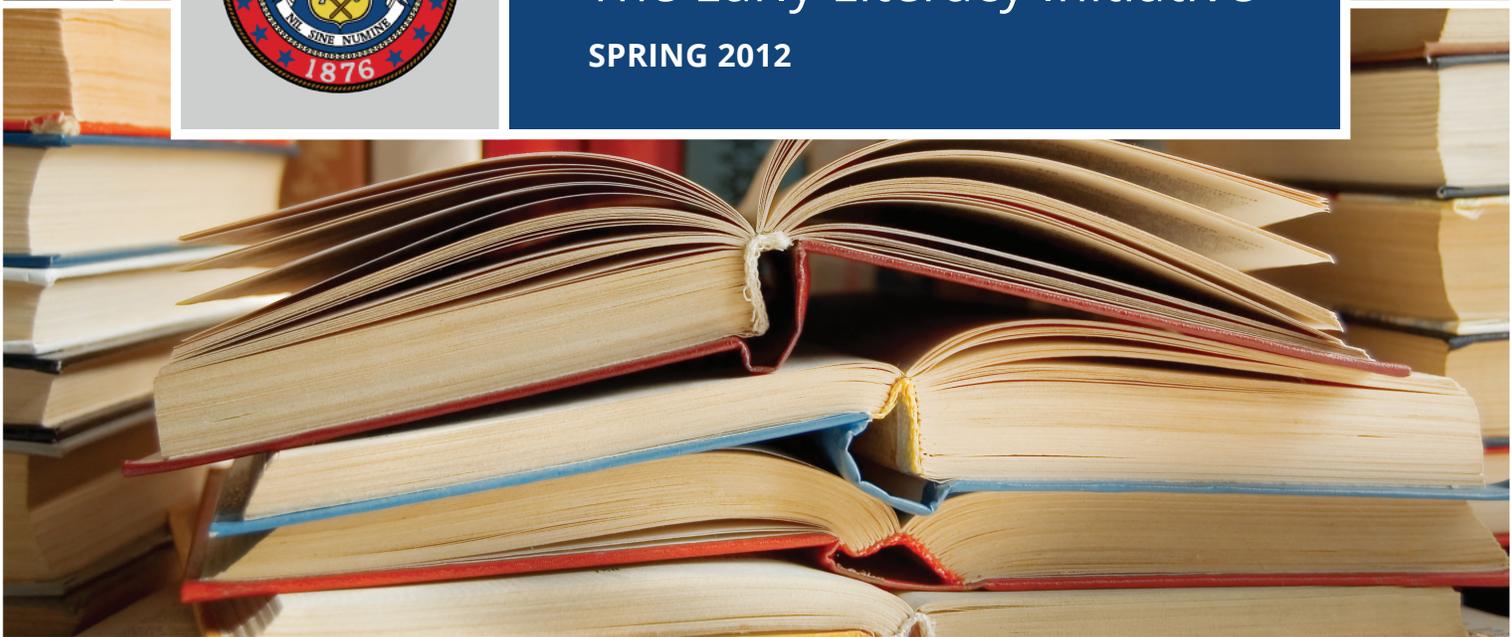




Colorado Reads: The Early Literacy Initiative

SPRING 2012



The Lieutenant Governor, the head of the Mile High United Way, the head of Rocky Mountain Public Broadcasting Systems, the head of the Colorado Education Association, and the head of the Colorado State Library System are all on a bus...

Sound like the start of a bad joke?

Not at all. What this group of leaders in business, civic advocacy, and education began when they joined a state-wide bus tour last fall was no joke. What they did was embark on the start of a journey we believe will have important consequences for the future of Colorado's kids.

At stops in towns and cities across Colorado, we learned that 26 percent of our third graders are not reading at grade level. Clearly, that's not a laughing matter.

That sobering statistic translates into 26 percent of Colorado's kids failing to graduate from high school. And that puts their future—and ours—at great risk in an ever more competitive world.

We already know that if children are not reading in the third grade their prospect of graduation is low. Not to mention, their likelihood of ending up hungry or homeless is higher than their peers who do graduate.

The Colorado *Early Literacy Initiative* is not a new idea. It builds on efforts that have been underway in Colorado for more than a decade. It reinforces and renews a commitment by business leaders, the foundation community, and our public sectors, to bring greater attention to the problem of illiteracy.

If we ignore this issue, the consequences are clear.

The consequences can be seen in our prisons. We see it in our homeless shelters. We see it in our unemployment lines. And we also know that the status quo is unacceptable.

This is a goal that transcends party affiliation, ideology and geography.

It resonated in every community we visited during our literacy tour.

We heard from hundreds of Coloradans. We heard from grandparents, parents, community members and teachers—all of whom expressed their concerns and shared their ideas.

We know there is widespread public interest in this issue.

We know because of the 8-year old in Fruita who waited eagerly to meet us and thank us for making the time to read to his friends at his school. We know because of the librarians we met in Mesa County who traveled several hours to talk about their successful reading programs and how to take them statewide. We know because of business leaders we met in Colorado Springs who testified with unbridled enthusiasm on the importance of early childhood education to our economy. We know because of the work underway at the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and the Telluride Foundation.

Our bus tour logged more than a thousand miles. We traveled through a snowstorm on Rabbit Ears Pass and saw the brilliant autumn foliage on Wolf Creek Pass.

We returned to Denver, not in agreement on every policy solution, but with a sense of hope that if we started rowing in the same direction, big things could happen.

The early literacy bus tour reminded us how important it is that as we drive this, and other public policy priorities forward, we do so in a way that brings communities together.

Colorado Reads: The Early Literacy Initiative is our attempt to capture the best ideas we heard about during our tour. It also identifies tools we will need to ensure that every child can read and succeed in life.

Our office is working closely with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) as it develops a state literacy plan that will serve as a roadmap for the implementation of literacy-related policies and programs, content standards, and assessments. The department's plan will guide its support of school districts and educators to

ensure the best educational outcomes for children. Our vision is to see that the *Early Literacy Initiative* and the *Colorado Department of Education's Strategic Literacy Plan* work together as part of a statewide effort to ensure all of Colorado's children are reading at grade level.

More than anything else, the *Early Literacy Initiative* is a call to action. It is a call to get involved in some way—large or small—and to make a difference in the lives of Colorado's children. This document describes examples of the good work already underway in communities across the state to improve early literacy.

