprehensive Reading Programs

Impact Studies from Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina and South Carolina  
August 2017



In 2017, ExcelinEd published four separate reports examining the K-3 comprehensive reading programs in Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina and South Carolina. These reports explore the programs' impact on student learning in their respective states, insights of local stakeholders into each program's successes and ways the states could strengthen their programs.

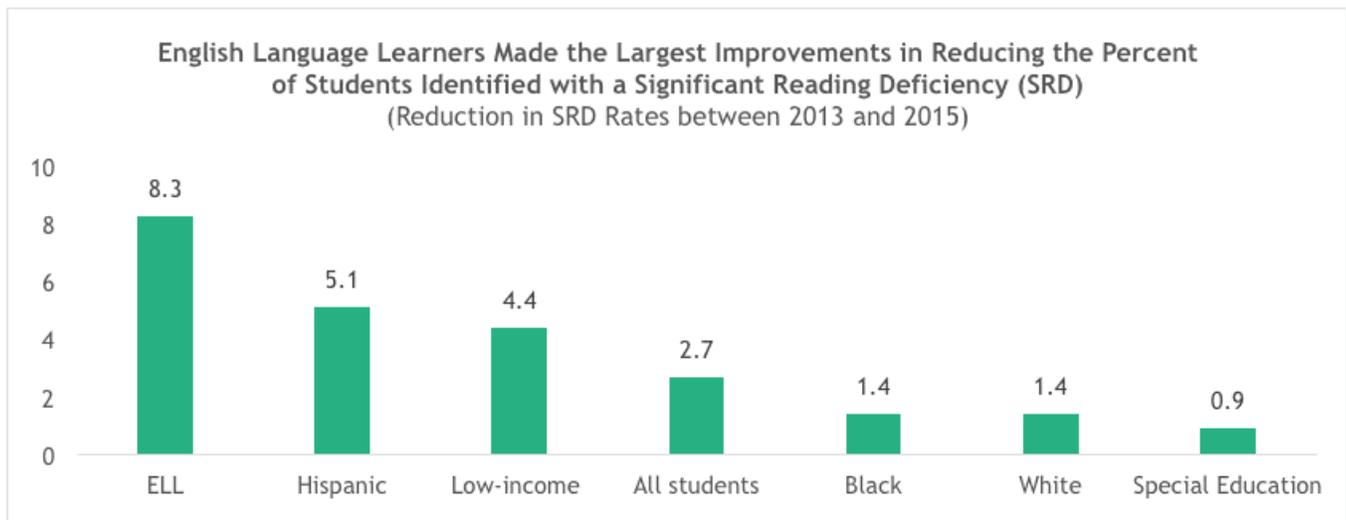
## COLORADO: READ ACT

[Colorado READ Act: An Inside Look](#) examines the Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act, known as the READ Act. The READ Act is Colorado's K-3 comprehensive reading policy designed to get all of the state's students reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

