

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

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

**JULY 2016**

## **A. PURPOSE & CONTEXT**

This report is filed pursuant to Chapter 287 of the Acts of 2012, *An Act relative to third grade reading proficiency*. The 2012 legislation established an Early Literacy Expert Panel (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. The Panel's work addresses the important educational benchmark of literacy, which strongly correlates with children's future success in school and beyond

To meet this charge, the Panel is directed to convene regularly between 2013 and 2016. The Panel is co-chaired by Undersecretary of Education Ann Reale (Secretary of Education James Peyser's designee) and Nonie Lesaux, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a national expert on reading development. Ms. Reale formerly was the Commissioner of the Department of Early Education and Care; Ms. Lesaux is currently the Chair of the Board of Early Education and Care. The Panel's members represent deep professional expertise in a range of domains related to children's reading proficiency, including education, medicine, public policy, and community and family promotion. See Attachment A for a list of the Panel members.

The Early Literacy Expert 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 the following:

- 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 (EEC), Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and Higher Education (DHE). EOE works with Panel members to schedule and support the Panel's meetings, collaborates with the Commissioners from each education department, communicates progress to the legislature, shares information with and from the field, and informs the general public of this important work throughout the year.

## C. YEAR THREE PROGRESS

### Overview

Described in more detail below, the Panel met four times over the last year, three times in Panel-initiated convenings and once as part of a formal presentation to the Board of Early Education and Care. The Panel's co-chairs also coordinated a meeting with the EEC and ESE Commissioners to inform the Panel's work.

Panel co-chair Lesaux serves as Chair of the Board of Early Education and Care, which has resulted in stronger alignment between EEC and the Panel's work. Meetings with and before EEC and ESE in the most recent fiscal year demonstrate the Panel's continued interest to identifying opportunities for enhanced coordination and alignment.

Using the information gathered in its first three years as a platform, the Panel aims 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.

This year, the Panel puts forward the following two recommendations:

- 1) The Commonwealth should support a uniform pre-kindergarten, developmental screener that includes language and vocabulary to identify and support children at risk for later reading difficulties.
- 2) The Commonwealth should provide guidance on tools and training regarding public pre-kindergarten screening.

The screening tool should be brief and simple and should not require extensive training to administer. The field should understand how to conduct screening and use the resulting data as one component of a comprehensive assessment system that will enable identification of children who may need additional services. It also will assist the Commonwealth with identifying trends at local, state, and national levels.

### FY 2016 Meetings

As noted, the Panel met four times in FY16, including once to present to the Board of Early Education and Care, and worked between the meetings to ensure progress of an action-oriented and outcome-driven agenda. Additionally, the Panel co-chairs held a meeting with the EEC and ESE Commissioners in January. A summary of each of these meetings follows:

1. **September 30, 2015:** The Panel met on September 30 at the Franklin D. Roosevelt K-8 School in Hyde Park, Boston. The Panel members received a presentation they had requested on early intervention and home visiting. The presentation focused on (1) the state's early intervention program and state-funded home visiting offerings and (2) opportunities for enhanced alignment among services. The presentation included an examination of examples in other states. The members discussed the need for a common data management

system, which could be housed at EOE, and discussed common assessment tools.

The panel members also discussed the need to coordinate with the Birth through Third Grade Advisory Group (B-3 Advisory Group), a body jointly managed by the EEC and ESE, particularly on the issue of student screening and assessment. Originally created to support a grant awarded to Massachusetts by the National Governor's Association, the B-3 Advisory Group is comprised of state employees from the three education departments and the Department of Public Health as well as research and programmatic representatives from the field. Panel co-chair Reale and Panel member O'Leary also serve on the B-3 Advisory Group.

- 2. November 10, 2015:** Panel member Mariela Páez (Ed.M., Boston College) along with EEC Associate Commissioner for Grants and Programs Carol Nolan and Amy Carithers from ESE presented on assessment and early literacy practices at the Board of Early Education and Care's (Board) November 10 meeting at Fitchburg State University.

Ms. Páez provided an overview of the Panel, including its creation, charge, and membership. She described the Panel's work to date, beginning with its efforts to gather information across four domains – assessment learning and development, promotion of reading skills, adult capacity, and language building. She next identified the Panel's priority areas of (1) early intervention and home visiting and (2) early identifiers of risk. With the Panel finding no universal screening in place (the first state-wide assessment of reading skills is the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade MCAS) and existing early assessments sometimes ineffective at identifying children at risk for later reading problems, Ms. Páez shared with the Board the Panel's two initial recommendations – a statewide implementation of a developmental screener with a focus on language and vocabulary and an effective implementation strategy that would include training and support around public prekindergarten screening. Panel co-chair and Board Chair Lesaux added that screening does more than identify warning signs; it also cultivates a focus on growth among the overall population in critical developmental domains and enriches meaningful conversations with parents and families about the importance of early language and vocabulary development.

