



RESEARCH REPORT

Understanding Opportunities for K-3 Teachers' Professional Development in Literacy

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DISCLAIMER

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INTRODUCTION

Michigan's early literacy law, the Read by Grade Three Law, outlines specific requirements for supporting teachers, especially K-3 teachers, in improving their literacy practice through professional development focused on literacy, including one-on-one literacy coaching. Research supports the use of both one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development to improve teachers' literacy practice and enhance student outcomes. For example, evidence suggests that coaching effectively improves instruction and literacy-related student outcomes (Blachowicz et al., 2005; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Kraft et al., 2018; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Additionally, other studies suggest that other literacy professional development can positively affect reading achievement for elementary-aged children (Basma & Savage, 2018; Fisher et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2010; Porche et al., 2012).¹ Therefore, it is important to understand how literacy coaching and other forms of literacy professional development are provided to K-3 teachers in Michigan.

The objective of this report is to understand how Michigan's K-3 teachers receive literacy professional development (including one-on-one literacy coaching), examine teachers' satisfaction with these opportunities, and provide recommendations for improvement. The recommendations will address both areas of literacy instruction that require greater attention and structural barriers that hinder the overall delivery of literacy professional development to teachers.

We ask four research questions:

1. What types of literacy professional development, including one-on-one literacy coaching, do K-3 teachers in Michigan receive throughout the year, and does it vary over time?
2. How is literacy professional development differentiated based on teachers' experience, teachers' effectiveness, or the needs of students?
3. How is literacy professional development aligned with teachers' interests and needs?
4. Do teachers feel supported by literacy professional development, and what barriers do they report to its perceived effectiveness?

We find four main takeaways about Michigan teachers' experiences with literacy professional development and potential ways for local districts and organizations to improve:

- Teachers report receiving **progressively fewer hours of literacy professional development, including one-on-one literacy coaching**, between 2019-20 and 2021-22. However, they had **greater access to a wider range** of one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development activities in 2021-22 than in 2020-21.
- Teachers are receiving support on a **wide range of topics** from both literacy coaches and through other literacy professional development. But evidence suggests that there is **no clear system** to ensure that all teachers receive literacy professional development on all aspects of **evidence-based reading instruction**.
- Teachers express a desire for more support to help them **differentiate instruction, collaborate with families, and meet the needs of all of their students**, especially those with reading disabilities such as dyslexia.
- Teachers feel **literacy professional development opportunities improved their instruction**, but **time and human capital constraints** limit their ability to fully utilize provided literacy professional development.

DATA AND METHODS

To answer these questions, we combine two sources of data collected as a part of EPIC's ongoing evaluation of the Read by Grade Three Law. First, we use survey responses from over 18,000 educators collected in the 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 school years.² These responses provide a comprehensive overview of the support delivered to a wide range of K-3 teachers. Second, we collected monthly logs (i.e., brief online surveys about their literacy professional development experiences) from a sample of 28 teachers who received one-on-one literacy coaching from their Intermediate School District (ISD) Early Literacy Coach³ during 2020-21 or 2021-22. These teachers were selected to participate by their ISD Early Literacy Coaches, and they recorded the types and amounts of literacy professional development they received each month. We refer to the sample of teachers who completed the monthly logs as the "sub-sample"—all takeaways from this dataset are found in light green sub-sample insight boxes throughout the report.

Table 1 summarizes the sample of K-3 teachers who participated in the annual survey. The demographics of the survey respondents closely align with those of the overall teacher populations in each respective year, although respondents are slightly more likely to be White and female and

less likely to hold a Master's degree or be rated as highly effective, which suggests that our findings may not fully reflect the experiences of teachers of color or teachers with advanced credentials. The survey was completed by between 5,392 and 7,110 K-3 teachers each year, with response rates ranging from 21% to 28%. To ensure data comparability, some analyses were limited to one or two years of data, as certain survey questions vary slightly between years. While the sample is reasonably representative of the broader K-3 teacher population, we report weighted survey responses.⁴ In the first year of the survey, teachers had to select one grade level, but in following years, they could select multiple, which explains why these grade-level percentages are drastically different between years. EPIC developed this survey in collaboration with external stakeholders. For an in-depth description of the survey and its creation, see EPIC's [Year One](#) and [Year Two](#) reports of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law (Strunk et al., 2021, 2022).

TABLE 1. Survey and Sub-Sample Descriptive Statistics

	2019-20		2020-21			2021-22		
	Population	Survey	Population	Survey	Sub-Sample	Population	Survey	Sub-Sample
Number of Teachers	16,401	7,110	19,633	5,831	11	20,057	5,392	12
% White	93.3%	90.0%	90.0%	91.3%	90.9%	89.6%	94.4%	100.0%
% Female	95.3%	95.2%	94.7%	93.9%	100.0%	94.7%	93.6%	75.0%
% w/Masters or Higher	55.4%	51.5%	54.3%	51.6%	36.4%	52.7%	49.7%	58.3%
% w/Professional Cert.	77.2%	72.1%	73.6%	70.1%	81.8%	70.0%	65.9%	66.7%
Average Years Experience	12.5	12.0	12.4	11.1	16.8	12.0	10.6	8.04
% K Teachers	30.3%	29.1%	32.4%	36.9%	9.1%	33.6%	38.4%	50.0%
% Grade 1 Teachers	25.7%	23.1%	35.7%	38.8%	54.5%	36.8%	38.9%	33.3%
% Grade 2 Teachers	25.0%	22.8%	35.1%	39.5%	18.2%	36.4%	40.4%	8.3%
% Grade 3 Teachers	23.6%	24.9%	34.3%	42.1%	18.2%	36.1%	44.7%	8.3%
% Novice (Less than 4 Years Experience)	24.9%	27.7%	26.1%	31.7%	0.0%	26.7%	31.3%	33.3%
% Mid Career (4-15 Years Experience)	33.1%	32.7%	32.8%	32.5%	45.5%	34.1%	31.7%	50.0%
% Veteran (More than 15 Years Experience)	42.0%	39.6%	41.1%	35.8%	54.5%	39.2%	36.9%	16.7%
% Rated Ineffective/ Minimally	1.3%	1.3%	1.1%	1.0%	-	0.8%	1.1%	-
% Rated Effective	49.6%	53.8%	52.1%	54.0%	-	48.6%	50.8%	-
% Rated Highly Effective	49.2%	44.8%	46.8%	44.9%	-	50.6%	48.1%	-

The monthly log data from the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years comprise a smaller and less representative group of teachers. In 2020-21, 11 ISD-coached teachers completed the monthly professional development logs, and 12 ISD-coached teachers did so in 2021-22. Because of the small sample sizes, there are noticeable differences between the sub-sample and the overall teaching population in terms of the grades taught and the average number of years teachers have taught in their current district. However, there are similarities in terms of race, gender, and

education levels. Additionally, Table 1 shows that in 2020-21, no novice teachers and very few kindergarten teachers participated in the sub-sample. While caution is necessary in interpreting these findings, we include the data from this sub-sample of teachers to provide a more detailed look into the types of support provided to these teachers on a monthly basis, as compared to the survey respondents who responded to questions that asked them to reflect back on professional development they received across the year.

