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MICHIGAN'S READ BY GRADE THREE LAW: *An Inside Look*

Prepared by:

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The Landscape of Michigan’s Read by Grade Three Law

Learning to read by the end of third grade is a pathway to a successful life. When students are unable to read by the end of third grade, their risk of falling behind academically grows exponentially. In fact, research shows that nearly nine out of ten high school dropouts were struggling readers in third grade.¹ Students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, and high school dropouts are not eligible for 90 percent of jobs in the U.S. economy.² To address this issue and ensure all students become capable readers by the end of third grade, many states have passed comprehensive K-3 reading policies, including Michigan.

In 2016, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed HB 4822 into law, establishing the Third Grade Reading law, which places a focus on early literacy for all Michigan elementary schools. Sponsored by Representative Amanda Price, the Third Grade Reading law, now called Read by Grade Three, was developed with recommendations from Governor Snyder’s bipartisan Third Grade Reading Workgroup. Michigan’s law implements steps to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are gaining the skills they need to be successful in school and beyond. Read by Grade Three focuses on identifying struggling readers early and providing them with the instructional supports they need to read on grade level by the end of third grade. The law requires districts and public school academies to:

- Develop a Reading Intervention Program that includes evidence-based core instruction; intensive instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; and parent “read-at-home” plans.
- Create early literacy coaching models that provide ongoing teacher training in reading instruction and in administering and using assessment results to inform instruction.
- Use a reading assessment system to identify students in need of additional support, inform instructional needs and assess progress toward growth goals for students in grades K-3.
- Provide written notification and regular communication with parents of students identified with a reading deficiency.
- Create individual reading improvement plans (IRIP), developed in collaboration with the parent, prescribing the immediate specialized instruction and supports that will be provided to the student identified with a reading deficiency.
- Provide more intensive intervention for students in third grade identified with a reading deficiency, such as daily small group or one-on-one instruction, and reading intervention in addition to the regular English Language Arts classroom instruction time with staff with specialized reading training.
- Starting in the 2019-2020 school year, the state test will determine whether third-grade students demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion (students scoring one year or more below grade level may be retained).
- Apply good cause exemptions from retention to recognize the special needs of some students.
- Provide specialized and intensified interventions and supports for retained third-grade students, delivered by a highly effective reading teacher.



¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, [Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation](#), 2011.
² Begin to Read, [Literacy Statistics](#), 2014.

About This Study

ExcelinEd contracted with RMC Research Corporation to conduct a study with the goal of better understanding stakeholders' perceptions of and early experiences with the Read by Grade Three law in Michigan. The questions of interest were as follows:

- What support strategies and technical assistance do the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and school districts provide to improve K-3 literacy?
- What are the perceptions of local educators about Read by Grade Three?
- What recommendations do stakeholders have for improving the implementation process?
- What impact has the Read by Grade Three law had on districts and schools?

The Sample

A purposeful sample of various stakeholders was selected for this study. RMC researchers interviewed the MDE's State Deputy Superintendent (Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports) along with the MDE State Literacy Manager. Six MDE staffers, regional coordinators and literacy coaches actively participated in a focus group. Superintendents and literacy leaders in two school districts provided local-level perceptions and experiences in implementing Read by Grade Three. Additionally, the two school districts disseminated a survey to all K-3 teachers to collect their perceptions.

To identify the two school districts to profile in this study, MDE provided researchers with a list of several districts that have demonstrated improved third-grade student achievement on the state's annual ELA test (M-STEP) since the law's passage. RMC researchers worked with MDE staff to narrow the list of possible school districts to the two included in this study. Three criteria that guided the final decision for districts to profile were:

- Representative of rural and suburban districts,
- Enrollment of at least 100 third-grade students in the district, and
- Consistent, district-wide improvement in literacy achievement since 2016.

The Methodology

RMC researchers asked MDE staff members a series of questions about the structure of state-level support, state-level communication strategies, recommendations for other states that may enact similar legislation and the impacts of the legislation. The interview with the State Literacy Manager and the focus group consisted of 90-minute, face-to-face sessions. The phone interview with the State Deputy Superintendent of Schools lasted 60 minutes. [Appendix A](#) contains the protocol for the State Deputy Superintendent of Schools interview; [Appendix B](#) contains the protocol for the State Literacy Manager interview; and [Appendix C](#) contains the protocol for the focus group. One RMC team member facilitated the sessions, and another RMC team member took notes. All sessions were recorded and transcribed.

The researchers also conducted interviews of literacy leaders in two districts via conference calls. One RMC team member facilitated the sessions, and another RMC team member took notes. Phone interviews were recorded and transcribed. [Appendix D](#) includes the protocol for the district interviews. Following the interviews, the district administrators disseminated an electronic survey to all K-3 teachers within their districts. The survey contained Likert-scale statements and one open-ended question. [Appendix E](#) contains a copy of the district teacher survey.

After each event, RMC staff immediately reviewed and analyzed both the interviews and focus group data. They also reviewed the notes in relation to the recorded transcriptions. Two RMC team members identified themes and patterns and reviewed summaries for accuracy. Participants at the state- and district-levels reviewed their respective narratives for accuracy.

