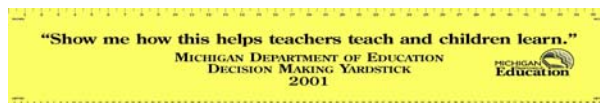




Michigan State Board of Education

Early Literacy Task Force Report



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Executive Overview

It wasn't very many years ago when the issue of early childhood literacy was not thought to be a concern of State Boards of Education. It is hard to find that sentiment today. Brain development research has helped to define the links between early learning experiences and later school success for children. The challenge we face is to define what the State Board of Education's role in early childhood literacy should be.

Learning to read starts long before a child enters school, and reading is what helps a child become a good student. In addition, being able to read is necessary for students to be successful in the other subjects that make up a well-educated, well-rounded adult. We, as the State Board of Education, need to take an expanded leadership role to increase public awareness of the importance of early literacy, as well as, foster interagency initiatives and support programs that reach out to our most vulnerable children.

It is important to recognize that the majority of our children do enter school equipped with the fundamental skills to actively participate in the learning process and to ultimately be successful. However, we know that not all adults understand how important it is to begin developing the skills of very young children to ensure that they will be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

Increasing public awareness of the importance of early childhood literacy is an integral part in helping young children acquire reading skills and must be incorporated into our long-range plan. Studies show over one-third of American children enter kindergarten unprepared to benefit from classroom instruction.¹ Studies also show nine out of ten children who are poor readers in first grade have the probability of being poor readers in fourth grade.² What is more ominous is that 75 percent of poor readers who are not helped prior to age nine, will continue to have reading difficulties through high school.³

The Michigan State Board of Education is charged with providing leadership and general supervision over all public education. Therefore, it is appropriate that we provide the leadership that fosters strong working relationships between the Michigan Department of Education; appropriate state and local agencies; school districts; educators; teacher preparation institutions; employers and, most importantly, parents and caregivers that make early literacy a priority. Working together our goals are to:

1. Ensure all children enter school ready to learn.
2. Ensure all children become independent readers/communicators who can understand and apply information within their daily lives.
3. Ensure that all schools are ready to meet the needs of all children.

As the chair of the Michigan State Board of Education's Early Literacy Task Force, it is with great pleasure that I submit the following recommendations for consideration and action.

Sharon Wise

¹ Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation, E.L. Boyer, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991

² Juel, C. 1998. Learning to Read and Write: A longitudinal study of 54 children from first through fourth grades. Journal of Educational Psychology, 80, pp. 437-447

³ Lyon, G.R., Statement to U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 4/28/98

Early Literacy Task Force Recommendations



Early childhood, which is the period in a child's life from birth through age eight, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives. A child's cognitive development during early childhood, which includes building skills such as pre-reading, language, vocabulary, and numbers, begins from the moment a child is born.

Developmental scientists have found that the brain acquires a tremendous amount of information about language in the first year of life, even before infants can speak. By the time babies utter or understand their first words, they know which particular sounds their language uses, what sounds can be combined to create words, and the tempo and rhythm of words and phrases.

There is a strong connection between the development a child undergoes early in life and the level of success that the child will experience later in life. For example, infants who are better at distinguishing the building blocks of speech at six months are better at other more complex language skills at two and three years of age and better at acquiring the skills for learning to read at four and five years of age.

Adults who live and interact regularly with children can profoundly influence the quality and quantity of their literacy experiences.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects.

Cotton, K., Wiklund, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series in Parent Involvement in Education.

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. When young children are provided an environment rich in language and literacy interactions and full of opportunities to listen to and use language constantly, they can begin to acquire the essential building blocks for learning how to read. A child who enters school without these skills runs a significant risk of starting behind and staying behind (Attachment A –The Michigan Department of Education Reading Fact Sheets.)

In order to close the gap between the best research and current practices in early childhood education, the parents and caregivers must fully understand the importance of providing an environment rich in language and literacy interactions and how to provide such an environment.

1.0 PUBLIC AWARENESS

Policy Recommendation

It is the policy of the State Board of Education that Michigan students achieve early literacy by: Promoting public awareness to inform citizens to become dedicated to early literacy.