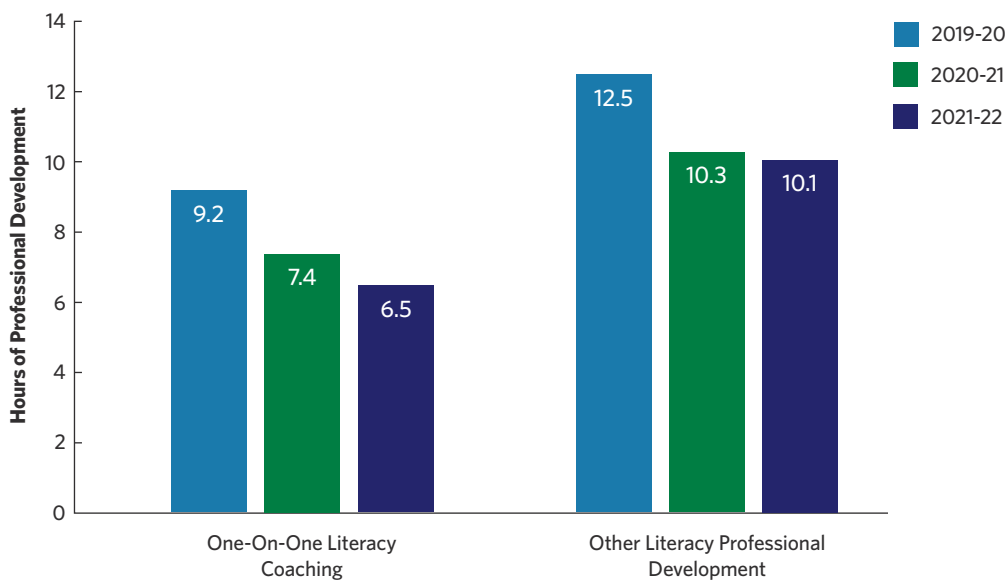
FINDINGS

Amount and Variety of Professional Development Received

Teachers Receive Less One-on-One Literacy Coaching Than Other Literacy Professional Development, With Decreasing Amounts Each Year

Surveyed K-3 teachers reported receiving between 6.5 and 9.2 hours of one-on-one literacy coaching on average each year. This is fewer hours than they receive of other literacy professional development (between 10.1 to 12.5 hours a year). The amount of both one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development declined each year of the study, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. This decline in support is concerning, as research shows the importance of sustained support for teachers over time (Amendum, 2014; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2010, 2011; Quick et al., 2009), but it is possible that this is related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic creating constraints on time and the ability to prioritize this type of work.

FIGURE 1. Average Hours of Literacy Professional Development Reported by K-3 Teachers, by Type and School Year



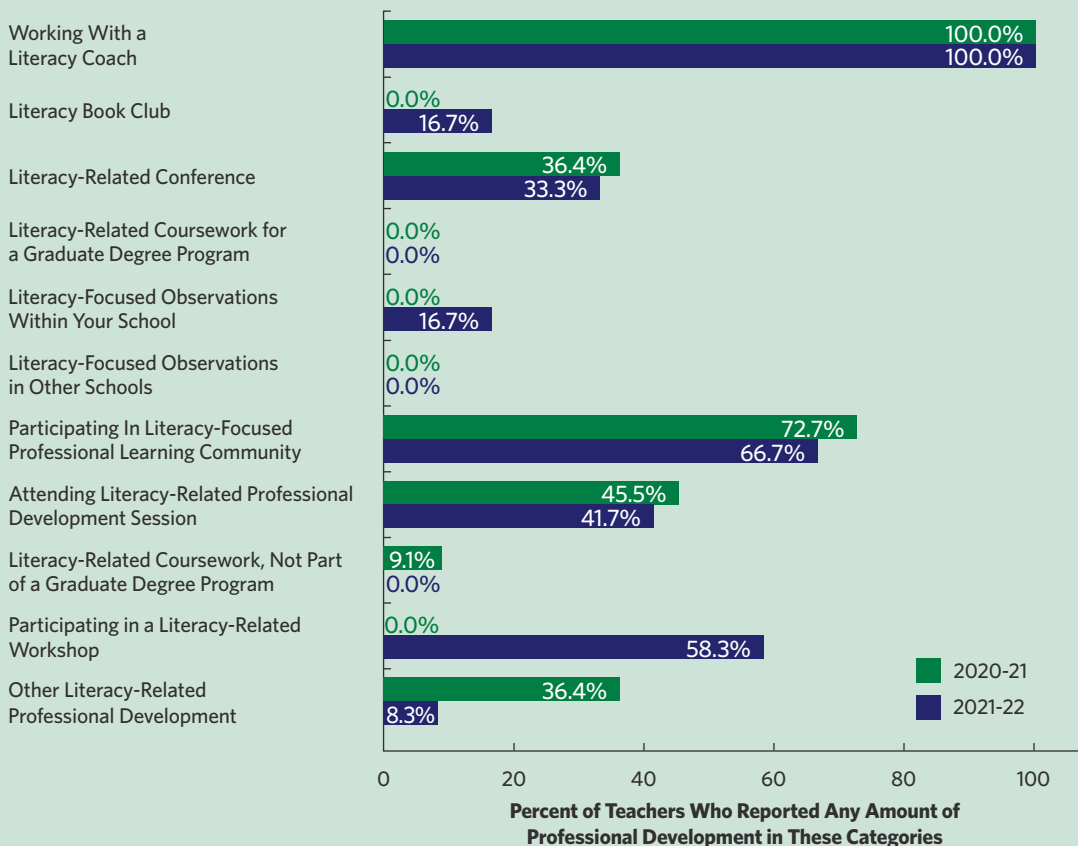
Note: Teachers were asked, “Since the beginning of the school year, approximately how many hours of one-on-one literacy coaching have you received? Please round to the nearest half-hour interval.” and “Since the beginning of the school year, approximately how many hours of other literacy professional development have you received? Please round to the nearest half-hour interval.” Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22.

SUB-SAMPLE INSIGHT: ISD-COACHED TEACHERS REPORTED ENGAGING IN A VARIETY OF COACHING ACTIVITIES IN 2021-22

The data from the monthly logs of teachers in the sub-sample provides additional insights into the variation of professional development and coaching received. Teachers benefit from a variety of professional development types, especially when combined with coaching (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Figure 2 shows that across both years of monthly log collection, teachers most frequently reported working with a literacy coach, participating in a literacy-focused professional learning community, and attending a literacy-related professional development session as their primary types of support.⁵

During 2021-22, however, teachers participated in a wider variety of professional development activities than they had in 2020-21, including literacy book clubs, literacy-focused observations within their schools, and literacy-related workshops. The increased variety of professional development types in 2021-22 might be associated with the transition back to more routine in-person instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic. This may have enabled schools and districts to provide more types of professional development activities as some of the pressures from remote and hybrid learning dissipated.