Research Findings

The research team collected data from stakeholders at the state, district and school levels. The information learned from the various sources provided insight to the early implementation of the Read by Grade Three law. The findings are organized into the following sections:

- Strategies that the Michigan Department of Education implemented to support schools
- Profiles of two districts that achieved student growth since the enactment of the Read by Grade Three law
- Perceptions of teachers and literacy leaders from the select districts
- Suggestions and lessons learned that participants wish to share with others
- Impact that the Read by Grade Three made on education in Michigan

State Support Strategies for K-3 Literacy

Former Superintendent Brian Whiston introduced Michigan’s *Top 10 in 10* initiative in 2015 with the goal of becoming a “top 10” state in education by 2025. This new push for excellence in education was followed by new legislation to promote early literacy. In 2016, the Read by Grade Three legislation focused on early literacy to ensure all students read on grade level by the end of third grade. This spurred the state to action. State education leaders began with strategic planning in three key areas: creating supports for early literacy, partnering with key constituents and improving communications with all stakeholders.

Priority supports. Upon arrival at the Michigan Department of Education in 2013, Dr. Venessa Keesler, the Deputy Superintendent (Division of Educator, Student and School Supports) knew that early literacy was a priority for the state. The priority, however, had not been clearly supported by any funding or staffing to help the vision for early reading become a reality. Previously, the state invested in early literacy by developing kindergarten readiness assessments, but it did not follow up with subsequent funding to support the use of the kindergarten assessments by teachers or administrators.



Data Sources

Interview with
MDE State Deputy
Superintendent,
*Division of Educator,
Student, and School
Supports*

Interview with
MDE State Literacy
Manager

Focus group of six
MDE staff, regional
coordinators and
literacy coaches

Telephone
interviews with
seven literacy
leaders in two
school districts

Online survey of
37 K-3 teachers



“Assessment is a part of a diagnostic to help us see the problem more clearly.”

MDE Deputy Superintendent

In 2015, as a precursor to the Read by Grade Three law, Superintendent Brian Whiston began developing a state-wide vision for early literacy when he partnered with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. This partnership played an important part in the development of the “ten essentials” for early literacy by their Early Literacy Task Force. This vital task was completed in 2017, shortly after the Read by Grade Three law took effect.

This was an important task, as there was no agreement on best practices for early literacy within the state before that time. The MDE adopted the “ten essentials” and worked to secure funding to implement a literacy coaching model, which would be managed by the intermediate school districts (ISDs). The initial influx of money led to at least one literacy coach in each of the 56 ISDs and a total of 96 coaches in the state.

Changes were made at the education department. MDE hired six new staff members, including a Literacy Manager whose role is to oversee efforts specific to early literacy. The goal was to place personnel with a vested and educated interest in early literacy into key departments. Each department is now required to have specific goals related to literacy to satisfy the law and to support the *Top 10 in 10* effort.

Partner for productivity. A hallmark of the response to Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law is the development of multiple successful partnerships. Many of the successes associated with Read by Grade Three have been indirect results of the MDE’s partnerships. Shortly after the law was enacted, the MDE obtained funding from the legislature to produce and disseminate digital training modules on the “ten essentials” using its MI Virtual system. MDE, having adopted the Early Literacy Task Force’s “ten essentials,” then utilized an existing online learning platform, originally designed for students, to make free professional development available to all administrators, literacy leaders and teachers in the state. Another example of a partnership that leveraged existing resources evolved from the requirement for the individualized reading improvement plan (IRIP). A new tool called MiRead was created to integrate a student’s IRIP with student data to provide an easy-to-navigate dashboard to be used for tiered systems of support. Although the MiRead tool has yet to find statewide usage, the feedback from teachers thus far has been positive.

Urgency Drives Improvement

Dr. Venessa Keesler, Deputy Superintendent (Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports) for the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), believes the Read by Grade Three law in Michigan created urgency for early literacy throughout the state. The legislation provided funding for six full-time staff to join the department’s early literacy team. After naming a Literacy Manager as the first new hire, Dr. Keesler chose to integrate the five remaining personnel into various existing divisions of the MDE, such as curriculum/instruction and assessment. This provided the divisions with a higher level of capacity regarding early literacy. Since the new legislation, the MDE named literacy as one of its three major areas of focus. Each division within MDE has its own specific literacy goals. Additionally, the MDE also adopted the ten “literacy essentials” created by the General Education Leadership Network’s Early Literacy Task Force. Representing the state’s intermediate school districts, the Task Force created the “ten essentials” to provide the state’s literacy educators with a common understanding of good practices. Dr. Keesler said that “agreeing on the literacy essentials, getting them to a consensus, and then sticking with the consensus” was another great step for the state. This key partnership between the state and its intermediate school districts helped to create a unified vision and a common language for helping students learn to read. Literacy coaches employed by the intermediate school districts brought the message of the “ten essentials” to local educators around the state. Dr. Keesler lauded two positive early results of Read by Grade Three: the work of the literacy coaches and MDE’s clear and unified vision for implementing the legislation. Inspired by the early successes associated with the law, the state’s Governor proposed a budget for 2019 that included funding to triple the number of literacy coaches in Michigan’s schools.