It also outlines the work in progress at the state level to improve early learning supports and services. By leveraging and expanding successful programs and inspiring community involvement and civic engagement, we will continue to find ways to come together to increase early literacy in Colorado.

For those who were on the bus ride with us, and for those who participated in the communities we visited, we wish to express our deep appreciation.

For every Coloradan, we commend this report to you and thank you for your interest in Colorado's children and our future.

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

Joseph A. Garcia
Lieutenant Governor



Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper and Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia

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Glossary of Acronyms

CAP4K	Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids
CBLA	Colorado Basic Literacy Act
CCCAP	Colorado Child Care Assistance Program
CDE	Colorado Department of Education
CDHS	Colorado Department of Human Services
CDPHE	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
CPP	Colorado Preschool Program
CSAP	Colorado Student Assessment Program
ECLC	Early Childhood Leadership Commission
ELC	Education Leadership Council
ELV	Early Learning Ventures
HCPF	Health Care Policy and Financing
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
K-12	Kindergarten – 12th grade
P-20	Preschool – Grade 20
P-3	Prenatal – Age 3

Thank You to the Literacy Advocates Who Have Informed and Advised the Initiative

Colorado Department of Education
Early Childhood Leadership Commission
Head Start State Collaboration Office
Mile High United Way
Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States
Serve Colorado

Accenture Foundation
Adams County
Adams State College
Alamosa County
Alamosa County School District RE-11J
AmeriCorps, VISTA
Arapahoe County
Aspen Community Foundation
The Aspen Foundation
Aspen School District
Ball Corporation
BASE Camp
Bennett Library
Bennett School District
Boards of Cooperative Educational Services
BookTrust
Boys and Girls Clubs of Northwest Colorado
Burlington Community and Education Center
Burlington Elementary School
Burlington School District
Byers School District
Children's Hospital of Colorado
City of Alamosa
City of Aspen
City of Burlington
City of Colorado Springs
City of Craig
City of Durango
City of Fort Collins
City of Fort Morgan
City of Fruita
City of Glenwood Springs
City of Grand Junction
City of Greeley
City of La Junta
City of Loveland
City of Montrose
City of Pueblo

City of Rifle
City of Steamboat Springs
City Year
Clayton Early Learning
Clifford the Big Red Dog
Colorado African Association
Colorado Association of Funders
Colorado Bright Beginnings
Colorado Children's Campaign
Colorado Council International Reading Association
Colorado Early Childhood Councils
Colorado Education Association
Colorado Head Start Programs
Colorado Libraries for Early Literacy
Colorado Mesa University
Colorado Mountain College
Colorado Municipal League
Colorado Rockies
Colorado Springs School District 11
Colorado State University, Fort Collins
Colorado State University, Pueblo
Comcast
Council Tree Library
David and Laura Merage Foundation
Denver Broncos
Dos Rios Elementary School
Durango School District 9-R
Early Childhood Councils Leadership Alliance
Early Connections Learning Center
Early Learning Ventures
East Otero Primary School
East Otero School District R-1
Education Commission of the States
Education Leadership Council
El Paso County
El Paso First Books
El Pomar Foundation
Entravision Colorado
Executives Partnering to Invest in Children
F.A.S.T. Learning
First Impressions of Routt County
Focal Point
Focus Points
Fort Lewis College

Fort Morgan Family Center
Fort Morgan School District RE-3
Garfield County
Garfield County Library
Garfield County School District RE-2
Gilcrest School
Gilpin County
Grand Valley Center for Family Learning
Greeley Chamber of Commerce
Greeley Community Foundation
Hansjoerg Wyss Foundation
Historic Day Nursery
Kit Carson County
La Plata County
Larimer County
Limon Childhood Development Center
Limon Public Schools
Lincoln County
Lincoln Elementary
Lutheran Family Services of Colorado
Marsico Family Foundation
Marsico Institute for Early Learning and Literacy
Martinez Elementary, Colorado Springs
Martinez Elementary, Greeley
Mesa County
Mesa County Libraries
Mesa County Valley School District
Moffat County
Moffat County School District
Montrose County
Montrose County School District RE-1J
Montrose Regional Library District
Morgan County
Morgan County Early Childhood Council
Motherhead/Fatheread Colorado
Needham Elementary
Ortega Middle School
Otero County
Ouray County
Ouray School District
Pathways Past Poverty
Peak Vista Community Health Centers
Pearson Foundation
Pikes Peak United Way
Pioneer Elementary School
Pitkin County
The Piton Foundation
Poudre River Public Library District

Poudre School District
Prairie Family Center
Project Learning Tree
Providers Advancing School Outcomes
Pueblo City-County Library District
Pueblo County
Pueblo Hispanic Education Foundation
Pueblo School District D60
Raising a Reader
Reach Out and Read Colorado
Reading Recovery
Red Rocks Community College
Right to Read, Weld County, Inc.
Rim Rock Elementary School
Roaring Fork School District
Rocky Ford School District
Rocky Mountain PBS
Routt County
Rural Communities Resource Center
Scholastic
Sopris Elementary School
Southern Colorado Higher Education Consortium
State Farm
Steamboat Springs School District RE-2
Strawberry Park Elementary School
Target
Temple Buell Foundation
Thompson Education Association, Inc.
Thompson School District
TIAA-CREF
Town of Bennett
Town of Byers
Town of Flagler
Town of Gilcrest
Town of Limon
Town of Ouray
United Launch Alliance
United Way of Larimer County
United Way of Southwest Colorado
United Way of Weld County
University of Colorado, Denver
University of Northern Colorado
Volunteers of America Foster Grandparent Program
Washington County
Weld County
Weld County School District 6
Weld County School District RE-1

Introduction

From the moment a child is born, language and literacy skills begin to develop. These early years of life lay a foundation for a child's future success in school and in life. Providing opportunities for children to develop these skills at an early age cements the path to higher academic achievement and increases their potential to become active members of Colorado's workforce.

