

Harnessing the Power of a Pilot for Improving Early Literacy Practices Statewide

Project Overview

In 2019, the Georgia legislature passed Senate Bill 48 (Georgia Code §20-2-159.6 or S.B. 48), which contained a mandate for all districts across the state to screen students for characteristics of dyslexia beginning in 2024-25. To prepare for this mandate, it also directed the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to initiate a three-year pilot program involving rural, urban, and suburban school districts to screen students for reading difficulties and provide intervention. Seven districts in Georgia applied to participate and were accepted to participate in the pilot, with planning beginning in 2019-20.

The GaDOE hoped to use the Georgia Dyslexia Pilot to understand how to support districts in implementing the legislative requirements to screen for and intervene with early reading problems, including dyslexia, and ultimately to improve reading achievement across the state. The GaDOE requested that the Region 6 Comprehensive Center (RC6) assist with the pilot by providing informational resources (e.g., sample parent consent letters for screening, links to professional development resources for early literacy) and conducting annual analyses to describe implementation in the seven pilot districts.

RC6 Project Approach and Support Provided

The RC6 approach to providing the requested support to the GaDOE was to become a thought partner with the key clients at the

GaDOE responsible for managing the pilot with the seven participating districts. The RC6 established client check-in calls every two weeks to develop this thought partnership. The primary RC6 focus was to document the efforts of the pilot districts to screen and provide support to students over the three-year pilot so that other districts could learn from their experiences

YR 1: Pilot Planning Year	YR 2: Pilot Year 1	YR 3: Pilot Year 2	YR 4: Pilot Year 3
RC6 provided informational resources.	RC6 catalogued GaDOE resources related to MTSS and dyslexia and created a key resources document.	RC6 reviewed state and federal policies and guidance related to dyslexia pilot implementation and created a "policy map" summarizing areas of alignment and disconnect.	RC6 extended use of the policy map in website form to a task force charged with helping the GaDOE develop guidance for implementation of S.B. 48.
All years: RC6 conducted interviews with district pilot leaders and developed a written summary of implementation efforts.			

when the 2024 statewide screening mandate goes into effect. The RC6 also provided the GaDOE with requested informational resources (e.g., summaries of screening instruments, a document with key MTSS- and dyslexia-related resources found on GaDOE webpages, resource documents from the National Center on Improving Literacy). Beginning in the second year of the support provided to the GaDOE, the RC6 began helping the GaDOE review its current guidance and policies and their alignment to each other and to the needs of the Dyslexia Pilot. Some highlights over the three years to-date of this RC6 project are described below:

1. **Gathered information on how the seven pilot districts are implementing the Dyslexia Pilot requirements** through conducting interviews about their implementation efforts at the conclusion of each school year. The interview data formed the basis for annual RC6 reports and district profiles summarizing how districts were screening, intervening, and progress monitoring for students with reading problems, including dyslexia. (In addition to serving the GaDOE's needs, these RC6 Implementation Analysis reports are publicly available on the [RC6 Resources web page](#).)
2. **Bolstered the capacity of the GaDOE** by developing more than a dozen documents responsive to the evolving informational needs of the pilot districts and the GaDOE and by hosting peer-to-peer meetings for the key clients to exchange ideas with state leaders in Massachusetts and Ohio.
3. **Provided support to the GaDOE in ensuring policy coherence across the State Education Agency** (i.e., across divisions including English Language Arts, Special Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages, and Georgia's Tiered System of Supports). This work included cataloguing MTSS- and dyslexia-related resources available on GaDOE webpages, [summarizing key MTSS and dyslexia resources](#) for district and school use, and analyzing nearly a dozen different state and federal policies to examine areas of alignment and disconnect related to the Dyslexia Pilot.

In addition to the three components of the work described above, RC6 support also included presenting the findings of the annual summaries of pilot district implementation efforts to groups of stakeholders, such as the Georgia Board of Education, dyslexia advocates, and district and school leaders across the state. Key early partners in the RC6 project were staff from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) who had extensive experience in describing state dyslexia policies nationally. The National Center on Improving Literacy also supported the RC6 by providing a national perspective on other state dyslexia pilot efforts.

Project Outcomes

When SEAs are charged through legislation to undertake a new initiative, it is often without additional time or resources for planning and evaluation. The RC6 was able to step in and support the SEA in this area. When the legislation includes a pilot phase preceding a statewide mandate for all districts, it is more important than ever that the experiences of pilot participants are understood and translated into future guidance. The RC6 provided this critical support to the GaDOE. One GaDOE client said to RC6 staff in September 2022 that her past experience with external consultants had been that “they’re peripheral to the work, but you’re *integral* to the work.” As a result of the RC6’s assistance, the GaDOE better understands the experiences of the pilot districts (for example, that implementing the screening

requirement of the dyslexia legislation is more complex and challenging than it may seem at first glance). As the pilot enters its third and final year of implementation in 2022-23, the GaDOE is focused on ensuring that the message conveyed to districts is clear and that the legislation driving the pilot does not just result in compliance without significant improvements in early reading practices. The GaDOE is also making great efforts to communicate across its divisions and review the alignment of relevant state policies and guidance. The RC6's involvement here has been an asset to ongoing efforts. As the GaDOE client noted, "This will open up a discussion about policy coherence in a way where [GaDOE colleagues] won't get their feelings hurt... It will likely lead to a more beneficial and structured kind of discussion between divisions about how to align policies for districts."

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Lessons learned from the pilot, as articulated in the RC6's annual briefs describing pilot implementation, are also informing the GaDOE's overall plan for improving reading achievement, including revisions to elementary ELA standards.

In summary, the RC6 helped the GaDOE implement a legislatively required pilot, as well as harness the power of the pilot to look and plan ahead for statewide efforts aimed at improving early literacy. The RC6 has served as a thought partner to the GaDOE clients since the project began and brought "continued coherence and focus to the project," the clients report. The next step is for the RC6 to assist the GaDOE in taking the lessons learned from the pilot, including recognizing areas in which districts across the state are likely to need the most assistance in implementing the requirements of S.B. 48, and planning for how best to support these districts in 2024-25. In effect, the RC6 is supporting the GaDOE in ensuring that the pilot does exactly what pilots are intended to do—inform future statewide efforts.

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This story was prepared by the Region 6 Comprehensive Center under Award #S283B190055 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro. The contents in this document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. © 2023 SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro.