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# NORTH CAROLINA READ TO ACHIEVE: *An Inside Look*

Prepared by:

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# Reading is the Gateway to Learning

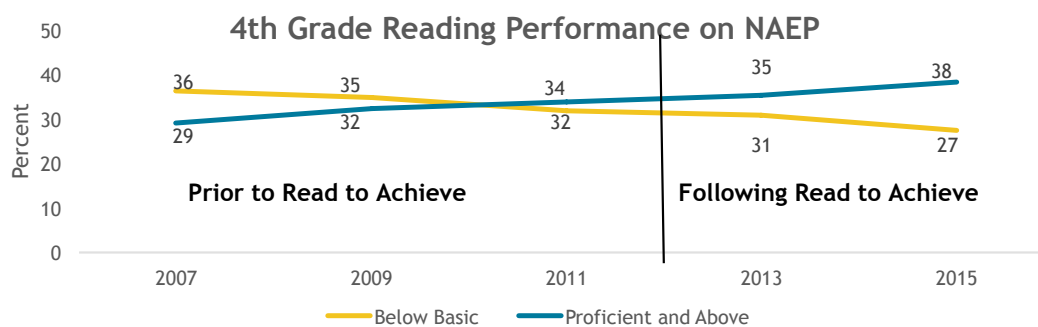
Learning to read by the end of third grade is the gateway to lifelong success. When students are not able to read by the end of third grade, their risk of falling behind grows exponentially. In fact, research shows that nine out of ten high school dropouts were struggling readers in third grade. Students reading below grade level are almost six times more likely than proficient readers to not finish high school on time.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing this fact, in 2012, the North Carolina General Assembly established the [Read to Achieve Program \(RtA\)](#) under the leadership of Senate President Phil Berger. RtA is a K-3 comprehensive reading policy that focuses on improving early reading development with the goal of all students reading on grade level by the end of third grade. The law:

- Mandates early literacy screening for K-3 students in order to identify those who are having reading difficulties and provide teachers with useful information that allows them to tailor instruction to meet each student's individual reading needs.
- Requires that parents of K-3 students identified with a reading deficiency be notified and ensures that intensive reading interventions are provided until the deficiency is remedied. It is further required that the progress of identified students be regularly monitored throughout the year.
- Mandates that summer reading camps be provided to students with a reading deficiency at the end of third grade. In 2015, the General Assembly appropriated \$26 million to expand summer reading camps to first and second grade students having reading difficulties.
- Ends social promotion of third graders who do not demonstrate sufficient reading skills on the state standardized assessment, an alternative assessment of reading or a test-based student reading portfolio. The law also includes good cause exemptions recognizing the special needs of some students.

The program has seen some updates since its inception. In 2016, the General Assembly appropriated \$10 million for bonuses for third grade teachers. Half of the funds are reserved for bonuses to the top 25 percent of third grade teachers based on Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) growth scores, and the second half are for bonuses to the top 25 percent of third grade teachers in each Local Education Agency (LEA).<sup>2</sup> An overview of the components of Read to Achieve is located in Appendix A.

Since the passage of RtA, North Carolina has seen a number of positive gains among its young readers. From 2011 to 2015, the state's fourth graders saw an improvement of half a grade level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading section, moving from an average scale score of 221 to 226. North Carolina also saw a decrease in students scoring below basic on the 2015 NAEP reading, complemented by an increase in students scoring at or above proficient the same year.



<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, 2011  
<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Public Schools, *Summary of Special Provisions and Money Report*, 2016

# About This Study

ExcelinEd contracted with RMC Research Corporation to conduct a study to better understand stakeholders' perceptions of RtA. In particular, ExcelinEd wanted to know:

- What support strategies and technical assistance did the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and school districts provide?
- How was information about RtA shared with districts, schools, teachers, parents and communities?
- What recommendations do stakeholders have for improving the implementation process?
- In addition to improved student outcomes, what impact has RtA had on districts and schools?