Failure to prepare children with strong language and literacy skills comes with both individual and societal costs. The Center for Labor Market Studies estimates that each American student who fails to graduate from high school costs the economy \$360,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity compared to their peers who graduate.¹ Non-graduates are likely to perpetuate a cycle of intergenerational poverty and under-employment. Research from the McKinsey Global Institute suggests that underperforming American schools "deprived the United States economy of as much as \$2.3 trillion in economic output in 2008."² The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that if half of Colorado's 17,300 dropouts from the class of 2010 had stayed in school and earned a diploma, the state would see \$92 million in increased earnings, 650 new jobs, and \$6.3 million in increased state tax revenue.³

Unlike Mama Llama who is "always near, even if she's not right here..." our non-llama babies always need us in the here-and-now and, when policies and budgets and other complicated adult matters get in the way of our children's excellence, a will and a way needs to prevail on their behalf. That is what is so great about (this initiative). The collaborative literacy effort you are designing has tremendous power, to lift Colorado's children and help them fly—all of them.

- Victoria Beck, *Expeditions to Excellence*

The stakes for Colorado and its children are high. Language and literacy development begin at birth and the best way to ensure children read proficiently by third grade is to provide them with the highest level of health assessments, early care programming, and interventions before they reach the kindergarten classroom. During the first three years of life, the brain undergoes its most dramatic development. Children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn, and reason during these years.⁴



¹ "The Dropout Problem: Dropping Out for Cash Often Leads to Poverty," AllBusiness.com, October 24, 2010, <http://www.allbusiness.com/labor-employment/compensation-benefits-wages-salaries/15229150-1.html>.

² Byron G. Augustine, Bryan Hancock, and Martha Laboissière, "The economic cost of the US education gap," *McKinsey Quarterly*, June 2009, url: http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/The_economic_cost_of_the_US_education_gap_2388.

³ "The Economic Benefits of Helping High School Dropouts Earn Both High School Diplomas and College Degrees," Alliance for Excellent Education, last modified December 2011, http://www.all4ed.org/files/Colorado_sebps.pdf.

⁴ "A Window to the World: Early Language and Literacy Development," Zero to Three, last modified 2011, <http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/policy-toolkit/early-literacywebmarch1-6.pdf>.

This document begins to lay out a blueprint for achieving reading success for every child growing up in Colorado. Many efforts are already underway and this early literacy initiative aims to leverage the work of the Colorado Department of Education and its *Strategic Literacy Plan*, the P-20 Education Coordinating Council, the Colorado Basic Literacy Act, the current Educator Effectiveness Initiatives, the Education Leadership Council, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, Mile High United Way's *Literacy Matters* initiative, and the numerous other state, local, public, and private efforts taking place in Colorado.

Some of these efforts may take more time to advance and would require a full and robust economic recovery as the state confronts a variety of challenges and competing policy priorities, all of which would benefit from an investment of more resources. Full-day kindergarten and universal preschool, for instance, represent long-term priorities that will be difficult to fund until revenues for existing state education obligations stabilize.

Because early literacy is a priority for this administration, limited resources will not deter the State's work to collaborate with partners and key stakeholders to find innovative solutions for ensuring that every child will read at grade level. The administration is supporting legislation in 2012 designed to help all children who face challenges and barriers in learning to read. The legislation will help diagnose, intervene, and remediate early; increase parental involvement in intervention strategies; promote research-based practices among schools and teachers; increase accountability for districts and schools; and, where necessary and appropriate, retain students. This blueprint is built on the thoughts, ideas, local initiatives and strategic partnerships that already exist.

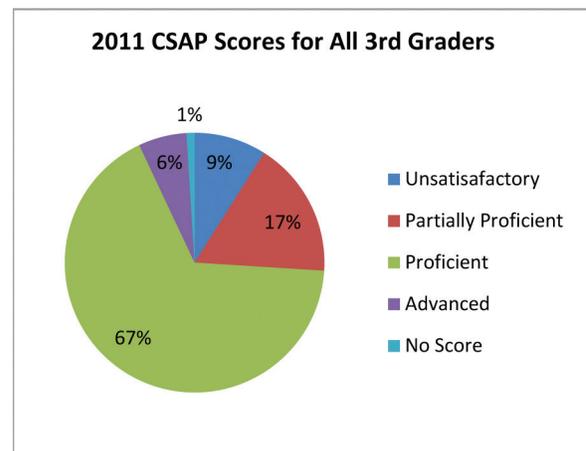
The *Early Literacy Initiative* is designed to bring attention to the work underway in communities across Colorado. It is both a call to greater awareness and action. It challenges all of us. One day every child in Colorado will read, but it will take a shared vision and a commitment to working together.

Colorado's Children

Colorado is a great place to raise a family and the numbers speak for themselves: there are nearly 650,000 young children (birth to age 8) in the state right now.⁵ Bright and prosperous futures await most of these children, yet Colorado must also pay attention to the state's growing child poverty rate—the fastest growing rate in the nation. More than 17 percent of the state's children are living in poverty and nearly 8 percent live in extreme poverty.⁶ Twenty-two percent of Colorado's third graders are English learners; of those 88 percent speak Spanish as a first language.⁷

Colorado tracks student literacy achievement through the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). In 2011, more than a quarter (26 percent) of Colorado's third graders scored partially proficient or unsatisfactory on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) literacy test. Children who are economically disadvantaged and/or English learners tend to fare far worse than their peers.

Third graders fluent in English did well on the CSAP with 91 percent of those children scoring proficient or advanced. Only 48 percent of children with Limited English Proficiency scored at a proficient level on the assessment. Of those children who were Not English Proficient, 63 percent scored unsatisfactory and 25 percent scored partially proficient. Only 9 percent of the children in this population were found to be reading at grade level.



⁵ "Colorado Early Childhood Needs Assessment," Early Childhood Leadership Commission, November 2011, <http://www.ecclc.org/cp/uploads/ECLCNeedsAssessmentFinal.pdf>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "CSAP Summary Data—2011 CSAP State Summary Results: Reading, Grades 3–10," Colorado Department of Education, last modified August 3, 2011, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap_summary.html#211.

