Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Improve K-3 Literacy

Accountability Measures

Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement

SL 2012-142 (HB950),Sec.7A.1(b)

G.S. 115C-83.1D

Date Due: ---October 15, 2014
Report # ----
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2013-2014

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Introduction:

During the 2012 session, the General Assembly passed the Excellent Public Schools Act. A component of this legislation is the North Carolina Read to Achieve Program which began with the school year 2013-2014. As part of this program the State Board of Education is directed to report biennially to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by October 15 of each even-numbered year. The report should include information on the implementation, evaluation, and revisions to the comprehensive plan for reading achievement and include recommendations for legislative changes to enable implementation of current empirical research in reading development. This report is comprised of four sections that include the overall strategic plan implemented by the Department of Public Instruction by component, the accountability measures of numbers of students falling within specific categories of the program, overall findings of an external evaluation, and current practices in response to feedback with recommendations for future legislation. The Read to Achieve Program includes seven basic components. Six of these components will be addressed in this report. The Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment process is on a different timeline for implementation and will begin in schools in the 2014-15 school year.

Section 1: Department of Public Instruction Strategic Plan for Implementation:

The legislation provided funding for technical assistance to LEAs to implement the program locally. As a result the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) established the K-3 Literacy division which is charged with the state-wide implementation of this law. The division includes a director, lead consultant, one field-based consultant in each state board district, one contract consultant for charter schools, and one contract consultant for data and budget analysis. The strategic plan involved prioritizing the six components of the law for full implementation in 2013-14.

<u>Priority One: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency (115C-83.1F)</u>

This component of the legislation states that kindergarten, first, second, and third grade students shall be assessed with valid, reliable, formative, and diagnostic reading assessments made available to local school administrative units by the State Board of Education. In August of 2012, one month after the legislation passed, the State Board of Education passed a policy adopting mClass Reading 3D as the formative, diagnostic assessment system that would be provided to every K-3 classroom teacher state-wide. This involved the purchasing and distribution of student assessment materials, the allocation of funding to districts for technology devices needed for the assessments, and the training of approximately 23,000 teachers. A train-the-trainer model was utilized involving two teacher trainers from each elementary school not currently using the program. These trainings and distribution occurred throughout the school year 2012-2013, and a majority of school systems and charters began the assessments early during different benchmark periods of that school year. At the beginning of 2013-2014 all

elementary schools in all schools systems (approximately 1,440 schools) state-wide began using the mClass Reading 3D assessment system affecting 477,000 students. The K-3 Literacy division was involved with the training of these schools and currently maintains trainings on: new teacher and refresher courses on the product, data analysis, administrative reports and usage, instructional practices stemming from data findings, and collaborative conversations around data and instruction among teachers and administrators. During this time frame three training sessions were also offered for Institutes of Higher Education in order for faculty in higher education to know and understand the assessment system and train pre-service students to be familiar with the assessments before they participated in their field experiences for student teaching.

Priority Two: Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement (115C-83.1D)

This component of the legislation states that the State Board of Education shall develop, implement, and continuously evaluate a comprehensive plan to improve reading achievement in the public schools. The plan shall be based on reading instructional practices with strong evidence of effectiveness in current empirical research in reading development. Per legislation this plan was to be developed with the active involvement of teachers, college and university educators, parents and guardians of students, and other interested parties. The K-3 Literacy division conducted eight regional meetings in each state board district in the late spring of 2013. Attendance at these focus groups included parents, teachers, principals, central office administrators, instructional coaches, and representatives from institutes of higher education. Each session followed the same procedures. The participants were given guiding questions and areas to consider in their conversations and feedback about how to move achievement forward in the state of North Carolina. All feedback was gathered, sorted and categorized into major headings and target areas. The K-3 Literacy division researched Comprehensive Reading Plans from across the United States and enlisted the help of the Southeast Education Development Laboratory (SEDL). SEDL is one of fifteen regional comprehensive centers that provide training and technical assistance to state education agencies to enable them to assist school districts and schools. A draft Comprehensive Reading Plan was developed based on feedback from the focus groups. The draft plan was redistributed to all focus group participants, other divisions, and literacy groups across North Carolina to gather additional feedback. The finalized Comprehensive Reading Plan was approved by the State Board of Education in September of 2013 and distributed to all local education agencies (LEAs) and charters. The K-3 Literacy division began trainings to inform the field of the practical use of the plan in their schools and districts. The plan includes specific deliverables for the DPI to accomplish in 2013-2014. These deliverables can be found in the appendix. (See attachment 1)

One major deliverable for the Comprehensive Reading Plan is the development and dissemination of a supplemental document listing research-based reading strategies. This document provides teachers with instructional strategies aligned to the five areas of reading development; phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

Priority Three: Elimination of Social Promotion (115C-83.1G)

This component involved clear communication to the field on what to expect with the legislation. State meetings began in October of 2012 with curriculum coordinators from across the state. These meetings were held by our Chief Academic Officer (currently the Deputy State Superintendent, Rebecca Garland) routinely to keep the central office staff informed of legislation and divisional work at DPI. Additional meetings of this group were held in the spring and fall of 2013. Read to Achieve was addressed and discussed in detail at each meeting. In February of 2013, the State Board approved the Read to Achieve Guidebook. This Guidebook gave details of how each component of the law should be implemented and identified the responsibilities at each level (state, district, school, classroom). Within the Guidebook there are sample Personalized Education Plan (PEP) forms (115C-105.41) that schools could use to document and track personal reading interventions and goals for struggling readers. The Guidebook has been updated twice since February of 2013.

Additionally, DPI used the Summer Institutes of 2013 to inform the field and establish a means by which districts could collaborate on ideas about communicating Read to Achieve with parents of elementary school students. These institutes were comprised of teams of participants from districts and charters. The sessions on Read to Achieve involved a detailed breakdown of the law with participants exchanging ideas on how to thoroughly inform parents. Many districts had established websites to inform parents and these websites were displayed on the K-3 Literacy livebinder (http://www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). This livebinder was developed in the spring of 2013 to keep all stakeholders informed about Read to Achieve. A parent letter explaining the Read to Achieve legislation was developed by DPI, distributed to the LEAs and charters, and placed on the livebinder. This letter could be customized to the needs of the LEAs/charters. DPI produced a parent slide deck for schools to use at open houses at the beginning of school. There was also a narrated version of the slide deck so that a consistent message would be heard by all who used the resource.

This component includes Good Cause Exemptions. The law stated that two of the exemptions could be proficiency on an alternative assessment or completion of a student reading portfolio. DPI provided all districts and charters with the Beginning-of-Grade (BOG) test, the retest of the End-of-Grade (EOG), the Read to Achieve alternative test, and mClass Reading 3D at Level P. Any of these assessments may be used as an alternative test. In February of 2013 the State Board approved a process whereby districts could choose local alternative assessments as long as the local board of education verified the validity and reliability of the tests. This gave multiple opportunities for third-grade students to show proficiency.

DPI is a member of the Southeast Regional Education Lab (REL) at Florida State which is sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This lab uses applied research, development, dissemination, and training and technical assistance to improve academic achievement for all students. Two members of the staff of the Southeast REL visited North

Carolina to give the staff of the K-3 Literacy division an overview of the details of how summer camps and reading plans were developed in Florida over the last ten years. While visiting and in subsequent phone conversations, the Florida model for portfolios was discussed. The Read to Achieve legislation read that the student reading portfolio and review process shall be established by the State Board of Education. After reviewing the Florida model, DPI Accountability and K-3 Literacy staff worked with North Carolina State Technical Outreach for Public Schools (NC TOPS) to develop a North Carolina portfolio model that would align with the NC EOG. NC TOPS has developed the NC EOG since its inception. The North Carolina portfolio system ensures that teachers have choice in the selection of materials to use for the portfolio while offering a consistent state-wide formative system that measures student understanding and application of standards. The same multi-step processes are used for developing the portfolio as is used for the development of an EOG. North Carolina teachers vetted the passage selections and developed the questions. This resource was approved by the State Board of Education in October of 2013 and training and dissemination of materials occurred in the following months for use in January of 2014. Teachers were to have full access to the portfolio passages so that they could use their discretion as to when and if students needed to begin to develop a portfolio.

Priority Four: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students (115C-83.1H)

The NC DPI staff has continually emphasized the level of support that this law provides struggling readers. There are multiple opportunities for students to show proficiency as listed in the section above. In addition, funding was established to offer reading camps for those who were unable to show proficiency through the various means. Each LEA is responsible for the planning, development and implementation of reading camps. NC DPI created a separate livebinder specifically targeting reading camps: (http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=1279155&present=true#anchor). The information included in the tabs and subtabs is only suggested activities, guidelines, and resources. Districts and schools were encouraged to use the ideas to customize reading camp experiences to meet the unique situation of their districts and schools.

If students are not successful in showing proficiency in reading camps, there are still supports. The State Board of Education adopted a mid-year promotion policy in March of 2013. Students can be placed in 3/4 Transition classes or 4th grade Accelerated classes and again have more chances to show proficiency by November 1. The K-3 Literacy staff developed, trained, and modeled professional development on the 90-minute uninterrupted block of reading instruction. This model can be used effectively in transition or accelerated classes. The staff also trained on small group instruction and the use of research-based instructional strategies based on a student's formative data on reading skills, comprehension and standards.

Priority Five: Notification Requirements to Parents and Guardians (115V-83.1I)

To help LEAs/charters with this component, NC DPI created sample templates that districts and schools could customize for their needs. The templates are forms that provide documentation required by legislation and give parents valuable information about the current needs of the student with interventions being employed to address those needs. The Notification forms are included in the Guidebook.

Templates for the monthly progress reports for students retained under the G.S. 115C-83.1G (a) were also provided to LEAs/charters. These forms can be customized.

Priority Six: Accountability Measures (115C-83.1J)

Per legislation the Accountability division established a uniform process for collecting the required information for reporting and posting on district websites. Through this process districts were able to report numbers through an electronic system that calculated the needed information into a uniform template. The state-wide, district, and charter results follow in Section 2 of this report.

Conclusion:

Many divisions within the Department of Public Instruction have collaborated to ensure the implementation of the Read to Achieve program followed all the requirements and components of the legislation. The strategic plan for the rollout of the program first involved completing the major initiatives. The establishment of a state-wide formative, diagnostic assessment system and the development of a Comprehensive Reading Plan are the foundations for the remaining components of the program. The DPI has provided strong professional development and support (over 1,000 direct trainings) to districts and schools as we have all worked to complete the major initiatives and the minute details of the program. The correct use of the formative, diagnostic assessment system beginning in kindergarten will help teachers identify specific foundational needs of students early so that interventions can begin and continue as needed through the subsequent grades. The Comprehensive Reading Plan gives schools and districts a structured plan to utilize in School Improvement Plans. The supplemental document of research-based instructional reading strategies provides the next step for teachers after assessing and analyzing data. The professional development provided by the K-3 Literacy division helps teachers, administrators, and central office staff realize how all the pieces of the legislation begin to fit together to provide positive supports for struggling readers.

In December 2012, the State Board of Education adopted policy requiring new licensure exam requirements for elementary and special education general curriculum teacher education candidates. Effective October 1, 2014, elementary and special education general curriculum teacher education candidates must pass the State Board adopted Foundations of Reading for North Carolina and General Curriculum for North Carolina exams in order to be issued a teaching license. For elementary education candidates, the exams will replace the currently required Praxis II Elementary Education: Instructional Practice and Applications licensure exam. For special education candidates, the exams will replace the currently required Praxis II Fundamental Subjects: Content Knowledge licensure exam.

The Foundations of Reading exam assesses four sub-areas: (i) foundations of reading development; (ii) development of reading comprehension; (iii) reading assessment and instruction; and (iv) integration of knowledge and understanding. The test framework and a full length practice exam can be found at http://www.nc.nesinc.com/prepare.asp .

The exams will be effective for teacher education graduates beginning in the 2014-15 academic year.

Through the first year of implementation the DPI learned lessons and listened to feedback from all stakeholders. Changes and adjustments were made to some procedures in 2013-14 if it was within the parameters of the law. HB 230 provided further clarifications and flexibility to districts in June of 2014. The DPI established proactive measures to respond to feedback during the year and will continue these practices going forward. A listing of these practices with suggestions for the future is included in Section 4 along with the recommendations for legislation.

Section 2: Accountability Measures / Statewide Results (Numbers & Percentages accurate as of September 12, 2014)

State of North Carolina **2013–14** **Read to Achieve Grade 3** **End-of-Year Results**	G.S. §115C-83.10 requires "each local board of education to publish annually on a Web site maintained by that local school administrative unit and to report in writing to the State Board of Education (SBE) by **September 1** of each year the following information on the prior school year:"

Note: The denominator for calculating the required percentages for Rows 1, 2, and 3 is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing.		**Number of Students**	**Percentage**
1	Demonstrated reading proficiency on the Beginning-of-Grade 3 (BOG3) ELA/Reading Assessment, the End-of-Grade (EOG) ELA/Reading Assessment, or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)	70,185	60.4%
2	Did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3 ELA/Reading Assessment, the EOG ELA/Reading Assessment, or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest	45,943	39.6%
3	The number and percentage of students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause. Students may be counted in this category only once.	9,454	8.1%
The denominator for Row 4 is the number of students from Row 2 minus the number of students from Row 3.			
4	The number and percentage of students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) (i.e., Read to Achieve Test or locally determined SBE-approved alternative assessment). Students may be counted in the numerator and/or the denominator only once for this category.	17,177	47.1%
The denominator for Row 5 is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing.			
5	Total number and percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on third-grade standards (For 2014-15, students who are not proficient will be either: (1)retained in third grade accelerated class, (2) placed in a ¾ transition class with a retained label, or (3)placed in a fourth-grade accelerated class with a retained reading label.	14,755	12.7%
The denominator for Row 6 is the number of retained students recorded in number 5.			
6	**Charter Schools Only**: Charter schools must indicate the number and percentage of retained students recorded in number 5 who do not return to the charter school for 2014–15	N/A	N/A

Note: Privacy laws dictate that for fewer than 5 students, the specific number and percentage should not be given. Therefore, if the number is fewer than 5 students, schools should use an asterisk (*) to represent fewer than 5 students and the percentage. An * indicates that the student population number and percentage is too small to report the value. The percentage and number of students are not shown if the percentage is greater than 95 percent (>95) or less than 5 percent (<5).

Reading Camp: 18,373 students eligible, 12,827 (69.8% attended),
3,426 (26.7) students proficient at end of camp

Accountability Measures - LEAs - (Numbers & Percentages Accurate as of September 12, 2014)

State of North Carolina District Level Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Students who demonstrated reading proficiency at reading camp[3]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	3588	19.6	14755	12.7
Alamance-Burlington Schools	929	54.8	767	45.2	161	9.5	307	50.7	39	13	260	15.3
Alexander County Schools	269	63.6	154	36.4	35	8.3	97	81.5	10	45.5	12	2.8
Alleghany County Schools	63	63	37	37	29	29	5	62.5	0	0	3	3
Anson County Schools	125	47.9	136	52.1	28	10.7	77	71.3	7	22.6	24	9.2
Ashe County Schools	151	64.3	84	35.7	28	11.9	39	69.6	1	5.9	16	6.8
Asheboro City Schools	167	45.9	197	54.1	29	8	69	41.1	3	6.3	45	12.4
Asheville City Schools	248	70.5	104	29.5	27	7.7	27	35.1	12	24	38	10.8
Avery County Schools	86	60.6	56	39.4	49	34.5	3	42.9	0	0	4	2.8
Beaufort County Schools	315	58.4	224	41.6	38	7.1	86	46.2	21	21	79	14.7
Bertie County Schools	76	43.7	98	56.3	6	3.4	31	33.7	3	4.9	58	33.3
Bladen County Schools	188	51.9	174	48.1	40	11	95	70.9	4	10.3	35	9.7
Brunswick County Schools	585	61.8	361	38.2	113	11.9	100	40.3	84	56.8	64	6.8
Buncombe County Schools	1257	66.2	643	33.8	214	11.3	188	43.8	53	22	188	9.9
Burke County Schools	584	61.7	362	38.3	81	8.6	202	71.9	38	48.1	41	4.3
Cabarrus County Schools	1537	65.2	821	34.8	145	6.1	358	53	61	19.2	257	10.9
Caldwell County Schools	527	60.9	339	39.1	64	7.4	190	69.1	22	25.9	63	7.3
Camden County Schools	103	77.4	30	22.6	0	0	22	73.3	1	12.5	7	5.3
Carteret County Public Schools	474	74.4	163	25.6	74	11.6	65	73	0	0	24	3.8
Caswell County Schools	113	55.9	89	44.1	3	1.5	39	45.3	12	25.5	35	17.3
Catawba County Schools	763	60.5	499	39.5	131	10.4	146	39.7	22	9.9	200	15.8
Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools	665	71.6	264	28.4	98	10.5	89	53.6	17	22.1	60	6.5
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	7248	61.6	4511	38.4	466	4	1779	44	155	6.8	2111	18
Chatham County Schools	431	62.9	254	37.1	67	9.8	53	28.3	29	21.6	105	15.3
Cherokee County Schools	141	58.5	100	41.5	42	17.4	13	22.4	9	20	36	14.9
Clay County Schools	71	65.1	38	34.9	27	24.8	8	72.7	0	0	3	2.8
Cleveland County Schools	792	65.3	420	34.7	204	16.8	89	41.2	63	49.6	64	5.3

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District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	3588	19.6	14755	12.7
Clinton City Schools	145	57.3	108	42.7	18	7.1	37	41.1	23	43.4	30	11.9
Columbus County Schools	239	53.1	211	46.9	34	7.6	65	36.7	15	13.4	97	21.6
Craven County Schools	696	60.7	451	39.3	88	7.7	193	53.2	50	29.4	120	10.5
Cumberland County Schools	2470	64.2	1380	35.8	390	10.1	218	22	124	18.7	540	14
Currituck County Schools	188	63.3	109	36.7	34	11.4	39	52	17	47.2	19	6.4
Dare County Schools	261	62.3	158	37.7	44	10.5	57	50	31	54.4	26	6.2
Davidson County Schools	890	59.3	610	40.7	129	8.6	293	60.9	30	16	158	10.5
Davie County Schools	305	67.2	149	32.8	39	8.6	51	46.4	8	13.6	51	11.2
Duplin County Schools	395	50.3	391	49.7	73	9.3	55	17.3	72	27.4	191	24.3
Durham Public Schools	1244	47.9	1352	52.1	188	7.2	281	24.1	88	16	462	17.8
Edenton-Chowan Schools	94	58.8	66	41.3	16	10	29	58	3	14.3	18	11.3
Edgecombe County Public School	143	32.9	291	67.1	59	13.6	80	34.5	67	44.1	85	19.6
Elkin City Schools	71	72.4	27	27.6	5	5.1	12	54.5	1	10	9	9.2
Forsyth County Schools	2358	58.3	1686	41.7	321	7.9	639	46.8	113	15.6	613	15.2
Franklin County Schools	373	57.7	273	42.3	35	5.4	63	26.5	17	9.7	158	24.5
Gaston County Schools	1199	51.5	1127	48.5	96	4.1	833	80.8	0	0	198	8.5
Gates County Schools	64	53.3	56	46.7	1	0.8	27	49.1	9	32.1	19	15.8
Graham County Schools	56	60.2	37	39.8	9	9.7	24	85.7	0	0	4	4.3
Granville County Schools	288	48.5	306	51.5	93	15.7	116	54.5	27	27.8	70	11.8
Greene County Schools	93	38.1	151	61.9	22	9	67	51.9	20	32.3	42	17.2
Guilford County Schools	3086	56	2428	44	500	9.1	1165	60.4	100	13.1	663	12
Halifax County Schools	105	36.1	186	63.9	16	5.5	71	41.8	3	3	96	33
Harnett County Schools	774	50	774	50	114	7.4	421	63.8	34	14.2	205	13.2
Haywood County Schools	362	67.5	174	32.5	52	9.7	77	63.1	16	35.6	29	5.4
Henderson County Schools	680	66	350	34	68	6.6	166	58.9	52	44.8	64	6.2
Hertford County Schools	111	44.6	138	55.4	10	4	58	45.3	18	25.7	52	20.9

