



### Introduction

In the United States, two thirds of all students are not proficient readers and one third of students do not read at even a basic or rudimentary level (Hurford, 2020). In 2012, Colorado passed the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act) with the goal of ensuring that all students are reading on grade level by third grade (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], n.d.-b). Since the READ Act was passed, the percentage of students, kindergarten through third grade, who qualify with a significant reading deficiency (SDR) has fluctuated over the years, but overall there has not been a significant change (CDE, n.d.-d). In the first year of data, 2012-2013, 16.5% of Colorado students were identified SRD and in the most recent year, 2017-2018, 15.5% of students were SRD (CDE, n.d.-d).

### Rationale (literature review)

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) released a report of their findings about reading instruction and described the five components of reading, which are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (CDE, 2019a; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). Although many think of reading as a natural task, it is not natural or easy (Moats, 1999; Shaywitz, 2003). Also, being a good or even expert reader does not mean that one is equipped to teach others to read (Seidenberg, 2017). Teacher preparation is a key factor at the heart of student success (Tolman, 2005). Recent studies have demonstrated that teacher knowledge has the potential to impact student learning (Park et al., 2019; Puliatte & Ehri, 2018). The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) states that, after six years under the READ Act, schools have not seen a significant decrease in the number of students with SRDs and in response, the state board of education and the legislature created several updates to the READ Act through Senate Bill 19-199 (SB19-199) (CDE, n.d.-c). One of the main changes to the READ Act is additional requirements for teacher training based on the identified need for improving teacher knowledge of evidence based instructional practices in reading. (CDE, n.d.-c).

### Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate the Colorado READ Act and to answer the following questions:  
 1. How prepared are elementary teachers to teach reading?  
 2. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of the Colorado READ Act, including the changes to the READ Act?  
 Data for the study was gathered through a survey which included both multiple choice and open-ended questions. The participants in this study were teachers at the elementary level, including both classroom teachers and other (non-classroom) teachers, such as interventionists and special education teachers. Most teachers had between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience. Twenty-eight complete survey responses were submitted. The responses were examined to determine common themes.

### Data

- 72% of classroom teachers and 88% of other teachers feel "very confident" in their skills related to reading instruction.
- 60% of all teachers feel they need more training about reading instruction or that they did not feel prepared to teach reading when they began their career. One teacher stated, "I think colleges need to better prepare future teachers".
- When asked what instructional strategies they use to teach reading, 64% of teachers responded with what components or skills they include in their instruction, rather than the specific strategies they use. Only one teacher mentioned reading research.
- 67% of teachers feel that the READ Act has not been effective or that it needs to be changed in order to be more effective, and 21% felt that the READ Act was mostly just paperwork and "red tape". One teacher stated that, while the READ Act "is a good plan... not all underachieving readers benefit from it".
- 57% of teachers had a mostly negative opinion of the READ Act and 21% had a mostly positive opinion of the READ Act.
- 35% of teachers had a positive opinion of the changes to the READ Act and 57% stated that teachers do need more training. However, 32% felt that it was too much to ask of teachers and 21% felt that the changes were not enough to ensure student success.
- 32% of teachers felt that the READ Act has had a positive impact on both their teaching and students.
- 32% felt that the READ Act has had no impact on their teaching and 42% felt that it has had no impact on students.

### Results/Findings

Most teachers, both classroom and other, had ten or more trainings in teaching reading and literacy development. All classroom teachers had fewer than ten classes on learning disabilities, special education, and MTSS, and most of the other teachers had fewer than ten classes.  
 The data also revealed that classroom teachers had mixed feelings about the impact the READ Act has had on their teaching and students, but that most felt it had no impact or they did not know what impact it had had. The other teachers expressed that the READ Act has had a positive impact on their teaching and students.  
 The two main themes which emerged from the survey were:  
 1. Teachers feel confident about their skills related to reading instruction, but that they need more training about reading instruction.  
 2. Teachers feel that the READ Act has not been effective thus far, and that they are not optimistic about the changes to the READ Act.

### Discussion

Research indicates that teacher training and skill level are important for student success in reading (Park et al., 2019; Puliatte & Ehri, 2018). Teachers in this study feel that they are skilled in teaching reading, but the majority of teachers in this study did not mention research-based reading instruction in their responses, and their description of reading instruction did not always match with current reading research. The data on SRD rates indicates that Colorado students are not successfully learning to read (CDE, n.d.-d).  
 Teachers in Colorado feel that the READ Act has not been successful and call for changes including training for teachers. However, the teachers expressed concerns that the training requirement would not be sufficient to improve student success rates. The CDE also found that the READ Act has not successfully improved student reading scores (CDE, n.d.-d).

