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SOUTH CAROLINA READ TO SUCCEED: *An Inside Look*

Prepared by:

RMC Research Corporation
Tampa, Florida





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With decades of experience in education, arts, humanities and healthcare, RMC Research engages with clients to measure their effectiveness and meet their goals to create opportunities for families, schools and communities. Learn more at RMCResearchCorporation.com.



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Reading is the Pathway to Success

Ensuring all students can read by the end of third grade is critical for their future success in school and in life. Children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.¹ Even more alarmingly, African American and Hispanic students who are not proficient readers are six times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school.² This is an education problem as well as an economic and social problem. According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), 7 out of every 10 prison inmates cannot read above a fourth-grade level.³ In addition, high school dropouts make up 75 percent of citizens receiving food stamps and 90 percent of Americans on welfare.⁴ In order to meet this issue head-on, a number of states have passed a Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy to ensure all students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

In 2014, the South Carolina General Assembly passed Act 284, which established the Read to Succeed Act. This Act was created to “address literacy performance...and put in place a comprehensive system of support to ensure South Carolina’s students graduate on time with the literacy skills they need to be successful in college, careers and citizenship.”⁵ The law includes the following components:

- Creates the Read to Succeed Office to serve as a support. The mission of the Read to Succeed Office is to ensure a comprehensive and systemic approach to reading and to ensure the delivery of professional development to teachers, staff and literacy coaches in reading instruction, content and assessment.
- Requires early identification of students’ early language and literacy development needs through administering a readiness assessment, which provide teachers and parents with the information needed to address the needs of the student.
- Mandates that students in Pre-K through third grade who are not reading on grade level are provided with in-class and supplemental reading intervention.
- Requires that third grade students who are not reading on grade level are provided with the opportunity to attend a summer reading camp. Students who attend summer reading camps must be taught by highly qualified teachers who have experience working with struggling readers.
- Specifies, as a last resort, that if a student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency, as indicated by scoring at the lowest achievement level on the state summative reading assessment at the end of third grade, the student can be retained. The law also includes good cause exemptions recognizing the special needs of some students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who were previously retained.
- Specifies that retained students receive more intensive interventions, such as reduced teacher-student ratios; more frequent student progress monitoring, tutoring or mentoring; and more dedicated time for reading intervention through an extended school day, week or year.
- Mandates that each school district develops a comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan for Pre-K through Grade 12.
- Modifies the teaching standards for new and current teachers so they are better prepared to teach reading skills. By 2020, all initially licensed K-12 teachers in South Carolina will have completed a Read to Succeed endorsement.⁶

1 Annie E. Casey Foundation, [Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation](#), 2011

2 Ibid.

3 National Center for Education Statistics, [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#), 1998

4 Begin to Read, [Literacy Statistics](#), 2014

5 South Carolina Department of Education, [South Carolina State Reading Plan](#), 2015

6 South Carolina Department of Education, [Read to Succeed](#), 2016

Although it is too soon to determine the impact of South Carolina’s Read to Succeed Act on student reading achievement, there are many states across the country that have passed similar reading policies and subsequently have seen notable improvement in reading achievement based on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These states include Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and North Carolina.

State	Year Adopted	Grade Level Improvement	Scale Score Improvement
Florida	2002	Nearly 1 ½	+13
Oklahoma	2011	More than ½	+7
Indiana	2010	½	+6
North Carolina	2012	½	+5
Arizona	2010	½	+5
National Public	2002	Less than ½	+4

About This Study

RMC Research Corporation conducted a study to better understand South Carolina stakeholders’ perceptions of and experiences with Read to Succeed. In particular, the questions of interest were:

- What support strategies and technical assistance did the South Carolina Department of Education and school districts provide?
- How was information about Read to Succeed shared with districts, schools, teachers, parents and communities?
- What recommendations do stakeholders have for improving the implementation process?
- What impact has Read to Succeed had on districts and schools?

The Sample

A purposeful sample of various stakeholders was selected for this study. The South Carolina State Department of Education’s Director of Early Learning and Literacy, the Deputy State Superintendent for the College and Career Readiness Division, the Chief Strategy Officer for Education, two Team Leads within the Read to Succeed unit and two Literacy Specialists provided a state-level view of Read to Succeed. In addition, literacy leaders located in four districts related their experiences in implementing Read to Succeed across schools in their respective district. And, a total of 359 K-3 teachers in these four districts provided their perceptions of Read to Succeed implementation in classrooms.