FIGURE 2. Percent of Sub-Sample Teachers That Reported Receiving Professional Development, by School Year and Support Type

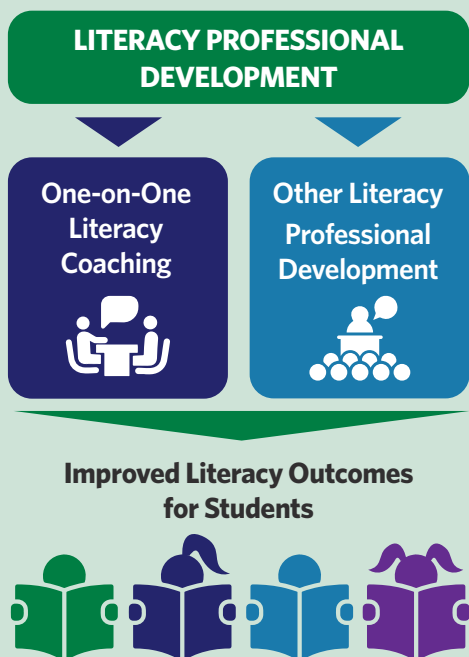


Note Teachers were asked, “In the last month, how much time (to the nearest 15 minutes) of literacy-related professional development have you received in the following formats?” The bars represent the percent of teachers who reported any amount of professional development in a particular format. For example, 100% of teachers reported working with a literacy coach in the 2020-21 school year. Source: Evaluating Michigan’s Early Literacy Coaching Initiative monthly teacher logs 2020-21 and 2021-22.

THE LAW IS SUPPORTED BY MULTIPLE FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Improved literacy instruction is supported by literacy professional development which includes providing highly qualified literacy coaches and other professional development.

There can be a multitude of providers of literacy professional development, including: ISD Early Literacy Coaches, school or district coaches, and literacy specialists. Given that the Law provides funding for ISD Early Literacy Coaches, we often separate out ISD Early Literacy Coaches from other coaching providers.



Topics of Literacy Professional Development

More Teachers Received Literacy Professional Development on All Topics in 2021-22 Than 2020-21

The Read by Grade Three Law stipulates that teachers must receive professional development focusing on several key topics related to providing high quality literacy instruction and assessing student progress. (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016) The mandated professional development areas include the five major reading components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), administering and analyzing instructional assessments, providing differentiated instruction and intensive intervention, using progress monitoring, and identifying and addressing reading deficiencies.

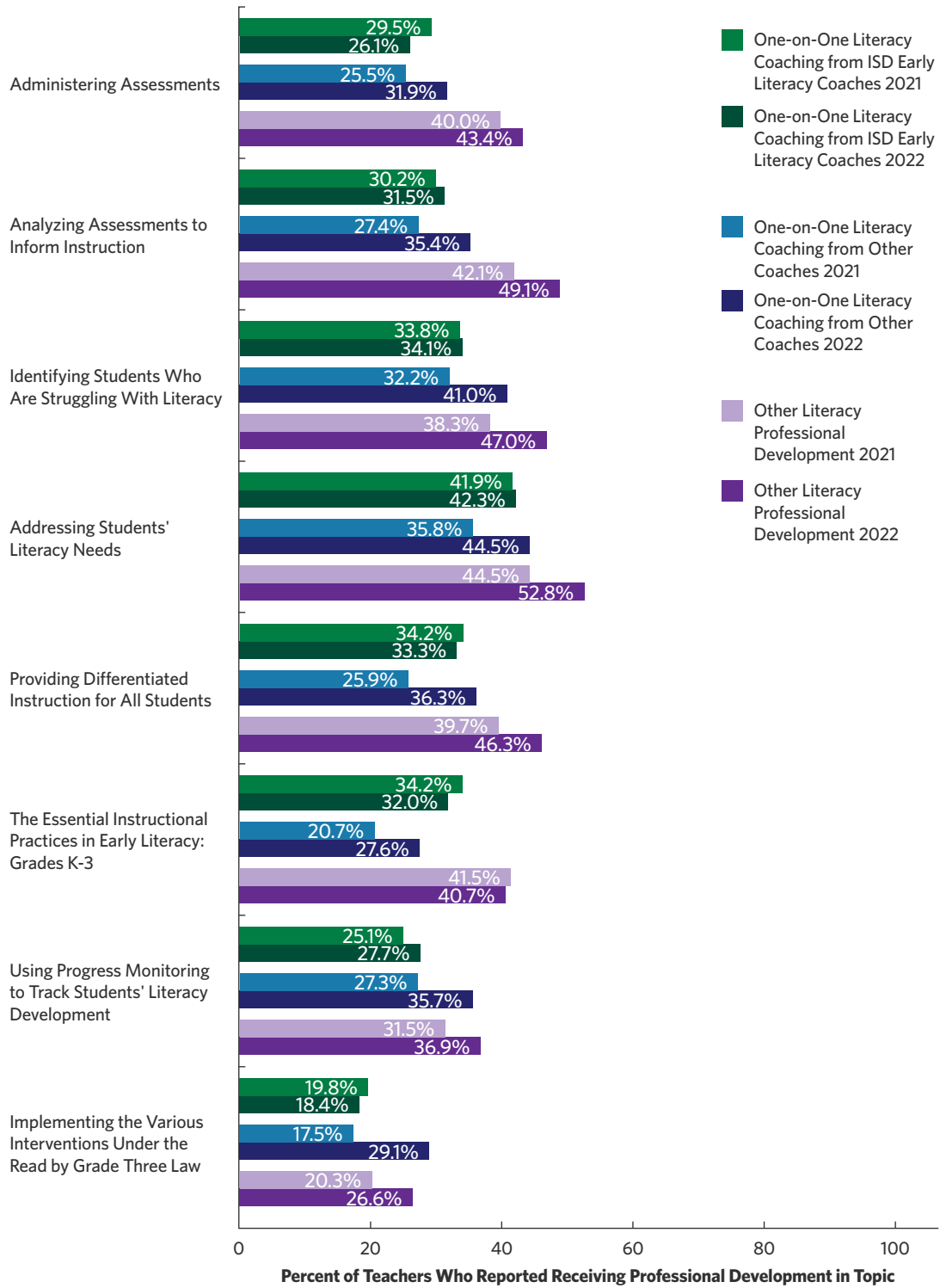
Figure 3 shows that the professional development provided to K-3 teachers largely covered a range of these topics. Notably, teachers reported receiving more literacy professional development on nearly all topics in the 2021-22 school year than in the 2020-21 school year. Exceptions to this were slight decreases in the provision of one-on-one literacy coaching from ISD Early Literacy Coaches on topics such as administering assessments, the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, and implementing the various interventions under the Read by Grade Three Law. Overall, this positive trend is encouraging as literacy continues to be a statewide priority, both through the Read by Grade Three Law and MDE’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals (MDE, 2020).

With that context, Figure 3 also shows that more than 35% of K-3 teachers consistently reported having received literacy professional development on addressing students’ literacy needs—this was the only topic to do so and is also the only topic on which more than 50% of teachers reported receiving in either year. At the other end of the spectrum, a slightly concerning trend that persisted was that less than 30% of K-3 teachers reported receiving professional development of any type on implementing the various interventions under the Read by Grade Three Law across both survey years.

