



Effective Policies and Practices for Reading + Literacy Instruction

Reading and literacy are essential to a young person's success. We need to implement proactive and holistic strategies that address gaps in reading and literacy skills. To respond to our student needs, Massachusetts schools are adapting their core reading, literacy and multilingual learner programs to utilize new curriculum, instruction, assessments and interventions for all students. Educators are engaging in professional learning to build their knowledge and skills in designing and delivering instruction.

The revised [English Language Arts and Literacy Frameworks \(2017\)](#), [Literacy Strategic Plan \(2018\)](#), [Dyslexia Guidelines \(2020\)](#) and [Early Literacy Screening Guidance \(2023\)](#) are just some of the recent initiatives our educators are currently implementing. We should not be rushing additional curriculum mandates or create more testing requirements for students.

Massachusetts policies on reading and English language arts instruction, as for all subjects, must allow schools to adapt to the needs of their students. Fewer than 60 percent of children were enrolled in an early education program, according to 2016 data. English learners' ACCESS testing in 2022 showed schools served nearly 64,000 English learners in grades K-5, many of whom were in their first year in Massachusetts schools. Grade 3 MCAS English language arts assessment, a measure of writing, comprehension and vocabulary, does not provide a valid or reliable picture of reading proficiency.

Classroom teachers, specialized literacy professionals, special education teachers and other educators need the time, funding and flexibility to analyze students' needs, provide appropriate interventions and quickly respond to student progress.

Policy & Practice Recommendations

Curriculum and Assessment Decisions: Core literacy curricula and assessments must be selected locally. Culturally responsive programs should include age-appropriate instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing as informed by the [Mass Literacy Guide](#). The [What Works Clearinghouse](#), [The Reading League Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines](#) and the [International Literacy Association](#) may also serve as resources for alignment with evidence based practices. Districts need support for investments in developmentally appropriate, diverse and culturally responsive curriculum and assessment tools. Massachusetts should consider funding programs such as [Growing Literacy Equity Across Massachusetts \(GLEAM\)](#) beyond the availability of the existing federal funding.

Early Literacy Screenings: The Early Literacy Screening regulations under [603 CMR 28.03\(1\)\(F\)](#) are going into full effect in the 2023-24 school year. Schools need resources to support the implementation and staffing requirements of the twice-yearly Early Literacy screenings, parent notification under [DESE Early Literacy Screening Guidance \(June 2023\)](#) and responsive interventions that align to the [Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines](#).

Dedicated Planning Time: All educators require sufficient time during the workday to attend to the new administrative and professional requirements. This includes time to adapt lessons to new curriculum resources, proactively plan interventions under [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#) and collaborate with specialized literacy professionals, English language acquisition teachers and special education teachers. Districts should collaborate with educators to identify opportunities to increase daily planning and collaboration times.

Reading and Literacy Interventions: Students enter public schools with uneven levels of prior learning experience. Multilingual learners, refugees and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), may require integrated language and literacy interventions such as programs modeled on Scarborough’s Reading Rope. School budgets should reflect resources for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions during the school day. Using untrained tutors or relying on in-class differentiation is not appropriate. Effective intervention programs require licensed educators and appropriate learning spaces for students in elementary, middle and high schools.

School and Classroom Libraries: School libraries and classroom libraries create opportunities for students to select high interest reading materials. Schools will need new commitments to fully fund school libraries staffed by licensed librarians as recommended by the 2018 Massachusetts School Library Study. Libraries support access to high interest and culturally responsive print and digital reading materials. Classroom teachers should be provided with resources for classroom libraries to integrate additional reading choices aligned to the curriculum.

Educator Preparation: Initial and advanced educator preparation must include defined coursework aligned with the International Literacy Association Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals that include field experiences with skilled mentors in diverse settings. The recommendations included in the Early Literacy Program Criteria should be updated to define age-appropriate pedagogy for candidates in all grade levels. For practicing educators, Massachusetts should provide grants or stipends that allow educators to obtain nationally recognized credentials in reading and literacy programs.

Expand Professional Learning: Educators at all grade levels should have opportunities to participate in role-appropriate professional learning aligned with the International Literacy Association Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals and other national organizations. This may include foundational skills in literacy, oral language, writing and engaging with texts for elementary and secondary students. DESE can also support expanded opportunities for individual educators to access Mass Literacy: Open Access for Professional Learning in reading, literacy and supporting multilingual learners.

Coordination Among Early Childhood Programs: All families need access to universal, public early-childhood programs and no-fee kindergarten programs. Public and private partnerships need to invest in collaborative professional learning to align curriculum, assessments and instructional practices among licensed, Early Education and Care (EEC) programs with local district programs. Early childhood partnership programs will support Child Find efforts, enable early identification of students with specific learning disabilities and connect families with the EEC Child Development Guidance for Parents.

Acknowledgements

This Reading + Literacy Instruction Plan Book was developed in collaboration with members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association Working Group on Reading and Literacy. Special appreciation to the members of the MTA Education Policy Committee, MTA members and staff for their contributions and feedback on this document.