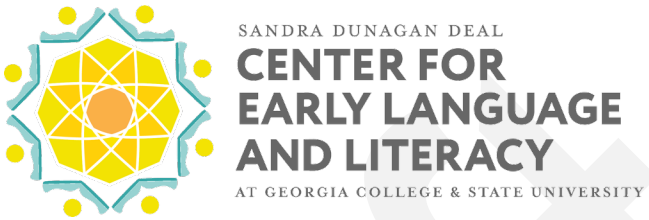
The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy



Unified Literacy Coaching Project: Brief Interim Report

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Acknowledgements

We extend our gratitude to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Georgia's Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) for their collaboration in data collection and analysis. We also extend our gratitude to the Literacy Coach Coordinating Committee (LCCC) and the Competency Task Force (CTF) for their collaboration in developing literacy coaching standards and competencies. The LCCC and CTF include leaders from state education agencies, university partners, and research organizations engaged in preparing educators and literacy coaches statewide. Special thanks to the literacy coaches, district leaders, and superintendents who participated in surveys and interviews, providing invaluable insights into the state's literacy ecosystem. This work is supported by funding from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement as approved by the Executive Committee of the Georgia Council on Literacy and directly aligns to *Georgia's Literacy Plan: Vision 2030.*

The Unified Literacy Coaching Project

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy (Deal Center) is conducting the Unified Literacy Coaching Project in partnership with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) on behalf of the Georgia Council on Literacy. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Georgia's 16 Regional Education Service Agencies have collaborated extensively with GOSA and the Deal Center to support the execution of the project. This comprehensive study was initially designed as a multi-phase project aimed at strengthening literacy coaching across Georgia by understanding current practices, establishing literacy coaching standards, and supporting evaluation systems. The project team includes literacy experts, methodologists, and literacy coach practitioners. Three core objectives were established to guide this work:

- **Objective 1: Landscape Analysis**
  Conduct a thorough analysis of Georgia's literacy coaching ecosystem to identify gaps, strengths, and opportunities for improvement through two distinct phases of research. The first phase centers on state-level literacy coaches including all state and federally funded coaches under the direction of GaDOE and the RESA Network. The second phase centers on locally funded, school-based coaches.
- **Objective 2: Establish Georgia Literacy Coach Domains, Standards, and Competencies**
  Create a unified set of domains, standards, and competencies for literacy coaching credentials in Georgia. The purpose of this objective is to establish a common set of expectations for literacy coaches and the framework for a credential recognized at the state level.
- **Objective 3: Support for Research and Evaluation Systems**
  Support development of a cohesive evaluation system of state and federally funded coaches to ensure long-term success of literacy coaching and recommend systemic changes based on findings.

The Unified Literacy Coaching Project is designed to inform policy, guide strategic investments, and enhance the effectiveness of literacy coaches in alignment with HB 307 and *Georgia's Literacy Plan: Vision 2030*.

What is a Literacy Coach?

The International Literacy Association (ILA) defines literacy coaches as being: "primarily responsible for improving classroom instruction by supporting teacher learning and facilitating literacy program efforts." Further, literacy coaches "collaborate with individual and groups of teachers via coaching and professional learning (PL) activities to improve classroom, grade-level, departmental, and schoolwide literacy teaching and learning." (International Literacy Association, 2015). Through the provision of job-

embedded professional development to teachers, literacy coaches work to enhance instruction, analyze data, model lessons, and provide feedback, ultimately improving student models.

Context for the Project

Georgia's literacy reforms have accelerated since the early 2020s, driven by legislation aimed at improving early reading proficiency and addressing dyslexia. Key laws include:

- Senate Bill 48 (2019): Established dyslexia screening, intervention, and a pilot program for early identification and support.
- Senate Bill 211 (2023): Created the Georgia Council on Literacy, a 30-member body tasked with reviewing birth-to-postsecondary literacy programs and ensuring alignment of state supports.
- House Bill 538 (2023): The Georgia Early Literacy Act, mandated high-quality instructional materials, universal screeners, interventions, professional learning, and teacher preparation for K-3 students.
- House Bill 307 (2025): The Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act, consolidated SB 48 and HB 538, clarified requirements for screening students at risk of reading difficulties, and emphasized structured literacy approaches.