Finally, Figure 3 highlights that K-3 teachers typically reported that they were more likely to have received literacy professional development on these topics through a means other than one-on-one literacy coaching. This is not surprising though as it could be easily explained by the nature of other literacy professional

development—which could be large-group professional development, professional learning communities, online courses, and conferences—and therefore often has a larger audience than one-on-one literacy coaching.

FIGURE 3. Percent of K-3 Teachers Reporting Receiving Literacy Professional Development, by Delivery Type and Year



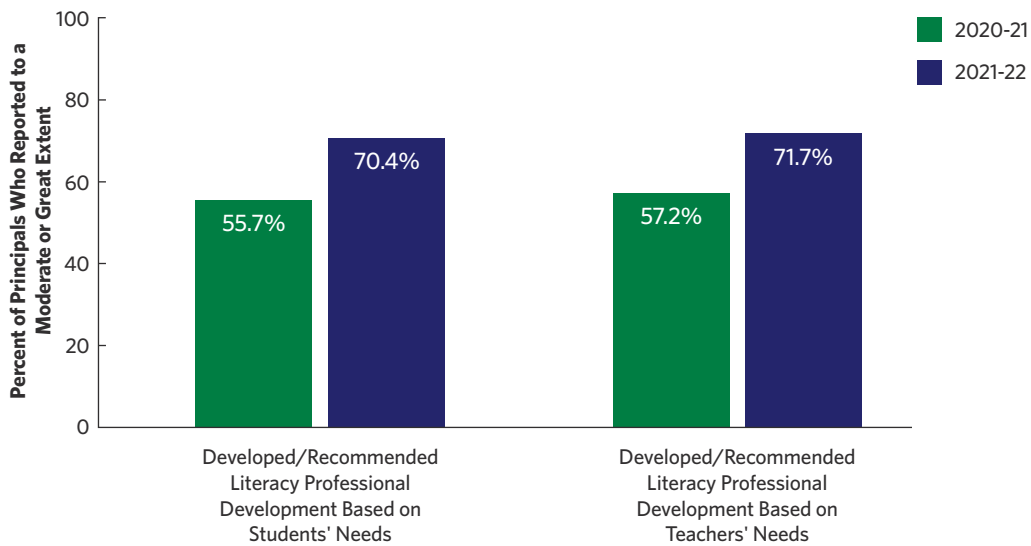
Note: Teachers were asked, "Please tell us on which of the following topics you have received literacy professional development this school year and in what format. Please mark all that apply. If you did not receive professional development in a given area, please leave that row blank." Each bar represents the percent of K-3 teachers who selected a specific area of focus through a specific method. Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2020-21 and 2021-22.

A Majority of Principals Reported Differentiating Literacy Professional Development

The Read by Grade Three Law specifically mandates that providers differentiate professional development for teachers based on both teacher and student progress monitoring data (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016). Tailoring literacy professional development to meet the needs of teachers across schools and districts is a best practice, as differentiated professional development better supports teachers in increasing student learning and engagement by providing more meaningful learning opportunities to students (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Stover et al., 2011). In the survey question, we suggested that students' needs be based on their performance on literacy assessments or portfolios of work and teachers' needs be based on data from their evaluations.

Accordingly, a vast majority of principals reported developing or recommending literacy professional development based on the needs of their teachers and students, with slightly more emphasis on the needs of teachers. Moreover, Figure 4 shows that the proportion of principals who reported differentiating literacy professional development based on either teachers' or students' needs increased from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

FIGURE 4. Principals' Approaches to Differentiating Literacy Professional Development Based on Student and Teacher Needs



Note: Principals were asked, "To what extent have you engaged in each of the following personnel activities as a result of the Read by Grade Three Law?" Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2020-21 and 2021-22.

There is Little Evidence That Literacy Professional Development Topics Differ by Teacher or District Characteristics

However, it is not clear from our data how principals choose to differentiate literacy professional development for their K-3 teachers. Because more or less experienced teachers and teachers that are rated differently by their districts' evaluation systems may require different levels of support, we examine areas of professional development mandated by the Law (as discussed earlier) that may vary across teacher experience levels and teacher evaluation rating levels. We also consider the demographic composition of students in teachers' districts, as these types of comparisons help us to understand differences in students' access to teachers with certain types of specialized training.

Broadly, we found no systematic evidence of variation in the topics covered in teachers' literacy professional development across teacher experience, effectiveness ratings, or the characteristics of the students in their districts. However, this lack of variation does not necessarily mean that differentiation is not occurring. As previously discussed, K-3 teachers across the state reported receiving literacy professional development on a wide range of topics aligned with the Law (see Figure 3). Furthermore, not all teachers receive literacy professional development on every topic; at most, 50% of K-3 teachers reported receiving some professional development on any given topic. With the available data, it is unclear whether this variation in the topics of literacy professional development received by teachers is a good or bad thing. Although the Law mandates that all teachers receive literacy professional development on these topics, the fact that not all teachers receive training on every topic might suggest that differentiation is, in fact, taking place.

One notable finding is that a larger proportion of teachers received other literacy professional development compared to one-on-one literacy coaching, and there was greater variation in the topics covered within other literacy professional development. This pattern is consistent across all literacy professional development topics shown in Figure 3. While we did not find significant variation across experience for most areas of literacy professional development, we found one example of this for literacy professional development focused on analyzing assessments to support instruction. In Figure 5, we highlight how literacy professional development in analyzing assessments to support instruction differs by professional development type and teacher experience, aggregated over the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. Figure 5 shows that teachers at various career stages were similarly likely to report having received one-on-one literacy coaching from any literacy coaching provider on analyzing assessments, but novice teachers were significantly more likely than their more experienced colleagues to receive other literacy professional development on this topic.

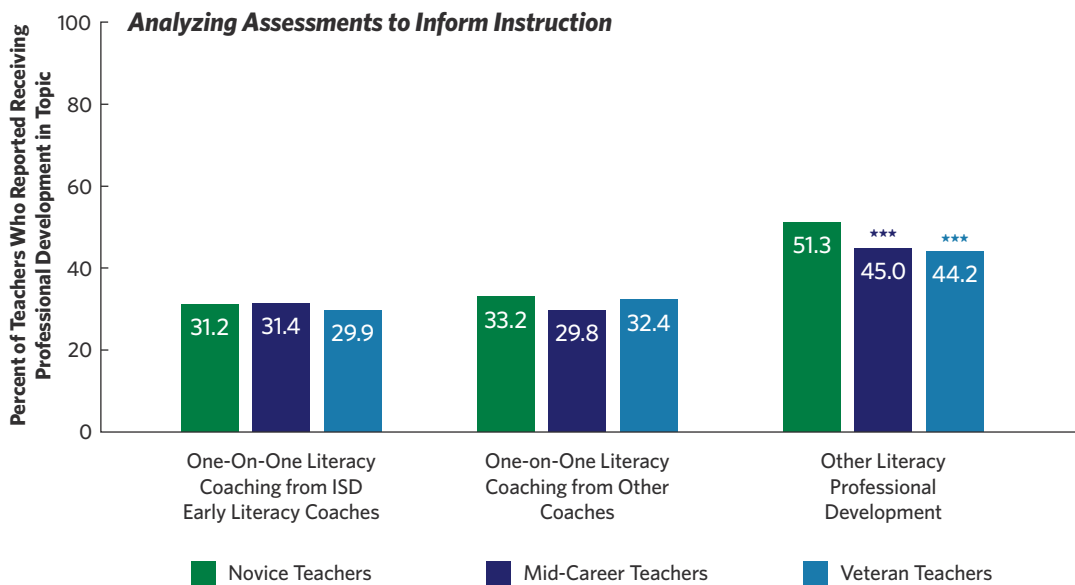
This finding suggests that other literacy professional development, including the specific programs or initiatives included in our study, remains the primary form of literacy professional development in Michigan. For teachers who did receive one-on-one literacy coaching, there was less systematic variation in the content covered. This could be attributed to the standardized training provided to ISD Early Literacy Coaches, ensuring greater consistency. District coaches, on the other hand, may prioritize specific topics based on their district's specific objectives and priorities. Given the high degree of local control in Michigan, professional development (like many policy and program decisions) are typically determined and offered at the local level. The content for this type of session will likely vary more than that of sessions designed for broader groups of teachers and districts.

