



LA Reads

**SUPPORTING OUR YOUNGEST
READERS: LA READS**
LOUISIANA'S EARLY LITERACY COMMISSION

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 **DEPARTMENT of
EDUCATION**
Louisiana Believes



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The Louisiana Department of Education worked with the Commission's co-chairs to provide resources and presentations for three Commission meetings and five workgroups, held between September 2021 and December 2021. Every Commission meeting was open to the public and also available as a livestream. The video link and meeting agenda were posted according to the state's open meetings law. Archived video links, agendas, and materials are publicly available on www.LouisianaBelieves.com.

The Commission's meetings have consisted of a review of the first 2019-2021 Commission's goals and recommendations and a review of the progress of Louisiana Department of Education's literacy initiatives. Commission members had the opportunity to engage in discussion and receive public comments.



EARLY LITERACY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY

- ✓ Early literacy is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success.
- ✓ Struggling with early literacy puts students at a greater risk of future academic struggles¹, including dropping out of school, and incarceration².

INVESTING IN EARLY LITERACY

The Early Literacy Commission believes that by the end of third grade, all Louisiana students should be proficient (“Mastery” level) in reading in order to successfully transition to higher grade levels and to be college and career ready. In order to ensure that more third grade students are proficient in reading by the end of the third grade, the following must be true:

1. Every teacher uses a high-quality curriculum to teach students the foundations of reading and language and literacy.
2. Every student who struggles to read receives research-based literacy interventions.
3. Every school leader maximizes the use of time and personnel through scheduling and collaborative planning.
4. Every educator preparation program emphasizes evidence-based literacy practices.
5. Every school has a culture in which all teachers are responsible for and equipped to deliver effective literacy instruction.

6. Every teacher uses evidenced-based practices to meet the literacy needs of all students.
7. Every teacher uses literacy assessment data to monitor students’ progress and inform instruction.
8. Every school community expands opportunities for parents and families to be engaged in their children’s literacy development.

All of these goals are certainly achievable. Louisiana teachers, students, and parents have been working hard to improve early literacy. The recommendations of the Early Literacy Commission acknowledge the current progress and work but demand a push ahead. In order to accomplish the recommendations of the Early Literacy Commission, our school systems and schools need an investment.

WHAT CAN LOUISIANA’S POLICYMAKERS AND STATE PARTNERS DO TO SUPPORT EARLY LITERACY?

Louisiana’s future is tied to early literacy. Commit to \$15 million in annual funding to support school systems and schools as they implement these recommendations.

1 Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade: How Is It Related to High School Performance and College Enrollment? Retrieved from: https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf

2 Literacy Behind Bars. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007473.pdf>

LOUISIANA'S EARLY LITERACY COMMISSION

Believing that Louisiana's students are as smart and capable as any in America, the Louisiana State Department of Education's (LDOE) vision is to set high expectations for all students putting every child on the path toward a college degree or professional diploma. To achieve that vision, the state is focusing substantial efforts and resources to provide young learners and school age students with opportunities to develop reading and writing skills that will enable them to be successful in school from the beginning. To bolster these efforts, the legislature re-established the state-level Early Literacy Commission (the Commission) through [Louisiana Senate Resolution 133](#) and [Louisiana House Resolution 119](#). The legislation calls on the Commission to develop and implement an aligned system to provide effective evidence-based reading instruction for children from birth through third grade.

The Commission's work builds upon the state's progress to increase reading proficiency of third grade students.

The Commission's appointees consist of school system and school leaders, educators, and parents. The Commission is co-chaired by Dr. Jenna Chiasson, the Louisiana State Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, and Dr. Susannah Craig, Board of Regents Associate Commissioner for Teacher and Leadership Initiatives. Other members include representatives from higher education and various educational organizations and a gubernatorial appointee.

Between September 2021 and December 2021, Commission members participated in the following activities to develop a vision and plan for early literacy:

- (1) Review the progress the Department has made toward the recommendations laid forth by the previous Early Literacy Commission.
- (2) Participate in workgroups to draft recommendations for the following areas: Curriculum and Materials, Explicit Interventions and Extensions, Family Engagement, Literacy Coach Expansion, and Teacher Preparation.

Commission meetings were guided by a variety of presenters and speakers, including school leaders and educators and LDOE staff. These experts emphasized several key messages:

- ✓ Literacy is among the most powerful predictors of school and life success.
- ✓ Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach all students to read.
- ✓ Parents must be notified if students are struggling with reading and provided resources to help their child with literacy skills at home.

"My Literacy Coach has been the greatest gift to me as a teacher this year...In my almost 7 years here, I have never felt this supported. I think that comes from having someone in our building whose position is to coach early childhood educators specifically around literacy, which is a unique niche in the teaching community."

