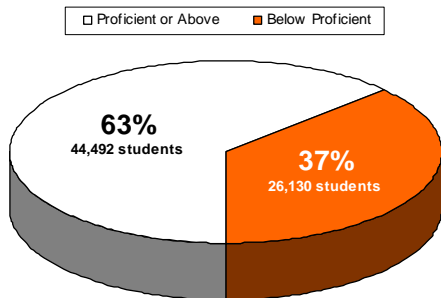


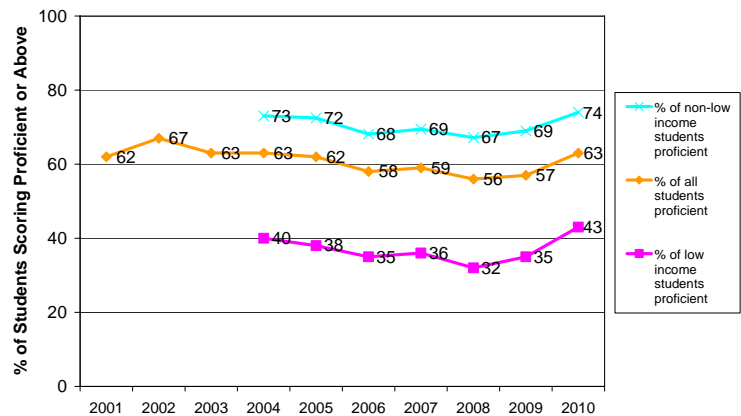
Momentum Grows: Third Grade Reading Proficiency in Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, 37% of third graders – including 57% of low-income students – do not read at grade level. Among children who read poorly in third grade, 74% will continue to struggle in high school.¹ They are less likely to graduate and develop skills essential for contributing to the knowledge-based economy. To ensure that children gain early skills that produce lasting success, there must be a systemic approach to supporting language and literacy development in family, school and community settings beginning at birth.

Third Grade Reading Proficiency in Massachusetts, 2010 MCAS

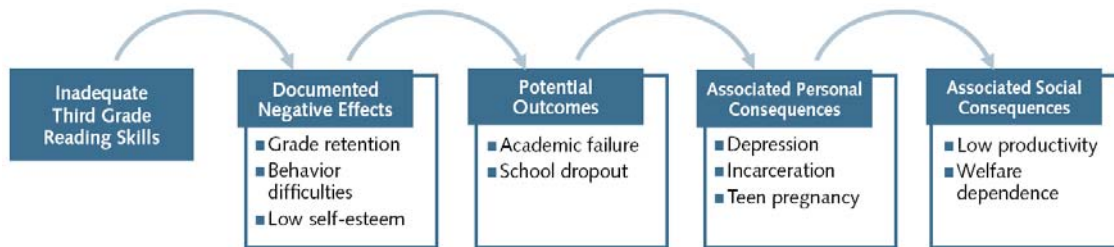


Third Grade Reading Proficiency in Massachusetts, 2001-2010 MCAS



Third grade reading proficiency: Critical predictor of school success

Third grade reading proficiency is perhaps the most critical benchmark for children as they progress through the education system and for policymakers as they seek evidence of the impact of public investments. Early literacy, language development and reading skills are the foundation of all future learning and can be nurtured in multiple ways in homes, schools and communities, starting at birth. If this foundation is not in place by the end of third grade, the consequences can be dire:²



Reading proficiency in Massachusetts

In both reading and math, Massachusetts students outperform all other states and many nations. However, substantial numbers of children are not proficient, and the state’s achievement gap is one of the largest in the country. This is apparent in the “Nation’s Report Card” – the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). On the 2009 fourth grade reading test, Massachusetts had:

