

Strasburg 31J School District
REQUEST FOR WAIVER PURSUANT TO C.R.S. 22-2-117

I. BACKGROUND

The Strasburg School District is a top-performing district. Our administrators, teachers, parents and students will tell you this is because we are a tight-knit community that works together to ensure all of our students are successful. Our data tells the same story. Strasburg has been accredited as a District of Performance for a number of years.

Strasburg is a small district on the Eastern Plains with fewer than 1,000 students. At Strasburg Elementary School, we have 30 licensed teachers and 17 para professionals who serve 490 students. One administrator and most of our teachers and paras fill multiple roles to meet school and student needs.

Because we are a small staff that partners with parents and students in many ways, we are highly accountable to our local community. We have robust parent involvement, with multiple ways of providing and receiving feedback. Over the past year, the Kindergarten teachers have been instrumental in evaluating implementation of the state's school readiness assessment statute. Last year, our teachers took the time to determine which state-approved assessment seemed most appropriate for our district. After careful consideration, they recommended the Desired Results Developmental Profile for Kindergarten (DRDP-K). During the 2015-16 school year, the Kindergarten teachers have been using the DRDP-K. The DRDP-K requires approximately 45 minutes per student each time our teachers need updated assessment information.

State and federal mandates, and the related data reporting requirements, were not designed for a district like Strasburg. They were designed for much larger districts. When implemented in our small school district, these requirements significantly impede instructional time and interfere with Strasburg's ability to serve its students. That is why Strasburg is seeking a waiver from these requirements. Taken together, the requirements place an almost overwhelming regulatory burden on our small staff, taking time away from the important task of instructing and guiding students.

Note that we are not seeking a waiver from the goal of student success. Rather, Strasburg simply needs flexibility so that its administrators and teachers can build upon and improve the strategies and interventions that have been critical to our students' success.

The mission of the Strasburg School District is to develop responsible and productive members of society. Our vision is delivering on the dream of academic achievement for every student. That mission and vision will not change with more flexibility in meeting state mandates.

II. DISTRICT PROFILE

- The Strasburg Elementary School received a high accreditation rating of "Performance" for the previous six years.
- Over the last six years, the third grade has performed right below the state average in "At or Above Proficiency" on the state literacy assessments:
PARCC: 2015: 731 (Strasburg 3rd Grade Students) vs. 737 (state average)
TCAP: 2014: 61% vs. 72%

2013: 70% vs. 73%
2012: 69% vs. 74%
2011: 70% vs. 73%,
2010: 63% vs. 70%

- Over the last six years, the third grade has mostly performed right above the state average in “At or Above Proficiency” on state math assessments:
 - PARCC: 2015:** 744 (Strasburg 3rd Grade Students) vs. 737 (state average);
 - TCAP: 2014:** 88% vs. 72%
 - 2013:** 87% vs. 82%
 - 2012:** 71% vs. 81%
 - 2011:** 82% vs. 70%
 - 2010:** 65% vs. 71%
- Yearly, our pre-school is evaluated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Health Department, by a parent and staff advisory group on the Colorado Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education Services, by a Colorado Preschool Program coordinator, and through a parent survey. The first three evaluations have resulted in no concerns overall. The program meets all expectations of the Colorado Preschool Program. Parents have indicated on the survey that they “mostly” to “strongly agree” with the operations of the pre-school.
- 20% of our students are minorities, 31% are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 6% are eligible for ELL services.
- We have one superintendent and a principal for each of the elementary, middle and high schools. These administrators manage all educational, instructional, disciplinary, and employment matters, as well as day-to-day matters involving other district services, including transportation, athletics and food services.
- We have three Kindergarten teachers with an average of 23 students in each class. There is a part time paraprofessional in each class on a daily basis.
- Based on our tight budget, we are unable to afford instructional coaches. Teachers mentor new teachers, but everyone has his or her own role to fulfill.
- Despite these realities, we are deeply committed to providing our students with the tools they need for success and are creating and implementing service delivery structures that maximize our local resources, support innovation in the classroom and serve our students effectively.