## The Sample

A purposeful sample of various stakeholders was selected for this study. The North Carolina DPI Director of K-3 Literacy and eight DPI Regional Consultants provided a state-level view of RtA. Literacy leaders located in four districts related their experiences in implementing RtA across schools in their respective district. And, K-3 teachers in these four districts provided their perceptions of RtA's implementation in classrooms.

In the North Carolina DPI, the literacy director has been in her position throughout the implementation of RtA and was able to provide a thorough account of the DPI's role in supporting RtA. In addition, eight DPI Regional Consultants who have been in their positions for several years provided valuable insight into how they work with districts and schools to implement RtA.

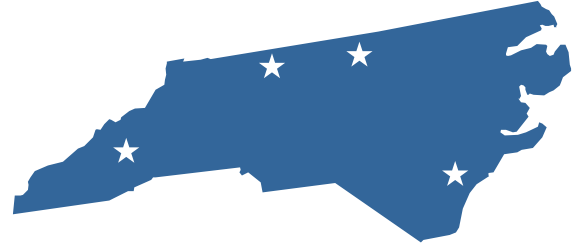
To identify school districts to participate in this study, state assessment data of third grade students were collected and analyzed prior to the implementation of RtA and for the two years after implementation (2013-2015). School districts were selected to participate in the study based on these primary criteria:

- Decrease in the percent of third grade students scoring at the lowest achievement level on the state assessment.
- Increase in the percent of third grade students scoring on or above grade level on the state assessment.
- Participation of at least 100 third grade students in the state assessment.

After identifying a pool of eligible school districts, the researchers mapped the districts to ensure both regional representation and district size (rural, city or suburban). An additional consideration was the length of time the district leader had been in the position. Four school districts were selected and agreed to participate in interviews with the research team and agreed to disseminate an online survey to all their K-3 teachers.

## The Methodology

North Carolina DPI 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 the interview with the Director of K-3 Literacy and the focus group held with eight Regional Consultants were 90-minute, face-to-face sessions. The protocol for the director interview is located in Appendix B; the protocol for the focus group is located in Appendix C. 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 D.

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 contains both Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix E.

## Results

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.

## Support Strategies for Read to Achieve

After Read to Achieve passed in July 2012, the North Carolina DPI created an office to support the implementation of the legislation's policies and practices. The Director of K-3 Literacy was hired in December 2012 and shortly thereafter began assembling a team of eight Regional Consultants and one Charter School Consultant. The turnaround time to implement the legislation for the 2013-2014 academic year was very short, especially for schools with year-round schedules. From the beginning, the Director of K-3 Literacy framed the state's role in RtA as providing support rather than ensuring compliance. The Regional Consultants agreed with this approach and were "very positive from the word 'go' about the law and what it meant for children." Regional Consultants began by building relationships with district office contacts. From there, district office contacts encouraged principal



### Data Sources

Face-to-face  
interview with the  
DPI Director of K-3  
literacy

Focus group of  
eight DPI Regional  
Consultants

Telephone  
interviews with  
seven literacy  
leaders in four  
districts

Online survey of 216  
K-3 teachers in four  
districts

involvement to build strong support of the legislation at all levels. Overall, the Director of K-3 Literacy found this to be an effective strategy for gaining stakeholder buy-in. Although it was not an “overnight process,” building positive relationships at the beginning and sending a consistent message of support influenced positive responses to the legislation.

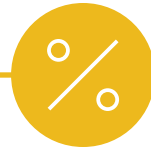
The North Carolina DPI supported districts and schools through two primary mechanisms: (1) creating the North Carolina Read to Achieve Guidebook and (2) providing a variety of technical support and professional development opportunities for school districts.

The Guidebook serves as the structural framework for the program and includes charts, flowcharts, narratives and descriptions of the legislation’s components. It was first disseminated in February 2013 and is updated annually. The Guidebook is intended to reflect the law in common language and clearly delineates the responsibilities of the state, districts, schools and teachers. The Guidebook is accessible on the Read to Achieve LiveBinder, a web-based resource that also includes narrated PowerPoints and instructional videos. According to the Director of K-3 Literacy, the Livebinder is the fifth most viewed LiveBinder in the nation.