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District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	3588	19.6	14755	12.7
Hickory City Schools	218	60.4	143	39.6	17	4.7	70	55.6	6	10.7	50	13.9
Hoke County Schools	327	49.2	338	50.8	73	11	76	28.7	28	14.8	161	24.2
Hyde County Schools	27	58.7	19	41.3	0	0	11	57.9	2	25	6	13
Iredell-Statesville Schools	954	61.9	586	38.1	213	13.8	58	15.5	39	12.4	276	17.9
Jackson County Schools	161	56.5	124	43.5	18	6.3	81	76.4	3	12	22	7.7
Johnston County Schools	1571	60.1	1044	39.9	231	8.8	538	66.2	105	38.2	170	6.5
Jones County Schools	51	50.5	50	49.5	13	12.9	10	27	0	0	27	26.7
Kannapolis City Schools	214	48.6	226	51.4	52	11.8	104	59.8	4	5.7	66	15
Lee County Schools	435	55.3	351	44.7	57	7.3	125	42.5	47	27.8	122	15.5
Lenoir County Public Schools	334	48.8	350	51.2	89	13	155	59.4	16	15.1	90	13.2
Lexington City Schools	128	50.8	124	49.2	45	17.9	18	22.8	6	9.8	55	21.8
Lincoln County Schools	605	68.9	273	31.1	103	11.7	85	50	36	42.4	49	5.6
Macon County Schools	185	60.9	119	39.1	17	5.6	89	87.3	0	0	13	4.3
Madison County Schools	112	61.5	70	38.5	21	11.5	37	75.5	5	41.7	7	3.8
Martin County Schools	132	48	143	52	3	1.1	60	42.9	7	8.8	73	26.5
McDowell County Schools	280	60.7	181	39.3	62	13.4	62	52.1	6	10.5	51	11.1
Mitchell County Schools	83	59.7	56	40.3	26	18.7	21	70	4	44.4	5	3.6
Montgomery County Schools	164	50.3	162	49.7	61	18.7	39	38.6	14	22.6	48	14.7
Moore County Schools	670	69	301	31	108	11.1	72	37.3	75	62	46	4.7
Mooresville City Schools	363	81.4	83	18.6	25	5.6	35	60.3	6	26.1	17	3.8
Mount Airy City Schools	66	62.9	39	37.1	10	9.5	12	41.4	11	64.7	6	5.7
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	629	50.8	608	49.2	54	4.4	109	19.7	85	19.1	360	29.1
New Hanover County Schools	1355	66	699	34	190	9.3	103	20.2	39	14.2	236	11.5
Newton Conover City Schools	131	58.2	94	41.8	28	12.4	31	47	9	25.7	26	11.6
Northampton County Schools	84	46.2	98	53.8	7	3.8	21	23.1	4	5.7	66	36.3
Onslow County Schools	1272	65	684	35	225	11.5	239	52.1	58	26.4	162	8.3

State of North Carolina District Level Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Students who demonstrated reading proficiency at reading camp[3]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	3588	19.6	14755	12.7
Orange County Schools	361	62.5	217	37.5	50	8.7	63	37.7	29	27.9	75	13
Pamlico County Schools	50	55.6	40	44.4	13	14.4	17	63	3	30	7	7.8
Pasquotank County Schools	256	56.6	196	43.4	29	6.4	26	15.6	55	39	86	19
Pender County Schools	394	61.4	248	38.6	59	9.2	110	58.2	0	0	79	12.3
Perquimans County Schools	75	55.1	61	44.9	1	0.7	43	71.7	0	0	17	12.5
Person County Schools	232	62.5	139	37.5	15	4	30	24.2	20	21.3	74	19.9
Pitt County Schools	959	53.7	827	46.3	106	5.9	246	34.1	60	12.6	415	23.2
Polk County Schools	134	70.9	55	29.1	6	3.2	16	32.7	9	27.3	24	12.7
Randolph County Schools	730	54.8	601	45.2	87	6.5	276	53.7	37	22.2	130	9.8
Richmond County Schools	266	49.1	276	50.9	110	20.3	78	47	5	5.7	83	15.3
Roanoke Rapids City Schools	112	52.3	102	47.7	24	11.2	34	43.6	12	27.3	32	15
Robeson County Schools	709	39.5	1086	60.5	91	5.1	305	30.7	217	44.1	275	15.3
Rockingham County Schools	512	50.9	493	49.1	69	6.9	216	50.9	57	27.4	151	15
Rowan-Salisbury Schools	768	51.8	714	48.2	88	5.9	258	41.2	41	11.1	327	22.1
Rutherford County Schools	399	64.4	221	35.6	36	5.8	154	83.2	11	35.5	20	3.2
Sampson County Schools	397	59.6	269	40.4	57	8.6	129	60.8	8	9.6	75	11.3
Scotland County Schools	261	61.4	164	38.6	44	10.4	67	55.8	7	13.2	46	10.8
Stanly County Schools	397	64.2	221	35.8	74	12	64	43.5	49	59	34	5.5
Stokes County Schools	241	56.3	187	43.7	38	8.9	101	67.8	5	10.4	43	10
Surry County Schools	409	62.5	245	37.5	43	6.6	192	95	0	0	10	1.5
Swain County Schools	86	58.9	60	41.1	26	17.8	10	29.4	5	20.8	19	13
Thomasville City Schools	70	36.3	123	63.7	27	14	36	37.5	18	30	42	21.8
Transylvania County Schools	169	71.3	68	28.7	21	8.9	26	55.3	14	66.7	7	3
Tyrrell County Schools	24	52.2	22	47.8	5	10.9	2	11.8	0	0	15	32.6
Union County Public Schools	2316	72.9	859	27.1	151	4.8	230	32.5	164	34.3	314	9.9
Vance County Schools	259	47.7	284	52.3	34	6.3	68	27.2	25	13.7	157	28.9

State of North Carolina District Level Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Students who demonstrated reading proficiency at reading camp[3]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	3588	19.6	14755	12.7
Wake County Schools	8423	69.4	3710	30.6	1002	8.3	1318	48.7	114	8.7	1199	9.9
Warren County Schools	81	43.3	106	56.7	19	10.2	8	9.2	26	32.9	53	28.3
Washington County Schools	55	45.8	65	54.2	2	1.7	24	38.1	28	71.8	11	9.2
Watauga County Schools	239	71.6	95	28.4	26	7.8	12	17.4	16	28.1	41	12.3
Wayne County Public Schools	732	49.4	749	50.6	147	9.9	450	74.8	67	44.1	85	5.7
Weldon City Schools	24	31.2	53	68.8	0	0	2	3.8	4	7.8	47	61
Whiteville City Schools	106	65	57	35	2	1.2	17	30.9	10	26.3	28	17.2
Wilkes County Schools	393	54.4	329	45.6	115	15.9	97	45.3	83	70.9	34	4.7
Wilson County Schools	490	51.9	455	48.1	104	11	248	70.7	58	56.3	45	4.8
Yadkin County Schools	251	60.3	165	39.7	47	11.3	84	71.2	11	32.4	23	5.5
Yancey County Schools	111	60.3	73	39.7	22	12	28	54.9	16	69.6	7	3.8

[1] The denominator for calculating the required percentage is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing.

[2] The denominator is the number of students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency minus students exempt from mandatory retention in 3rd grade for good cause.

[3] The denominator is the number of students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency minus students exempt from mandatory retention in 3rd grade for good cause minus students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE.

Accountability Measures
Charter Schools

State of North Carolina Charter School Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	14755	12.7
River Mill Academy	34	72.3	13	27.7	1	2.1	6	50	4	8.5
Clover Garden	33	71.7	13	28.3	2	4.3	8	72.7	3	6.5
Crossnore Academy	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	.	0	0
Washington Montessori	29	76.3	9	23.7	5	13.2	1	25	1	2.6
Charter Day School	85	78	24	22	0	0	10	41.7	14	12.8
Evergreen Community Charter	39	88.6	5	11.4	3	6.8	2	100	0	0
ArtSpace Charter School	29	72.5	11	27.5	3	7.5	4	50	4	10
Francine Delany New School	14	77.8	4	22.2	1	5.6	2	66.7	1	5.6
New Dimensions	13	68.4	6	31.6	0	0	3	50	3	15.8
Carolina International School	58	81.7	13	18.3	0	0	4	30.8	9	12.7
Cabarrus Charter Academy	52	78.8	14	21.2	4	6.1	10	100	0	0
Tiller School	29	90.6	3	9.4	1	3.1	0	0	2	6.3
Chatham Charter	33	89.2	4	10.8	4	10.8	0	.	0	0
Woods Charter	30	93.8	2	6.3	1	3.1	1	100	0	0
Willow Oak Montessori	24	82.8	5	17.2	0	0	4	80	1	3.4
The Learning Center	10	58.8	7	41.2	3	17.6	4	100	0	0
Pinnacle Classical Academy	38	88.4	5	11.6	0	0	1	20	4	9.3
SEGS (STEM Ed Global Society) Academy	0	0	9	100	0	0	1	11.1	8	88.9
Columbus Charter School	70	63.1	41	36.9	2	1.8	15	38.5	24	21.6
Alpha Academy	24	55.8	19	44.2	0	0	0	0	19	44.2
Water's Edge Village School	1	50	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	50
Maureen Joy Charter School	17	37	29	63	16	34.8	0	0	5	10.9
Healthy Start Academy	17	41.5	24	58.5	6	14.6	8	44.4	10	24.4
Carter Community Charter	9	37.5	15	62.5	0	0	5	33.3	10	41.7
Kestrel Heights School	32	52.5	29	47.5	6	9.8	19	82.6	4	6.6
Research Triangle Charter	42	50.6	41	49.4	5	6	11	30.6	25	30.1
Central Park School For Child	38	74.5	13	25.5	8	15.7	2	40	3	5.9
Voyager Academy	74	72.5	28	27.5	13	12.7	8	53.3	7	6.9
Global Scholars Academy	11	61.1	7	38.9	0	0	1	14.3	1	5.6
The Institute Development Young Leaders	1	14.3	6	85.7	0	0	4	66.7	2	28.6
North East Carolina Prep	33	41.3	47	58.8	1	1.3	11	23.9	26	32.5

State of North Carolina Charter School Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	14755	12.7
Quality Education Academy	27	81.8	6	18.2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Carter G Woodson School	8	21.1	30	78.9	12	31.6	2	11.1	12	31.6
Forsyth Academy	39	52.7	35	47.3	6	8.1	13	44.8	16	21.6
The Arts Based School	45	80.4	11	19.6	0	0	9	81.8	2	3.6
The North Carolina Leadership Academy	31	86.1	5	13.9	1	2.8	3	75	1	2.8
Crosscreek Charter School	14	60.9	9	39.1	0	0	3	33.3	6	26.1
Piedmont Community Charter School	81	83.5	16	16.5	0	0	10	62.5	6	6.2
Mountain Island Charter	66	72.5	25	27.5	5	5.5	15	75	5	5.5
Falls Lake Academy	32	78	9	22	0	0	3	33.3	6	14.6
Greensboro Academy	70	84.3	13	15.7	1	1.2	10	83.3	0	0
Guilford Preparatory Academy	12	41.4	17	58.6	4	13.8	7	53.8	6	20.7
Phoenix Academy	55	57.9	40	42.1	2	2.1	16	42.1	22	23.2
Triad Math and Science Academy	30	71.4	12	28.6	1	2.4	5	45.5	6	14.3
Cornerstone Charter Academy-CFA	61	75.3	20	24.7	19	23.5	1	100	0	0
College Prep and Leadership Academy	11	64.7	6	35.3	4	23.5	1	50	1	5.9
Summerfield Charter Academy	66	78.6	18	21.4	0	0	16	88.9	2	2.4
The Mountain Community Sch	16	80	4	20	3	15	1	100	0	0
American Renaissance School	46	79.3	12	20.7	2	3.4	8	80	2	3.4
Success Institute Charter	0	0	9	100	3	33.3	0	0	6	66.7
Pine Lake Preparatory	114	91.2	11	8.8	2	1.6	5	55.6	4	3.2
Langtree Charter Academy	58	85.3	10	14.7	1	1.5	7	77.8	2	2.9
Summit Charter	21	87.5	3	12.5	1	4.2	2	100	0	0
Neuse Charter School	54	81.8	12	18.2	1	1.5	8	72.7	3	4.5
Children's Village Academy	4	17.4	19	82.6	0	0	5	26.3	14	60.9
Lincoln Charter School	98	83.1	20	16.9	12	10.2	7	87.5	1	0.8
Community Charter School	8	34.8	15	65.2	2	8.7	10	76.9	2	8.7
Sugar Creek Charter	42	38.9	66	61.1	10	9.3	35	62.5	16	14.8
Kennedy Charter	11	45.8	13	54.2	3	12.5	1	10	8	33.3
Metrolina Reg Scholars Academy	41	100	0	0	0	0	0	.	0	0
Queen's Grant Community School	76	89.4	9	10.6	1	1.2	8	100	0	0
Community School of Davidson	72	83.7	14	16.3	1	1.2	8	61.5	1	1.2

State of North Carolina Charter School Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	14755	12.7
Socrates Academy	74	88.1	10	11.9	1	1.2	4	44.4	5	6
Corvian Community School	70	81.4	16	18.6	0	0	7	43.8	6	7
Aristotle Preparatory Academy	10	55.6	8	44.4	1	5.6	2	28.6	3	16.7
Charlotte Choice Charter	14	46.7	16	53.3	2	6.7	0	0	10	33.3
Invest Collegiate	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0	0	0	2	18.2
The Academy of Moore County	20	76.9	6	23.1	2	7.7	1	25	3	11.5
STARS Charter	24	63.2	14	36.8	4	10.5	1	10	9	23.7
Rocky Mount Preparatory	36	34	70	66	0	0	14	20	32	30.2
Cape Fear Center for Inquiry	33	84.6	6	15.4	2	5.1	2	50	2	5.1
Wilmington Preparatory Academy	8	66.7	4	33.3	0	0	1	25	3	25
Island Montessori Charter	15	62.5	9	37.5	2	8.3	2	28.6	5	20.8
Z.E.C.A. School of Arts and Technology	4	26.7	11	73.3	5	33.3	0	0	6	40
Orange Charter	19	90.5	2	9.5	1	4.8	1	100	0	0
Arapahoe Charter School	32	72.7	12	27.3	0	0	4	33.3	8	18.2
Bethel Hill Charter	47	77	14	23	0	0	10	71.4	4	6.6
Southeastern Academy	10	52.6	9	47.4	0	0	5	55.6	4	21.1
Thomas Jefferson Class Academy	90	89.1	11	10.9	1	1	4	40	6	5.9
Lake Lure Classical Academy	13	72.2	5	27.8	5	27.8	0	.	0	0
Millennium Charter Academy	51	81	12	19	0	0	7	58.3	5	7.9
Mountain Discovery	16	88.9	2	11.1	0	0	1	50	1	5.6
Brevard Academy	24	85.7	4	14.3	0	0	3	75	1	3.6
Union Academy	82	88.2	11	11.8	2	2.2	3	33.3	6	6.5
Vance Charter School	52	85.2	9	14.8	8	13.1	1	100	0	0
Magellan Charter	65	97	2	3	0	0	1	50	1	1.5
Sterling Montessori Academy	62	82.7	13	17.3	3	4	6	60	4	5.3
Franklin Academy	104	83.2	21	16.8	16	12.8	5	100	0	0
East Wake Academy	78	82.1	17	17.9	0	0	10	58.8	7	7.4
Torchlight Academy	23	39.7	35	60.3	6	10.3	2	6.9	27	46.6
PreEminent Charter	25	37.9	41	62.1	3	4.5	23	60.5	13	19.7
Quest Academy	16	100	0	0	0	0	0	.	0	0
Hope Elementary	3	16.7	15	83.3	0	0	3	20	11	61.1

State of North Carolina Charter School Report 2013-14 Read to Achieve Grade 3 End-of-Year Results	Students who demonstrated reading proficiency on BOG3, EOG, or the EOG Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)[1]		Students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3, the EOG, or the EOG Retest[1]		Students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause[1]		Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the SBE[2]		Percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on 3rd grade standards[1]	
District Name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
State of North Carolina	70185	60.4	45943	39.6	9454	8.1	17177	47.1	14755	12.7
Casa Esperanza Montessori Charter School	30	88.2	4	11.8	0	0	3	75	1	2.9
Endeavor Charter	52	91.2	5	8.8	0	0	3	60	2	3.5
Triangle Math and Science Academy	37	92.5	3	7.5	0	0	3	100	0	0
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	3	30	7	70	1	10	2	33.3	3	30
Two Rivers Community School	20	95.2	1	4.8	0	0	0	0	1	4.8
Dillard Academy	8	30.8	18	69.2	6	23.1	0	0	12	46.2
Bridges Academy	10	76.9	3	23.1	2	15.4	0	0	1	7.7
Sallie B Howard School	23	36.5	40	63.5	3	4.8	19	51.4	18	28.6

[1] The denominator for calculating the required percentage is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing.

[2] The denominator is the number of students who did not demonstrate reading proficiency minus students exempt from mandatory retention in 3rd grade for good cause.

Section 3: Overview of Findings of External Evaluation

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) contracted with SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to collect data during spring 2014 regarding the statewide implementation of Read to Achieve (RtA). SERVE collected data intended to reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators with RtA and included: online surveys, interviews in six districts, and focus groups held in all eight regions of the state. Each of the three data collection approaches focused on five affected role types: 1) district superintendents, 2) district elementary supervisors or others who were the Read to Achieve contact/leader for the district, 3) elementary principals, 4) 3rd grade teachers, and 5) K-2 teachers. Participation included:

- Statewide online surveys: completed by 66 superintendents, 77 district elementary supervisors/RtA district leads, 729 elementary principals, 719 kindergarten, 709 1st grade, 708 2nd grade, and 1,008 3rd grade teachers
- Statewide focus groups: 40 focus groups with a total 356 participants, representing 88 of 115 districts.
- District site visits: 30 interviews across six districts (five interviews per district)

The seven components of the Read to Achieve legislation (Bill 950/S.L.2012-142 Section 7A) are:
1. Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement
2. Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)
3. Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency
4. Elimination of Social Promotion
5. Successful Reading Development for Retained Students
6. Parent/Guardian Notification
7. Accountability Measures

Components 2 and 7 were not yet implemented at the time of the data collection, and thus, were not included. This overview section provides a brief summary of the findings across the three data collection methods (online surveys, focus groups, interviews in districts).

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF READ TO ACHIEVE: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

District contexts for implementing RtA requirements

A majority of district leaders agreed with the need for a statewide initiative to improve K-3 reading outcomes. However, they reported different contexts that likely affected their experiences with the RtA requirements. For example, some reported that RtA components aligned well with, and thus, enhanced their prior district-wide efforts to improve early reading. Some reported less alignment, such that RtA conflicted with prior reading improvement efforts. Also, some districts with the highest percentages of non-proficient readers perceived RtA as a greater burden, primarily due to its assessment demands on teachers.

Statewide RtA rollout and implementation processes

Respondents from kindergarten teachers to superintendents expressed frustration with the processes and timelines for the design and roll out of the RtA legislation. A common theme expressed was that educator input should have been more systematically and extensively sought in the design of the RtA components and statewide rollout, which may have prevented significant implementation problems that arose. Educators described a very stressful, difficult and time-consuming first year of RtA implementation, which many attributed to unrealistic timelines, frequent changes in state guidance, lack of piloting of some components before requiring statewide implementation, or not enough time or guidance for districts to plan well for implementation.

Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency via mCLASS Reading 3D

Unlike other components of RtA, many educators reported that mCLASS Reading 3D had been sufficiently piloted in districts over multiple years resulting in a level of readiness for full implementation of this K-3 reading assessment system. There were, however, implementation challenges identified by respondents that need attention, mostly related to teachers' struggles with the amount of time needed to administer benchmarking and progress monitoring assessments and a perception that reading assessments are taking too much time away from instruction.

Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion

The 3rd grade alternative reading assessments and retention policies were perceived by many respondents as unfairly putting the burden of accountability for non-proficient readers solely on 3rd grade teachers. There was a concern that 3rd grade is too late to get struggling readers up to grade level and that more strategic interventions and state support at earlier grades are needed. Also, principals felt strongly that RtA retention policies should allow them some discretion in making case by case promotion decisions for students who have unique situations.

Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Student

Many respondents agreed in concept that summer interventions can be very helpful for non-proficient readers. However, they would like more flexibility and discretion in when (such as in earlier grades), for whom, and how to use state funds for intervention activities for struggling readers. Some district and school leaders with high numbers of non-proficient readers expressed concerns about how the requirements for the 4th grade might be met in their situations if there is no new state funding.

NOTE: The full external review report by SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina Greensboro is available in appendix 2 of this document.

Section 4: Current Practices in Response to Feedback and Recommendations

During the 2013-2014 school year the DPI received feedback from all stakeholder groups on the components of the law, the implementation process, the assessment system, the portfolio process, and the need for more transparent and clear communication. As a result the DPI implemented the following practices during the year to respond to the comments. Some of these practices also address concerns that were identified in the external evaluation.