- Teacher, Phillis Wheatley Community School

EARLY LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Louisiana Law ([Act 438](#)) and a policy established by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) require the administration of a literacy screener not later than thirty days after the beginning of each school year in the early elementary grades. The literacy screener is a brief assessment of a particular skill or ability that is typically predictive of a later outcome. The key skills measured at each grade level follow:

Kindergarten: Phonemic Awareness

First Grade: Phonics

Second Grade: Oral Reading Fluency

Third Grade: Reading Comprehension

School systems can choose from [four research based screening assessments](#). These assessments are valid and reliable tools to measure the skills listed above. A vast majority of school systems (around ninety-two percent) administer one of the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)* assessments -- *DIBELS Next* or, the newer version, *DIBELS 8th*. Around six percent of school systems administer the *System to Enhance Educational Progress (STEEP)* assessment, and less than 2 percent of school systems administer the *Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP)* assessment.

Students' scores for all four assessments are reported as "On or Above Benchmark" or "Below Benchmark." Students who score "Below Benchmark" are considered "At Risk" for reading difficulties.

The Commission continues to stand behind the 2019 Commission recommendation to build a clear accountability system for K-2 grades that defines excellence in each grade and incentivizes progress and rewards achievement, but also recognizes that this work has now shifted to the Accountability Commission.

Between 2018-2020, findings showed that literacy proficiency had dropped at each grade level. For example, on average across all four grade levels K-3, the percentage of children scoring "On or Above Benchmark" decreased from 57.2% in 2018 to 51.5% in 2019 to 45.1% in 2020.

The Department increased their literacy efforts, including but not limited to, implementing a literacy coaching pilot, increased opportunities for accelerating learning, creating LDOE accelerate resources and building a literacy library of resources for teachers, leaders, and families. The [Fall 2021 Reading Report](#) revealed these efforts among others had a positive impact on literacy outcomes. There was a 4.1% increase in overall K-3 literacy proficiency in 2021.

In sum, data shows that 41.5% of kindergarten students scored "On or Above Benchmark" on the literacy screener. Additionally, 49.6% of first graders, 52.5% of second graders, and 53.2% of third graders scored at this same level. This year's data highlights success but also the need for continued efforts in literacy improvements for all students.

The findings indicate the need for educators and policymakers statewide to continue to prioritize a set of actions that will turn the tide and produce positive literacy outcomes for Louisiana's students. Guided by four

literacy pillars, resources, tools, and support for systems, teachers, and leaders have been developed and continue to be developed in the [Literacy Library](#).

Literacy Goals

Guidance and templates for planning and developing literacy actions, creating literacy plans, and reporting literacy screener results are available to support system leaders and teachers in setting and monitoring literacy goals.

Professional Growth

Complete series on foundational literacy skills implementation are provided for teachers and leaders. Based on requests from the field, a series on K-2 writing is available and additional tools are in development.

Explicit Instruction, Intervention, and Extension

Support for schools around literacy best practices includes scheduling and implementation guidance, information for librarians, templates for sound walls and phonological awareness activities, and guidance for providing targeted interventions and extensions.

Family Literacy Engagement

Based specifically on recommendations from the commission, a workgroup was formed to explore and develop a strategic plan to improve family literacy engagement. In addition to that plan, the library houses numerous activities for schools and families to use in efforts to increase literacy skills. Many resources have been translated into the native languages represented in Louisiana schools.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Though both early childhood community networks and school systems across Louisiana are working hard on many fronts to improve the quality of early literacy and have faced adversity through a pandemic and major hurricanes, challenges remain. These include:

- ✓ Every teacher is not using a high-quality curriculum to teach students the foundations of reading and language and literacy.
- ✓ Teachers are not receiving sufficient support to effectively implement high-quality curriculum.
- ✓ Teachers need additional training and support to teach the foundations of reading.
- ✓ Louisiana's accountability system, though inclusive of early childhood and 3rd grade through high school, skips K-2. This gap means that educators and families receive less information about how children are performing in these grade levels.

To address these challenges, Louisiana needs to build a seamless support system for early learning — one that prepares all children to achieve mastery in reading in third grade and beyond. Achieving this vision will require implementers at all levels — from site and system leaders to classroom teachers — to embrace policies and practices that support a consistent, coherent approach to children's education that provides continuous, enhanced learning opportunities from birth through third grade.

COMMISSION VISION

The Early Literacy Commission recognizes the importance of a strong literacy foundation in preparing children to succeed in school. Early literacy plays a key role in enabling the kind of early learning experiences that research shows are linked with academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher graduation rates, and enhanced productivity in adult life.

The Commission's vision is for all Louisiana students to become proficient readers no later than the end of third grade as evidenced by performing Mastery on the state assessment.

COMMISSION GOALS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND MILESTONES

To achieve its vision of reading proficiency for all children, the Commission developed a long-term plan to improve early literacy in Louisiana.

The Commission's plan establishes eight goals and a set of nineteen policy recommendations for the Department to act upon to achieve these goals.