The North Carolina DPI hired eight Regional Consultants and one Charter School Consultant to provide direct technical support and professional development to district offices and schools requesting additional assistance. The Regional Consultants started by working with district office contacts who then disseminated information on RtA to their schools. Once districts were more familiar with the legislation, the Regional Consultants began working with schools and their professional learning communities. When possible, they also worked with schools designated as low-performing. Some districts declined consultants’ offers of technical assistance, but most were very receptive.

The North Carolina DPI provided sequential technical assistance on different components of the RtA legislation each year, starting with using mCLASS:Reading 3D™ in Year 1. They provided all K-3 classroom teachers with the mCLASS:Reading 3D™ formative and diagnostic assessment system and used a train-the-trainer model to support implementation. In 2013-2014, the Regional Consultants provided training on using the mCLASS:Reading 3D™ diagnostic and formative assessments, and in 2014-2015 they trained stakeholders to identify student needs using the assessment data. In 2015-2016 the Regional Consultants focused on the instructional environment. The Director of K-3 Literacy reported that by the 2016-2017 academic year they “are finally getting to the place where we can really focus on instruction.”

In addition, the North Carolina DPI developed 33 professional development trainings that supported legislative requirements and helped districts and schools select instructional resources. The professional development activities are based on effective research-based instruction and are available through an internal WIKI or Google shared drive page. These resources were developed by the K-3 literacy consultants who identified state-wide trends and instructional needs and then designed the activities around those needs.



**84% of teachers agreed that their knowledge of and skill in using assessments to drive instruction increased.**

RtA Teacher Survey

**80% of teachers agreed professional development improved their knowledge of research-based reading instruction.**

RtA Teacher Survey



The Regional Consultants provide information on “drilling down into the data to find out who needs intervention.” Then, support and guidance are customized to address the different needs of students with reading deficiencies, students who have been retained in third grade and students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). For example, to help students retained in third grade, 360 Master Literacy Trainers received nine days of intensive instruction on the intervention strategies designed by the North Carolina DPI. In addition, the North Carolina DPI Director of K-3 Literacy and the Regional Consultants are working closely with ELL staff on support strategies for students needing extra assistance.

School district leaders and teachers report that the support strategies North Carolina DPI provided were very effective in providing clear, consistent information. Districts also built upon the assistance they received from the state and implemented practices to support the implementation of the legislation and enhanced the resources they received from the North Carolina DPI. Examples of the variety of support strategies that the districts in this study implemented are displayed in the box.



That [Master Literacy Training] has been gold. You don't get that kind of ongoing professional development often...I don't know how we could have done it without that.

District Literacy Leader

### School District Strategies to Support Read to Achieve

- ✓ Data days with the Regional Consultant after the assessment window and throughout the year to ensure that assessments are not just for compliance and that teachers use the data.
- ✓ Weekly Collaboration Around Student Achievement (CASA) meetings where PLCs meet with school administrators to look at data, progress monitoring and assessments.
- ✓ Monthly meetings with school literacy leaders and coaches.
- ✓ Monthly leadership team meetings that include several departments. During the meetings, the literacy coach may work with principals on the literacy plan, data, successes, areas for improvement and next steps tied to school improvement plans.
- ✓ “K Connect” team meetings to bring together early childhood educators and instructional coaches to share information and best practices.
- ✓ Educator conferences where teachers share strategies with other teachers.
- ✓ Book studies to identify how to address areas of weakness using research-based practices.
- ✓ Literacy coaches conducting modeling sessions.
- ✓ Refocus of existing funds to support literacy coaches in every elementary school, district-wide.
- ✓ Intervention kits and tools provided for every classroom teacher.
- ✓ Additional professional development days for principals that included common tenets of literacy instruction.
- ✓ Shifting resources to support a transition class for fourth grade students to allow them to advance with their peers while receiving more intense reading instruction.
- ✓ Tutors and interventionists in fourth and fifth grades to help students continue their growth.
- ✓ Additional work days built into school calendar to allow for more professional development and professional learning communities.