At the researchers’ request, the South Carolina Office of Early Learning and Literacy provided a list of recommended school districts for this study, using the following criteria:

- A mix of rural, suburban and urban districts
- Regional representation
- Enrollment of at least 100 third grade students in the district
- Stability of district leadership since enactment of Read to Succeed

Four school districts were selected and agreed to participate in interviews with the research team. The districts also agreed to disseminate an online survey to all their K-3 teachers.



The Methodology

South Carolina Department of Education staff members were asked a series of questions about the structure of state-level support and strategies, state-level communication strategies, recommendations for other states that may enact similar legislation and the impacts of the legislation. Both an interview and a focus group were 90-minute, face-to-face sessions. Protocol for the key state staff interview is located in Appendix A; protocol for the focus group is located in Appendix B. One RMC Research team member facilitated the sessions, and another RMC Research team member took notes. All sessions were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews of the four district-level literacy leaders were conducted via conference calls. RMC Research team members followed the same procedures as in the state sessions. The protocol for the district interviews is located in Appendix C.

Following the district interviews, the district literacy leader disseminated an electronic link to a teacher survey to all K-3 teachers in the district. The survey contained both Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix D.

The interviews and focus group data were reviewed and analyzed immediately after each event. Notes were reviewed in relation to the recorded transcription. Themes and patterns were identified. Summaries were reviewed by two RMC Research team members for accuracy.

Teacher surveys were aggregated across the four school districts. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize teachers' responses to the Likert-scale statements. The two open-ended questions were analyzed for emerging themes and patterns.

Research Findings

The research team collected data from stakeholders at the state, district and school levels. The information gleaned from the various sources provide a glimpse into the changes that have occurred since Read to Succeed was implemented in South Carolina schools. The findings are organized by the strategies that provide support to schools and districts, the communication methods used to publicize Read to Succeed, the lessons that South Carolina educators wish to share with others, and perceptions of the impact Read to Succeed has made on education in South Carolina.



Data Sources

Face-to-face interview with three key South Carolina Department of Education leaders

Focus group of five South Carolina Department of Education staff

Telephone interviews with eight literacy leaders in four districts

Online survey of 359 K-3 teachers in four districts

Support Strategies for Read to Succeed

After Read to Succeed legislation passed in June 2014, the Office of School Transformation located within the South Carolina Department of Education was charged with implementing the legislation. Notably, the legislation did not provide for additional full-time staff positions. In Year 1 of the initiative, the Department’s Office of School Transformation pulled staff from other offices to form a Read to Succeed Team composed of a Team Leader, two Associates and twelve Literacy Specialists who had been supporting districts and schools through other state initiatives. In Year 2, the Office of Early Learning and Literacy was established, and the Read to Succeed Team was housed there. The existing Team was expanded and now includes the Director of the Office of Early Learning and Literacy, a Team Leader, a Lead Literacy Specialist, two Associates and 19 Literacy Specialists who support literacy coaches in the field. The expanded office increased the state’s ability to implement the legislation and increased opportunities for collaboration across agencies and units. According to one state leader, “This cross-agency collaboration has increased communication about the needs from the field and how the state can meet those needs.”



Administrators see us as a group of people with new eyes and expertise for coaches.

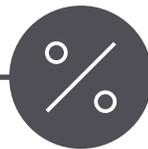
Literacy Specialist

State-provided supports. The state currently provides support to districts and school through two primary mechanisms: (1) employing Literacy Specialists who provide direct support and professional development, and (2) disseminating information about the legislation.

The type of support that Literacy Specialists provide to coaches and teachers has evolved over time. In Year 1, each of the 12 Literacy Specialists worked with 40 to 45 coaches and prioritized their support to districts that had the greatest need. This support focused on deepening coaches’ content knowledge and increasing their coaching skills. In Year 2, seven additional Literacy Specialists were hired, reducing the ratio to 20 to 25 coaches per Literacy Specialist. In addition, Literacy Specialists’ skill sets were matched to the needs of particular regions in order “to provide the best support we could.” In both years, Literacy Specialists provided technical assistance on district literacy proficiency plans, provided training for summer reading camps and worked “side-by-side with

coaches to look at data and analyze it.” In Year 3, Literacy Specialists will work with coaches in their region to individualize professional development rather than to provide professional development in a large-scale regional format.