SUB-SAMPLE INSIGHT: WITHIN-YEAR DIFFERENCES IN LITERACY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTENT

Data from the monthly teacher logs illustrate how one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development topics, particularly related to the Literacy Essentials, vary both across semesters and years. Some topics such as small group instruction and observation/assessment are consistently emphasized throughout the school year. Others, such as instruction in letter-sound relationships, receive more attention in the first half of the year.

Some variations between semesters and across years may be due to COVID-19 pandemic-related changes in instruction. For example, in the fall semester of 2020, teachers reported an emphasis on motivating students to read and conducting read-alouds.

FIGURE 5. Differences in Literacy Professional Development Topics by Teacher Experience



Note: Teachers were asked, "Please tell us on which of the following topics you have received literacy professional development this school year and in what format. Please mark all that apply. If you did not receive professional development in a given area, please leave that row blank." Stars represent significant differences between experience groups * <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001 . Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2020-21 and 2021-22.

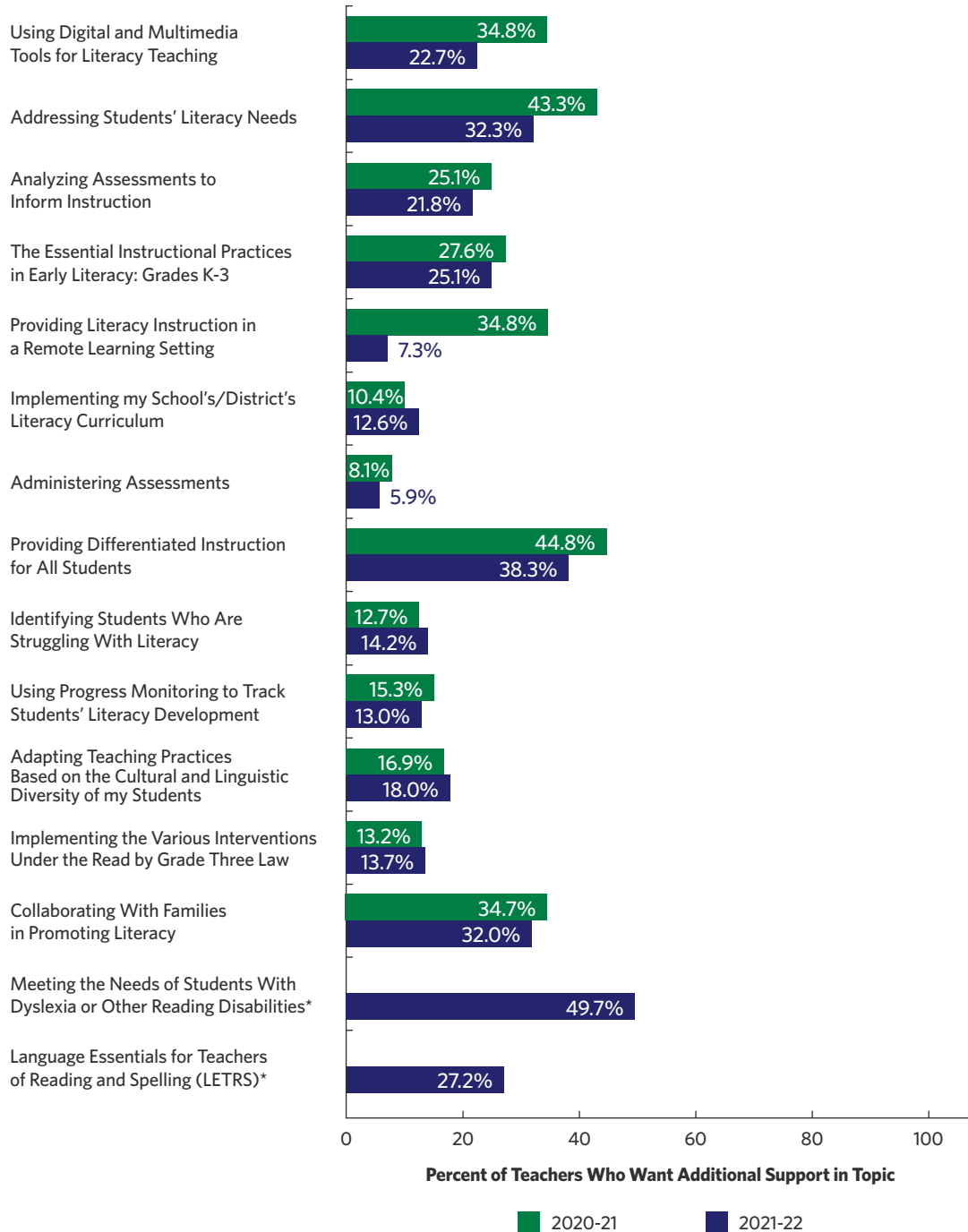
Areas in Which Teachers Want Additional Support

Teachers Want Additional Literacy Professional Development in Specific Content Areas

Despite receiving literacy professional development on a broad range of topics, teachers expressed an interest in receiving more opportunities to learn how to improve their literacy instruction. In particular, Figure 6 shows more than 30% of K-3 teachers wanted additional support to help them provide students with differentiated instruction, address students' literacy needs, and collaborate with families. Conversely, teachers expressed the least interest in further professional development regarding administering assessments, identifying students who are struggling with literacy, implementing Read by Grade Three prescribed interventions, and using progress monitoring. Teachers' interest in professional development on using digital tools and providing remote instruction decreased between 2020-21 and 2021-22, likely due to the return to traditional and consistent in-person instruction in 2021-22.

Regardless of whether many or most teachers have received literacy professional development on a given topic, it is clear that there are certain areas in which teachers felt they need additional opportunities to develop their skills and strengthen their practice. For instance, while many teachers have received literacy professional development on differentiating instruction and addressing student needs, almost 40% of teachers desired additional support on these topics. On the other hand, relatively few teachers—less than 20%—have received professional development on collaborating with families, in promoting literacy yet about 35% expressed a need for it. Together, these data suggest a need for ongoing and targeted literacy professional development to meet teachers' needs.