Finally, and perhaps most important to the success of the state’s push to improve early literacy, MDE has relied on literacy coaches managed by their ISDs. State educators value the use of literacy coaches because their effectiveness is supported by a strong research base. This means the state is utilizing evidence-based strategies that should produce results if implemented with fidelity. The literacy coaches are managed by and provided support through the ISDs. The perception of the impact of literacy coaches in the state has been so positive that current senior leadership in the state legislature is working to obtain \$30 million to increase Michigan’s number of literacy coaches.

Accessible and consistent communication. During the initial push for better early reading outcomes, state officials almost immediately recognized that their communication style with the public was ineffective. Information important to many constituents was not easy to find online, and the information that was disseminated was not written in easy-to-understand language. MDE hired personnel with expertise in public relations and graphic design. These new employees were tasked with the creation and dissemination of user-friendly Read by Grade Three materials. The Early Literacy Task Force also hired a communications expert to facilitate the dissemination of its early literacy materials. Then, as mentioned in prior state-level strategies, the MDE utilized its partnerships to improve communication. For example, MDE relied on the Early Literacy Task Force to share some of their documents on early literacy and worked with ExcelinEd to obtain digital media resources on early reading.

Since the enactment of Read by Grade Three, the MDE has completed a well-stocked resource webpage on early literacy and various aspects of the law. The [Facts for Families infographic](#) provides a good example of the recent documentation provided by MDE. This infographic is designed to be an easily accessible and effective tool for families. Working with partners helped the MDE to achieve two important results to support Read by Grade Three: more effective communications and consistent messaging.

District Support Strategies for K-3 Literacy



Leaders of the two profile districts agreed to participate in telephone interviews with the researchers. Neither district is identified for the purpose of this report. The profiles that follow capture the successes and challenges each district faced in meeting the requirements of the new law. In both districts, there was improvement on the M-STEP ELA Grade 3 assessment since the enactment of the law. The districts provide different perspectives on the Read by Grade Three law, with lessons to be learned from both districts’ experiences with the legislation.



“The collaborative nature of what’s happening around literacy because of Read by Grade Three is something for us to be proud of.”

MDE Staff



“Participation on the Read by Grade Three Communications Committee [meant] a commitment to communicating a consistent message.”

MDE Literacy Manager

District A

“Good ideas only work if you have the capacity to implement them.” (District Administrator)

A couple of hours north of Detroit, near the “thumb” of Michigan’s lower peninsula, lies the small community of District A – population 5,725. District A serves 1,800 students in five schools, because many students from surrounding areas use school choice to attend District A schools. About 63% of District A’s student body attends from outside the district, including many students from a neighboring city, reflecting one of the highest uses statewide of Michigan’s school choice policies. As unique as this district may be, its approach to improving early literacy is simple: significant investment in capacity building for teachers and administrators.

Even before the Read by Grade Three law came into effect, District A had initiated efforts for improving literacy. District leadership used Section 31a (State School Aid Act of 1979) money to obtain a literacy coach for the district, primarily to work on-site at its only primary school. At that time, District A combined funding from the federal government (Title I and Title II), state government (State School Aid Act Sections 31a and 35a) and general district funds to provide professional development for teachers and administrators on the literacy standards, improve their MTSS model and purchase research-based interventions and resources. The District A team valued the professional development on the literacy standards because their video training modules included “real teachers in real classrooms.”

District A belongs to an intermediate school district (ISD) tasked with data collection, special education services, career/technical education services and hosting professional development across the state. Although the ISD was already working with the district, District A’s new literacy coach optimized the use of its resources and created a unified message to support early literacy in the district. To support implementation of the legislation for its districts, the ISD produced multiple documents including the Third Grade Promotion Law Resource Pack. District A credits this document with its successful implementation of the law. The ISD’s materials translated the law into easily understood terms, helped staff understand different tiered instruction for students and provided administrators with documents to share with students’ families. The ISD was a substantial support to District A’s newly hired literacy coach, because it provided regular, intensive training along with regular collaborative meetings with the other literacy coaches in the state.

District A’s principal and literacy coach developed a close partnership to drive the district’s endeavors in early literacy by directly linking these efforts with improved student learning. Together, they saw teacher collaboration as the one of the best paths to improvement. During their first year of implementation, their elementary teachers resolved to work on the Early Literacy Essentials and to target small group instruction due to its direct application to a new requirement of the Read by Grade Three law – the individualized reading improvement plan (IRIP). Initially, faculty had difficulty completing the IRIPs required for struggling readers in addition to their other normal teaching responsibilities. By creating a common language among K-3 teachers, reviewing common data and designing more vertical alignment in the curriculum, the literacy coach successfully facilitated the transition for the teachers. In the current school year, District A teachers were trained with phonics instruction and implementation; next school year, they have opted to work on evidence-based, read-aloud strategies to strengthen Tier 1 instruction based on Essential 2. Additionally, the collaboration included several district departments, including child services, early literacy and multitiered systems of support.

The District A literacy leaders credit the state legislation with educating the public about the importance of early reading and shifting practices in the classroom. The Read by Grade Three law also spurred another positive outcome in the classroom: increased attention to individual student needs. Likewise, the district fostered success through the training obtained for evidence-based strategies in early literacy and tiered instruction. Not only are the district’s teachers more confident, but students in the upper elementary grades are reading at higher levels than past cohorts of students - a solid indication that they are on the right track.