English Learner CSAP Scores 2011

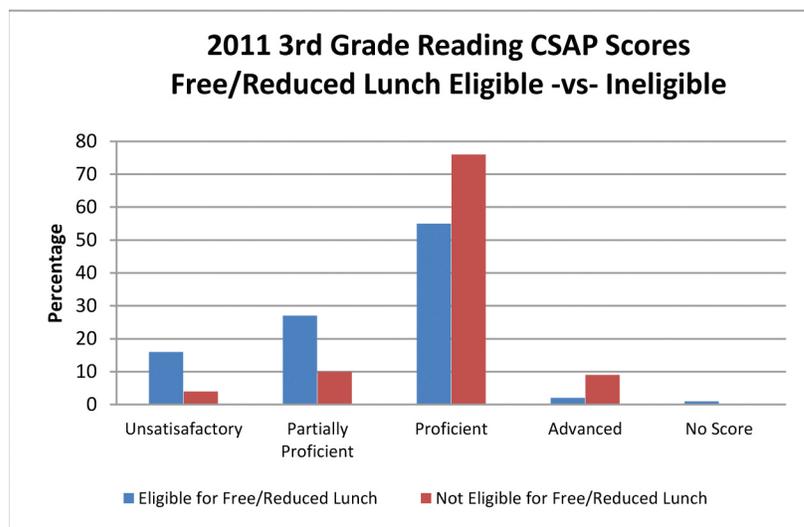
	Unsatisfactory	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Advanced	Not Scored
Not English Proficient	63%	25%	9%	0%	2%
Limited English Proficiency	12%	38%	48%	0%	1%
Fluent English Proficiency	2%	6%	84%	7%	0%

Colorado’s low-income children are also at risk of academic failure. Of children eligible for free/reduced cost lunch (FRL), 43 percent were reading below grade level, while only 14 percent of middle- and high-income children were found to be at the same level.

As Colorado aims to improve third grade literacy rates, research-based strategies must be used to reach all children. Quality early instruction is critical for all children and attends to the specific needs of students who are economically disadvantaged and English learners.

Providing children with high-quality programs and services early in life can have a profound effect on language development and literacy. Unlike the state’s K-12 system, however, early childhood programming is less formal and can be more difficult to access.

Programs such as the Colorado Preschool Program, Head Start, Child Find, home visitation programs, and privately-funded preschool and child care programs exist throughout the state, but the quality of programs varies and those of highest quality serve relatively few children.



Colorado's Path to Success



Building on the 1997 Colorado Basic Literacy Act, the Administration and the General Assembly are introducing legislation in the 2012 session—the Colorado Early Literacy Act (HB12-1238). This bill will strengthen the state's approach to early intervention, increase parental engagement, and make schools and districts more accountable for literacy results.

CDE is also implementing new educator effectiveness measures and systematically higher literacy standards. The Department has initiated a strategic literacy plan to serve as a focal point for all of the Department's efforts to support Colorado districts, schools, and communities to ensure all Colorado children are on track to meet the literacy demands of the 21st century.

The *Early Literacy Initiative* builds on the foundational work of two landmark pieces of legislation that reform the system of standards and assessments as well as the system of evaluation of teachers and administrators. Together, these policies aim to deliver a universally-excellent public education for every child in Colorado, regardless of region, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. SB10-191, known as the educator effectiveness bill, emerged from the belief that great teachers and leaders can and do make a difference in the lives of all children. The law is in the midst of implementation and will provide teachers and principals with a clear set of expectations, based on multiple measures and tied to student learning. SB08-212 created the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), which aligns school standards from kindergarten through college to add an unprecedented level of curricular coherence and rigor to schools.

Under CAP4K the State Board of Education adopted the following description of school readiness: "School Readiness describes both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students in preschool and kindergarten. School Readiness is enhanced when schools work collaboratively with families and community service providers to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content." (For the full description see <http://earlychildhoodcolorado.org/inc/uploads/CDE%20School%20Readiness%20Description.pdf>.)

The *Early Literacy Initiative* takes guidance from this definition of school readiness by recognizing that a literate child becomes so through many overlapping and complementary efforts beginning at birth. A child becomes literate when parents and families talk, read and sing; when communities build and support libraries; when teachers and school leaders use research-based instructional techniques; when non-profits step up when new needs arise; and when doctors and nurses screen for and identify problems early. These combined efforts, each essential in different ways, help raise children who are healthy and ready to read and learn as they make their way toward productive and meaningful lives.



The Issues: Barriers and Challenges to Early Literacy Success

Issue 1: Health and Development Risks

School readiness begins with good health. Health and developmental problems—whether physical, emotional, or social—threaten to delay a child’s ability to learn and thrive, and highlight the importance of early identification and intervention. They also highlight the critical role that health care providers must play in any effort to improve language acquisition and literacy.

We need to address (literacy) problems when kids are young, identifying families in crisis and work with them. The child needs to be healthy mentally and physically and avoid problems at the stage where they are very young.

- Chief District Judge Dennis Maes,
10th Judicial District

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends 10 well-child visits with a health provider between birth and age 2, when development is observed as part of a routine checkup. Ideally, checkups would occur in primary care medical homes that facilitate discussions among the many providers that see a single child patient. Early identification of potential developmental delays is critical to the well-being of children and their families. The AAP also recommends that the health provider complete a comprehensive, standardized, developmental

screening at 9-, 18-, and 30-month well-child visits, allowing for timely and effective interventions when developmental concerns arise.

In Colorado, comprehensive health and development assessment systems lay the groundwork for healthy development and higher rates of literacy. For example, the Assuring Better Child Health and Development project (ABCD) encourages pediatric healthcare providers to use standardized developmental screening tools to facilitate early identification and referrals. Expanding this system of coordinated and integrated screenings will likely improve literacy outcomes when children served reach third grade. Another pioneering group is Reach Out and Read Colorado, which has drawn a direct connection between health and literacy by enlisting health care providers to give books and information on the importance of literacy to low-income parents at each well-child visit.

Throughout Colorado, communities are working to improve health outcomes for young children. In Montrose, two health care centers were placed inside local schools, allowing health professionals to reach children and engage families in health care discussions. A DVD was distributed to parents/families to support learning at home. Montrose is also partnering with the Mexican Consulate to provide literacy programs, English as a Second Language classes, and GED classes for local Spanish speakers. As more parents acquire literacy skills and English fluency, they can better assist their children in learning these same skills.



The Nurse Family Partnership and other home visitor programs, such as Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers (PAT), and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIY), provide training and education to parents, families, and caregivers about child health and development in their homes. Home visitation programs strengthen the ability of parents, families, and caregivers to play their role as their child’s first and most important teachers by ensuring that they understand the importance of language rich environments for children. Home visitation programs can also support families and caregivers who are English learners and provide resources to increase family literacy, such

as books and materials in the language used in the home. Families looking for support in learning English can be referred to English as a Second Language classes.