- 3. December 3, 2015:** The Panel met on December 3 at the Auburn Public Schools. EEC Commissioner Tom Weber attended by phone. The meeting primarily focused on screening and assessment, beginning with a follow-up discussion regarding the meeting of the Board of Early Education and Care and Ms. Páez's presentation, in particular. To continue to move the work forward, the Panel began to map a draft timeline to support implementation of its recommendations regarding pre-kindergarten screening, with attention to cross-agency alignment, field engagement, and professional development. Members also discussed the Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS), a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education and after-school settings in the state – and its relationship to tracking growth and development in early literacy skills among the childhood population. Finally, the Panel revisited its discussion regarding the September presentation on home visiting.

The following week, on December 11, co-chair Reale provided a summary of this Panel meeting and discussion at a gathering of the B-3 Advisory Group meeting.

4. **January 27, 2016:** Panel co-chairs Reale and Lesaux coordinated a meeting with Executive Office of Education Secretary Peyser, EEC Commissioner Weber, ESE Commissioner Mitchell Chester, and their respective staffs to discuss the departments' current screening and assessment initiatives and opportunities for coordination and alignment. The group discussed the initial findings of the Early Literacy Expert Panel and the draft timeline that the Panel composed at the December 3 meeting.
  
5. **April 22, 2016:** The Panel met on April 22 at the Auburn Public Schools. The co-chairs first summarized their meeting with Secretary Peyser and Commissioners Weber and Chester. Next, the Panel heard an EEC presentation about the assessments that the Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) sites are using as a condition of their grants as well as the screening that is taking place at those sites. An ESE representative then shared information about home language screening provided in K-12 schools and the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment, which has been supported by federal Race to the Top funding. The importance of professional development for educators was noted as a key consideration with respect to screening and assessment. The Panel members engaged in a substantive discussion of assessment and screening, noting the importance of streamlining and standardization. Consensus was reached on the importance of using screening as a benchmark for growth and implementing use with trained persons other than classroom teachers conducting the screening assessments in order to ensure that the teachers have the necessary time and focus to work with the resulting information.

**Year 3 Timetable**

<b><i>Panel Activity</i></b>	<b><i>Timeframe</i></b>	<b><i>Progress</i></b>
<i>Communication to and with education stakeholders</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Initial communications have informed stakeholders of meeting dates and content; updates and information are provided through the EOE web site</i>
<i>Meeting One</i>	<i>September 16, 2015</i>	<i>Presentation of Early Intervention and Home Visiting project and share and discuss information on screening and assessment gathered over the summer months</i>
<i>Presentation to the Board of Early Education and Care</i>	<i>November 10, 2015</i>	<i>Presentation to the Board of Early Education and Care on the Panel's charge and work to date, with a focus on screening</i>

<i>Meeting Two</i>	<i>December 3, 2015</i>	<i>Discussions on assessment/ screening and the QRIS system</i>
<i>Meeting with Secretary Peyser and Commissioners Weber and Chester</i>	<i>January 27, 2016</i>	<i>Meeting of Panel co-chairs with EEC and ESE Commissioners to discuss existing screening and assessment initiatives</i>
<i>Meeting Three</i>	<i>April 22, 2016</i>	<i>Continued discussion of existing screening and assessment initiatives</i>
<i>Annual Report</i>	<i>July 2016</i>	<i>Completed</i>

#### **D. NEXT STEPS**

The Early Literacy Expert Panel, supported and co-chaired by the Executive Office of Education, is committed to continuing to work closely with the three education departments (EEC, ESE, and DHE), as well as the Birth to Third Grade Advisory Group, to inform them of the Panel's progress, seek their input, and identify opportunities for collaboration. In FY 2017, the Panel will make recommendations regarding the selection and adoption of a screening tool and the development of professional development opportunities to improve early educators' and administrators' capacity to implement comprehensive assessment systems appropriately, including to conduct screening effectively and, most importantly to use the resulting information to improve early literacy rates among the Commonwealth's youngest children.

**Attachment A**  
**Early Literacy Panel Members**  
**Fiscal Year 2016**

- **Ann Reale**, Designee of Secretary of Education Jim Peyser and Co-chair  
Undersecretary and Chief Operating Officer, 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**, *ending May 2016*  
Director of Reading Proficiency, Strategies for Children
- **Mariela M. Páez**  
Associate Professor of Education, Boston College
- **Amy O’Leary**, *beginning May 2016*  
Early Education for All Campaign Director, Strategies for Children
- **Jessica R. Roth**  
Pediatrician, Children’s Hospital Boston and the Martha Eliot Health Center
- **Wayne Ysaguirre**  
President and CEO, Nurtury, Boston