District B

Early readers benefit from district autonomy

District B is a small, rural town of about 12,000 people in Northern Michigan. District B serves 2,300 children in one kindergarten center, two lower elementary schools (Grades 1-3) and one upper elementary school (Grades 4-6). The district faces significant challenges due to its geographic location, such as belonging to an intermediate school district (ISD) that covers 1,000 square miles and being a seven-hour drive from most statewide trainings in Lansing, the state capitol. The district's leaders value their autonomy and ability to solve problems their way. While district representatives feel that the Read by Grade Three law focused the state on literacy, they have had to overcome several obstacles in order to meet its requirements.

A couple of years before the Read by Grade Three legislation took effect, District B leaders had begun the meaningful process of improving outcomes for their early readers. They purchased a commercially available curriculum and paid consultants to train the district's teachers for 45-60 hours. Since the legislation passed, District B has carried on with this literacy work, believing it is the best solution to help meet the requirements of the Read by Grade Three legislation.

One challenge for District B is a lack of regular and consistent access to the ISD literacy coach. Even though the home office for the ISD's literacy coach is local, the coach must serve a wide geographic range. To compensate, District B made a large investment in an early literacy curriculum and secured consultants to provide on-site training for its teachers and support staff. They reallocated Title I and Title II funds to purchase the curriculum and ongoing training. Another challenge District B faced was reconciling their assessment program with their reading standards. Although the district's formative assessment program was on the approved list for the state, the connected literacy curriculum does not match fully with the "ten essentials" of early literacy produced by the Early Literacy Task Force and subsequently adopted by the state. District personnel acknowledge that their curriculum has some overlap with the "ten essentials," but there are also noticeable differences.

With the new literacy curriculum in place, the district laid out clear responsibilities for instructional staff in helping their K-3 students learn to read. Interview participants felt the process was positive because it clearly re-prioritized the district's efforts toward early literacy. Two positive outcomes of the district's efforts and group trainings were increased collaboration and vertical alignment across grades K-3. A change the district made following the trainings was the addition of a kindergarten center. The kindergarten center includes many support staff (behavioral interventionist, social worker, therapist, psychologist and special education specialist) and a developmental kindergarten (called "begindergarten"). The kindergarten center allows the district to work on early literacy at the very start of a student's schooling, which is a strongly held value of the district.

The District B administrators, teachers and support staff also built their own cadre of tools to support their renewed focus on early literacy. The curriculum package included digital formative assessment capabilities, allowing teachers to address students' needs more personally and more effectively. The teachers and administrators analyzed individual student data within the context of aggregated data across classrooms and schools. Even though their curriculum did not align perfectly with the "ten essentials," the district's increased use of assessments was credited with helping the teachers to more fully understand the principals of teaching early literacy to their students.

Another benefit of the district's time and effort on early literacy was being well prepared for the individualized reading improvement plan (IRIP), a requirement of the Read by Grade Three law. Each student's IRIP begins as a draft within the first 30 days of the school year, and parents and teachers review the final draft about six to eight weeks into the school year at conferences. The IRIP contains benchmark assessments and intervention materials, along with suggested strategies for parents to implement at home to support their child's reading. Because of the teachers' prior trainings and proficiency with formative assessments, the state's requirement to document IRIPs for students was easily implemented by District B.

Test scores for District B indicate early success with the legislation. In 2017, the district observed the largest within-year growth and the highest ever reading levels for its end-of-year kindergarteners. District personnel also point to other evidence to demonstrate their early readers are being successful. For example, the district's teachers reported that 71% of K-2 students worked on early learning modules online during Spring Break. For the district, the levels of reported engagement and performance by their early readers was remarkable.

Although these successes correlate to enactment of the Read by Grade Three law, district personnel do not credit the law as responsible for their literacy improvements. While they agree that the legislation brought a heightened awareness to early literacy, the district staff believe they made these improvements without the help of the state. The District B team remains apprehensive about the Read by Grade Three law, namely retaining third grade students not able to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion.

District B provides an example of many obstacles most districts face when confronted with new legislation such as Read by Grade Three, especially for rural districts. Like many districts, to meet the demands of Read by Grade Three, district leadership had to be creative and make some compromises. With their choices and strategic efforts, they have been quite successful in improving early literacy outcomes for their students over the last few years.

Teachers' Perceptions of Read by Grade Three

RMC researchers asked the two select districts to disseminate an electronic survey to their K-3 teachers. Twenty respondents completed the survey from District A, and 17 respondents completed the survey from District B. Both districts achieved a response rate of over 80%. The following table displays teachers' levels of agreement with statements about the Read by Grade Three law.

On 12 of the 17 survey questions, District A teachers responded with 30% or higher agreement than District B teachers. Despite those differences, a similar result was that the highest response in both districts (100% District A, 67% District B) was to the same survey question, Item 1: "since the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law, my school increased its efforts to engage parents of struggling readers in a timely fashion." Another question that received strong agreement between both districts (85% District A, 65% District B) was Item 9: "I receive adequate support that helps me analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions based on the data." District A teachers were much more likely to agree on items related to a literacy coach and professional development. This discrepancy was probably due in part to District A having a literacy coach on-site in its only elementary school. As outlined in the district profile, District B shared a literacy coach with a large geographic range and multiple elementary schools within the district.