A. Maximizing Student Achievement and Growth

- Strasburg Elementary School places a high value on the important purposes underlying the requirements put in place by S.B. 191, the READ Act and CAP4K.
- Over the past four years, we have been working hard to implement Colorado’s education reform laws and we are committed to continuing and building upon our successes.
- Our K-5 teachers use aligned curriculum materials along with standards-based lessons and formative and summative assessments to identify students who are not performing on grade-level. In our small classes, teachers adjust lessons, assignments and assessments for individuals at all ability levels on an as-needed basis.
- We are leveraging technology, through the leadership of East Central BOCES, to support our rural system and advance productivity through virtual learning for our students; virtual professional development for our staff and technology based data input, analysis and retrieval systems.

- We hold Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) every other Friday where our teachers come together to analyze data and the effectiveness of various strategies.
- We have created a modified schedule that allows our struggling students additional academic assistance, where they receive individualized instruction specific to their needs. We have a Title 1 teacher, a Tier 2 math interventionist and an ELL paraprofessional to assist the students.
- Quarterly, the general education teachers meet with the above interventionists. They discuss the students' achievements and areas of growth. The response to intervention (RTI) coordinator is in those meetings. Then, the RTI coordinator leads the RTI team- two teachers, the counselor, the special education teacher and the principal- finds solutions to challenges brought up at the meeting. The team works with the general education teachers to implement the solutions.

B. Colorado Academic Standards

Data teams are the vehicles we use to provide our teachers with the support necessary to implement the Colorado Academic Standards. Data teams are comprised of two to four teachers grouped according to grade level. These teams work together to prioritize standards, write short cycle formative assessments, analyze student data and identify research based instructional strategies they all can use to implement CAS effectively. These data teams meet with an Implementation Coach, employed by the East Central BOCES, throughout the year to support and guide their work.

We recognize that strong leadership is critical to the success of our data teams and other instructional and support programs. Towards this end, our administrators and several teacher leaders participate in leadership trainings implemented by the East Central BOCES and designed to strengthen their capacity to lead our work.

The leadership trainings are focused on:

- Deeper implementation of the data teams;
- Better understanding of the growth required to meet their schools state growth targets and the number of students that need to move academically;
- Implementation of the Core Literacy Strategies curriculum; and
- Understanding the “why” behind standards and instructional strategies.

C. Educator Evaluations (SB 191)

Our administrators and teachers place a high value on the evaluation system created by S.B. 191 and we are implementing the state's model evaluation rubric. By analyzing and implementing the 50% student growth component, our teachers and administrators have a better understanding of each student's individual needs and each teacher's overall performance and areas for improvement.

Our student-growth measures include data collected from assessments in reading, writing, math, physical education, music, and art, as well as state-assessment data if/when available and other curriculum based measures identified at each grade-level.

Our district utilizes the RANDA tool through CDE which allows us to set shared goals with our

teachers each year. We establish and gather data obtained through student assessment and classroom observations on numerous data points consistent with the quality standards adopted by the State Board, including student growth.

D. Purpose of Waiver

We are not seeking this waiver to get out of any work. Instead, we are seeking this waiver to:

- Ensure that policies and practices align with our local goals and values and are suited to the needs of our local community;
- Maximize existing resources and build on current successes; and
- Eliminate prescriptive procedural requirements that have limited impact and are unnecessary in our small school environment.

III. RATIONALE FOR WAIVER OF C.R.S. 22-7-1014(2)(a)

The district is seeking a waiver of the requirement in C.R.S. 22-7-1014(2)(a) that we administer DRDP-K, or other state-approved school readiness assessment, to every in-coming Kindergarten student. The district is not seeking a waiver of the requirement that each student have a school readiness plan.

The intent of the assessment requirement is to ensure that districts carefully monitor whether each student enrolled in Kindergarten progresses towards demonstrating school readiness. Our district is committed to evaluating and analyzing our students' school readiness, but does not need an additional, time-consuming assessment to monitor and evaluate whether our students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in school.

Approximately 70% of our incoming Kindergarten class comes from either our district pre-school, which is located in the classrooms down the hall from our Kindergarten classrooms, or the town's recreation-led, pre-school which works in tandem with our district pre-school. All of our pre-school students are assessed using a report reflective of the TS Gold assessment report, and their scores and any necessary readiness interventions are documented in the students' cumulative folders that are later shared with our Kindergarten teachers. For those 70% of our students who enroll in our Kindergarten after participating in our district-led or local recreation-led preschool, the district does not need to re-administer a TS Gold-type assessment.. The reduced assessment time and elimination of extensive paperwork will free up our Kindergarten teachers to spend more time collaborating with one another, teaching lessons, and implementing interventions for students who need them..