FIGURE 6. Percent of K-3 Teachers Wanting Additional Support, by Content Area and School Year



Note: Teachers were asked, "We want to understand the areas in which you would like to receive additional literacy support (through either one-on-one literacy coaching or other literacy professional development). Please mark the top five areas in which you would like to receive additional literacy support." Each bar represents the percent of K-3 teachers who selected a specific area of focus. Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2020-21 and 2021-22. * Denotes questions only asked in the 2021-22 survey.

K-3 TEACHERS REPORTED A NEED FOR TARGETED LITERACY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



In 2021-22, approximately 20% or fewer of K-3 teachers reported having received literacy professional development on topics such as collaborating with families in promoting literacy (19%), meeting the needs of students with reading disabilities (22%), and on LETRS (16%).

This is interesting because over 25% of those teachers expressed that they would like to receive literacy professional development on these topics.

Teachers Expressed an Interest in Literacy Professional Development That Aligned With Legislative Efforts

Given recent legislative attention in 2021-22, we added survey items about the literacy professional development teachers received on the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training and supporting students with reading disabilities, and their desired additional needs. Interestingly, these two topics were among the top five most requested areas for additional support, along with differentiating instruction for all students, addressing students' literacy needs, and collaborating with families in promoting literacy.

In the 2021-22 survey, less than 20% had received professional development on LETRS and yet 27% of teachers expressed an interest in receiving such (Figure 6). With a quarter of surveyed teacher wanting additional professional development on the topic, the state allocated timely resources to extend LETRS training at no cost in July 2022 (Rice, 2023; Michigan Public Act 144, 2022). Since LETRS training typically takes 18-24 months to complete, this is a trend that we tracked in the subsequent survey but those data were not yet available at the time of writing.

Additionally, around 25% of teachers reported receiving professional development on meeting the needs of students with reading disabilities, like dyslexia. However, Figure 6 highlights that almost 50% of teachers expressed interest in receiving additional training on supporting students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities, which has also been a topic discussed in the Michigan legislature for several years. In April 2021, Senate Bill 380 was introduced which would require screening for and providing services to students with dyslexia, but it eventually failed to pass (Senate Bill 380, 2021). MDE has since begun to address this interest in the field by releasing "[Michigan Dyslexia Handbook](#)" and associated professional development in August 2022. Therefore, while there seems to be an appetite from the teachers and corresponding action from MDE, additional support for students with reading disabilities has not yet received the legislative action that LETRS training has received.

To understand these trends further, we examined the open ended responses teachers provided on the survey. Although relatively few teachers in the 2021-22 survey expounded on their desire for additional literacy professional development opportunities to learn how to support students with reading disabilities, those who did made clear that a lack of attention to identifying and supporting such students was harmful. For example, one teacher said:

Teachers need more professional development on learning disabilities like dyslexia. There are a lot of kids slipping through the cracks because teachers don't have the proper training to identify what they need.

In addition, several respondents specifically mentioned support for the proposed legislation on dyslexia. For instance, one teacher wrote:

I feel like our state does not do enough to identify and teach students with dyslexia. These students are often lost through the cracks, and are in large part why we have so many struggling readers. I wish Michigan had more laws involving dyslexia so schools would have to acknowledge this specific learning disability and better equip teachers on how to meet these students' needs.

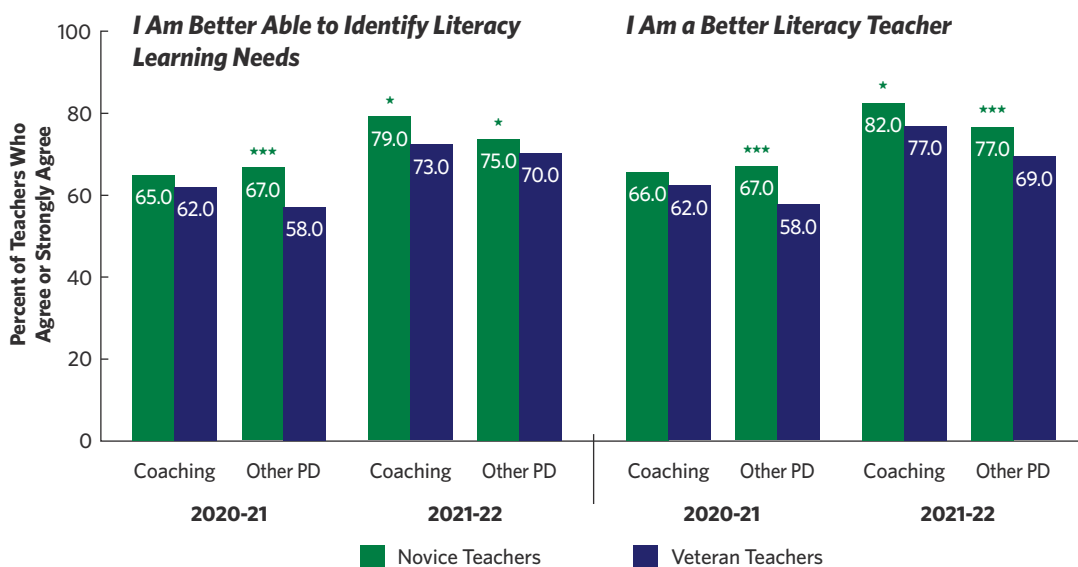
With only one year of survey data on these topics, there appears to be evidence of strong demand for additional support related to supporting students with reading disabilities and LETRS training. These topics seem to be in line with legislative efforts which may better support literacy instruction and achievement.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Provided Literacy Professional Development and Reported Barriers to Access

Teachers Feel More Confident and Capable as a Result of One-on-One Literacy Coaching and Other Literacy Professional Development

Teachers generally felt that other literacy professional development and one-on-one literacy coaching improved their teaching abilities. Figure 7 shows that most K-3 teachers reported experiencing these benefits across both years, with a slightly higher proportion in 2021-22 than in 2020-21. Teachers perceived one-on-one literacy coaching to be more effective than other literacy professional development in increasing their confidence and identifying students' learning needs. Novice teachers were more likely than veteran teachers to report these benefits.

