

**EARLY LITERACY EXPERT PANEL
Year One Annual Report**

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

JULY 2014

A. PURPOSE & CONTEXT

On September 26, 2012, Governor Deval Patrick signed *An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency* into law. The legislation, filed in January 2011 by former Representative Martha Walz (D-Boston) and former State Senator Katherine Clark (D-Melrose), addresses an important educational benchmark, third grade reading proficiency, which strongly correlates with children's future success in school and beyond. The legislation established an Early Literacy Expert Panel, comprised of nine members, that is charged with providing recommendations to state education agencies on the alignment, coordination, implementation and improvement of all existing efforts that bear on children's literacy outcomes, guided by the goal of improving third grade reading outcomes in the Commonwealth.

To address this charge, the Panel is scheduled to meet regularly between 2013 and 2016. The Panel is co-chaired by Secretary of Education Matthew Malone and Nonie Lesaux, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a national expert on reading development. Its members, appointed by Secretary Malone in September 2013, represent deep professional expertise in a range of domains related to children's reading proficiency, including education, medicine, public policy, as well as community and family promotion. See Attachment A for a list of the panelists.

This Panel represents a significant opportunity to cut across the boundaries of policy, research, and practice and to work collaboratively to discuss and develop new policies and policy-based initiatives in a number of domains that influence children's early literacy development, including: 1) strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of curricula for children in early education and care programs through third grade, 2) effective instructional literacy practices, 3) pre-service training and professional development for early educators, 4) screening and assessment to monitor and report on children's progress, 5) strategies for establishing family partnerships to improve the quality, frequency and efficacy of home-school interactions, and 6) the broader domain of effective *implementation* of policy and policy-based initiatives, guided by what is known from improvement science focused on risk and prevention among children and families.

B. OVERSIGHT OF THE PANEL

The Executive Office of Education (EOE) is responsible for overseeing the Early Literacy Expert Panel and has been working collaboratively with the Departments of Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education. The EOE works with Panel members, collaborates with the Commissioners from each Department, communicates progress to the legislature, shares information with the field, and informs the general public of this important work throughout the year.

C. YEAR ONE PROGRESS

Overview

Described in more detail below, the Panel met six times over the last eight months, focusing on what they refer to as two initial phases of the overall work plan: (1) preliminary mapping and information gathering, both of promising state-level initiatives across the country as well as current Massachusetts initiatives focused on four critical areas of literacy: assessing learning and development, promoting reading skills, building

adult capacity, and building language from birth to age 8, and (2) identifying two early priority areas and crafting supporting recommendations. Using the comprehensive information gathered as a platform, the Panel plans to make recommendations amenable to both policymakers and ground-level leaders. These recommendations will be: 1) feasible with respect to resources; 2) synchronous with the current context and policy environment; 3) evidence-based; 4) equitable in their implementation across populations, communities, and institutions; and 5) largely universal in nature, in order to have an effect on all children and families in the Commonwealth.

FY 13-14 Progress

As noted, the Panel met six times in FY14 and worked between the meetings to ensure progress of an action-oriented and outcome-driven agenda; a list of meeting dates appears in the Timetable section below.

1. **October, 2013.** At its inaugural meeting, the Panel co-chairs outlined the Panel's charge: to make bold recommendations that better align the work that impacts early literacy across the three educational agencies, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and the Department of Higher Education (DHE). The legislation, *An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency*, that created the Massachusetts Early Literacy Expert Panel is unique among other states because its members are cross-sector; for this reason, the co-chairs urged Panel members to take a comprehensive view that includes educators, parents and families, pediatricians and other stakeholders who have an impact on children's literacy development. Panel members reviewed and discussed *Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*, the report that informed *An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency*. Panelists then agreed to an initial mapping phase—to begin to put shape on the current statewide initiatives and efforts that support literacy development statewide across the K-12 system as well as before and around that system, including the work of community-based organizations and medical professionals. The Panel also decided to examine other states with exemplary programs and/or policies that could serve as models for Massachusetts.
2. **December, 2013.** The Panel created a timeline, work plan and organizing framework to guide their efforts. The work plan included delineating two distinct phases: (1) preliminary mapping and information gathering from December 2013-March 2014, and (2) the development of recommendations in two identified priority areas from May-October 2014. As part of Phase 1, the Panel developed an organizing framework for its work. The framework is composed of 4 key domains for developing literacy-related policy strategies: 1) assessing learning and development; 2) promoting reading; 3) building language; and 4) building adult capacity. Panelists used this organizing framework to address and complete two questions for each domain: 1) what are we currently doing, and 2) what do we wish we were doing. The Panel also examined some exemplars from other states: assessment and screening efforts in Minnesota and building adult capacity in New Jersey's Abbott districts.