As health care providers and groups offer the necessary medical guidance and intervention, it is also critical that parents and caregivers work at home to provide language rich experiences in order to promote early literacy development. Research indicates the immense potential parents, families, and caregivers have to encourage literacy in their children, both at home and at school. Parent, family and caregiver attitudes toward literacy and learning, engagement in children’s schooling, and support of reading at home all contribute to a child’s academic success. Resources exist to help parents build their capacities, including programming that promotes access to books and literacy activities during the summer to curb loss of reading skills outside the school setting.

When health and development risks are identified early, interventions can be implemented and children can avoid further delays to their language and literacy skills.

Issue 2: Early Childhood Program Quality

Improving the quality of early learning programs for children from birth through third grade can help to ensure that Colorado’s children receive all possible supports for literacy success. Currently programs such as Head Start and the Colorado Preschool Program provide children with supports and skills that improve their chances of developing language and literacy skills that result in grade-level reading. Expanding resources and quality standards into child care settings, such as in-home child care and summer reading programs, can improve educational experiences for children before they enter the public school system.



Many efforts to improve program quality exist in Colorado. Qualistar Colorado is the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System which provides ratings of child care or school setting quality. Qualistar Colorado rates child care centers, homes, and schools with a one-, two-, three- or four-star rating indicating whether the setting is high quality or working on quality. Qualistar also provides training and technical assistance to improve program quality.

Head Start programs across the state have begun using the CLASS tool. CLASS looks at three domains of teacher-child interaction: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Research demonstrates that children in classrooms with high CLASS scores have more positive social and early academic development.⁸

Early Childhood is the foundation to many of the preventative strategies that need to be the focus of policy makers... If anything can be done for this country and state in education it would be providing every child a fair opportunity to a free and appropriate early childhood program.

- Amy Buford, Poudre School District

Colorado also has 30 Early Childhood Councils that coordinate activities and support programs across most of the state. Early Childhood Councils across Colorado bring together partners to coordinate, increase, and improve the education, health, social/emotional, and parent and family engagement opportunities available to all young children and their families. Additionally, Early Childhood Councils attempt to share best practices between communities and bring feedback and ideas to the state.

⁸“Understanding and Using the CLASS for Program Improvement,” The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, last accessed February 22, 2012, <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/CLASS.pdf>

Early Learning Ventures (ELV), an initiative of the David and Laura Merage Foundation, is an innovative approach engaging the public, private, and philanthropic sectors to address the operational challenges facing early care and education in Colorado. The ELV network of Alliances or hubs, which are made up of independent child care providers in a particular area of the state can reduce provider costs by sharing administrative functions with other organizations. This allows child care providers to improve the strength of management and focus on increasing program quality.

High-quality early childhood programs can have a significant impact on a child's language and literacy development. According to the National Institute on Early Education Research, high-quality preschool experiences can substantially increase a child's likelihood of succeeding in school and later in life. "Children who attend high quality preschool programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education and more likely to graduate high school. They are less involved in crime and delinquency. They also earn more as adults and are less likely to become dependent on welfare."⁹

Issue 3: The Early Childhood Workforce

How does Colorado teach teachers and child care providers to teach children to read? This question is critical to the success of young readers. Colorado is committed to improving educator effectiveness and has already begun work to define a knowledge and competency framework to establish universal performance measurements for early childhood professionals.

Research indicates that teacher ability has a significant impact on students' reading achievement. Some studies indicate that the individual teacher working with a child and his or her professional experience and personal characteristics are the most important factors contributing to a child's success. Improving and strengthening professional development experiences for the early childhood workforce can ensure that the adults who are caring for children have the tools they need to ensure that children are receiving effective instruction for language and literacy development.



Professional development initiatives exist throughout Colorado. The Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation has made a significant investment in early childhood professional development throughout the state. Without this investment many early childhood professionals would have far fewer opportunities to improve their teaching skills. Durango schools utilize the LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) professional development and literacy specialists to increase the effectiveness of their teachers and have created Durango's Professional Learning community, which allows teachers to collaborate and share best practices. Other professional learning programs and opportunities include AmeriCorps' and City Year's army of trained literacy tutors to support classroom teachers and students who are not reading at grade level and Denver Academy's F.A.S.T (FUNdamental Applications for Successful Teaching) program that trains teachers how to teach literacy using research-based reading instruction.

⁹ "Frequently Asked Questions," National Institute on Early Education Research, last accessed February 22, 2012, <http://nieer.org/faq/index.php?TAid=131>.

Issue 4: Access to High-Quality Preschool Programs

Children who participate in high-quality preschool programs do better in school and in life. A recent study by the Center for Public Education shows the power of universal preschool programming. This study shows that children who attend high-quality preschool prior to kindergarten score significantly higher on reading tests than children who attend full-day kindergarten without preschool.¹⁰ The benefits of preschool are even more pronounced for minority and low-income children who can start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers.¹¹ High-quality preschool is an important tool for closing the achievement gap. Beyond the direct benefits for children, high-quality preschool is an important tool for saving taxpayer dollars. Children who attend high-quality preschool are less likely to be placed in special education programs, less likely to be retained, and more likely to graduate from high school.



Colorado has already made significant investments in preschool programming throughout the state. In 1988, the Colorado General Assembly created the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) to serve the young children in Colorado who were experiencing poverty, disability, or another circumstance making them vulnerable to starting grade school unprepared. The Legislature recognized that providing high-quality early childhood education would ultimately curb dropout rates, help children achieve their full potential, reduce dependence on public assistance, and decrease susceptibility to criminal

activities. The state currently funds 20,160 CPP slots. To broaden the reach of this important program, some local communities are creating partnerships between Head Start and CPP; however, nearly 6,500 more children qualify for the program, but can't be served by either CPP or Head Start because of funding constraints.

Local governments have also made significant investments in preschool programming. The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) is a voter-approved tax initiative to give parents tuition credits to help pay for high-quality preschool or home child care. DPP also provides quality improvement resources to preschool classrooms and professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals. DPP is open and voluntary for all Denver children the year before they start kindergarten. The City of Aspen, Summit County, and the Boulder School District also dedicate funds generated through voter-approved tax or mill levy increases to fund high-quality early childhood programs by giving financial assistance to parents and families, as well as support for quality improvement efforts.

