
MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents
CC: Principals and Educators
FROM: Interim Secretary Zoie Saunders, M.Ed.
SUBJECT: Announcing **Read Vermont**
DATE: September 17, 2024

Purpose

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is pleased to announce the launch of Read Vermont, a comprehensive state-wide initiative dedicated to improving literacy outcomes for Vermont students. Building on recent legislation, including [Act 139](#), Read Vermont aims to ensure every child can read by third grade and graduates high school ready for college or career. The AOE has planned a multifaceted approach that involves close partnership with and support of Vermont's Supervisory Unions/ Supervisory Districts (SU and SD) and educators.

Background

Improving literacy outcomes for Vermont students is a shared priority that various education partners, the General Assembly, and the [Advisory Council on Literacy](#) have long supported. Over the last several decades, Vermont has focused on establishing systems and policies to improve student literacy outcomes. Most recently, in the 2023-2024 legislative session, the General Assembly enacted Vermont's most comprehensive literacy legislation to date, [Act 139](#), which focuses on early identification and intervention for students reading below grade level, parental notification, and strengthening educator preparation programs. The Vermont General Assembly's enactment of [Act 139](#) in the 2023-2024 session represents a significant step forward.

Over the last year, the AOE has engaged with education partners – including teachers, curriculum leaders, and Superintendents – to understand literacy needs and opportunities. Common themes highlight critical needs that align with the Advisory Council on Literacy's recommendations. The common themes identified include the need for:

- Resources to support the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment in Vermont's Supervisory Unions/ Districts (SU/SD) and classrooms.
- High-quality professional learning and job-embedded coaching that supports classroom educators in putting research into practice.
- AOE resources, guidance, and accountability measures to guide SU/SD shifts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.



These insights have shaped the Read Vermont initiative, ensuring it addresses the most pressing needs.

Vermont's Shared Vision for Literacy

At the core of Read Vermont is our shared vision for literacy: Delivering high-quality reading and writing instruction based on scientific evidence will ensure that every child has the foundational skills necessary to successfully engage with text and experience the joy of reading. Convergent evidence has accumulated over the last fifty years and demonstrates that:¹

- Learning to read is a complex process that involves multiple skills, knowledge, and cognitive abilities.²
- Reading and writing are taught skills.³
- All students benefit from explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing based on their proficiency and skill level.⁴
- The most common causes of reading and writing difficulties can be remediated by explicit, systematic, code-based instruction combined with opportunities to practice weak skills until they are mastered.
- Students benefit from multiple and varied opportunities to practice literacy skills.
- It is important to leverage student data to differentiate individual, small-group, and classroom instruction based on identified needs and skill level.
- Students benefit from access to different types of texts at different times and for different purposes. For example:
- Decodable texts support mastery of sound-symbol correspondence until readers are accurate and automatic decoders.
- Authentic, complex, and content-rich texts help build word and world knowledge, increase interest, and provide exposure to complex syntax.
- Learners of all languages benefit from evidence-based instruction and developing oral language skills as they learn to read and write in a new language.

¹ Vermont Advisory Council on Literacy Recommendations; [Reid Lyon, "TenMaxiums: What We've Learned So Far About How Children Learn to Read"](#), Reading Universe; [Vermont Act 139](#); National Reading Panel (US), National Institutes of Health, *"Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction: Reports of the Subgroups"*.

² Lyon, Reid. "Ten Maxims: What We've Learned So Far About How Children Learn to Read," Reading Universe.

³ Anne Castles, Kathleen Rastle, and Kate Nation, "Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition from Novice to Expert," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 19 (2018)

⁴ Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes, "Exploring the Foundations of Explicit Instruction," in *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, ed. Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes (Guilford Press, 2011); 2011; Rayner, K., Foorman, B. R., Perfetti, C. A., Pesetsky, D., & Seidenberg, M. S. (2001). How psychological science informs the teaching of reading. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2(2), 31–74.

- Philosophies of teaching word reading that are based on visual cues (whole words, three-cueing, word shapes) or inference do not support students' long-term ability to automatically decode familiar or unfamiliar words.
- The availability and use of texts that are culturally relevant and representative of historically underrepresented voices is critical to ensure that all students can connect their experiences to the text they are reading.⁵
- Active self-regulation, including but not limited to executive function skills, motivation and engagement, and use of evidence-based strategies, can impact reading and can be impacted by instruction.⁶

In summary, reading comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading, relies on multiple skills, knowledge, and cognitive abilities: including spoken language comprehension, accurate and automatic decoding, developed vocabulary, and background knowledge. When students master foundational skills, experience reading success, and discover the benefits of reading, they will continue to grow as readers, setting them up for lifelong success.

Key Priorities of Read Vermont

- *Professional Learning*: Launch high-quality synchronous virtual, in-person, or hybrid high-quality professional learning opportunities for all PK-12 educators and leaders. The detailed schedule announced in early October.
- *Job-Embedded Coaching*: Intensive and personalized job-embedded coaching for elementary schools (K-3) in six to twelve Vermont SU/SD over one year. Interested schools must apply and be determined based on the highest need.
- *Literacy Learning Network*: Develop a network of leaders and educators engaged in a facilitated learning series to elevate learning and sharing among peers across the state.
- *Guidance Documents and Resources*: Issue a series of guidance documents and resources for SU/SD around Act 139 implementation and evidence-based practices.
- *Family and Caregiver Engagement*: Develop resources to support educators when engaging with families and caregivers.

⁵ [Vermont Act 139](#)

⁶ Duke, N. K., & Cartwright, K. B. (2021). The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the Simple View of Reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 51(S1), S25–S44.
<https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/rrq.411>

Key Milestones

- September 2024:
 - Read Vermont Launch webinar
 - Professional learning asynchronous modules “Building a Foundation for Lifelong Literacy Success” Facilitation Guides released
 - Read Vermont Capacity Building [Request for Proposals](#) closes
- October 2024:
 - Professional learning and coaching opportunities announced
- November 2024:
 - Reviewed screening instruments guidance document issued
 - Parental or guardian notification recommendations issued
- December 2024:
 - Professional learning guidance document issued
- July 2025:
 - AOE submits recommendations to VT Standards Board on strengthening educator prep programs
- July 2026:
 - VT Standards Board to consider AOE’s recommendations and update educator preparation programs as appropriate

Next Steps

We are dedicated to keeping you informed and working collaboratively to shape the future of Read Vermont. Please sign up for the [Read Vermont listserv](#), look for the webinar launch date, and future opportunities. Reach out to Emily.Lesh@vermont.gov with questions and to learn more.