These legislative actions emphasize evidence-based practices rooted in the science of reading, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension. Literacy coaching is essential to the success of these reforms (Biancarosa et al., 2005; Brieske-Ulenske et al., 2022); Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011), and it creates a bridge between theory and practice, helping teachers implement structured literacy amid reforms. There are three independent state-level coaching systems currently in place to support districts on a limited basis using three different coaching models.

Proposed Legislation Suggests a Shift in Focus

Recent proposed legislation (HB 1193) aimed at bringing a cadre of school-based literacy coaches into the field suggests a need to shift from the initial focus of the Unified Literacy Coaching Project to better meet evolving needs.

Changes to Objective 1: Landscape Analysis

Objective 1 initially intended to evaluate the current structures, strengths, and gaps in Georgia's literacy coaching, with recommendations for greater unification of the existing state coaching systems. In response to the evolving policy context, however, Objective 1 will now prioritize identifying how existing state-level systems can best support the implementation of the proposed legislative changes and foster a more systematic approach to coaching. The revised primary research question is: *What can*

we learn from the current state-level coaching systems that will support a better roll out, stronger implementation, and a unified systematic approach to state-level coaching support for school-based coaches?

Changes to Objective 3: Support for Research and Evaluation Systems

Objective 3 initially intended to understand the effects of each of the three state-level coaching systems on teacher instructional practices and students' literacy outcomes. However, the proposed legislative changes point toward a need to include research and evaluation methods that facilitate understanding the influence of school-based coaches as well.

A Report of Current Progress

The sections below detail the current progress on Unified Literacy Coach Project objectives, including key interim findings and next steps.

Objective 1: Landscape Analysis

As previously stated, the initial purpose of the Objective 1 was to conduct a thorough analysis of Georgia's literacy coaching ecosystem to identify gaps, strengths, and opportunities for improvement with recommendations for greater unification of the existing state coaching systems. Due to anticipated policy changes, the primary research question has been revised to:

What can we learn from the current state-level coaching systems that will support a better roll out, stronger implementation, and a unified systematic approach to state-level coaching support for school-based coaches?

The following research questions guide the portion of the landscape analysis focused on state-level literacy coaches:

1. What are the structures and core activities of the three state-level literacy coaching systems?
2. What types of training, resources, and support have state literacy coaches received?
3. What are the strengths of the current state literacy coaching systems?
4. What critical supports for state literacy coaches are needed?

The following research questions guide the portion of the analysis focused on district-based literacy coaches:

5. How many literacy coaches are employed by school districts in Georgia?
6. What types of training have district literacy coaches received?
7. What types of training or support would district literacy coaches like to receive?

The analysis involves a mixed-methods approach that includes quantitative surveys of literacy coaches, qualitative interviews with literacy coach leaders, and a review of standard documents used to prepare, support, and evaluate literacy coaches.

State Literacy Coach Survey

State Literacy Coach Survey responses were collected from 188 literacy coaches (88%) serving in the three state-level literacy coaching systems: Let's Read Georgia (LRG), Growing Readers (GR), and Structured Literacy Coaches in Comprehensive Support for Improvement (CSI) schools. Data have been analyzed but due to pending legislation, recommendations have not been finalized and shared (see Figure 1 and also *Georgia State Literacy Coach Survey* and *Aggregated State Coach Survey Graphs* documents).