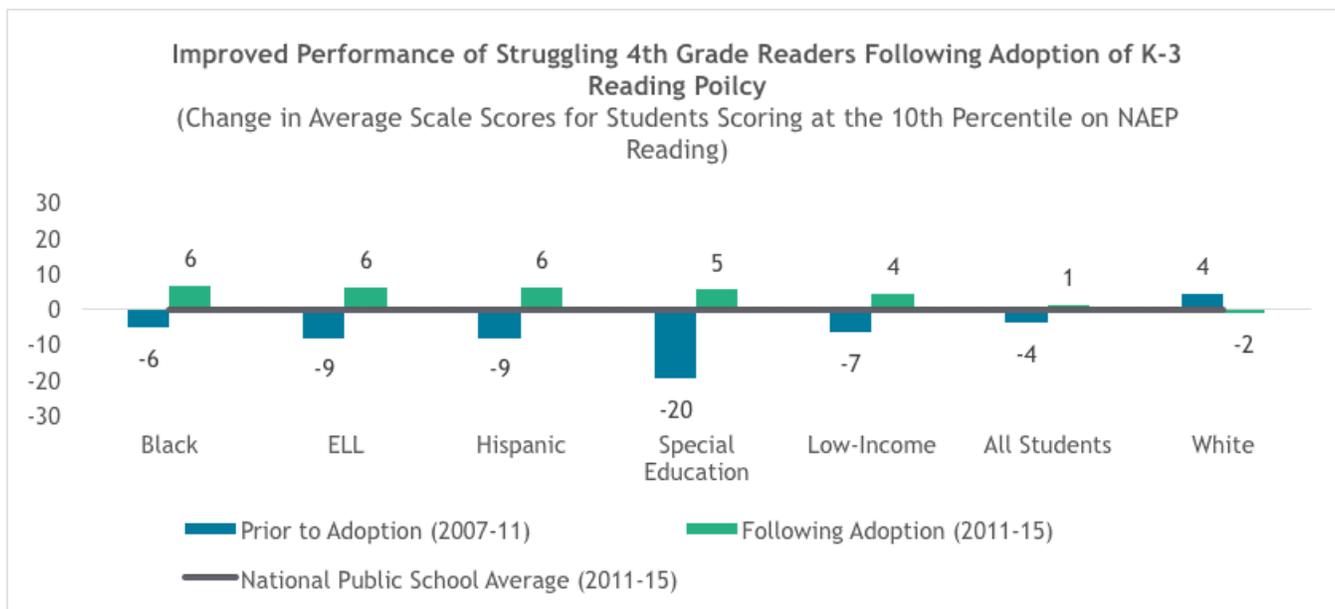
### Key Findings

Key findings from the report include:

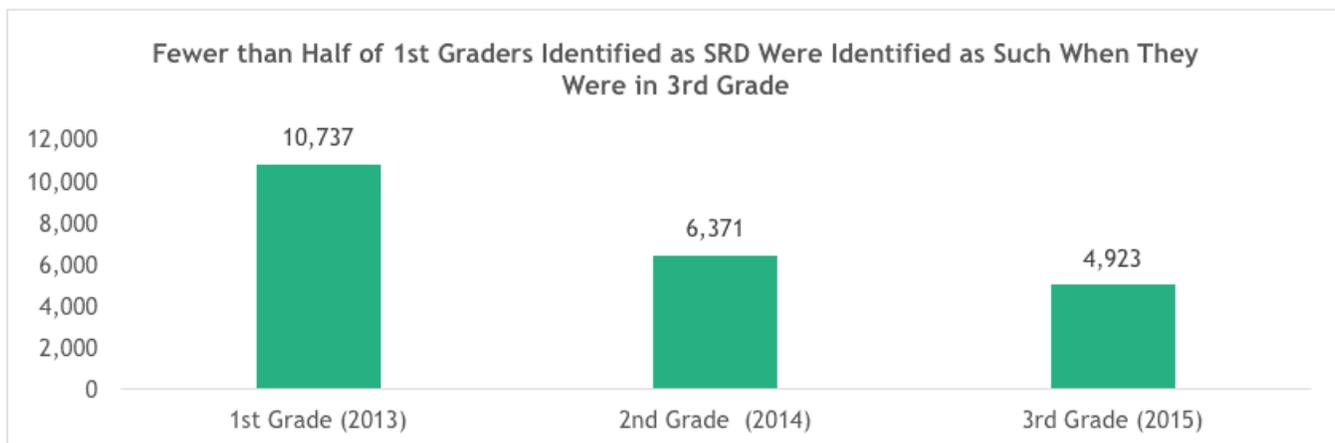
- 6,059 fewer students were identified with a significant reading deficiency from spring 2013 to 2015.
  - As displayed on the chart below, this trend has continued for many student subgroups, the largest being English Language Learners (ELLs) with an 8 percentage point decrease in identification.



- NAEP for fourth-grade reading shows that low-performing ELLs improved their reading performance by approximately a half a year following the adoption of the READ Act, compared to losing nearly a year's worth of learning prior to adoption.
- Similar results were found for other traditionally disadvantaged student groups which provides evidence that the READ Act has had a significant positive impact.



- Fewer than half of the first graders identified as having a Significant Reading Disability (SRD) were identified as such when they were in third grade.



## District and Educator Perspectives

District leaders and teachers shared their perspectives on the READ Act through interviews and surveys.

**Districts:** District staff agreed that the READ Act has increased teachers' understanding of literacy and the importance of using data to systematically plan instruction to meet the needs of all students. The districts are now more intentional about progress monitoring and providing interventions to students who are struggling. They also are including and informing parents on an ongoing basis.



**Teachers:** More than half of the teachers surveyed responded that the professional development they received improved their knowledge of and skill:

- Understanding research-based reading instruction (59 percent);
- Providing effective interventions (58 percent); and
- Using assessments to drive instruction (63 percent).

When teachers were asked, “From your perspective, what are the most positive aspects of the READ Act?”

- More than half of the teacher surveyed mentioned the help that struggling readers receive.
- About a fourth of teachers provided comments on the value of the assessments and use of data.
- About a fourth of teachers indicated that communications with parents are improved because of the READ Act.

Teachers’ comments further highlight the benefits of the READ Act at the classroom level. Some teacher responses included:

*“Our testing gives us a good indication of where to begin with each student and [helps us] help struggling readers right away when school begins.”*

*“It keeps struggling readers on the radar and helps with communication with parents about the child’s needs.”*

*“These prescribed interventions move students!”*

*“I believe we are more focused now. Our school looks at data in a more purposeful manner.”*

## Recommendations for Strengthening the READ Act

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District leaders and educators made the following recommendations to improve the READ Act:

- ✓ Distribute funds through competitive grants to ensure accountability and strengthen buy-in. The grant districts and schools have achieved great impact.
- ✓ Align preservice programs with the requirements of the READ Act so new teachers are better prepared.
- ✓ Provide more leadership training for district leaders, principals and teacher leaders.
- ✓ Continue funding personnel such as the literacy consultants, interventionists and literacy coaches who are available to model instructional practices and support teachers in their continued professional learning.