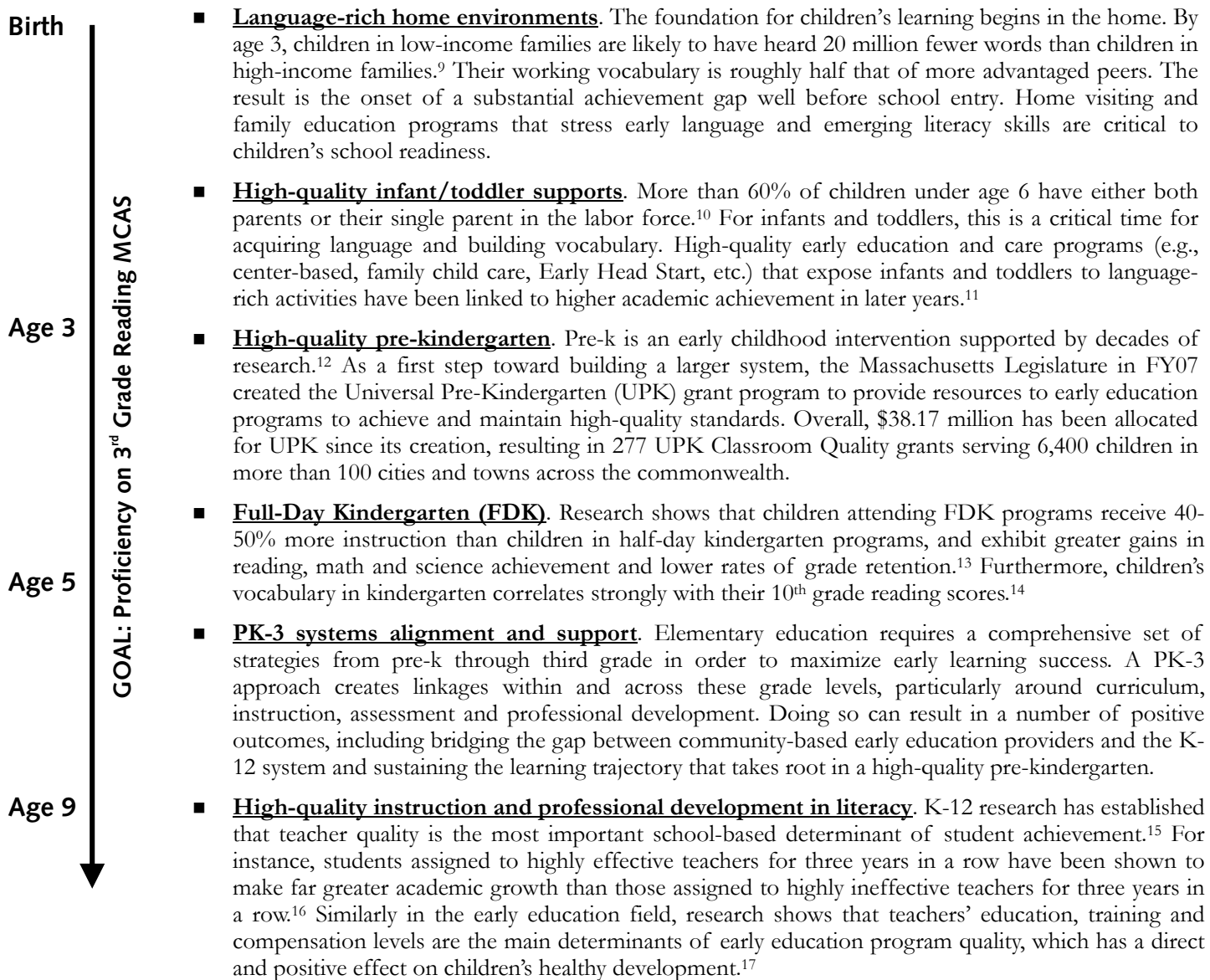
- The highest average score of all 50 states, yet 53% of students scored below proficient,
- The 18th largest black-white gap,
- The 8th largest Hispanic-white gap, and
- The 10th largest income-based achievement gap.³

Strategies for Children and its signature Early Education for All Campaign work to ensure that children in Massachusetts have access to high-quality early education and become proficient readers by the end of third grade.

On the 2010 MCAS, Massachusetts' own statewide assessment, 37% of third graders – including 57% of low-income students – scored below proficient, thus falling short of the benchmark for reading at grade level.⁴ Despite strong gains on the 2010 test, results have remained stagnant since the test was first administered in 2001. However, new research shows that much can be done to alter this pattern and improve the language and reading skills of Massachusetts children.⁵

Components of a high-quality early learning system

Providing all children with high-quality early learning experiences is perhaps the best approach for promoting reading proficiency and ensuring the commonwealth's long-term economic and civic vitality. Research has never been clearer about the critical role that high-quality, language-rich learning environments play in young children's growth and development. For example, investments in high-quality pre-kindergarten yield a 10 - 16% return,⁶ children learn more in full-day kindergarten than in half-day programs,⁷ and building the foundation for children's future reading ability starts at birth.⁸ The challenge is to use this rich early childhood research base to build an aligned high-quality early learning system in Massachusetts.