3. **March, 2014.** The Panel revisited the organizing framework, reported out on their learnings about the current initiatives and efforts as well as discussed the disparities between today's context and the work that needs to be done. Co-chair Nonie Lesaux encouraged panelists to identify gaps in knowledge and outstanding questions and using this information, develop a list of experts who could present to the Panel and provide information to fill these gaps. Panelists then discussed taking a broad lens on the policy recommendations it proposes. For example, the Panel will consider making recommendations about legislated or institutional policy actions as well as policy-based initiatives that emerge from the policy landscape. Panelists will also take into consideration the different levels of policy (federal, state and local) and policy levers (legislation, regulations, and guidelines). Finally, the Panel will examine policy recommendations that are both targeted and universal.

4. **May, 2014.** Panelists reviewed the work plan and assessed progress on the four domains identified as key policy levers. The Panel then moved from Phase 1 (general discussion and input) into Phase 2 (targeted, systematic information gathering and inclusion of public commentary) of the work plan. In launching Phase 2, panelists divided into two work groups focused on areas central to early literacy development – assessment and early intervention/home visiting. These areas were selected based on evidence that: (1) both are effective ways to improve early literacy when targeted and well-implemented; (2) both provide high leverage for early detection; and (3) both already have local, statewide and national traction. Each workgroup conducted an initial document review highlighting current statewide initiatives and the latest research, began to explore a mix of short-term and bolder, longer-term recommendations and identified information that is still needed to inform these recommendations.

5. **June, 2014.** The Panel met twice during this month. At its first meeting on June 16th, invited experts provided information and data to inform the development of recommendations in the two identified priority areas: early intervention/home visiting and screening/assessment. To inform the Panel's work on early intervention and home visiting, the Panel heard from three invited speakers: **Ron Benham**, *Director of the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition for the Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services*; **Susan Murray**, *Northeast/Boston Regional Specialist for Massachusetts Early Intervention Services at the Department of Health and Human Services* and **Stephanie Jones**, *Marie and Max Kargman Associate Professor in Human Development and Urban Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education*. Panelists provided information on the Commonwealth's current early intervention and home visiting programs and identified strengths, challenges and potential areas of improvement. To inform its work on screening/assessment, the Panel heard from four invited speakers: **Alison Schonwald**, *Medical Director of Developmental Behavioral Outreach at Boston Children's Hospital and Assistant Professor in Pediatrics at the Harvard Medical School*, **Donna Traynham**, *Education Specialist in Learning Support Services at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*, **Betsy Edes**, *Early Education Coordinator at the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care*, and **Doug McNally**, *Director of the Berkshires Readiness Center at the*

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Panelists described the status of the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment and the challenges of its implementation to date as well as the current developmental screening process through pediatric clinics, and its strengths and challenges. At its second June meeting, the final one of the academic year, the Panel discussed the information presented by experts and implications for potential recommendations before splitting into the two work groups for more in-depth discussions. The Panel then generated a list of questions (see Attachment B) that will be used to guide further information gathering efforts in July and August.