1. **Development of a Parent Advisory Committee for Read to Achieve**
   This committee is comprised of parents of all ages of children from all State Board districts. The meetings involve updates on the legislation, networking with other parents, receiving feedback on the needs of parents, and opportunities for parents to give suggestions about clear and transparent communication that reaches everyone. A separate parent livebinder has been developed to inform parents and provide resources.
2. **Development of a Portfolio Advisory Committee (PAC)**
   This committee is comprised of educators of different levels from all State Board districts. The PAC gives feedback on the components of the NC DPI portfolio system, established the process for the State Board policy on the local alternative assessments, reviews local alternative assessments, and makes recommendations to the State Board on local alternative portfolio systems that meet the requirements of the policy and the legislation.
3. **Regional Meetings**
   During the spring of 2014, the K-3 Literacy consultants began regular regional meetings involving district leaders and curriculum coordinators. The consultants facilitate the meetings, but generally let the district leaders pose questions, network, share ideas and propose solutions to pressing issues. Some district leaders have suggested meeting monthly to achieve consistency state-wide on issues and practices. These meetings will address the external evaluators' findings about the need to always receive feedback and gather educator input from the field before moving forward with initiatives. The report also found that educators would like the opportunity to share successful strategies related to Read to Achieve implementation.
4. **Master Literacy Trainers**
   In the early summer of 2014, funding for training of Master Literacy Trainers was approved through the Race to the Top grant. There will be two cohorts of Master Literacy Trainers (MLTs) trained. Each district will have the opportunity to send two representatives and the ten largest districts will have an opportunity to send six participants. The K-3 Literacy division is providing the professional development. These MLTs will be a point of contact in the districts and work closely with the K-3 Literacy consultants delivering professional development and support to teachers and administrators. The expectation is that this will build capacity in the district for literacy and to model best practices and research-based instructional strategies.

5. **Establishment of livebinders**
   Livebinders are a way to immediately post information and keep all stakeholders informed. Currently the K-3 Literacy division has three public livebinders; Read to Achieve, Reading Camp, and Parent. The MLTs have a secured livebinder with all professional development materials and slide decks that they can use in their districts when training.
6. **Portfolio addendum**
   The State Board of Education amended the portfolio process in February of 2013 to include instructional passages, averaging scores, and the ability to use the passages more formatively. The 2014-15 portfolio has been completely reviewed by content experts and third grade teachers. Instructional passages are designated and the Implementation Guide specifically states that portfolios are an OPTION and that teachers should have total discretion in choosing passages to align to instruction.
7. **Time Study**
   Discussions are underway with SERVE to continue their external evaluations and conduct time studies on the formative, diagnostic assessments. Schools that have used the assessments for several years would be compared to schools that have just begun. Best practices for implementing and using the assessment system as a part of the instructional cycle will be evaluated.
8. **Lessen load for third-grade teacher**
   The DPI has communicated a reduction in progress monitoring for the strongest third-grade students. Districts can decide to allow teachers not to progress monitor the strongest readers in third grade that meet certain criteria in the benchmarking assessments.

Recommendations for legislation:

1. **Instructional Coaches**
   All elementary schools need an instructional coach to work with classroom teachers. These instructional coaches would be instrumental in assisting the classroom teachers with analyzing data, collaborating with peers, planning instruction, providing professional development, co-teaching, modeling, and assessing student and teacher needs. The coaches would be a liaison between teachers and the district and would work with the K-3 Literacy consultants and district MLTs to help build capacity for literacy at the teacher level. This also addresses the external evaluation report about ways to provide additional staffing and supports to help districts/schools meet the rigorous demands of Read to Achieve.
2. **Reading Camps for Younger Students**
   The feedback from the external survey revealed the need to be more proactive with early interventions. Most educators feel that waiting until third grade for camp may be too late and reactive to the reading problems students may have. Opportunities for reading camp for younger students would allow instruction to continue during the summer months, serve smaller groups of students creating more individualized instruction, give more time for instruction and interventions on the basic foundational skills, and lessen reading skill loss

during summer months. Districts would like more flexibility in how and when they provide camps for students.

3. **Expanding the number and future development of Master Literacy Trainers**
   The Race to the Top funding for Cohort I and II MLTs concludes at the end of 2014-15. The response to this training has been extremely positive due to the depth of literacy focus, the analysis process for identifying needs of struggling readers, the identification of next steps for teachers in adjusting instruction, and the development of quality targeted instruction. There is a need for the current Cohorts to hold periodic joint meetings and a need to build the pool of MLTs in each district. The external review indicated a need for more state-wide focus on supports for quality literacy instruction.
4. **Funding for reading camp**
   The external evaluators received feedback on the need to examine the 2014 reading camps implementation challenges and costs in comparison to budget allocations in order to determine state-level changes needed for 2015. The report also suggested that LEAs have more flexibility in the use of state funding for reading camps.
5. **Funding in general**
   Superintendents were especially concerned with the budgetary impact of Read to Achieve on districts and schools. Comments indicated that some superintendents believe that in order for effective implementation of all the Read to Achieve components to be realized, increased funding and support from the state are needed.
6. **Stay the course**
   The external evaluation revealed a recommendation to stay the course on the Read to Achieve intent and focus and that a state-wide commitment to and support for improving reading proficiency in K-3 is important to maintain. Most feedback from the field indicated a need to receive systematic input from educators before moving forward on key issues and a slower and more phased implementation for future components and initiatives.

Appendix 1

Comprehensive Reading Plan Deliverables

Area(s)	Reading Plan	Action Steps
Standards	Provide a list of research-based interventions and strategies that align with the NCSCoS	• Researched strategies for each of the five big areas of reading • Completed strategies chart to include definition, instructional focus, Common Core State Standards, strategies, and research • Placed chart on the LiveBinder in February, 2014 • K-3 Literacy Consultants shared the research-based strategies in sessions with teachers and administrators
Standards	Support districts in developing and communicating policy expectations for all students	• Visits, emails, phone calls, meetings with LEA administrators and principals, regional sessions, and presentations • Developed professional development for teachers (Standards Progression) on the progression of the standards in Kindergarten through 3rd grade
Leadership	Support districts in the development of a reading plan to include school, community and parent/guardian partnerships	• State reading plan used as model for districts and schools • Emailed Central Office Contacts Contacts to assist with reading plan development • Developed professional development for ALL leaders on Literacy Rich Instructional Leadership and Walkthroughs so that LEA, School, and Classroom staff could develop understanding of literacy rich instruction and support needed at all levels
Leadership	Provide collaboration opportunities for all stakeholders	• June Atkinson, Rebecca Garland, Carolyn Guthrie, and K-3 Literacy Consultants conducted meetings across the state about reading achievement as well as discussions about RtA and Reading 3D requirements. • Regional Consultants hold regional/LEA meetings for collaboration opportunities about Summer Reading Camps, 3/4 Transition and Accelerated Classes • Scheduled 4 regional meetings for each of the SBE regions for the 2014-15 school year. • K-3 Literacy Consultants scheduled regional meetings for Fall 2014 to review state and regional data, collaborate on reading camps, and clarify Read to Achieve updates

Leadership	Use state-level data to inform decision making in the area of reading/literacy across all content areas	• EVAAS training in February completed by Ashley Padgett from Beaufort County Schools. • Use of Reading 3D Data Slides provided by Amplify to review with LEAs the State/Regional/District data • Provided professional development to 4th grade teachers on how to read and understand the use of Reading 3D data in regards to Retained Reading students
Leadership	Support LEAs in planning professional learning opportunities in reading	• Provided quality professional development for regions and districts in the area of reading • Made available a listing of K-3 Literacy Division professional development • Developed professional development for Master Literacy Trainers funded through a grant from the USED (Race to the Top) • Provided professional development for Master Literacy Trainers around the 90 minute block of uninterrupted quality reading instruction
Leadership	Provide information and guidance on the selection of highly qualified teachers who teach the summer reading classes, the third/fourth transitional classes, and the accelerated classes	• Email communication from Carolyn Guthrie and Consultants as well as information shared during RESA updates • Summer Reading Camp 2014 through school year 2015, principals will use teacher evaluations, observations, and walkthroughs to determine effective teachers.
Instruction	Provide instructional support in the area of reading through regional consultants	• Guided Reading , MSV, Written Response to Text , R3D Refresher, Progress Monitoring Refresher, IL Data Analysis, Progress Monitoring, Refresher • CCSA Presentations (Melissa, Abbey, Anne, Judy) • Collaborated with RESA, NCCAT • Teacher Demonstrations and Video Tutorials located on the LiveBinder • Over 1000 pd sessions completed • K-3 Literacy Consultants serve as mentors for the Master Literacy Trainers to build understanding of statewide early literacy expectations and recommendations from NCDPI to meet the requirements of Read to Achieve
Instruction	Recommend to LEAs that time be provided for collaborative planning, professional learning opportunities, uninterrupted blocks of instruction in the area of reading	• Share with admin and districts during visits as we view and assist with school planning and scheduling • Assist administrators with scheduling blocks of instruction

Instruction	Provide guidance to LEAs on the structure of the required summer reading camps	• Provided information to LEAs through the Summer Reading Camp tab located on the LiveBinder
Instruction	Promote the ongoing study of current research in reading, teaching, and learning	• Shared resource books during PD as well as the professional reading list located on the LiveBinder • K-3 Literacy Consultants included research in professional development modules created that is current and research-based best practices and strategies
Instruction	Encourage the use of resources that addresses the needs of students whose communication skills are below grade level, on grade level, and above grade level	• Shared strategies located in the NC Comprehensive Reading Plan • Professional Development (3/4 Transition PD, Reading is Not Just a Third Grade Law PD) • Assisted teachers with planning lessons and literacy stations that are differentiated to meet the needs of all learners • Encouraged teachers during professional development modules (3/4 Transition training, Small Group Instruction training) to use Literature Circles, Book Studies or customized instruction.
Instruction	1. Promote the use of complex texts, resources, and literacy-rich experiences that facilitate reading, writing, speaking, listening , and language skills development for all learners 2. Encourage the use of vocabulary-building strategies in all content areas	• K-3 Regional Consultants developed professional development to address differentiated instruction, the use of complex texts, vocabulary building, 90 Minutes of Literacy Instruction, small group instruction, written response to text, anchor charts, using informational texts
Instruction	Encourage the use of Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) to support the reading programs and instructional practices in all schools	• Emailed Central Office contacts to share Extended Learning Opportunities with Regional Consultants
Professional Development	Promote regional, district, and school-level professional development in the area of reading that is high quality, job-embedded, ongoing, and	• Professional Development offerings along with additional professional development developed for 2014-15 school year • Continue to monitor progress, accessible for questions/concerns on the implementation of

	research-based for administrators, teachers, and support personnel	professional development • K-3 Literacy Consultants developed at least 9 new professional development modules for the 2014-15 school year • Professional development previews shared with the MLT Cohort 1 in Greensboro (August 2014) • Previews were short segments based on the 90 minute block of uninterrupted instruction
Professional Development	Collaborate with administrators to build capacity in using data to allocate resources, analyze trends, and make informed decisions for professional development	• Consultants received training in EVAAS in February • Discussed ALL data points with principals to determine trends and needs for professional development
Professional Development	Continue professional development in the area of reading/literacy and the NCSCoS	• CCSA presentations • Written Response to Text PD • Small Group Instruction • Completed Hill Center training • NCDPI/Friday Institute Technology Training • Nine new modules for the 2014-15 school year for teachers, instructional coaches, MLTs, and principals
Professional Development	Promote the continuous skill development of literacy and instructional coaches	• Regional trainings for Master Trainers • Regional trainings for ToTs (two times per year) • Training sessions for MLTs through the K-3 Literacy Division Director and Regional Consultants • K-3 Literacy Consultants will mentor MLTs in each district across the state
Assessment	Support LEAs in their efforts to maintain fidelity of assessment systems	• Continue to work with district and school leadership on fidelity of implementation • Monitor invalidation requests from LEAs
Assessment	Provide guidance to districts in utilizing a balanced system of assessments including formative, benchmark, and summative Offer professional learning and support in formative, benchmark, summative assessments and data analysis	• Data analysis sessions with teachers and administrators at the school and LEA level • Assist teachers with planning for individual student needs • Continue to work with teachers in PLCs to study student data and analyze students' instructional needs • Assist teachers with planning for small group instruction and the use of differentiated strategies to meet students' individual needs based on the data

Assessment	Encourage the problem-solving model used in Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) to identify students who need additional reading support, including students who are in need of intensive support as well as those who are reading at advanced levels	• K-3 Literacy Consultants received training on the RtI tab for Reading 3D • K-3 Literacy Division works with DPI RtI staff and EC staff to develop a common language and understanding of Read to Achieve and RtI • Professional development developed by K-3 Literacy, RtI, and EC
Partnerships and Communication	Provide sample notification templates to LEAs to fulfill the written notification requirements of the NC Read to Achieve law	• Provided to district contacts during Fall RESA meetings • Continue to update forms for various components of RtA such as Summer Camp, Parent Letters, etc. • Read to Achieve narrated PowerPoint for parents on the LiveBinder • Provided information to LEAs to post accountability information on district websites as required by law
Partnerships and Communication	Recommend the funding of a literacy/instructional reading specialist at each school to support classroom teachers and school leaders	• Included in the 2014 list of recommendations to the General Assembly
Partnerships and Communication	Collaborate with IHEs on the development of courses that demonstrate coursework in reading instruction for teacher preparation programs to include the NCSCoS reading content, the use of the formative, diagnostic, assessment system, and the integration of all content areas	• Consultants are available to train reading professors on Reading 3D • Amplify through NCDPI held 3 trainings across the state for IHEs on Reading 3D • 2 Consultants provided training for ECU reading professors • Continue to offer trainings to IHEs
Partnerships and Communication	Establish a statewide parent advisory board to provide suggested opportunities for parent involvement, education, and open communication	• Parent Advisory Board met on April 28, 2014 and September 29, 2014 • Parent LiveBinder established • Future meetings will be regional to involve more parents
Partnerships and Communication	Collaborate with community, civic and faith-based organizations, business partners, service organizations and families to promote reading achievement and to support school and district efforts for reading proficiency	• Receive input from parent advisory board on how to include business and faith based organizations and use LiveBinders to communicate messages to stakeholders.

Partnerships and Communication	Promote the use of community mentors to serve as role models for student projects	• Made recommendations on Summer Reading Camp tab about using mentors and training them to read with students.

Appendix 2

External Review Report by SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF READ TO ACHIEVE: A STATEWIDE FORMATIVE EVALUATION

September 2014

Prepared for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
By SERVE CENTER at UNCG

SERVE CENTER at THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at GREENSBORO

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF READ TO ACHIEVE: A STATEWIDE FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Conducted for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

September 2014

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EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF READ TO ACHIEVE: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

District contexts for implementing RtA requirements. A majority of district leaders agreed with the need for a statewide initiative to improve K-3 reading outcomes. However, they reported different contexts that likely affected their experiences with the RtA requirements. For example, some reported that RtA components aligned well with, and thus, enhanced their prior district-wide efforts to improve early reading. Some reported less alignment, such that RtA conflicted with prior reading improvement efforts. Also, some districts with the highest percentages of non-proficient readers perceived RtA as a greater burden, primarily due to its assessment demands on teachers.

Statewide RtA rollout and implementation processes. Respondents from kindergarten teachers to superintendents expressed frustration with the processes and timelines for the design and roll out of the RtA legislation. A common theme expressed was that educator input should have been more systematically and extensively sought in the design of the RtA components and statewide rollout, which may have prevented significant implementation problems that arose. Educators described a very stressful, difficult and time-consuming first year of RtA implementation, which many attributed to unrealistic timelines, frequent changes in state guidance, lack of piloting of some components before requiring statewide implementation, or not enough time or guidance for districts to plan well for implementation.

Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency via mCLASS Reading 3D. Unlike other components of RtA, many educators reported that mCLASS Reading 3D had been sufficiently piloted in districts over multiple years resulting in a level of readiness for full implementation of this K-3 reading assessment system. There were, however, implementation challenges identified by respondents that need attention, mostly related to teachers' struggles with the amount of time needed to administer benchmarking and progress monitoring assessments and a perception that reading assessments are taking too much time away from instruction.

Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion. The 3rd grade alternative reading assessments and retention policies were perceived by many respondents as unfairly putting the burden of accountability for non-proficient readers solely on 3rd grade teachers. There was a concern that 3rd grade is too late to get struggling readers up to grade level and that more strategic interventions and state support at earlier grades are needed. Also, principals felt strongly that RtA retention policies should allow them some discretion in making case by case promotion decisions for students who have unique situations.

Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students. Many respondents agreed in concept that summer interventions can be very helpful for non-proficient readers. However, they would like more flexibility and discretion in when (such as in earlier grades), for whom, and how to use state funds for intervention activities for struggling readers. Some district and school leaders with high numbers of non-proficient readers expressed concerns about how the requirements for the 4th grade might be met in their situations if there is no new state funding.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THREE DATA SOURCES

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) contracted with SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to collect data during spring 2014 regarding the statewide implementation of Read to Achieve (RtA). SERVE collected data intended to reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators with RtA and included: online surveys, interviews in six districts, and focus groups held in all eight regions of the state. Each of the three data collection approaches focused on five affected role types: 1) district superintendents, 2) district elementary supervisors or others who were the Read to Achieve contact/leader for the district, 3) elementary principals, 4) 3rd grade teachers, and 5) K-2 teachers. Participation included:

- Statewide online surveys: completed by 66 superintendents, 77 district elementary supervisors/RtA district leads, 729 elementary principals, 719 kindergarten, 709 1st grade, 708 2nd grade, and 1,008 3rd grade teachers
- Statewide focus groups: 40 focus groups with a total 356 participants, representing 88 of 115 districts.
- District site visits: 30 interviews across six districts (five interviews per district)

The seven components of the Read to Achieve legislation (Bill 950/S.L.2012-142 Section 7A) are:

1. Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement
2. Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)
3. Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency
4. Elimination of Social Promotion
5. Successful Reading Development for Retained Students
6. Parent/Guardian Notification
7. Accountability Measures

Components 2 and 7 were not yet implemented at the time of the data collection and thus, were not included. This overview section provides a brief summary of the findings across the three data collection methods (online surveys, focus groups, interviews in districts). It is followed by individual summaries of results for each of the three data collection methods.

District contexts for implementing RtA requirements

KEY FINDING: A majority of district leaders agreed with the need for a statewide initiative to improve K-3 reading outcomes. However, they reported different contexts that likely affected their experiences with the RtA requirements. For example, some reported that RtA components aligned well with, and thus, enhanced their prior district-wide efforts to improve early reading. Some reported less alignment, such that RtA conflicted with prior reading improvement efforts. Also, some districts with the highest percentages of non-proficient readers perceived RtA as a greater burden, primarily due to its assessment demands on teachers.

Many educators recognized the value of or need for a statewide focus on early reading as demonstrated by the survey results below (and also expressed in focus groups and interviews):

- 61% of superintendents responding “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that “RtA helped my district enhance our focus on improving K-3 reading outcomes.”
- 63% of elementary principals and 64% of 3rd grade teachers “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “the ideas behind RtA have great potential to make a positive difference in reading achievement.”

However, districts differed in their central office staffing levels, expertise in literacy, and the extent of prior district-wide efforts to improve early reading. That is, some superintendents (60%) reported being

fairly far down the road with efforts to improve K-3 reading prior to RtA while others (38%) reported "some progress but facing some challenges." Thus, districts had different starting points in making sense of RtA requirements.

When asked about the alignment of RtA components with the district's prior early literacy improvement efforts, district responses were similarly varied. Only 18% of district elementary supervisors reported that RtA was "well-aligned; and enhanced our prior work in improving early literacy" with 55% selecting "somewhat aligned" as the best descriptor. Almost a quarter of elementary supervisors indicated RtA was "minimally aligned; conflicts with some of our prior work in improving early literacy" with 4% indicating it was "not at all aligned." In the site visits, districts reporting less alignment between RtA and their prior literacy improvement efforts described a more frustrating or difficult process in implementing the requirements of RtA.

The interviews conducted in six districts also revealed differences in perceptions of RtA. Two districts that described a mostly positive reaction to RtA were those in which the timing of RtA was such they could use RtA to enhance significant district-wide literacy improvement efforts that had already been underway for the past several years. Two districts reported RtA coming at a time in which there had been some past focus on district-wide literacy improvement but that RtA provided an opportunity to refocus on and strengthen past efforts. Two districts reported greater disconnects between RtA and their past work with literacy and thus, more frustrations.

In the site visits, districts with the highest percentages of non-proficient readers (e.g., 80%) reported RtA as a greater burden, primarily due to the increased assessment demands on teachers (with higher numbers of non-proficient readers to monitor). This lost instructional time for the students who need reading instruction the most was a major concern for these districts. Teacher turnover was also a challenge contributing to difficulties in implementing complicated reading assessment processes well.