Figure 1. *Timeline of State Literacy Coach Survey Data Collection Process*

Key Interim Findings

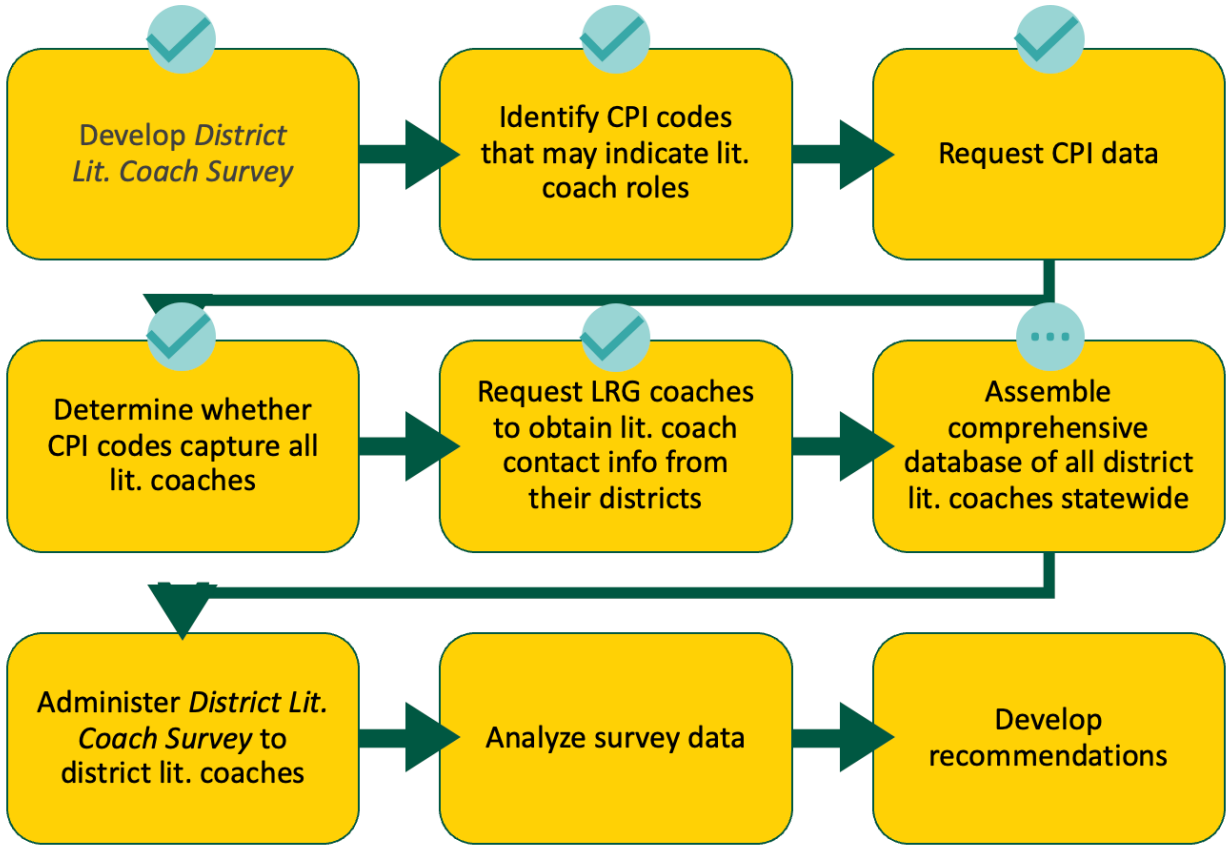
- Georgia currently employs approximately 227 literacy coaches statewide. This total includes roughly 167 coaches funded through state programs and operating through the 16 RESAs, and about 60 school-based coaches placed in high-need school sites.
- The majority (52%, or 98 coaches) serve as LRG coaches, while 29% (54 coaches) are CSI Literacy Coaches, 14% (27 coaches) are GR coaches, and a small group of 5% (9 coaches) work across both LRG and GR.
- Experience levels stand out as a major strength among responding state literacy coaches:
    - More than one-third of coaches have 30 or more years in education, another third have 21–30 years, and few have less than a decade.
    - Nearly half of coaches spent 15 or more years as classroom teachers.
    - Most coaches have comparable experience teaching literacy specifically, with over 70% having 11 or more years' experience teaching in that domain.
    - The current average tenure in coach's current coaching positions is 2–3 years. However, this data is skewed by the fact that LRG and CSI coaches have only been able to be in role for two years whereas GR coaches have had the potential to be in role for 10 years. Given the fact that the majority of coaches surveyed are LRG and CSI coaches, this data trends low relative to the experience of state level coaches.

