

SENATE No. 234

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Joseph A. Boncore

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to early literacy education.

PETITION OF:

| NAME: | DISTRICT/ADDRESS: | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Joseph A. Boncore</i> | <i>First Suffolk and Middlesex</i> | |
| <i>Michael S. Day</i> | <i>31st Middlesex</i> | |
| <i>Patrick M. O'Connor</i> | <i>Plymouth and Norfolk</i> | <i>1/29/2019</i> |
| <i>Nick Collins</i> | <i>First Suffolk</i> | <i>2/1/2019</i> |

SENATE No. 234

By Mr. Boncore, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 234) of Joseph A. Boncore, Michael S. Day, Patrick M. O'Connor and Nick Collins for legislation relative to early literacy education. Education.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court
(2019-2020)**

An Act relative to early literacy education.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. (1) The General Court finds that:

2 (a) All students can succeed in school if they have the foundational skills necessary for
3 academic success. While foundational skills go beyond academic skills to include such skills as
4 social emotional competence, they must also include the ability to read, understand, interpret,
5 and apply information;

6 (b) A lack of reading proficiency by fourth grade creates lifelong consequences, and the
7 obstacles to that goal begin at birth. In order to succeed in school and in life, every child needs to
8 receive proper vision and hearing screenings, among other services;

9 (c) Massachusetts has prioritized early learning through its investments in preschool and
10 full-day kindergarten, and the General Court recognizes that these investments can best be
11 leveraged by adopting policies that support a continuum of learning from birth through fifth
12 grade and beyond;

13 (d) It is more cost-effective to invest in targeted early literacy education rather than to
14 absorb costs for remediation in middle school, high school, and beyond;

15 (e) A comprehensive approach to early literacy education can improve student
16 achievement, reduce the need for costly special education services, and produce a better
17 educated, more skilled, and more competitive workforce;

18 (f) The purpose of this act is to promote the identification and assessment of early literacy
19 deficiencies, to intervene to address those deficiencies, and to provide educator support;

20 (g) The act seeks to increase collaboration among community leaders to analyze the early
21 literacy landscape in their school districts and to deliver early literacy support programs to
22 community members in need;

23 (h) An important partnership between a parent and child begins before the child enters
24 kindergarten, when the parent helps the child develop rich linguistic experiences, including
25 listening comprehension and speaking, that help form the foundation for reading and writing,
26 which are the main vehicles for content acquisition;

27 (i) The greatest impact for ensuring student success lies in a productive collaboration
28 among parents, teachers, and schools in providing a child's education, so it is paramount that
29 parents are informed about the status of their children's educational progress and that teachers
30 and schools receive the financial resources and other resources and support they need, including
31 valid assessments, instructional programming that is proven to be effective, and training and
32 professional development programs, to effectively teach the science of reading, assess students'
33 achievement, and enable each student to achieve the grade level expectations for reading; and

34 (j) This act will assist local education providers in setting a solid foundation for students'
35 academic success and will require the ongoing commitment of financial and other resources from
36 both the state and local levels.

37 SECTION 2. Chapter 69 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
38 section 1P the following section:-

39 Section 1Q. The department of elementary and secondary education, hereinafter referred
40 to as the department, shall establish a grant program subject to appropriation to be known as the
41 early literacy education grant program for the purpose of providing grants to assist school
42 districts and Horace Mann and Commonwealth charter schools with the implementation and
43 provision of early literacy education programs and services for students in kindergarten through
44 grade five. To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, districts shall have approved
45 chronic absenteeism, kindergarten screening, and early literacy improvement plans, which target
46 early literacy development by way of assessment, intervention, and professional development for
47 teachers, on file with the department. Such programs shall continue to make use of existing
48 resources in school districts, educational collaboratives, and other agencies, service providers,
49 and organizations. Districts must also have conducted an early literacy education needs
50 assessment. The department shall recommend curricula and interventions, one or more of which
51 each district shall adopt in order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section.

52 Funding shall be awarded to districts on a per-pupil basis at the kindergarten and
53 elementary school levels, giving priority to districts with a higher number of students qualifying
54 for free and reduced lunch economically disadvantaged, as defined by the department in

55 conjunction with the department of early education and care. The department shall not issue any
56 grant in an amount less than \$50,000 per district per year.