Statewide RtA rollout and implementation processes

KEY FINDING: Respondents from kindergarten teachers to superintendents expressed frustration with the processes and timelines for the design and roll out of the RtA legislation. A common theme expressed was that educator input should have been more systematically and extensively sought in the design of the RtA components and statewide rollout, which may have prevented significant implementation problems that arose. Educators described a very stressful, difficult and time-consuming first year of RtA implementation, which many attributed to unrealistic timelines, frequent changes in state guidance, lack of piloting of some components before requiring statewide implementation, or not enough time or guidance for districts to plan well for implementation.

A theme emerging from all focus groups and the district site visits was that although the intent of the legislation was worthwhile (to improve reading outcomes), there were significant frustrations with how this statewide initiative was designed and rolled out. That is, many respondents perceived that the roll out occurred too quickly, with too little piloting or planning of components, and with too little educator input. Focus group participants described difficulties due to frequent state changes in policies and guidance and to tight timelines for implementing key pieces such as portfolios and summer reading camps.

Focus group respondents indicated that problematic issues could have been avoided and addressed earlier if legislators had included educators in the planning phase of the legislation and if resources for implementation were provided with more flexibility. Focus group participants recommended that the RtA implementation process in future years should have greater piloting of new requirements, more educator feedback from the beginning on what may and may not work, and carefully planned and phased in timelines that allow for adjustments along the way. There was a strong desire voiced for legislators to listen to and understand the daily work of educators along with a desire for more structures for educators to provide feedback and input to NCDPI.

- Over 90% of elementary principals, K-2, and 3rd grade teachers responding to the survey "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "going forward with RtA, NCDPI should have a structured process of listening to and trying to address the concerns of educators."

Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency via mCLASS Reading 3D

KEY FINDING: Unlike other components of RtA, many educators reported that mCLASS Reading 3D had been sufficiently piloted in districts over multiple years resulting in a level of readiness for full implementation of this K-3 reading assessment system. There were, however, implementation challenges identified by respondents that need attention, mostly related to teachers' struggles with the amount of time needed to administer benchmarking and progress monitoring assessments and a perception that reading assessments are taking too much time away from instruction.

A majority of focus groups mentioned that the use of mCLASS Reading 3D by teachers has or can improve the ability of schools and teachers to differentiate reading instruction. Because many districts had participated in NCDPI pilots of the 3D system in prior years, they felt more prepared to implement this assessment system district-wide than they would have without this prior experience. District elementary supervisors also frequently reported that NCDPI's K-3 Literacy Division's regional consultants were excellent in their support of mCLASS Reading 3D implementation by teachers.

When asked about their training and satisfaction with mCLASS Reading 3D:

- 71% of elementary principals, 84% of 3rd grade teachers, and 83% of K-2 teachers answered "Yes" that they had been sufficiently trained.
- 85% of elementary principals were either "moderately satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall utility of 3D in providing data to identify and intervene with students experiencing reading difficulty. K-2 and 3rd grade teachers were more divided in their satisfaction with the utility of 3D: 55% of K-2 reporting being "moderately" or "very satisfied" compared to 45% indicating "slightly satisfied" or "not at all satisfied", 50% of 3rd grade teachers reported being "moderately" or "very satisfied" with 50% only "slightly" or "not at all" satisfied.
- Satisfaction levels with the use of mCLASS Reading 3D data for teacher evaluation (Standard 6) were low (68% of K-2 teachers and 67% of 3rd grade teachers responding to the survey were only "slightly satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with use for this purpose).
- One of the key implementation challenges reported by principals and teachers in the use of 3D was achieving the right balance of reading assessment and instruction. For example, only 17% of K-2 teachers and 4% of 3rd grade teachers responding to the survey indicated "Yes, they were able to achieve the right balance"; 80% of K-2 teachers and 93% of 3rd grade teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement that "RtA has resulted in a significant loss of instructional time."

Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion

KEY FINDING: The 3rd grade alternative reading assessments and retention policies were perceived by many respondents as unfairly putting the burden of accountability for non-proficient readers solely on 3rd grade teachers. There was a concern that 3rd grade is too late to get struggling readers up to grade level and that more strategic interventions and state support at earlier grades are needed. Also, principals felt strongly that RtA retention policies should allow them some discretion in making case by case promotion decisions for students who have unique situations.

In all three types of data collection, respondents expressed that major changes to this component of Read to Achieve (the elimination of social promotion) are needed.

- A majority, 65% of superintendents and 63% of elementary principals responding to the survey, indicated that they were "not at all supportive" or "slightly supportive –major changes are needed" of Component 4 (the elimination of social promotion in 3rd grade). Roughly 30% of both groups were "moderately supportive –some changes are needed" and 5% were "fully supportive".

- In terms of the kinds of changes needed, the focus group and district site visit interview respondents raised concerns that an overuse of retention may lead to an increase in dropout rates. Principals also felt strongly that they and their school teams need some discretion in making final promotion/retention decisions for 3rd graders due to the very individual set of factors (performance in other subjects, growth during the year, health, home, or social/emotional situations) for some students that would not be covered by any Good Cause exemptions.

- Third grade teachers in focus groups repeatedly mentioned frustration with the amount of reading assessment required of them to do between mCLASS Reading 3D and alternative reading assessments of proficiency to inform promotion decisions; they reported the amount and intensity of these assessments were negatively impacting some students' attitudes toward reading and their enjoyment of teaching. Eighty-eight percent of elementary principals and 90% of 3rd grade teachers responding to the survey either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement that "it may be difficult for our school to find experienced teachers to teach 3rdgrade in the future as a result of the stresses associated with Read to Achieve."

- A majority of survey respondents (86% of superintendents, 74% of elementary principals, 76% of 3rd grade teachers, 55% of K-2 teachers) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that "the amount of focus/attention paid to K-2 struggling readers in the Read to Achieve program is sufficient." The focus group respondents mentioned various ways in which the state could provide increased support for K-2 (e.g., funding for reading coaches, more support for reading interventions, expanded professional development for teachers in the foundations of reading, a state K-3 reading framework providing resources for teachers in implementing a 90 minute literacy instructional block).

<u>Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students</u>

KEY FINDING: Many respondents agreed in concept that summer interventions can be very helpful for non-proficient readers. However, they would like more flexibility and discretion in when (such as in earlier grades), for whom, and how to use state funds for intervention activities for struggling readers. Some district and school leaders with high numbers of non-proficient readers expressed concerns about how the requirements for the 4thgrade might be met in their situations if there was no new state funding.

Concerns were raised about the initial lack of flexibility with the funding for and design of summer reading camps and how the requirements for the 4th grade might be met with no new funding.

- Participants in the focus groups and district site visit interviews frequently mentioned that a summer reading program has the potential to improve the reading achievement of non-proficient readers and appreciated the state funding. However, only 19% of superintendents responding to the survey indicated that they thought the state allocation for 3rdgrade summer reading camp would be sufficient, thus, requiring district or other funds to supplement.
- When asked at what grade level they thought summer reading camps would benefit struggling readers the most, 54% of elementary principals selected 1st grade and 34% selected 2nd grade while only 6% selected 3rd grade. A majority of K-2 teachers (57%) also selected 1st grade as the

most beneficial year for a summer reading camp. Third grade teachers selected 2nd grade (48%) and 1st grade (41%). Only 5-7% across the three groups selected 3rd grade as the year a summer reading camp would be of most benefit to struggling readers.

- Because the requirements for the 4th grade had not yet been implemented at the time of the data collection, the potential concerns raised in the focus groups about this aspect had to do with how to staff sufficiently to provide reading interventions, ensure the expertise of 4th grade teachers in dealing with struggling readers, ensure adequate funding, and other logistics involved with tracking student progress for non-proficient readers.

Overall, from the various data sources, the story emerging from educators of the first year of Read to Achieve implementation was some agreement in concept with the need for a statewide focus on early reading, and support for some aspects of the legislation. Perceptions of the aspects of RtA with the most potential for positive impacts on reading outcomes were complicated by fairly universal frustrations about the tight timelines, lack of educator input, and the rushed nature of the statewide implementation in the first year. The "high-stakes" nature of basing promotion in 3rd grade solely on reading proficiency was an approach that was perceived by many to have fallen suddenly and heavily on the shoulders of 3rd grade teachers and their students in 2014.

PART I:

READ TO ACHIEVE

ONLINE SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Purpose. The purpose of this mini-report is to summarize the results of online survey responses collected from educators across the state in May and June of 2014 on the first year of implementation of the Read to Achieve (RtA) program. The online surveys were one part of a three-part data collection effort conducted by SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro under a contract with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), K-3 Literacy Division, which is responsible for the implementation of six of the seven components of the Read to Achieve legislation. (Note: The second component, Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment, is the responsibility of the Office of Early Learning at NCDPI.)

Methodology. SERVE developed and piloted online surveys for five key role types affected by Read to Achieve: 1) district superintendents, 2) district elementary supervisors (referred to in the report as district RtA leads), 3) elementary principals, 4) 3rd grade teachers, and 5) K-2 teachers. Some survey items were similar across multiple role groups while others were specific to just one group—reflecting aspects of RtA of most relevance to that role type. The online surveys were reviewed and approved by NCDPI prior to being disseminated in May and June of 2014. Table 1 describes the sample, number of completed surveys, and years of experience of respondents.

Table 1. Types of online surveys, dissemination strategy, and number of responses

Survey/Role Group	Sample/Dissemination	# Completed Surveys	Years of Experience of Respondents
Superintendents	Disseminated to all 115 NC superintendents	66	• 1 or less = 26% • 2-5 = 58% • 6-10 = 12% • more than 10 = 3%
Elementary Supervisors/ District RtA Leads	Disseminated to all 115 NC designated Read to Achieve district-level contacts	77	• 1 or less = 11% • 2-5 = 53% • 6-10 = 25% • more than 10 = 12%
Elementary Principals	Disseminated to principals of 1,418 NC elementary schools with grades K-3	729	• 1 or less = 9% • 2-5 = 25% • 6-10 = 22% • more than 10 = 45%
Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd Grade Teachers	Disseminated to principals of 1,418 NC elementary schools to forward via email to their K-2 teachers	2,193	• 1 or less = 9% • 2-5 = 25% • 6-10 = 22% • more than 10 = 45%
3rd Grade Teachers	Disseminated to principals of 1,418 NC elementary schools to forward via email to their 3rd grade teachers	1,008	• 1 or less = 13% • 2-5 = 27% • 6-10 = 25% • more than 10 = 35%

Overall, respondents represented a wide range of districts and schools from across the state with responses from within all eight of the NCDPI-designated regions. Large, medium, and small districts[1] were evenly represented. District free and reduced lunch student percentages ranged from 27% to 93%. In terms of schools, 90% of responding principals worked in "traditional" schools, 7% in year round schools, 2% in schools with modified calendars, and 1% in schools with a mix of both year round and traditional schedules. This mirrors the state's average with the exception of schools with modified calendars—which are underrepresented in this survey. In terms of grade-levels, the largest number of respondents by grade-level was 3rd grade teachers (1,008) while kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grades each had over 700 respondents (719, 709, and 708 respectively).

The purpose of this mini-report is to summarize results across the five surveys. It is organized by the following six sections:

- Context and Implementation of Read to Achieve
- Component 1: Comprehensive Plan for Reading
- Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Via mCLASS Reading 3D
- Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion
- Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students
- Overall Perceptions of the Read to Achieve Program

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM FIVE ONLINE SURVEYS

Context and Implementation of Read to Achieve

Reported level of progress prior to Read to Achieve. When asked to reflect about the progress made in implementing reading interventions, programs, policies, practices or teacher professional development to improve K-3 reading outcomes **prior to** the Read to Achieve program, the majority of superintendents (86%), district RtA leads (82%), and principals (80%) reported that their district/school had either been making "some progress, but facing some challenges" or "steady progress." Only a small percentage reported "very significant and sustained progress" (12%, 13%, and 16%). —and an even smaller percentage reported "little progress and facing major challenges" (2%, 5%, and 5%). Thus, the prior context for Read to Achieve for the majority of respondents seemed to be making progress, but not yet significant and sustained progress.

Table 2. Perceptions of progress before RtA: Percentage responses by role types

How would you describe the progress made in implementing reading interventions, programs, policies, practices or teacher professional development to improve K-3 reading outcomes **prior to** the Read to Achieve program?	**Superintendents** (n=66)	**District RtA Leads** (n=76)	**Principals** (n=723)
Little progress and facing major challenges	2%	5%	5%
Some progress, but facing some challenges	38%	33%	30%
Steady progress	48%	49%	50%
Very significant and sustained progress	12%	13%	16%

Note: In this report totals may not always equal 100% due to rounding.

[1] District size was determined by total student enrollment: 0 – 3,700=small district; 3,701 – 9,600=medium district; and above 9,601=large district.

Alignment with prior early literacy improvement efforts. The district RtA lead and principal surveys included a question asking how well the Read to Achieve components and requirements aligned with what their district/school had been doing in terms of early literacy improvement in past years. As Table 3 indicates, the two groups responded very similarly to this question. The majority of district RtA leads (73%) and principals (62%) reported Read to Achieve was either "somewhat aligned" or "well aligned" with prior early literacy improvement efforts—while approximately a third of each group reported RtA was "minimally aligned" or "not at all aligned." A majority (55%) of both groups selected "somewhat aligned" as the best descriptor and only 14 (of 77) district RtA leads and 46 (of 632) elementary principals selected "well-aligned" as the best descriptor.

Table 3. Perceptions of alignment: Percentage responses by role types

How would you describe the alignment of the Read to Achieve components and requirements with your district's/school's prior early literacy improvement efforts?	**District RtA Leads** (n=77)	**Principals*** (n=632)
Not at all aligned: conflicts in major ways with our work in improving early literacy	4%	9%
Minimally aligned: conflicts with some of our prior work in improving early literacy	23%	25%
Somewhat aligned: enhanced some of our prior work in improving early literacy	55%	55%
Well aligned: enhanced our prior work in improving early literacy	18%	7%

*Column does not equal 100% due to option of "other" response not listed in table

Familiarity with Read to Achieve legislation. Four of the five role groups reported a high level of familiarity (between "3" and "4" on a 4-point scale) with the Read to Achieve legislation—while K-2 teachers reported the least familiarity with the legislation (2.2).

Table 4. Familiarity with legislation: Mean response by role type on a scale of 1-4

Scale: *1= not at all familiar , 2=slightly familiar, 3=moderately familiar, and 4=very familiar*	**Superintendents** (n=65)	**District RtA Leads** (n=76)	**Principals** (n=715)	**Teachers**	
				3rd Grade (n=976)	**K-2** (n=2,052)
How would you rate your familiarity of the North Carolina Read to Achieve Legislation (Bill 950/S.L. 2012-142 Section 7A)?	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.1	2.2

Knowledge of Read to Achieve requirements. Out of the four role groups asked to rate their knowledge of the various Read to Achieve requirements on a 4-point scale, district RtA leads reported the highest level of knowledge about the requirements of RtA (3.7). K-2 teachers reported having the least knowledge (2.5).

Table 5. Knowledgeable about RtA requirements: Mean response by role type on a scale of 1-4

Scale: *1= not at all knowledgeable , 2=slightly knowledgeable, 3=moderately knowledgeable, and 4=very knowledgeable*	**District RtA Leads** (n=76)	**Principals** (n=715)	**Teachers**	
			3rd Grade (n=978)	**K-2** (n=2,057)
How would you rate your current overall knowledge of the various requirements of the Read to Achieve program?	3.7	3.4	3.3	2.5

Feedback from the field. Principals and teachers were asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement about the importance of educator input as RtA moves into the second year. Principal and teacher mean scores (3.4-3.6 out of a 4-point scale) indicated they agreed that such a mechanism for listening to and addressing educators' concerns was needed. Over 90% of each group indicated that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement.

Table 6. Perceptions of educator input: Percentage and mean response on a scale of 1-4

Scale: *1= strongly disagree , 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Principals** (n=630)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=905)	**K-2** (n=1,725)
Going forward with Read to Achieve, NCDPI should have a structured process for listening to and trying to address the concerns of educators	(A)=97% (D)=4% M=3.6	(A)=91% (D)=9% M=3.6	(A)=94% (D)=6% M=3.4

(A) = Sum of percentages for "moderately satisfied" and "very satisfied" indicating more agreeable responses
(D) = Sum of percentages for "slightly satisfied" and "not at all satisfied" indicating more disagreeable responses
M = mean

Component 1: Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement

Familiarity of Comprehensive Reading Plan and supporting resources. The surveys included questions for all five role groups about familiarity with various RtA informational sources. Table 7 summarizes their responses. The highest level of familiarity across three resources/documents was reported by district RtA leads (between "3" and "4" on a 4-point scale). Teachers indicated lower levels of familiarity, with K-2 teachers indicating the least familiarity with the LiveBinder (1.9).

Table 7. Familiarity with RtA documents: Mean response by role type on a scale of 1-4

Scale: *1= not at all familiar , 2=slightly familiar, 3=moderately familiar, and 4=Very familiar*	**Superintendents** (n=65)	**District RtA Leads** (n=76)	**Principals** (n~716)	**Teachers**	
				3rd Grade (n~977)	**K-2** (n~2043)
North Carolina Read to Achieve Comprehensive Reading Plan K-12 2013-2014	3.5	3.5	3.3	2.9	2.2
North Carolina Read to Achieve LiveBinder	2.9	3.8	3.0	2.5	1.9
NCDPI K-3 Literacy Division website	2.7	3.4	2.7	2.3	2.1

Usefulness of LiveBinder. Respondents who indicated some level of familiarity with the North Carolina Read to Achieve LiveBinder were asked to what extent the resources provided in the Binder were useful to understanding the RtA requirements. As seen in Table 8, district RtA leads indicated the highest levels of usefulness (3.4).

Table 8. LiveBinder usefulness: Mean response by role type on a scale of 1-4				
Scale: *1= not at all useful, 2=slightly useful, 3=moderately useful, and 4=very useful*	**District RtA Leads** (n=76)	**Principals** (n=673)	**Teachers**	
			3rd Grade (n=780)	**K-2** (n=1,201)
To what extent have the resources provided in the NCDPI LiveBinder been useful to you in understanding the Read to Achieve requirements?	3.4	2.7	2.4	2.3

Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Via mCLASS Reading 3D

One of the seven components of RtA required that K-3 teachers use the mCLASS Reading 3D assessment system as the formative, diagnostic reading assessment.

mCLASS Reading 3D implementation. Teachers and principals were asked to what extent they agreed/disagreed that the implementation of the mCLASS Reading 3D assessment system was well-planned and supported by NCDPI. The means and patterns of responses were similar across the three groups. As seen in Table 9, a majority of principals (58%), 3rd grade teachers (53%), and K-2 teachers (52%), indicated agreement ("agree" or "strongly agree")—with 42%-48% indicating disagreement ("disagree" or "strongly disagree").

Table 9. Perceptions of mCLASS implementation on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response			
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ***Scale:*** *1= strongly disagree , 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Principals** (n=630)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=905)	**K-2** (n=1,725)
The implementation of the mCLASS Reading 3D assessment system was well-planned and supported by NCDPI	(A)=58% (D)=42% M=2.5	(A)=53% (D)=48% M=2.4	(A)=52% (D)=48% M=2.4

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

mCLASS Reading 3D training. When asked if they had been sufficiently trained, over 80% of K-2 and 3rd grade teachers indicated they were sufficiently trained on the mCLASS Reading 3D system. A slightly lower percentage of principals than teachers indicated being sufficiently trained.

Table 10. Perceptions of mCLASS training: Responses by role types			
Do you feel you have been sufficiently trained on the mCLASS Reading 3D System?	**Principals** (n=689)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=943)	**K-2** (n=1,995)
Yes	71%	84%	83%
No	23%	12%	13%
Not sure yet	6%	4%	4%

Satisfaction with mCLASS Reading 3D. The survey included items regarding the level of satisfaction with various aspects of the mCLASS Reading 3D system:

a. specific grade-level measures,
b. validity or quality of benchmarking data,
c. utility in providing data to identify and intervene with students experiencing reading difficulty,
d. use of data for Standard 6, and
e. amount of time needed for teachers to administer benchmarking assessments.

a. Specific grade-level measures. Kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the various mCLASS Reading 3D measures that were applicable to their grade level. As seen in Table 11, First Sound Fluency (FSF), Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), and Word Recognition (WR) received mean satisfaction scores at or above a "3" (indicating "moderately satisfied") across all grade level teachers. Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), Oral Reading Fluency (DORF), and Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) received mean satisfaction scores across multiple grade levels between a "2" (indicating "slightly satisfied") and a "3" ("moderately satisfied").