School/District Literacy Coach Survey

The School/District Literacy Coach Survey has been developed but not yet administered. The Deal Center Team is currently working to compile a comprehensive database of educators serving in the capacity of literacy coaches at the school or district level. Initial efforts were made to obtain such a list using Certified/Classified Personnel Information (CPI) data. However, after investigation, several issues rendered the CPI data unusable for this purpose. There is a plan, though, to cross reference data collected from the current plan with reported data from CPI on identified coaches in districts.

LRG coaches are now assisting with compiling the names and contact information of district literacy coaches in districts where they serve to compile the comprehensive database. After the comprehensive database is assembled, the District Literacy Coach Survey will be administered, analyzed, and recommendations will be developed (see Figure 2 and *Georgia District Literacy Coach Survey* document).

Figure 2. *Timeline of School/District Literacy Coach Survey Data Collection Process*



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Key Interim Findings.

- Creating a comprehensive database of district literacy coaches is challenging, but essential to understanding the scope of literacy coaching support available to teachers statewide. This data will be essential for evaluating the needs of school-based coaches potentially hired through current legislation and determining the impact of school-based coaches across the state.

Document Review

- Standard documents used to hire, prepare, support, and evaluate literacy coaches are being collected and analyzed to understand the structures and core activities of the three state-level literacy coaching systems.

Key Interim Findings.

- None to report currently.

Qualitative Interviews with Literacy Coach Leaders

Qualitative interviews are being conducted with literacy coach leaders. Attendees have included LRG co-system leads and a lead literacy coach, the CSI system lead, the GR system lead and one design team member, and five Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) directors. Additional interviews are still being conducted.

All interviews are being recorded, transcribed, coded, and interpreted to identify key themes. Identified themes will be combined with quantitative survey data to inform recommendations (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Timeline of Qualitative Interview Data Collection Process*

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Key Interim Findings.

- None to report currently.

Objective 2: Establish Georgia Literacy Coach Domains, Standards, and Competencies

As stated, the purpose of Objective 2 was to develop a unified set of domains, standards, and competencies for literacy coaching credentials in Georgia. This work is essential preparation for the Literacy Coach Endorsement that is referenced in the current drafts of HB 1193.