The North Carolina RtA legislation provides funds for the establishment of summer reading camps in each district. These reading camps are a strategy to provide additional instructional time to third grade students who do not meet proficiency on the state assessment. In addition, districts receive funding to support first and second grade students who demonstrate reading comprehension below grade level. Eligible students are highly encouraged to attend the reading camps but not required – parents are given the final decision.

The North Carolina DPI staff members reported that early on, summer reading camps were viewed as “punitive.” That view is changing. Slightly more than half the teachers who responded to the RtA survey agreed that the summer reading camps are achieving the purpose of accelerating reading progress for struggling readers. One teacher stated, “Summer reading camp is a great idea, especially now that camp has been extended down to first grade.” A few teachers suggested expanding summer reading camps to more students, including kindergarten students. There have been some challenges to districts in offering the summer reading camps, mainly transportation, nutrition services and personnel.

## Communication Strategies

Read to Achieve impacted every school district in the state, which means that getting correct information about the policy to all stakeholders was vital. The North Carolina DPI relied on a variety of strategies for insuring that information flowed smoothly to districts, schools, parents, guardians and the general public. Their success came from substantial efforts on two major fronts: creating materials and providing on-the-ground, face-to-face support.

In addition to the Guidebook described in the previous section, the North Carolina DPI created two parent brochures in English and Spanish and a parent-specific LiveBinder that describes the law, provides an overview of the assessments and directs parents to resources. District staff, as well as teachers, indicated that the LiveBinder is one of the most effective communication strategies because it provides one place to house the most current information. Teachers responded that these efforts increased their knowledge of the requirements of RtA. Districts indicated that they fully use the North Carolina DPI materials and find the documents for parents to be very helpful, often tailoring them to meet their community’s needs.

Early on, communication was a constant battle. Specifically, accurate information about RtA did not reach some buildings or classrooms. To address this challenge, the Director of K-3 Literacy created a teacher listserv to ensure that information about the legislation was sent to them directly.

Face-to-face support provided by the North Carolina DPI began with state staff attending superintendent meetings and curriculum staff meetings. They also provided information to Regional Consultants who interact face-to-face with district leaders and teachers. Districts reported that they rely heavily upon Regional Consultants – “a real person with a real phone number who answers” – to be their primary “go to” source of information.

To engage families, the North Carolina DPI initially assembled Parent Advisory Committees three times a year, but the attendance dropped by the third meeting. Next, they tried organizing regional parent meetings, which yielded mixed results. The North Carolina DPI then tried reaching out to parents locally at school open houses or parent nights. While these state-level efforts were somewhat successful, parents and guardians most often turned to their local districts and schools for information.



We went out,  
and we talked.

NC DPI Director of K-3  
Literacy



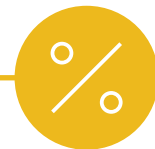


The districts tried to create a consistent message through large-scale presentations and events, printed documents and websites. One district described its communication approach to those outside the building as three-tiered, starting with the local school board because it determines how resources, time and funds are spent. Next, they held large events such as presentations and parent academies with families. Finally, they conducted more intensive work with families to equip them to help their children. One district focused on having second grade teachers meet with families to explain RtA so that they were “front-loaded for third grade.”

Teachers voiced that the RtA was communicated to families in easy to understand ways and that their schools have increased their efforts to engage families. One teacher commented, “I love the fact that parents are informed at each step so they know the progress their child is making.” Despite all the efforts put into activities such as breakfast meetings, academies, parent nights and technology-supported strategies, the most effective strategy voiced by the districts for communicating with families was having a well-informed principal or instructional coach who could sit down one-on-one with a parent or guardian to answer their questions and address their issues.