Over 50% of teachers across all grade levels reported that they were either "moderately" or "very" satisfied with the various mCLASS measures (as indicated by the percentage next to the "A"), with the exception of 1st grade teachers with Oral Reading Fluency (46%) and 3rd grade teachers with Nonsense Word Fluency (47%). Across all groups and measures, kindergarten teachers reported the highest percentage satisfaction ("very satisfied") with the First Sound Fluency (FSF) measure (40%)—while 1st grade teachers reported the highest percentage dissatisfaction ("not at all satisfied") for the Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) measure (28%).

Table 11. Satisfaction with mCLASS measures on a scale of 1-4: Responses by teacher grade level

How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the…? ***Scale:*** *1= Not at all satisfied, 2=slightly satisfied, 3=moderately satisfied, and 4=very satisfied*	**Kindergarten Teacher** (n~659)	**1st Grade Teacher** (n~657)	**2nd Grade Teachers** (n~655)	**3rd Grade Teacher** (n~922)
DIBELS: First Sound Fluency (FSF)	(A)=85% (D)=15% M=3.2	--	--	--
DIBELS: Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	(A)=76% (D)=24% M=3.0	(A)=78% (D)=23% M=3.1	--	--
DIBELS: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	(A)=77% (D)=23% M=3.0	(A)=75% (D)=25% M=3.0	--	--
DIBELS: Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	(A)=62% (D)=37% M=2.7	(A)=58% (D)=43% M=2.6	(A)=52% (D)=48% M=2.5	(A)=47% (D)=53% M=2.4*
DIBELS: Oral Reading Fluency (DORF)	--	(A)=46% (D)=54% M=2.4	(A)=68% (D)=32% M=2.8	(A)=69% (-)=32% M=2.8
DIBELS: Maze (DAZE)	--	--	--	(A)=59% (D)=41% M=2.6

Table 11. Satisfaction with mCLASS measures on a scale of 1-4: Responses by teacher grade level				
How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the…? ***Scale:*** *1= Not at all satisfied, 2=slightly satisfied, 3=moderately satisfied, and 4=very satisfied*	**Kindergarten Teacher** (n~659)	**1st Grade Teacher** (n~657)	**2nd Grade Teachers** (n~655)	**3rd Grade Teacher** (n~922)
Word Recognition (WR)	(A)=79% (D)=22% M=3.1	(A)=75% (D)=25% M=3.0	--	--
Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC)	(A)=63% (D)=38% M=2.7	(A)=53% (D)=48% M=2.5	(A)=54% (D)=46% M=2.5	(A)=60% (D)=40% M=2.6

(A) = Sum of percentages for "moderately satisfied" and "very satisfied"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "slightly satisfied" and "not at all satisfied"
M = mean
* Only 484 3rd grade teachers responded regarding Nonsense Work Fluency (NWF).

b. Validity or quality of benchmarking data. Principals and teachers were asked about their satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the validity or quality of benchmarking data. As seen in Table 12, teachers were split in their perceptions with roughly half indicating being "moderately" or "very" satisfied" with this aspect of mCLASS and half indicating lower levels of satisfaction ("slightly" or "not at all"). Principals reported higher levels of satisfaction than teachers with 69% satisfied ("moderately" or "very"). Almost a quarter of principals (22%) indicated the highest level of satisfaction ("very satisfied")—while only 13%-14% of teachers indicated "very satisfied."

Table 12. Satisfaction with benchmark validity/quality on a scale of 1-4: Responses by role types			
How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the validity or quality of benchmarking data?	**Principals** (n=673)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=922)	**K-2** (n=1,953)
Not at all satisfied (1)	9%	14%	18%
Slightly satisfied (2)	23%	35%	32%
Moderately satisfied (3)	47%	38%	36%
Very satisfied (4)	22%	13%	14%

c. Utility of data. Principals and teachers were asked about their satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the overall utility to the school/teacher in providing data to identify and intervene with students experiencing reading difficulty. As seen in Table 13, the majority of principals reported that they were either "very" or "moderately" satisfied (85%) compared to about half of the teachers reporting that they were either "very" or "moderately" satisfied. Forty-one percent of principals indicated the highest level of satisfaction ("very satisfied")—while only 12%-15% of teachers indicated that they were "very satisfied."

Table 13. Satisfaction with utility in providing data on a scale of 1-4: Responses by role types			
How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the overall utility to the school/teacher in providing data to identify and intervene with students experiencing reading difficulty?	**Principals** (n=673)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=918)	**K-2** (n=1,952)
Not at all satisfied (1)	3%	15%	14%
Slightly satisfied (2)	12%	35%	31%
Moderately satisfied (3)	44%	38%	40%
Very satisfied (4)	41%	12%	15%

d. Use of data for Standard 6. District RtA leads and teachers were asked about their satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of its use for teacher evaluation (Standard 6). As seen in Table 14, the majority of principals (75%), K-2 teachers (68%), and 3rd grade teachers (67%) reported that they were either "slightly" or "not at all" satisfied with the use of the mCLASS data for teacher evaluation purposes. A third to slightly over a half of the respondents from the three role groups reported being "not at all satisfied" with the use of mCLASS for teacher evaluation purposes (from 35% to 54%).

Table 14. Satisfaction with use of data for Standard 6: Responses by role types			
How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the use of data from mCLASS Reading 3D for teacher evaluation (Standard 6)?	**District RtA Leads** (n=72)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=868)	**K-2** (n=1,892)
Not at all satisfied (1)	54%	35%	41%
Slightly satisfied (2)	21%	32%	27%
Moderately satisfied (3)	17%	26%	24%
Very satisfied (4)	8%	7%	9%

e. Time to administer benchmarking assessments. As seen in Table 15, the majority of 3rd grade teachers (79%), K-2 teachers (72%), and principals (65%) reported that they were either "slightly" or "not at all" satisfied with the time that was required to administer the mCLASS benchmarking assessments. Across the role groups, large percentages reported "not at all satisfied" (43%-59%)—while small percentages reported being "very satisfied" (5%-9%).

Table 15. Satisfaction with time needed to administer benchmarking: Responses by role types			
How would you rate your satisfaction with the mCLASS Reading 3D system in terms of the amount of time needed for teachers to administer benchmarking assessments?	**Principals** (n=672)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=924)	**K-2 Teachers** (n=1,969)
Not at all satisfied (1)	43%	59%	48%
Slightly satisfied (2)	22%	20%	24%
Moderately satisfied (3)	26%	16%	20%
Very satisfied (4)	9%	5%	8%

Balance of time on assessment and instruction. Principals were asked if they thought K-2 teachers were able to achieve the right balance in terms of time spent on reading assessment and reading instruction (Table 16). Of the 674 principals responding, only 15% responded "Yes," that the K-2 teachers in their school were able to achieve the right balance in terms of time spent on reading assessment with the use of mCLASS and reading instruction.

For K-2 teachers, only 17% responded "Yes," that they were able to achieve the right balance. Of those responding "No," the majority of K-2 teachers selected a response indicating that they did not know how to fix this lack of balance next year.

For 3rd grade teachers, only 4% reported "Yes," that they were able to achieve the right balance—while 78% reported "No," that too much instructional time was lost this school year as a result of implementing Reading 3D assessments. Of those 78% of 3rd grade teachers, 22% indicated they should be able to make changes in order to reach an acceptable balance over time; however, 56% indicated they do not know how to improve the balance for next year.

Table **16. Perceptions of balance of time on assessment and instruction: Responses by role types**

…achieve the right balance in terms of time spent on reading assessment with use of mCLASS Reading 3D and reading instruction?	In your school this year, do you think K-2 teachers were able to…	In your reading instruction this year, were you able to… **Teachers**	
	Principals (n=674)	**3rd Grade** (n=938)	**K-2** (n=1,979)
Yes	15%	4%	17%
No, too much instructional time was lost this year but we should be able to work this out over time	34%	22%	22%
No, too much instructional time was lost this year and we don't know how to fix it next year	32%	56%	42%
Don't know (since this is the first year, it is hard to tell whether balance will be achieved over time)	8%	8%	11%

Note: Columns do not equal 100% due to option of "other" response not listed in table.

Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion

Support for elimination of "social promotion" legislation requirement. All five role groups were asked to rate their level of support for this Read to Achieve legislation requirement. As seen in Table 17, mean scores were similar across role types (indicating a mean of around 2 = "slightly supportive; i.e., major changes are needed"). Approximately two-thirds of all groups reported being either "not at all" or only "slightly" supportive of the legislation as currently written. Only 4%–8% of the role groups indicated being "fully supportive; no changes needed."

Table 17. Support for elimination of "social promotion" legislation: Responses by role types					
How would you rate your level of support for the Read to Achieve legislation requirement to provide a retention label at the end of 3rd grade (i.e., "elimination of social promotion") in order to ensure support for students who are non-proficient in reading?	**Superintendents** (n=60)	**District RtA Leads** (n=73)	**Principals** (n=663)	**Teachers**	
				3rd Grade (n=934)	**K-2** (n=1,955)
Not at all supportive of the legislation as currently written (1)	18%	26%	36%	31%	27%
Slightly supportive—i.e., major changes are needed (2)	47%	38%	27%	35%	34%
Moderately supportive—i.e., some changes are needed (3)	30%	27%	33%	30%	34%
Fully supportive—i.e., no changes needed (4)	5%	8%	4%	5%	4%
Mean Response	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.1

Use of portfolio as an alternate assessment. Principals were asked if their schools used the NCDPI-provided portfolio passages as an alternative assessment option for determining if 3rd grade students were proficient in reading. Of the principals responding:

- 61% indicated their school used the portfolio passages with all 3rd grade students
- 24% indicated their school used the portfolio passages with some 3rd grade students
- 7% indicated they did not use the portfolio passages for assessment but did suggest teachers use them for instructional purposes
- 2% indicated their school did not use the portfolio passages at all
- 5% indicated "other"

In addition, both principals and 3rd grade teachers were asked whether or not they thought the portfolio passages worked as an alternative assessment option for identifying students who could meet 3rd grade reading expectations. As seen in Table 18, approximately 40% of both role groups indicated "yes"; however, 3rd grade teachers reported a slightly higher percentage of "no" responses (43%) than principals (33%).

Table 18. Perceptions of portfolios as an alternative assessment: Responses by role types		
Do you think the portfolio passages worked as an alternative assessment option for identifying students who could meet 3rd grade reading expectations?	**Principals** (n=611)	**3rd Grade Teachers** (n=892)
Yes	41%	40%
No	33%	43%
Not sure yet	26%	16%

3rd grade teacher stress. Principals and teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement about the difficulty in hiring experienced teachers to teach 3rd grade in the future as a result of the stresses associated with Read to Achieve. As seen in Table 19, a total of 85% of K-2 teachers, 88% of principals, and 90% of 3rd grade teachers indicated either "agree" or "strongly agree"—with approximately half (49% -58%) indicating "strongly agree."

In addition, 3rd grade teachers were asked if they expected to be teaching 3rd grade next year. Out of the 916 3rd grade teachers responding to this question, 63% reported "yes," 17% reported "not sure yet," and 14% reported "no, I have requested a transfer to another grade level." (Note: 6% of 3rd grade teachers indicated they did not expect to teach 3rd grade again next year for "personal or other reasons.")

Table 19. Difficulty hiring experienced teachers to teach 3rd grade: Responses by role types

It may be difficult for our school to find experienced teachers to teach 3rd grade in the future as a result of the stresses associated with Read to Achieve.	**Principals** (n=622)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=898)	**K-2** (n=1,706)
Strongly Disagree (1)	3%	3%	5%
Disagree (2)	10%	8%	10%
Agree (3)	34%	32%	36%
Strongly Agree (4)	54%	58%	49%
Mean Response	3.4	3.4	3.3

Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students

Size and funding for 3rd grade summer reading camps. Superintendents were asked to estimate how many students in their district would be required to attend the state-funded 3rd grade summer reading camps**.** The estimated numbers from the 58 superintendents responding to this question ranged from 5 to 1,400 students (Table 20). When examined by district size[2]:

- small districts estimated between 5-100 students—with 24% students with disabilities (EC) and 13% limited English proficiency (LEP) students
- medium districts estimated between 15-400 students— with 22% students with disabilities (EC) and 17% limited English proficiency (LEP) students
- large districts estimated between 100-1,400— with 25% students with disabilities (EC) and 14% limited English proficiency (LEP) students

Thus, for all districts responding, over one-third of the students anticipated to attend the 3rd grade summer reading camps were expected to be students with disabilities (EC) and limited English proficient (LEP).

In terms of funding the summer camps, 19% of superintendents indicated state allocations for 3rd grade summer reading camps were sufficient for their district. However, when disaggregated by district size, 50% of superintendents in small districts indicated that the funding allocated by the state was sufficient compared to only 9% of superintendents from the medium-sized districts and no superintendents from the large districts indicated the allocation was sufficient.

[2] District size was determined by total student enrollment: 0 – 3,700=small district; 3,701 – 9,600=medium district; and above 9,601=large district.

Table 20. Size and funding for 3rd grade summer reading camps: Responses by district size				
District Size	**Range**	**Avg. % expected EC students**	**Avg. % expected LEP students**	**% indicating sufficient funding**
Small districts (n=16)	5-100	24%	13%	50%
Medium districts (n=22)	15-400	22%	17%	9%
Large districts (n=20)	100-1,400	25%	14%	0%

Note: District size was determined by total student enrollment: 0-3,700=small district; 3,701 – 9,600=medium district; and above 9,601=large district.

Benefit of 3rd grade summer reading camp. Read to Achieve legislation originally required that students who do not show reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade must attend summer reading camp. Principals, 3rd grade teachers, and K-2 teachers were asked their opinion regarding at which grade level they thought summer reading camps would most benefit struggling readers (Table 21).

A majority of principals and K-2 teachers selected 1st grade (54% and 57%) whereas 3rd grade teachers were somewhat split between 1st grade (41%) and 2nd grade (48%).

Less than 10% of any of the three groups selected 3rd grade as the grade level in which struggling readers would most benefit from summer reading camps.

Table 21. Perceptions of most effective grade level for summer reading camps: Responses by role types			
At which grade level do you think summer reading camps would benefit struggling readers most?	**Principals** (n=650)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=936)	**K-2** (n=1,966)
Kindergarten	7%	4%	14%
1st grade	54%	41%	57%
2nd grade	34%	48%	24%
3rd grade	6%	7%	5%

Overall Perceptions of Read to Achieve

The surveys included items assessing the overall perceptions of Read to Achieve by the various role groups. Respondents used a 4-point scale—with "1" indicating "strongly disagree" to "4" indicating "strongly agree" to indicate their level of agreement with each statement.

Appropriate focus/attention. All five role groups were asked the extent to which they agreed that the components proposed in the Read to Achieve legislation are the right areas of focus for ensuring reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade. As seen in Table 22, the mean scores were relatively similar across all role groups ranging between 2.3 and 2.6 on a 4-point scale. Overall, respondents were somewhat split in their perceptions with roughly half of each group reporting either "agree" or "strongly agree" (47%-56%) and half reporting either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" (45%-56%).

In addition, the five role groups were asked if the amount of attention paid to K-2 struggling readers in the Read to Achieve program is sufficient. A total of 86% of superintendents, 76% of 3rd grade teachers, 74% of district RtA leads, 65% of principals, and 55% of K-2 teachers reported either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" that the

focus on K-2 struggling readers was sufficient; thus, indicating that more support at the K-2 levels is needed for struggling readers.

Table 22. Perceptions of appropriate focus/attention on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response

Scale: *1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Superintendents** (n=56)	**District RtA Leads** (n~72)	**Principals** (n~623)	**Teachers**	
				3rd Grade (n~872)	**K-2** (n~1,530)
The components proposed in the Read to Achieve legislation are the right areas of focus for ensuring reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade	(A)=56% (D)=45% M=2.5	(A)=55% (D)=45% M=2.6	(A)=47% (D)=56% M=2.3	(A)=51% (D)=50% M=2.4	(A)=48% (D)=52% M=2.3
The amount of focus/attention paid to K-2 struggling readers in the Read to Achieve program is sufficient	(A)=15% (D)=86% M=1.8	(A)=25% (D)=74% M=2.0	(A)=35% (D)=65% M=2.1	(A)=23% (D)=76% M=1.9	(A)=46% (D)=55% M=2.3

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

Impact on focus/articulation of early literacy approach. All five role groups were asked the extent to which they agreed that the Read to Achieve program helped their district/school better enhance their focus on improving K-3 reading outcomes. As seen in Table 23, 61% of superintendents, 59% of district RtA leads, and 53% of principals "agree" or "strongly agree" that RtA enhanced their focus on improving K-3 reading outcomes. However, a majority of 3rd grade teachers (65%) and K-2 teachers (59%) "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Thus, the district leaders are slightly more positive than principals who are more positive than teachers.

Table 23. Perceptions of impact on focus on early literacy on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response

Scale: *1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Superintendents** (n=55)	**District RtA Leads** (n=72)	**Principals** (n=622)	**Teachers**	
				3rd Grade (n=866)	**K-2** (n=1,503)
The Read to Achieve Program helped my [district or/school] better enhance our focus on improving K-3 reading outcomes	(A)=61% (D)=39% M=2.6	(A)=59% (D)=40% M=2.6	(A)=53% (D)=46% M=2.3	(A)=35% (D)=65% M=2.1	(A)=41% (D)=59% M=2.2

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

Impact on reading instruction. Principals and teachers were asked the extent to which they agreed that the Read to Achieve program: a) helped identify/address reading difficulties early and b) will likely have a positive impact on K-3 instructional reading practices. As seen in Table 24, for statement a): 49% of K-2 teachers, 61% of principals, and 65% of 3rd grade teachers indicated disagreement (reported "disagree" or "strongly disagree").

In terms of b) whether or not Read to Achieve will have a positive impact on K-3 instructional reading practices, 55% of K-2 teachers, 56% of principals, and 62% of 3rd grade teachers indicated they "disagree" or "strongly

disagree" with this statement. On the positive side, 38% to 46% of the three groups agree that Read to Achieve has had or will likely have a positive impact on K-3 instructional reading practices.

Of the three role groups, for both items, the K-2 teachers had a greater percentage of respondents with a positive response (agreement) than the principals or 3rd grade teachers.

Table 24. Perceptions of impact on reading instruction on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response

Scale: *1= strongly disagree , 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Principals** (n~621)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n~822)	**K-2** (n~1,559)
a. Read to Achieve has helped K-3 teachers in my school with identifying and addressing reading difficulties early	(A)=39% (D)=61% M=2.2	(A)=35% (D)=65% M=2.1	(A)=51% (D)=49% M=2.4
b. Read to Achieve has had or will likely have a positive impact on K-3 instructional reading practices	(A)=44% (D)=56% M=2.3	(A)=38% (D)=62% M=2.1	(A)=46% (D)=55% M=2.3

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

Impact on instructional time. Because of the heavy emphasis on the use of new reading assessments in Read to Achieve (mCLASS, alternative 3rd grade reading assessments), principals and teachers were asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement about the loss of instructional time in their school/classroom. As seen in Table 25, 93% of 3rd grade teachers, 84% of principals, and 80% of K-2 teachers indicated agreement with the statement that RtA has resulted in a significant loss of instructional time.

Table 25. Perceptions of impact on instructional time on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response

Scale: *1= strongly disagree , 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*	**Principals** (n=627)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=911)	**K-2** (n=1,546)
[At my school/in my classroom], Read to Achieve has resulted in a significant loss of instructional time	(A)=84% (D)=16% M=3.3	(A)=93% (D)=8% M=3.6	(A)=80% (D)=20% M=3.1

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

Impact on student achievement. Principals and teachers were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the ideas behind the Read to Achieve program have great potential to make a positive difference in reading achievement. As seen in Table 26, the means and patterns of responses were similar across the three groups. A majority of principals (63%), K-2 teachers (59%), and 3rd grade teachers (64%) indicated agreement ("agree" or "strongly agree") with 36%-41% indicating disagreement ("disagree" or "strongly disagree"). Thus, a majority agree with the potential of RtA to make a difference in reading achievement.

Table 26. Perceptions of impact on reading achievement on a scale of 1-4: Percentages and mean response			
Scale: 1= strongly disagree , 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree	**Principals** (n=617)	**Teachers**	
		3rd Grade (n=893)	**K-2** (n=1,576)
The ideas behind Read to Achieve have great potential to make a positive difference in reading achievement	(A)=63% (D)=37% M=2.6	(A)=64% (D)=36% M=2.6	(A)=59% (D)=41% M=2.5

(A) = Sum of percentages for "agree" and "strongly agree"
(D) = Sum of percentages for "disagree" and "strongly disagree"
M = mean

Recommendations Based on Survey Results

At the end of each survey, all five role group were asked to provide suggestions for how Read to Achieve legislation, the Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement, or support to districts could be improved. All superintendent (n=22) and district RtA lead (n=38) comments were content analyzed as well as a random sample of 200 responses each from three groups (principals, K-2 teachers, and 3rd grade teachers). The recommendations provided by respondents were grouped according to themes (see Table 27). Many of the identified themes were mentioned by each of the role groups; however, it is the intent here to highlight the top three for each role group.