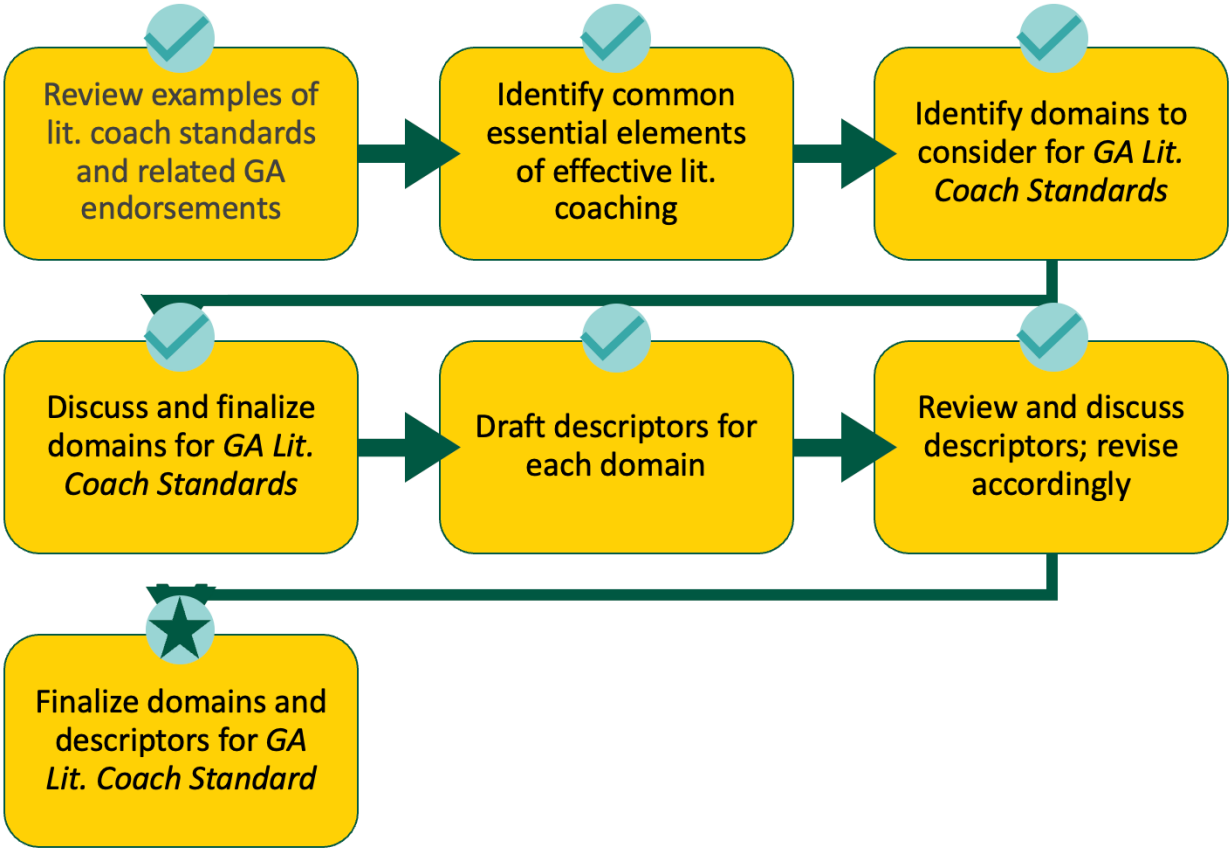
Literacy coach ***domains*** define specific areas of evidence-based expertise and responsibility necessary for effective literacy coaches. Literacy coach ***standards*** define the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary for being an effective literacy coach. Literacy coach ***competencies*** are behavioral descriptions that define the knowledge, skills, and abilities literacy coaches must do effectively to support teachers in improving literacy instructional practice and student achievement. Developing domains, standards, and competencies establishes clear, consistent, high-quality benchmarks for effective literacy coaching.

Development Process

Developing the literacy coach domains, standards, and competencies was a rich collaborative process involving a multi-disciplinary Competency Task Force formed in October 2025. The Competency Task Force was comprised of representatives from the University System of Georgia (Georgia College and State University, Georgia Southern University, Georgia State University), the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, RESA leadership, and representatives from each of the three state literacy coaching systems (LRG, GR, and CSI). After the task force was formed, the work of identifying literacy coach domains, standards, and competencies promptly began. The development process was expertly facilitated by a leading literacy expert with support from the Deal Center Team.

Domains. The Competency Task Force engaged in a series of activities to develop the domains for the Georgia Literacy Coach Domains, Standards, and Competencies (see Figure 4 and *DRAFT Coaching Competencies* document). The group first reviewed examples of domains and standards developed in other states and from related Georgia endorsements to elevate common essential elements of effective literacy coaching for consideration. In small subgroups, the task force worked to sort standards into potential domains for consideration and then convened as a group to finalize their decisions. Part of this review of standards included current Georgia standards for literacy content (Dyslexia and Reading endorsements) and coaching (Coaching and Teacher Support Coaching endorsements).

Figure 4. *Timeline of the Process for Developing Literacy Coach Domains*



The outcome of this series of activities was a list of four domains and corresponding descriptors:

Domain 1: Creating and Fostering a Culture of Collaborative Literacy Leadership
Descriptor: *Literacy coaches partner with stakeholders to build and sustain collaborative cultures that support continuous improvement in literacy instruction. They establish and foster trusting relationships, communicate effectively, align coaching efforts to school and district goals, and model continuous professional growth.*

- **Domain 2:** Knowledge and Application of Assessment to Inform Literacy Instruction
  Descriptor: *Literacy coaches support educators to use assessment data to inform literacy instruction. They support appropriate and effective assessment practices, including data analysis and interpretation. They support educators to*

use assessment results to strengthen instruction across all tiers, monitor student progress, and differentiate instruction as needed.