IV. REPLACEMENT PLAN FOR WAIVER OF C.R.S. 22-7-1014(2)(a)

If a waiver is granted, our district proposes the following replacement plan. Every student who has not participated in the district-led or local recreation-led preschool will be assessed using DRDP-K or other state approved assessment in Kindergarten. The District will not administer DRDP-K, or other state approved assessment to students who are tested in pre-school unless the student, based on the first weeks of school assessments/ observations demonstrate a need for additional assessment. Otherwise, the results of our pre-school report card will provide the basis for each student's school readiness plan. The district will use data generated through local assessments, together with teacher observation of performance against the district's academic

standards and close communications with parents, to ensure that each student enrolled in Kindergarten progresses towards demonstrating school readiness.

State law includes the following school readiness indicators:

- physical well-being and motor development;
- social and emotional development;
- language and comprehension development;
- cognition; and
- general knowledge.

Under the district's replacement plan, we will continue to measure each Kindergarten student's progress on the school readiness indicators as described below.

Physical well-being and motor development:

Students will participate up to four times weekly in PE classes that instruct students on the Colorado Academic Standards in physical education, including movement competence and understanding, physical and personal wellness, emotional and social wellness, and prevention and risk management. Students will be assessed on motor skills and development using a locally created checklist modified from the DRDP-K assessment.

Additionally, students will participate in art classes weekly and music classes up to two times weekly. These classes will help students develop gross and fine motor skills, which also will be assessed using the modified physical-wellbeing and motor development checklist.

Any concerns will be referred by the physical education, art and music teachers to the classroom teacher and/or RTI team and be documented in the student's readiness plan.

Social and emotional development:

Students will participate in character education classes throughout the year and receive direct instruction on developmentally appropriate behaviors in and out of the classroom. Our school counselor will meet with our physical education classes every other week to provide instruction in the areas of social interaction and emotional growth.

Students' progress and any needs in these areas will be assessed through observation by the classroom teacher, using a checklist modified from the DRDP-K. In making observations, the classroom teacher will collaborate with parents and other professionals. Our school counselor or the East Central BOCES psychologist will observe each student using either a checklist modified from the DRDP-K assessment or observation notes, and based on that observation, share concerns with the student's teacher and parents.

Any social emotional concerns and necessary interventions will be referred to the school counselor and/or the RTI team and are documented in the student's school readiness plan. Our school counselor will offer social groups, changing families groups and one-on-one visits, if appropriate.

Language and comprehension development

The i-Ready assessment will be administered to all students in our elementary school at three points throughout the school year.

Students will receive 20 minutes of individualized guided reading every day. This instruction will be driven by the Colorado Academic Standards, addressing the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) appropriate to the age, grade and needs of each student.

Our poorly performing readers receive targeted instruction in one or more of the five components of reading from their classroom teacher and the District's Title I program teacher. The classroom teacher uses the guided reading approach using the numerous titles at numerous levels stored in our book room. The Title 1 teacher uses the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) series in a guided reading formation, as well. All student assessment data and necessary interventions, as identified through the above-described interventions, are recorded in each student's school readiness plan.

Cognition

Using a checklist modified from the DRDP-K, Kindergarten teachers will assess students' ability to show persistence, curiosity and motivation, and flexibility and inventiveness. This will be done through observation in numerous settings throughout the school and by multiple teachers.

The Kindergarten teachers will assess problem solving through math activities, and through observations in the classroom and on the playground. They will assess classification skills through science and math activities. Students will be able to demonstrate that they are making connections through discussions they are asked to have, through reactions to lessons that are being taught, and when they meet in reading groups.

General Knowledge—Literacy

Our district is deeply committed to Colorado's Early Learning and Development guidelines, and we have implemented a number of programs to ensure that all of our students demonstrate grade-level competency in literacy by or before the end of third grade.

We have selected i-Ready as the "interim assessment" or screening tool that is required by the READ Act, and is aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and the results provide a road map for determining where each student is performing in relation to those standards. The i-Ready and DRA-2 assessments are administered to all K-3 students at three points throughout the school year to determine each student's reading competency.

Kindergarten teachers assess letter recognition and phonemic awareness throughout the year when students meet in reading groups.

Kindergarten teachers also administer a writing assessment at the beginning of the year to assess students' writing skills. Two of the three teachers score each student's work and then discuss the results. The rubric used by the teachers is from Ruth Culham of 6 Trait fame.

