

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 included 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 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.

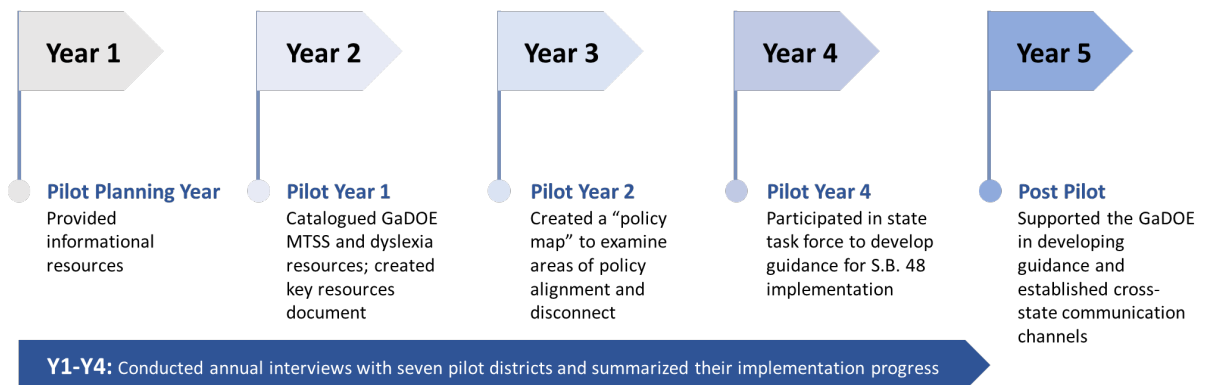
The GaDOE requested that the Region 6 Comprehensive Center (RC6) assist with the three-year pilot by providing informational resources (e.g., sample parent consent letters for screening, links to professional development resources for early literacy instruction) and conducting pilot district interviews resulting in annual summaries of implementation progress in the seven pilot districts. From 2020 to 2023, RC6 support enabled the GaDOE to learn from the pilot districts and prepare guidance for implementing the statewide screening mandate in 2024. In the fifth year of RC6 support (2023-24), the project scope expanded to include work that increased the capacity of the GaDOE to improve organizational coherence around state reading improvement efforts. Because of the interest in improving early literacy outcomes across the three RC6 states, the RC6 also established cross-communication channels between literacy leaders in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in 2023-24.

RC6 Project Approach and Support Provided

The RC6 approached the project with the goal of becoming a thought partner with the key clients at the GaDOE responsible for managing the pilot with the seven pilot districts. To facilitate regular communication, the RC6 established client check-in calls every two weeks and maintained these throughout the five years of the project. The RC6's primary focus during the three-year pilot was to document the efforts of the pilot districts to screen and provide support to students so that other districts could learn from their experiences 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 and 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. In Years 4 and 5, the client requested that the RC6 assist with the development of state guidance for districts and schools to support them in implementing the requirements of S.B. 48. The passage of the Georgia Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538) in 2023—which required universal literacy screening, reading intervention plans, high-quality instructional materials, and teacher training in the science of reading—also impacted the last two years of RC6 support. Highlights to date of the RC6's work with the GaDOE clients are described below.

1. **The RC6 gathered information on how the seven pilot districts implemented the Dyslexia Pilot requirements** by 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 conducting screening, intervention, and progress monitoring for students with reading problems, including dyslexia. (In addition to serving the GaDOE’s needs, these implementation analysis reports are publicly available on the [RC6 Resources webpage](#).)
2. **The RC6 bolstered the resource 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. **The RC6 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 state and federal policies to examine areas of alignment and disconnect related to the Dyslexia Pilot.
4. **The RC6 supported the GaDOE in developing and communicating guidance to districts and schools for the implementation of S.B. 48 and H.B. 538**, including a [screening process flowchart](#), the state’s [Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric](#), and state templates for the reading intervention plans and dyslexia instructional plans required by H.B. 538 and S.B. 48.
5. **The RC6 established cross-state communication channels between Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina about the states’ work to improve literacy for all students.** This group of state leaders is meeting every two months throughout Year 5 of the project to share information and ideas on topics, including early literacy coaching models, improving adolescent literacy, and identifying English learners with characteristics of dyslexia.



In addition to the work described above, RC6 support also included presenting the findings of the annual summaries of pilot district implementation efforts to key stakeholders, such as the Georgia Board of Education, dyslexia advocates, and district and school leaders.

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. 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 and the complexity of implementing reading and dyslexia screening requirements across schools and districts with very different contexts. These understandings continue to inform the guidance the GaDOE provides to schools and districts working to implement the requirements of S.B. 48 and the Georgia Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538). Following the conclusion of the pilot in 2022-23, the GaDOE focused on ensuring that the messages it conveyed to districts were clear and that the legislation driving the pilot did not just result in compliance without significant improvements in early reading practices. The RC6 has assisted by co-developing guidance documents that are already being used in schools across the state as of fall 2023. The client said of these resources in January 2024, “This is the kind of quality I want and don’t have time [to create].”

To further improve and extend the reach of state guidance, beginning in 2023-24, the GaDOE hosted monthly virtual Literacy and Dyslexia Technical Assistance Chats during which school and district staff can hear updates and ask questions related to how they should implement the requirements of both S.B. 48 and the Georgia Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538). The client engaged the RC6 as a thought partner in planning these chats and the RC6 attended the chats to help answer questions as needed. The RC6’s facilitation of collaborative meetings between literacy leaders in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina also informed the GaDOE’s efforts in Year 5. One client said, in January 2024, “I learned things [from the early literacy meeting] I was able to use in conversations just this week.”

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.”

– GaDOE client

The GaDOE is also making great efforts to communicate across its divisions and review the alignment of relevant state policies and guidance, and feels that 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 . . . It will likely lead to a more beneficial and structured kind of discussion between divisions about how to align policies for districts.” Lessons learned from the pilot, as articulated in the RC6’s annual briefs describing pilot implementation, have also informed the GaDOE’s overall plan for improving reading achievement, including recent 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 plan ahead for statewide efforts aimed at improving early literacy. As the final year of the project comes to a close, the RC6 continues 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.