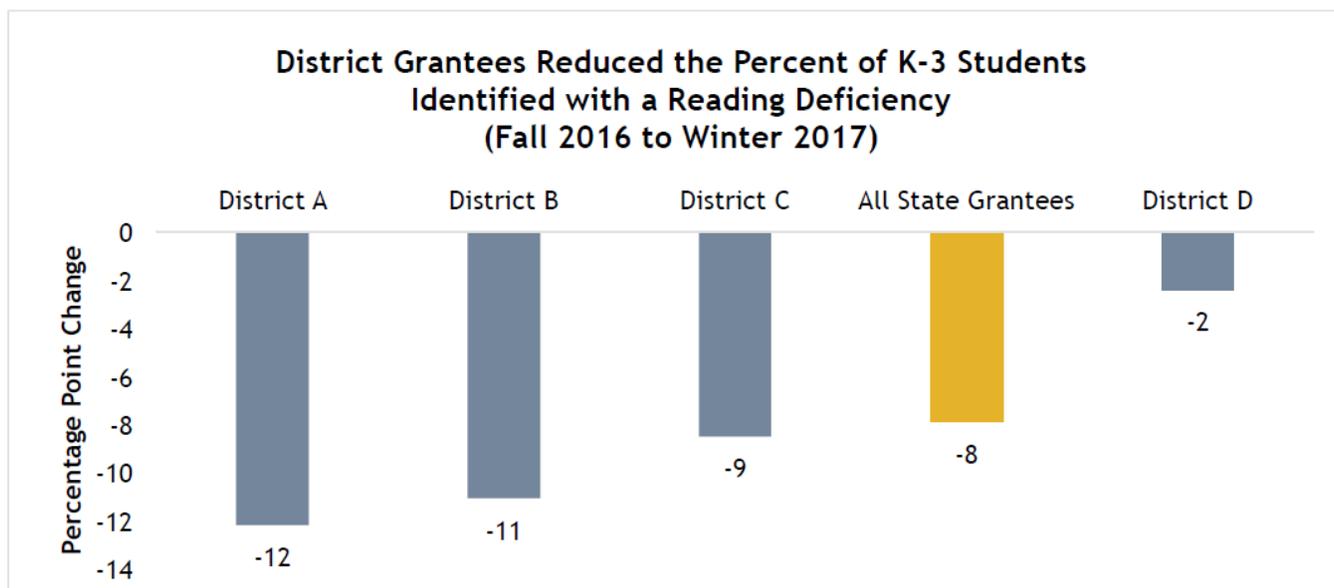


## NEVADA: READ BY GRADE THREE

*Nevada Read by Grade Three: An Inside Look* examines Nevada's new Read by Grade Three policy in action. The study helps to better understand Nevada stakeholders' perceptions of and experiences with Read by Grade Three, including an analysis on initial impact of the policy on student reading achievement.

### Key Finding

Even though Read by Grade Three is in its infancy, teachers are seeing improvements in their classrooms. Preliminary student outcome data, using fall 2016 and winter 2017 assessment points, indicate that already districts are reducing the percent of students identified with a reading deficiency.



### Educator Perspectives

Teachers surveyed agreed that the Read by Grade Three had positive impacts in these areas:

- 81 percent of teachers agreed that they received adequate support from school administration that assisted them in implementing Read by Grade Three.
- 81 percent of teachers agreed that they received adequate support that helped them analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions based on the data.
- 77 percent of teachers agreed that efforts to engage parents of struggling readers has increased.
- 75 percent of teachers agreed that the assessments they use help improve their instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- 74 percent of teachers support the Nevada Read by Grade Three requirement to eliminate social promotion to help ensure that struggling readers get the time they need with intensive interventions to be successful in fourth grade and beyond.
- 72 percent of teachers agreed that the Learning Strategist provides support that helps them improve their reading instruction.



- 68 percent of teachers agreed that their school has increased learning time for struggling readers.
- 68 percent of teachers agreed that their instructional practice to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties has changed since implementation of Read by Grade Three.
- 68 percent of teachers agreed that Read by Grade Three has had a positive impact on improving K-3 reading outcomes for students.
- About a tenth of teachers commented that mandatory retention was the most positive aspect.

Teachers' comments further highlight the benefits of Read by Grade Three at the classroom level. Some teacher responses included:

*"Poring over the data gave me more insight into what my students as a whole were lacking so I could address their needs in upcoming lessons."*

*"I think it has shined a light on students that may have in the past slid by into the next grade level. It has also encouraged more parent communication."*

*"I think this initiative has helped schools be more aware of the struggles teachers have from day to day with the diversity of our learners and has at least started a new conversation of teaching reading to these learners."*

*"By getting professional development on how to properly conduct assessments and choose strategies, it has positively impacted all students in my classroom, but especially the students performing below grade level expectations."*

*"Struggling readers will stop being promoted when they are not ready which hinders them academically in all subjects, putting them even further behind their peers."*

## Profile: Charter School Perspective

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Read by Grade Three explicitly addresses education in every Nevada public school district and charter school that serves students in grades K-3. Many charter schools saw this mandate as an opportunity. There are eight charter districts that currently receive funds through competitive Read by Grade Three grants. One of these funded charter districts participated in this study and shared insights into what Read by Grade Three has meant for them. Here are some of the benefits they shared:

- District leaders collaborated with leaders in other districts at statewide meetings to develop their plan. Having the opportunity to share best practices with colleagues at regional meetings was most helpful. They request more of these opportunities to collaborate and learn from peers.
- Across their campuses, there is consistency in expectations, accountability, screening and progress monitoring.
- They are seeing success in providing interventions for struggling students. In the past, interventions were often seen as a gateway to special education. Now, teachers are using interventions to "exit students" from that pathway.



