2012 MCAS Results Show Little Progress in Third Grade Reading

September 17, 2012 - In Massachusetts, 39% of third graders are not proficient readers, according to MCAS results released today. Performance in reading on the third grade MCAS has remained stagnant since 2001, when 38% of third graders scored below proficient in reading. Among children from low-income families, 60% lag in reading.

See charts: Trends in Third Grade Reading, by Income and Third Grade Reading 2012 MCAS.

Reading is the foundation of success in both the classroom and the workplace. Research finds that third grade reading is a critical educational benchmark that strongly predicts children’s future performance in school and beyond. In July, the Legislature passed An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency with overwhelming bipartisan support. Today, the bill was enacted by the House and Senate and is currently before Governor Patrick. The bill, which was introduced by Senator Katherine Clark (D-Melrose) and Representative Marty Walz (D-Boston), would establish an Early Literacy Expert Panel to advise state agencies on research-based strategies to improve the language and literacy development of children from birth to age 9.

Amy O'Leary, director of Early Education for All, a campaign of Strategies for Children, issued the following statement:

“We should all be alarmed that 39% of third graders are not proficient readers and that Massachusetts has made virtually no progress in third grade reading over the past decade. We should all be concerned about the wide and persistent achievement gap. We know what to do to improve children’s literacy. We must act now on this knowledge.

“The 2012 MCAS results underscore the importance of An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency, which establishes this critical benchmark as a state priority. The path to reading success begins at birth, with children's earliest language development, and includes high-quality early education, working with families, supporting teachers and early educators, and building an education continuum that runs from birth to third grade and on to college and career.

“Research finds that one in six children who struggled with reading in third grade do not finish high school by age 19. The average high school dropout in Massachusetts costs taxpayers an estimated $349,000 more over his/her lifetime in lower tax revenues and higher public assistance costs than the average high school graduate. Massachusetts simply cannot afford to have close to 40% of our children leave third grade without becoming successful readers.”

Senator Katherine Clark and Representative Marty Walz, lead sponsors of An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency, issued the following statements:
Senator Katherine Clark: "By investing in early literacy, we provide children with the tools for future academic and economic success. Studies have quantified high rates of return for public investment in literacy for children under the age of 5 --- higher returns than for many traditional economic development efforts,” said Senator Clark. "This bill will help every child become a proficient reader by third grade which is a wise investment in our children's future – and our own."

Representative Marty Walz: "For far too long, reading scores have been stagnant. Despite receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in state aid, large numbers of school districts have been unsuccessful in teaching all students to read proficiently by third grade. We need a rigorous assessment of what should be done differently so students gain the reading skills necessary for their future academic success."

*Strategies for Children and its 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. Read our blog, Eye on Early Education. Find us on Facebook. Follow us on Twitter. View us on YouTube.*