
Five States' Efforts to Improve Adolescent Literacy

State Education Agency (SEA) officials and policymakers in the Northeast and Islands Region are acutely aware of the need to improve adolescent literacy and are at different points in developing and implementing a state approach to adolescent literacy improvement. This project aims to inform the efforts of state policymakers engaged in this work by describing the policy activities of five states that have focused considerable attention and resources on developing and implementing policy to support adolescent literacy improvement. Each state is presented as a case study providing contextual information and specifics about adolescent literacy programs, policies, and implementation factors. Commonalities across states, particularly challenges and lessons learned by state policymakers, are also included.

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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Document state policies and practices to promote implementation of effective adolescent literacy practices at the school and district level.
- Describe lessons learned by SEA officials engaged in policy development and implementation to support adolescent literacy to inform policymakers in earlier stages of this work.

METHODOLOGY

- Interview key staff in the case-study states' education departments.
- Review policy documents for case-study states collected during site visits and Internet searches.
- Produce case studies of five states thought by experts in the field to be ahead of the curve in addressing adolescent literacy.

AUDIENCE & APPLICATION

- State-level policymakers concerned with improving adolescent literacy achievement.

FINAL PRODUCTS

- Issues & Answers Report published by the Institute of Education Sciences, which may be found at: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2009067.pdf

What Are Fast-Response Projects?

Fast-Response Projects are short-term projects that respond to regional and national needs and priorities and provide research-based knowledge to inform policy and practice. They use methods such as research syntheses, mining of existing datasets, and descriptive studies.



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This report includes case studies of SEA policies to support adolescent literacy in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Each case study provides contextual information and specifics about adolescent literacy programs, policies, and implementation factors. The case study descriptions highlight activities and strategies each state emphasized as important to its policy development. Cross-state commonalities, challenges, and lessons learned are highlighted in order to further describe elements of policy development and implementation. The criteria for case selection are used as an organizing framework.

Criterion 1: The state has engaged key stakeholders in making adolescent literacy a priority.

- Four of the five states involved multiple stakeholders during the policy development process to encourage broad support of policies.
- One state focused on involving families in efforts to improve literacy across the state.

Criterion 2: The state has set rigorous state literacy goals and standards, and they have aligned other state policies to support them.

- Two states have taken specific action to ensure collaboration and communication across SEA departments to support alignment of standards, assessments, and curriculum.
- Five states are building on and extending the literacy efforts that target students in elementary grades to develop a literacy continuum that extends through high school.

Criterion 3: The state has aligned resources to support adolescent literacy goals.

- Five states use different means to determine how to allocate adequate time and identify skilled instructors in order to provide intervention instruction appropriately.
- Five of the states draw on multiple funding sources and discussed the importance of allocating money specifically for adolescent literacy.

Criterion 4: The state has built educators' capacity.

- States pursued two main strategies to build SEA capacity to support schools: (1) hiring new staff and developing individuals within the state department of education, and (2) cultivating partnerships with institutions of higher education and other external organizations.
- Five states have developed the role of school-based coaches for the purpose of building schools' instructional capacity; however, states have defined this role in different ways.

Criterion 5: The state has measured progress and used data to make decisions and provide oversight.

- Five states require the collection of screening, diagnostic, and assessment data to measure progress, inform placement, and support instruction, but their guidelines differ.
- Five states are engaged in oversight and monitoring activities for their adolescent literacy efforts, but all reported that this is an area where more capacity is needed.

Contact Information

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