FIGURE 7. K-3 Teachers' Feelings of Teaching Abilities as a Result of Literacy Professional Development, by Experience Level



Note Teachers were asked, "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about how the one-on-one literacy coaching (from any provider) you have received this school year has affected your literacy instruction? Please mark one option for each row." and "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about how

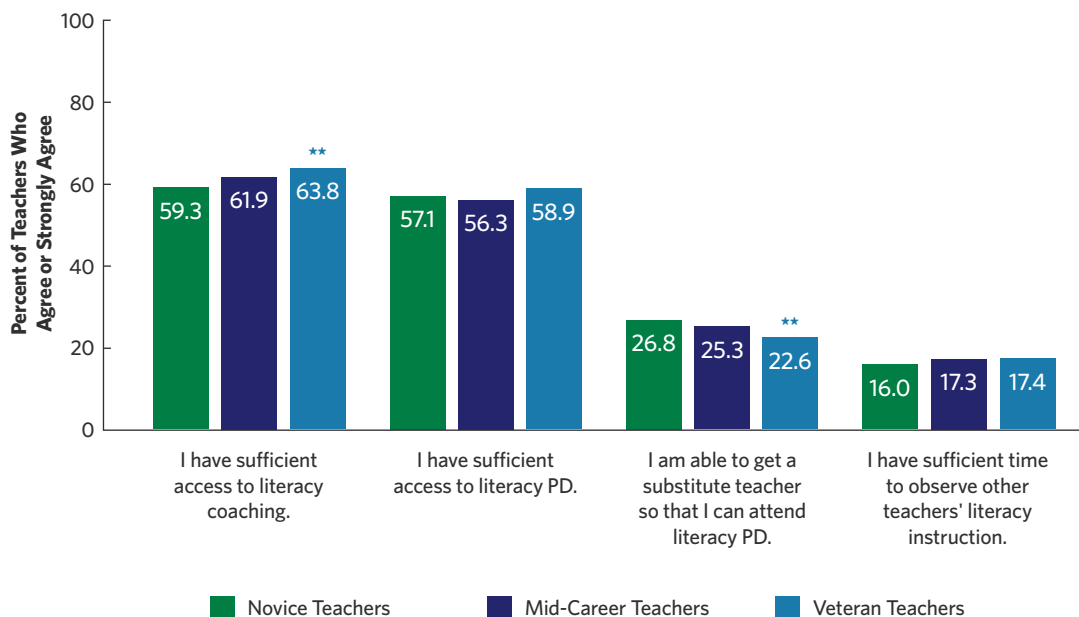
the literacy professional development (NOT including one-on-one literacy coaching) you received this school year has affected your literacy instruction? Please mark one option for each row." Stars represent significant differences between experience groups. * <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001 . Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Although not shown, teachers' beliefs about the efficacy of one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development did not vary by teacher effectiveness rating. Overall, the literacy professional development provided to K-3 teachers successfully enhanced their confidence in their abilities.

Teachers Report Sufficient Access to One-on-One Literacy Coaching and Other Literacy Professional Development, With Some Constraints

Overall, approximately 60% of K-3 teachers reported having sufficient access to one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development in 2021-22. However, time and human resource constraints may impede teachers' ability to fully benefit from the available supports. Figure 8 shows that only 24% of K-3 teachers reported being able to get a substitute teacher so that they could attend literacy professional development in 2021-22. This is compared to 41% of K-3 teachers who reported doing so in 2019-20 (not shown). Similarly, only 17% of K-3 teachers reported being able to observe other teachers' literacy instruction in 2021-22, down from 21% in 2019-20. The scarcity of substitutes could contribute to the reduced time and opportunity for participation in various types of literacy professional development.

FIGURE 8. K-3 Teachers' Perceptions of Access to Literacy Professional Development Under the Read by Grade Three Law, by Experience Level



Note: Teachers were asked, "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your ability to improve your literacy instruction and/or implement the Read by Grade Three Law? Please mark one option for each row." Stars represent significant differences between experience groups. * <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001 . Source: EPIC survey of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2021-22.

Figure 8 shows that these responses were fairly consistent across teacher experience levels, although veteran teachers were slightly more likely to agree that they had sufficient access to one-on-one literacy coaching than were their earlier career colleagues, and they were slightly less able to get substitute teachers in place to allow them to attend literacy professional development sessions.

Access to one-on-one literacy coaching and the ability to observe other teachers varied slightly across district demographics. Figure 9 demonstrates that K-3 teachers in districts with historically higher ELA performance reported greater access to one-on-one literacy coaching, while teachers in districts with lower ELA performance reported greater ability to observe other teachers' literacy instruction. Similarly, teachers in districts serving a larger proportion of economically disadvantaged students reported significantly less access to one-on-one literacy coaching but more time to observe other teachers' literacy instruction. These differences, although small, are worth noting. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in access to literacy professional development or access to substitute teachers across district subgroups.

Indeed, in their open-ended survey responses, teachers identified a lack of substitutes as a barrier to their participation in literacy professional development activities, such as attending conferences, observations, and other trainings. Some even went so far as to call it a "dire need of substitutes." One special education teacher explained how this has affected their professional development:

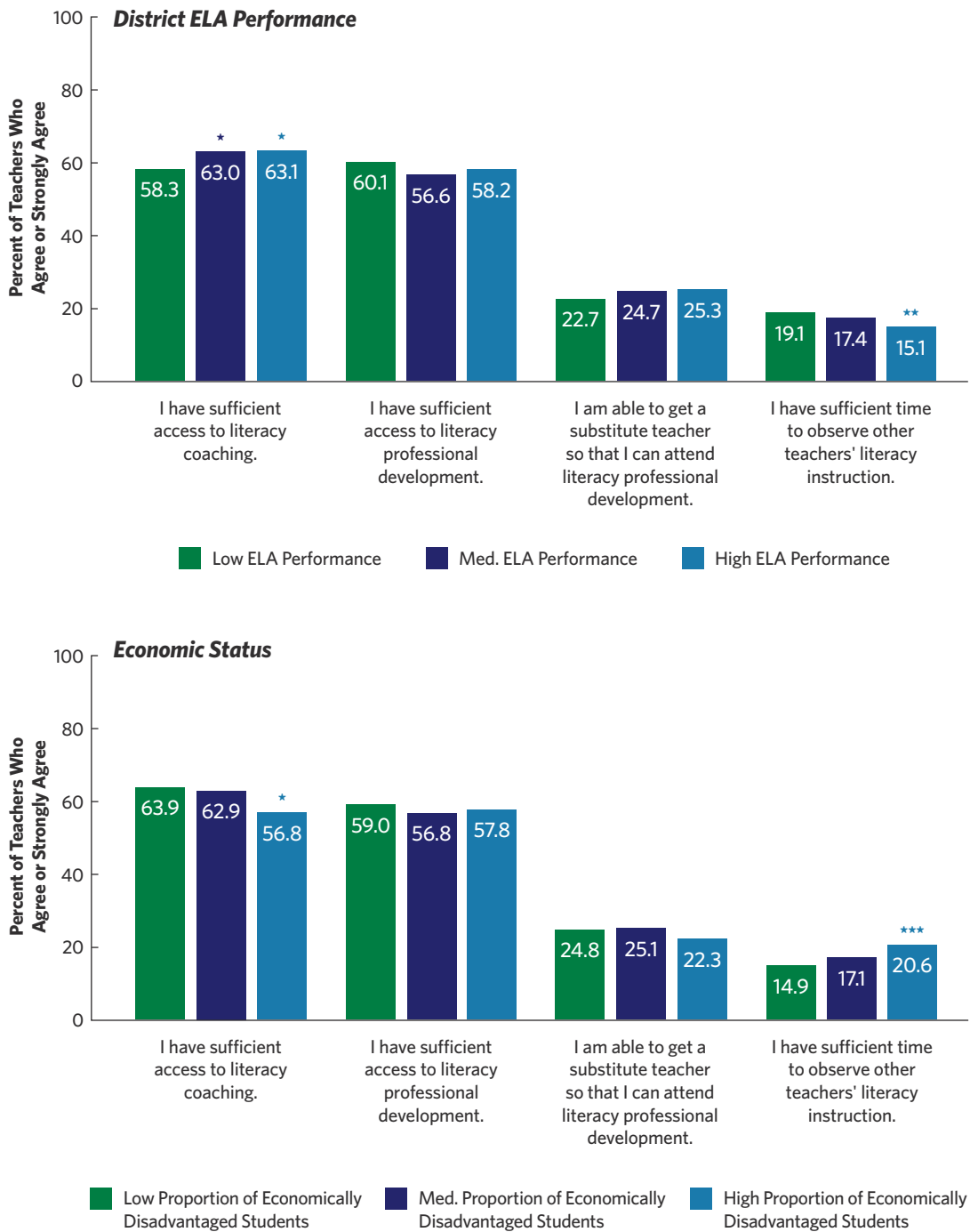
As a Special Education teacher, the last three years we have not had the ability to go to conferences, whether they were virtual or not, as there are not enough substitute teachers for the general education teachers, and so therefore we were denied access to the trainings.

