# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:** | April 19, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Literacy Launch |

This memorandum provides information to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding the proposed Literacy Launch initiative.

This new initiative – Literacy Launch: Reading Success from Age 3 through Grade 3 – is a multi-year strategy that aims to improve early literacy education by expanding access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction for students across Massachusetts. In her FY25 budget proposal, Governor Healey has recommended $30 million for the first year of the five-year Literacy Launch proposal, on top of $5 million in continuing early literacy programming from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

As described in the Governor’s budget recommendation, Literacy Launch would support:

* the adoption and implementation of high-quality curricular materials by public schools and districts and early education program providers;
* the provision of technical support, coaching, and professional development to maximize educator impact and improve student learning of literacy skills for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 3, including the support of required staff for the development and implementation of the program by the granting agencies;
* the coordination and alignment of assessment and screening, curriculum, and professional development across the Department of Early Education and Care and DESE;
* other professional learning initiatives and supports related to literacy assessment, measurement, and instruction for specific groups of learners or specific evidence- based materials; and
* acceleration of the program review of educator preparation programs approved by DESE.

Literacy Launch will be a key lever in advancing DESE’s [educational vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/vision/), which states that DESE will promote deeper learning so that all students engage in grade-level work that is real-world, relevant, and interactive. Through Literacy Launch programs, schools will receive support to enact key strategies toward achieving this vision, including:

* Select and skillfully implement high-quality and engaging instructional materials that support culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and foster deeper learning; and
* Use multi-tiered systems of support to implement interventions that provide all students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, equitable access to deeper learning.

As proposed, Literacy Launch would be directed by the Secretary of Education and executed by DESE in partnership with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). In collaboration with the Executive Office of Education and EEC, DESE staff have begun designing and planning Literacy Launch programming so that if funded, we can begin offering these programs without delay in FY25.

The goal of Literacy Launch is to “increase the number of public schools and licensed early education and care providers in the commonwealth providing evidence-based literacy instruction to students in prekindergarten through grade 3.” This new initiative deepens investment in the work already happening in school districts and supported by DESE. Since issuing the Literacy Strategic Plan for Massachusetts in 2019, DESE has been emphasizing, and supporting districts with, evidence-based early literacy. In 2020, DESE released [Mass Literacy](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/), a guide with tools and supports for evidence-based early literacy instruction for all of our students. Additionally, under several programs including [Growing Literacy Equity Across Massachusetts (GLEAM)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/gleam/) and [Accelerating Literacy grants](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2023/730/), DESE has been offering opportunities for districts to receive multi-year technical support and funding for improvements in literacy teaching and materials.

We envision Literacy Launch will be comprised of the following programs, all designed to help schools and districts put key components of an evidence-based early literacy approach in place:

* Professional development offered to all teachers across the state in evidence-based, culturally and linguistically sustaining early literacy knowledge and practices;
* Institutes and networks, open to teams from all schools and districts across the state, to learn together and collaborate towards improved practices for students;
* Grant support and technical assistance to help interested districts implement [Appleseeds](https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7147567/Appleseeds-Resource-Sharing-Form), DESE’s free curriculum for early reading foundational skills; and
* Intensive support grants that will provide districts with significant funding and technical assistance to transform literacy instruction in their communities.
  + These districts will be selected through a competitive grant process.
  + One group of grantee districts will be those that need to adopt high quality curricular materials for literacy; a second group of districts will be those that already have high-quality curricular materials in place but are seeking support for implementation.

Literacy Launch will also support DESE to accelerate reviews of educator preparation programs. DESE’s goal is that all Early Childhood, Elementary, and Moderate Disabilities teacher candidates in Massachusetts are prepared, through coursework and opportunities for practice and high-quality feedback, in evidence-based early literacy as outlined in the Mass Literacy Guide. With the additional funding support, DESE’s Educator Effectiveness team will be able to conduct thorough reviews of relevant programs on an accelerated schedule (4 years to review all programs instead of 7). In addition, DESE plans to offer new and expanded supports for educator preparation programs to strengthen evidence-based and culturally and linguistically sustaining preparation for teacher candidates.

The programs proposed as part of Literacy Launch are modeled after, and improve upon, existing successful DESE programs, and are inspired by effective early literacy policies in states such as Colorado, Mississippi, Tennessee, and California. To further promote effective use of this investment, DESE plans to engage an outside entity to conduct formative and summative evaluations of Literacy Launch’s impact.

DESE is engaging stakeholders throughout the planning process so that Literacy Launch programs will meet the needs of students, families, and educators. DESE staff have been meeting with representatives from a variety of educator and advocacy groups, as well as early literacy experts to advise on the design of programs.

At the April 30 meeting, Erin Hashimoto-Martell, DESE’s Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support, and Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy & Humanities, will present an overview of the Literacy Launch initiative, including the Department’s intended outcomes, to the Board and invite discussion, questions, and feedback.