In all, teachers from both districts disagreed heavily on two survey items, Items 16 and 17 (the last two in the table). Only 58% of District A teachers and 36% of District B teachers agreed that the law helped them to better identify reading difficulties early. Similarly, only 55% of District A teachers and 33% of District B teachers felt the assessments associated with Read by Grade Three helped to improve their instruction for all students. These results suggest that district profile teachers do not perceive the law and the assessments as critical to how they identify students with reading difficulties and how they plan instruction for those students.

Percentage of Teachers Agreeing with Statements About Read by Grade Three

Survey Question	% Agreement	
	District A n = 20	District B n = 17
Since the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law, my school increased its efforts to engage parents of struggling readers in a timely fashion.	100	67
I receive information and guidance documents that increase my knowledge of the requirements of the Read by Grade Three law.	95	31
My reading coach or literacy leader provides support that helps me improve my reading instruction.	95	21
The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill in providing effective interventions.	90	53
I receive adequate support from my school administration that assists me in implementing the Read by Grade Three law.	90	53
The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill with assessments and their use to drive instruction.	90	24
I support the Read by Grade Three requirement to help ensure struggling readers get the time they need with intensive interventions to be successful in fourth grade and beyond.	89	56
The extended learning opportunities, including summer programs and/or before-after school programs, are achieving the purpose of accelerating reading progress for students with a reading deficiency.	89	40
I receive adequate support that helps me analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions based on the data.	85	65
The Read by Grade Three law was communicated to parents in a way that is easy for them to understand.	83	33
The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill in research-based reading instruction.	80	47
The Read by Grade Three law has a positive impact on improving K-3 reading outcomes in my school.	80	13
Because of the Read by Grade Three law, I changed my instructional practices to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.	79	60
Because of the Read by Grade Three law my school has provided increased learning time for struggling readers.	74	53
The Read by Grade Three law guidance documents provide information that is useful to me.	70	31
The Read by Grade Three law has helped me identify and address reading difficulties early.	58	36
The Read by Grade Three assessments that we use help me improve my instruction to meet the needs of all students.	55	33

Slightly more than two-thirds of the teachers in the two profile districts responded to the open-ended survey statement: “The most positive aspect of the Read by Grade Three law is . . .” Researchers categorized the teachers’ comments into four themes: classroom supports, early identification of struggling readers, parent involvement and curriculum and instruction. A cross section of the teachers’ responses to the question serve as examples of the four themes:

The most positive aspect of the Read by Grade Three law is...

“the formal process of the IRIPs.”

“more support for struggling readers at a very early age.”

“that it is making parents be more aware and active in their child’s reading instruction.”

“using assessments to guide instruction for the students who need the most help in the ELA area.”

Lessons Learned from Michigan Educators

Based on Michigan educators' experiences with Read by Grade Three, literacy leaders at the state and district levels provided constructive advice for legislators, state departments of education and literacy leaders in other states that may be considering similar literacy initiatives.

Considerations for Legislators, State Departments of Education and District Leaders

Early Action

- ✓ Create an internal/external communication committee early in the process.
- ✓ Engage with stakeholders from the beginning to ensure buy in, understanding and support.
- ✓ Begin the process as soon as possible.
- ✓ Build a strong base with legislators.

Effective Collaboration

- ✓ Create partnerships between lawmakers and the state's Department of Education to leverage strengths, improve implementation and provide consistent messaging.
- ✓ Form strategic partnerships with key constituents: legislators, academics, researchers and local, regional and state agencies.
- ✓ Empower people to participate in the work since the scope of the work is so large.
- ✓ Share in the successes that occur along the way.

Implementation

- ✓ Develop realistic timelines for change to occur.
- ✓ Ensure a solid knowledge base of the standards and processes.
- ✓ Provide instructional and guidance documents to LEAs.
- ✓ Plan a statewide coaching collaborative that is differentiated for novice and experienced literacy coaches.
- ✓ Provide professional development for teachers that connects the standards to assessment and instruction.

Student-focused

- ✓ Focus on student needs.
- ✓ Begin working with children on early literacy before kindergarten.
- ✓ Use research to find solutions that are developmentally appropriate for the students to meet the requirements of legislation.
- ✓ Leverage the law to improve early literacy instruction and intervention to ensure students read on grade level by the end of third grade, and use retention as a last resort.

Funding

- ✓ Provide direct funding to support successful implementation of the legislation.
- ✓ Understand the supports that are needed to make appropriate funding decisions.
- ✓ Provide funding to districts that allows for flexibility.
- ✓ Commit to ongoing funding in order to sustain the legislation.

Impact of Read by Grade Three

The Read by Grade Three legislation has been a catalyst for all levels of the educational system in Michigan to reconsider their resource allocation in order to meet the law’s requirements for early readers. In some circumstances, this has led to a boon of innovation that manifested as collaborations throughout the state. For example, in 2015 an Early Literacy Task Force was created with state, regional and district administrators, university researchers, professional organizations in education and policymakers. Their participation in early literacy led to a major outcome, the creation of the “ten essentials” shortly after the passage of the law. However, collaborations like this can be a challenge for smaller education agencies like District B, because the district is geographically isolated from most collaborating partners.