About Strategies for Children

Strategies for Children, Inc., (SFC) plays a critical role in advocating for the financing and implementation of a high-quality early learning system in Massachusetts. Through its signature Early Education for All Campaign, a coalition of leaders from business, early childhood, labor, religion, health care, education and philanthropy, SFC works in partnership with state leaders and key decision-makers to achieve the following four goals:

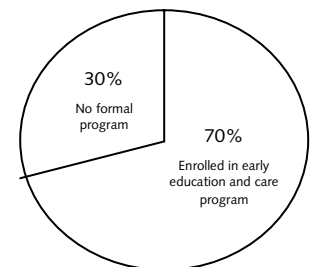
- Voluntary, universally accessible, high-quality pre-kindergarten for every child delivered through a mix of public and private programs;
- Voluntary, universally accessible, high-quality full school-day public kindergarten for every child;
- A statewide system of high-quality early education and care for all children, beginning at birth; and
- A statewide system to improve the training, education, and compensation of the early childhood workforce.

Working to achieve these goals has led to substantial progress toward the creation of a high-quality early learning system in Massachusetts, including:

- The creation of the nation's first consolidated Department and Board of Early Education and Care (EEC);
- The Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) pilot program that provides incentives for pre-k programs to meet and maintain high standards of quality;
- Unanimous passage of "An Act Relative to Early Education and Care," formally establishing Massachusetts' UPK program in statute; and
- The creation of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship program to help ensure a well trained and educated workforce.
- Expanded investments in full-day kindergarten, which have led to 77% of public school kindergartners enrolled in full-day classrooms, up from 38% in 2000.¹⁸

Who has access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs?

- Today in Massachusetts, 92% of the half million children under the age of 7 receive care from someone other than their parent or guardian each week.¹⁹
- Approximately 70% of Massachusetts preschool-aged children are enrolled in a formal early education program, but only one in four receives public support:
 - 5% are enrolled in Head Start programs;
 - 9% receive state subsidies to attend center-based or family child care;
 - 11% are enrolled in public preschool programs; and
 - 45% pay privately for center-based or family child care.²⁰
- Massachusetts has the country's highest annual tuition for full-day, full-year early education and care programs – averaging \$13,158 for programs serving 4-year-olds and \$18,773 for programs serving infants and toddlers.²¹



A research-based strategy

High-quality pre-kindergarten is one of the few educational strategies with a quantifiable positive impact on school preparedness and later academic achievement and life outcomes. These gains help reduce educational, health and social services costs, delivering a 10-16% return on investment.²² Nobel Prize-winning economist Dr. James Heckman has called high-quality early education "America's best economic stimulus package."²³

Why Quality Matters

It is children's participation in *high-quality* early education that has been linked to improved learning outcomes. Lower-quality programs appear to do little to mitigate the enormous challenges faced by families in disadvantaged areas.¹ Characteristics of high-quality early education programs include: well-educated and caring teachers/providers, program quality standards, a curriculum that meets a child's developmental needs, regular assessments of children's progress, and a balance of play and structured activities.

¹ See for example Dearing, E., McCartney, K., Taylor, B. (2010). Does higher quality early child care promote low-income children's math and reading achievement in middle childhood? *Child Development*, 80, 5. pp 1329-1349.

- **Increased school readiness.** Children who participated in high-quality early education developed better language skills, scored higher on school-readiness tests and experienced fewer behavioral problems in school.²⁴
- **Improved educational outcomes.** Low-income children who attended high-quality early education programs scored higher, on average, on school achievement tests between ages 9 and 14 than children who did not.²⁵ They were 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade, 30% more likely to graduate from high school, and more than twice as likely to attend college.^{26,27}