Timetable

Panel Activity	Timeframe	Progress
Communication to and with education stakeholders	Ongoing	Initial communications have informed stakeholders of meeting dates and content; updates and information are provided through the EOE web site
Year 1: Meeting One	October 31, 2013	Reviewed <i>Turning the Page</i> report that informed the legislation; developed process to guide initial work; discussed next steps for future meetings
Year 1: Meeting Two	December 4, 2013	Developed work plan, organizing framework, and timeline; started Massachusetts mapping work
Year 1: Meeting Three	March 31, 2014	Discussed information-gathering process and different types of types of policy recommendations; continued Massachusetts mapping work
Year 1: Meeting Four	May 14, 2014	Launched Phase 2 of the Panel work, consisting of more targeted information gathering in two areas: 1) early intervention/home visiting and 2) assessment

Year 1: Meeting Five	June 16, 2014	Expert outside panelists presented on early intervention/home visiting and assessment
Year 1: Meeting Six	June 19, 2014	Debriefed on expert presentations, identified areas for information gathering in the short-term and explored potential recommendations in the two priority areas.
Annual Report	July, 2014	Completed
Year 2: Meeting One	September 10, 2014	Share and discuss information gathered over the summer months
Year 2: Meeting Two	September 24, 2014	Draft recommendations related to early intervention/home visiting and screening/assessment

C. NEXT STEPS

The Executive Office of Education is excited to be leading the Early Literacy Expert Panel and will continue to work closely with all three agencies (EEC, ESE, DHE) to inform each of the Panel's progress, seek input, and to identify opportunities for collaboration. At the Panel's September meetings, members will explore and develop recommendations related to better aligning and coordinating early intervention and home visiting programs with the Commonwealth's system of early education and care, expanding screening programs, and identifying new assessment opportunities for early elementary students. For the remainder of 2014, the Panel will be focused on bringing more coherence and connectivity to the Commonwealth's system for children and will develop bold, actionable recommendations supported by evidence that will set Massachusetts on a course to closing its early literacy achievement gaps and ensuring that all students are proficient readers by third grade.

Attachment A

Early Literacy Panel Members

- **Matthew H. Malone**, Co-chair
Secretary of Education, Massachusetts Executive Office of Education
- **Nonie Lesaux**, Co-chair
Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- **Lisa Antonelli**
Kindergarten 1 Teacher, Franklin D. Roosevelt School, Boston
- **Maryellen Brunelle**
Superintendent, Auburn Public Schools
- **Joan Kagan**
President and Chief Executive Officer, Square One, Springfield
- **Kelly Kulsrud**
Director of Reading Proficiency, Strategies for Children
- **Mariela M. Páez**
Associate Professor of Education, Boston College
- **Jessica R. Roth**
Pediatrician, Children's Hospital Boston and the Martha Eliot Health Center
- **Wayne Ysaguirre**
President and CEO, Nurtury, Boston

Attachment B

Questions Related to Early Intervention/Home Visiting and Assessment

Early Intervention

- Who and how many children are receiving both EI and home visiting? To what extent are EI and home visiting redundant? What budgetary constraints exist that might keep EI and home visiting separate?
- In terms of implementation of EI services, what is the balance between educating parents and providing highly qualified personnel who deliver direct services to children?
- To what extent is EI helping the high rates of toddler boys referred for low-language levels? (Is this supported by data?) Are there ways to take more preventative approaches for this population?
- In what ways might EI's impact lead to improvements in the language and literacy domain – from referral through to services?
- How does the program approach screening and services for families who speak a primary language other than English? Are the screenings provided in a language other than English? Are services provided for these families, and in what language? How many families are served (if any) in a language other than English?

Home Visiting

- Which of the home visiting programs in MA line up with the principles of developing early language skills?
- For those programs that do align, what are the rates of children served and implementation of the program – scope and reach?
- Within these home visiting programs related to early language skills, what is the measurement, if any, of children's language growth? Are there ways to augment that?
- What are the measures and screeners within the program, beyond ASQ, for the adults?
- How do these programs approach screening and services for families who speak a primary language other than English? Are services provided for these families, and in what language? How many families are served (if any) in a language other than English?

Screening

- What are the implications for early language development for children with mothers suffering from undiagnosed post-partum depression (which is currently not reimbursed)?
- What are the current rates of English language learners who are screened? How might we increase these rates? (For example, deliver screenings in multiple languages.)

MKEA Assessment

- What is the core goal of MKEA? What does MKEA currently provide to the state?
- Given the current implementation of MKEA, how do we maintain our focus on the problem that the 3rd grade MCAS scores are the first measure of reading skills within the early elementary population?