- Funding made it possible to have a Literacy Strategist. Having funds for personnel was viewed as invaluable. The Learning Strategist is helping teachers feel supported, which previously has been a challenge. For example, to reduce their loads, teachers are now developing lesson plans together with the assistance of the Learning Strategist.

When asked what advice they would offer to their peers, the charter’s literacy leader remarked, “I think the biggest piece of advice is the transparency. We are not going to have a change without setting expectations, setting data points. If our kids can’t read, it affects everything. The Read by Grade Three legislation says what we did was not working—let’s look at what is working...Push forward. Know how you will hold yourself accountable.”

## Recommendations for Strengthening Read by Grade Three

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District leaders and educators made the following recommendations to improve Read by Grade Three:

- ✓ Provide in-depth professional development for Learning Strategists and teachers in research-based literacy strategies. In particular, teachers need assistance in providing interventions for struggling readers.
- ✓ Provide additional funds to support effective implementation of the new common assessment.
- ✓ Ensure funds are appropriated so the state can provide necessary support to districts and schools for effective implementation of Read by Grade 3.



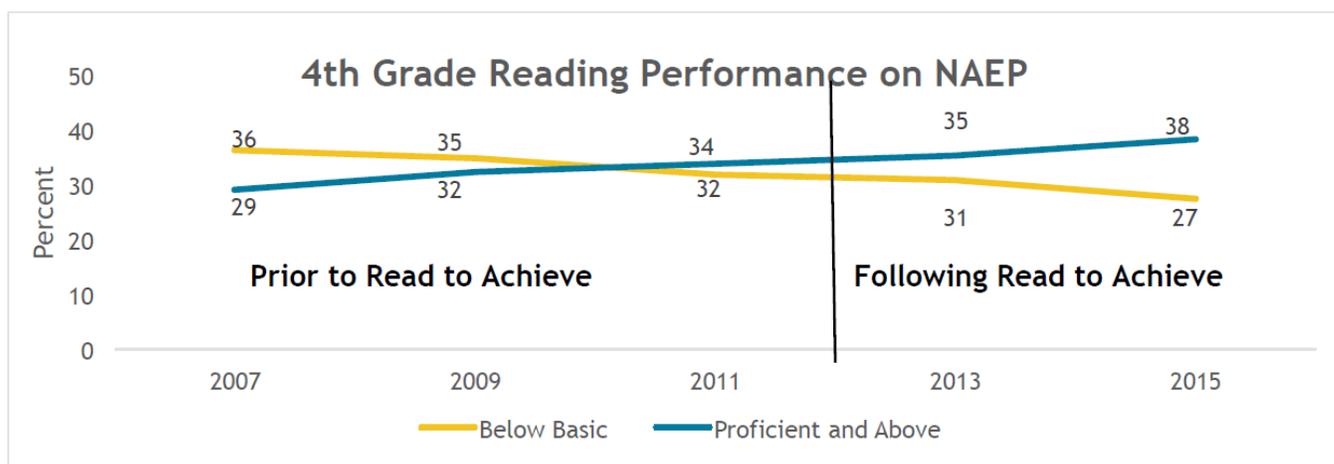
## NORTH CAROLINA: READ TO ACHIEVE

*North Carolina Read to Achieve: An Inside Look* examines Read to Achieve (RtA)—the K-3 comprehensive reading policy designed to get all North Carolina students reading on grade level by the end of third grade—and data collected from over 200 North Carolina educators and education leaders.

### Key Findings

Key findings from the report include:

- Since 2011, the state’s fourth graders saw an improvement of half a grade level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading section, increasing student proficiency by 4 percentage points and decreasing the percent of students scoring below basic by 5 percentage points.



- 84 percent of teachers agreed that their knowledge of and skill in using reading assessments to drive instruction increased after the policy was implemented.
- 80 percent of teachers agreed professional development improved their knowledge of research-based reading instruction after the policy was implemented.
- 72 percent of teachers agreed that there was an increase in learning time for struggling readers to get the help they needed to be successful after the policy was implemented.
- Nearly 75 percent of teachers reported their schools have increased efforts to engage parents since the policy was implemented.