- Four out of five role groups recommended a more strategic statewide roll out and communication process in the future. Comments described respondents' desire for: a) more consistent policies and guidance, b) more educator input in the design phase, and c) slower and/or phased implementation of future components or initiatives.
- Four out of five role groups suggested more focus on and support of K-2 literacy interventions instead of focusing so strongly on 3rd grade. Overall, comments indicated that educators feel more emphasis needs to be placed on identifying and intervening with struggling readers in grades K-2—and even pre-K—to ensure better literacy outcomes in the 3rd grade.
- The most frequently mentioned recommendation by both 3rd grade teachers and K-2 teachers was to ensure more statewide focus on supports for quality literacy instruction and less on assessment. Comments indicated that the increase in required reading assessments, as a result of RtA, led to a loss of instructional time—which they believe hurts their struggling students who need more instructional time in reading to successfully improve their reading skills.
- Both superintendents and district RtA leads suggested more local discretion and flexibility in some components. Comments indicated discretion and flexibility is especially important in terms of retention decisions, local assessments, and design/implementation of summer reading camps.
- Principals and 3rd grade teachers recommended a review and revision of the current 3rd grade portfolio process. Comments indicated a desire for: a) more engaging and grade-appropriate passages, b) decreasing the number of passages required, and c) clear guidelines and support for portfolio administration.
- Superintendents were especially concerned with the budgetary impact RtA has had on districts and schools. Comments indicated that some superintendents believe that in order for effective implementation of all the RtA components to be realized, increased funding and support from the state are needed.

Table 27. Content analysis of survey responses about recommendations for improving RtA by role type					
Recommendations	**Superintendents** (n=22)	**District RtA Leads** (n=38)	**Principals** (n=200)	**3rd Grade Teachers** (n=200)	**K-2 Teachers** (n=200)
A more systematic approach to implementing statewide initiatives to include a piloting phase, feedback from educators, and longer timelines		√	√	√	√
More focus on and support of K-2 literacy interventions and support	√	√	√		√
More focus on quality reading instruction and less on reading assessment				√	√
More local discretion/flexibility	√	√			
Revise 3rd grade portfolio process			√	√	
More funding and support for implementation	√				

PART II:

READ TO ACHIEVE

FOCUS GROUPS IN EIGHT REGIONS

INTRODUCTION

Purpose. The purpose of this mini-report is to summarize the results of focus groups conducted across the state in April through June of 2014 on the first year of implementation of the Read to Achieve program. The focus groups were one part of a three-part data collection effort conducted by SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro under a contract with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The focus of the SERVE data collection was on the implementation of six of the seven components of the Read to Achieve legislation under the direction of the K-3 Literacy Division. The second Read to Achieve component, Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment, is the responsibility of The Office of Early Learning and was not a focus of the SERVE data collection.

Methodology. SERVE Center conducted 40 focus groups across the state, five in each of the eight regions of the state. SERVE developed and piloted focus group protocols for five role types affected by Read to Achieve: 1) district superintendents, 2) district elementary supervisors or others who were the Read to Achieve contact/leader for the district (district RtA leads), 3) elementary principals, 4) 3rd grade teachers, and 5) K-2 teachers. Every district in the state was invited to send a representative from each of the five role types to participate in the focus groups held at a central location in each of the state's eight regions. SERVE worked closely with the state's Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) in scheduling and planning the focus groups. A total of 88 of 115 LEAs in the state sent participants to the focus groups. All focus groups were recorded with the recordings then transcribed. The eight transcripts for each role type were reviewed with content organized by themes/subthemes.

In the Summary below, we describe the themes and subthemes identified across role types, organized by the roll out of the legislation and then the components of Read to Achieve (Components 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6):

- Roll out of Read to Achieve
- Component 1: Comprehensive Plan for Reading
- Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Via mCLASS Reading 3D
- Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion
- Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students
- Component 6: Notification to Parents and Guardians

A "Frequently Mentioned Subthemes by Role Type" table introduces each theme within the six sections of the Summary. The tables indicate the subthemes that were mentioned repeatedly by a particular role type.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Roll out of Read to Achieve

Legislation and roll out processes. Read to Achieve became law in 2012 and was implemented statewide in 2013. Due to the limited time between the passage and implementation of the law, many clarifications and changes related to guidance on the requirements occurred during the 2013-14 school year. Because of the complexity of implementing the requirements of the Read to Achieve law in a short timeframe (one year), focus group participants repeatedly described challenges they faced due to the way this statewide initiative was implemented. Their comments about the statewide roll out of Read to Achieve are described below by subtheme.

Table 1: Legislation and Rollout Processes—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Legislation and Rollout Processes	Frequency of policy changes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Implementation process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Focus on literacy					
	Educator input	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Use of LiveBinder					

Frequency of policy changes. All five role types described difficulties due to constant changes in policies and guidance. Participants in each group described a feeling of lost credibility with their stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers) as guidance changed through the year. Some superintendents, district RtA leads, and principals said they held back information for several days to make sure that there were no changes before passing information along. Although participants expressed a great deal of frustration, several administrators acknowledged that the Department of Public Instruction had a very difficult task in providing guidance on requirements so quickly.

Implementation processes. Many participants across all five role types discussed the need to pilot components of RtA in a small number of districts in order to resolve problems before the requirements are implemented statewide. Some administrators suggested that RtA, rather than beginning with high stakes tests for 3rd graders, should have begun with the 2013-2014 kindergarten class (with the statewide mandate for teachers to use mCLASS Reading 3D) and piloting of summer interventions for struggling readers. When that kindergarten class reached 3rd grade in three years, educators and students would have been more prepared for high stakes promotion/retention decisions. Several principals and district RtA leads felt the state rollout of RtA was inconsistent with what is known about implementation science and successful large-scale implementation efforts (such as conducting readiness assessments, developing training and coaching supports, implementing first with a small sample, assessing what is and isn't working, and revising before scaling up).

Focus on literacy. Strength of Read to Achieve that was mentioned in some groups was a statewide focus on literacy. These participants reported that Read to Achieve has created more discussion about literacy, and schools are spending more time on literacy as a result. Some participants expressed a concern that other subjects are not receiving the amount of instructional time that they should.

Educator input. Repeatedly, across all five focus groups, participants expressed concerns about lack of educator input into the design of RtA. The focus groups described frustration that educators were not included in the initial design of the components of RtA or in the implementation planning. They indicated that problematic issues with portfolios, Good Cause exemptions, summer camps, etc. could have been avoided and addressed earlier if educators' input about how these aspects might work was sought in the planning phase. They felt their expertise in effective literacy instruction and promotion/retention decision making could have guided lawmakers and those involved in planning the implementation of the law.

Frequently mentioned was a sense that the RtA legislation showed a lack of trust in and lack of respect for the professionalism of educators. Some participants, mostly in administrative positions, indicated that they were worried that the legislation represented an effort to make traditional public schools less attractive to students and parents, in favor of charter schools, private schools, homeschooling, and other non-traditional forms of K-12 education.

Use of LiveBinder. The Department of Public Instruction created the LiveBinder website to disseminate information about RtA. There were differences of opinions about the utility of the LiveBinder although many reported familiarity and use of it (with more use reported as coming from the district and school administrators than by teachers). Many participants, especially district RtA Leads, said that overall it was a helpful resource and some noted that it increased transparency. Teachers were less likely to comment on their use of the site but some did report regular use. Some district RtA Leads said that the time it took to go through the LiveBinder, get the updates, and pass them on to teachers was overwhelming.

General funding. There were many comments, particularly from the three types of administrators (superintendents, district RtA leads and principals), suggesting that RtA funding should be increased if the goals are to be reached.

Table 2: General Funding—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
General Funding	Resources	✓		✓		
	Staffing	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Resources. Superintendent and principal focus groups voiced a concern that in order to achieve the goal of RtA, more resources are needed. These resources include materials to provide reading instruction both during the school year and in summer reading camps.

Staffing. Administrators and teachers stressed the need for more trained professionals to provide early reading instruction and interventions for struggling readers and to help with the increased reading assessment demands of mCLASS Reading 3D and portfolios. A few superintendents referenced the reading legislation implemented in Florida and thought that Florida's funding for reading coaches was a critical missing piece of the North Carolina Read to Achieve legislation.

Component 1: Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement

Read to Achieve plans/expectations. A goal of this component is to enhance the use of research-based reading instructional strategies and interventions by K-3 teachers statewide.

Table 3: Read to Achieve Plans/Expectations—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Read to Achieve Plans/Expectations	Confusion on what is included in RtA					
	Professional development for K-5 teachers		✓			

Confusion on what is included in Read to Achieve. The RtA implementation followed the state adoption and required implementation of Common Core State Standards. Some superintendents discussed confusion within the community about RtA, particularly with how recent education reform efforts such as Common

Core and RtA align (e.g., some parents who think they are unhappy with Common Core are actually dissatisfied with components of RtA).

Professional development for K-5 teachers. Some superintendents mentioned that teachers are not always prepared to teach reading after they receive their degree in elementary education. Further, a number of district RtA leads highlighted increased professional development as a need, particularly on how to teach reading in 90 minute blocks. Some district RtA leads mentioned that grade 3-5 teachers may need more professional development in teaching struggling readers because expertise in teaching early reading skills to less proficient readers has not been expected of them in the past.

Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Via mCLASS Reading 3D

North Carolina adopted mCLASS Reading 3D as the statewide reading assessment for students in grades K-3. The state provided the funds and training support for districts to implement it.

Training.

Table 4: Training—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Training	Implementation of training		✓			
	Future support			✓		
	Regional consultants	✓	✓			

Implementation of training. Focus groups of all role types reported that they felt they had had adequate initial training in mCLASS. Some administrators and district RtA leads reported that having master 3D trainers in their districts was helpful and worth the costs. A few administrators mentioned that teacher turnover made training more challenging, costly, and time-consuming. Additionally, district RtA leads described the difficulties of finding time and resources to conduct further training, citing multiple programs currently being implemented, lack of time in teachers' schedules, funding for substitutes, and/or money for stipends for teachers to attend training.

Future support. Principal focus groups frequently mentioned a need for additional or ongoing training for mCLASS Reading 3D. They mentioned that refresher trainings had been helpful.

Regional consultants. Focus groups of superintendents and district RtA leads frequently reported that NCDPI's K-3 Literacy Division regional consultants were excellent in their support of mCLASS Reading 3D implementation by teachers.

Quality/design of system.

Table 5: Quality/Design of System—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Quality/Design of System	Technical issues					
	Specific measures (validity and reliability)				✓	✓
	Writing component of TRC			✓	✓	✓

Technical issues. There were some complaints about the lack of technical support for Reading 3D. Reading 3D is used across the nation, and some teachers and district RtA leads reported that staff providing technical support at Amplify were not able to answer some questions specific to its use in North Carolina. Others

complained about instances in which teachers lost data and had to re-administer assessments. Some teachers reported that iPads were much more reliable for administration than other devices.

Specific measures. Teacher focus groups frequently brought up issues having to do with the validity and reliability of particular measures within the mCLASS assessment system, citing subjectivity of the TRC writing rubric as one issue. They pointed out that administration and scoring using the rubric can vary from teacher to teacher, so that results may not be comparable between, or even within districts.
In addition, some had concerns about the mCLASS Reading 3D use of nonsense words to assess a component of reading and expressed a belief that the use of nonsense words is not valid and is inconsistent with good reading instruction, particularly for ELL students or struggling readers.

Writing component of TRC. There were mixed reactions to the writing component of the TRC. Some focus group participants volunteered that the writing component is a significant strength of the TRC because they feel that writing about text and reading text are both important aspects of comprehension. Other principals and teachers saw the use of writing on the TRC assessment as a problem--that students are given inaccurate scores on reading if they have problems with writing but not with reading.

Use for benchmarking and progress monitoring.

Table 6: Use for Benchmarking and Progress Monitoring—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Use for Benchmarking and Progress Monitoring	Time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Administration		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Impact on instruction		✓		✓	✓

Time. Participants across all role types reported that teachers and students are spending too much time on benchmarking and progress monitoring. Teachers mentioned that the total time spent on reading assessment represents a significant portion of their available instructional time in reading, some of which could be better spent on instruction. Participants across all role types also reported difficulty with trying to get all the 3D assessments done within the required timeframe, for example trying to get some students progress monitored every 10 days. Across the focus groups there was a concern expressed that the combination of Reading 3D with other LEA- required or alternative assessments in 3rd grade was too much assessment for 3rd graders.

Administration. mCLASS Reading 3D benchmarking can be administered by the student's teacher of record or another person. Many participants were frustrated by the changing rules about whether or not the teacher of record must do the assessment. Participants disagreed about whether it was better for the teacher to conduct the assessment or not. Advantages mentioned of teachers assessing their own students included--the teacher knows the child better and some students will perform more accurately for an adult with whom they are comfortable; some students have speech difficulties and only their teacher may understand them; and the point of the assessment is for teachers to learn what their students' difficulties are to inform instruction. The disadvantage mentioned of teachers assessing their own students was that some measures are subjective and thus, can be unreliable if teachers are not be properly trained or want their students to do well or want to do well themselves since their teacher evaluation is now linked to their students' performance.

Teachers and principals discussed issues of the inflexibility of progress monitoring requirements. Some reported that students must be progress monitored so often that it interferes with instruction and that there is no flexibility when students are absent or if there have been holidays or snow days. Some teachers mentioned that they have to progress monitor within 10 days for their most at-risk students and sometimes they know these students have not had enough instruction to show growth. They suggested they need flexibility in when to progress monitor when they are certain a student has not had sufficient instruction to progress in the last 10 days.

*Impact on instruction***.** Many participants across all role types felt that the use of mCLASS Reading 3D has improved or can improve the ability of schools and teachers to differentiate reading instruction if it is used as a formative assessment. A reported strength of mCLASS Reading 3D was increased alignment of reading instruction and assessment across K-3 teachers. Teachers reported that they are using these data to plan and evaluate reading instruction and appreciate the very specific and detailed information that mCLASS Reading 3D offers. A few administrators expressed frustration that teachers have all this information but, because they are spending so much time on assessment, they do not have enough instructional time to implement interventions with students. Some teachers also stated that while the 3D assessment program provides good data, they are unable to use it as effectively as they would like because of the time required in completing the assessments.

Use for teacher evaluation (Standard 6).

Table 7: Use for Teacher Evaluation (Standard 6)—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Use for Teacher Evaluation (Standard 6)	Validity/accuracy	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Change in policy	✓	✓	✓		

Validity/accuracy. Repeatedly, across all role types, participants raised the issue of using mCLASS Reading 3D for teacher evaluation as a concern. They argued that using it this way introduces more problems with fidelity and pointed out that some teachers might assess their students as early as possible to increase the likelihood that students show maximum growth. Several administrators argued that this assessment was not created to evaluate teachers and that using 3D for this purpose was not appropriate. There were no focus groups that described support for the use of Reading 3D for teacher evaluation purposes.

There were multiple comments regarding the issue of who should administer the benchmark 3D assessments. If the purpose of 3D is to provide formative, diagnostic data for teachers and administrators, then participants felt teachers should conduct the assessment to learn what additional instruction each student needs. If the goal is to use 3D for teacher evaluation then they suggested an objective assessor should conduct the benchmarking.

Change in policy. Participants across several role types frequently mentioned that they were upset by the policy change that Reading 3D would be used to evaluate teacher effectiveness. They reported that they were told that would not be the case; that it was to be used for formative, diagnostic purposes only. Administrators described feeling as if they not only lost credibility with teachers when the policy changed but that they felt they had been misled. They reported promising teachers that this assessment would be formative in purpose and not used for teacher evaluation and that it was very stressful to go back to those teachers and explain that the policy had changed, particularly since many feel strongly that the policy change is inappropriate.

Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion

Focus group participants were asked about the 3rd grade portfolio, alternative assessments, Good Cause exemptions, and retention decision making aspects of RtA.

Portfolio.

Table 8: Portfolio—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Portfolio	Content quality	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Quantity of passages	✓	✓		✓	
	Alignment of passages with report card grades or EOG					
	Passage administration and mgmt.		✓		✓	
	Impact on instruction	✓	✓		✓	

Content quality. Participants across all role types raised the issue of whether some passages were above 3rd grade level. Participants from one district said they had determined the lexile scores for the passages and found that they ranged from 3rd to 9th grade level. Teachers, principals, and district RtA leads also had concerns about the content of some passages that they felt were not sufficiently interesting to students. They described some antiquated passages, passages that needed more vetting, changing answer keys, and content that might not be familiar to many of the students, especially those from homes with limited resources and/or English language learners.

Quantity of passages. Another concern raised by several role types had to do with the difficulty of administering 36 passages in the timeframe outlined (a reason why some schools or districts said they did not choose to use them). Some teachers also talked about the length of the passages, indicating they were told it would take students approximately 15 minutes to complete a passage. Yet, some passages were 5-7 pages long, such that struggling readers might take up to 30-45 minutes to complete them.

Alignment with report card grades or EOGs. A few administrators said they thought the portfolio passages helped their district get a better sense of what the state considers on grade level for students as far as the types of questions and the types of passages that students will be expected to read on the End-of-Grade test. They described the portfolio passages as being an eye-opening experience for some 3rd grade teachers and believed exposure to the passages had increased the rigor of reading instruction and expectations. Some focus group participants felt that mCLASS Reading 3D was not well-aligned with other 3rd grade Read to Achieve assessments. Some teachers also mentioned that they are working with old materials, such as books and question stems that may not align with the portfolio expectations.

Passage administration and management. Some district RtA leads discussed the cost of copying the portfolio passages. One participant reported that they budgeted $36,000 and quickly realized that the cost to copy passages for all students would be around $180,000. Because of this cost, they felt they could not offer portfolios to all 3rd grade students. Many concerns surfaced about offering opportunities for portfolio assessment equitably; that parents whose children were not offered the chance to complete the passages might be upset if their children were not promoted. In general, the percent of 3rd grade students taking the portfolio assessments seemed to vary by district, and some participants were concerned about this inconsistency.

Focus groups frequently mentioned challenges with managing the whole portfolio administration and record keeping processes—making copies, securing passages, distributing them to teachers for individual students,

tracking results. Some schools used an Assistant Principal and others used instructional facilitators or coaches to do much of this work on portfolio management.

Impact on instruction. Although some participants expressed the potential value of portfolio passages as an alternative to the EOG reading test and as a potential way to expose students to the expectations of the EOG, many focus groups expressed concerns about "lost instructional time" in 3rd grade due to the demands of the portfolios, at least as implemented in 2014.

Alternate assessments.

Table 9: Alternate Assessments—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Alternate Assessments	Need for multiple measures					
	Consistency					

Need for multiple measures. Participants seemed to agree with the idea that reading proficiency should not be measured with just one End-of-Grade test. They agreed with the need for multiple measures to inform a decision as important as retention. Many were relieved that students had several opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and avoid retention.

Consistency. Some superintendents, principals, and teachers were concerned that different districts were using different alternative assessments (some which they felt were inconsistent in terms of their rigor and some which they felt were not valid measures of proficiency in reading at the 3rd grade level).

Teacher and student reactions.

Table 10: Teacher and Student Reactions—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Teacher and Student Reactions	Increased stress for students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Undermining intrinsic motivation to read					
	Teacher departure		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Student departure		✓			
	Working conditions for 3rd grade teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Increased stress for students. Participants across all role types reported observing high levels of stress in 3rd grade students. They reported that even some students who are not at-risk for retention were expressing that they were stressed and anxious about the testing related to Read to Achieve. Many participants described the emotional toll on children with the high stakes tests. They were distressed by seeing some young children crying and vomiting due to testing pressures.

Undermining intrinsic motivation to read. Some participants expressed concern that the constant assessment and high stakes testing is undermining students' love of reading.

Teacher departure. Repeatedly, across four role types, focus groups mentioned cases of 3rd grade teachers leaving the profession or asking for transfers to other grades due to the stress of RtA.

Student departure. Some focus groups shared examples or fears of student departures from their school or district due to the stresses of RtA. Some had heard parents making comments about removing their children for the 3rd grade year and then re-enrolling them in the school in 4th grade.