## Lessons Learned From North Carolina Educators

Based on their experience with several years of RtA implementation, literacy leaders at the state and district level, along with classroom teachers, provided advice for legislators, state departments of education, district leaders and schools in other states that may be considering similar literacy initiatives. Their suggestions can be categorized under five main topic areas.



**Nearly 75% of teachers reported their schools have increased efforts to engage parents.**

RtA Teacher Survey



...this is one of the most informed initiatives that we've had.

NC DPI Regional Consultant

## Recommendations to Legislators, State Departments of Education and District Leaders

### Take Time to Plan

- ✓ Stakeholders recommend that implementation should roll out in stages. District literacy leaders suggest allowing at least six months for the districts to process the legislation, communicate with stakeholders and make plans for implementation.
- ✓ To many constituents, the research and pedagogy will be new. Be thorough and deliberate in planning how this information will be shared with all parties.
- ✓ Consider a pilot year to refine policies and procedures.

### Build Relationships and Open Communications

- ✓ From the beginning, start a large communications campaign designed to seek input and garner “buy-in.”
- ✓ Talk with the state and local school boards so they are informed and can provide support.
- ✓ Have an easily accessible digital site where information can be shared with all stakeholders. In North Carolina, the LiveBinder is lauded as the source of the latest information.
- ✓ Ensure that the message is clear and consistent.

### Provide and Fund Adequate Personnel

- ✓ Recruit and hire literacy personnel who work in regions and can be the “go to” experts to assist districts and school coaches understand the legislation.
- ✓ Increase the number of literacy coaches to model instructional practices and support teachers in their continued professional learning.
- ✓ Teachers need additional personnel to help with administering progress monitoring assessments and to assist in providing additional time for student interventions.

### Use Data to Inform Practice and Policy

- ✓ Choose assessments wisely and be willing to revise. Pay close attention to teacher feedback on the assessments.
- ✓ Plan conversations around data.
- ✓ Ensure that teachers do not think that the legislation is only about compliance. Instead, help them use data to identify appropriate strategies that keep students moving forward.
- ✓ Involve school leaders in the assessment process. This fosters a deeper understanding of how they can support and build a culture of data usage in their schools.

### Keep the Big Picture in Mind

- ✓ Do not lose focus on teaching and learning.
- ✓ Remember that the legislation is intended to support children and to ensure that every child receives high-quality instruction. Carefully examine what is being asked of students and teachers.
- ✓ Stay the course. Too many initiatives fall by the wayside because there is not a clear understanding of what is and is not working. Be willing to adjust and refine policies, procedures and practices.

## Impacts Beyond Student Achievement

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 influence – state, district or classroom.

The North Carolina DPI Director of K-3 Literacy reported that North Carolina changed its licensure procedures for preservice teachers based on RtA legislation. Since October 2014, elementary educators must pass the North Carolina Foundations of Reading Test to obtain certification to teach in the state. Additionally, each preservice teacher has to be familiar with the reading assessment, mCLASS:Reading 3D™. The DPI and the vendor provided software licenses for preservice courses and trained preservice teachers at several institutions of higher education on how to use the assessment.

North Carolina DPI Regional Consultants expressed that the legislation has been positive and has created awareness of K-3 literacy needs. In addition, the legislation has “put the focus back on those basic early literacy skills and why they need to be taught” and has shifted the conversation to how student needs can be identified using assessment data.

District literacy leaders indicated that the legislation created a new sense of urgency and accountability, as illustrated by the following reports:

- Drilling down into data and problem solving has “increased greatly.”
- Coaching and training support has shifted and become tighter.
- The legislation made everyone focus on literacy.
- Teachers are more aware that reading comprehension needs to be systematically taught.

One district literacy leader stated that teachers now know how to teach reading more effectively using best practices, and there is now more accountability for effective reading instruction. Leaders also reported that K-3 data discussions have promoted embedded professional development, and professional learning communities have been enhanced by consistent data collection, which drives planning to support student success.