1.1 Early Literacy Education Recommendations:

- a) Direct the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to encourage and support intermediate school district (ISD) and local education agency (LEA) efforts to promote public and parent awareness of the importance of parents as their children's first teachers, and the critical role parents and adults share in fostering a child's early literacy.
- b) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to restore funding for the Read, Educate, And Develop Youth (R.E.A.D.Y.) program to provide kits containing important child development information, learning activities and other engaging materials to all Michigan families with young children.
- c) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to meet with various agency directors to identify actions to increase early childhood parent information efforts during pre-natal, immunization and pediatrician visits.
- d) Direct the MDE to continue involvement and support for early childhood public awareness that promotes the importance of early literacy.
- e) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a list of recommended educational priorities for corporate and community foundations.
- f) Direct the MDE to seek corporate and foundation funding for Department early literacy public awareness and professional development efforts.



1.2 Research and Knowledge Development Recommendations:

- a) Direct the MDE to update early childhood education standards and develop pre-kindergarten literacy benchmarks.
- b) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to promote awareness of ISDs, LEAs, educators, administrators, decision makers and teaching colleges regarding research-based information on early childhood development and evidence-based practices for early childhood literacy acquisition.
- c) Direct the MDE to commission a longitudinal research study to determine the level of literacy development of Michigan children entering kindergarten.
- d) Direct the MDE to include a comprehensive multi-year evaluation component on student achievement, teacher behavior and program efficacy in all early childhood, literacy and other grant programs administered by the Department.

2.0 COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS

The goal of collaboration is to bring individuals and members of communities, agencies and organizations together in an atmosphere of support to systematically solve existing and emerging problems that may not be solved by one group alone. Issues affecting early literacy reach far beyond the purview of the MDE and require the collaboration of numerous state and community partners.



Policy Recommendation

It is the policy of the State Board of Education that Michigan students achieve early literacy by: Promoting early literacy and fostering collaborative partnerships that optimize the growth and development of Michigan's children.

2.1 *Service Agencies, Medical and Community Collaboration Recommendations:*

- a) Direct the MDE to encourage Multi-Purpose Collaborative Bodies to form or continue workgroups comprised of all major stakeholders including local human service and interagency representatives to encourage unified and coordinated services and programs to support the growth and development of children birth to age eight.
- b) Direct the MDE to recommend local school leaders work with community human service agencies, including public libraries, to provide parents with information on available programs and services to help their children succeed.
- c) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage ISDs to:
 - Promote community awareness of early learning programs;
 - Collaborate with hospitals and medical associations to provide free early learning materials through ISDs, the State and the U.S. Department of Education to families with young children; and
 - Build partnerships with local libraries, including the Library of Michigan, to encourage use of the library to promote reading readiness and early literacy and to develop children's and family programs that support acquisition of early reading skills.
- d) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to continue strong support and involvement with the Ready to Succeed Partnership.

2.2 *School/Child Care/Parent Partnerships Recommendations:*

- a) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to strengthen partnerships among early childhood education programs, providers of early childhood care and education, and parents.
- b) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage ISDs and LEAs to develop and support programs and efforts to strengthen the relationship between elementary schools and parents of children birth to age five.

- c) Direct the MDE to develop tools to assist schools in creating and supporting partnerships between elementary schools and parents of children birth to age five.

Note: Tools may include a how to guide for elementary schools to establish a Family Resource Center to provide parents of young and elementary age children additional access to information and high-quality reading materials.

3.0 COMPREHENSIVE EARLY LITERACY SERVICES

While Michigan hosts a variety of early childhood and literacy programs, very few provide young children long-term, consistent, seamless services to ensure reading success. Instead, most programs vary significantly in size, scope and mission creating fragmentation and gaps in services.

For example, families of toddlers at-risk of school failure may exit an early intervention program only to find that no services or programs are available for three-year-old children to maintain the family and child's progress. Or, children exiting a preschool program for four-year-olds may require additional help prior to or upon entering school; however, they may not receive services until they have failed in school numerous years or qualify for a special education reading intervention program.

Policy Recommendation

It is the policy of the State Board of Education that Michigan students achieve early literacy by: Ensuring that Michigan's children will receive seamless, high-quality early literacy experiences.

