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Improving Third Grade Reading in Michigan – What's Next

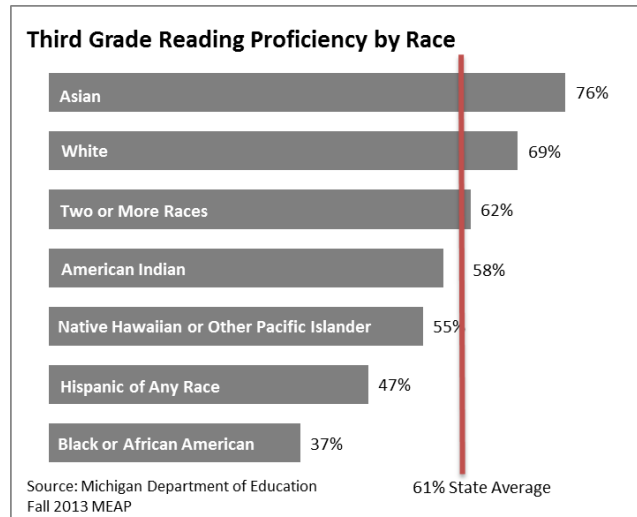
Reading proficiently by the end of third grade can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development. Up until the end of third grade, most children are learning to read; and beginning in fourth grade, they are reading to learn. While only six of every ten Michigan students demonstrated reading proficiency in third grade in 2013, the statistics were significantly worse for certain groups of students.

To tackle this, the Governor created the Third Grade Reading Workgroup comprised of policymakers working to identify key interventions needed to improve literacy. They released their recommendations in early June, which included the following strategies:

- Give every student the research-supported diagnostic and screening instruments, instruction, and interventions necessary for success.
- Provide every educator with training to use diagnostic-driven methods with knowledge and fidelity.
- Give every parent the information and support needed to develop early literacy skills, to parent effectively, and to provide adequate home-supports for every student.
- implement K-3 smart promotion to ensure struggling students succeed
- Provide Michigan with accurate data about how our students and schools are performing in growth and proficiency compared to other states, and an annual report on our progress towards the highest early reading proficiency in the nation.

Some of these strategies were reflected in the fiscal year 2016 budget through the inclusion of a \$31 million investment for an array of services. While these investments are a good starting point to improve literacy, more and better targeted investments will be needed to move the dime for Michigan's most challenged young readers. Below are Michigan's Children's recommendations to improve literacy.

Parent Coaching and Support through Home Visits: Continue to increase state investments in voluntary, evidence-based parent coaching and support through home visiting services for at-risk children and their families. Current funding for evidence-based home visiting only serves approximately 15-20% of Michigan's eligible population. In addition to improving school readiness, home visiting programs improve maternal and child health, increase families' self-sufficiency, and reduce child maltreatment, all while providing a significant return on investment.



Early On Early Intervention: Begin providing a state appropriation for *Early On* Early Intervention, which serves nearly 18,000 families with infants and toddlers birth to age three who have a development delay or disability. While Michigan receives \$11.8 million in federal funding through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – Part C, these funds are vastly insufficient to provide adequate intervention like speech therapy and specialized instruction. National longitudinal studies demonstrate that 40 percent of infants and toddlers who receive adequate early intervention services will not need special education at preschool or kindergarten entry.

Great Start Readiness Program for three-year-olds: Begin piloting GSRP for the most at-risk three-year-olds who are not able to access Head Start. Working closely with Head Start and GSRP providers, provide a school-year, school-day length two-year preschool option that supports three- and four-year-olds who are at-risk of starting kindergarten behind their peers.

Expanded learning in K-3rd Grade: The FY2016 budget includes \$17.5 million for additional instruction time in k-3rd grade. For future budgets, Michigan needs targeted and increased state funding for expanded learning programs in k-3rd grade to before-school, after-school and summer-learning opportunities through Michigan's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC). Michigan currently receives \$39 million in federal 21st CCLC funding to support expanded learning programs in the most challenged communities across the state, but this funds fewer than half of the best programs applying in Michigan. Targeted investment to fund additional 21st CCLC programs that focus on k-3rd grade literacy can improve students' performance in reading and math, increase student participation and engagement, and promote students' development in other areas needed for success in school and life.

Family Literacy Programs: Invest in family literacy programs that concurrently provide classes for adults to improve their literacy skills while also providing literacy rich opportunities for their children through high quality early childhood care and education opportunities. Decades of research, including evaluation of the formally funded Even Start programs in Michigan, tells us that family literacy is more effective than adults-only or children-only literacy programs; and young learners will face more struggles to read proficiently if their parents cannot support them through their reading journey.

Child Development and Care (CDC): Maintain and build upon the quality improvement efforts of Michigan's CDC program by increasing the eligibility threshold for child care subsidy eligibility from 121% to 250% of the federal poverty level, continuing to provide 12-months of continuous eligibility for CDC recipients, and further increasing tiered reimbursement rates for star-rated quality programs to ensure that low-income working families can access 75% of the high quality child care market in their communities. Also, shift Michigan's subsidy reimbursement payment away from an hourly structure to one that is based on part-time or full-time care.

As recommended by the Third Grade Reading Workgroup, Michigan's Children also is supportive of ongoing investments for:

- early assessments including a kindergarten entry assessment, and first and second grade assessments to determine students' proficiency levels prior to third grade;
- literacy coaches to support kindergarten through third (k-3rd) grade teachers; and
- a multi-tiered system of support to improve reading proficiency.