One district related that RtA has impacted the quality of their school leaders. They reported that principals are aligning purchases and resources with intended outcomes and are becoming better at using data across all aspects of schooling. Two of the district’s former teachers who received training and support through RtA have moved into principal roles and have become strong literacy leaders in their schools.

A challenge mentioned in the district leaders’ interviews is teacher turnover. One district reported that about a third of their third grade teachers moved to a different grade level because of the increased accountability. Another district leader commented that in one school, there are eight new teachers in K-3, which means constant training and retraining.



...we’re all in and we’re going to do this together instead of each school and principal as an island on their own.

District Literacy Leader

When teachers were asked to respond to survey statements about the impact of RtA, there was strong agreement that RtA:

- Improved K-3 reading outcomes (64%)
- Changed their instructional practices (62%)
- Increased learning time for struggling readers to get the help they need to be successful (72%)

When asked the open-ended question, “From your perspective, what are the most positive aspects of Read to Achieve?” almost a third of teachers commented on the opportunities for student success. About a fourth of the teachers described how they provide immediate interventions to struggling students, and about a fifth of the teachers referenced the value of assessments and data. The following sample of teacher responses highlights the benefits of RtA at the classroom level.

"Giving students a chance to gain and grow through RtA is great."

"It has really helped to have the tools...students have been coming to my third grade classroom more prepared than before Read to Achieve."

"Giving students and their families opportunities for success."

"Children are starting to believe they can...It gives all children a chance to be successful."

"Success of students and their confidence levels raised."

"I like that there is more of a focus on finding reading deficits early."

"More emphasis on urgency for meeting the needs of struggling readers."

"The most positive aspect is continuity of assessment. Students are judged by the same standards statewide."

"...ability for teachers to monitor student growth, assess their students' level in reading and phonics, and have activities to support instruction."

"Instant data!"

"Knowing exactly where a child is and being able to tell the parents."

"...it takes the guesswork out of things."

"The Read to Achieve initiative has helped me learn to change my instruction to help struggling readers."



I believe with all that's in me, it's because of the work that we're doing with this; our K-3 teachers know their students better than anybody else. If I had a way for every teacher K-12 to have a magic button that says, "now what do I do?" then I would go for it. The "now what?" and teachers having the tools at their fingertips to be able to help them is vital, and I wish we had it for every teacher so every teacher would know what to do when a child is struggling.

District Literacy Leader



## Summary

North Carolina's Read to Achieve 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 North Carolina DPI, school districts, classroom teachers, families and communities. Since the enactment of the legislation in 2012, there has been clear advancement toward reaching this goal for North Carolina's third grade readers. This study investigated the perceptions of stakeholders who have insight into the successes and challenges that North Carolina encountered in pursuit of the RtA vision.

Overall, perceptions are positive toward Read to Achieve and its components. District literacy leaders and teachers have received support through professional development and on-the-ground technical assistance that improved instruction. Efforts to communicate with and engage families in helping their children have increased. Students who are struggling are identified early and provided intensive interventions to prevent future failure. There is a clear, consistent message across the state: our students will be provided with the foundational reading skills needed to learn, graduate and succeed.





# APPENDICES



## Appendix A: Overview of Read to Achieve Components

**Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement (Component 1).** Schools will develop, implement and continuously evaluate a comprehensive plan to improve reading achievement. The plan must be based on reading instructional practices that have strong evidence of effectiveness in current empirical research; reflect research; include curriculum standards; include revised teacher licensure and renewal standards; and include revised teacher education program standards.

**Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (Component 2).** The State Board of Education shall develop, adopt and provide developmentally appropriate individualized assessment instruments for kindergarten through third grade. These assessment instruments will be used by local school administrative units to generate a Child Profile within the first 60 days of kindergarten enrollment. All students entering kindergarten will be screened in early language, literacy and math within 30 days of enrollment. The assessment is to be administered at the classroom level in all LEAs, be aligned with North Carolina’s early learning and development standards as well as with North Carolina’s Common Core and Essential Standards and be appropriate for use with all students.

**Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency (Component 3).** K-3 students shall be assessed with valid and reliable formative and diagnostic reading assessments. Assessments and instructional supports shall address the National Reading Panel’s research on the Big 5 Ideas of reading. LEAs are encouraged to partner with volunteers, mentors and tutors.

**Elimination of Social Promotion (Component 4).** Students who fail to demonstrate proficiency on reading End-of-Grade tests in third grade will be retained. Good Cause exemptions are provided for LEP students; students with disabilities with IEPs; students who demonstrate proficiency on an alternate assessment; students who demonstrate proficiency on the portfolio process; and students who have been retained more than once. Superintendents determine good cause exemptions.

**Successful Reading Development for Retained Students (Component 5).** Students who have not demonstrated reading proficiency shall be encouraged to enroll in a reading camp prior to being retained. Students retained shall be provided with a selected teacher based on demonstrated student outcomes in reading proficiency and placed in an accelerated reading class or a transitional third and fourth grade class. The State Board of Education (SBE) shall establish a midyear promotion policy for any student retained who, by November 1, demonstrates reading proficiency. Parents or guardians of students who have been retained once shall be provided with a plan for reading at home. Parents or guardians of students who have been retained twice shall be offered supplemental tutoring outside the instructional day.

**Notification Requirements to Parents and Guardians (Component 6).** Parents or guardians shall be notified in writing that the student shall be retained if the student is not demonstrating reading proficiency by the end of third grade and the reason the student is not eligible for a good cause exemption. Parents or guardians of retained reading students will also receive at least monthly written reports on student progress toward reading proficiency. Teachers and principals shall provide opportunities to discuss the notifications with parents and guardians.

**Accountability Measures (Component 7).** Local boards of education will annually publish to a website and provide a report in writing to the State Board of Education (SBE) on the progress of reading proficiency. Local school boards will provide the SBE with a written report that describes all interventions provided to retained students. The SBE will establish a uniform format for reporting and will compile the local reports for the Governor, Senate, House and Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. The SBE will provide technical assistance to LEAs and schools on implementing all parts of Read to Achieve.

# Appendix B: 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 Achieve 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 Achieve, 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 C: 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 Achieve 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 D: 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 Achieve. The North 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 Achieve. 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. State-Level Support Strategies	10 minutes
2. District-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
3. District-Level Communication Strategies	10 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	10 minutes

## Interview Questions

### Topic Area 1: State-Level Support Strategies

- 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: District-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: District-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 E: Teacher Survey

This survey is part of a study of the North Carolina Read to Achieve 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 Achieve 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 NC Department of Public Instruction that assisted me in implementing Read to Achieve.
2. I received adequate support from my school administration that assisted me in implementing Read to Achieve.
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 such as the LiveBinders and/or the North Carolina Read to Achieve Guidebook that increased my knowledge of the requirements of Read to Achieve.
6. The Read to Achieve guidance documents provided information that was useful to me.
7. The professional development that I received from my school district and/or the NC Department of Public Instruction 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 NC Department of Public Instruction improved my knowledge of and skill in providing effective interventions.
9. The professional development that I received from my school district and/or the NC Department of Public Instruction improved my knowledge of and skill with assessments and their use to drive instruction.
10. The Read to Achieve 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 Achieve initiative, my school has provided increased learning time for struggling readers.
13. Because of the Read to Achieve initiative, I have changed my instructional practices to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.
14. The Read to Achieve initiative has a positive impact on improving K-3 reading outcomes in my school.
15. The Read to Achieve initiative has helped me identify and address reading difficulties early.
16. The Read to Achieve initiative was communicated to parents in a way that was easy for them to understand.

17. Since implementation of the Read to Achieve initiative, my school has increased its efforts to engage parents of struggling readers in a timely fashion.
18. I support the Read to Achieve 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 Achieve?
20. What advice do you have to improve the implementation of Read to Achieve?

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