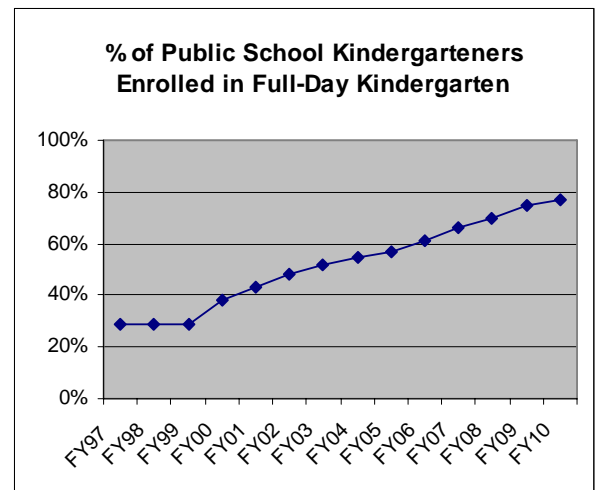
- **Improved health and social outcomes.** High-quality early education programs help increase children’s access to health services through referrals, screenings and preventive services (e.g., immunizations). Benefits extend into adulthood; researchers have found significant relationships between participation in high-quality early education and health insurance coverage, awareness of one’s health, and the ability to pay for and seek treatment.²⁸
- **Reduced high-risk behaviors.** Adolescents and adults who participated in high-quality early education were less likely to smoke, use drugs and abuse alcohol, or participate in criminal activities. Female participants were less likely to become teenage mothers.²⁹
- **Substantial economic gains for families and taxpayers.** High-quality early education provides both immediate and sustained economic benefits. In the short-term, investments in high-quality early education and care strengthen parents’ ability to be reliable employees, thus helping to reduce employee turnover and absenteeism. Absenteeism due to discontinuity of child care costs American businesses \$3 billion annually.³⁰ Over the long-term, individuals and taxpayers reap substantial financial rewards. A 2002 benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian Project – a comprehensive high-quality early education program – estimated that program participants earn \$143,000 more over their lifespan than non-participants, and the mothers of participants earn \$133,000 more than the mothers of non-participants.³¹ Estimates of a national, universal pre-kindergarten system with an enrollment rate of 80% predict a net benefit of \$150.8 billion.³²

Next steps: QRIS

To provide a mechanism for all EEC licensed programs (infant/toddler, preschool, after school/out-of-school) to meet and maintain high-quality standards, state leaders have begun piloting a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Evidence suggests that QRIS models help improve program quality over time and increase low-income children’s access to high-quality programs.³³ Since 1998, 21 states and Washington, D.C., have implemented a QRIS, and 27 additional states, including Massachusetts, are in some phase of development.³⁴ In May 2010, approximately \$3.3 million in QRIS Program Quality Improvement grants was awarded to 640 early education programs in Massachusetts for the purpose of advancing programs at least one level before receiving an official rating. QRIS will help to establish early education program standards, support quality improvements, monitor and evaluate program outcomes, and make information accessible to parents to inform decision-making.

Full-day kindergarten

Research shows that children attending full-day kindergarten (FDK) programs receive 40-50% more instruction than in half-day kindergarten programs, and exhibit greater gains in reading, math and science achievement and lower rates of grade retention.³⁵ In Massachusetts, the mandatory school age is 6, and children are not required to attend kindergarten. Current state regulations mandate that 425 hours – 2.5 hours per day for the academic school year – of kindergarten be provided by all public school districts and be made available to all children. The Kindergarten Grant Program administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) provides support to local school districts to help transition part-time kindergarten classes to full-day and improve the quality of full-day programs. Since FY05, the Kindergarten Grant Program has received more than \$27 million in cumulative new state funding. In FY10, 162 school districts received Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grants. Today, although most Massachusetts school districts that include kindergarten (279 of 311) offer at least one full-day classroom, 77 districts charge families tuition fees to cover the cost of providing FDK..



Conclusion

The case for a high-quality birth-9 education and care system is straightforward. Research shows that early childhood is the most critical period of development in a child’s life and sets the stage for future school and life success. Children who

succeed in school are more likely to become effective citizens and contribute to a growing economy. Massachusetts has made significant progress over the past decade. However, much remains to be done to ensure a high-quality early education system that benefits all children, families and taxpayers through language-rich home environments, high-quality infant/toddler programs, universal pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, PK-3 alignment and supports, and workforce development programs for all educators of young children. Federal, state, and local leaders must help sustain these efforts.

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“Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success” - Reading scores show us that we need to do a better job educating all our children. This 2010 report by Dr. Nonie Lesaux of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the first to comprehensively examine third grade reading in Massachusetts, offers five recommendations to improve the quality of early learning settings and ensure children become proficient readers. Recommendations focus on program design, assessment, professional development, curriculum, and partnerships with families.

Implementing the report’s recommendations will result in new and exciting partnerships across sectors and geographic regions. Schools alone cannot meet this challenge – families, community organizations, the early childhood field, healthcare providers, the faith community, and schools must all rise to this challenge. For a copy of the report, visit:

<http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/0reading.html>

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