

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

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

JULY 2015

A. PURPOSE & CONTEXT

This report, which is filed pursuant to Chapter 287 of the Acts of 2012, *An Act relative to third grade reading proficiency*, addresses an important educational benchmark, 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 James Peyser and Nonie Lesaux, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a national expert on reading development. Its members, appointed 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 TWO PROGRESS

Overview

Described in more detail below, the Panel met seven times over the last year, focusing on advancing the two early priority areas that were selected in year one of the Panel's work and crafting supporting recommendations. The latter half of year two brought a shift in leadership in the Executive Office of Education. In early January, James A. Peyser was sworn in as secretary and became the new co-chair of the Early Literacy Panel, replacing former secretary Matthew Malone. Secretary Peyser has selected Undersecretary Ann Reale as his designee on the Panel.

Using the comprehensive information gathered in year one 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 14-15 Progress

As noted, the Panel met seven times in FY15 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. **September, 2014.** The Panel met twice in September, on the 10th and 24th. On September 10th, Panel members met at the Nurtury Learning Lab and received an update on information gathered over the summer on home visiting and early intervention. Ron Benham from the Department of Public Health joined by phone to provide answers to questions related to Early Intervention and Home Visiting that the Panel developed over the summer. Next, working groups for Early Intervention/Home Visiting and Assessment/Screening met to discuss initial recommendations. The Panel then developed a fall timeline of meetings and action items with the goal of producing a policy document outlining its initial policy recommendations. The Panel meeting ended with a tour of the Martha Eliot Health Center and discussion of the literacy programs provided there. On September 24th, the Panel met in Auburn and heard a presentation from the Birth to 3rd Grade Advisory Group which is supported by the National Governors' Association and is charged with building a birth-through-grade-three policy agenda that will help children achieve success in school and later in life. Working groups then met and reported out on their progress during a whole Panel discussion of recommendations.
2. **October, 2014.** On October 20th Panel Co-chair Nonie Lesaux presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education an overview of the Panel's work to date and future plans. On October 22nd, the Panel met at Roosevelt School in Hyde Park to focus on the development of an interim policy brief with a first set of recommendations and the communication of that brief in light of the upcoming gubernatorial transition. The Panel heard from Amy O'Leary, Early Education for All Campaign Director at Strategies for Children and Chris Horan, Founder and Managing Partner at Horan Communications. Both presenters provided the Panel with insights and recommendations about presenting and effectively communicating its recommendations to maximize their impact. The Panel then developed the policy document (attached as a .pdf to this report) with its initial policy recommendations in Early Intervention/Home Visiting and Early Screening. For Early Intervention and Home Visiting, the Panel recommended that: 1) The Departments of Early Education and Care, Public Health, and Elementary and

Secondary Education generate a "map" or "menu of services" to support a sharper professional understanding of what's offered and for whom, and how to

- access services to promote a better match between referrals and services for children and families, 2) consolidate Early Intervention (Dept. of Public Health) and home visiting programs (Dept. of Early Education and Care) into one agency that oversees, coordinates, and streamlines services, and 3) extend Early Intervention to age 5. In order to identify early indications of risk, the Panel recommended 1) a language checklist to monitor vocabulary development as part of the well-baby visit in the pediatrician's office, which could be implemented as a pilot initiative for pediatric clinics and offices with the goal of statewide adoption and 2) the Dept. of Early Education and Care and the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education should provide guidance about screening tools, including a list of possible tools and corresponding training.
3. **November, 2014.** The Panel met in Cambridge and members revisited the organizing framework and reviewed the timeline, workplan and process. The focus was on moving from Phase II (generating initial policy recommendations) to Phase III (advancing first recommendations and expanding to additional priority areas). The Panel developed new working groups for 1) Messaging and Communication and 2) Implementation. The Panel identified key short-, mid-, and longer-term action steps for each of the recommendations described above. And, for Early Intervention and Home Visiting, the Panel identified a mapping project to be done in collaboration with the Department of Early Education and Care to analyze state-level efforts that provide home visiting and early intervention services for young children and their families, in order to ensure effective resource allocation and program implementation, and to enhance referral mechanisms and processes.
 4. **December, 2014.** Panelists met in Auburn and focused on the context for its work as well as its progress in Phase III. Panel members revisited the communications strategy in light of the incoming administration and discussed next steps for screening and assessment. The Panel also discussed its proposed strategy of streamlining Early Intervention into one agency. Finally, the Panel agreed on a potential timeline for 2015, dependent upon the new administration's priorities.
 5. **April, 2015.** This was the Panel's first meeting under the Baker-Polito administration and Undersecretary Ann Reale co-chaired as Secretary Peyser's designee. The Panel began with introductions and reviewed its work to date as well as its 2015 priorities. Undersecretary Reale described the new administration's commitment to improving third grade reading levels. Panel member Kelly Kulsrud then presented an overview of legislation filed that was relevant to early literacy. Next, Panel members discussed early identifiers of risk and the need to agree on an early identification tool as a state so that there is consistency and that there are fewer assessments, but assessments that are better and more targeted. Undersecretary Reale noted the importance of simultaneously building and using a statewide data system to track early learning. The meeting concluded with a discussion of potential topics for further discussion and exploration, including higher education and literacy requirements for early educators, site-based instructional leadership in literacy and teachers' capacity to use preventative and targeted intervention strategies.

6. **June, 2015.** The Panel met for a special session on understanding kindergarten screening and assessment in Massachusetts. Betsy Edes, Early Education Coordinator for the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) and Birth to 3rd Grade Alignment at the Dept. of Early Education and Care presented on the status of MKEA. The Panel then discussed the purposes of assessment and agreed that good assessments should minimize the time spent testing and maximize time for instruction. In addition, assessments are only valuable if the data are used to inform instruction. Co-chair Lesaux described the characteristics of effective screening tools, including: sensitivity, specificity, practicality and consequential validity. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the need for accurate messaging to the field about screening and assessment. The Panel set its next meeting for September, during which it will focus on crystallizing short-term strategies to advance its recommendations.

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 2: Meeting One	September 10, 2014	Drafting of initial recommendations on Early Intervention and Home Visiting and early identifiers of risk
Year 2: Meeting Two	September 24, 2014	Finalizing of recommendations
Year 2: Meeting Three	October 22, 2014	Development of interim policy document
Year 2: Meeting Four	November 12, 2014	Shifted from Phase II to Phase III of work
Year 2: Meeting Five	December 10, 2014	Developed communications strategy and confirmed 2015 timeline
Year 2: Meeting Six	April 15, 2015	First meeting under new administration; reviewed progress to date and recommendations in the two priority areas.
Year 2: Meeting Seven	June 19, 2015	Focused on screening and assessment and identified next steps for advancing recommendations
Annual Report	August 2015	Completed

Year 3: Meeting One	September 16, 2015	Presentation of Early Intervention and Home Visiting project and share and discuss information on screening and assessment gathered over the summer months
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C. NEXT STEPS

The Executive Office of Education is committed to 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. Panel Co-chair Lesaux was recently appointed to chair the Board of Early Education and Care, which will result in tighter alignment of the Panel’s work. At the Panel’s upcoming meetings, members will identify ways to implement its initial recommendations and explore and develop recommendations in new areas such as building adult capacity. For the remainder of 2015, the Panel will focus on bringing more coherence and connectivity to the Commonwealth’s system for children.

Attachment A

Early Literacy Panel Members

- **James A. Peyser**, Co-chair, *January 2015-June 2015*
Secretary of Education, Massachusetts Executive Office of Education
- **Matthew H. Malone**, Co-chair, *July 2014-December 2014*
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