Students requiring interventions are referred to the RTI team and such needs and related interventions will be documented in students' school readiness plans. Poorly performing readers receive targeted instruction in one or more of the four components (oral expression and listening, reading for all purposes, writing and composition, and research and reasoning) of reading from their classroom teacher and the district's Title I program or Special Education teacher.

To further support our students' literacy skills, Strasburg implements *i-Ready* instruction, our technology based, district-wide reading and math instruction program. The program provides for continuous assessment of each student's reading level adapts to the specific level of the student. It has proven to be highly successful with our students at all levels. An advantage to this program is that it is Internet based and allows students to work at their own pace at home

General Knowledge—Mathematics

Kindergarten teachers give a math cumulative pre-assessment designed by the BOCES Balanced Math team and also administer the i-Ready math assessment.

Students who have performed poorly on these assessments receive targeted instruction in one or more of the four components of math (number sense, properties and operations and shape, dimension and geometric relationships) from their classroom teacher and the school's Tier 2 Math Interventionist or Special Education teacher. As described above, our district implements the i-Ready, technology-based instruction program to support continuous assessment of each student's math level and adapts instruction for the specific level of the student.

General Data Analysis/ Reporting

Every other Friday, our elementary school teachers meet to review data. They share information about students' literacy skills and review which students may need extra interventions for literacy or any other areas. Every quarter, the Kindergarten teachers meet with all school interventionists to review progress, and add or dismiss students, depending on that progress. Our elementary school's RTI coordinator is at that quarterly meeting, and then follows up with the Kindergarten teachers several other times throughout the quarter to make sure all students are at their appropriate Tier. If necessary, the coordinator will help teachers with IEP paperwork.

All teachers share updates with parents four times a year through a report card that is based on the Colorado Academic Standards. We also hold Parent/Teacher Conferences twice a year, where teachers and parents can communicate face to face. If there are concerns that arise sooner, teachers communicate those concerns to the parents via phone call or email.

IV. THE WAIVERS WILL ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY AND QUALITY IN THE DISTRICT

As a small rural district, our resources are extremely limited. Currently, we are prioritizing the use of these limited resources for innovative professional development and literacy programming. Our teachers are working collaboratively in data teams to design lesson plans and assessments aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards and their work is supported by administrators who have

invested heavily in the state's personnel evaluation rubric and the critical conversations necessary to encourage and support their professional growth. By eliminating the resource-intensive school readiness assessment and the related burdensome procedural requirements, our teachers will have more time to spend in the classroom working to serve each student's individual needs and our administrator will have more time to directly observe classrooms and provide meaningful feedback.

We are requesting this flexibility with the full support of our teachers, professional staff and community. Though we have relatively low teacher turnover, we have a hard time replacing teachers when they leave due to our limited applicant pool. This waiver evidences our strong commitment to support our teachers and students and we hope will enhance our ability to attract and retain quality teachers who appreciate the additional flexibility and support.

V. THE COSTS OF COMPLYING WITH THE STATUTES AND RULES INCLUDED IN THE WAIVER SIGNIFICANTLY LIMITS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY WITHIN THE DISTRICT

As has been stated, our district has extremely limited resources and we have gone to great lengths to maintain an educational program that provides meaningful benefits to all of our students. That being said, we have had to respond to state budget cuts in recent years. Next year, absent a significant increase in funds to the district, we will be forced to eliminate some of the para professionals who assist our Kindergarten teachers. With reduced staff, we will have even less capacity to comply with the statutory requirements for which we are seeking this waiver and continue to effectively serve every student in our school.

VI. THE DISTRICT HAS COMPLIED WITH ALL LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS

The district has complied with all notice requirements of C.R.S. 22-2-117(2) by posting notice in the I-70 Scout newspaper for three weeks, in our district's monthly newsletter, and in three public places for not less than 30 calendar days prior to our school board's discussion of this waiver request. The notice provided as follows:

Pursuant to C.R.S. 22-2-117, Strasburg Elementary School is seeking a waiver from the State Board of Education from certain requirements of C.R.S. §§ 22- 7-1014. This regards eliminating the state-mandated additional assessment of most Kindergarten students. The School Board will consider this waiver request at its monthly meeting on March 9, 2016 at Strasburg High School. The hearing will start at 6:30. Public comment is welcome.

Our elementary school principal consulted with the District's Accountability Committee on the waiver request on February 8th, more than 30 days prior to the school board meeting.