The collaborations throughout the state led by the Early Literacy Task Force helped to create a consistent understanding about the importance of early literacy within the state. The state’s adoption of the task force’s “ten essentials” for early literacy has led to educators at all levels speaking a common language around early literacy instruction. As has been outlined in this study, even though districts do not have to use the same curriculum, they all appear to be aware of the “ten essentials” and how their individual curriculum should map to them. The MDE, together with its partners, have created online, asynchronous learning modules for teachers to use alongside the “ten essentials.” One district leader spoke very highly of the training modules because they were perceived as “by teachers, for teachers.” With a heightened awareness of the “essential” ways to teach early readers, the state of Michigan has gained from this process.

Some impacts of the Read by Grade Three legislation have yet to materialize. As of the publication of this study, full implementation of the law has not taken effect.

In 2019-20, students not demonstrating reading readiness for fourth grade will be retained, providing students with the time and instruction they need to become grade-level readers. Consistently throughout our interviews and focus groups, state and local administrators remain apprehensive about the high stakes impact that retention may have on students. However, the responses gathered in this study reveal that the Read by Grade Three law has brought early literacy to the forefront of the minds of early educators in Michigan. In addition, the data on student achievement collected thus far indicate that a renewed focus on early literacy in some districts is succeeding in increasing the number of students reading at grade level by Grade 3.

Summary

While efforts were already underway to improve reading outcomes for early learners in Michigan prior to the Read by Grade Three legislation, the law created an urgency that spurred school districts into action. In the early phases of implementation, the Michigan Department of Education managed to build internal capacity with new hires and a consistent language around early literacy in the state. The literacy coaching model has shown strong signs of success, and state leaders are finding more ways to expand access to coaches. MDE literacy leaders were able to overcome some of the early obstacles by leaning on strategic partnerships to help carry their message. Since local education agencies have a high degree of autonomy, success has, and will, continue to look different throughout the state. With retention going into effect during the next school year, much stands to be learned about the law and its impacts. However, the state appears poised to succeed because educators at all levels have a common understanding of the essential skills necessary for early readers. Further, they have access to a host of resources for support, including the online modules and literacy coaches.



“How are we using our resources in alignment with what research says will give them the biggest impact on their students?”

MDE Staff



APPENDICES

Appendix A: State Deputy Superintendent Interview

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Communication Strategies	15 minutes
3. State-Level Support Strategies	15 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	5 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

1.1. Since the passage of the Read by Grade Three law, describe the organizational structure (or office) that is tasked to support its implementation and why you chose this structure to facilitate implementation of the legislation.

- If this structure existed prior to the legislation: What changes did you feel were needed to be made to the structure to facilitate its implementation?

1.2. What funds were received for implementation of the Read by Grade Three law? How are these funds used to support educators?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Communication Strategies

2.1. Describe the effectiveness of the state’s communication strategies to inform the general public, especially parents, about the legislation and to increase awareness of the importance of early literacy. Which strategies are most successful and why?

2.2. Describe how you communicate with district and school leaders about the legislation and how you garner their support.

2.3. Describe the communication strategies you use to inform legislators of the importance of early literacy, student outcomes and existing needs in schools.

Topic Area 3: State-Level Support Strategies

3.1. Describe the support you provide to the MDE office that is tasked with implementing this legislation.

3.2. Which of the state-provided supports—including guidance, professional development, literacy coaching, instructional resources, assessment systems and interventions support—do you feel are the most helpful to districts and schools in implementing the requirements in the legislation to improve reading achievement? Why do you think that?

3.3. Students with a reading deficiency must have an individualized reading improvement plan created by their school. A part of the IRIP is the “Read at Home” plan developed between the school and family. Why was the “Read at Home” plan such an important part of the legislation? What supports do you provide for the “Read at Home” plans? What has been the LEAs impression of this part of the law?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

- 4.1. What advice would you want to share with other state superintendents or deputy superintendents of education if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?
- 4.2. How can lawmakers continue to support you in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

- 5.1. How does the legislation impact other areas in your state, such as Pre-K or intermediate grades?
- 5.2. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation is impacting your state?

Appendix B: State Literacy Leader Interview

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Communication Strategies	15 minutes
3. State-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	5 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

1.1 Since the passage of the Read by Grade Three law, describe the organizational structure (or office) that is tasked to support its implementation and how this structure facilitates implementation of the legislation.

- If this structure existed prior to the legislation: What changes were made to the structure to facilitate its implementation?

1.2. What funds are used to support state-level implementation and provide support to districts? How have existing and/or new funds and other resources been used to support this effort?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Communication Strategies

2.1. What strategies are used to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the Read by Grade Three law?

2.2. What does the state do to help districts and schools communicate with parents about the Read by Grade Three law, including reading performance of students who are identified with a reading deficiency?

2.3. Since the passage of the legislation, what strategies are you using to raise public awareness of the importance of early literacy statewide?

2.4. Describe the overall effectiveness of these communication strategies. Which strategies are most successful and why?

Topic Area 3: State-Level Support Strategies

3.1. Since the passage of the legislation, what guidance documents does the state provide to districts and schools? Which formats and dissemination methods are most effective?

3.2. Since the dissemination of the guidance documents, what follow-up support for implementation does the state provide to districts and schools? How effective is this follow-up support?