Literacy leaders at both the state and district level agreed that the most helpful state-provided supports for Read to Succeed are the professional development and onsite technical assistance provided to literacy coaches. The professional development is intended to deepen coaches’ knowledge in literacy through meeting face-to-face, modeling instruction, developing literacy proficiency plans and working together to leverage resources. These state supports have been helpful at multiple levels. Coaches’ capacity to develop, support and coach teachers has increased. As a result of their work with coaches, teachers’ capacity for literacy instruction is increasing at schools.



88% of teachers agree their reading coach provides support to improve their reading instruction.

Read to Succeed Teacher Survey

School district literacy leaders who were interviewed for this study considered the state-provided professional development and technical support of the Literacy Specialists very successful in providing insight into thinking about best literacy practices as a whole and building the capacity of their coaches. For school administrators, the professional development and technical support have helped them understand what to look for in classrooms. One district literacy leader stated that in the past, professional development was fragmented, so having a highly-trained coach in the school “day in and day out” has been key to helping teachers integrate and follow up on new ideas. One leader commented that their teachers were “getting support like they have never received before.”

In Year 2, the Office of Early Learning and Literacy created an intervention guidance document that was shared with districts and schools to “help them understand the reading process.” School districts viewed this as very helpful and were involved through the state’s vetting process. In South Carolina, all Department of Education guidance documents are vetted by a large group of stakeholders. “Everyone has an opportunity to weigh in.” Final guidance documents, and webinars explaining the documents, are posted on the Department of Education website. PowerPoints, which also include links to the website, are handed out in face-to-face meetings with principals and instructional leaders.

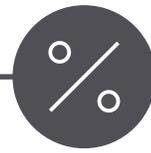
District-initiated supports. The four school districts that participated in this study eagerly implemented Read to Succeed and have gone above and beyond the resources provided by the state. Most notably, these districts recognized the value of coaches working hand-in-hand with teachers, and they actively sought ways to fund additional coaches. The districts leveraged local funds and other program funds to provide literacy coaches in all elementary schools and, in some instances, in grades not covered by the legislation (i.e., middle schools and high schools). One district was even able to provide funds for summer camps for students in grades other than third. Some of the districts have provided additional reading materials, intervention materials, leveled texts and professional libraries at all grade levels. Teachers have received additional training on topics such as Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) in preschool classrooms, learning standards and writing workshops. They have also participated in book studies and online courses in reading and writing, and they have attended and presented at education conferences. Further, the school districts enlisted the support of community partners such as United Way, YMCA, Rotary Club, AmeriCorps and Head Start to provide assistance with summer camps, tutors, additional resources and parent programs as another way to supplement the districts’ efforts.

Consensus on the value of professional development. Each of these school districts lauded professional development as making the difference in improving student outcomes. Teachers agreed that professional development had a positive impact on their instruction, their use of assessment data and their skills in providing effective instruction. Data team meetings became



They [Literacy Specialists] actually taught us to look at what we were doing in our classrooms.

District Literacy Leader



85% of teachers agreed professional development improved their knowledge of research-based reading instruction.

Read to Succeed Teacher Survey

90% of teachers agreed they receive adequate support to help them analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions.

Read to Succeed Teacher Survey

the norm for schools. A Literacy Specialist remarked, “When teachers are meeting in data teams, you can see the impact through the conversations they are having...analyzing what struggling readers are doing.”

This profile describes one district’s approach to an in-depth approach to professional learning:

Profile: Comprehensive Professional Learning in a District

One South Carolina school district took the Read to Succeed legislation to heart and put their money, time and effort toward transforming K-3 student literacy achievement in their schools. The district staff developed a five-year, “big picture” literacy plan with the goal of providing a comprehensive evidence-based professional learning component to increase teacher knowledge of literacy and best practices. First, they took full advantage of the state-provided professional development for coaches, district personnel and teachers. Then, they used district funds and grant monies to go beyond the legislative requirements.

To assist teachers with the requirement to add a literacy endorsement on their certificates, the district repurposed some district professional development funds, including Title II, to contract with the South Carolina virtual learning program to provide courses. They did not want the cost to be an obstacle for teachers in getting the literacy endorsement. While they may not be able to continue this financial support, this gave their teachers a great start.