57 Grants under this section may be used to acquire and implement early literacy resources,
58 including, but not limited to: reading coaches; reading interventionists who must be trained in
59 proven approaches for addressing learning disabilities, including dyslexia; school adjustment
60 counselors; supplemental compensation to teachers to perform home visits and collaborative
61 planning time with parents of students; literacy consultants; professional development for
62 teachers, including basic literacy instruction; establishment of summer teacher and student
63 academies; vision and hearing screenings; and early literacy education technology. The grants
64 shall also encourage voluntary expansion of existing early literacy education programs in the
65 Commonwealth, and shall be used to provide early literacy education programs for students who
66 are at risk of educational failure due to reading deficiencies and truancy. Since research has
67 shown that behavioral issues have a negative impact on a student's ability to read, grants may
68 also be used to assist in developing programs that provide a range of approaches to address
69 behavioral issues, such as behavior specialists, in-school suspension rooms and crisis centers, in
70 addition to out-of-school alternative settings.

71 Grant recipients shall develop remediation plans for students that address both academic
72 and behavioral issues. Grants may also be made available for in-school regular education
73 programs that include self-improvement, behavior management and life skills training to help
74 provide students with tools to better manage their lives and attitudes, to support programs that
75 use family-based approaches, and to assist students and teachers during the transition of students
76 back into regular education classrooms.

77 A grant awarded pursuant to this subsection shall require that recipients undertake
78 ongoing program evaluations that document the effectiveness of the program in helping students
79 to achieve and maintain literacy skills. In awarding grants, priority shall be given to programs
80 that employ interventions that have been empirically validated including the use of multiple
81 assessments of progress throughout the school year.

82 The department shall establish guidelines governing the early literacy education grant
83 program. The guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, a requirement that, as soon as
84 possible after a student is identified as having need of a reading improvement plan, a
85 representative of the school district shall meet with the student and the student's parents or legal
86 guardian to develop a reading improvement plan that specifies the responsibilities of the school,
87 the student and the student's parents or legal guardian. The plan shall, at a minimum, include:

88 (a) The student's specific, diagnosed reading skill deficiencies that need to be remediated
89 in order for the student to attain reading competency;

90 (b) The goals and benchmarks for the student's growth in attaining reading competency;

91 (c) The type of additional instructional services and interventions the student will receive
92 in reading;

93 (d) The scientifically based or evidence-based reading instructional programming the
94 teacher will use to provide to the student daily reading approaches, strategies, interventions, and
95 instruction, which programs at a minimum shall address the areas of phonemic awareness,
96 phonics, alphabet and letter knowledge, grapheme-phoneme correspondence, word recognition
97 fluency, invented spelling, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral skills, and
98 reading comprehension.

99 (e) The manner in which the school will monitor and evaluate the student's progress;

100 (f) The strategies the student's parent is encouraged to use in assisting the student to
101 achieve reading competency that are designed to supplement the programming described in
102 paragraph (d) of this subsection; and

103 (g) Any additional services the teacher deems available and appropriate to accelerate the
104 student's reading skill development.

105 To ensure that the early literacy education grant program improves students' progress
106 toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade, the department shall:

107 (a) Monitor the performance of school districts that receive grants under this section,
108 including students' progress toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade;

109 (b) Intervene where necessary to ensure appropriate and effective use of grants
110 apportioned under this section; and

111 (c) Facilitate continuous improvement of use of grants apportioned under this section by
112 implementing strategies for school districts to share best practices for improving students'
113 progress toward increasing reading competency by fourth grade.

114 Not later than December 31, 2020, and every two years thereafter, the State Auditor shall
115 conduct financial and program audits of the uses of the early literacy education grant program
116 and the effectiveness of the program in achieving its stated purposes. The State Auditor shall
117 submit the audit reports to the General Court and the Governor.

118 SECTION 3. Chapter 15D of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the
119 following section:-

120 Section 19. The department of early education and care, hereinafter referred to as the
121 department, shall establish a grant program to be known as the early literacy service provider
122 grant program for the purpose of providing grants to support early literacy initiatives for children
123 ages zero through five. In order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section, districts must
124 conduct an early literacy education needs assessment.

125 Funding shall be awarded to districts with one or more economically disadvantaged
126 students, as defined by the department in conjunction with the department of elementary and
127 secondary education. Regardless of the number of economically disadvantaged students in any
128 district, no grant shall be issued in an amount less than \$50,000 per district per year.

129 The superintendent of each district which receives a grant under this section shall
130 assemble a local stakeholder group of not more than thirteen individuals for the purpose of
131 structuring and administering a competitive grant program for redistribution of the grant funds to
132 early literacy service providers who will serve children ages zero through five in that district.
133 Eligible recipients of the competitive grant shall include grantees across the Commonwealth,
134 which deliver family support programs and care-giver education.

135 The department shall establish guidelines governing the early literacy service provider
136 grant program.