



Tobacco Settlement
Revenue –
Investments in Youth

EDUCATION INITIATIVES

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILES

Colorado Read to Achieve Grant Program

SUMMARY

The Colorado Read to Achieve grant program awards funds to eligible elementary schools for research-based intensive reading programs. The program is designed specifically for kindergarten through third grade students whose literacy and reading comprehension skills are below the level established by the Colorado Basic Literacy Act. Funding for the Read to Achieve grant program is contingent upon appropriations made by the Colorado Legislature from tobacco settlement monies. Activities include reading academies for intensive reading instruction, after-school literacy programs, summer school clinics, tutoring, and extended-day reading programs. Since the program's inception in 2001, over 600 schools across the state of Colorado have received \$105 million in Read to Achieve grant funding, providing intensive reading programs to more than 95,000 students. Legislated funding; the requirement that all proposals are based on best practice principles; and a rigorous evaluation process that emphasizes accountability and makes subsequent funding contingent on each year's performance have all contributed to the success of this grant program.

For youth programs to be successful, policymakers, program leaders and intermediary organizations need access to flexible and sustainable sources of funding. State payments from the tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) currently fund a range of health, education, prevention, and other initiatives serving young people. This series of promising practice profiles focuses on the use of MSA funds to support educational programs and services that promote the positive development of youth.

BACKGROUND

Since FY 2000, Colorado has received approximately \$85 million per year from the tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. As a result of legislation passed in 2000, Colorado established the Tobacco Settlement Cash Fund as a repository for their tobacco settlement revenues. A portion of the funds are deposited into an endowment trust fund to ensure adequate funding for programs should tobacco settlement revenues decrease over time. In addition, seven new programs were established to improve the health of Coloradans, support tobacco education initiatives, and to improve literacy of Colorado's public school students, including the **Colorado Read to Achieve grant program**.

The Colorado Read to Achieve grant program is administered by the Read to Achieve Board and funded through annual appropriations from the tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. The grant program operates within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to fund research-based intensive reading programs for students whose literacy and reading comprehension skills are below levels established by the State Board of Education and who are in kindergarten through third grade. By statute, ninety-seven percent of the funds are distributed directly to the recipient schools, with no more than 3% of the money used for the administration.

Since the program's inception in 2001, \$105 million in grant funding was disbursed to over 600 schools. From FY 2001 through FY 2005, a state statute authorized the Read to Achieve grant program to receive 19 percent of the total amount of tobacco settlement funds received by the State each year, not to exceed \$19 million annually. Beginning in FY 2006, the statute reduced the amount to 5 percent of tobacco settlement funds, not to exceed \$8 million annually. However, at the end of the 2006 legislative session, a supplemental payment of \$11.5 million was authorized for FY 2006. Because this funding was allocated at the end of the fiscal year, funded schools were able to use these funds for FY 2007 activities.

The CDE has made a concerted effort to leverage funding and facilitate collaboration among Read to Achieve and other grant programs as well as other literacy focused supports. In 2006, among the 347 schools receiving Read to Achieve grant funding: 58% of schools also received Title I funds, 11% also received Colorado Reading First funding, 11% also received 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants and 1% also received Comprehensive School Reform grants.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Read to Achieve grant program is administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) under the direction of the Read to Achieve Board. The Read to Achieve Board consists of 11 members, no more than 6 of whom are from the same political party. Members represent education departments at the state and local levels, both houses of the General Assembly, and parents of children who may participate in the program. The Board collects and reviews grant applications and recommends grant funding after considering the number of kindergarten through third-grade pupils in the school that have below grade level reading skills; whether the proposed program is based on a research model that has proven successful in other schools; and the per-pupil cost of the program.

The Board is required to ensure, to the extent possible, that grants are awarded to schools in a variety of geographic areas across the state. The Board, in partnership with the CDE, is responsible for the following goals:

Goal 1: Provide additional intensive reading services to all second and third graders on Individual Literacy Plans (ILPs) so that they will be proficient readers by the end of third grade.

Goal 2: Collect and review applications for Read to Achieve Grants.

Goal 3: Recommend to the State Board of Education the schools that should receive grants as well as the duration and amount of each grant.

Goal 4: Determine continued funding of grants based on adequate progress during granting period, e.g., grantee meets the goals established in the grant application including demonstration that at least 65% of the students enrolled for the prior year met the reading standard.

Goal 5: Report to the Governor and to the General Assembly on the effectiveness of the program.

The grant program was originally designed for second- and third-grade students. However, in 2007 program legislation was amended to include kindergarten, first-, second and third-grade

students whose reading skills are below the level established by the Colorado Board of Education to comply with the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA).

By statute, the Read to Achieve grant program is a competitive funding process in which subsequent funding is contingent on each year's performance. Public elementary schools in Colorado may apply for Read to Achieve grants. Criteria used to determine eligibility include the percentage of students over time whose reading readiness and reading comprehension levels are less than proficient, and the distribution of funded sites based on geographic location and school size. Grant funds must be used to supplement, not supplant any moneys currently being spent on programs such as reading academies, after school literacy programs, summer school clinics, tutoring services, or extended-day reading programs, lasting up to three years. All Read to Achieve grantees are required to develop proposals based upon principles in the *Report of the National Reading Panel –Teaching Children to Read*, which includes the six dimensions of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, building background and vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation. After a comprehensive needs assessment, each grant has to show how the school plans to implement each of the six dimensions.

