

Idaho Literacy Task Force Report

November 2014

Introduction and Background

In June 2014, the Idaho Literacy Technical Advisory Committee gathered to review existing early literacy legislation, create recommendations for revisions to submit to the State Board of Education, and make redline edits to the existing Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Act. The committee's approximately 20 members from across the state included K-3 teachers, principals, professors of education, state legislators, business representatives, librarians, and other advocates of early literacy.

Over the course of six months, the committee developed a common understanding of the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Act (ICLA) of 1997, including its requirements at the school, preservice, and inservice levels. At the school-level, requirements include using the Idaho Reading Indicator to screen every K-3 student, providing at least 40 hours of intervention to students identified as most in need, and public reporting of school-level results. Preservice requirements include aligning college coursework with the ICLA, requiring K-8 teacher candidates to pass an assessment demonstrating their knowledge and skills, and reporting yearly on the number of preservice teachers who took and passed the assessment. For inservice requirements, K-8 teachers need to pass a three-credit reading instruction course in order to maintain certification.

Within six years of the legislation passing, the state experienced successes and challenges related to the ICLA. While reading achievement improved statewide, concerns were raised in regards to tracking students and the need for more resource in professional development and secondary intervention. The 2000s brought changes to early reading in Idaho, including implementation of the federal Reading First Initiative and shifts in the assessment measures of the Idaho Reading Indicator.

In order to make well-informed decisions, the committee engaged in collective learning about the components of a comprehensive assessment system, the early literacy policies of other states, understanding dyslexia (including instructional and policy implications), and the research about proven ways to bring effective practices to scale across a state. After careful consideration, discussion, and debate, the committee made the following recommendations to the State Board of Education.

Recommendations and Rationale

ASSESSMENT

Recommendation: The Idaho Reading Indicator shall be used to screen K-3 students.

Rationale: Screening is a cost- and time-efficient method of predicting reading success and identifying struggling readers. Screening all students fosters early reading intervention.

Recommendation: The Idaho Reading Indicator shall not be used for accountability at the student, teacher, or school level. Progress monitoring may be used for this purpose, as it measures student growth over time.

Rationale: The Idaho Reading Indicator was designed to inform decision making before instruction, not to examine the effectiveness of an instructional program after its conclusion. Using a screening tool for accountability has the potential to compromise test administration and encourage teaching to the assessment, which in turn invalidates the results.

Recommendation: The Idaho Reading Indicator shall be reviewed to address concerns about its technical adequacy and to explore alternative measures.

Rationale: A study conducted by Drs. Kristi Santi and David Francis raised several concerns about the Idaho Reading Indicator, including its technical adequacy, the lack of reading comprehension questions, and questions about the purposes of the assessment.

Recommendation: The Idaho Department of Education shall provide screening and progress monitoring tools to LEAs.

Rationale: The Department of Education plays a key role in supporting LEAs and ensuring consistent statewide practice by vetting, purchasing, and distributing assessments.

Recommendation: LEAs shall continue to screen and progress monitor students beyond third grade until students who are not meeting grade-level proficiency have mastered grade-level expectations.

Rationale: Screening and progress monitoring data are key tools to guide instructional decisions for students who need continued instructional support and intervention.

Recommendation: The Idaho Department of Education shall provide K-3 diagnostic assessments in early reading to LEAs.

Rationale: Diagnostic assessments are used to pinpoint areas of student need and efficiently determine appropriate curriculum and instruction.

CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

Recommendations and Rationale to be included here.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation: The Idaho Department of Education shall provide professional development in the administration and analysis of assessment data, to include the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

Rationale: Proper training in test administration is essential to test validity and reliability. Professional development in analysis ensures that test results are correctly interpreted and used to make decisions about instruction and resource allocation.

Recommendation: The Idaho Department of Education shall evaluate the expectations and implementation of the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Course.

Rationale: As policy, research, and practice evolve, the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Course must change to reflect emerging best practices. Regular review of this course will ensure that it is current and consistent.

POLICY AND EVALUATION

Recommendation: The Idaho State Board of Education shall reauthorize the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Act every five years.

Rationale: As research and practice evolve, the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Act must change to reflect emerging best practices. A five-year review cycle shall be implemented to guarantee that policy is not a hindrance to progress.

Recommendation: The Idaho Department of Education shall conduct reading initiative program evaluations every two years.

Rationale: Ongoing program evaluation enables Idaho policymakers to analyze trends, make program decisions, and deploy resources based on current data. Program evaluation is essential to fostering public trust and ensuring appropriate use of tax dollars.

Conclusion

A strong early literacy system is one of the best investments a state can make in its future. According to research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development. Failure to read proficiently is linked to higher rates of school dropout, which suppresses individual earning potential as

well as the nation's competitiveness and general productivity." Knowing how to read proficiently enables a student to read and learn content in other subject areas.

The Idaho State Board of Education has a timely opportunity to rejuvenate the focus on early literacy through updated policy and strategic investment in proven practices in assessment, instruction, and professional development. The early literacy stakeholders represented on the Idaho Literacy Task Force call on the State Board to act upon the recommendations above on behalf of the students of Idaho.

References

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