The district also wrote a grant to “front-load” training by selecting at least two teachers from every elementary school who would become the school literacy leaders. The district provided these teacher leaders with professional development through a community partnership. The district’s vision was that these teacher leaders’ classrooms would be models where reading coaches could work with other teachers and demonstrate effective literacy practices.

The district strengthened the training of their literacy coaches by scheduling full-day, monthly meetings with the reading coaches. After “digging and diving” through both content and data as a team, the coaches return to their schools and deliver the training to their teachers in grade-level sessions. Coaches know when they leave these monthly sessions that district leaders will follow up with them. In “bring back” sessions, coaches return the next month and share how their various training sessions were received by teachers. The coaches are expected to bring work samples and evidence of how the new learning is being implemented. Furthermore, the coaches are placed into cohorts that travel to different schools, visit classrooms and observe teachers and students. Working within their cohorts, the coaches gather information, look at trends in the district and plan professional development and support to teachers.

The district indicated that this comprehensive professional development plan has made a difference. They are seeing struggling learners make steady progress, and fewer students are being referred for retention. Additionally, the district is seeing an improvement in teacher practice and collaboration. For example, teachers are having powerful conversations with one another about classroom practices. Before Read to Succeed, there was more of an attitude of “I have worked with them [the students]. I don’t know what to do. I think they need a specialist to take over.” That attitude is changing. Administrators are seeing more communication and collaboration between practitioners and specialists to meet the needs of all students. Everyone is working together to help students succeed.

The district’s Director of Early Childhood shared, “I was talking with a teacher the other day after her observation...and I told her there was a point where I almost cried, because I was so excited to see all the written elements of our reading plan coming to life in her classroom. Because when you write a massive plan like this, you don’t always get to see it at that level...see it come to life!”

Feedback on Communication Strategies

Communication about Read to Succeed was difficult during the first year. The Read to Succeed legislation was enacted in June 2014 and was expected to be implemented by the start of school a few months later. One state staff member indicated that some schools had started implementing aspects of the law before it had passed. Thus, state leaders needed to address misunderstandings about Read to Succeed that were circulating in the field. State staff members tried to put out a clear message that filtered from superintendents to principals to teachers. They relied on a variety of communication strategies such as face-to-face meetings and monthly webinars for district personnel. The state staff made presentations at state conferences, disseminated information via newspapers and attended local school board meetings. They provided information and FAQs on the South Carolina Department of Education website and responded to multiple emails daily. Public awareness for literacy was raised through efforts such as communication with early childhood centers, book giveaways during summer reading camps and the Gamecock/Clemson reading challenge where students win tickets to football games for reading.

School districts focused more of their efforts on communicating with parents and families. While some of the parent communication strategies were standardized across a district, most schools tailored their outreach to meet the needs of their families and communities. These outreach strategies included parent newsletters, PTA meetings, demonstrations of read alouds, parent advisory boards, parent conferences and literacy nights. The school districts expressed that communicating with parents about the various aspects of Read to Succeed has been difficult. They would like more assistance from the state staff to address parent communications.

Lessons Learned From South Carolina Educators

Based on their experiences with Read to Succeed, South Carolina's literacy leaders at the state and district level, along with classroom teachers, have provided constructive advice for legislators, state departments of education, district leaders and schools in other states that may be considering similar literacy initiatives.



Recommendations to Legislators, State Departments of Education and District Leaders

Plan for Implementation

- ✓ Allocate sufficient time to develop a comprehensive plan before implementation.
- ✓ Develop a communication plan and pertinent documents before implementation, being sure to consider parents' needs.
- ✓ Build program evaluation components into the comprehensive plan.
- ✓ Design a clear structure of support for schools and districts.
- ✓ Develop a timeline so districts have adequate time to recruit and hire quality personnel, such as reading coaches, before implementation.

Define the Legislation and Guidance

- ✓ Reflect on and refine the language of the law for “clarity and sensibility.”
- ✓ Develop a common understanding of the terminology used in the legislation (e.g., *evidence-based*, *certification*, *endorsement*, *intervention*).
- ✓ Develop clear guidance on the third grade retention policy and exemptions.
- ✓ Be thoughtful about identifying best practices and resources that align with Read to Succeed.

Provide Opportunities for Collaborative Input

- ✓ Involve all stakeholders, including district and school administrators, in policy decisions.
- ✓ Listen to implementers and revise or clarify the legislation based on feedback from the field.
- ✓ Learn from others who have implemented similar legislation and policies.
- ✓ Identify a liaison or task force of district leaders to work with the education committees in the House and Senate.

Allow for Flexibility in Purposeful Funding

- ✓ Consider personnel and other funding challenges in small, rural schools.
- ✓ Provide funding for intervention personnel and for strategies such as extended learning opportunities during the school year.
- ✓ Allow flexibility in the use of funds for summer reading camps to cover costs such as transportation and student health needs.

Develop and Support High Quality Literacy Coaches

- ✓ Explicitly define the role of reading coaches.
- ✓ Fund a reading coach in every elementary school to have the greatest impact.
- ✓ Expand coach positions to all levels for continued support after third grade.
- ✓ Provide professional development for coaches in the summer to limit time away from schools.
- ✓ Provide additional pay for coaches, as they have more job requirements than teachers.
- ✓ Provide in-depth support to coaches on specific interventions.
- ✓ Continue to provide state Literacy Specialists to support coaches, schools and districts.



Impact of Read to Succeed

Study participants were asked about the impact of the legislation on areas other than student outcomes. Their responses were closely aligned to their level of responsibility—state, district or classroom.

State perspectives. Since the enactment of Read to Succeed, there has been greater awareness of the importance of literacy and the need to increase knowledge of and skill in providing literacy instruction. Preservice programs and teacher certification programs have changed to incorporate a strong foundation in literacy. All South Carolina teacher preparation programs must have approved coursework to ensure that teacher candidates graduating from their programs will possess the knowledge and skills to effectively assist children in becoming proficient readers. By Spring 2020, all licensed K-12 teachers will have a Read to Succeed endorsement as part of their initial licensure. In addition, reading interventionists, special education teachers, speech providers, psychologists, principals and district administrators will have completed Read to Succeed endorsement by 2020. The legislation also influenced the revision of early learning standards to align with the research basis of Read to Succeed.

District perspectives. School districts reported that teachers were using data more effectively and working collaboratively in data teams to find solutions to ensure student success. A district literacy leader observed that there is now a collective responsibility in educating all students. One district restructured its third grade classrooms from departmentalized to self-contained so that every teacher is responsible for ensuring all students are proficient readers. Another district invested in hiring middle school literacy coaches because they wanted to keep the focus on maintaining and increasing the progress that students achieved.

Teacher perspectives. There was strong agreement among teachers, as noted in these survey percentages, that the Read to Succeed initiative achieved the following:

- increased learning time for struggling readers (86%)
- improved K-3 reading outcomes (85%)
- increased efforts to engage parents and guardians of struggling readers (81%)

When asked the open-ended question, “From your perspective, what are the most positive aspects of Read to Succeed?” more than a third of teachers commented on the opportunities for professional learning and growth, and about a third of the teachers indicated that classroom instruction has improved throughout their schools.

The following teacher responses further highlight the benefits of Read to Succeed at the classroom level:

“Students who are struggling with reading don’t skip by us.”

“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.”

“Giving all teachers, even 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.”

“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.”

“...never give up on the students. There are different strategies out there for our struggling readers. I am so thankful that I am learning new methods for those students.”

“The professional development has helped me rekindle my excitement for teaching reading again.”

“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.”

Summary

South Carolina’s Read to Succeed legislation was enacted to ensure that all students are reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Reaching that goal requires collaboration, coordination and concerted efforts of all stakeholders—the South Carolina Department of Education, school districts, classroom teachers, families and communities. This study investigated the perceptions of stakeholders who have insight into the successes and challenges that South Carolina educators encountered in pursuit of the Read to Succeed vision.

Overall, perceptions are very positive toward Read to Succeed and its components. District literacy leaders, coaches and teachers have received support through professional development and on-the-ground technical assistance that have improved instruction. In particular, the districts in this study appreciated the Literacy Specialists who provided expertise and assistance to assist in working with coaches and schools. The teachers responded that having a literacy coach was of great value in helping them make instructional improvements. Because of the intense professional development and coaching provided to teachers, students who are struggling are identified early and provided timely, intensive interventions to prevent future failure.