Grants are awarded in three-year cycles. Schools may apply for grants in increments of one to three years. In order to receive subsequent year funding, schools are required to meet the statutory requirement that 65% of the students involved in the intensive reading program for the instructional cycle would be at grade level or proficient on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) at the end of the program. This statutory requirement increased from 25% to 65% beginning in 2007. Schools not meeting the statutory requirement may receive funding with the Read to Achieve Board approval if they are able to demonstrate that their students are on pace to achieve grade-level proficiency on the state assessment in reading. All the requirements for receiving these dollars relate directly to the expectations of the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA).

Important supports are provided by the CDE for grantees, including automated evaluation tools, online supports such as web-based conference calls, and participation in professional development opportunities such as the Colorado Reading Summit Conference and grant writing sessions. CDE also provides technical assistance on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment training. DIBELS is the assessment used by grantees to track student success in the five areas of Reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

EVALUATION

All programs funded with tobacco settlement monies are monitored by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The Read to Achieve grant program contracts an external evaluator to avoid conflicts of interest and assure accountability. The grant program also conducts internal evaluations to continually refine program structures and activities. An annual report is submitted to the Department of Public Health and Environment that is used to make decisions about subsequent funding for schools and assess the overall effectiveness of the programs. The report describes the amount of tobacco settlement money received for the fiscal year, the program's goals, the number of persons served by the program, the services the program provided, and information on the effectiveness of the program in achieving its stated goals. The Department of Public Health and Environment then submits a combined annual report on all tobacco settlement funded programs to the General Assembly, the Attorney General, and the Governor.

As part of the evaluation process, schools are required to provide student-level and school-level data to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE.) Student-level data includes demographic information such as ethnicity, gender, whether students were English Language Learners and/or in need of Special Education services. Student data also includes an analysis of third-grade DIBELS and the third-grade reading test of the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). School-level data includes the number of students the school expected to serve, and the details

about the content and structure of the Read to Achieve services. Read to Achieve collaborates with Information Management Services within CDE to gather information from schools electronically.

Primary accomplishments since the grant program's inception in 2001 include:

- Over 600 Read to Achieve schools have received funding.
- More than 95,000 students have been served, with over 80% of students participating in the program for the full instructional cycle.
- Student performance data has shown sustained gains regarding the statutory expectation of performance goal. In 2007, 73% of schools met the statutory goal that 65% of the students involved in the intensive reading program for the instructional cycle would be at grade level or proficient on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) at the end of the program.
- Each year, the Read to Achieve grant program develops more powerful and efficient supports for grantees, including automated evaluation tools, online supports, improved response time in addressing ongoing questions, and participation in unique professional development opportunities such as the Colorado Reading Summit.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ✓ **Legislation secures the use of tobacco settlement funding** for the Read to Achieve grant program.
- ✓ Funded programs are required to be **based in best practice** in literacy.
- ✓ **A rigorous evaluation process emphasizes accountability** and makes subsequent funding contingent on each year's performance.
- ✓ **Evaluation outcomes are used to strengthen program legislation** and refine program structures and activities.
- ✓ The Reach to Achieve grant program is **aligned with state priorities for tobacco settlement funds**.
- ✓ MSA funds have allowed the CDE to **leverage funding** and **facilitate collaboration** among Read to Achieve and other grant programs as well as other literacy focused supports.

RESOURCES

Websites

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), <http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html>
- Colorado Basic Literacy Act Website (CBLA), <http://www.cde.state.co.us/action/CBLA/index.htm>
- Colorado Department of Education (CDE), http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_home.htm
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us>
- Colorado Read to Achieve Grant Program, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelgi/r2a.htm>
- Colorado Reading First Initiative, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomp/rf_home.htm

- Colorado Student Assessment Program, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/usa_index.html
- Comprehensive School Reform Program, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/compreform/index.html>
- The Finance Project's Tobacco Settlement Revenue - Investments in Youth Initiative, <http://www.financeproject.org/tobacco>
- Title I (Part A), <http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

Publications

- Pacey Economics Group, *Read to Achieve Grant Program Performance Audit, July 2006*, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/OSA/coauditor1.nsf/All/49299D33C9C8CF72872571D1006046FD/>
- *Read to Achieve Grant Program 2006 External Evaluation Report*, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelgi/R2A/Downloads/Resources/External_Eval_0506.pdf
- *Read to Achieve Grant Program 2006 Annual Report*, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelgi/R2A/Downloads/Resources/2006_AnnualReport.pdf
- *Read to Achieve Grant Program 2007 Annual Report*, http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelgi/R2A/Downloads/Resources/2007_AnnualReport.pdf
- *Report of the National Reading Panel –Teaching Children to Read*, <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm>
- The Finance Project, *Tobacco Settlement Agreement State Profile-Colorado* (2008). Available online at: <http://www.financeproject.org/tobacco/factsheet.cfm?abbr=CO>
- Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, Available online at: http://www.naag.org/backpages/naag/tobacco/msa/msa-pdf/1109185724_1032468605_cigmsa.pdf

CONTACT

John D. Love
 Communications Consultant
 Colorado Read To Achieve
 201 E. Colfax, Room 407
 Denver, CO 80203
 (303) 866-6982
love_j@cde.state.co.us

This Profile is part of a series of resources developed by The Finance Project intended to provide key state decision makers and opinion leaders with the information and tools necessary to consider how tobacco Master Settlement Agreement revenues can support initiatives that promote the positive development of youth, including the prevention of smoking and the adoption of healthy behaviors. The Finance Project has not conducted program evaluations of the initiatives profiled and does not endorse particular policies, practices, or programs. This Profile was developed under a grant from Underage Tobacco Prevention: Philip Morris USA, an Altria Company. For more information, visit www.financeproject.org/tobacco or email tobacco@financeproject.org.