Two children entering Kindergarten can be like different jigsaw puzzles. The child who attended preschool has the border built and all the pieces turned face up. This child is well-prepared for school and ready to start making connections. The other child, who did not attend preschool, still has all the pieces in the box.

**- Debbie Becker,
United Way of Weld County**

Additionally, local programs such as Raising a Reader are making an impact. Raising a Reader's vision is that one day all children will enter kindergarten in love with the printed page and ready to learn to read. Twenty independent evaluations have indicated that the program significantly increases the time families spend reading together and child language and literacy outcomes across diverse cultural and language demographics. Raising a Reader's mission is to engage parents in a routine of daily "book cuddling" with their children from birth to age 5 to foster healthy brain development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy skills critical for school success. It also includes receiving four books a week via a "book bag".

Children who participate in high-quality preschool programs score significantly higher on reading tests than children who do not have the opportunity to attend. Efforts to increase the number of high-quality opportunities available to children and families will be a critical part of Colorado's efforts to improve third grade literacy rates.

¹⁰ "Starting out right: pre-k and kindergarten: full report," The Center for Public Education, last modified February 2012, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Starting-Out-Right-Pre-K-and-Kindergarten/Starting-Out-Right-Pre-K-and-Kindergarten-full-report.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Issue 5: Access to Full-day Kindergarten

Gains made when a child attends high-quality preschool may diminish over time if the intensity of schooling is not maintained through elementary school. Quality full-day kindergarten sustains the progress that students make in preschool. Because the ability to regain lost ground after first grade is rare, experts advise that for 90-95 percent of poor readers, early detection and intervention is crucial.¹² Quality full-day kindergarten programs contribute to school readiness, literacy achievement in later grades, and a reduction in the achievement gap for students of low socioeconomic status.¹³



Full-day kindergarten programs exist throughout Colorado. Some school districts fund full-day programs while others require parents to pay for part of the day. Often students identified as at-risk or needing additional preparation for first grade are prioritized for full-day kindergarten programs. Quality full-day kindergarten sustains the progress that children make in preschool. Because gaining lost ground after first-grade is extremely difficult, continuing the intensity of schooling during kindergarten is important.

As increasing access to full-day kindergarten will improve language and literacy outcomes for Colorado's children, so too will fully implementing kindergarten assessments. The 2008 CAP4K legislation requires development and implementation of a statewide school readiness assessment by December 2013. The purpose of the multi-domain, ongoing school readiness assessment is to inform instruction and intervention in order to assure that young children are on track for success in school and beyond. In the Results Matter program, more than 30,000 preschoolers are now being assessed with *Teaching Strategies GOLD*[®], a valid and reliable research based early childhood assessment system that yields child, program, and state level information. As of this fall, CDE is piloting *Teaching Strategies GOLD*[®] for its utility as the state's school readiness assessment. This assessment will allow teachers to identify and address a child's individual educational needs.

The community of Trinidad wanted to fund all-day kindergarten and they have done so now for 10 years. It has been a huge success—82% tested at or above grade level for reading.

In addition to child-level in-school assessments, local communities could implement community-level assessments such as the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The EDI is an assessment tool that measures the health and development of populations of children and then maps the results to other community indicators. The EDI is a useful tool to engage communities in data-driven processes to inform and improve early childhood service systems. This kind of tool helps communities best support their children and ensure they receive the services they need to succeed in kindergarten.

¹⁰ G. Reid Lyon, "Overview of Reading and Literacy Research," in *Keys to Literacy*, eds. Susannah Patton and Madelyn Holmes (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1998), 1–15.

¹³ "Full Day Kindergarten: Moving Ontario Forward," Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2008, <http://www.etfo.ca/Publications/PositionPapers/Documents/Full-Day%20Kindergarten%20-%20Moving%20Ontario%20Forward.pdf>.

Working Together: How Colorado is Driving Early Literacy Success

Just as the benefits of early literacy reveal themselves throughout a child's life, an integrated community-based approach reinforces childhood achievement through a child's social surroundings. This *Early Literacy Initiative* relies on a statewide collaboration between parents, families, caregivers, educators, local school districts, businesses, and community groups. Each member of a community can—and should—play an active role in educating Colorado's children.

The Office of the Lieutenant Governor is working closely with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) as it develops a statewide plan—called the *Strategic Literacy Plan*—that will serve as a roadmap within the department for the implementation of literacy-related policies and programs, academic standards, and assessments.

While the *Early Literacy Initiative* outlines the primary issues related to early literacy facing Colorado, it is also important to note the work being done statewide to engage parents, families and caregivers to promote volunteerism and to educate communities about the importance of providing Colorado's children with opportunities to develop language and literacy skills.

Research indicates that reading programs that utilize tutors with basic training are effective in raising the reading scores of young children.¹⁴ This research supports one-on-one reading instruction as opposed to group instruction. In collaboration with Mile High

United Way, the Hickenlooper-Garcia Administration has begun efforts to promote volunteer tutoring programs as a tool to improve language and literacy skills. This effort will include a multi-faceted recruitment effort that will place volunteers in schools as well as a partnership with Serve Colorado that will allow 20 AmeriCorps members to reach over 400 students throughout Colorado.



A public awareness language and literacy campaign is also under development. This statewide campaign will educate parents, families, and caregivers about the importance of early language development and literacy as well as promote volunteerism for the general public.

Many local-level collaborations already exist in the state. For instance, the Grand Valley Center for Family Learning was created from the school district's long-term goal to have one center where all young children could attend high-quality early childhood programs and parents and families could access educational services and support. Community organizations such as Rotary, Optimist, and

Kiwanis Clubs in many communities support literacy programs by providing books and dictionaries and monetary support, among other things. Libraries throughout the state have many established programs to reach out to the community to engage parents and youth and increase access to books. One example is the Colorado Baby Library card, which will be a statewide campaign designed to encourage parents to develop a habit of reading and engaging with their children from birth.

State, local, public, and private initiatives are happening throughout Colorado. As the state continues forward with this effort to increase third-grade reading rates, this document will be continually updated. This will be a living, breathing initiative that will have the flexibility to grow and change as opportunities arise and more is known about the way children develop, learn and grow.