Working conditions for 3rd grade teachers (increased stress). Several superintendents noted that there has been a piling on of negative conditions for teachers including the change in core curriculum, the requirement that administrators identify 25% of teachers worthy of a raise who will then lose their tenure if they take the raise, student achievement being tied to teacher evaluations, and then RtA. They argued that there is a cumulative effect of current stressors for teachers, particularly in 3rd grade.

Retention beliefs and decisions.

Table 11: Retention Beliefs and Decisions—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Retention Beliefs and Decisions	When to retain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Relationship between retention and dropping out	✓		✓		
	Retention decisions by those who know students best	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

When to retain. Participants across all role types believed that research supports retention earlier than 3rd grade. They explained that there are fewer negative social/emotional outcomes when retention takes place in K-2.

Relationship between retention and dropping out. Superintendents and principals cited research that suggests that retention predicts dropping out and that two retentions were highly correlated with dropping out. They were frustrated that this research seems to be have been ignored in the desire to "eliminate social promotion" in 3rd grade. With RtA, some principals said they would not retain students in kindergarten or 1st grade because they fear the outcome of two retentions, even though they think those earlier retentions would lead to better academic outcomes. Moreover, administrators argued that when a student shows a great deal of growth during an academic year but does not make the cutoff for proficiency, retention may not always be the best course of action for that particular student.

Retention decisions by those who know students best. Across all types of focus groups, concerns about the decision making articulated in the RtA approach to the "elimination of social promotion" were raised. Participants argued that teachers and principals are most qualified to decide if a child should be retained (when they do not qualify for Good Cause exemptions). They said that retention decisions should be made at the school level, as they have been in the past, with thoughtful deliberations by the student's teacher, school counselor/psychologist, and the principal as well as parents. District RtA leads, principals and teachers all felt promotion/retention decisions were never taken lightly, and factors other than reading proficiency must also be considered, such as performance in other subject areas, the student's health, and family situations outside of the school. Teachers in particular cited the need to examine individual student growth when making retention decisions. Teachers, principals and district RtA leads were frustrated with their lack of input under RtA into promotion/retention decisions in 3rd grade, given their experience as professionals in making decisions based on individual student situations. As retention decisions are made at the school level for all other grades but 3rd, respondents reported feeling a disconnect in being able to make retention decisions for some students but not others.

Good Cause exemptions.

Table 12: Good Cause Exemptions—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Good Cause Exemptions	Changes in policy	✓		✓		
	Parent responses		✓			
	EC students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	ELL students		✓			✓

Changes in policy. RtA identifies Good Cause exemptions for not retaining 3rd grade students. Superintendents and principals referenced a lack of clear guidance for specific populations, for example, English language learners, students with disabilities, and children with parents in different locations. Superintendents reported that they sometimes could not get answers to questions on this topic because the guidance was still evolving. Participants from various role types expressed frustration with the changes concerning whether children who were on Extend 2 were exempt. Another significant change referenced had to with what districts were told about whether a non-proficient reader would be retained if he or she did not attend summer school.

Parent responses. Some administrators had experiences with parents who were trying to use Good Cause exemptions to avoid summer camp or retention for their children. For example, several administrators reported parents who were hoping to get their children identified with a disability so they could become exempt through the Exceptional Children Good Cause exemption.

EC students. Participants across all role types expressed concerns for students who have an identified reading disability in terms of how their promotion/retention decisions are made. Specifically, there was concern about those who will not be exempt this year or next year when the exemption for Extend 2 is removed. They felt that it is inappropriate to continue to use high stakes 3rd grade reading proficiency assessments for students who have an identified disability. The issue was not whether students should have the opportunity to go to summer camp, but whether they should be retained if they have an IEP. There was also concern that RtA guidance on the elimination of social promotion is in conflict with IDEA, leading to the possibility of legal ramifications.

ELL students. Some focus groups expressed concerns about the appropriate treatment of students who are English Language learners (ELL) in the RtA requirements on the elimination of social promotion. They cited research and experience suggesting that students need five to seven years of English language instruction to be successful in school and fully learn English for an educational environment. They argued that ELL students who are non-proficient readers in 3rd grade and who do not meet the two-year Good Cause exemption should not automatically be retained.

Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students

Summer camp benefit/impact on students. Read to Achieve legislation originally required that students who do not show reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade must attend summer reading camp.

Table 13: Summer Camp Benefit/Impact on Students—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Summer Camp Benefit/Impact on Students	Provides support for struggling readers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Student self-esteem		✓			

Provides support for struggling readers. Many participants recognized that students from more disadvantaged economic situations often experience a loss in reading proficiency over the summer. They were in agreement that a summer program has the potential to mitigate this loss and to help struggling readers in general. Some educators said their districts had summer school programs in place and the RtA funding would be helpful in expanding their efforts. However, many groups felt that the summer camps they could provide within the RtA guidelines would not be as effective as other interventions at assisting struggling readers.

*Student self-e*steem. District RtA leads frequently referenced concerns that students and parents are viewing the 3rd grade reading camp as a punishment that will affect students' self-esteem. They are also concerned that if a parent decides not to allow a child to go, then the student will be penalized with retention.

Funding and logistics for planning summer camp.

Table 14: Funding and Logistics for Planning Summer Camp—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Supts	District RtA Lead	Principals	Grade 3 Teachers	K-2 Teachers
Funding and Logistics for Summer Camp	Funding allocations	✓	✓	✓		
	Transportation	✓	✓	✓		
	Staffing	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Attendance/design	✓	✓	✓		
	Materials					

Funding allocations. Administrators reported frustration that the summer camp might be underfunded in their districts. They estimated spending a high percentage of their summer reading camp allocation from the state on transportation, which may leave little for instruction and other expenses. District RtA leads also expressed frustration with the need to support summer camp with other funds. Some participants suggested that they be allowed more flexibility with how they use various funding streams to supplement RtA funds for the summer camp and with using RtA funds for summer reading camps that could also include K-2 students.

Transportation. In addition to the expense, administrators described time issues for rural districts in getting students to a central location within a reasonable amount of time or without having to start the transportation very early in the morning. That is, with half day programming, some students might have a very early bus pick-up time, spend an hour or more in transit, attend a few hours of summer camp, and then spend an hour or more returning home.

Staffing. Read to Achieve requires that staff for summer programs be highly qualified. Administrators reported having difficulty finding staff to fill positions, so the requirement for "highly qualified" staff might be a difficult one to meet. They understood, however, that the lack of experienced staff might negatively impact the quality of the instruction offered. Many participants described 3rd grade teachers as "burned out" from the school year and thus, not likely to commit to the summer teaching. Participants also noted that ideally the RtA reading camp should have low teacher-to-student ratios but, because of funding constraints, larger class sizes may be necessary.

Attendance/design (flexibility). Administrators requested more flexibility to create summer programs with RtA dollars that are most cost-effective given their district and school contexts and most likely to effect change in students' reading proficiency. Because there is no attendance policy, administrators noted a concern that some students may come only for one day or will complete their passages quickly and not return.

Materials. Some participants hoped there would be additional RtA funding and guidance on developing curriculum and instruction for the 3rd grade summer reading camp that would have the best chance at improving reading performance over this period of time. They felt if students struggled during the 3rd grade in reading, they needed instruction in the summer that went beyond what was typically provided during the school year.

Funding and logistics for 4th grade requirements.

Table 15: Funding and Logistics for 4th Grade Requirements—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes						
Theme	**Subtheme**	**Supts**	**District RtA Lead**	**Principals**	**Grade 3 Teachers**	**K-2 Teachers**
Funding and Logistics for 4th Grade Requirements	Implementation of "transition classes"	✓	✓	✓		
	Further guidance is needed					

Implementation of "transition classes" (design/logistics). Administrators raised various concerns about how the transition classes in 4th grade might work. For example, some felt that it would be very challenging for 4th grade teachers if they felt they had to teach to two grade levels of students with little previous training in working with struggling readers. They were also concerned that the 3rd grade students entering 4th grade with the retention label may have difficulty learning the 4th grade curriculum if they were also pulled out of regular instruction regularly for 3rd grade reading proficiency instruction. Some administrators also noted that parents of high achieving students may request that their children not be in these transitional classes.

Further guidance is needed. Administrators also reported a "wait and see" attitude, in that, at the time of the focus groups, they did not have a clear sense of what the guidance from the state would be on the approach to dealing with any non-proficient 3rd grade readers in the 4th grade. Because of the lack of clarity about what this component of RtA means, some principals and superintendents reported frustration in having to try to explain this policy to parents. They anticipated parent confusion about whether or not their child is in 3rd or 4th grade, and did not feel prepared to explain the policy to them.

Component 6: Notification to Parents and Guardians

Message to parents. Districts are required to inform parents about the Read to Achieve legislation and how it will affect their children.

Table 16: Message to Parents—Frequently Mentioned Subthemes						
Theme	**Subtheme**	**Supts**	**District RtA Lead**	**Principals**	**Grade 3 Teachers**	**K-2 Teachers**
Message to Parents	Approaches used				✓	
	Challenges		✓			
	Parent accountability					

Approaches used. Most administrators reported that they sent information home to parents and held informational meetings to advise parents about RtA. Participants also referenced requiring parents to come to the school for one-on-one conferences. Some superintendents and principals reported their school staff conducts home visits to families who did not respond to invitations to come to the school.

Challenges. District RtA leads emphasized that staff were frustrated with the mixed messages they had to share with parents based on changing assessment policies. For example, some parents were told their children were on grade level at the end of 2nd grade, only to be informed at the beginning of 3rd grade that their children were not on grade level. In addition, the Beginning of the Grade (BOG) cut scores were reported as having been changed mid-year, which meant school staff had to change what they told parents in terms of whether their children were on grade level. Participants commented on the difficulties of reaching some parents of struggling readers who have weak communication links with the school. Therefore, getting information to this population of parents can be difficult. Participants in general felt they are able to meet the

requirements of notifying parents, but they still find parents who seem to know nothing about RtA or about their child's likelihood of being retained.

Parent accountability. Some participants noted that the law has the potential to increase parent accountability because most parents take notice when schools talk about student retention.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FOCUS GROUPS

Recommendations for Roll out of Read to Achieve

- Given that legislation such as Read to Achieve, requiring significant statewide changes in educational practice, has an enormous impact on affected educators and students, legislators should consider gathering educator input, piloting and then revising components (such as portfolios, summer camps, etc.), and using longer timeframes for implementation to allow for the refinement of the proposed changes before they are mandated.
- Obtain systematic educator input in 2014-15 for Read to Achieve policy approaches and changes before rolling out guidance statewide (in order to avoid unintended negative consequences and garner educator buy-in).
- Consider how to provide additional staffing or other supports to help districts/schools meet the rigorous demands of RtA.
- Provide opportunities (in person or virtually) for educators to share successful strategies related to RtA implementation.

Recommendations for Component 1: Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement

- Work with districts across the state to provide professional development resources for K-5 teachers on effective reading instruction (for example, managing a 90 minute reading block) and how to intervene with struggling readers.

Recommendations for Component 3: Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Via mCLASS Reading 3D

- Continue to provide mCLASS 3D support through the NCDPI regional consultants to ensure improvement in the use of mCLASS.
- Provide more flexibility for educators to determine when students are progress monitored, so that struggling students are not tested when teachers know they will not do well and time is not taken away from needed instruction.
- Collect data statewide on how 3D is being implemented in classrooms (for example, who is administering, amount of time lost from instruction for progress monitoring and benchmarking, how data are used for instructional planning) to inform NCDPI decisions about any additional guidance or support needed.
- Obtain educator input on the pros and cons of using mCLASS Reading 3D data for teacher evaluation, given that educators understood it would not be used for this purpose and educators have concerns that the use of 3D data for Standard 6 could potentially invalidate its use for formative, diagnostic purposes.

Recommendations for Component 4: Elimination of Social Promotion

- Enlist regional consultants in exploring with districts ways to improve the management of the 3rd grade portfolio administration process.
- Consider the amount of stress that RtA and high stakes reading assessments have put on 3rd grade teachers and students and how it could be alleviated such that the experienced teachers do not request assignments to other grade levels or leave the profession.
- Consider how more reading intervention support could be provided in K-2 in order to preempt reading problems before 3rd grade.
- Give principals the flexibility to make promotion decisions in special cases when Good Cause exemptions do not apply, but the school team believes that promotion is the right decision given the student's circumstances.

Recommendations for Component 5: Successful Reading Development for Retained Students

- Examine 2014 summer camp implementation challenges and costs in comparison to budget allocations in order to determine state-level changes needed for 2015.
- Offer more flexibility to districts in deciding how to use summer reading camp funds (for example, using funding for K-3 students or for earlier grades).

PART III:

READ TO ACHIEVE

INTERVIEWS IN SIX DISTRICTS

INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) contracted with SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to collect data during spring 2014 regarding the statewide implementation of Read to Achieve (RtA). SERVE collected data intended to reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and included: online surveys, interviews in six districts, and focus groups held in all eight regions of the state. This section describes the results of interviews conducted in six districts. This report provides information about district contexts for implementing RtA and similarities and differences in experiences with RtA in a small sample of districts.

Methodology. We invited eight districts (one from each of the eight regions of the state) to participate in a set of onsite interviews conducted by SERVE staff. Six districts agreed to participate. In each district we conducted five, one-hour individual or group interviews, using similar interview protocols, with staff representing five role types—(1) superintendent or assistant superintendent, (2) district elementary supervisor/RtA lead, (3) elementary principal, (4) 3rd grade teachers, and (5) K-2 teacher leaders. The elementary school respondents (principal, 3rd grade teachers, K-2 teachers) were all from the same school in each district.

The six districts that agreed to participate represent different regions and contexts. Geographically, they are located in six different regions of the state. Three are small districts with approximately 4,000 to 7,000 students (5-7 elementary schools), two are mid-sized with around 13,000 students (9-12 schools), and the sixth district has roughly 25,000 students with over 20 elementary schools. Demographically, the districts range from 25% to 66% minority students and from 47% to 82% of students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch status. The percent of English Language Learner (ELL) students eligible to take the End of Grade (EOG) tests ranged from 1% to 20%. Finally, the percent of 3rd grade students who scored proficient or above in 3rd grade reading on the EOG test in 2013, ranged from 20% to 52%. These percentages are relevant, because they are what the districts were initially using at the beginning of the RtA implementation process as rough estimates of the number of students who might have to attend 3rd grade summer reading camp. Thus, for example, a district with only 20% of students who passed the 3rd grade reading test in 2013 was looking at a worst case scenario of 80% of their 3rd grade students needing to attend the 2014 summer reading camp.

Using the structure/organization of the interview protocol as a guide, two researchers, who conducted the interviews, summarized the interview responses from the five transcripts for each district in one document (i.e., a matrix of interview responses by role types). From this matrix of responses by role types for each district, the researchers created six district summaries. The summaries described what was learned from the interviews about each district's prior work in improving early literacy, their articulation of positive and negative impacts of RtA, their identification of implementation issues relating to the specific components of RtA, and their recommendations for improving RtA. The summary below describes findings across the six districts.

SUMMARY OF DISTRICT SITE VISIT INTERVIEWS

Our summary of the six districts' experiences with RtA is presented in four sections below.

- **Perceptions of Read to Achieve (RtA).** This section summarizes the reactions of the six districts in terms of the kinds of positive and negative impacts of RtA reported.
- **District Contexts for RtA Implementation.** This section describes how districts differed in terms of contexts that seemed to influence how RtA was perceived.
- **District Support for Schools/Teachers in Implementing RtA.** This section describes how interviewees described the role of the central office.

- **Perceptions of Implementation Progress and Issues with RtA Components.** In this section, implementation challenges reported across districts are summarized.

Perceptions of Read to Achieve (RtA)

Interviewees were asked for their overall perception of Read to Achieve. The responses ranged from "mostly positive," to "some positive and some negative," to some who reported "mostly negative" experiences. The majority of those interviewed selected "some positive and some negative" as the most accurate descriptor for their experiences this year with RtA implementation. The following tables describe the kinds of positive and negative impacts the interviewees described.

Types of positive impacts mentioned	Sample quotes
Increased clarity about rigor and grade level expectations	*I think anytime that you can give teachers tools and devices to have better formative assessment and have a road map for those students that is positive.* – district administrator *It says, okay, we really need to work on reading skills – not that we weren't already thinking about it, but more so. We really need kids to be able to read by the end of 3rd grade.* – district administrator *We've been given some portfolio passages that can be used instructionally that should be of similar rigor and complexity as the EOG reading test so that helps us with instructional rigor.* – district superintendent *Big positive was exposure to what 3rd grade EOG passages look like through the portfolio, what each standard is asking a student to do, what those kinds of questions look like.* – 3rd grade teacher
Increased "intentionality" and differentiation of instruction by teachers	*If students are reading way below grade level, we are focusing on what level that child is working on so that we can either differentiate instruction through remediation or enrichment.* – 3rd grade teacher
Increased data use through K-3 reading diagnostic assessment (mCLASS Reading 3D)	*With RtA, the use of diagnostics has been a great positive.* – district administrator *I think the positive piece that people are getting out of it is that we do want children to be proficient readers when they leave 3rd grade. I think the premise behind the legislation is positive as is the diagnostic piece that teachers have with mCLASS data.* – school-based instructional facilitator. *I think we all agree that the assessment part is a strength, the consistency of using 3D across the state.* – K-2 teacher
Students can show grade level reading proficiency using alternative assessments (3rd grade)	*Portfolio passages are spread out over time allowing some students to be more successful versus one big test at the end of the year.* – 3rd grade teacher

Types of negative impacts mentioned	Sample quotes
Lack of time and funding to implement well	*Because of the requirements and timeframes and everything we've been asked to do all at one time, it has just put an enormous amount of stress and burden on teachers, students, and staff just trying to figure out what the requirements are and the best way to do it. None of it was given to us. And we lost the most important piece – the kids and how to move them forward.* – principal *A huge part of my time as an instructional coach has been spent on what can I take off of 3rd grade teachers so that the finite amount of time they have can be geared towards high quality instruction instead of trying to figure out how do I make this doable? But in the meantime I've lost coaching time that would have helped teachers with instructional strategies.* – school-based instructional coach *RtA was a good initiative, but the way it's been laid out was not good; the roll out was a nightmare. You're asking teachers to implement something before you know what's going on. RtA still isn't consistent now, it's still changing.* –K-2 teacher
Less able to consider individual situations (student's health, social and emotional needs, growth in reading) in making promotion decisions for 3rd graders	*And a child who has lots of family issues at home, retaining them may be more detrimental to their wellbeing than promoting them and giving them more interventions and more help with trying to read in the 4th grade.*– district administrator *When it's time, we sit down, our principal, our school counselor and psychologist, teachers and anybody who touches the child; it's a joint decision based on a lot of information (about promoting). The student's house may have burned down this year or all those other things outside of school that affect how the child performed (they missed such and such amount of days or they need another year to try). If I were a parent I would want to know that those conversations were had and that the school team decided; it just wasn't one person's decision with one piece of data. So I would hate that team decision making about a child to be taken from 3rd grade with RtA.* – K-2 teacher
Too much class/instructional time spent on assessment	*I don't think that we're going to become faster at doing it (3D). And the whole problem is the amount of time that it's taking to administer these tests and the benchmarking all through the year.* – principal *We spend a lot of time assessing and very little time teaching, especially if you have a large class of students that are at risk, or struggling readers.* – K-2 teacher *The amount of assessment, we look at EOG, retest, 36 portfolio*

Types of negative impacts mentioned	Sample quotes
	passages for one student in one school year, that's a lot for a child who's in 3rd grade. They need to come see what it really feels like to be in a 3rd grade classroom where children have great reading needs and you're asking the teacher to work with a group of kids at a reading table but assess other kids on an assessment that determines whether or not they may be proficient in 3rd grade. And the teacher is expected to teach this group and monitor that group while others are doing other work. I think it's a lot for the instructional resources we're given. – district administrator *We need more instructional time. I don't need as much time assessing them to tell me that they aren't where I need them to be. So finding the right balance is going to be crucial for us, and I just feel like when these things come down they don't understand the impact it has in a school and they certainly don't understand the impact on a school that has as many students in need as we do.* – principal
Students feel stressed about reading	*We don't want reading to be seen as a threat to students, like 'You better pass this reading test or you're going to be retained,' or that students' self-esteem goes down because of this movement. We want to do things to encourage children to read.* – district administrator
3rd grade teacher attrition	*In the past no one wanted to teach 5th grade because of the science tests. A long time ago no one wanted to teach 4th grade when we had the writing test. Now no one wants to teach 3rd grade. I'm just waiting for my 3rd grade teachers to say, "Can I move?*"– principal *3rd grade teachers are so deflated that they're considering leaving education completely, and I feel we have at least one at my school who will.* – school-based instructional coach *We're just releasing the high quality teachers and the teachers who don't care are the ones who are staying.* – school-based instructional coach

The theme emerging most consistently across the interviews conducted in the six districts was that the intent of the legislation (to improve early reading outcomes) was worthwhile but that, overall, the way RtA was designed and rolled out (so quickly with so little piloting or planning of components and so little input from the field) was very frustrating.