Further, there is now a clear and consistent message across the state that literacy is important. While the Read to Succeed initiative is still relatively new, there are multiple indications that it is off to a good start. A district literacy leader said, “This is some of the best work I’ve been involved in...You can’t put a price on someone being able to read.”



APPENDICES

Appendix A: State Literacy Leader Interview

Moderator Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We are with RMC Research Corporation. As you know, RMC is collecting information on Read to Succeed for a study being conducted by the Foundation for Excellence in Education, headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida.

For our study, we will be gathering the perceptions of state education leaders like you about a range of policies related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade. We will also be gathering the perceptions of SEA staff members whom you have identified, and later, district literacy leaders and teachers. The information that we gather and analyze will be summarized in a report. Your input is extremely valuable for this project and for determining future research projects in this area.

We will have 90 minutes for our discussion. [name] will be taking notes and will be responsible for keeping us on track with the suggested times. I will be facilitating our discussion. We ask that you make your comments as concise as possible and as directly focused on the topic as possible. This will help us make the best use of our limited time.

While your comments will not be directly linked to your name, because you are the state literacy leader, your comments cannot be considered anonymous. We will be audio recording this session, but the recording will only be used by RMC Research Corporation staff for this project and will not be shared with any other organization. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
3. State-Level Communication Strategies	15 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	5 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

1.1. After the passage of Read to Succeed, describe the organizational structure (or office) that was tasked to support the implementation of the legislation and how this structure facilitated implementation of the legislation.

- If this structure existed prior to the legislation: What changes were made to the structure to facilitate implementation of the legislation?

1.2. In what ways do you think this structure has been effective in implementing the legislation and promoting student reading achievement?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Support Strategies

2.1. After passage of the legislation, what guidance did the state provide to districts and schools to help all K-3 students read at grade level? What formats and dissemination methods did you use? Were some formats and methods more effective than others?

2.2. Describe the technical assistance that the state provided to districts, schools and reading coaches. How effective do you think the assistance has been?

2.3. Describe the professional development support that the state provided to K-3 teachers and reading coaches. How effective has this professional development been in increasing knowledge and skills in reading instruction?

2.4. What guidance did the state provide to districts and schools in selecting instructional resources (e.g., research-based textbooks, software and other materials)?

2.5. What is the state's role in providing K-3 reading assessments, such as screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostic assessments and summative assessments? How successful has this been?

2.6. How do you support and provide guidance to help schools intensify interventions for K-3 students identified with a reading deficiency? Students retained in third grade? Students in English language programs? What are the challenges you encountered and how did you address them?

2.7. Which of the state-provided supports—including guidance, technical assistance, professional development, instructional resources, assessment systems and interventions support—do you believe have been the most helpful to districts and schools in implementing the requirements in the legislation to improve student reading achievement? Why do you think that?

Topic Area 3: State-Level Communication Strategies

3.1. What strategies were used to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the new legislation?

3.2. What did the state do to help districts and schools communicate with parents about the reading performance of K-3 students having reading difficulties?

3.3. Since passage of the legislation, what strategies have been used to raise public awareness of literacy statewide?

3.4. How would you describe the effectiveness of all of these communication strategies? Which strategies were most successful and why?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

4.1. What advice would you want to share with other state departments if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?

4.2. How could lawmakers continue to support you in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

5.1. What impact has the legislation had on other areas in your state, such as Pre-K and preservice education?

5.2. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation has impacted your state?

Closing

This concludes our questions for this interview. As we noted earlier, our purpose for this interview was to gather your perceptions about a range of policies related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade.

Do you have any final questions for us?

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix B: Key SEA Staff Members Focus Group

Moderator Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We are with RMC Research Corporation. RMC is collecting information on Read to Succeed for a study requested by the Foundation for Excellence in Education, headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida.

Before we start, I want to thank you for participating in this focus group and sharing your perceptions.

For our study, we will be gathering the perceptions of key SEA staff members about a range of policies related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade. We will also be gathering the perceptions of your state literacy leader, district literacy leaders and teachers. The information that we gather and analyze will be summarized in a report. Your input is extremely valuable for this project and for determining future research projects in this area.

We have 90 minutes for our discussion. [name] will be taking notes and will be responsible for keeping us on track with the suggested times and ensuring that everyone has a chance to share their comments. I will be facilitating our discussion. We ask that you make your comments as concise as possible and as directly focused on the topic as possible. This will help us make the best use of our limited time.