Another teacher discussed the potential benefits of being able to observe other teachers if substitutes were available, "I would love to have more substitutes to be able to spend time watching other teachers during literacy lessons throughout our building. We can learn and grow so much from each other!" While it is not the only hindrance, the lack of substitute teachers appears to substantially impede teachers' ability to fully engage in literacy professional development.

SUB-SAMPLE INSIGHT: TEACHERS MAY BE UNABLE TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF LITERACY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DUE TO LACK OF SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

Very few teachers who filled out monthly logs reported attending or participating in conferences, workshops, or literacy observations in other classrooms. One possible explanation for the lack of participation in these types of literacy professional development could be the lack of time to do so and substitute teachers available, as reported by the broader sample of teachers who completed the survey.

FIGURE 9. 2022 K-3 Teachers’ Perceptions of Access to Literacy Professional Development Under the Read by Grade Three Law, by District Demographics



Note: Teachers were asked, “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your ability to improve your literacy instruction and/or implement the Read by Grade Three Law? Please mark one option for each row.” Stars represent significant differences in relation to the Low proportion group. *<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001. Source: EPIC surveys of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law 2019-20 and 2021-22.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Takeaways

Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law emphasizes the importance of effective professional development and coaching to enhance teachers' literacy instruction, as supported by previous research (Basma & Savage, 2018; Kraft et al., 2018), and therefore positively affect student literacy learning. Since the passage of the Law, Michigan has allocated additional funding to improve coaching and professional development (Rice, 2023). In particular, Michigan has continually reinvested in the potential of ISD Early Literacy Coaches. Allocations have increased from \$31.5 million in 2016-17 (MDE, 2022) to \$42 million in the most recent budget (Michigan Public Act 103, 2023). This funding was intended to increase the number of ISD Early Literacy Coaches statewide from 280 to 336 and increase the amount available per coach from \$112,500 to \$125,000.

While teachers feel better equipped to effectively teach as a result of the literacy professional development provided to them, time spent on one-on-one literacy coaching and other literacy professional development declined between 2019-20 and 2021-22, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated constraints. However, this is problematic because literacy professional development is intended to be a key driver of improved literacy outcomes for students under the Read by Grade Three Law.

Principals report differentiating literacy professional development content based on the needs of teachers and students, and it is evident that teachers are receiving support on a wide range of topics from various literacy coaches. Yet, evidence suggests that teachers continue to receive a mix of literacy professional development opportunities with no clear system to ensure that all teachers receive literacy professional development on all aspects of evidence-based reading instruction. There are particular topics—including collaborating with families and meeting the needs of all of their students, especially those with reading disabilities—where teachers report the need for more literacy professional development.

While the state has invested considerably in literacy coaching as part of the Law, the majority of literacy professional development that teachers receive continues to occur outside of one-on-one literacy coaching. This stands in contrast to research evidence that shows that sustained professional learning with coaching to support implementation of new practices is more effective than brief workshops to improve instruction.

While the state has invested considerably in literacy coaching as part of the Law, the majority of literacy professional development that teachers receive continues to occur outside of one-on-one literacy coaching.

Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, we propose the following courses of action to improve support for literacy instruction provided to K-3 teachers in Michigan:

Prioritize dedicated time for literacy professional development. Given the importance of professional development in driving improved literacy outcomes, policymakers should emphasize the need for dedicated time and resources for teachers to engage in one-on-one literacy coaching and other professional development activities. This may involve revisiting appropriate staffing levels and schedule and workload considerations to provide teachers with regular and protected time for literacy professional development. Additionally, providing incentives and recognizing the value of ongoing literacy professional development can help motivate teachers to actively participate in these activities.

Develop a comprehensive system for literacy professional development. Although teachers in Michigan report receiving support on a wide range of topics, there is evidence of a lack of coordination and consistency in literacy professional development opportunities. To address this issue, policymakers should establish a comprehensive system for literacy professional development that ensures teachers receive training on all aspects of evidence-based reading instruction. In states like Michigan with a strong system of local district control, policymakers will need to work with ISDs and districts to align literacy professional development.

Increase investment in coaching as a primary form of literacy professional development. Despite the allocation of funds for coaching, the majority of literacy professional development Michigan teachers receive is through methods other than one-on-one literacy coaching. Research also suggests that sustained professional development with coaching is more effective than brief workshops. Therefore, policymakers should continue funding efforts that will increase the availability and accessibility of coaching for teachers.

ENDNOTES

1. Other literacy professional development can take a variety of forms including workshops, conferences, book clubs, professional learning community meetings, or other types of sessions.
2. While the results about perceptions of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law in this report pull primarily from K-3 teacher survey responses (with one addition from the K-5 principal survey), we do survey: K-5 teachers and principals, ISD Early Literacy Coaches, school and district literacy coaches, literacy specialists or interventionists, and district superintendents.
3. ISD Early Literacy Coaches are literacy coaches who primarily work with teachers on improving literacy instruction. They are funded by the Read by Grade Three Law through section 35(a)4 of the State School Aid Act (MDE, 2022). They are hired at the ISD level. Please note that an ISD and a regional educational service agency (RESA) are similar entities in Michigan. Hereafter, all references will mention only ISD as policymakers more commonly use this term.
4. Given the differences between the survey samples and the general populations, we weight the survey responses to allow the results from our survey analysis to be representative of K-5 teachers and principals across the state. We derive the analytical weights based on educators' age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment duration within their current districts (i.e., whether they were hired within the past five years), certifications and endorsements (i.e., elementary certified, secondary certified, or holding an ELA/literacy/reading endorsement), and the sector of schools or districts (i.e., traditional public school or charter).
5. Even though "working with a literacy coach" is the only professional development that reached a 100% across both years, we anticipated that would be the most common professional development received by sub-sample teachers. The structure of the study only included teachers who had agreed to receive coaching from their ISD Early Literacy Coach and report on their coaching experience regularly.

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