MPOWERED

empowering michigan education

IMPROVING LITERACY OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS IN MICHIGAN

Providing Appropriate Curricula

We have failed to give every child in Michigan an equal chance to learn to read and write proficiently. The consequences of our failure to equitably develop all Michigan children's literacy skills are evident. There is a glaring disparity in the reading and writing abilities of students of color compared to their white counterparts. A similar disparity exists for children from economically disadvantaged families compared to those who are not.[1]

For instance, African-American fourth-graders in Michigan, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, have clearly received an unequal literacy education. **These students, in 2011, ranked dead last among the 50 states on the reading portion of the NAEP.**

Our failure to adequately teach literacy skills to students experiencing poverty is especially troubling because of how potentially widespread our failure may be. Nearly half of Michigan students qualify for free or reduced price lunch (48.6% in 2013), and one in four Michigan children live below the poverty line.

Youth affected by poverty are bright and capable, but we have denied them excellent instruction. Too often, we aim to improve literacy in communities of the highest need by turning to curricula and assessments that are disengaging, overly focused on low-level skills, misaligned with current standards and research, and unresponsive to students' backgrounds.

We need to provide Michigan schools with relevant and sensible curricula and assessments, and then make sure that schools use these tools. We must:

- Require low-performing or start-up schools serving high numbers of students affected by poverty to have **literacy plans** that include the rapid identification, intervention, and specialized support for struggling readers and writers.
- **Build literacy learning into the curricula of all disciplines**—science, math, technology, and history—as well as English Language Arts.
- **Respect and value students' rapidly expanding use of digital media** as the way in which students make meaning of the world, and utilize inquiry-based curricula that give students a reason to read and write as they explore issues of concern to them.
- **Evaluate the amount of instructional time and money diverted to administering and preparing students for standardized testing** and consider alternative ways to assess and improve students' higher-order literacy skills such as teacher-based formative evaluations, diagnostic measures, informal daily appraisals, and writing portfolios.
- **Use alternative assessments**, conversations with students, teachers and parents, as well as enhanced partnerships between K-12 schools and universities to collect better data about what students can do (not just what they can't) and conduct further research about what would meaningfully support literacy teaching and learning.

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WHO CAN HELP

Here is how we, as a state, can take action to ensure a quality literacy education for all of our children.

GOVERNOR, STATE BOARD, AND LEGISLATURE
- Allocate funding for appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curricula to districts in need of additional funding.
- Allocate funding for and launch a competitive grants program for research on appropriate, meaningful, and engaging K–12 literacy curricula.
- Mandate and allocate funding for the development of a secure and accessible statewide student record database.
- Allocate funding for development of appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL REFORM/REDESIGN OFFICE
- Identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curricula, across disciplines.
- Organize and lead competitive grants program and collaborative curriculum development, enactment, and research in partnership with all stakeholders.
- Partner with university-based statisticians to build a secure and accessible student record database that can be available to researchers to support the evaluation of curricular efforts and other studies of literacy development in Michigan.
- Require all K–12 low-performing schools or start-up schools serving high numbers of students affected by poverty to present substantive, research-based literacy development plans within their school improvement or start-up proposals.
- Design and implement appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive literacy assessment programs that are right-sized for maximum benefit to all stakeholders.

UNIVERSITIES AND TEACHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS
- Identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula, across disciplines.
- Conduct research on the feasibility, usability, and the learning outcomes of curricula.
- Build a secure and accessible student record database that can be available to researchers to support the evaluation of curricular efforts and other studies of literacy development in Michigan.
- Offer consulting to ISDs and LEAs on the development of substantive, research-based literacy development plans, appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs; offer analyses of the assessment data from various programs.

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS
- Collaborate with the MDE/SRO and universities to identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula, across disciplines.
- Partner with researchers to conduct research on the feasibility, usability, and learning outcomes of curricula.
- Support local schools in developing substantive, research-based literacy development plans.
- Work with university researchers and local schools to help teachers and school leaders understand and enact with fidelity appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs.

LOCAL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS
- Collaborate with intermediate and district personnel to locate or develop and to enact appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula, across disciplines.
- Actively participate in research on the feasibility, usability, and learning outcomes of curricula.
- Develop substantive, research-based literacy development plans particular to the local needs of each school.
- Enact assessment programs rigorously.

[1] National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). Reading: 2013 State Snapshot Report: Michigan Grade 4 Public Schools. The Nation's Report Card. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2013/pdf/2014464MI4.pdf; National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). The NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/achieveall.aspx; Michigan Department of Education. (2013). State demographic report. Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Retrieved from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Fall_2013_MEAP_State_Demographic_Report_448999_7.pdf.

Want to learn more about what you can do? Read the full report on *Improving Literacy Outcomes for Students in Michigan's Most Vulnerable Schools* at aclumich.org.