Your comments will be confidential, and no names will be used. All of your responses will be summarized and reported anonymously. We will be audio recording this session, but the recording will only be used by RMC Research Corporation staff for this project and will not be shared with any other organization. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let’s begin by sharing your names and your roles at the agency. Would you [point to person] like to start for us?

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
3. State-Level Communication Strategies	10 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	10 minutes

Focus Group Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

1.1. What are your perceptions about the organizational structure (or office) that was tasked to support the implementation of the legislation? How has this structure facilitated implementation of the legislation and promoted student reading achievement?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Support Strategies

2.1. How effective was the SEA guidance in helping schools and districts understand the new legislation?

2.2. What are some of the challenges and successes you experienced in providing technical assistance to districts, schools and reading coaches to support implementation of the legislation?

2.3. What professional development do you provide? How is it delivered? How effective do you feel the professional development has been in ensuring all K-3 teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties?

2.4. What successes have you experienced in providing support to reading coaches?

2.5. What challenges have you experienced in providing support to reading coaches?

2.6. What key resources provided by the state to districts and schools have been most valuable and why?

2.7. How have the K-3 reading assessments (e.g., screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostics and summative assessments) implemented in schools and districts made a difference?

2.8. What are the successes you have experienced in supporting schools to implement K-3 interventions and to intensify those interventions for students retained in third grade?

2.9. What challenges have you experienced in supporting schools to implement K-3 interventions and to intensify those interventions for students retained in third grade?

2.10. Which of your state-provided supports—including guidance, technical assistance, professional development, assessment systems, instructional resources and interventions support—do you believe have been the most helpful to districts and schools in implementing the requirements in the legislation? Why do you think that?

Topic Area 3: State-Level Communication Strategies

3.1. How would you describe the effectiveness of the state’s communication strategies to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and awareness of literacy?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

4.1. What advice would you want to share with your same-role peers in other state departments if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?

4.2. How could lawmakers continue to support your work in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

5.1. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation has impacted schools and districts in your state?

Closing

This concludes our questions for this focus group. As we noted earlier, our purpose was to gather the perceptions of state education staff like you about a range of policies related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade.

Does anyone have any final questions for us?

Thank you again for your participation in this focus group.

Appendix C: District Literacy Leader Interview (via telephone)

Moderator Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is _____ and on the phone with me is my colleague _____. We are with RMC Research Corporation. RMC, in partnership with the Foundation for Excellence in Education, is conducting a study on Read to Succeed. The South Carolina Department of Education agreed to participate in the study and recommended your district for this interview.

Before we start, I want to thank you for participating in this telephone interview and sharing your perceptions.

For our study, we will be gathering the perceptions of district literacy leaders and teachers, and key SEA staff members about a range of practices related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade since the enactment of Read to Succeed. The information that we gather and analyze will be summarized in a report. Your input is extremely valuable for this project and for determining future research projects in this area.

We have 90 minutes for our discussion. [name] will be taking notes and will be responsible for keeping us on track with the suggested times and ensuring that we cover all the questions. I will be facilitating our discussion. We ask that you make your comments as concise as possible and as directly focused on the topic as possible. This will help us make the best use of our limited time.

Your comments will be confidential, and no names will be used. Your responses will be summarized and reported anonymously. We will be audio recording this session, but the recording will only be used by RMC Research Corporation staff for this project and will not be shared with any other organization. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
3. State-Level Communication Strategies	10 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	10 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

- 1.1. How effective was the SEA guidance in helping schools and districts understand the new legislation?
- 1.2. What types of technical assistance did the state provide to districts and schools, and how effective was it in helping the teachers implement the legislation?
- 1.3. How did the professional development provided by the state increase district leaders knowledge and skills in literacy? Coaches' literacy knowledge and skills? Teachers' literacy knowledge and skills?
- 1.4. What key resources did the state provide to districts and schools? Which have been the most valuable and why?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Support Strategies