- **Domain 3**: Knowledge and Application of Literacy Development and Instruction
  Descriptor: *Literacy coaches possess deep knowledge of literacy development, learning sciences, and evidence-based instructional practices across all components of literacy – reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They apply this knowledge to support educators to implement explicit, systematic, cumulative, diagnostic, and integrated literacy instruction for all students.*

- **Domain 4:** Development and Implementation of Literacy-Focused Professional Learning
  Descriptor: *Literacy coaches design and facilitate professional learning that builds educator capacity to plan, implement, and monitor effective literacy instruction. They apply adult learning principles and learning sciences, use intentional coaching approaches, and monitor the impact of professional learning on instruction and student outcomes.*

Standards. After developing the domains, the Competency Task Force was divided into two separate work groups to begin crafting the standards. Once standards were drafted for each domain, the entire group met to review and discuss the proposed language and suggested revisions to ensure a high level of clarity and ease of reading, eliminate redundancies, and ensure that all essential content was included. The task force worked collaboratively to revise the standards until the group reached consensus on the wording for each. As of the writing of this report, the domains and standards have been developed and are in the process of being reviewed by key stakeholders, which will be followed by public review (see Figure 5 and *DRAFT Coaching Competencies* document).

Figure 5. *Timeline of the Process for Developing Literacy Coach Standards*

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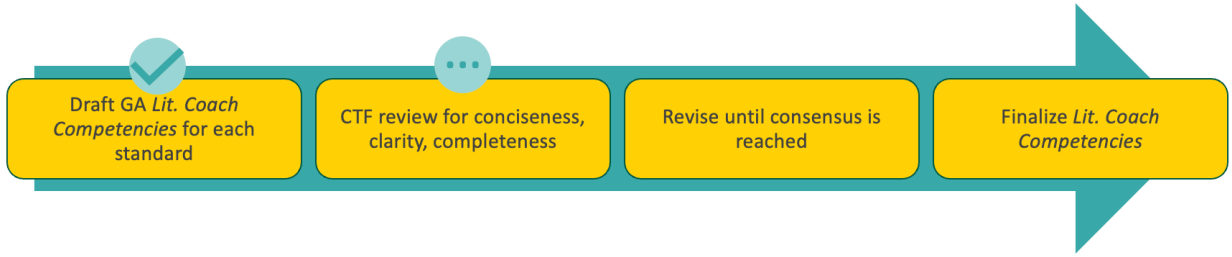
Competencies. The next activity of the Competency Task Force was to develop competencies for each standard. Once again, the group worked collaboratively to identify competency content and potential assessment activities where competencies might be assessed. The expert facilitator and literacy expert along with two additional literacy experts from the Deal Center Team created a set of draft competencies for the task force to review.

An initial draft of the competencies is under review by the Competency Task Force (see Figures 6 and *DRAFT Coaching Competencies* document). A glossary of terms is also being developed to ensure that definitions of key terms and concepts are described and represented in a consistent way by all literacy coaches.

April timeline for finalization for standards allows for the engagement of the GaPSC to establish a formal task force for the establishment of the Georgia Literacy Coach Competency Endorsement. This timeline will allow for the adoption of a state literacy coach credential by the timeline identified in HB 1193 of January 1, 2027.

Figure 6. *Timeline for Developing Literacy Coach Competencies.*



Note. Activity in progress denoted by an ellipsis (…). CTF = Competency Task Force.

Key Interim Findings.

- The wide and varied composition of the Competency Task Force resulted in deep discussions about the domains, standards, and competencies that are necessary for effective literacy coaching in Georgia. The perspectives of the group contributed to domains, standards, and competencies that are clear, concise, and comprehensive.