The goals are:

1. Every teacher uses a high-quality curriculum to teach students the foundations of reading and language and literacy.
2. Every student who struggles to read receives research-based literacy interventions.
3. Every school leader maximizes the use of time and personnel through scheduling and collaborative planning.
4. Every educator preparation program emphasizes evidence-based literacy practices.
5. Every school has a culture in which all teachers are responsible for and equipped to deliver effective literacy instruction.
6. Every teacher uses evidenced-based practices to meet the literacy needs of all students.
7. Every teacher uses literacy assessment data to monitor students' progress and inform instruction.
8. Every school community expands opportunities for parents and families to be engaged in their children's literacy development.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS (TABLE 1)

Instruction Materials
Goal Every teacher uses a high-quality curriculum to teach students the foundations of reading and language and literacy.
Recommendations Review and, as needed, revise the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool for ELA Grades K-12 (IMET). In addition to being fully aligned to Louisiana Student Standards, programs that receive Tier 1 ratings must provide evidence-based instruction methods that include writing and the five explicit, systematic components of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension and aligns to the science of reading. Programs must include explicit writing instruction that encompasses foundational and writing process/composition writing as grade-level appropriate.
Review, and as needed, revise the Teacher Leader Advisor application and selection process to include science of reading training as a requirement to review rubric components focused on foundational skills.
Provide a list of which school system uses which curricula to encourage collaboration between school systems and transparency to stakeholders.

Explicit Literacy Interventions and Extensions

Goal 1

Every student who struggles to read receives research-based literacy interventions.

Goal 2

Every school leader maximizes the use of time and personnel through scheduling and collaborative planning.

Recommendations

Create an Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool for ELA Foundational Skills Supplemental Materials for Grades PK – 2 (IMET). In addition to being fully aligned to Louisiana Student Standards, programs that receive Tier 1 ratings must be data-driven, individualized by student, systematic, and provide explicit instruction that aligns to the science of reading and the needs of diverse learners, including, but not limited to dyslexia.

Ensure Instructional Materials Review (IMR) rubric for Tier 1 (core) foundational skills programs addresses the need for embedded interventions for phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and aligns to the science of reading and needs of diverse learners, including, but not limited to dyslexia.

Create K-2 school schedules that incorporate daily developmentally appropriate foundational skills instructional blocks, language and literacy instructional blocks, and daily time for interventions and common planning time.

Produce evidence-based intervention guidance for school systems to utilize as best practices to address the specific needs of all students.

Educator Preparation

Goal

Every educator preparation program emphasizes evidence-based literacy practices.

Recommendations

Review and evaluate licensure assessments for PreK-5 and special education licensure to ensure teacher preparation candidates are assessed on their literacy knowledge aligned to the science of reading. Any additional literacy licensure requirement should replace one of the existing licensure assessments.

Share literacy training for teacher-preparation and administrator-preparation program faculty.

Review and, as needed, revise the process to include actionable course specific feedback used to evaluate teacher-preparation and administrator-preparation programs to ensure that literacy coursework in PreK-5 includes the Foundations of Reading (phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency) and Language and Literacy (comprehension and vocabulary) and writing (foundational and writing process/composition).

Publish a comprehensive handbook inclusive of validity and reliability information around the teacher preparation evaluation process.

Review and, as needed, revise the process used to evaluate teacher-preparation and administrator-preparation programs to ensure that literacy coursework in PreK-5 includes the Foundations of Reading (phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency) and Language and Literacy (comprehension and vocabulary) and writing.

Professional Growth

Goal 1

Every school has a culture in which all teachers are responsible for and equipped to deliver effective literacy instruction.

Goal 2

Every teacher uses evidenced-based practices to meet the literacy needs of all students.

Recommendations

Ensure all stakeholders whose work is directly related to PreK-3 literacy are trained in the science of reading, including but not limited to, teachers, district and school leaders, and speech language pathologists, including those who work with special education, dyslexia, and intervention implementation.

Select and train a literacy coach who is an expert around early language support and language modeling for Early Childhood Networks and pre-K classrooms.

Select and train a literacy coach for every K-2 school, with a requirement for Comprehensive Intervention Required (CIR) schools.

Select and train Regional Literacy Specialists to provide support for literacy in K-2 schools.

Identify a district literacy coordinator to ensure all school system literacy efforts align and to provide support to literacy coaches.

Family Engagement

Goal 1

Every teacher uses literacy assessment data to monitor students' progress and inform instruction.

Goal 2

Every school community expands opportunities for parents and families to be engaged in their children's literacy development.

Recommendations

Provide and explain assessment data to parents/caregivers regularly, including how the data will be used to adjust instruction.

Develop a user-friendly parent portal with literacy resources and guidance available in students' native languages and resources to support students who struggle including students with dyslexia.

Develop education/media strategies and a campaign to increase families' and community stakeholders' knowledge about the importance of effective literacy screening and instruction from birth to 8, the components of effective literacy instruction, and high-quality curriculum.

FUTURE ACTIONS FOR THE COMMISSION

Louisiana must continue to work to ensure that more students are proficient in reading by the end of third grade students. In 2022, the Commission will receive reports from the Louisiana Department of Education on the following areas through its meetings:

1. **Literacy Library:** LDOE will provide updates on additional resources and support added for systems, leaders, teachers and families.
2. **Media Campaign:** LDOE will provide updates on the planning, development, and implementation of a widespread media literacy campaign.