Success in school begins way before a child enters kindergarten. By investing in early care and education we are preparing our children for the future. And the future of our children is in the hands of all of us. Education is always your way up.

- David Merage, *President and CEO, Consolidated Investment Group*

¹⁴ Batya Elbaum, Sharon Vaughn, Marie Tejero Hughes, and Sally Watson Moody, "How effective are one-to-one tutoring programs in reading for elementary students at risk for reading failure? A meta-analysis of the intervention research," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 92, no. 4 (2000): 605-619.

The Work of the State

1. Identify and Eliminate Health and Development Barriers to Literacy

Encouraging and supporting physical, oral, and social-emotional health programming in all early childhood settings is a significant step towards eliminating health and development barriers to early literacy. To ensure consistent and uniform standards across all child care settings, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Education plan to implement a statewide set of early learning and development guidelines for children from birth to third grade. These guidelines will promote quality preventative health services and help ensure early interventions for those children at greatest risk of developmental delays. Additionally, by increasing and integrating high-quality health, wellness, and safety strategies in all early learning settings, children will have more immediate access to better health, nutrition and developmental services.

State agencies are actively engaged in promoting early intervention, home visitation, and medical home resources. By working in partnership with healthcare providers, the State is helping to provide additional support for early literacy through medical home initiatives.

ACTION: We will help to ensure more children have greater access to health, nutrition, and education opportunities. Together, state agencies will increase the number of children served by early interventions and home visitation programs and increase the number of medical and dental homes.

2. Educate and Empower Parents to Engage their Children in Language and Literacy Activities

Parents and families play the most critical role in early childhood development. As a child's first and most important teachers, parents and families need access to tools to help them succeed. Home visitation programs are one way to reach parents and families to educate them about the importance of language and literacy development. State agencies will continue to grow and strengthen home visitation services by taking advantage of opportunities, such as the federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation program, to provide support and education to families and caregivers. Through the early literacy public awareness campaign, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Department of Education, and the Department of Human Services will strive to increase parent, family, community, and volunteer engagement in language and literacy activities.

ACTION: We will increase the number of families served through home visitation programs and create greater awareness of the critical role parents and families play as teachers to their children.

3. Maximize Access to Preschool Programs

Current economic conditions and limited resources are not deterring the State's work to collaborate with key stakeholders to find innovative solutions for ensuring that every child reads at grade level. This includes steps to increase the number of children who attend preschool programs by exploring how current resources can be most efficiently and effectively combined to maximize current opportunities. For example, many programs combine funding sources such as Head Start, CPP, and CCCAP to increase the number of children served. Additionally, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission is developing a cost-model that will allow early childhood stakeholders to analyze the efficiencies of early childhood programming.

ACTION: We will explore every option to maximize preschool enrollment opportunities including expanding partnerships with federal programs and supporting local initiatives to expand preschool programming.

4. Improve Early Learning Program Quality (Birth to Age 8)

High-quality child care and early learning opportunities are essential to improving early literacy. The State will continue to drive excellence in the broad spectrum of early learning programs by incentivizing child care providers through national TEACH scholarships, school readiness supports, and infant/toddler training programs.

Numerous other efforts are helping to advance the level of language and literacy instruction children receive within licensed child care settings. The State is working to create a system of quality support hubs to provide training and technical assistance to child care providers. Colorado is also enhancing the current shared services system to provide back-office support in order to allow small center administrators to focus more attention on high-quality learning experiences for children.

Program quality hinges on setting and adhering to high standards and expectations for early learning. The newly created position for a state Literacy Specialist within the Department of Education will steer the delivery of research-based early literacy instruction and provide guidance and support to early literacy educators throughout the state. By creating the next generation of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and including these in child care licensing rules, the State will not only increase the number of high-quality preschool programs, but ensure child care professionals meet the industry's highest expectations.

ACTION: State agencies will increase both the number of high-quality child care settings and the number of children receiving high-quality early childhood services.

5. Strengthen the Early Childhood Workforce

Great teachers make a significant difference in student learning. In alignment with Educator Effectiveness efforts (SB10-191), the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and the P-3 Professional Development Task Force are creating and implementing an early childhood workforce knowledge and competency framework that can be used across all early childhood settings. Additionally, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education, and the Department of Higher Education are streamlining licensing systems so teachers and administrators can easily navigate between requirements for school-based and other early childhood settings. Steps to provide more in-state education opportunities include creating pathways for an Early Childhood Education bachelor's degree in Colorado.

ACTION: We will establish high expectations, rigorous standards, and exceptional educational opportunities for early childhood workforce professionals.

Legislative Priorities

1. Effectively Merge Early Childhood Programs into one Office of Early Childhood

The early childhood governance proposal was developed through a collaborative process with leaders from the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, the Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's Offices, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Health and Environment, and the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, along with input from the Department of Education. The Office of Early Childhood proposal (SB12-130), unanimously endorsed by the agencies listed above, includes the co-location of many programs and the strengthening of interagency partnerships and collaboration in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of childhood and youth supports, services, and programs in Colorado.



ACTION: We will work together to more effectively, efficiently, and elegantly guide us in our efforts to address early literacy.

2. Strengthen Early Literacy Policy

The proposed Colorado Early Literacy Act (HB12-1238) strives to reinforce early literacy policy and education in kindergarten through third grade in a variety of ways. This legislation promotes more frequent and early use of formative and criterion-based assessments to diagnose reading problems and to provide immediate and responsive interventions to specific literacy deficiencies. Parents will now be invited into the process earlier to assist with tailoring specific remedies to address student needs. When necessary and appropriate, the bill provides for the retention of students.

ACTION: We will support the enactment of a stronger statewide early literacy policy.

3. Fully Fund & Implement SB10-191

The quality of teachers and principals in schools matters. In 2010, the state of Colorado enacted the *Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness Act* (SB10-191), which made sweeping reform to how school districts evaluate educators for effectiveness and requires districts to use data on educator effectiveness to make key human capital management decisions. If Colorado can better attract, prepare and support educators, the state will significantly improve students' academic growth and mastery of standards. Fully funding the measures called for within this legislation will allow districts to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to improve language and literacy programming in their classrooms. Additionally, with the recent passage of the *Rule Review Evaluation of Educator Effectiveness* (HB12-1001) Colorado is ready to move forward with full implementation. The rules cover the quality standards school districts must adopt in their educator evaluation systems, teacher content knowledge standards, the structure of performance evaluations, definitions of performance evaluations and consequences, and the role of the Colorado Department of Education.

ACTION: We will work together to fully fund SB10-191 in 2012 – 2013. This effort begins with a \$7.7 million request in the fiscal year 2012-13 budget.

Community-Based Initiatives

1. Expand & Grow Summer Reading Programs

Summer reading programs in public libraries encourage readers to continue engaging in books, magazines and other reading materials when school is not in session. These programs reduce summer reading loss and help children stay on target with their reading efforts. Research indicates that about two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between students living in poverty and their more advantaged peers can be attributed to summer learning loss.¹⁵ Libraries across Colorado provide free summer reading programs that can be accessed by children of all ages.

ACTION: We will work together to increase the number of pages read by children in 2012 to 1.25 million.

2. Integrate One Congregation – One Family into Literacy Efforts

One Congregation – One Family, the statewide initiative, demonstrates the power of collaboration between the government, faith communities, non-profits, local leaders, and businesses, as well as the results achieved by working together. A Statewide Clergy Council, representing diverse faith community leaders, will be convened by the Denver Leadership Foundation to guide the One Congregation – One Family model through development and implementation in each community. The One Congregation – One Family Statewide Initiative will encompass hunger, literacy, and homelessness.

ACTION: We will work to expand One Congregation - One Family statewide to address hunger, housing, and literacy.

¹⁵ "Summer Can Set Kids on the Right—or Wrong—Course," National Summer Learning Association, last modified November 24, 2009, http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_02_-_Alexander.pdf.

3. Facilitate Distribution of \$3.6 million for literacy programming into local communities through Mile High United Way

During the summer of 2011, Mile High United Way was awarded \$3.6 million from the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund. Mile High United Way will fund sub-grantee programs that leverage community volunteers to collectively improve third grade literacy rates by 25% in up to 15 rural and urban areas across Colorado, serving an estimated 2,000 students per year.

ACTION: We will work together to deploy and match these funds statewide.

4. Develop Model Colorado Reading Corps

Based on the Minnesota Reading Corps, the Colorado Reading Corps will be a statewide initiative to help every Colorado child become a successful reader by the end of third grade. AmeriCorps members will be trained in research-based instruction to help students catch up to their peers. Target and AmeriCorps have invested \$150,000 and \$300,000, respectively, to jump-start this effort.

ACTION: We will work together to develop the framework for a Colorado Reading Corps.

5. One Book 4 Colorado

In an effort to promote reading to our children at an early age, the private sector, foundation community, the State Library, public libraries, and Reach Out and Read Colorado are teaming up to make sure that every four-year-old reads the same book. A four-year-old in San Luis will have something in common with a four-year-old in Craig! Modeled after and in collaboration with One Book One Denver, this effort activates volunteers, supports parents, and promotes reading by distributing the same book to more than 70,000 four-year-olds statewide. The book will be available in Spanish and English and will also be accessible to children with special needs.

ACTION: We will distribute more than 70,000 books statewide through Reach Out and Read and public libraries and activate volunteers in our communities to ensure that every four-year-old has the opportunity to read the same book.

6. Coordinate Annual Colorado Literacy Week

The first annual Literacy Week will kick off on Monday, February 27, 2012 with a proclamation from Governor Hickenlooper. Literacy week will help inform the people of Colorado about how they can become involved in the literacy movement. From press events to visiting and recognizing some of the top literacy organizations in the state, this week will highlight successes of the literacy movement and work to educate, empower, and inform all Coloradans.

Many of the items identified above in this section will be launched during the 2012 Colorado Literacy Week. The week culminates with Colorado Education Association's "Read Across America Day" activities on March 2. Governor Hickenlooper, Lieutenant Governor Garcia, Cabinet Members, members of the General Assembly, and business and community leaders will be joining children in classrooms all around the state to celebrate the importance of early reading.

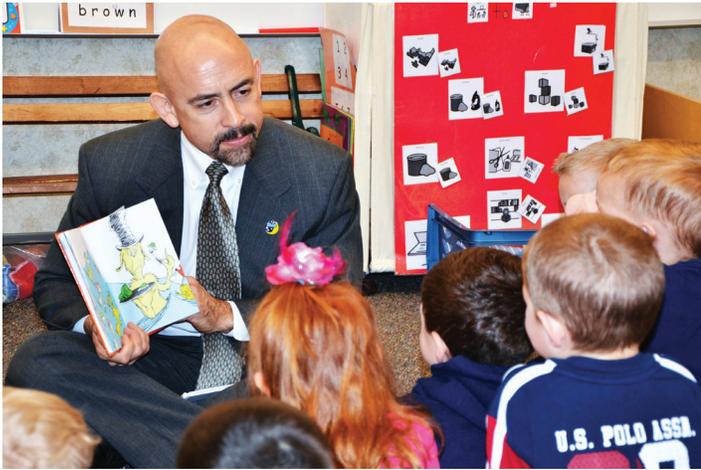
ACTION: We will work together to engage the public, private, and non-profit sectors in an annual week of community awareness, education and action to showcase our focus on literacy.

Conclusion

By joining efforts, policy makers, community members, parents, families, and caregivers can all contribute to an increase in third grade literacy rates among all children. A unified approach aligns the strengths of many communities toward the statewide goal of improving early childhood literacy. Together, these recommendations will yield gains in third grade literacy, which will in turn improve the lives of all Coloradans and the health of Colorado's economy.

The improvements to the system recommended for exploration in this document contemplate impacting children at birth and encouraging literacy through parental and social interaction and continue through a child's third grade education. Simultaneously, high-quality programming and effective teaching methods will be the everyday practice of education professionals throughout the state, and will provide continued support of early literacy.

This effort is not only about third grade literacy rates. It is about ongoing success for children, for communities, and for the future of Colorado. Efforts to increase early literacy enhance the educational, cultural, and economic vitality of our state. This commitment to the state's youngest children should continue to grow and evolve. Our goal is that Colorado becomes a place where all children have the resources and opportunities to read, learn, and improve their lives.



*"The more you read, the more things you will know.
The more you learn, the more places you'll go."*

- Dr. Seuss, I Can Read with My Eyes Shut!