3.1 *Early Childhood Experiences for All Children Birth Through Kindergarten Recommendations:*

- a) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to restore and increase All Students Achieve Program-Parent Involvement and Education (ASAP-PIE) funding to serve all Michigan children on a formula versus competitive grant basis.

Legislative language should include mandating a percentage of funding awarded to ISDs be set aside for evaluation and a media campaign to promote parent awareness.

- b) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage ISDs and LEAs support to continue and expand high-quality, evidence-based, early education programs.

3.2 *Early Childhood Literacy Experiences for Children Birth to Kindergarten At-Risk of Reading Failure Recommendations:*

- a) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to increase funding for the Michigan School Readiness Program to provide access to the program for all three-and four-year-old children at-risk of school failure or reading failure.
- b) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to fund full day, full-year, high-quality early education programs for at-risk young children.



3.3 *Early Elementary (K-3) Literacy Experiences for Children At-Risk of Reading Failure Recommendations:*

- a) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to provide funding for in-school and out-of-school, evidence-based, early reading intervention programs.
- b) Direct the MDE to form a task force of school library media specialists, in coordination with the Library of Michigan, to draft recommendations on how to enhance literacy experiences in schools for children at-risk of reading failure.

3.4 *Extended Learning Opportunities for At-Risk Children Recommendations:*

- a) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage ISDs and LEAs to partner with mental health programs such as, but not exclusive to, infant mental health and Preschool Expulsion Prevention Projects.
- b) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage ISDs and LEAs to partner with libraries and local cultural arts programs.

4.0 TEACHER PREPARATION/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring all children learn to read not only requires children entering school ready, but also that the school and teachers are ready for the students. Teacher preparation research indicates:

- Primary grade teachers take an average of 1.3 college undergraduate courses in the teaching of reading (Goodlad, 1997:36).
- Teacher preparation for the teaching of reading has not been adequate to bring about the research-based changes in classroom practices that result in success (Corlett, 1988; Nolen et al., 1990; Moats and Lyon, 1996; Moats, 1994).
- In a survey study about teacher knowledge of reading development, approximately 400 teachers indicated:
 - students in elementary teacher preparation programs rarely observe professors demonstrating instructional reading methods with children,
 - work is superficial and typically unrelated to teaching practice and student teaching experiences and,
 - practices are fragmented and inconsistent (Lyon, G. R., Vaasen, M., & Toomey, F. (1989). Teachers' Perceptions of their Undergraduate and Graduate Preparation. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 12(4), 164-169.)



Policy Recommendation

It is the policy of the State Board of Education that early literacy opportunities for Michigan children will be provided by knowledgeable and capable individuals providing high-quality early literacy experiences.

4.1 Early Education and Care Provider Training/Professional Development Recommendations:

- a) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene a meeting with appropriate agency directors to recommend methods to increase training and early childhood development in literacy for all providers of early childhood care and education.
- b) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to provide funding to increase evidence-based professional development for all providers of early childhood care and education.

This could be implemented through the Regional Literacy Training Centers and could include the Teacher Education And Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program.

4.2 *Teacher Early Childhood Development and Literacy Recommendations:*

- a) Approve a recommendation to the Legislature from the State Board of Education to restore funding to support the Regional Literacy Training Centers' efforts to increase the number of teachers and administrators receiving professional development in early literacy development and acquisition.

Note: Title II of the ESEA now requires districts to offer professional development to administrators.

- b) Direct the MDE to revise administrative rules to require all newly assigned kindergarten through second grade teachers to have early childhood (ZA) endorsements within two years of their assignment by September 1, 2005.
- c) Direct the MDE to make early literacy and early childhood development part of the continuing education certification process for all kindergarten through second grade teachers.
- d) Direct the MDE to encourage ISDs and LEAs to deliver evidence-based teacher professional development to ensure that all teachers have the skills and time they need to assess, identify, and overcome literacy barriers facing their students.

4.3 *Teacher Preparation/PreK-12 University Partnerships Recommendations:*

- a) Direct the MDE to revise the early childhood teacher certification test to ensure knowledge of literacy development and acquisition.
- b) Direct the Superintendent of Public Instruction to work with teacher preparation institutions to ensure student teachers seeking an early childhood (ZA) endorsement are placed with experienced teachers with that endorsement.



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