- 2.1. Did your district provide guidelines or guidance documents in addition to the state-issued guidance documents? If so, what were the particular areas of the legislation that the district needed to clarify further?
- 2.2. What are some of the challenges and successes that your district experienced in providing technical assistance to schools to support implementation of the legislation?
- 2.3. In addition to state-provided professional development for K-3 teachers and school-based literacy leaders, what professional development do you provide? How is it delivered? How effective do you feel the professional development has been in ensuring all K-3 teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties?
- 2.4. How does your district support school-based literacy leaders? What successes have you experienced in providing support to literacy leaders?
- 2.5. What challenges have you experienced in providing this support to school-based literacy leaders?
- 2.6. How are your school-based literacy leaders supporting teachers? What strategies are most successful?
- 2.7. What key resources, in addition to those provided by the state, has your district provided to schools that have been most valuable and why?
- 2.8. How have the K-3 reading assessments (e.g., screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostics and summative assessments) implemented in schools and districts made a difference?
- 2.9. What are the successes you have experienced in supporting schools to implement K-3 interventions and to intensify those interventions for students retained in third grade?
- 2.10. What challenges have you experienced in supporting schools to implement K-3 interventions and to intensify those interventions for students retained in third grade?
- 2.11. Which of your district-provided supports—including guidance, technical assistance, professional development, assessment systems, instructional resources and interventions support—do you believe have been the most helpful to schools in implementing the requirements in the legislation? Why do you think that?

Topic Area 3: State-Level Communication Strategies

- 3.1. How would you describe the effectiveness of the state’s communication strategies to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and awareness of literacy?
- 3.2. What communication strategies did your district employ to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and awareness of literacy? Which strategies do you think were most effective and why?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

- 4.1. What advice would you want to share with literacy leaders in other districts and states if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?
- 4.2. How could the state department of education continue to support your work in reaching the goals of this legislation?
- 4.3. How could lawmakers continue to support your work in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

- 5.1. What changes in your district and schools can be attributed to the implementation of this legislation?
- 5.2. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation has impacted schools and your district?

Closing

This concludes our questions for this interview. As we noted earlier, our purpose was to gather the perceptions of district literacy leaders like you about a range of policies related to reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade.

Do you have any final questions for us?

Thank you again for your participation in this interview.

Appendix D: Teacher Survey

This survey is part of a study of the South Carolina Read to Succeed initiative. Your responses are voluntary and will be reported only in combination with responses of other teachers from across the state. Please answer the questions in relation to the Read to Succeed initiative.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Thank you – we value your input.

Scale: Strongly Agree - Somewhat Agree - Somewhat Disagree - Strongly Disagree - N/A.

1. I received adequate support from my school district and/or the South Carolina Department of Education that assisted me in implementing Read to Succeed.
2. I received adequate support from my school administration that assisted me in implementing Read to Succeed.
3. I receive adequate support that helps me analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions based on the data.
4. My reading coach provides support that helps me improve my reading instruction.
5. I received information and guidance documents that increased my knowledge of the requirements of Read to Succeed.
6. The Read to Succeed guidance documents provided information that was useful to me.
7. The professional development that I received from my school district and/or the South Carolina Department of Education improved my knowledge of and skill in research-based reading instruction.
8. The professional development that I received from my school district and/or the South Carolina Department of Education improved my knowledge of and skill of providing effective interventions.
9. The professional development that I received from my school district and/or the South Carolina Department of Education improved my knowledge of and skill with assessments and their use to drive instruction.
10. The Read to Succeed assessments that we use help me improve my instruction to meet the needs of all students.
11. The third grade summer reading camp is achieving the purpose of accelerating reading progress for struggling readers.
12. Because of the Read to Succeed initiative, my school has provided increased learning time for struggling readers.
13. Because of the Read to Succeed initiative, I have changed my instructional practices to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.
14. The Read to Succeed initiative has a positive impact on improving K-3 reading outcomes in my school.
15. The Read to Succeed initiative has helped me identify and address reading difficulties early.
16. The Read to Succeed initiative was communicated to parents in a way that was easy for them to understand.

17. Since implementation of the Read to Succeed initiative, my school has increased its efforts to engage parents of struggling readers in a timely fashion.
18. I support the Read to Succeed requirement to eliminate social promotion to help ensure struggling readers get the time they need with intensive interventions to be successful in fourth grade and beyond.

Open Ended:

19. From your perspective, what are the most positive aspects of Read to Succeed?
20. What advice do you have to improve the implementation of Read to Succeed?

Please indicate the school district in which you teach. (list of four districts)