"The Georgia Literacy Coaching Standards are clear, well-organized, and easy to read. Each standard is written in a way that is easy to understand and provides strong guidance for literacy coaching practice."

--State Literacy Coach

- Georgia literacy coach standards and competencies have the potential to stand out nationally for their quality and focus.
- Initial feedback on the literacy coach standards has been overwhelmingly positive, with minimal suggestions for improvement.

Objective 3: Support for Research and Evaluation Systems

As stated, the initial purpose of Objective 3 was to support development of a cohesive evaluation system to ensure long-term success of literacy coaching. To accomplish this, an evaluation plan was i created to conduct a rigorous study of the effects of each state coaching system on related outcomes such as changes in teachers' literacy instruction and improved literacy outcomes for students. However, proposed legislative changes point toward a need to include research and evaluation methods to understand the influence of school-based coaches as well.

The initial evaluation plan included three studies designed to leverage and evaluate each state coaching system's unique context, reach, and activities. However, given proposed legislative changes, the evaluation plans will need to be altered to permit evaluation of literacy coaching in a different context. A brief description of the proposed evaluations for each state literacy coach system is listed below (see Figure 6 and *Evaluation Plans* document).

Evaluation Plan for Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) Literacy Coaching

The Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) initiative identifies Georgia's lowest-performing elementary schools—those falling in the bottom 5% statewide on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)—and provides them with intensive, structured literacy coaching focused on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. Because eligibility is determined by a sharp, objective cutoff score, the most rigorous and credible evaluation design is a regression discontinuity design (RDD). This design compares schools that fall just below the cutoff (and therefore receive CSI coaching) with schools that fall just above the cutoff (and do not). Schools on either side of that line are virtually identical in prior performance and characteristics except for their CSI eligibility, so any sudden "jump" in outcomes right at the cutoff can be confidently attributed to the coaching program itself. When the cutoff is not manipulated, RDD produces causal evidence that meets WWC Standards Without Reservations (a national standard for quality research). This is the same rating given to a well-run randomized trial. The evaluation will measure effects on two levels: student reading achievement (school-wide universal screener composite scores) and teacher instructional practice (blinded classroom observations). Coach practice and quality (observations of coaching sessions) will be used as a covariate. This research design can be implemented even with the proposed legislative changes.

A confounding factor in this analysis is the additional support in place at all CSI identified schools. For each of these schools, a School Effectiveness Specialist, a School Improvement Specialist, and a District Improvement Specialist is assigned to provided structural and systemic change support at the school level. This additional

level of support allows for the changes supported by CSI coaches to have a more systematic implementation at the school level.

Evaluation Plan for Let's Read Georgia and Growing Readers Literacy Coaching

The evaluation plan for Let's Read Georgia and Growing Readers literacy coaching will likely need to change if proposed legislative changes are approved and enacted. After more is known about the shifting context, the Deal Center Team will revise the evaluation plan for Let's Read Georgia and Growing Readers.

Figure 6. *Timeline for Developing Support for Research and Evaluation Systems*

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Key Interim Findings.

- The suggested evaluation method designed to assess the impact of the CSI state coaching system can be used regardless of whether the proposed legislation is enacted.
- The suggested evaluation method designed to assess the impact of GR and LRG state coaching systems may need revision if the proposed legislation is approved and enacted due to a change in how the two systems may be implemented.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Deal Center Team in collaboration with the Georgia Literacy Coach Coordinating Committee and the Georgia Literacy Coach Competency Task Force has made substantial progress toward completing the three objectives. In spite of the proposed legislative changes that suggest a shift in focus, the Deal Center Team is on track for timely completion.

The Deal Center has also proposed an addendum to the objectives discussed here which would allow for the continued development of an assessment and associated assessment for the creation of a GaPSC approved competency-based endorsement for Georgia literacy coaches. This endorsement would allow for the systemization of literacy coach credentialing and provide a system of professional development that would allow for school- and RESA-based coaches to be universally credentialled as Georgia literacy coaches.

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