Overall, perceptions are positive toward RtA and its components. District literacy leaders and teachers have received support through professional development and on-the-ground technical assistance that improved instruction. Efforts to communicate with and engage families in helping their children have increased. Struggling readers are identified early and provided intensive interventions.

### Recommendation for Strengthening RtA

District leaders and educators made the following recommendation to improve RtA:

- ✓ Increase the number of school-based literacy coaches to model instructional practices and support teachers in their continued professional learning.



## SOUTH CAROLINA: READ TO SUCCEED

*South Carolina Read to Succeed: An Inside Look* examines the relatively new Read to Succeed (RtS) program. The study examined stakeholders' experience with early implementation, including perceptions of support strategies from the Department of Education and school districts plus "lessons learned" recommendations for improving implementation.

### District and Educator Perspectives

With RtS underway, school districts reported that teachers were using literacy data more effectively and working collaboratively in data teams to find solutions to ensure student success. Teachers agreed that the Read to Succeed program had these positive impacts:

- 85 percent of teachers agreed that RtS has improved K-3 reading outcomes.
- 86 percent of teachers agreed that there was increased time for instruction and intervention for students with reading deficiencies.
- 83 percent of teachers agreed that they changed their instructional practices.
- 81 percent increased their efforts to engage parents and guardians of struggling readers.

Teachers' comments further highlight the benefits of RtS at the classroom level. Some teacher responses included:

*"Having a reading coach in every building has been extremely positive...Now, coaches work in coaching cycles which last several weeks and are much more beneficial than superficial one-time walk-throughs and observations."*

*"I think this is helping teachers to see that we are ALL accountable for teaching our students to read, and that being strong readers is so closely linked to success in life."*

*"I have valued the professional development aligned with Read to Succeed. This has allowed me to make the most of data collected on my students and use it effectively."*

*"Giving all teachers, even [those in] special areas, the knowledge and tools to identify the struggling readers. It stresses that everyone is a reading teacher and we can all work together to make a difference."*

### Recommendations for Strengthening RtS:

District leaders and educators made the following recommendations to improve RtS:

- ✓ Fund a reading coach in every elementary school to have the greatest impact.
- ✓ Provide in-depth professional development for literacy coaches in the summer to limit time away from schools.
- ✓ Allow flexibility in the use of funds for summer reading camps to cover costs such as transportation and student health needs.



## Recommendations for Other States Pursuing K-3 Reading Policy in the Future

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District leaders and educators made the following recommendations for other states pursuing similar K-3 reading policies in the future:

### Plan for Success:

- ✓ From the beginning, start a large communications campaign designed for all stakeholders to seek input and garner “buy-in.”
- ✓ Have an easily accessible digital site where information can be shared with all stakeholders.
- ✓ Ensure the message is clear and consistent.
- ✓ Design a clear structure of support for districts and schools.
- ✓ Develop clear and timely guidance on the K-3 Reading Policy.
- ✓ Provide in-depth professional development and support to districts, school administrators, literacy coaches and teachers.
- ✓ Choose assessments wisely and be willing to revise. Pay close attention to teacher feedback on the assessments.

### Provide and Fund Adequate Personnel:

- ✓ Recruit and hire literacy personnel who work in regions and can be the “go to” experts to help districts and school reading coaches understand the legislation.
- ✓ Ensure adequate reading coach school support to model instructional practices and support teachers in their continued professional learning.

### Keep the Big Picture in Mind:

- ✓ Ensure that teachers do not think that the legislation is about compliance. Instead, remind them that the legislation provides support to teachers and children to ensure that every child receives high-quality instruction with the goal of all students reading on grade level by the end of third grade.
- ✓ Seek out success stories and publicize.
- ✓ Learn from others who have implemented similar legislation and policies.