3.3. What is the state's role in providing K-3 reading assessments, such as screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostic assessments and summative assessments? How common are the assessments across the state? How are the cut scores determined for identifying students with a reading deficiency and for promotion/retention decisions?

- 3.4. What is the state’s role in providing guidance to districts and schools in selecting instructional resources (e.g., research-based textbooks, software and other materials)?
- 3.5. Describe the professional development model used to provide K-3 teachers and reading coaches with knowledge of and skill in research-based reading instruction. How effective is this professional development in increasing knowledge of and skill in reading instruction?
- 3.6. How do you support and provide guidance to help schools intensify interventions for K-3 students identified with a reading deficiency? Students in English language programs? Students with disabilities? What challenges are you encountering, and how are you addressing them? What funds are being used to support interventions?
- 3.7. What guidance or requirements does the state provide to districts and schools for extended learning opportunities for students identified with a reading deficiency, including summer programs and before/after school programs? Which funds are being used to support extended learning opportunities?
- 3.8. Which of the state-provided supports—including guidance, professional development, literacy coaching, instructional resources, assessment systems and interventions support—are the most helpful to districts and schools in implementing the requirements in the legislation to improve reading achievement? Why do you think that?
- 3.9. What are the state’s plans to support students retained in third grade?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

- 4.1. What advice would you want to share with other state departments if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?
- 4.2. How can lawmakers continue to support you in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

- 5.1. How does the legislation impact other areas in your state, such as Pre-K or fourth grade and beyond?
- 5.2. Describe the state-supported requirements for teacher certification for pre-service K-3 teachers and recertification for current teachers (e.g., reading endorsements, reading credentialing and professional learning requirements).
- 5.3. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation is impacting your state?

Appendix C: Key SEA Staff Members Focus Group

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. Structure of State-Level Support	10 minutes
2. State-Level Communication Strategies	10 minutes
3. State-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	5 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: Structure of State-Level Support

1.1 What are your perceptions about the organizational structure (or office) that is tasked to support the legislation’s implementation? How does this structure facilitate implementation of the legislation and promote reading achievement?

Topic Area 2: State-Level Communication Strategies

2.1. Describe the effectiveness of the state’s communication strategies to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and to increase awareness of the importance of early literacy.

Topic Area 3: State-Level Support Strategies

3.1. How effective are the SEA guidance documents in helping schools and districts understand the legislation?

3.2. Describe your challenges and successes in providing support for districts’ and schools’ implementation of the legislation.

3.3. How are the K-3 reading assessments (e.g., screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostics and summative assessments) making a difference?

3.4. Describe the professional development that you provide to districts and schools. How effective is the professional development in ensuring all K-3 teachers have the knowledge of and skill to teach all students to read?

3.5. Describe your successes and challenges in providing support to reading coaches.

3.6. Describe your successes and challenges in supporting schools’ implementation of K-3 interventions and in intensifying those interventions for third grade students still identified with a reading deficiency.

3.7. Describe the state-supported extended learning opportunities for students identified with a reading deficiency (i.e., summer programs and before/after school programs).

3.8. Which of your state-provided supports—including guidance, implementation supports, literacy coaching, professional development, assessment systems, instructional resources and interventions support—have been the most helpful to districts and schools in implementing the legislative requirements? Why do you think that?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

- 4.1. What advice would you want to share with your same-role colleagues in other state departments if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?
- 4.2. How can lawmakers continue to support your work in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

- 5.1. What do you think has been the greatest impact of this legislation in schools and districts?
- 5.2. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation has impacted schools and districts in your state?

Appendix D: District Literacy Leader Focus Group

Agenda

Topic Area	Time
1. State-Level Support Strategies	10 minutes
2. District-Level Communication Strategies	10 minutes
3. District-Level Support Strategies	45 minutes
4. Recommendations	15 minutes
5. Impacts of the Legislation	10 minutes

Interview Questions

Topic Area 1: State-Level Support Strategies

- 1.1 How effective was the SEA guidance in helping schools and districts understand the new legislation?
- 1.2. What types of supports, such as professional development and resources, did the state provide to districts and schools, and how effective has it been with helping teachers with implementing the legislation?

Topic Area 2: District-Level Communication Strategies

- 2.1. What communication strategies did your district employ to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and awareness of literacy? Which strategies do you think were most effective and why?
- 2.2. How would you describe the effectiveness of the state’s communication strategies to inform different stakeholders, including parents, about the legislation and awareness of literacy?
- 2.3. What does family engagement look like in the district/schools?

Topic Area 3: District-Level Support Strategies

- 3.1. Did your district provide guidelines or guidance documents in addition to the state-issued guidance documents? If so, what were the particular areas of the legislation that the district needed to clarify further?
- 3.2. What are some of the challenges and successes that your district experienced in providing technical assistance to schools to support implementing the legislation?
- 3.3. Describe how your district has used existing funds and/or new funds to ensure students are reading by the end of third grade.
- 3.4. Does the district have a literacy leadership team? If so, what role do they serve? What professional development do they receive? Have they attended professional learning on the GELN Early Literacy Task Force Essential Instructional Practices in Elementary Literacy?
- 3.5. In addition to state-provided professional development for K-3 teachers and school-based literacy leaders, what professional development do you provide? How is it delivered? How effective do you believe the professional development

has been in ensuring all K-3 teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach all students to read, including students with severe reading difficulties?