Component 3 (Facilitating early grade reading through formative diagnostic assessment in the form of mCLASS Reading 3D) was the exception to the sentiment relating to the rushed implementation of RtA. Most of those interviewed felt this component of RtA had been sufficiently piloted in districts across the state over multiple years, resulting in a level of readiness for the RtA requirement for teachers to use mCLASS Reading 3D. NCDPI also, according to the interviewees, provided well-regarded teacher training support through the K-3 Early Literacy Division regional consultants during this year of full statewide implementation of 3D.

In contrast, the 3rd grade RtA requirements (alternative assessments, portfolio passages, summer reading camp, Good Cause exemption policy) were perceived fairly negatively in terms of how they were introduced and rolled out with no piloting process, minimal educator input/feedback, and tight and very challenging timeframes.

Most district staff interviewed reported low morale among many teachers affected by RtA, particularly 3rd grade teachers; a feeling that educators' input and knowledge about solutions to problems are not valued; and that legislators may not be aware of the demands on teachers in today's classrooms. Respondents suggested that better systems for designing, piloting, and implementing statewide initiatives would lead to fewer frustrations, unintended negative consequences, and more buy-in from educators for the initiatives.

District Context for RtA Implementation

District interviewees reported that they agreed with the intent of the legislation (i.e., that a statewide focus on improving early literacy was warranted and helpful). However, there were some differences between the districts in how they experienced RtA requirements, given their particular district context. Below we identify four types of district contexts/reactions to RtA.

- RtA aligned with and enhanced established district-wide literacy improvement efforts.
- RtA helped to "jump start" revisions to district-wide literacy improvement plans or strategies.
- RtA conflicts with some district initiatives or strategies.
- RtA presents a significant time and resource challenge.

Because our sample was small (six districts), the four categories of district contexts/reactions to RtA are not intended to portray an exhaustive typology of all possible contexts/reactions. There may be other types of reactions not represented here that would surface in a larger sample of districts. Still, it is important to note that, even in this small sample, district experiences with RtA seemed to reflect differences in contexts.

***RtA aligned with and enhanced established district-wide literacy improvement efforts*.** Two districts that described a mostly positive reaction to RtA were those in which the timing of RtA was such they could use RtA to enhance significant district-wide literacy improvement efforts that had already been underway for the past several years.

District One described RtA as coming at a time when their efforts over the last several years on various district-wide strategies to improve early literacy were already resulting in achievement gains. The past work included district development of a framework for a 90 minute literacy block which was used in all elementary schools; the selection and use of a district-wide basal program; the piloting of mCLASS Reading 3D in most schools prior to RtA; the hiring of an instructional facilitator in each elementary school to work with teachers on the effective use of the 90 minute literacy block; and the addition of a differentiated literacy intervention block in the day's schedule for all students. Because the district leaders had begun to see results from their past three years of work in improving literacy, they reported that they sent a positive, "RtA will only help us" message, to their principals, school-based instructional facilitators, and teachers.

In *District Two*, RtA provided an incentive to revisit their pre-existing district literacy plan and make revisions. District leaders felt that they were already very focused on literacy improvement as a district prior to RtA, and that the legislation enhanced, rather than detracted, from their explicit focus on improving literacy outcomes. The district had participated in an mCLASS Reading 3D pilot in previous years; so the formative, diagnostic reading assessment was familiar to teachers. Also, in their past efforts to improve reading achievement, the district had initiated school-based literacy teams with a focus on implementing 90 minute reading blocks. Therefore, they had school-based teams in place at the time of RtA. RtA was also perceived to align closely with their past work on helping teachers differentiate instruction in reading.

RtA helped to "jump start" revisions to district-wide literacy improvement plans or strategies. Two districts reported RtA coming at a time in which there had been some past focus on district-wide literacy improvement but that RtA provided an opportunity to refocus on and strengthen past efforts.

For *District Three*, RtA was an opportunity to build its central office staffing capacity to provide more leadership in and support for literacy improvement to the elementary schools (e.g., by adding a district literacy coach to work with all elementary schools). At the same time, there had been enough experience in the past with literacy improvement efforts focused primarily on classroom-level changes that the superintendent understood the complex and long-term nature of improving the effectiveness of reading instructional practices. Realizing the challenges of improving reading achievement through a focus on instructional improvements alone, the district leaders hoped to leverage RtA to start new conversations in the community about the urgency for new community resources to improve kindergarten readiness. That is, RtA was described as a chance to focus the whole community on providing increased pre-k literacy support to families needing it. The strategy of using RtA to galvanize a community focus on the pre-kindergarten years (through discussions with the mayor and others) was based on the assumption that if students who are behind in their readiness for kindergarten do not get help earlier in their development, it will be difficult for schools to remediate these reading deficits by 3rd grade.

District Four, prior to RtA, invested in several literacy interventions with a focus on balanced literacy. After beginning with a literacy plan in the elementary levels, the district revised and extended the literacy improvement planning into high school. The district leaders perceived RtA as an opportunity to review their pre-existing district literacy improvement plan and consider how to use additional staff to support struggling readers. Although RtA was considered to have had a positive influence on their literacy improvement planning, they were concerned about specific components of RtA. For example, they expressed concerns about promotion decisions in 3rd grade being taken out of their hands and the use of mCLASS Reading 3D for teacher evaluation purposes (Standard 6) rather than using it just for formative, diagnostic purposes as originally intended in the state.

RtA conflicts with some district initiatives or strategies. *District Five* indicated that they have achieved good results in reading achievement by 5thgrade but, with their high number of English Language Learners, it was difficult to help these students achieve reading proficiency by 3rd grade. They reported having significantly invested in district-wide efforts over several years to provide students support in order to improve the graduation rate. The district respondents were concerned that mandating or encouraging retention as an approach to improving 3rd grade reading proficiency could undermine their past efforts at improving the graduation rate, given the link between retention and dropping out of school. Although their elementary schools are required to use a 90 minute guided reading instructional block, the district leaders felt that teachers were still learning how to effectively implement it, so adding the reading assessment requirements from RtA made teachers' implementation of the 90 minute block even more difficult. Finally, this district had implemented summer reading interventions for earlier grades in prior years. Due to the 3rd grade summer reading camp requirement, they had to eliminate their pre-existing summer interventions at earlier grades to have sufficient funds for implementing the RtA required 3rd grade reading camp.

RtA presents a significant time and resource challenge. In *District Six*, over 80% of students come from economically disadvantaged homes (qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch status). In addition, about that same percent of their students were not reading at a proficient level on the 3rd grade reading EOG in 2013. The district and school leaders expressed frustration with how RtA affected their teachers and students given this context. They reported that the pressure to read well or be retained was affecting many students and their teachers. They were also concerned with the amount of instructional time that was lost due to the high numbers of students who had to be continually assessed with 3D and portfolio passages. They feared that the increased reading assessment requirements from RtA would continue to result in lost instructional time for those students who need reading instructional time the most. They were concerned that this lost instructional time in reading due to increased assessment demands could result in a widening of the reading achievement gap in the future. High teacher turnover including teacher turnover at midyear was also mentioned as a factor that made implementation of complicated assessment processes more difficult. A principal interviewed feared that having a large number

of 3rd grade students with a retention label would increase the amount of resources needed to deal with these students in 4th grade. Having no new funding, the school might have to move teacher assistants from K-1 to 4th grade which would take critical resources away from providing early interventions to struggling readers.

District Support for Schools/Teachers in Implementing RtA

All districts reported an active central office role in trying to translate the requirements of RtA for schools. In most districts, the elementary supervisor and the superintendent or an assistant superintendent worked closely together in trying to make sense of the various RtA requirements. In terms of components, most district elementary supervisors were responsible for and had prior exposure to mCLASS Reading 3D which facilitated the implementation of this component. Several districts also mentioned having instructional facilitators, one assigned to each elementary school. Monthly meetings between central office staff and these school-based instructional staff facilitated regular conversations about RtA implementation. Some school principals reported a lack of good guidance on RtA but attributed that more to the constant changes from the state rather than a problem in communication with their central office staff.

One district described taking a particularly proactive role in the roll out of the 3rd grade components of RtA (e.g., portfolio passages) as described below. They also asked the school-based instructional facilitators to help with portfolio recordkeeping to reduce the paperwork burden on the 3rd grade teachers.

Making sense of portfolio passages:

> *"When the first box of passages came, we sat down with it and we looked at our pacing guide and then we looked at our standards, and we literally were locked in our office for 2-3 days with that first box. Then when all the boxes came, we aligned everything. We put everything together for the 3rd grade teachers. We looked at the difficulty of the passages and identified more difficult ones for instructional purposes. Teachers verbalized the appreciation they had for us (*at the district office*) for doing this leg work."*

Introducing portfolio passages to 3rd grade teachers:

> *"What we tried to do when we were talking to our principals was to say, 'What do your teachers need before we start rolling this out?' They said, 'We need one voice. We need everybody to hear the same thing.' [*So we used*] one of our professional development days to have all of our 3rd grade teachers, all the principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches* [in one building]. *We rolled this thing out to them, and they all heard it and could ask questions. I bought accordion files for them and put all their portfolios passages in it and handed them out that day. We let them put everything in this file, get organized, let them have questions after different parts of the day. Our superintendent came and spoke and it was such a positive meeting. We were worried because we knew our 3rd grade teachers were stressed about this (portfolios) in terms of how to do this, but we supported them and I think that made a difference. Otherwise, it would have been a box full of passages and they would have had to make sense of it at their schools. This way it gave the district a more systematic approach which we find effective.*
>
> *[*In the accordion file*], we organized the passages by standard so the teachers sat with their school's instructional coach at this meeting and they both understood that it wasn't going to be them pulling something haphazardly and running to the copy machine and running 30 copies and them trying to figure it out. Everything we did [*in presenting the portfolio to teachers*] was intentional. We selected the instructional passages they would use and looked at our pacing guide and aligned it with what had been taught. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense; you're not teaching that standard, why would you pull a passage on it and have teachers assess students on it if it hadn't been taught?"*

Implementation by teachers:

> *"We still get questions but they feel comfortable emailing me and so I think the roll out was really positive, with the principals setting the tone as well as our instructional coaches [*assigned to each school*]. Our teachers were real concerned about fitting the passages into their 90 minute instructional block so we met with the school-based instructional coaches and showed them how to model 'here is what I do in the whole group, here is what I do in a small group'. It sounds very structured but we thought teachers needed that. I think if we had just said to 3rd grade teachers 'ok, you go do it,' it would have been chaos. Has it been hard work? Absolutely, but one thing I've heard from many teachers when I've gone into their classrooms to talk about it, they said 'the complexity of text has made us have to work harder and be better teachers."*

Other district leaders interviewed mentioned the critical role of district staff in translating RtA and providing support in the schools. However, they also reported that these critical district staff members often did not have enough lead time for the planning needed.

> *"Negatives are the amount of time we're spending on Read to Achieve coupled with timing of everything else. For example, if we're going to have a six week summer camp, we'll end school on June 13 and camp will probably start on June 23, so between the last day of school and the first day of camp we have a lot of things that have to happen".*

> *"I'd say 30% of the Elementary Supervisor's time this year has gone to RtA, the planning, the training, and the meetings. It's too important for her not to play this role. She had to be the support for teachers and principals learned things from her. So that took a lot of her time. So I think [*the state] *should have done more things through pilots so we could get prepared. We could have talked about it in the district, prepared for it but it came down (*from the state*) with no transition time.*"

Our analysis suggests that, if examining districts across the state, one would find different levels of capacity to handle large mandated state initiatives. Central offices in small districts may have staff who wear many hats and thus, may have less time or expertise for dealing with big changes in a particular area like literacy. Some districts may be in a 'good place,' with a full complement of experienced staff who communicate and work well together and have extensive expertise that informs RtA implementation. The latter may have been in a better position to translate RtA directives in ways that minimized the frustrations of their schools and teachers. To the extent that some districts have very new superintendents or vacancies in key district leadership positions (e.g., several districts had only recently hired an elementary supervisor), the district may have experienced more challenges in translating comprehensive new legislation like RtA and supporting their schools in understanding it. Also, districts with the greatest numbers of students who were affected by RtA (below grade level in reading proficiency), may have been likely to experience greater frustration levels with RtA.

Several respondents raised concerns about the differences in ways particular state guidance was being interpreted even within schools in a district. These differences at the end of the first year of RtA implementation suggest that effective and consistent implementation of RtA will take several years and ongoing support from the state level.

Perceptions of Implementation Progress and Issues with RtA Components

In their interviews, the six districts surfaced similar implementation issues related to RtA components.

K-3 formative diagnostic assessment using mCLASS Reading 3D. All districts felt that this tool had filled a real need. They stated that positive impacts were realized, such as better and earlier identification of specific student reading skill deficits, better use of data within and across K-3 grade levels to have discussions about

students' instructional needs, and regularly "drilling down" to plan instruction around students' reading skill deficits. There are, however, some areas that they felt need state attention, such as adding flexibility to decisions about the frequency of the progress monitoring process, particularly for comprehension; more support for the administration of benchmark assessments, given the amount of time it takes teachers to administer; and consideration for how the use of 3D data for teacher evaluation (Standard 6) may impact the validity of scores. According to some interviewees, the exact nature of the implementation issues is perhaps less important than the need for ongoing dialogue between the field and NCDPI on how mCLASS Reading 3D could be continuously improved, considering that the successful and effective use of 3D by all teachers statewide will take time.

Assessment processes in 3rd grade (portfolio passages). In general, the districts commented positively on the idea of using multiple measures beyond the EOG to determine if students were reading at grade level at the end of 3rd grade. For example, some indicated that students who would be overwhelmed by the number of passages on the EOG could complete them if spread throughout the year as portfolio passages related to standards taught. The portfolio passages were viewed as having value in terms of deepening teacher and student understanding of expectations and standards. However, issues such as the quality of some passages, the paperwork and management issues that took extensive teacher time, and the timeframe (starting so late in the year) significantly hampered their effective use in 2014. For the portfolios to work as intended, respondents suggested ongoing discussions between the field (those implementing) and NCDPI on how to improve the portfolio passage approach, particularly relating to the management issues resulting in lost instructional time by teachers and the need for instructional coaches or school administrators to spend significant time in managing the processes (securing, copying, recording results).

Retention decision-making process in 3rd grade. A consistent theme across the principal interviews in particular was concern about the lack of discretion for schools/principals in making individual student retention decisions under RtA. Principals indicated that not all possible individual student situations that arise could be fully anticipated or covered by Good Cause exemptions. They described various examples of students who faced an unusual set of factors (health, home, social/emotional) that would not be covered by any Good Cause exemption. They described a very thorough process for decision making about the retention of individual students in their schools. They hoped that the legislation could be changed to allow principals some discretion in promotion/retention decisions for the truly unique individual situations that arise each year. They felt that such discretion would demonstrate respect for the thoughtful processes that schools have used in the past for gathering input and thoroughly considering each student's academic, social, and emotional needs in making promotion decisions.

Most district staff interviewed commented on the conflict between retention research as they understand it (indicating a connection between retention and dropping out) and the RtA focus on retention in 3rd grade as a primary strategy for improving reading.

Summer reading camp after 3rd grade. A common theme expressed by the interviewees was that summer reading loss for high poverty students is a real issue they face and that the need for interventions to support continued reading development during the summer for these students is a critical need. Therefore, state funding in this area was appreciated. However, there were questions raised as to whether the summer after 3rd grade was the most effective time for a summer intervention (compared to earlier grades like 1st grade).

Other implementation issues reported had to do with the desire for flexibility for summer camp design (e.g., duration); how to accommodate a potential large number of students identified due to the change to state tests in 2013; whether the teacher/student ratio could be small enough to really make a difference with students in a few weeks' time; and whether the transportation, staffing, and other logistical issues could be resolved in the short amount of planning time available.

Successful reading development for students in 4th grade with a retention label. Respondents had many questions about how the 4th grade aspect of RtA could be implemented and whether the resources would be available for their schools to do the level of intervention needed for those students with the non-proficient reading label. One school, for example, mentioned potentially having to pull K-1 teacher assistants to work with

the 4th grade's potentially high number of non-proficient readers. One district had already made it clear to 4th grade teachers that they would be teaching the 4th grade curriculum in classes with students with the 3rd grade non-proficient reading label. Other districts were not yet clear how they would meld the needs of non-proficient readers with the 4th grade curriculum. Some had concerns that the 4th grade curriculum would be watered down if there were too many non-proficient readers needing interventions in their 4th grade classes, thus, potentially hurting the students on or above grade level in 4th grade.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SIX DISTRICTS

The participants were asked at the end of the interview for the key recommendations they would like to offer to legislators and NCDPI for the improvement of RtA.

RtA statewide rollout. All the districts had recommendations about how to improve the rollout of a statewide initiative of this magnitude (the totality of RtA components). In particular, they suggested that the General Assembly should systematically include input and feedback from educators when drafting education-related legislation that will significantly impact educators. Moreover, it was recommended they visit schools and understand the varied classroom contexts and potential implementation challenges before finalizing legislation.

Rather than implementing statewide changes as large as those in RtA in such a short period of time, they suggesting using a longer timeframe and piloting components in a small number of districts, identifying implementation challenges, revising state guidance, and then requiring it statewide only after implementation issues have been resolved.

***Lost instructional time due to demands of reading assessments*.** All districts recommended that legislators and NCDPI take a good look at how much time K-3 teachers spend on assessment (particularly 3rd grade teachers who use both the mCLASS Reading 3D and the portfolio passages). In their words, too much assessment in the classroom equates to lost instructional time. Teachers were very concerned that the lost instructional time will hurt students who most need to make significant improvements in reading. In particular, they were concerned with the inflexibility of some aspects of mCLASS Reading 3D (e.g., progress monitoring every 10 days), the time needed to conduct benchmark assessments three times per year, and the time taken to administer the portfolio passages. They thought that better ways of helping teachers manage the portfolio process are needed (e.g., copying, record keeping). Some suggested that NCDPI could play a very useful role in encouraging problem-solving conversations between districts about successful strategies for handling various implementation issues, such as the intensive paperwork demands of the portfolio process.

Flexibility with 3rd grade promotion/retention decisions. As mentioned previously, principals were particularly concerned with the lack of discretion for making promotion/retention decisions in 3rd grade. They recommended that leeway be given for them to make at least some small number of 3rd grade promotion/retention decisions governed by their school team's understanding of the child's situation (academic, family, health, social, emotional) rather than simply whether the child fit any of the Good Cause exemptions. They felt that such flexibility allowed to principals for a small number of promotion exemptions that did not fit any Good Cause category could be documented and reported to the district and state.

State funding and support for intervening with struggling readers. The districts described contexts in which budgets were tight and RtA was creating some additional financial burdens, such as summer reading camps that in some cases were going to cost more than the state allocation. There was a common recommendation voiced that state funding and support for intervening with struggling readers should be provided with more flexibility to districts. More flexibility was desired in the design of summer reading camps and in the selection of the grade level of students served in the summer. They reported that many students from economically disadvantaged homes enter kindergarten behind in their literacy development and that schools are playing catch up from that point. They suggested more resources for outreach and support to parents to improve kindergarten readiness in reading.

Interviewees described other needs ranging from human resources (such as more staffing in 4th grade to account for the influx of 3rd grade students who were non-proficient readers), to informational resources (e.g., materials for use with 90 minute reading blocks and intervening with struggling readers), to more networking opportunities with other districts and schools on how they are dealing with the various implementation challenges of RtA components.

Overall, the message we heard from the six districts can be summarized as a three-pronged recommendation:

1. Stay the course on the Read to Achieve intent and focus as most interviewees felt that a statewide commitment to and support for improving reading proficiency in K-3 was important to maintain.

2. However, legislators should consider revising the RtA legislation with input from educators on key issues, such as allowing more school-level discretion in making 3rd grade promotion/retention decisions that honor unique student situations and increased flexibility in the use of state funding for summer reading camps.

3. NCDPI should continue to collaborate with educators to refine and improve the use of required assessments (mCLASS Reading 3D and 3rd grade portfolio passages) to minimize the unintended consequence of lost instructional time in reading. It is clear from all interviewed that there is a very real concern at the teacher level with the amount of assessment involved with mCLASS Reading 3D and 3rd grade portfolio passages, in addition to other alternative assessments. Most saw real value in mCLASS Reading 3D as a formative benchmarking and progress monitoring system. Additionally, some saw value in the portfolio passages if spread throughout the year in 3rd grade, but they have real concerns about lost instructional time.