3.5b. If not mentioned, ask: Are the GELN Early Literacy Task Force Essential Instructional Practices in Elementary Literacy modules being used? Are they helpful?

3.6. How many literacy coaches do you have to support K-3 reading? How does your district support school-based literacy leaders, such as administrators and reading coaches?

- Have the coaches attended professional learning on the GELN Early Literacy Task Force Essential Instructional Practices in Elementary Literacy?
- Are they part of the ISD coaching network?
- Does the district use the ELTF coaching modules and MDE Coaching Model to support coaches and the practice of coaching? Are they helpful?

3.7. How does your district support school-based literacy leaders, such as administrators?

3.8. What successes and challenges have you experienced in providing support to school-based literacy leaders?

3.9. How is support provided to teachers and which strategies are most successful?

3.10. What key resources, in addition to those provided by the state, has your district provided to schools that have been most valuable and why?

3.11. What does your district assessment system look like (e.g., screeners, progress monitoring tools, diagnostics and summative assessments)? How does the district collect and use data from this assessment system?

3.12. How has your K-3 reading district assessment system made a difference in schools?

3.13. What is the instructional plan for K-3 reading in your schools (e.g., time, resources and groupings)?

3.14. Describe your strategies to provide interventions to students most in need. How are individual reading improvement plans carried out? How is data used as a part of this process? How do you ensure schools are implementing K-3 interventions and intensifying those interventions for third graders still identified with a reading deficiency?

3.15. Describe your district's guidance to schools regarding extended time for students identified with a reading deficiency, including summer programs and/or before/after school programs. What grades are being served?

3.16. Which of your district-provided supports—including guidance, technical assistance, professional development, literacy coaching, assessment systems, instructional resources and interventions support—are the most helpful to schools in implementing the legislation? Why do you think that?

Topic Area 4: Recommendations

4.1. What advice would you want to share with your same-role colleagues in other state departments if they are charged with implementing similar legislation?

4.2. How can lawmakers continue to support your work in reaching the goals of this legislation?

Topic Area 5: Impacts of the Legislation

5.1. What changes in your district and schools can be attributed to implementation of this legislation?

5.2. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how this legislation has impacted schools and your district?

Appendix E: Select District Teacher Survey

This survey is part of a study of the impact of legislation enacted to improve early literacy. Michigan’s *Read by Grade 3* law, passed in 2016, prioritized supports for struggling early readers with the goal of all student reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Students with a reading deficiency are identified early on an assessment given within 30 days of the beginning of school, starting in Kindergarten. These students receive an individualized reading improvement plans (IRIP) that prescribes the specialized support and interventions they will receive. In addition, these students’ parents are provided a “read at home” plan to help support literacy at home. At the end of third grade, students who score a grade level or more behind in reading are retained in third grade unless they qualify for a good cause exemption. Retention provides students severely below grade level with the time they need with highly effective instruction to gain sufficient reading skills to be successful in fourth grade and beyond.

The following statements are designed to collect your perceptions of this legislation. Please respond to the statements in relation to the Read by Grade 3 Law. Your responses are voluntary and will be reported only in combination with responses of other teachers from across the state.

This survey will take approximately 8 minutes to complete. Thank you – we value your input.

Scale: Strongly Agree - Somewhat Agree - Somewhat Disagree - Strongly Disagree - N/A.

1. I receive adequate support from my school administration that assists me in implementing the Read by Grade 3 Law.
2. I receive adequate support that helps me analyze student assessment data and make instructional decisions based on the data.
3. My literacy coach or literacy leader provides support that helps me improve my reading instruction.
4. I receive information and guidance documents that increase my knowledge of the requirements of the Read by Grade 3 Law.
5. The Read by Grade 3 Law guidance documents provide information that is useful to me.
6. The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill in research-based reading instruction.
7. The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill in providing effective interventions.
8. The professional development (i.e., time with literacy coaches, district/building PD days, PD offered by intermediate school districts and PLCs) that I receive improves my knowledge of and skill with assessments and their use to drive instruction.
9. The Read by Grade 3 assessments that we use help me improve my instruction to meet the needs of all students.
10. Because of the Read by Grade 3 Law, my school has provided increased learning time for struggling readers.
11. The extended learning opportunities, including summer programs and/or before-after school programs, are achieving the purpose of accelerating reading progress for students with a reading deficiency.

12. Because of the Read by Grade 3 Law, I changed my instructional practices to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.
13. The Read by Grade 3 Law has a positive impact on improving K-3 reading outcomes in my school.
14. The Read by Grade 3 Law has helped me identify and address reading difficulties early.
15. The Read by Grade 3 Law was communicated to parents in a way that is easy for them to understand.
16. Since implementation of the Read by Grade 3 Law, my school increased its efforts to engage parents of struggling readers in a timely fashion.
17. I support the Read by Grade 3 requirement to help ensure struggling readers get the time they need with intensive interventions to be successful in fourth grade and beyond.

Open Ended:

18. The most positive aspect of the Read by Grade 3 Law is _____

Please indicate the school district in which you teach. (list of two districts)

Thank you for your participation.

